MY WAR 1917-1918

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On the 26th May, 1917 I enlisted at Victoria Barracks for general service in the Australian Imperial Force.

After a few horrifying days and nights at the Showground where we were issued with dungarees, boots made of cast iron, I think, and straw to sleep on, and where we were given "stew" to eat which one would not feed to pigs, I was drafted as a gunner in the Australian Field Artillery in camp at Liverpool.

The experience at the Showground made me very home sick and to realise the vast gap between the sheltered life of a citizen and the life I was about to enter upon.

The first month of training was very strenous and we were sure it would kill us. We were so tired at night we just tumbled into our bunks and passed out until, at an unearthly hour in the morning, trumpets sounding reveille would drag us back to the world again.

We suddenly found we were all beginning to feel very fit and alive and, as our training moved on to rifle and gun drill, it was much more interesting, especially map reading, range finding, driving and handling horses in a gun team. Every man was trained to be a griver as well as a gunner.

We were inclined to be a bit snobbish because we had all been picked for the Artillery by the C.O., and took great pride in our leather gear and spurs. We were nicknamed the "Kiwi Kings" by the more down to earth infantry.

I was drafted into the 32nd Reinforcements together with fellows I had enlisted with and chaps I knew including F. O. B. Wilkinson, J. M. Brunton, G. H. Phippard, J. H. Roxburgh, R. E. Shute, J. Bruce Smith, J. B. Jones, etc. We naturally enough had a wonderful time together during our camp in Australia. In the late afternoons afterwork we would rush for an awaiting car and trundle over the 24 miles of terrible road to Sydney and, sometimes, just got back into camp in time for early morning reveille.

At 2a.m. on the 16th November, after our final embarkation leave, we assembled on the parade ground and the 32nd Reinforcements entrained for Sydney. Colonel Cox Taylor our C.O. gave us a down to earth talk - what was expected of us and what we had to expect. We were all probably excited and het up and we cheered him wildly. We marched to Liverpool Station carrying our kits and stood on the platform and watched the dawn break over our old camp for the last time.

At Sydney Central we were met by crowds of people who gave us a very cheery welcome and insisted on carrying our kit bags as we

marched all the way to the docks. This was a great help as, in those unenlightened days, we all carried far too much personal and unnecessary gear; a lot of us had tailor made uniforms for use on leave in London.

At the quay we boarded H.M.T.S.Canberra and pulled out into the stream. At 12.30 we weighed anchor and steamed through the Heads followed by a string of little tooting boats, including ferries.

Besides our own crowd on board there were reinforcements for the Light Horse, Camel Corps, Engineers and Infantry.

We had good weather to Fremantle and occupied the time shaking down to our new quarters. We all slept on or in canvas hammocks suspended from the ceiling and we were so tightly packed together that the hammocks touched each other, and the whole mass of men and hammocks swayed together with the movement of the ship.

Hammocks were stowed away in day time and tables for our mess set up. A boxing ring was set up and, because I had been having boxing lessons, none of my friends would take me on. This suited my reputation very well and I kept away from the other troops because I couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag.

The Canberra, of about 8,000 tons, was clean and the food not bad and we enjoyed ourselves.

At Fremantle we were given six hours shore leave; most of us piled into taxis and private cars and drove along the beautiful road into Perth. Our taxi took us on a long tour of Perth and the beautiful riverside drive. He positively refused to accept any payment for the drive. Our party, consisting of Phippard, Wilkinson, Street, Brunton and myself finished up with an excellent dinner at the Esplanade Hotel - our last good meal for many long months.

After taking on some Western Australian reinforcements at 9p.m. on the 24th November, we sailed for, we supposed Ceylon.

Sailed into Colombo on the 5th December after a calm and uneventful voyage. The port authorities were rather dubious about allowing us ashore, but finally decided half the men would be taken for a route march one day, the other half the next. We desperately needed a walk and I happened to be in the first batch. We were marched to the Barrack Square and locked in.

That did it! We were perfectly orderly until then. The Port Authorities certainly didn't understand Australians. A great number made a bolt for it - climbed the walls and jumped into the first rickshaws, carriages, or what ever came along. The drivers were delighted with their windfall and robbed us happily. We roamed the

city and returned in an orderly way to the ship late in the afternoon.

As a result of this "mutiny" no one was allowed ashore next day so, after dark that night, thirty or forty men slid over the side of the ship on to an empty coal barge, pushed off and tried to make for the shore without oars or poles. Of course they got stuck in mid stream. Finally some launch pushed them back to the ship and a token attempt by the officers was made to arrest them. However a great mass of jostling men blocked every passage way and deck leading to the stern where other men were hauling the fugitives back over the stern.

At Colombo we were joined by the N.Z. troopship "Tofua" and we sailed on the 8th December.

We were met off the Meldive Islands by the British light cruiser H.M.S. Juno and the two troop ships proceeded under escort to Aden where we parted company with the Juno and the Tofua. They were apparently going by the Cape while we continued our course into the Red Sea.

On the 15th December I contracted measles and was immediately put into quarantine with 13 or 14 others. The isolation ward had 4 bunks. We were treated bery badly. We got no attention, no food and, as all bunks were occupied, we all had to sleep on the deck in the open. The day before we reached Suez we ran into a heavy rain storm - the last of Egypt's annual fortnight of wet. This did not improve the condition of the feverish patients as we lay drenched on our straw palliasses. After a couple of hours I decided I had had enough, found my clothes and went below.

On the evening of the 20th December we steamed into Suez harbour. A glorious day without a breath of wind. We were escorted into port by British aeroplanes which were silhouetted against the orange and golden glow of a fantastic sunset.

Next morning we sick men were taken by ambulance to the Anglo-Egyptian hospital in Suez while the rest of the troops were marched to their various camps in the desert a couple of miles out of town.

The isolation hospital was a rough but comfortable place, consisting of five or six long reed huts with an iron roof and mud floor. The Egyptian name for these wards is Koshk. There were two other men from the 32nd Reinforcements in hospital with me - Bob Rankin and Stan Leitch, both very good chaps and friends of mine. We had a great time together.

In the evenings we would sometimes sneak out the back gate and go for a walk to a little oasis where some natives grew vegetables with the aid of a primitive and complicated irrigation system. Sometimes we got donkeys and galloped at the breakneck speed of about six miles an hour over the desert with their "boys" yelling and pleading behind.

On Christmas Day the Governor of Suez put on a great spread for us - turkey, goose, ham, plum pudding and jellies all washed down with beer.

On the 1st January, 1918, Rankin and I rejoined our unit leaving Stan to follow in a few days.

Sleeping on the cold hard floor of a tent with only two blankets was not a pleasant change from the confortable hospital bed, but, as we were given ten days no duty for convalescence, we didn't have to do the slogging marches and spent most of the time at the aerodrome near by.

There were about 5,000 men in camp who will be sent to various destinations to reinforce units. The Light Horse and Camel Corps to Cairo or Alexandria, the Artillery, Engineers and Infantry to England.

At 5a.m. on the 9th January we breakfasted on iron rations and entrained into open and very dirty coal trucks; we had been told to wear our overalls over our uniforms. We arrived at Port Said at 4p.m. after a rather cramped journey. We were 35 men and their kits to a truck.

At Port Said we embarked straight on to H.M.T.S. Kashgar. We thought we were probably bound for Marseilles or Naples. On board with us were several English batteries of 6 inch Howitzers complete. The ship was old, overcrowded and filthy, and the very little food we got was very poor.

On the 10th January we saw a rather gruesome sight. I was up in the bow speculating on our departure and watching a six or seven thousand ton ship go past us seawards. Suddenly a terrific explosion ripped half the bridge away and, at the same time, a great sheet of flame burst up from her forward hatch. A moment later there was a second explosion and her stern erupted in flame. Some of the crew from amidships jumped overboard but flaming oil began to pour out of the port holes and soon the water around the ship was a sheet of flame and those in the water shared the same fate as those trapped on board. The ship drifted onto a sand bank in Port Said Harbour and later that night her boilers blew out.

We leanred afterwards that she had been carrying a cargo of 500,000 gallons of benzine for Salonica and that 25 lives were lost. It was the first time most of us had seen men die and we felt shaken.

We were kept on that wretched ship, without even a march ashore, until the 16th when we sailed escorted by two Japanese destroyers of the latest type and several chasers. The latter left us when we were out of sight of land.

On the afternoon of the 18th one of our escorting destroyers

darted ahead firing rapidly at some small object while we turned about and made off in the opposite direction with all speed with the second destroyer circling around us. Shortly after there was a muffled explosion in the sea and it is thought that the Japs had exploded a mine which had been dropped by a submarine as it submerged.

We lived in our kapok filled life belts on board and men often went to sleep in the sun and set themselves on fire with cigarette butts.

The Japs handled their boats very efficiently and we were most impressed.

On the 20th January we arrived off Taranto in the very south of Italy where we were met and escorted, by light Italian gun boats, through a mine field into Taranto Harbour. The harbour was crowded with Italian battle ships of every description and we wondered why they weren't out escorting convoys through submarine infested waters.

We were taken ashore in barges and marched to a camp in an olive grove - ten men to a tent.

On the 21st January we had a route march into Taranto a distance of about 8 kilos. Not much of a place, very old and very dirty but the country behind it is beautiful.

Next day we entrained at 7p.m. for England. We travelled via Brindizie, Bari, Foggia, along the east coast to Ancona. Leaving the coast line at Rimini we went to Bologna then across the Apennines to Genoa, along the French Riviera, through Mentone, Monte Carlo, Nice and Cannes - all places I had visited before war broke out - across to Marseilles and through Aix; up along the River Rhone to Lyons; from here we went right up to St. Germain and across to Cherbourg.

It was a wonderful trip - a tourist excursion and an eye opener to those who might never have seen Italy or France. The journey was a bit tiring; eight men to a compartment; bully beef and army biscuits and as we were pretty crowded we took it in turns to sleep on the floor, on the seats and two in the luggage racks high up. I got up there because I was so light. We were seven days in the train almost non stop except for three stops in fields where washing facilities were set up and a pannikin of tea. The cold was intense.

On our arrival at Cherbourg we had a medical inspection and a welcome hot meal. After dark we embarked on a small cross channel steamer and at 1.30a.m. we sailed under escort for the coast of England. The boat was too small to accommodate everyone below

and a great many were forced to sleep on deck. I remember I was sleeping on a tarpaulin covering some barrels and during the night the ship rolled and I landed up against the ~~O.C.~~ CORPORAL, IN CHARGE of our unit, a man named Roebuck who was most unpopular with the men. He, likeme, had elected to sleep on deck to increase our chances of survival if we were torpedoed. The ~~O.C.~~ was very annoyed at my intrusion on his slumbers and told me so, but I was too stiff with cold to move or care so stayed where I was.

We arrived off Southampton early next morning, but fog prevented us landing until midday - most unpleasant with all those subs around. We waited on the wharf from noon until 5p.m. for our train to arrive. Meanwhile we amused ourselves watching a lot of very brand new looking Yanks arriving with their extraordinary looking equipment. Some of the officers carried leather suitcases and umbrellas and looked more like commercial travellers than soldiers. However we searched in vain for a bowler hat!

At last we entrained for Codford on Salisbury Plains where a number of German prisoners were camped. From here we marched 2½ miles to our camp at Heytesbury. There was a railway station at Haytesbury but no Australian, at any time, under any condition was allowed to alight there as Lady Heytesbury objected for some reason of her own. So, all the time we trained at this camp, we had to tramp the 2½ miles each way to Codford.

This was a training camp for all Australian Field Artillery reinforcements and was known as the Reserve Brigade. It consisted of four batteries. No. 1 battery trained men to reinforce all howitzer batteries while the others trained men for the 18 pounders.

The discipline was severe and the training strenous and the weather wet and cold, but the huts were good, the food fair and we enjoyed ourselves and took pride in our appearance and the job.

