

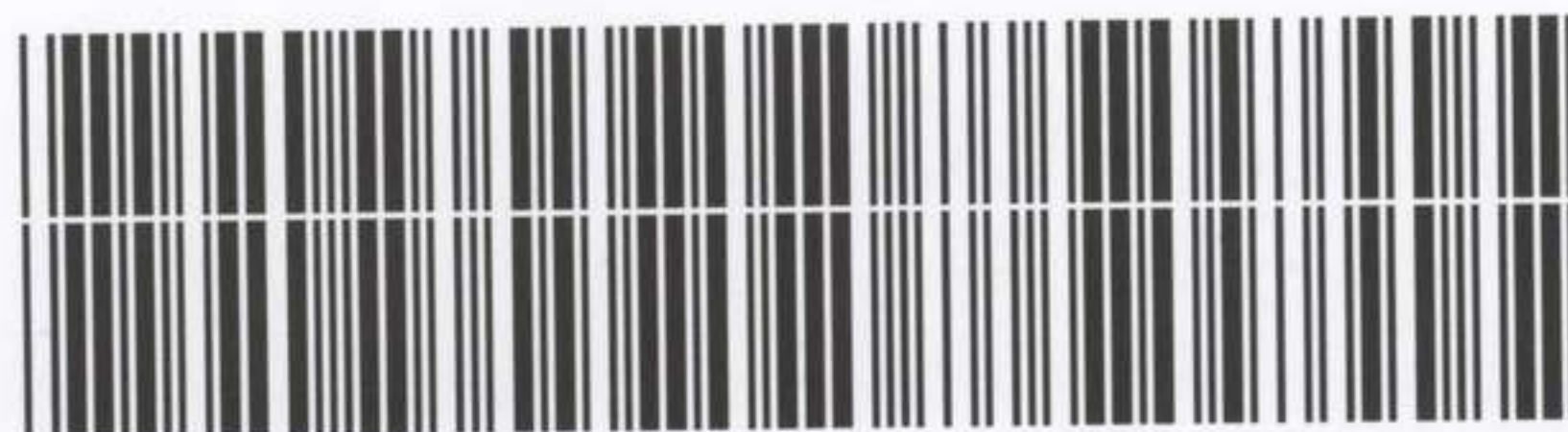
AWM4
Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,
1914-18 War

Infantry

Item number: 23/72/5

Title: 55th Infantry Battalion

July 1916



AWM4-23/72/5

WAR DIARY

or

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

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Army Form C. 2118.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.



Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
EGYPT ALEXANDRIA	June 22	-	The Battalion sailed from ALEXANDRIA in H.M.T. "CALEDONIA," en route for FRANCE, reaching MALTA on 25 th . On the evening of the following day the ship left MALTA, arriving at MARSEILLES on 29 th June.	
	30	-	An Advance party disembarked and embarked at 11.30. The remainder of the Battalion followed, and embarked by 12.30, the journey commencing about 1 p.m.	
FRANCE THIENNES	July 1+2	-	These two days were spent in travelling	
	3	2.30 A.M.	The troop train arrived at its destination. The Battalion detrained and marched to billets in the town of THIENNES, District of NORD	
	4	-	The Battalion paraded under Company arrangements for Bayonet Fighting, Musketry and lectures on Gas attacks and ^{the} defensive measures to be adopted.	
	5	}	The same training was continued on these days. In addition several route marches were made through the surrounding countryside.	
	6			
	7			
	8	-	Battalion exercised in a practical Gas attack and tear shell test.	
	9	8 a.m.	The Battalion, together with the rest of the 14 th Brigade A.I.F., left its billets in THIENNES and route marched to ESTAIRES, about 22 Kilometres distant. A halt for lunch	

