

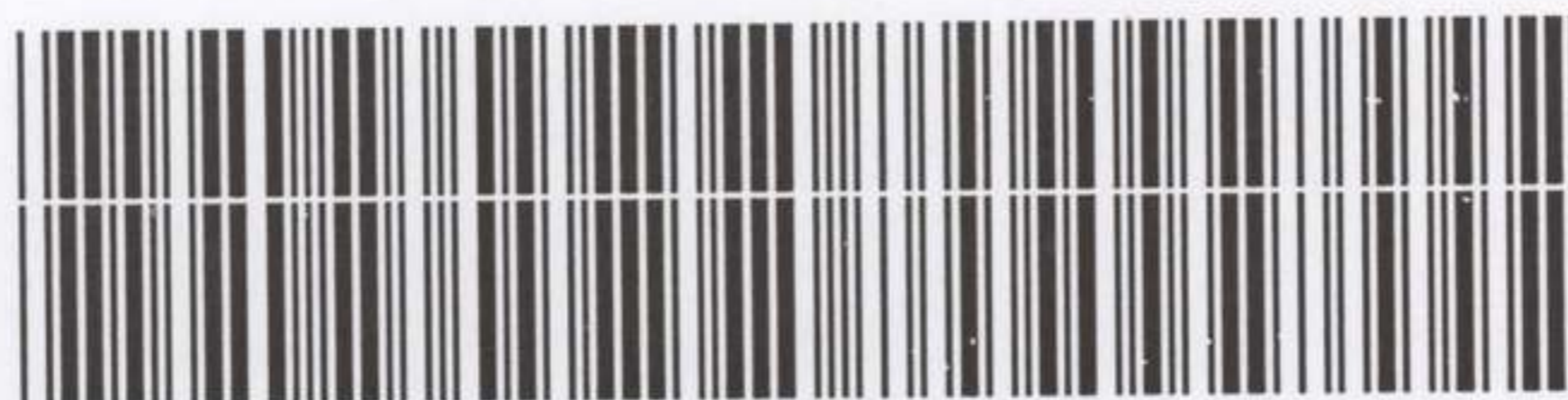
**AWM4**  
**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,**  
**1914-18 War**

Artillery

**Item number:** 13/127/1

**Title:** Australian Heavy Artillery Training  
Depot

June 1915 - December 1917



AWM4-13/127/1

The first actual steps taken to form a body known as Reinforcements for the "O" Siege Brigade, as it was first styled, was by Lieut. Col. W.A. Coxen, R.A.G.A., at St. Kilda Barracks, Melbourne, Victoria, in June, 1915.

On that occasion Batteries Nos. 1 and 2, as they were first numbered, were told off, and the remainder constituted what was to be known in the future as the 1st. Reinforcements.

They, with the batteries, left Australia on the S.S. Orsova on July 17th, 1915, via the Suez Canal, arriving eventually at Devonport Docks, England, where they disembarked and entrained for the Siege Artillery Depot at Lydd in Kent, on the 23rd. Aug. 1915.

On arrival at Lydd the batteries and reinforcements were put through a most strenuous course of training in every branch of artillery work, and on every type of gun that was at the disposal of the instructors. Other works incidental to the training of siege batteries for active service in France was carried out concurrently with the gunnery training, such as construction of dug-outs, concealing gun positions, camouflage, etc.

All this training resulted in 54 and 55 Batteries, as they were now known, reaching a first class state of efficiency.

A shoot by the two batteries from 30 cwt. 6" B.L. Howitzers and 8" R.M.L. Howitzers resulted in a first class pass being obtained against about fifty batteries of artillery representing the Empire.

Newspaper reports of the day describe the Royal Australian Artillery as the envy and despair of the British R.G.A. officers; so efficient and yet at the same time so self reliant were they in all their work and bearing.

The training having been completed the two batteries on the first of December, 1915, moved to Taunton, in Somerset; selected as being one of the mildest parts in England, and suitable for Australian troops on that account.