Because of a case of mumps the 24 men in our hut were put into isolation. Orders were we were not allowed out of camp or into any of the canteens, but we simply took off our yellow arm bands and went our way.

On the 16th March when we were preparing for embarkation leave I contracted mumps and was taken to the Australian hospital at Sutton Veney. This exasperated my hut mates as their leave and their departure for France was delayed another month.

The mumps ward contained 14 beds. The food was splendid and we were looked after by an orderly who did his best to keep us in order. There were men there from the various camps around and the liveliest crowd I have ever met. We led the orderly a terrible life and staged furious pillow fights using the beds as barricades. These affairs often ended in bloodshed and when we left each man was docked one poundfrom his pay to cover cost of burnt and destroyed linen.

Returned to my duty on the 4th April and quickly got myself

five days C. B., and then a nasty fall with a horse on frozen ground. Happily the double duty brought upon myself by the first event was counteracted by no duty ordered by the doctor for the second. We had to fit spikes into the horses' shoes to enable us to train on the frozen ground but it was still risky.

On the 11th April went to London on embarkation leave. By saying I was going to Scotland I got six days instead of four. I spent my time in London going to all the theatres and living a luxurious life. I made my headquarters at 17 Pembridge Gardens, Notting Hill Gate. Father, Mother and I had stayed there before the war. On the night of the 17th April a lot of us met on the station platform and caught the midnight train back to Warminster from where we got a taxi back to camp.

On the 26th April I was warned for draft, and on the 30th April at 9a.m. the draft for France lined up and (thanks to Lady Heytesbury) marched to Codford. Our entire kit besides our bandolier, water bottle, gas mask and mess tin, consisted of one waterproof ground sheet, one blanket, one spare pair of socks, one change of underclother and our small haversack with a few personal knick-knacks.

We embarked at PORTSMOUTH on a cross channel boat together with a few English troops and a great many Americans. The crossing was rough and we had a miserable trip.

We landed at Le Havre on the morning of the 1st May and marched 8 kilos to the Australian General Base Depot. This base is very rough and we were billetted 15 to a tent.

The next day we were issued with steel helmets and marched to the great Gas schools in the hills outside Havre. By the time we got there we were nearly dead with the unaccustomed weight of the steel helmets but had to go through long and tedious gas drill which we considered unnecessary after all our gas drill in England.

On the 4th May we left camp and started our long march up the line. Bob Schute, John Roxburgh and I had been drafted into the 3rd division and Phippard went to the 5th division. We got to Liercourt on the 5th May, my nineteenth birthday. We marched the 11 kilos to Longpre where we entrained for St. Leger. From here we marched about 5 kilos to some billets of wet straw laid down in old cowsheds (my birthday night). That night we were flooded out and moved to drier quarters.

On the 8th May we again took to the open road in the direction of Vaux. The weather was frightfully hot and our heavy kits nearly broke our backs. We lost our way and after walking all day and covering a distance of some 25 kilometers we finally reached Vaux. This rest camp was right along side a very large aerodrome. It was a wonderful sight to see 50 to 60 planes rise into the air at sunset

and go through all kinds of manoeuvres.

Next morning we marched to our divisional headquarters which was situated in a wood out of Abbaville and only a couple of kilos behind Amiens. From this camp we could see anti-aircraft shells bursting around our and German planes. That night, camped in the wood, we had our first experience of German night bombing.

Next day, the 10th May, we arrived at the 3rd D.A.C. Headquarters at Pontnoyelles and were allotted to different batteries. Roxburgh, Schute and I were sent to the 30th Battery together with 4 or 5 others. The 30th Battery is in the 8th Brigade, 3rd Division.

That same evening we were sent up to battery wagon lines which are just outside what was once Pontnoyelles and between 6 and 7 kilos behind the line. From the way the section sergeants argued over us we concluded reinforcements were rather badly needed. This conclusion was strengthened by 3 bodies neatly sewn up in their blankets packed just inside the tent waiting to go back to H.Q.

Then a most unfortunate thing happened while entering our names. One of our reinforcements was named Flannagan, a rather delicate and very young boy. .S M. McMurray, the battery sergeant major, a very decent chap, commenting on the name, said rather jokingly "I dont want to scare you or anything like that, but its rather a coincidence, a namesake of yours came to the battery only a fortnight ago and he was killed a couple of days ago!" It turned out to be the young reinforcement's brother. The poor kid was shattered and the S.M. horrified at what he had done. The incident made the rest of us realise we had arrived at the war!

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Action 12thMay, 1981: On Sunday, the 12th May I was sent up to the guns to replace a casualty. I went up in the evening on the ration cart and, to use the favourite expression "Somewhat had the wind up". When we got quite close to the battery position a German plane came right over us, flying very low, and spotted us and evidently the battery as well.

Our gun pits were just behind the village of Ribement and the B.H.Q. in an old house just in the village. I reported to B.H.Q. and was told to just wait outside a minute. During this minute, which lengthened into ten, Fritz took it into his head to shell the village. I had never heard a shell coming before, the sound usually arrived a second after the explosion, and it didn't take me long to decide I didn't like the sound. I later came to dislike it more. The shells were bursting about 70 to 100 yds away and, at first, I couldn't understand the whistling noise which accompanied the explosion of the bursting shell. I was eventually rescued and taken to the O.C. who had his headquarters in the basement. I was told to report to the sergeant in charge of D subsection gun. On emerging from the basement I was just in time to see a cottage on the other side of the square go up in smoke and debris.

The D Sub fellows were all very nice to me "welcomed me to their home" which consisted of a hole in the ground about 8ft square by about 5ft deep and roofed with iron and about 6 inches of earth. They told me I had come at a good time as the right half of the battery was doing all the shooting that night as well as the S.O.S. guard, and we could therefore look forward to an undisturbed night. Accordingly the five of us took off our boots and leggings, put our gas masks at the ready and slumbered peacefully.

Some time after 5a.m. next morning I was awakened by a harsh voice shouting into the dugout. I looked up and saw a red faced and dust covered officer yelling to us to "Get out and make for the old trenches on the left, its getting too hot up here". This was all double Dutch to me but, as the other chaps were scrambling into their boots, I followed their example. Not realising the urgency of the situation I was the last to leave. As I got my head just above the ground I had a vision of the other men lying flat on their faces in all attitudes. The next second there was a roaring, blinding crash almost on top of us. Bits of things flew all around me and I was blown back headlong into the dugout. Someone said "Come on out of here tout suite" and I picked myself up and rushed out again and nearly fell over a man lying near the entrance to the dugout with half his head blown off. I saw where the others were heading and I ran like a hare after them.

All that day and night we crouched in the old trenches about 150 yards to the flank of the battery while our guns were blasted. The 108th Howitzer Battery had only just vacated a position close to us. They had left some of their own gas shells to collect later. German shelling exploded these and the gas drifted down onto us with the result that we had to wear gas masks for many hours.

That day another man from our subsection was hit - a name sake of mine, Corporal "Jedda" Armytage, a Victorian. When they took him away - not very badly wounded I think - he left his tunic behind. It happened to be my size and, as mine had already been damaged, I souvenired it and wore it until laterit was blown off my back by a gun backfire.

It rained all day and most of the night and the trench got incredibly muddy and half flooded. At midday two men volunteered to go to the cook house in the village for some food. The cook house had been straffed too. They eventually ran and crawled back to us under heavy fire and gas. They made it all right but we had a very gassy stew.

That night we manned our guns, or what was left of them, and I took my turn at S.O.S. guard and was told that the lights

shot into the air one below the other and suspended by a parachute was to be recognised as a call for help in the way of a protective barrage from the infantry in our sector.

My job was to rush and wake everyone, rush back to the guns which were already loaded and laid on fixed lines of sight and fire them off one by one, and continue to fire until the gun crews arrived (which was usually in a matter of seconds). It was a wonderful sight to stand on high ground at night looking over the line, watching the way the gun flashes lit up the trees and the innumerable flares the Germans sent up. Occasionally a great red flare came from an incendiary shell, reflecting in the clouds or a distant ammunition dump on fire added to the effect and made the scene weird and beautiful.

We had another casualty that night - a signaller who had come up to the battery with me. He didn't see much of the war. He was very badly wounded. We heard afterwards he had been sent back to Australia eventually, as a cot case, with 20 pieces of shrapnel in his body.

We had four shoots that night and, as I had passed the gun layers test in England, I was put in the layer's seat. We just fired off our specified number of rounds at our specified target and got back to our trench before the counter fire started.

Next morning, the 14th May, we handed over our battered guns and position to the 11th Battery and made our weary way back to the waggon lines. I dont think there was anyone more relieved than I to get away from that place. It was my first experience of the line, and I was still a bit dazed and shocked by all the gas and after effects of being knocked head over heels back into the dugout.

The following morning the battery packed up and began its march to the back areas. I had had only a few days of it, but the rest of the chaps had been in action for months and badly needed a spell.

The whole 3rd Division moved out of the line that morning also all the mounted brigades, the field artillery, the divisional ammunition column and the army service corp. The procession covered kilometers and made quite a sight on the road. At all events a party of German planes seemed to think so. They were most interested and we were glad we were moving out of and not into the line. As it was they could not do much. We were too far back to have artillery directed on us and, as they seemed to be on a reconnaissance, they only had machine guns.

A new C.O. took command of the battery the day we moved

out, Major Walker, a Sydney man, who had won a M.C. in the March retreat. We went through Vaux towards Abbeville. We had camped at Vaux beside a large aerodrome on our way up. We camped in some open field the first night of our withdrawal and at 4a.m. continued on our way. The weather way hot and the roads dusty and the gunners had to tramp beside their guns. The limbers were loaded with gear and camouflage nets. We had to half run to keep up with the horses.

We finally arrived at Epangs, our destination, about 4 kilos from Abbeville and 30 miles from the line. We averaged 15 miles a day on our march. At Epangs we were billetted in the beautiful grounds of an old chateau. The officers lived in the chateau. We camped under the trees. We bathed every afternoon in the Somme which flowed at the foot of the grounds. We did battery manoeuvres with the rest of the brigade in the mornings and the afternoons were free. We soon discovered that our new major was a very fine chap!

The Germans flew over us every night to bomb Abbeville. They did a lot of damage and one night killed a number of W.A.C.S. who were attached to a military hospital. And occasionally a bomb was dropped in our direction but the A.A. batteries in Abbeville and Epangs gave them a pretty hot time.

On the 1st June we marched out of our quiet chateau to take our place in the line. The first day's march took us through Liercourt to Hangest. The Huns tried to drop bombs on the column on our second day but they were attacked by British planes and one British and one German plane went crashing into the ground.

We passed through Amiens and Camon, both towns had been knocked about considerably, in fact Amiens was receiving an occasional 8" shell as we passed through - just to remind us, I suppose, there was a war on!

We established our waggon lines in an orchard right under a railway bank just behind Glisy. We were not very favourably impressed with the position at first æ this line was the main line from Amiens to St. Quintin and La Fere, and was joined about 500 yards away by the main Albert-Amiens line. These facts alone, we thought, would be sufficient to condemn the place as a long range artillery target but, to add to this, there was an English 12" railway mounted gun hidden on one line and a 13" French gun on the other. We expected a lively time from enemy fire drawn by the two guns. It turned out we were quite mistaken, and the waggon lines turned out to be ideal. We are losing a lot of men through sickness. D sub has lost 2 from trench fever and another was run over by a limber and had a leg crushed.

On the 4th June we took over from the 4th division behind Villers Bretonneaux and straight in front of Amiens. We took over badly shelled gun pits which took a bit of cleaning up. Their D sub pit had been blown sky high, gun and all, but after a great deal of

work we cleaned the place up after a fashion.

The Huns were shelling about 100 yards to the left of the road as we brought the guns up. Roxburgh and I shared a 2'6" x 6' trench which we made our home. The weather was hot and fortunately very dry. We sometimes got a bit of gas and because of the lowness of the ground, it hung about for hours.