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55th BATTALION
A.I.E.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
FRANCE MERVILLE ESTAIRE	July 9	4 p.m.	took place just beyond MERVILLE, after which the march was resumed and ESTAIRES reached about 5 p.m., where the Battalion was billeted, Battalion Headquarters being established in the Burgomaster's house.	
	10	-	A few men of the Battalion fell out on the march, but all eventually reached their new billets. Remained in billets all day.	
SAILLY-SUR-LA LYS		8.30 p.m. 11.30 p.m.	The 54th + 55th Battalions left ESTAIRES for SAILLY-SUR-LA LYS, about 10 Kilom. distant, arriving there about 11.30 p.m., where they were billeted. Progress was slow and cautious owing to enemy aeroplane activity and the proximity to the firing line.	
	11	8.30 p.m.	Men remained in billets during the day and in view of the activity of enemy aircraft, were not permitted to wander or loiter in the streets. The Battalion commenced its march of the final stage to the trenches, going via BAC ST MAUR, and took over the position of the front line, sections 37 to 44, at the time held by the 45th Battalion of the 12th Australian Infantry Brigade. The position (Map reference H 35. C. 8. 4 - Sheet 36 Ed. 67) which the Battalion now held lay, roughly, 4 miles to the South of ARMENTIERES, and formed the outside of a Horseshoe Salient, the distance between our trenches and the enemy's at this point, being about 300 yards.	
Front Line Trenches.	12	1 a.m.	The relief and taking over was completed about 1 a.m. on the morning of the 12th - Battalion Headquarters was established at FORAY FARM (Map reference H 35. C. 8. 4 - Sheet 36 Ed. 67). During the day there was little activity beyond artillery exchanges. Casualties. One man wounded by rifle grenade explosion.	

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55th BATTALION
A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
FRANCE	July			
	13		<p>Intelligence reports that the trenches opposite us are occupied by the 21st Bavarian Regiment</p> <p>Enemy bombarded CONVENT AVENUE and BOUTILLERIE AVENUE at intervals between 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.</p> <p>"Gas Alert" at 11.30 p.m.</p>	
	14		<p>Casualties. 1 man Killed; 1 wounded - Through bursting shell</p> <p>Our Artillery caused much damage to enemy parapets they are busy repairing same</p> <p>Enemy artillery very active during afternoon and evening. CONVENT AVENUE again shelled.</p> <p>We sent out patrol from 10.30 p.m. to 2.30 a.m. 14/15th.</p> <p>Casualties. 1 man wounded during artillery bombardment.</p> <p>Enemy snipers very active during evening used many flares.</p>	
	15	9 p.m.	<p>Troops holding line to our right made Gas attack on enemy. Some of the gas drifted across 55th Battalion lines, and Gas Helmets had to be called into use. No casualties.</p> <p>Relieved by 6th. Bn. Shropshires Light Infantry between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. Battalion moved into billets in BAC ST MAUR. A very heavy bombardment took place after the gas attack but no losses were incurred by the Battalion in withdrawing</p>	

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55th BATTALION
A.I.E.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices												
FRANCE	July															
BAC ST MAUR	16		Battalions now in billets, and being utilised for fatigues, carrying ammunition, stores etc. up to the front line preparatory to an attack on the enemy's trenches													
	17 th + 18 th		These two days were occupied in the same way.													
	19 th	4.30 p.m.	Received final orders for the attack on German lines this afternoon. Marched out of billets to join in attack which was launched about 6 p.m. The attack was successful and the German trenches were pushed carried. The trenches were held during the night and communication established with our own lines. Owing to strong counter attack by the enemy, and to being exposed on both flanks a retirement was necessary and this was effected. The losses were heavy, but the battalion, four-fifths or more of whom were strangers to battle, acquitted itself honorably in its first engagement, and returned with 140 German prisoners (The report of the commanding officer, Lieut.-Col. D. M. McConaghy C.M.G. is attached. See Appendix "A.")													
	20 th	7 A.m.	<p>Casualties:</p> <table><tr><td>Killed</td><td>2 officers</td><td>35 other Ranks.</td></tr><tr><td>Died of Wounds</td><td>5 "</td><td>5 "</td></tr><tr><td>Wounded</td><td>5 "</td><td>149 "</td></tr><tr><td>Missing</td><td>4 "</td><td>139 "</td></tr></table> <p>This is a statement of casualties as known on 31st July 1916. Many of the missing will undoubtedly be proved to have been killed - and others wounded in their trenches are doubtless prisoners of war.</p>	Killed	2 officers	35 other Ranks.	Died of Wounds	5 "	5 "	Wounded	5 "	149 "	Missing	4 "	139 "	Appendix A.
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55th. BATTALION
A. I. F.

Army Form C. 2118.