The reinforcements were drafted from Lydd to a camp at Cooden, near Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex, in November, 1915.

During the time they were there a bitter cold spell was (for Australians) experienced. The sight of water service pipes being wrapped up as a protection against cold was quite a new thing to most of them. A bath could be only taken in hot water, of which a plentiful supply could always be obtained. The

The food was good and plentiful, though at first the free use of Margarine was not taken to very kindly, as Australian are such butter eaters.

There were about three thousand men in this camp, embracing Australian Siege Artillery, South African Heavy Artillery, and Royal Garrison Artillery. The R.A.A. in appearance always showed to advantage, owing to general bearing, attention to work, and smart appearance of uniform issued by the Commonwealth, and perhaps owing to the fact of their being regular soldiers.

A rigid adherence to syllabus was made by the unit, which was at this time commanded by Lieut. P.W. Dobson, R.A.G.A., assisted ably by Lieut. G. Rowe, R.A.G.A. and Lieut. R.W. Lennox, R.A.G.A. Infantry and Rifle drill, Guards and Sentries, Signalling, Telephony, Rangefinding, and Lectures on the higher branches of artillery work, were consistently carried out. Physical training and route marches kept the men in a very fit condition. Athletics of all kinds were indulged in to a great extent.

The health, notwithstanding the cold, was very good; one man only developing what subsequently became known as Trench Feet. It was a curiosity, and was one of the many new complaints that the troops had to learn of.

It being desirable by the authorities to have the reinforcements in the vicinity of the two batteries, it was decided to draft them to Taunton, Somerset, where the two batteries had already been established in billets, a new experience for Australians. Accordingly the depot was moved to the new location where they arrived on Dec. 26th. 1915.

The people of Taunton of the better class, having heard that Australians were coming to the town for the first time, formed an unofficial committee and offered their homes instead of allowing the men of the depot to go into hotels or huts. The batteries had already been well provided for in this respect by the civil police.

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The reinforcements were very fortunate in this respect, for the fare and treatment provided was far and away above the amount allowed by the military authorities for that purpose.

The brigades (54. and 55. Batteries) became part and parcel of the life of the town. Many marriages were contracted, whilst the religious, social, and sporting life of the community were all invaded by the R.A.A. The band, which was composed of members of the brigade, was in great demand for social and charitable functions, and was ably assisted, whenever possible, by members of the Reinforcements. A football team, composed of both brigade and reinforcements, defeated a team at Wellington, and at the conclusion of the match the players and other members of the unit were entertained at a public dinner tendered them by the townspeople of that community. Many lasting friendships were made as a result of this.

Now we must go back a little and mention that the 2nd. Reinforcements were called into camp at School of Gunnery, South Head, Sydney, New South Wales, on July 1st. 1915. where after doing a severe course of training in Repository, the technical branches of Gunnery, and artillery work in general, they were despatched to join the reinforcements in England per S.S. Marilda, arriving at Egypt, where they changed over to the S.S. Nestor, and eventually arrived at Plymouth on 26th. Nov. 1915.

The reinforcements to the 36th (Aust) Siege Brigade, as it was now known, being trained gunners, their services were always made use of as gun crews on the various transports they came away from Australia with. Guns were mounted on the transports to be used against enemy submarines, commerce raiders, etc., and the services of these reinforcements were very useful for this purpose.

The 2nd. reinforcements comprised two officers (Lieuts Lennox and Rowe) and 28 men, which on arrival at Plymouth marched to Ernslet Camp, St Budeaux, on the 27th. Nov. 1915. They left for Weymouth the next morning and arrived the same day.

On the 1st. Dec. they joined the 1st. Reinforcements at Cooden Camp, Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex.