One peaceful morning John and I were sunning ourselves in shorts just outside the Battery H.Q. dugout. Suddenly there was the screech of a heavy weight long range shell. John dived headlong into the dugout and ripped a foot long gash in his thigh. My reactions being slower I just fell flat and the shell burst harmlessly in an old shell hole 100 yards away. I took great glee in pouring our almost black, strong iodine all along the wound. John's comments were impressive.

One night, during one of our routine shoots, an S.O.S. signal went up in our front sector. We quickly changed to our barrage range and, after about 15 minutes of straffing, the Hun, the raid petered out. On our right was a French battery. Their guns were beautiful pieces with a split trail, and fired a shell about 5" in diameter. They were long range guns and did all their shooting at night. They used a charge which seemed to make less noise than our 18 pounders and less flash. The gunners lived in great dugouts 40' below ground where they had also built a small mess room and their dugouts all had gas proof curtains at the entrances. We lived in holes 4'6" deep by 6' x 8' square with galvanised iron and 10" of earth over us. We became very friendly with the French gunners (who always had wine) and they said, when we asked them why they troubled to build such elaborate dugouts, "Why Messieurs" no dugout no "apres la guerre".

Behind us was a battery of British motor aircraft guns which received considerable attention from German 4.2 "whizbang" high velocity shells. These things travel so fast the scream of their approach comes after they explode.

Our new major soon won everyone's admiration by his coolness and manner of taking all difficulties in his stride.

One day Colonel Macarthur King arrived to escort a tribe of big wigs and brass hats from Divisional H.Q. to inspect the Brigade. When they arrived at our battery and saw the shattered state of everything and the multitude of fresh shell holes around us, the big wigs decided it wasn't a very healthy place to spend a holiday and suddenly remembered they had left their smelling salts back at H.Q. and hurried off in that direction just as a great 5.9 "woolly bear" burst right over us. This did nothing to postpone their departure.

A "woolly bear" is the name given to a German high explosive shell fitted with a time fuse or delay action fuse, and which explodes

with a mass of brown and white smoke. They are usually used for ranging as the observer can see where they explode and one can expect a straffing to follow.

I

June 9th/was one of a party sent forward to dig pits for the centre section gun. This section was to occupy a high ridge some 3,000 yards in front of and to the left of the main battery. It was to serve as anti-tank section and only go into action in the event of a tank attack. This ridge was under open observation from the German lines and soon after we started work we were spotted by the Huns and came under machine gun and whiz bang fire. One of our party, in his haste to fling himself on Mother Earth, flung himself on me incidentally stopping a piece of shell splinter with his shoulder and saving me a nasty crack. We had learned a lesson and henceforth worked only at night. We crawled away from the site and Fritz made it uncomfortable for us all the way back to the battery. This was accomplished by a series of short wild runs always terminating in the bottom of some old shell hole and crawling through a very wet and very damaged wheat field.

That evening I was one of a party which went into Villiers Bretonneaux to search houses for flour to help out our gas damaged food supply. We did this to the tune of a constant stream of machine bullets passing harmlessly overhead. As a souvenir of the occasion I picked up a return ticket to Amiens on the platform of the wrecked railway station.

On the 11th June we were relieved by another detachment of gunners and went back to the waggon lines for ten days rest (?). Our "rest" at the waggon lines consisted of reveille at 6a.m., watering and grooming horses and feeding them; breakfast - the identical breakfast that men have eaten since the war began - a dessertspoon full of pork and beans stew or a piece of boiled bacon 3½" x 2" and sometimes a piece of bread. After breakfast we turned the horses out to graze on the flats and worked on building earthwork revetting or cleaning up the horse lines till 11.30 when we mustered the horses and groomed for an hour. Lunch always consisted of a spoonful of deplorably watery stew and an army biscuit which was quite inedible until soaked in tea. These were known as "Anzac Wafers".

In the afternoon we worked on the revetting, a protection for the horses from shell splinters. In this case we made them from big cut turves of rooty grass from the flats of the Somme and these walls were about 2' thick at the base and 1' thick at the top, which was a bit higher than a horse's back. The walls ran both front and behind the horse lines with subdivisions between.

At 5 p.m. our tea consisted of one slice (thick) of bread and one large spoonful of jam or margarine or cheese. Every second night we would be up all night carting ammunition up to the battery or doing horse line picket duty. On one occasion I had been up to the battery with a full [illegible] of ammunition as an attack was expected. It was a pitch black night and we lost the track a couple of times. On our second trip up from the ammunition dump we ran into a bit of

gas and were shelled while unloading at the guns. On our way home, when all seemed quiet, there was a horrible rushing, wobbling sort of scream overhead and a huge driving band (metal) apparently from one of our own big 12" guns in the rear near Glisy, dug itself into the ground beside C Sub first line waggon team. It could have just about cut a horse - or man - in half.

The Germans had a huge gun of about 12" cal. away back whose sole task appeared to be to shell Amiens at dusk. We would hear this distant boom just when most things were quiet, and about 30 seconds later we would hear the great shell whining high overhead and another 30 seconds later hear the crash of its explosion in the town. Later in the evening our big railway gun would go off with a blinding flash and an earth shaking crash and we could hear the great shell shrieking through space probably searching for the spiteful gunner of Amiens.

June 19th: We gunners in the waggon lines relieved those at the guns, the centre section having moved their guns up into the new anti-tank position one night. So, that's where we went. We unloaded our waggon in a sunken road about 150 yards behind our detached section. While helping to UNLOAD inboard I met Bob Shute, who was being relieved. He didn't say much but what he did say was very much to the point. "Dont waste too much time getting across that open stretch of ground between here and the guns and when you get there keep your bloody head down. 'Bye." I didn't wait to ask questions as most of the fellows were on their way, so I picked up my kit and went for my life.

At the position we all dropped our kits and started to take stock of the place. Everything was so calm and peadeful and the view from the ridge was so beautiful and, I think, for the moment we forgot there was a war on. I certainly forgot Bob's warning. We were rudely brought back to earth by the whining screams and bursting of shells about 30 yards in front of us and we all dived like rebbits into the miserable holes the former occupants had been happy to call dugouts.

The place I found myself in with two other fellows was dug into the chalk bank. It had some 4" of soil and chalk over it together with some sand bags full of stones and several logs thrown on top and bits of iron to act as "bursters". The dugout was 4' wide (the head) narrowing to 3' at the foot and entrance end x2½' high x 6½' long. The floor and walls were of crumbling clay which fell in handfuls if touched. Entrance was gained to this burrow by crawling down 3 chalk steps, head first - a bit like crawling down a ladder head first. We had nothing to do all day but play cards and sleep and keep a man on watch day and night with his head just sticking up and watching for an S.O.S. or gas.

Our longest range was only 1,000 yards and, in the event of attack, our orders were to keep going as long as possible and if necessary try to blow the guns up. There was no chance of getting

them out.

It was an unwritten law that no more than one man should leave the dugout at a time in case one had to beat a hasty retreat into the clumsy entrance. So - we lived like rabbits coming up for our food (often cold tack) and going down again to eat it.

From our ridge we had a splendid view of Corbie and Windy Flat and Corps Corner and the shelling these places received; Corbie in particular. All the enemy shells had to pass over our heads as they were behind us and we were between them and the Germans and one could never be sure when one of the shells would drop on us.

There was a battery of 18 pounders behind us very cleverly camouflaged on Windy Flat. I later found out this battery was the 49th with John Brunton and Fob Wilkinson. John looked a bit of a wreck. He was a big man and had lost stones of weight.

We acquired a great respect for the German artillery and at dusk when our observation balloons were hauled down he would start shelling along our ridge and would continue at half hour intervals all night. It was always an anxious time for our SOS guard identifying the numerous lights going up all the time in the front line and ducking for cover from shells and sniffing for gas as the Germans pumped a lot of gas into the low ground around Corbie. Our carefully used cook house, a hole 5' x 4' and 4' deep got a direct hit with a German 5.9 mustard gas shell. All our food was, of course, ruined and we had no food or water till the evening of the following day. We all got a bit of mustard gas but, miraculously, we lost only two men. It took us all night, working in gas masks, to beat and burn the gas out of our dugout. One dugout had to be abandoned.

One night a Hun plane dropped a bomb on the trail of C Sub gun blowing it to bits, setting the camouflage alight and exploding some of our ammunition and, at the same time, cutting a swathe in the protective wheat crop for a radius of some 5 yards. It was during this affair that Sergeant Marker of D Sub was awarded a military medal for preventing the destruction of one ammunition supply among other things.

After the mustard gas shell two men took it in turns to go down to the main battery every night for rations. This meant a 2 mile walk, run and crawl each way across open country under observation from German observation balloons and which was raked by shell fire at odd times all night to try and catch transport moving at night.

The infantry coming and going out of the line used this place too, and we had some pretty roung moments there. There was a Salvation Army chap holed up in an old dugout in the middle of Corps Corner and he used to give cups of coffee to us harrassed blokes. This magnificent bloke was always there with his quiet smile and his coffee urn. But one night when we got there the old dugout was blasted and there was no sign of the man or his coffee urn.

July 13th: Started making preparations for a stunt. A

brigade of the 4th Division started digging gun pits on our left but were spotted and given a lively time. The battery of English Royal Horse Artillery,which pulled into action behind our ridge twice a week for 30 rounds rapid gunfire, desisted and we were exceedlingly glad. They only stayed about half an hour and then they limbered up and galloped off and we got the back lash which was intended for them. Their speed and precision were most impressive and they always managed to finish their shoot and get away before the return fire started.

After pulling out from our ridge towards the end of the month we started carting and hiding vast quantities of ammunition across the Somme and into an open area. We had to cross a pontoon bridge in total darkness and the traffic jam was terrible. Australian Engineers erected this bridge every night after dark and dismantled and hid the pontoons every morning before daylight. One night we were hopelessly blocked by an English unit's waggon which had got a wheel over the narrow bridge. After a while we could stand it no longer, so we unhitched the horses and tipped the waggon and contents into the river. The Tommies took a poor view, but everyone else was pleased.

July 4th: Got to our new positions and started setting progressive fuses at about 2 a.m. and on the tick of 4 a.m. every gun on this mile long, and God knows what depth of wheel to wheel guns, fired simultaneously. The earth shook and the mind boggled at the concussion. After a while thick smoke settled into a fog and we had difficulty seeing our aiming lights. This was the beginning of the end. The assault was on Hamel and we were drawn up between Villiers Bretonneaux and Sailly-le-Sec. The third and fourth Australian divisions went over the top and gained their objective, a ridge beyond Hamlet. For our part we didn't have a single German shell near us but the 4th Division Brigade suffered severely.

They had 8 killed and some wounded in one battery alone. One of the casualties happened to be an old 32nd reinforcement man. Another battery behind us also had a few casualties. This battery caused considerable trouble with premature burst. This was due to poor American made ammunition and since they were right behind us and shooting over us some of us had one or two narrow escapes from flying shell splinters. One piece of red hot steel about 2" long whizzed past my head and buried itself in the ground at my feet.

The attack was a complete success and the Australians took over 200 prisoners and ninety machine guns. Those GERMANS who came back past us seemed rather weedy and very young and utterly shattered by the savagery of the barrage.

Many English tanks were in the assault and suffered rather badly. Aeroplanes dropped more ammunition and messages and the air was full of planes. The Germans counter attacked about an hour later but, after we put up another short withering barrage, the infantry quickly drove him back.

On the 9th July I was again sent back to the waggon line.