251

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II. and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
FRANCE.				
BAC ST MAUR	20 th		Men of assembled in billets near BAC ST MAUR OF BATTALION	
	21 st		Battalion rested in billets whilst awaiting further orders.	
	22 nd		Battalion paraded at Divisional Baths, where they obtained hot baths and exchanged clothing. Orders received to proceed to front line again & take over part of trenches formerly occupied.	
Front Line Trenches. Sections.		9.15 p.m. 11.30 p.m.	Marched from billets and relieved 6 th Battalion Kings Shropshire Light Infantry. The relief was completed about 11.30 p.m. Battalion Head Quarters again established at FORAY FARM. The part of the line occupied is from N.5.C. 9. 6. to N.6.C. 5. 10.	
40. to 42 and part of 43.	23 rd		Due to losses in action A and B Companies are temporarily combined ^{- as one Company -} and C and D Companies. Similarly 1 platoon is at BOUTILLERIE POST and one at FORAY FARM.	
	24 th		Intelligence Officer reports hearing a noise as of a compressed air machine boring in the enemy's lines at TURKS POINT Casualty 1 man wounded in the hand by a sniper	
	25 th		A new R. A. P. at N.5. a. 10. 6 being built today under supervision of Engineers. The wire opposite Listening Post on our right destroyed by a shell. Our patrol out from 9.45 p.m. to 11.45 p.m.	

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A. I. F.

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
FRANCE	July			
Front line trenches.	26 th	4.50 p.m. 10.30 pm	<p>Enemy busy the last few days on repairing their trenches, parapets etc.</p> <p>Artillery shelled enemy trenches - Enemy have not been using flares so exhaustively lately.</p> <p>Our patrol went out 10.30 p.m. - Reported hearing an engine working near N. 5. d. 5.2</p> <p>Casualty: 1 man wounded.</p>	
	27 th		<p>Quiet during day</p> <p>On night 27th/28th Gas alarm at 1.45 a.m. received from 53rd Battalion A.I.F., but proved false alarm (1.55 a.m.)</p>	
	28 th		<p>Artillery on both sides moderately active during day & up to 1 a.m. 28th/29th Enemy fired about 230 shells over rear of our lines</p> <p>Owing to fine weather our aircraft was very active and were subjected to constant bombardment by enemy who expended much ammunition in attempting to drive them off</p> <p>Casualties: 1 man wounded.</p>	
	29 th		<p>Enemy have searchlight, fixed in rear of their lines at N. 5.2 searching for aircraft by night</p> <p>Enemy artillery very active and Fleurbain was shelled during afternoon setting a church and several houses afire.</p> <p>Casualties: 1 man wounded.</p>	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
FRANCE	July			
Front line trenches	30th	7pm	<p>During last 2 days and again today pigeons have been observed flying over our lines from enemy trenches going in direction of FLEURBAIX</p> <p>Our Artillery bombarded enemy trenches. Enemy retaliated placing several shells on BOUTILLERIE AVENUE and several near Battalion Headquarters</p> <p>Sound of engine working near TURKS POINT, N.S.A.H. 2. heard during night 30/31st.</p> <p>"Gas Alert" given by Brigade at 11.45 p.m.</p> <p>Casualties: 1 man wounded.</p>	
	31st	10pm	<p>Several black pigeons observed crossing our lines during the day</p> <p>Artillery fairly quiet.</p> <p>Aircraft again active</p> <p>Gas alarm was given but proved false.</p>	
		1030pm	<p>Enemy began to bombard our trenches. Our Artillery was asked to retaliate which they did so effectively that the enemy's fire was silenced within 10 minutes.</p>	

REPORT of Lieut.-Col. D. M. McCONAGHY, C.M.G., Commanding
 55th. Battalion A. I. F., on the operations of the
 55th. Battalion during attack on German lines on
 the night of 19th-20th. July, 1916.

At .00 (Zero Time) my Battalion was in billets in BAG ST MAUR.

At 6.00 it was disposed as follows:

12 Working Parties of 1 Sergt. and 25 Other Ranks were in position in our old 300 yards line, and 4 Working Parties of 1 Sergt, and 25 Other Ranks each were at LAYS DUMP. These parties were drawn from C and D Companies, and were under the command of Major Holland, with 6 other officers in charge of parties.

A and B Companies and Battalion Head Quarters were distributed along the RUE DU BOIS in readiness to go forward into the 300 yard line after the 4th wave of the attack had gone forward

A prisoners' Guard of 2 Officers and 30 other ranks were at LAYS DUMP.

At 7.00 or shortly afterwards the working parties, fully loaded, went across to the Hun Lines in rear of the last wave of the attack, and the remainder of the Battalion took up a temporary position in our old 300 yards line.