The 3rd. reinforcements, comprising 28 men, went into the School of Gunnery, South Head, Sydney, New South Wales, on Sept. 1st. 1915., and were put through a strenuous course of Physical Training, Lectures on Slide Rule, Rifle Drill, Rangefinding, and other technical details of artillery training. This draft of men were despatched per the S.S. Orsova, and being trained gunners, and the only fighting unit on board, they were utilised as gun crews throughout the whole of the trip from Nov. 10th. 1915. to Dec. 22nd. 1915., when the docks at Plymouth were reached. Train was immediately taken for Cooden, where they arrived in the teeming rain on 23rd. Dec. 1915. Next day being Christmas Eve, and the men being new arrivals from such a long distance, the local tradespeople and professional men, with their wives, organised a committee, who extended invitations to the whole of the reinforcements there for Christmas dinner, to try and make their first Christmas Day away from home a little brighter and that result was obtained. In fact many lasting friendships were contracted, and the departure of the Depot of reinforcements from Cooden was feelingly and deeply regretted. The reinforcements at this time numbered about 120 all told, when the move was made to Taunton, on Dec. 26th. as before mentioned.

From this time onward the training of the reinforcements was carried on entirely apart from the brigade. A separate parade ground was chosen in "THE CRESCENT" and training ground in "VIVARY PARK" to carry on with infantry drill, signalling, rangefinding, etc. Route marches to keep the men physically fit were resorted to, and twenty and twenty-two miles were marched in full marching order without any great inconvenience.

Cold weather was experienced during the December to February months, and a fall of snow took place - the heaviest, in "mild" Taunton Deane for 25 years. It was a new experience for the troops and greatly enjoyed, and numerous snow fights with the townspeople took place.

The training of the troops went on without any hindrance by the snow. Town police and Guard duties were carried out by the reinforcements in their turn on brigade stores, lorries, caterpillars tractors, motor cycles, cars, and guns; in fact all the paraphernalia that goes to equip a siege brigade.

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Repeated surprise inspections R.G.A. Staff Officers and others took place from time to time and no fault was found. On the other hand much praise was given on these inspections, which was deserved. The men were determind to uphold the opinion expressed on their departure from Melbourne, Victoria, (vide the Australian Press), that they were the finest body of trained men to ever leave Australia's shores. The chronicles of the brigade later on proved this, as such a large percentage were selected for commissions for different arms of the service. (But this is digression).

The two batteries having at last received their guns, (54 Battery-8" Howitzers. 55 Battery-9"2" Howitzers) and everything ready for a move overseas, a few vacancies were filled by transferring some of the reinforcements. The two batteries were made up originally entirely of Royal Australian Garrison Artillery men, but the first vacancies were filled partly by R.A.G.A. and Australian Garrison Artillery (Citizen Force Artillery). This was the first occasion that the reinforcements were made use of. The batteries having been completed up to strength a move was made abroad, first by 54 Battery on Feb 26th. 1915. and by 55th Battery on March 2nd. 1915., to France, in perishing cold weather, heavy snow and frost, as photos of guns on trucks at Taunton railway station at the time or in French Weir Reserve can testify, but this did not damp the spirits of the brigade, for hardly did ever a body of troops leave for the "Great Unknown" in better spirits.

After the brigade left, according to general report and experience of siege batteries at the front, it was thought that 28 men every two months would be more than sufficient to reinforce the main unit, as data furnished showed very few casualties among this arm of the service, unless a battery had such casualties that would cause a complete re-organisation. Now in March, 1916. at Mont St Eloi 55 Battery had an experience quite to the contrary, for before they had even fired a shot, their billet at a farm was shelled by the enemy with 5"9" shells on the 15th. of that month, when three men killed and sixteen wounded necessitated the reinforcements been drawn upon at once. Immediately on the demand being received on the 17th. April, 1916. twenty men were despatched on that date to replace those put out of action. They did not reach the battery until nearly three months later.