Strictly no civilian was allowed within 12 miles of the front line but, in spite of this, one old peasant and his middle aged daughter continued to live and work their fields near our waggon lines. I was talking to our brigade interpreter, a Frenchman, one evening as we passed them. The interpreter stopped them and started yarning. He questioned him about being allowed to stay so close to the line and was he not afraid of being overrun by the Germans? He replied that everyone knew he was a loyal and honest Frenchman and there was no need to worry about the Germans getting through with Australian infantry in front of him. As far as the odd shell coming over - well he was an old man and he could not be worried about that! And "Iknow in my heart they will never cross this ground again. I know bacause a German Uhlan Officer who billetted himself and his men on us told me laughingly that two battalions of AUSTRALIAN infantry were then marching through Amiens to drive back the whole German Imperial Army! We buried him that afternoon with several of his men while the Germans were being driven back through Villiers Bretonneaux".

On the 14th July we reluctantly handed over our model waggon lines to the 2nd Division and made temporary lines to the left front of Glisey and behind Corbie on the Somme. On the way up we passed some 5th Division lines and I just missed Brunton and Wilkinson by half an hour. These temporary lines were very rough and watering horses difficult because of the steep river bank, though we enjoyed the river and German shelling of the river a little higher up supplied us with lovely fish.

When the shelling started we would strip off and dive in and wait for the stunned fish to drift down river. Fritz also shelled the opposite bank at night with yellow and blue cross gas which used to drift across to us.

There was an English observation balloon anchored just near us and a 12" gun close by in the village so it is a wonder we didn't get more attention. To make matters worse the main Albert-Amiens line ran between the river and the little village of Daours and was used to bring up the big gun at night to fire into the enemy back areas. One of our drivers drowned in the river. No one knows how and one night a German plane brought down 3 of our observation balloons in one go. The guns had been moved up in front of Vaux and in front of Sailly-le-Sec.

On the 19th July we left our waggon lines and pulled into a very open position under a big bank in front of Lahausay Wood and in right rear of the village of Lahausay. The only watering point for miles was right in the village where they had large troughs. Consequently the batteries, and hundreds of horses, had to form up in queues and all water for washing had to be carried away in canvas buckets. The Germans, of course, constantly shelled the village reducing it to rubble but, apart from making it very uncomfortable for us, never actually damaged the troughs.

We ran our horse lines along under the bank, dug out

bivouacs into the bank, and started building frames for earthen revetting walls to protect the horses exposed side. We got the wood for this job from the wood some 200 yards away - why we did not make our waggon lines in the wood I will never know. This wood was honeycombed with heavily armed and barb wired support trenches. It was also full of wild cherry trees and although the fruit was small it was ripe and sweet. Consequently wood chopping parties sent up there were usually discovered a couple of hours later by a frantic sergeant major asleep beside a felled cherry tree. In fact most off duty men could be found there crawling about in the barb wire to get some hard to get fruit. The wood also housed a team of monster crawler tractors for a six inch battery and they would occasionally drawl out with a great deal of noise to move their guns.

On the 24th July I went up as brakesman on a waggon carrying ammunition to the battery. The road through Lahausay and Bonay (very badly knocked about) and in which our 5th Division was caught one night and rather badly knocked about. The road continued through what was left of Corbie then down a long steep hill and along a left bank of a large marshy lagoon. After unloading the ammunition the major told us we were to go into Vaux and collect a load of scrap timber from the shattered village and take it up to a proposed new gun site about 1,000 yards in front of the batteries present position.

After we had done this he told us to go up to Maille-le-Sec and salvage a gig he had seen up there which, typically, he thought he could use. So we started off. It was a bright moonlight night by now and absolutely still in this great depression. We went on and on and thought we were never coming to the place. We quite expected a German to pop up from the roadside or find ourselves in no-man's land and all the time the sound of machine guns was getting closer.

At last we pulled up in the village under cover of a pile of rubble which represented the village church. We left the lead driver in charge of the horses and went in search of the gig. We crawled into every battered farm and stable yard we could find. All the time, in the still silent night, we could hear the shells passing high overhead and the tut-tut-tut of German machine gun bullets chipping bits of the shattered buildings above our heads.

We found numerous wrecked farm carts, but finally found one in fair repair though badly chipped by shell splinters - a sort of light spring gig. We got it out from the collapsed roof, turned our team, tied the cart onto the back of the G.S. waggon and lost no time in getting out.

We were blocked just outside the village by an infantry transport column which had been caught by shell fire while we were in the village and had suffered heavy casualties. We finally got past these people in the gully just below the big hill and struck some gas. We decided to make a dash for it. In the middle of our dash the gig, to our dismay, started to work loose so I had to climb over the back of the waggon, grab the shafts while the whole outfit

careered madly along a shell pitted road. What an absorbing sight we must have presented in the early hours of a moonlight morning.

Our next and almost last trouble was encountered in Boney. The road here, a bottle neck, was jammed thick with guns, men, horses and waggons going to and from the line. We were almost in the centre of the village when the shelling started. The recognised procedure here is for pedestrians to get off the road the best way they can through houses, ditches, alleyways, anywhere to give the teams a chance to get clear. We were going well when our two leading horses went down into a shell hole. The two wheelers bore down on top of them while the crazy gig swung out into the road and jammed a gun team dashing in the opposite direction.

In a moment the road was a tumbling mass of men and horse-flesh. Miraculously injuries to man and horse were all minor and everyone was on their way in a very short time. It is remarkable how men can work when under fire, but the already somewhat "dented" gig was in no way improved. By the time we had got it back onto the road the major's ears must have been burning.

Nearly home and passing an anti-aircraft battery a German plane chanced to fly over us very low (it was daylight now) and the battery opened up at a low angle just over our heads and a few yards away. The blast nearly blew us off the face of the earth, and the horses, already badly shaken, nearly collapsed on the spot and broke the pole again for the second time that night.

However, our work was not yet done. Before leaving the lines the previous evening we were told, on our return, to pick up a load of hay in a nearby field. So, we plodded wearily on, now in pouring rain, picked up the now wet hay and returned home just in time for 6a.m. day's work.

Sometime later while I was up at the guns a German plane dropped an aerial torpedo one night right onto our horse lines - a direct hit between the tall bank and the revetting. Sixty three horses were killed or had to be destroyed. It must have been a ghastly sight. Only two men were hit. The replacement horses, an untrained lot, gave endless trouble.

On the 26th July I again went up to the guns with the re-lief. As D Subdivision had received reinforcements I was trans-ferred back to my C. Subdivision. The battery was in an ideal posi-tion some 200 yards in front of Vaux, on a level stretch of ground between a little hill and a tree lined road. At our usual 20 yards interval the six guns just fitted in. Our pits had been dug into the edge of a ripening wheat field and we changed our camouflage as the colours of the wheat changed. Our dugouts were dug into the side of the hill under some scattered trees and our Officers' mess and S.O.S. post were higher up under another fringe of trees. We had to cross open enemy observed ground to get there so dug a com-munication trench from the batteryto O.M.

There were two footpaths worn some 30 yards behind our guns; one by infantry passing at night from the road to old support trenches on top of the hill; the other path worn by ourselves, but this latter path led from the trees past our pits and stopped suddenly some 20 yards from the road. An aerial photograph showed this suspicious looking path stopping just short of the road so we promptly tramped an extension to the road and both paths then looked like innocent tracks from the hill to the road - except for a few empty brass shell cases not under camouflage, shining in the sun. This was soon remedied and we had only one casualty in this position.

One night during a late shoot we had a bad backfire on our gun caused by a flaw in the shellcase. There are small ports in the breech mechanism of the gun provided especially for such an emergency, and a small portion of the explosive charge escapes through them. Unfortunately I received most of this by-passed explosive charge right in the middle. It blew half the right side of my tunic and breeches away, and badly charred my leather money belt and most of my two-up winnings of the week before. We were engulfed in a thick creamy sulphureous smoke and when it cleared sufficiently I found myself sitting on the floor of the pit trying to put out my smoldering clothes. I was almost totally deaf for about ten days. This was known as Gun Deafness - NO sympathy!

About this time stories were coming in of German dawn patrols going out to relieve their night outposts and finding them deserted. There seems to have been quite a bit of this most mysterious and demoralising thing happening and it appeared that blackened Australian infantry parties would sneak out, surprise these outposts and, at the point of cold steel, bring them back without firing a shot! Pitch black nights and the noise of gunfire used to advantage covered any sound they made!

One day we received orders from headquarters to build a real dugout, for some future advance, into the hillside of our good position and a sapper was sent down to direct operations. We started to drive 2 tunnels into the hillside each about 6' high and a yard wide and both heavily timbered. We took it in turn to work 2 men at a time in 1½ hour shifts. Persomally I think that dugout did more harm than good because, frequently, we didn't have enough camouflage to adequately cover the freshly dug earth and sometimes engineers would bring up timber while we were too busy to cover it and the fresh sawn timber might lie exposed for a couple of hours. Enemy pilots had very sharp eyes and low flying airmen didn't miss much. I am positive that timber was responsible for one bad straffing we got one night at the end of July.

The S.O.S. duty was most unpleasant at this position owing to its exposed position in full view of enemy lines, but excellent from our point of view to spot enemy gun flashes at night and to pinpoint a German battery.Sometimes, during a German area straff, the unfortunate guard would spend his time dashing for cover in the nearby slit trench then rushing back to his S.O.S. board to try to measure the angle to give him the position of enemy gun flashes. At the same time he had to keep his head clear enough to recognise

his own area S.O.S. flare signal amongst all/coloured flares the Jerries were sending up about this time. He was expected to report position of enemy guns, calibre of shells fired, kind of shells and rate of fire among other things. Sometimes a fellow was too busy to run and wake his relief.

July 31st. Three more of our balloons bere brought down just behind us and that night Jerry opened up with a battery of 4.2s firing shrapnel. He was only hopefully raking those two innocent looking paths on the chance of getting some infantry but, as the one innocent looking path went past our camouflaged guns, we got the benefit of it all. Only one man was actually hit and he got s B lighty out of it. One shell blew the side out of our gun pit and covered me with dirt and shrapnel rattled against the gunshield and punctured some of our live shells without exploding anything. Another shell exploded just behind our gun where our sub commander had been standing. I looked around to see where his remains had been blown and saw him unconcernedly crawling out of a near by shell hole brushing the dirt off his tunic.

August 3rd: We manhandled ammunition up from the road all the afternoon and right through the night, breaking off at fairly frequent intervals to give the Hun sixty rounds at gunfire rate on various parts of his support lines. The heavy batteries away behind us roared incessantly pumping gas and high explosive into the enemy positions. At this stage one realised just how much our artillery bombardments had been steadily increasing for the past 2 or 3 weeks. One could imagine how many new batteries must have been brought into action and we also noticed the Hunn artillery didn't seem to be quite so keen to start an artillery duel and his daylight work dropped considerably.

From dark to daylight the roads were becoming increasingly jammed with lorries carrying small and large ammunition, engineers supplies and every imaginable kind of equipment. The noise of engines increased with the density of traffic. The shouting of drivers and the curses of men and the heavy rumble of the solid tyred lorries all added to the confusion until we thought the noise would reach the German lines.

One night a Hun plane dropped a parachute flare right above the road beside us. I expected to see wild confusion but nothing stirred. There might have been not a living thing for miles. ~~For~~ the lightless, yard apart lorries stood motionless, their dusty tops matching exactly the colour of the road.

Later that night the Germans heavily bombarded the whole valley with gas, shrapnel and high explosive. We thought the show must have been given away, but he evidently didn't guess what was

going on and his "strafe" was just routine. Obviously something big was about to happen and we were getting rather strung up lest the Germans would get suspicious and have time to reinforce the area.

On the 6th August "A" sub guns moved up to a forward position in front of Vaux and got into position beside the right section which already had its guns there. For the past 3 nights our waggon lines had been carting ammunition to this new position, but now they started carting all our spare ammunition from our gun pits. B ob Shute happened to be brakeman on one waggon and on his second load, about midnight, I asked him what sort of a place we were going to. He described it as an open field, bang under the noses of the Huns, with not enough cover to hide a cat. To get there one had to cross a constantly shelled pontoon bridge, along a road through a swamp, and, if you get off the road, you've had it!