At 7.24 p. m. I received the following order from Brigade:

"Please take your Headquarters and your two companies in "300 yards line quietly to our old front line and await "orders. Do not leave our old front line."

This was immediately done with but few casualties.

At 8.55 p. m. I received a message from Brigade:

"Please send 1 Company to report to O. C. 53rd Battalion "and 1 Company to report to O. C. 54th Battalion."

I ordered B Company across to support 54th Battalion and A Company to support 53rd Battalion. B Company got across without a casualty, whilst the casualties in A Company were very slight. My Lewis Gun Section were then sent forward to render support where it was most needed, and their work through very trying circumstances was of a very high order. This

This move was completed by 9. 30 p. m.

At this time I was still in our original front line reorgan-
 -ising working parties, many of whom had been ordered by differ-
 -ent officers to rein force fighting troops.

About this time I advised Brigade that all my Battalion, with the exception of a few working parties were in the Hun trenches and that I was shifting my Headquarters over there. This I did, arriving at 10.10 p.m. I first went to the right of our section, where I found portions of the 53rd and one Company of the 55th hard pressed. The 53rd had lost nearly all their Officers, including their C. O., and were much concerned about their right flank, where we expected the 15th Brigade to be. I immediately sent an Officers' patrol to get intouch with the 15th Brigade, but none of the patrol returned. I then sent another patrol which was driven back by bombs. I therefore concluded the 15 th Brigade were not in position on our flank. Two barricades were built, and bombers and snipers stationed at

(Annex are referred to in War Diary, for month of July, 1916, for 255th Battalion A.I.F.)

2.

APPENDIX A

REPORT of Lt-Col. D.M.McCONAGHY, C.M.G., (continued)

each, but the Huns knew the country and the trenches so perfectly that they succeeded time and again in bombing us back.

I considered a bayonet charge would be effective, and ordered Lieut. Denoon, with 1 other Officer, and about 50 men other ranks to charge along both parapet and parapets, and drive the bombers back. This party cleared a further 60 yards of trench, but both the officers became casualties, and the remainder of the party were driven back again, still, however, holding for more than an hour, an additional 40 yards of trench.

It was now 1 a.m. on the 20th, and things had considerably quietened down on the right flank, but only for a time. In the meantime I had reported to Lieut-Col. CASS how matters were on the right, and he asked me to make sure we were linked up with the 8th Brigade on our left. I found a mixture of 31st., 54th, and 55th working very hard converting a communication trench into a firing line, but further to the left (about 3 a.m.) there were only small groups of men holding the line, at irregular intervals..

It was at about this time that some foolish orders were circulated, something to this effect: "Our own Artillery are shelling us." "We have been ordered to retire." I had the support of about 5 officers at this time, and we checked this confusion and kept the men in their trenches within a radius of about 25 yards, but the remainder to the left, made their way back to our front line. The enemy noticing this pushed his advantage with bombers on our left flank, as he was also doing most vigorously on our right flank. At 4.15 a.m. I reported to Col. CASS that unless strong reinforcements were hurried forward, there was a good chance of the two enemy bombing parties joining forces behind us, and thus cutting us off. At this stage we received orders for the 14th. Brigade to take up a position in our own front line, and Col. CASS detailed me to organise a rearguard action. I kept Capt. GIBBINS and 4 other officers, and about 50 men to do this, and it was due to the very fine action of these men that the remainder of the garrison were able to get across NO MAN'S LAND with comparatively few casualties. They fought very valiantly, and their leader, Capt. GIBBINS, was killed, and 2 Officers and 25 men of the party are missing.

The Staff arrangements in regard to supplies &c. proved very workable, and we received promptly all support asked for, especially from our advanced Brigade Head Quarters. I must say, however, that practically all communication had to be maintained by runners, the telephone service not proving adequate. This is surely due to the terrific bombardment cutting the lines.

I would also like to mention that, even at this stage, there are many men who cannot handle bombs. I even saw men throwing Mills Grenades without withdrawing the safety pin. This was not peculiar to any one Battalion.

I am sending a further report mentioning the good work done by individuals, for consideration.

23rd July, 1916.

McConaghy
Lt.-Col
C.O. 55th Battalion A.I.F.

My Battalion was in billets in BAC ST MAUR on the 17th and 18th inst consequently no report concerning these dates is deemed necessary.