I said good night to Shute and was just crawling into my b lankets when I was told I must go up with the waggons to the new position and learn as much as I could (in the dark) about the area so that I could act as guide for the guns. By this time the waggons had gone on so, cursing at the top of my voice, I ran after them and scrambled over the back of the first waggon I came to only to find it was from another battery. I rode with it until we came to the bottle neck of the pontoon bridge. I crossed the shaking overladen bridge on foot. Shells started falling in the village j just ahead and one could hear the teams breaking into a gallop.

I crawled on to one as it started its wild careering - wrong waggon again. It belonged to the 29th battery but this was near enough as I knew that, wherever we went, my battery would be right beside it. It had been such a wonderful, still night with hardly even a distant shot until these shells started falling in the village, but now the noise of many hundreds of horse teams and their clattering guns and waggons was enough to wake the dead. The infantry, walking at the roadside going up the line, cursed us and yelled at us to go slow and make less noise. However, once this sort of momentum started it was hard to stop. Why the Huns weren't alerted I shall never know.

At last we got out on to the open marshy country and I wandered about looking for my outfit. I knew we were very close to the front line. The German verey lights were so bright they looked close enough to fall on you. There were long piles of ammunition covered by long dry grass everywhere. Everytime a flare went out the night seemed utterly pitch black. In the light of another flare I could see a lot of horses, harness, waggons and tin hats shining dangerously bright.

An old piece of cardboard with the 30th written on it assured me I had found the battery. The first man I ran into was

I had been mechanically sighting and firing for 10 minuted. The gun was lurching so badly the bubble on my chronometer was jumping wildly and the only way I could sight was to catch the bubble as it came more or less level, pull the trigger and hope for the best. I was relieved after about half an hour which was about as much as a gun layer could stand at that pace. The sound waves beat against my head and I looked around to find us half buried in shell cases. There was no wind and lots of men were made violently ill by the discharged cordite fumes. The smoke hid our aiming posts to add to our difficulties, but we were not fired on once.

As the sun rose the smoke lifted a bit and we could see what was going on. In front of us was the village of Hamel. Our barrage had lifted well beyond it and our tanks and infantry were passing through it. On either side of us as far as we could see was a great wall of field guns - what the papers were to describe later as "a wall of guns, wheel to wheel, along the entire front". Actually the guns were at 20 yard intervals but that was close enough. All guns were still in action and the sight of all this massed artillery right out in the open, without a spot of cover, was a sight to see. From that day on we forgot about sandbag shelters and gun pits and fought in the open.

A long way behind us the heavies were still pounding away and the 60 pounders were about 1,000 yards behind us. We fired continually until 8.30 a.m., lifting our barrage every 15 minutes. The operation was an outstanding success. Our infantry advanced 9,000 yards. The Germans, shattered and ~~stultified~~ stupified by the suddeness and force of the attack, offered little resistance. A great many of them had to thank the thick pall of smoke for their escape.

The advance was made in 3 stages. First the frontal attack with very heavy barrage. Second an open warfare attack with creeping barrage and third explorations and digging in. The tanks and exploration parties had a great time digging detached parties of Huns out of hiding.

At 9 a.m. we limbered up our guns and started our advance into captured territory. What was left of the roads after our shelling was blocked with traffic and, until now, we had hardly had a shell returned at us.

However, we now learned that all had not gone so well on our left. The English troops had been held up and ran into trouble on some bad ground and had been unable to silence the enemy guns on their sector. In consequence of this, when we made our advance, we came under flank fire from enemy guns. Things got uncomfortable until we entered a bit of sunken road and here we were given ten minutes of hell. A German battery of 5.9 guns was dug in on our right and had an open sights target of all of us. In a few minutes of unmolested shooting the Huns had our column a mass of blown up tanks, guns, waggons, men and horses. The mess was indescribable. The horses went down ~~and~~ with their drivers and the gun wheels shattered. We decided to get out but it was amazing how our drivers stayed

with their horses and tried to get them free. A gun team, from some other battery, trying to gallop away along the top of the bank was literally blown on top of us - horses, gun and all. Snow Hamilton, a mate of mine, and I nearly got our heads kicked off by wounded horses. When we got clear I clambered over the back of some waggon that was galloping away. A fourth division battery, ordered into action against this German battery, was blown off the face of the earth before it could get its guns unhitched. They had 80% casualty.

When the English troops had been reinforced and taken their objectives we returned to try and salvage our gun. The sight was beyond description. Heaps of debris consisted of vehicles, men and horses and shattered guns. Our kits, tied to the waggons, were scattered in rags everywhere. Our gun was hardly worth salvaging but, with the help of ordinance, we got replacement parts for it and got it back into service. My gun team got out of this horrible business with extraordinary luck. Only one of the four of us was killed and two wounded but our horses didn't fare so well. We had a bad few minutes, the worst I have had. It was a horrifying business struggling there and looking more or less down the barrels of a battery of 5.9" guns firing point blank at you!

That night the battery pulled into action on the crest of a ridge just to the left of what had once been a thick wood. The rubble of Ceresy Gailley was somewhere on our right. Our waggon lines were just behind us. We had orders to engage, in open action, any target that presented itself.

We didn't have much shooting that night. The Hun didn't feel like presenting himself and without a gun our section had none. Some batteries were less fortunate. One made their waggon lines in an old German dressing station. The Hun got right on to them and next morning their lines were a shambles - horses, waggons harness, and gear. The same evening an English, very heavy battery, away to the rear, started dropping huge shells in Ceresy wood around which our brigade was sited. We could do nothing to stop them, and it was some time before they discovered their mistake - someone must have given someone the wrong map reference!

S.O.S. guard was a bit nervy work that night as no one was quite certain where the Huns were or if they would make an expected counter attack. Furthermore we were on newly captured territory which could be mined and in which the Hun certainly had every important spot accurately pinpointed for artillery fire. Nothing happened but, during my watch in the still creepy hours, I did see something moving. My first thought was "God, we've been surrounded". I nearly panicked and started an alarm!

It was a man and, in the bright moonlight, I could see his face. I nearly shot him but, as he seemed to be making very painful progress and was staring at me as he crawled towards me, I finally

went towards him. He let out a croak and called "Not shoot, not kill me". When I ventured closer I found a very badly wounded German. He had a leg blown almost off and a bad wound in the side. I got help and we dressed his side but could not do anything about the leg. At first he was certain he was going to be shot. We managed to reassure him, and while keeping a sharp look out for a trick, persuaded him to tell us, in very poor English, he had been wounded in our advance and had lain in a thicket all night afraid to come out until pain forced him to. The dope we gave him eased his pain a bit and among other things he gratefully forced on me was a 2nd class order of Iron Cross. When he was carried off to a dressing station he was again sure he would be killed. He might have been right. A couple of hours later a German shell landed right on the dressing station and blew it to hell!

The next day a Hun spotter plane, looking for artillery targets, wasbrought down close to us. We rushed over and hacked souvenirs off the remains. Things were pretty quiet. The Germans had been so shattered by the ferocity of the assault, had lost so many thousands of men as prisoners, they were not in a position to make an effective counter attack, and their troops were not in a condition to stand much more for a while.

In this position our waggon lines were very short of water and the horses, half at a time, had to be taken a considerable distance to water.

On the afternoon of the 9th August we pulled out of the line and camped the night on "Windy Flat" near Corbie, now well out of range of enemy fire, and next day moved up into the line again to take up new positions. There was a hitch somewhere in arrangementts. Probably our infantry took longer to fight through to a new objective and met stiffer opposition, anyway, while advancing quietly along a road we were shelled rather erratically, and the forward columns broke into a canter. We all headed for some woods on our left front. We had to cross a lot of open ground and found ourselves looking straight at the guns of a battery of German 5.9s only a short distance in front of us. They must have seen us, out in the open like sitting ducks, but they continued their ineffective shelling of the sunken road we had just left. They missed an extraordinary opportunity to blaze into us with open sights at point blank range.

We got our guns into action in the wood and our horse lines were made against a steep bank facing the enemy and in front of the guns. It was the only possible place. That bank was the only protection we had from open observation by the Hun.

Soon after we got there a battery of Royal Horse Artillery galloped up with their little 12 pound guns and went into action bang on top of our bank, and opened up on the German battery. Of course they drew fire. When things got too hot they cleared out leaving

us to whatever the Hun chose to throw at us. He gave us a lot. We seemed to interest him quite a bit. I got a shell splinter through my tin hat - fortunately it wasn't on my head at the time. I was very annoyed but my mate, Snow, couldn't see what I was upset about. He said it had never contained anything of any value!

In this position behind the bank we were shelled all night with high velocity 5.9" shells. This saved us because the high velocity shells have a low trajectory and to clear the bank the shells had to burst some distance behind us while we crouched against the front bank. He chased us up and down the gully all night and here I lost the only stripe I ever had. I was limber gunner in charge of the guns efficiency and cleanliness. While I had the breech mechanism in parts I thought Jerry was going to sweep to the left with his shelling, but he started sweeping to the right, the way I had moved. A shell burst on the top of the bank above me and covered me and everything else with barrow loads of dirt. My superiors showed very little sympathy over my loss of one or two breech block parts.

German planes bombed us three times that night and the fourth time they dropped a flare. Fortunately for us the pilot's attention was caught by a column of infantry passing near by. They showed up in the glare of a powerful flare and the poor wretched men were practically wiped out. This must have satisfied the pilots because, although they knew we were there, we were left alone after that.

We christened this place "Eight Inch Gully" because of three huge 8" German guns in it captured by the 45th Battalion. Further round in the gully was a captured battery of 5.9" guns and a battery of "whiz bangs". The diggers got these batteries into action against their previous owners. There was a great quantity of gas shells scattered around these guns and everyone who passed picked up a couple and fired them off into enemy territory at extreme range. Where they went no one knew but a couple of thousand gas shells fired into enemy territory must, at least, have given some people headaches!

It was then decided to try to fire the 8" guns but a careful examination showed that, of these apparently intact guns, two had been booby trapped. About 50 men manhandled the remaining gun and, using our own instruments, we trained it on to a large German marshalling centre. The shelling must have been unexpected because our own heavies had not yet had time to move forward. In fact the speed of our advance made the cumbersome heavy artillery useless.

We later tried another German heavy. We took no risks. We tied one end of a long piece of telephone wire to the trigger and took the other end into an old German dugout about 100 yards

away. We pulled. There was a shattering crash and we crawled out to find the carriage of the gun standing quietly where we had left it whil the whole piece - the barrel and breech mechanism was buried in the ground behind! Heaven only knows where the shell went! We only hoped it got as far as the enemy lines. The cunning Hun had taken off the recoil buffer, removed the springs and carefully replaced everything.

Early next morning Jerry opened up on us with howitzers. This meant he could drop shells right over the bank on to us. We had to evacuate. We had a few casualties before we could get the horses out. I dashed down into the gully as anxious to get out as anyone, grabbed the first pair of horses I came to, jumped on bare back and without bridles galloped along the gully with the rest.

Our search for water for the horses brought us to a small village where German cavalry had been in action against Australian infantry. The one street was full of dead Uhlans and their heavy type horses but there were comparatively few Australian dead. The fighting had been hand to hand and pretty grim.

That day I lost my gas mask and I have never been more "windy" and nervous. One feels so helpless against gas without one's gas mask and there was always a chance of running into it.

That night we were ordered to move our waggon lines back - a thing we were only too happy to do as they were still in front of our guns. We moved back to a position near Cericy and here, to my great relief, my gas mask was miraculously returned to me. One of the fellows in the battery had seen it hanging on a tree, picked up by some passer by. My name was scrawled all over it. I had dropped it while watering horses.

For our horse lines we chose the blind side of an artificial bank and early the following morning we were awakened by enemy 5.9 delay action shells bursting along the top of the bank. They were working towards us in 25 yard strides and were soon on us. I had slept the night in a gutter on top of the bank and had a dress circle view. One shell burst under our C sub waggon but went so deep it didn't damage it. One of our chaps running for cover was knocked out cold by a clod of earth the size of a football. These delay action shells, falling right amongst us, did extraordinarily little damage. They have to actually hit something hard.

On the evening of the 12th August we moved south near Rosieres. Here we met the Canadians. They told us the storming troops for the whole offensive consisted mainly of colonials. They said there were 82,000 Canadians, 80,000 Australians, 35,000 English as well as New Zealand and African troops. At this point we were a good distance inside captured enemy territory and the roadsides were littered with enemy dumps, guns of all callibre and every kind of equipment. We, like almost every battery, now sported a German service waggon to carry our surplus gear. The horses, caught roaming around, had probably never been in a waggon before and caused some problems.

Near Rosieres we made our waggon lines in a valley which was a large German ammunition dump. A light railway ran through it, now run by the Canadians. Hundreds of thousands of shells were arranged in neat piles around the valley. There were every kind and every callibre from H.E. to gas. Not an ideal place for waggon lines especially as Hun bombers came over at night. However we were not molested while we stayed in reserve waiting for orders. There was one annoyance, nothing more. For some reason spent bullets occasionally whined into our camp fired from Heaven knows where.

The horse watering facilities were bad here and the only ones for miles around consequently there was a continuous queue of at least a thousand horses waiting to drink. The germans knew this and had it ranged accurately but, for some reason, only fired an odd shell once or twice a day. One can imagine the scatter when a shell did come over and the subsequent rush to beat the other fellows back to the trough when the shelling stopped.

On the 16th August we came back through Villiers Bretonneaux to Corbie without going into action after all on the Rosiers sector. We passed through just after the village had been shelled by long range guns and a lot of artillery reinforcements had been caught in the fire. There were some casualties and, to most of them, it was their first experience and they were sitting about in holes and gutters smoking; calm but with that stolid, vacant sort of expression one sees on men who have just come through this sort of thing.

On the 20th August we moved up to Cericy and made our waggon lines behind the same bank that had sheltered us before and next day our guns went into action on a new line. We established our gun limber lines handy on the bank of the Somme canal about 500 yards behind the guns in case we had to get them out in a hurry. I was given the Major's pet charger. He had two, and I was a sort of second groom. I took it up to the limber lines and had to look after it there. For my own mount I was given a fiery, hard mouthed little chestnut that took a bit of handling. I had to lead the Major's horse with all his equipment as well as all my own gear. This consisted of blankets, oil sheet, spare clothes, overcoat, tin hat, gas mask, haversack, water bottle, bandolier with 50 rounds of ammunition and rifle.

I started out all right but I no sooner came to the first house in the village when the Huns started shelling it. With a shattering screech a 5.9" shell burst right inside the pisé mud brick house not five yards from me. I was covered with flying fragments of timber and lumps of mud. My horse went down like a log and I found myself between my fallen horse and the Major's terrified animal.

Amazingly my mount had only been knocked out by a lump of earth and was almost unscratched. I got him up, grabbed the

Major's horse and, with my tin hat fallen over my eyes completely blinding me and with all my gear flapping around me, I set off at a wild gallop as more shells fell and leaving the direction to the horses. We turned a corner and my horse went down again, tripping into a mass of wounded horses and wrecked vehicles and a smashed motor ambulance. We got disentangled. Shells were falling everywhere and the village around us was ablaze. My horse was bleeding badly and I was afraid he was not going to stand much more. Both my hands were fully engaged with the horses and my tin hatwould fall over my eyes and all my gear was still swinging wildly but we eventually got clear and away.

The Major was concerned about his blasted horse and seemed to think it was my fault. His horse, however, suffered only minor wounds and the vet took over my mount and it soon recovered. I felt let down because I had no scars to show for the affair.

We few men at the limber lines had a good time, taking turns to cook and spending the day bathing in the canal or sleeping. We only lost one horse through shell fire, but gas used to hang about at night. The Hun shelled the canal higher up a lot, looking for a pontoon bridge he had abandoned. After each strafing we would strip off and dive into the canal and collect a feed of stunned fish. We sent surplus fish up to the battery.

One day Bombardier Anderson M.M., a battery galloper came cantering along the canal bank towards us. A german shell burst in the canal beside him. It knocked them over without hurting either HORSE OR A RIDER but they were both thoroughly drenched and when he got to us, roared with laughter while he felt himself all over - nothing could upset that chap.

On the 22nd Auguat a big stunt opened out and it was very successful. Several thousand prisoners were brought back past us. This stunt just left us out of range of enemy targets. On the 23rd the attack on Bray was made. Our brigade didn't fire in the attack but leap-frogged through the other batteries while they were in action. Bray is in a deep hollow valley and the surrounding country is very high, though completely level like a tableland. As we advanced the Germans were being driven out of Bray by our troops and we could see the fighting on both sides of the town, and the German and our own artillery barrages steadily moving back into German territory. It was a wonderful sight.

This high road into Bray was littered with German skeletons. They must have been there for years. The flesh was all gone from their bones and they were just sketons in rotting uniforms. We could not understand why they had been left there. They were well inside old German territory and had been driven over for ages. Our horses hated it and whimpered. There were skeletons of horses too.

On this road Bray lay at our feet at the bottom of a precipitous chalk cliff over 200 feet high. It was a wonder to me we got our guns down the rough track at all. The vehicles tumbled and slipped all over the place. The wheel horses did a wonderful job. As I was horse holder I went ahead with the Major to look for a new battery position. Bray was not a pretty sight but the Australian dead were few compared with the Germans. They had some good regiments there too as it was an important railhead, but our artillery barrages must have been terrible.

Our new position was through the town and above the railway yard. While we were there the Major was hit by a shell splinter and rather badly wounded in the right shoulder - a "blighty" at least. I thought he had lost an arm. We got him off on a stretcher pretty soon as there happened to be a first aid post not far away.

Major Walker was a very fine man and he had the admiration and respect of everyone. He was extraordinarily game in a casual sort of way. I have seen him - to my great fear if I was with him - walk calmly towards a positive hail of shell fire and usually the shelling would conveniently lift until he had passed. (~~He was more~~) He was more worried about his horse which was not badly hit. I took it back to our new horse lines on a ridge behind Etenium across the valley from Chepilly Wood.

This wood was full of English and American dead. Also on the edge of this wood was an abandoned battery of German 5.9" guns. They had evidently been caught in our barrage whilst trying to save them with disastrous results. The place was a tangle of mangled men and horses. I have never seen such a bloody sight. Two British tanks had been shelled and blown up and their crews were just heaps of ashes. Not a nice place!

That evening one of our mules (they had replaced some of our extensive horse casualties with mules) coming back from watering stepped on the spring of a German mine with the resulting casualties of one man and three mules.

These waggon lines were a long way from the guns which meant it would take all night for the ammunition teams to make two trips. We would leave the lines about 9 p.m. in pouring rain and get back about 6 a.m. wet, caked with chalk, tired and hungry - just in time to set out again on some other job. I made a couple of trips to the guns in daylight with Tommy Hannar (M.M.), "the water cart king". Tommy refused medals ~~three~~ twice times and was finally ordered to take one. Sometimes these trips were nasty. He had a once splendid red silk cushion with gold braid and tassels, which he always sat on, and cherished greatly. On one of our trips we were stopped outside Bray by a military police patrol who said "You cant go past here with that thing, it is not safe". I inwardly agreed but Tommy just quietly told those police where they could go, nudged on his two donks "This & That" and went on his way. He said

"the boys gotter have water".

When the shelling got bad, (the German balloons were looking right down on us) he would light his pipe and smoke furiously - if only those blasted mules would have galloped. Sometimes I would sing to stop my teeth from chattering. Several times we were covered in flying splinters, rocks and mud, and stones and the fume of exploding shells. Tom's crimson cushion had a corner blown off and one water cart wheel was torn by a shell splinter. Our chaps at the guns on the ridge had been watching us and cheered Tommy's arrival but left me, who felt quite a hero, to help unload the water. The return trip was just as bad. BUT, WE DID GALLOP

The next day Tommy, "Fat" Ellis the C sub sergeant and two others left for long leave in England after three years of war.

On the 27th August we moved our guns to a high ridge on the left of Suzanne. The gun position was again an awfully long way from the waggon lines through difficult country with no roads. We got there with only one chap named Maclean and his horse casualties.

I was driving wheel on an ammunition waggon that might. We were the last waggon in the convoy. We got separated by heavy shell fire in the pitch darkness in a wood. After wandering around for over an hour we eventually got our waggon into a valley where we discovered what had been once a road and which we followed. At a junction we found the remains of a signpost. I dismounted and finally made out a sign pointing to Suzanne. Back along the way we had come! We seemed to be awfully close to German machine gun fire but there was no shelling. One of the drivers said "God we could be in German territory". So we headed away from the firing. A couple of hours later we came upon some of our own chaps - we never did get to the guns. The men we met were returning from their second trip to the guns so they had plenty of ammunition.

I was doing a lot of driving about this time, usually wheel. This meant I rode the near side wheel horse of the six horse team. They were a pair of splendid greys. The wheelers had the waggon pole between them and took the brunt of the thrust and pull of the waggon or gun and controlled the vehicle on hills, etc.

Next day the waggon lines were moved up to our old battery position at Bray. Another chap and I were detailed to take rations up to the battery so we harnessed old "Polly" into the mess cart - an old French farm cart with a canvas top to it and off we went expecting to be back by about midday. We never saw Bray again!

We wandered about for hours looking for the battery. They had moved during the night. We drove into Suzanne, got chased out of there by shell fire, went into a village on its left, unknowingly passing within a couple of hundred yards of the battery, got chased out of this village too, so we decided to try "over the next ridge". We soon came back. We found ourselves under direct fire from the enemy and came back with a goodly piece of the tail board

blown away. This business of almost walking into enemy territory was occuring far too often. The trouble was none of the lesser mortals quite knew where the front line was. I suppose the Germans were doing the same thing.

The position of the line changed sometimes a couple of times a day. We eventually found the battery - on the other ridge, hidden amongst heaps of German road metal. We also found the rest of the battery there too - teams, waggons, headquarters, everything. In our absence orders had come to move up. Someone brought along some of my kit but much of it was left behind at Bray. As we moved forward I collected new kit from the roadside - another overcoat, a bandolier, another water flask and from an old German dugout I got a supply of blankets. Unfortunately our lice were different to the German lice and, of course, these blankets were full of German lice - still they were a more colourful breed than ours!

That night we camped in old French 1916 dugouts recently vacated by the Germans and struck camp at 3 a.m. and moved our horse teams up behind the guns while they opened up on an attack, then moved up to a position in front of Han as the Germans retreated. Han was a rail junction and large German material and stores dump. He put up a hard fight for it, and we had a pretty hot time. This great dump was in a valley and the Germans had laid down corduroy roads for wet weather.

I shall never forget carting ammunition to the guns in their new position. Each team made three trips. Three times we went into that damned gully and each time I thought it would be our last. The Hun was bombarding the dump with 5.9" and 8" shells and each time we had to gallop through this inferno, in a positive hail of flying shell splinters, coils of barb wire, planks and girders. Everything he had in that dump was flying about. Each time we arrived we gathered in a cutting and the six teams tried to time the series of salvos and take it in turn to make a wild dash.

Our casualties were incredibly few. One of my lovely greys got a small shell splinter in the neck, but I stuffed a bit of rag in the hole and she was all right until we treated the wound that night. All I got was a nick on the cheek. Other teams were not so lucky. One man and his horses were obliterated, and one waggon was reduced to matchwood by a flying girder. Han was a bad place. The battery lost several men. One of our subs, named Kemster, was killed.

Next day we changed our gun crews and I went up to the guns again. The shelling had fortunately stopped. We moved our guns forward near a flattened pile of bricks which had been the village of Clery in the centre of which were cross roads - a lovely target.

We relieved a battery on the left which reported 80%

casualties. It was a rough show we got into. When things calmed down all I can remember was Bomdardier Anderson shoving one of those ammonia capsules up my nose while I lay against a bank. The place reeked of gas and everyone wore their gas masks.

At 4.30 the following morning we opened up our barrage for the coming attack and a very nasty accident happened! During the night another battery had pulled in in front of us higher up the ridge - much too close, and during the stunt one of our right section's guns miscalculated the angle required to clear the crest and the guns in front with the result that one of its shells made a direct hit on one of the guns in front of us, killing two men and wounding others. This nasty incident indicated how densely packed our artillery was for these attacks. Clery was a bad place, and a couple of new replacements to our guns got a terrible initiation.

On the 4th September our waggon lines were bombed out of their Clery position by planes and we moved behind Suzanne, and into reserve on the 6th near Hem. While we rested here the roads were blocked at night with men, munitions, guns, horses, lorries and even cavalry all moving forward. Obviously something big was afoot and the presence of cavalry meant they were going to try a breaak through. It turned out to be the capture of Peronne and Mt. St. Quintin.

On the 9th September we moved up through Clery and Peronne and Doingt and made reserve lines about a mile in front of Doingt. Peronne showed signs of having been a fine town but, when we passed through, it was little more than a head of rubble. It seemed evident that another big push was imminent, and we suspected we weren't being rested for nothing. Great efforts were made to prevent observation of our back areas and the build up of stores.

By now the Hun was getting a bit timid about flying over our lines in daylight, but still kept up heavy bombing raids at night. On the night of the 13th September about a dozen enemy bombers came over low and immediately the sky was alight with search lights and the planes were subjected to a withering fire from machine guns (including ours) and several batteries of A.A. guns. The planes didn't last long. Many of them crashed in flames, their bombs exploding when they hit the ground. The survivors fled. One bomb crashed uncomfortably close to us. It was a terrific sight but, what went up had to come down, and one could sometimes hear those thousands of machine gun bullets and shell splinters swishing past us. One of our men was killed by a piece of shrapnel that went right through his tin hat.

About this time the idea was conceived whereby a particular sector of the front line contacted a particular aerodrome when bombers flew over them at night. Night fighters were sent up but kept in the background until our search lights picked up a

bomber. A fighter would then move in behind, drop a cease fire signal rocket and move in for the kill. We saw five bombers shot down in one night this way. We felt the British pilots took a great risk of being shot down by our own fire.

On the 17th September we moved forward through Courcelles, passing a demolished hospital, through Tincourt and over open country to a gully running roughly parallel with the front line. We travelled up this gully. The night was so still - it was ominously still - and even the horses got nervous and jumpy. Suddenly a gas shell whined over us with its peculiar noise and exploded three quarters of a mile up the gully. This was followed by a high explosive 100 yards nearer. We realised the Hun was sweeping the gully with gas and H.E. at 30 second intervals with 100 yard sweeps. As we were going towards the shelling, and it was coming towards us, we increased the distance between vehicles to 150 yards. As we went on a shell exploded between the first and second gun teams. The next exploded in a heap of blue metal and I think every man and horse within 100 years was gashed by flying stones.

We were very close to the enemy lines and finally the full moon came out and revealed "C" Subs, 6 grey horses in the gun team and a bomber just cruising low over head. The bomber swooped and as the bombs exploded we cursed the grey horses and we cursed the moon. We had a sticky time and a telegraph post, struck by a bomb, fell on the greys and tangled horses and men in the wires. Mercifully the moon went into heavy cloud again and the bombing stopped. We finally established waggon lines in peace in front of Hamlet and to the right of Roisel.

It was cold that night and came on to rain. Our great coats got sodden with water and we couldn't smoke because we were under direct observation from the enemy. We lay on the ground under waggons and tarpaulins. When the moon finally came out two enemy planes found us and dropped an aerial torpedo which fortunately exploded on the bank above us leaving a crator about 12' deep and 20' wide. Other bombs fell and damaged our waggons and tarpaulins under which we lay. One or two men were hit. A dog, from Heaven knows where, found its way under my old piece of tin cover and tried to lie on my face. It had been hit and bled all over my gas mask much to my annoyance.

Our guns went into action before Jeancourt and to the right of Hervilly on the edge of the Bois de Hervilly. A thunderous attack opened up at dawn and four times that day our guns advanced - talk about work! Thousands of prisoners were brought back past us and this told us how the fight was going.

During that day and the following night the Germans were driven right back to the first defences of the Hindenburg Line.

It must have been a magnificently controlled advance. We slept while riding our horses. We slept while walking and we slept while standing up. We moved forward on the 19th through Jeancourt and took up a position on top of a chalk pit looking into Le Bois du Grand Priel. One of our chaps, Stevens, was unlucky here. Firing a Lewis gun at an enemy aeroplane the rear gunner got him with a well directed burst, and we had a busy time when the camouflage on our gun was ignited by shell fire.

Here we watered our horses at troughs in a one time sugar factory and tanks assembled there gave us some shelter from occasional shell fire.

On the night of the 29th September we pulled our guns out and moved northward back along the same gully past Rosiel and camped in an open field near Hesbecourt and Templeux-le-Guerand. Before daylight we were moving back up into the line equipped as horse artillery. All blankets and gear were left behind and rations strapped to each gun limber. We passed through Hagicourt and the whole 8th artillery brigade was assembled in a big gully nearly.

Here we waited for the attack to develop. We were to leap frog and pass through the Americans who were attacking first (our first experience of actually actively supporting the Yank). The line was only over the rise in front of us. We were to dash out and into action before the Hun could recover from the first onslaught

The Yanks went over but we still waited. A Hun plane came over and spotted the whole brigade assembled. He dropped a signal flare for its artillerybut, luckily for us, the air was so think with smoke, bursting shells, tank exhaust smoke, and smoke screens the signal was not seen. The plane was brought down by our A.A. or machine gun fire.

At last we got the order to advance. As we went over the ridge we found ourselves in the midst of the most wonderful and impressive battle field scene imaginable. It was a scene never to be forgotten with infantry, tanks, guns, everything in action in a sort of inferno of smoke and shell bursts. We immediately came into a hail of machine gun fire which cut short all further contemplation of the scene. Our horses were getting hit and we had to retire hastily.

We now discovered that the Americans had advanced right through the German first defences without stopping to clear out the dugouts and machine gun pockets and had gone on to their second line of defence sending their prisoners, unescorted, to the rear. These prisoners,finding their first line defences still occupied by a number of Germans, rallied and reinforced their comrades. The result was the Americans found themselves between two lines of German trenches, cut off from both retreat and reinforcements by a barrage of reformed German machine guns.

This was a horrible example of bad fire discipline and cost

a lot of lives. We could not give support because we were too close to fire from cover and would have been literally mown down trying to site our guns on top of the ridge. We had to camp the night in some old trenches.

On the 1st October we went into action on the right of Bony; a totally destroyed village which had been the centre of terrific fighting of the battle of the day before. The adjacent wood was thick with American dead, derelict tanks and large numbers of German dead.

Our position was right among the trenches of the first defences of the German Hindenberg line. We had to clear large numbers of German dead away before we could make a camp. We stayed here two or three days and got some pretty heavy German artillery fire directed at some barb wire entanglements only about 30 yards from our guns. The German fire was extraordinarily accurate and we were not touched. We did a lot of shooting from here.

I slept in a shallow trench and twice the first night a man, camped further along, dashed wildly over me trampling over my face and body. Shivering, he swore he heard groans coming from a decapitated German body near him. The poor chap had shell shock and was sent back next day. It was unfortunate that a mate and I had eaten a box of chocolates received from England that night, and my tummy was not feeling too happy. This bloke's gruesome descriptions did nothing to improve it.

On the Hindenberg line the Huns had placed a machine gun every 20 yards. From here we moved up into Bellecourt. This town was not so badly knocked about and was built high above the canal. The canal ran under a considerable part of the town through a tunnel. In this tunnel the Germans are alleged to have had their boiling down works where they extracted fat from their own dead. In the tunnel were certainly great boilers and a good many dead but these latter had been killed in the fighting and, since most of the boiling work's fittings had been removed for some time, it was impossible to guess to what purpose the boilers had been put.

With our waggon lines still at Bellicourt we put our guns into action in front of Weincourt and since our waggons were so far behind we established limber lines in a valley behind the guns in case we had to get out quickly.

The night before the next attack we were to take part in, our limber lines were heavily shelled and I arrived about 2 a.m. to find them evacuating the lines for all they were worth to save the horses. The night was pitch black. The valley was full of gas and, in the confusion, I charged over a steep bank some 30' high. My horse fell and we both rolled to the bottom in a cloud of dust and gas, but were none the worse.

It was impossible to see properly anyway through the

fogged up eye holes of one's gas mask. That is why so many gun layers risked their lives during an attack by taking off the mask and leaving only the nose and mouth pieces in position.

The 49th battery was near us here and I met Brunton, Phippard and Wilkinson.

At 4 a.m. our waggon lines moved up to our temporarily evacuated limber lines. As this happened while I was on another job my kit was, of course, left behind once again!

Great numbers of cavalry were used in this attack together with large numbers of new, fast Whippet tanks. It was a great success and the enemy evacuated a large area burning stores and villages æ they went. They mined roads and booby trapped abandoned guns and equipment. We seemed to be taking greater slices of territory at each successive attack.

A tank 'drome was established near us after the show and the crews had great tales of the far penetrating attack that sometimes developed into a chase. From them we learned that three divisions of German cavalry had taken part.

We moved forward through Remicourt, Mort brehain, Brancourt, and Primont to Busigney where we established waggon lines and stayed in reserve for a few days prior to taking part in another big stunt. We came in for some enemy shelling here however, and lost several men and horses killed.

One night, as black as the ace of spades, we moved our guns up through Busigney, a village heavily mined by the Germans, and took up a position on a crest some 800 Yards in front of Busigney and looking down on a tiny village still occupied by the enemy. We had a nasty time getting into position as the Hun constantly swept the ridges and valleys with shell fire knowing advancing artillery must use these places. We also had difficulty laying out our lines of fire at night as any light would have been disastrous.

I had a couple of close escapes here. That night I was in a party of six (about 70 yards in front of our guns we were each "laying out" our respective gun aiming posts) when a veritable hail of shells burst on us. There was absolutely no cover but we had seen the gun flashes and fell flat on our faces. The night lighting equipment I was putting up got knocked about rather badly in my fall and I had lost my torch. I groped about endlessin the dark looking for it but, thanks to that evening's rum ration and four friends who did not drink, the whole business amused me considerably. When I found the torch and the aiming equipment it was impossible to see what was wrong so I tried to risk a quick light shielded with by body. I was immediately the centre of concentrated machine gun fire. So from then on I worked

in pitch darkness between bursts of fire. It took ages getting the appartus set up. When I finally got myself back to my gun the others were not amused.

When we opened up in the early hours of the morning things looked pretty bad. The whole crew of the E sub guns were soon wiped out and a lot of our ammunition had been set on fire. Several men in D sub were wounded and 6 horses in the teams waiting behind the guns were killed. The bracing effects of my rum had long since worn off and I was feeling pretty edgy as, in fact, we all were on our gun. Then it happened. With a shattering shriek a shell tore through our gun shield and buried itself right beside the trail of the gun. In the split second of time we knew we could not possibly survive, then nothing happened. We started to breathe again and realised the shell was a dud. After that we all felt much better as though some awaited disaster had been averted. We manned our gun like a quartet of demons, yelling and cursing and generally letting off steam.

A great many prisoners were taken in that stunt. Heaven only knows where they put them all. Some American detachments got lost in the confusion. Some even came back upon us, hesitating half thinking we were German gunners - we told them!

The Germans put up a very fierce fight, and their counter artillery fire on our sector was severe. We had a pretty hot time.

We followed on the advance immediately moving along a road littered with the debris of war. There were hundreds of German and American dead, horses, waggons, tanks and supplies. It worried me to see the Americans had still not learnt the art of strategy or initiative. There were lanes of American dead in front of machine gun nests. Very game they rushed headlong at entrenched machine guns never outflanking them. Other troops went around attacking the posts from the rear where the Hun could not bring his machine gun to bear.

As we approached our new position we came under shell fire and speeded up accordingly. As we galloped through St. Martin with bricks and mortar flying everywhere we saw a man calmly standing amongst it all taking a moving picture of us. We decided he was a bit light in the head.

Owing to some mistake, or perhaps we were intended to wait awhile, it was impossible for us to fire from our new position. We were so close to the enemy lines we would have been blown out of existence had we broken cover to site our guns.

It transpired the Americans in front of us had been unable to drive the Germans out of a strongly held position in a deep

railway cutting, thus leaving a salient in which we, unfortunately, were in the middle. To remedy this English troops made a daylight attack with very little artillery support. We, close behind, lay on our stomachs and watched. They were magnificent and so were their tactics. They drove the enemy out of his stronghold and into the distance. The scene was almost unreal it was so ordered. Grey and khaki figures were running, fighting and falling admidst the grey puffs of bursting shells.

This railway cutting formed part of the Hindenberg line. It was here I met Rex Chambers, an officer in a battery in the 7th Brigade. He had just spent 24 hours in a shell hole on observation duty and looked like one of Bainfather's Sketches.

We moved forward again to a position behind Roberville. Not a nice place with lots of shelling and gas. I stopped a very small piece of shell splinter in the neck - quite a small wound and a dose of iodine did the trick. The 29th battery, 100 yards to our left, had very heavy casualties.

From here we moved to a position in the open to the right of Le Cateau and in front of Abre le Guise. From here we were to fire part of the next stunt and then move forward with the advance a couple of thousand yards and go into action wherever a target presented itself.

Because of the short range of our 18 pounders we often had to move forward in the middle of a battle to keep within striking distance of the retreating Germans. Our infantry never seemed to miss a trick, and our own boys seldom held us up.

As we started to move forward a second time a German shell landed under C sub gun team and blew men and horses to bits. Fortunately none of our own shells in the gun limber exploded or things would have been worse. When the rest of our battery reached our new position it was up in the support lines and our machine gunners were putting down a barrage. We had to wait while a hail of shells and enemy machine gun bullets hissed harmlessly overhead. One of E sub's waggons was knocked out and all the horses killed, and the men wounded.

We stayed here a couple of nights, fired a stunt from here then pulled out and went to Weincourt. We had lost all idea of days or dates but, from here, we made a day's march to La Villa Malabre for a day or two's rest. In this village some of the famous Scotch regiments were billeted - the Black Watch, Gordon Highlanders and the Camerons. They were the finest looking lot of men I have ever seen and put our ragged, shell torn lot to shame.

While we pulled our guns into position in front of our waggon lines at our next position we got a bit of strafing and an English observation balloon was destroyed alongside us as it was being inflated. The road to the guns was treacherous and always

under fire, and some of our chaps were gassed. When we pulled out from here we headed again for Weincourt. Horrible weather raining in torrents! I took over Terry's horses when he was hit and taken to hospital.

We had just ridden through Brancourt when the leading column turned about, so we concluded we were being called into action. However the whole brigade stayed at Brancourt and we made ourselves comfortable in the deserted and only partly destroyed village. (Must have been the 10th November.)

On the 11th November we were told the war was over. (The day after we pulled in here.) That night we celebrated by blowing up old charges of cordite and stacks of German verey lights but, I think, it took a day or two for the implications of the Armistice to sink in, and everyone became very quiet and relaxed.

Unfortunately some top brass decided the Australians must be smartened up! This didn't mean replacing our terribly ragged and gun oily clothes but polishing our guns,and bits of brass had to have the paint scraped off. We even had to polish the steel wheel rims.

We had constant review type parades until finally some weeks later the entire division staged a protest parade. We were all very weary and wanted a little time to relax. We still had all the usual horse lines work to do - cleaning lines, watering, feeding, grooming and exercising horses, and guard and picket duties.

This protest parade was a model of order and discipline. Officers and N.C.Os were excluded. Temporary section and battery leaders were appointed and, on the day, the general agreed to hear our plea. We paraded in a large paddock - an excellent, very disciplined parade. The general's arrival was greeted with a fanfare of trumpets and a short, written request was presented to him. We then marched off in our units after these requests had been immediately granted as sensible and reasonable.

It was one of the smartest parades I have ever seen - taking into account the ragged condition of our clothing. Most of us blamed the railway union leader in Australia for this. A man named Chifley who called a nation wide strike and blocked all sorts of stores getting to us in France.

In early December we made a three day march from Brancourt to Hantmont. The whole brigade horse strength was stabled in a huge salt factory and the men very comfortably billeted in private houses. The people waited on us hand and foot. After early morning stables the only parade was not till 9.30 a.m. and in the afternoon there were a variety of classes one could attend.

We were close to Maubeuge, a big mining town, south of Brussels. These places still had a civilian population and had not been badly knocked about except for some huge mines the Huns exploded. The population consisted entirely of old men and women. The young had been sent to forced labour in Germany. The shops were

empty but the estaminets dug up a lot of champagne from extra-ordinary places. Some of us breakfasted on this fare one morning, and/finished up driving an abandoned German lorry into a hugh mine crator in the middle of the town square.

We were paraded for, and were inspected by the Prince of Wales, most unwillingly on our part because we still had not been issued with new uniforms and I am sure he must have been equally reluctant to walk down the lines of such a ragged villainous looking lot. We were ordered to wear greatcoats to hide our uniforms but, when the C.O. saw our greatcoats he said "For God's sake take them off again".

Because I could speak a little French I was given the wonderful job of advertising the pending auction sale of some of our horses. Our horses were graded first class to return to England and second class (some a bit the worse for wear) and our mules were to be sold to the French farmers. They desperately needed horses as the Huns had taken all their livestock. My job entailed riding out every day with a mate, visiting the local mayors in the villages in a wide radius around Maugeuge, giving them posters and telling them what type of horses and mules were to be sold.

We had a whale of a time. Every child and girl had to try on our hats and learn a few words of Australian (mainly "Good OH) while we consumed large quantities of food and wine pressed on us by the gleeful families. We always arrived home feeling very happy and it is just as well our mounts knew the way home.

I could have made a packet selling odd horses "under the table". My two fine wheel horses went back to England in spite of the fact that they both had minor wounds. For days after the auction odd mules and horses kept arriving back at the battery having slipped away from their new owners. They must have missed their mates. It was funny at the auction, the auctioneer wanted to know "Who the B Hell Monsieur Jim" was? The C.O. wanted to know what tales I had been telling!

I applied for early repatriation to Australia on the grounds of being a student. Then I got word that Father and Mother were coming over to England to meet me. So I applied for discharge in England. Both applications were granted. This caused some confusion, but the army was happy to give me my dischargeas I had to sign away all claims on the Australian Government such as cost of return to Australia and repatriation benefits of any kind.

Before I left France, Europe and England were smitten with a terrible type of flu which killed thousands and thousands of people. We all got it in my billet and of those who went to hospital nearly all died. Snow Hamilton, John Roxburgh and I were treated by the old old woman who owned our billet and who was so good to us. She dosed us on herbs she collected from the sountryside and we made s remarkable recovery.

After spending weeks in an English holding camp where I

became a guinea pig for testing all sorts of injected anti-flu drugs I got my discharge in time for a joyous reunion with my family.

We bought an old Sunbeam car and toured England very pleasantly accompanied by my friend, John Roxburgh. When we finally boarded the steamer to return home I was in civilian clothes and my war was over.

1993 75th Anniversary of World War. One.

Gallipoli has become a symbol of Australias part in World War One
It is remembered because it was the first time Australians fought in their own army & not as a contingent attached to other troops.

Seven thousand men died on Gallipoli before it had to be evacuated.
In the ensuing two & a half years Forty five thousand Australians died fighting in France.

A high price to pay for our part in what was to be called "the War to end all Wars"!

The Germans made their last breakthrough in the Corbie - Villiers Bretonneux area & were stopped at Amiens largely by Colonial troops under our own General Monash.

In August the great offensive started & our advance never really stopped.

Reading over. these notes I realise we just didnt have time to write up a diary during the final stages of the war.

I didnt even mention the shrapnel wound to my left knee. I was patched up with a sort of splint & carried on with a stiff leg for about a month.

This is the only wound to cause me trouble in later years. The gas seems to had no effect!

I should have mentioned our meeting the Gurkhas - Small, nuggety, smiling men, & totally ruthless.

They advanced through our lines at dusk with their horrible looking long knives strapped to their backs.

They offered to bring us back German heads.

It would be a brave man who would stand up to those fellers in the dark.

Then there was the occasion when I got permission to visit a mobile dental unit; I rode over a couple of miles, tied my horse to one of the outside poles of the small marquee.

The dentist was busy drilling

when the shelling started: he panicked, ordered an evacuation & jammed some filling in my cavity.

Meanwhile my frightened horse was doing a much better job of dismantling the marquee that the dental staff!

Years later a Vale dentist - found the Army dentist - had broken the head of his drill in my cavity & just plugged it in.

There are so many more I could write another diary just on the final stages of the war.

Frank Cody our C sub sergeant. He asked what the hell I was doing there? When I told him he let off steam and told me John Roxburgh had already been sent up as guide for the guns. So, after exchanging mutual opinions on the ruling powers, I made for the road, jumping a passing limber and made for home.

Another block at Circular Quay (the pontoon bridge) - and this time another Tommy waggon was half over the side. They had sent a man back to report for orders to their commander miles away. To the Tommies horror this was also quickly tossed over the side and I wondered how many waggons and limbers had already gone over. As shelling started up again even the Tommies stopped protesting.

On the 7th August we knew/were close to the big thing. At nidnight we gave the Hun sixty rounds of gunfire with the last of our ammunition, firing shrapnel ~~of~~ AT percussion to try to deceive him. The horse teams waited behind us to limber up immediately the last shot was fired.

We took our guns across "Circular Quay" queueing up with hundreds of other vehicles quietly enough, with only an occasional shell dropping in the background. When we reached the little village the Hun started shelling it but, luckily for us, concentrated his fire on a road entering from the east while we and most of the traffic were on the west road.

We got out on to the flat marshy country where our guns were to be sited. It was utterly still. Vehicles made no sound on the marshy ground There was no talking and only an occasional random burst of German machine gun fire and an odd gun going off in the distance. Only the constant display of enemy varey lights going up from their trenches worried us. The silence played on our nerves a bit. As we got our guns into position you could hear drivers whispering to their horses and men muttering curses under their breath, and still the silence persisted, broken only by the whine of a stray rifle bullet or a long range shell passing high overhead.

We started putting out our lines of fire, calculating our charging fuse settings so that our shells would keep bursting ahead of our advancing infantry. Some clown along the line had trouble with his fuse board and lit a match! When he pulled himself from under the mass of men on top of him he was covered in marsh mud and straw! Each crew's world centred around his gun, but we could feel that hundreds of groups of men were doing the same thing - preparing for the heaviest barrage ever launched.

At 4.29 a.m. silence reigned everywhere. Jerry appeared to be sleeping peacefully, unaware that hundreds of men had their fingers on hundreds of triggers. Away on our right we heard the stutter of some battery whose watch was a few seconds fast, then all hell broke loose and we heard nothing more. The world was enveloped in sound and flame, and our ears just couldn't cope. The ground shook and our little sphere simply heaved.

I was gun layer and eventually I looked down and realised