Mention might be made here of the method of making up drafts of reinforcements from the Commonwealth for the Siege Brigade from about this time onward. A new procedure was adopted. Two sources were chosen to draw volunteers from. Primarily the R.A.G.A. and secondly the A.G.A. The R.A.G.A. called for recruits, who would sign on to do a preliminary training in the various Forts and then be drafted to the School of Gunnery for higher technical training in siege work. The A.G.A. were selected after they had served at least a year in the unit, and were then sent to the same school to carry out the same training in siege work as the R.A.G.A. Thus it can be seen how a highly trained unit of men would leave Australia every two months, and as before mentioned, utilised as gun crews on the armed transports. All reinforcements from this time, therefore, were thus composed of R.A.G.A. and A.G.A. and representative of every state in the Commonwealth.

Just prior to the brigade moving overseas the 4th Reinforcements, comprising 28 men, arrived in Taunton, and were found billets. By a coincidence this draft of men arrived on the day that 54 Battery left for overseas, viz. Feb. 26th. 1916.

On the 24th. March, after the brigade had left, the reinforcements were withdrawn from their billets and located in huts in Ash Meadows, near Vivary Park. Here wet weather was experienced and heavy falls of snow took place, but the health and spirits of the men always remained at a high level.

About the 4th. May, 1916. a second draft of men left the Depot for overseas to reinforce the batteries, and on the 9th. May, or thereabouts the depot was removed to Wellmarsh Camp, Sheerness, on the Isle of Sheppy. The move was made in fine weather, but much wet weather was experienced later on. The health and discipline of the troops still maintained at a high standard. Strict attention to training was made while Sheerness was used as a depot, seventeen to twentyone miles route marches was a usual thing. Constant drill was carried out on 6" Howitzers, and specialists work was gone on with in accordance with syllabus.

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On the 30th. May, 1916. the 5th. reinforcements arrived under the command of Lieut. J. H. Russell, R.A.G.A. This draft attested at the School of Gunnery on 31st. Dec. 1915. and left Sydney on the S.S. Nestor as gun crews, and arrived about the 27th. May at Monte Video Camp, Weymouth, and thence on to Sheerness. This draft comprised 28 men also, and were quite up to the standard ~~well~~ in all respects to previous drafts.

During May and August nothing unusual occurred, but during August three drafts were despatched overseas, viz:- 20 men on 10th. Aug., 20 men on 23rd. Aug. 15 men on 30th. Aug.

The 6th. reinforcements attested at the School of Gunnery and left for England on S.S. Beltana, arriving at Sheerness on 5th. Aug. 1916.

On 10th. Sept. a further draft of 20 men left for overseas.

The 7th. reinforcements attested at the School of Gunnery on 26th. April, 1916. and left Australia about 19th. July, on the S.S. Orsova as gun crews. They arrived at Plymouth and entrained right away for Sheerness, arriving there on 21st. Sept. 1916.

Lieut. Rowe and Lieut. Dobson left Sheerness for France to join the brigade on 29th. Aug. 1916.

During September, 1916. the depot was again moved to Stowlangtoft, Sufflok, and here the men were kept hard at work on 13, 15, and 60pdr. guns, also 6" and 8" Howitzers, and 9" R.M.L. Howitzers. The usual physical training, route marches, signalling, etc. on syllabus were all carried out, no steps being left that would prevent the men from being highly trained and fit before proceeding overseas.

On 13th. Nov. 1916. a draft of 20 men left for overseas, and on the 27th. Nov. 1916. a draft of 28 men arrived from Australia; this was the 8th. reinforcements to leave the School of Gunnery.

About the 21st. Dec. 1916. another Australian Siege Battery, afterwards known as 338 Siege Battery, was formed, and in process of formation men were drawn from the reinforcements then in the depot. This battery comprised officers, H.C.O.s, and men drawn from 54 and 55 Batteries serving in France, a batch of which arrived in England on 1st. Jan. 1917., and men who had seen service and had returned sick and wounded and eventually reached this depot after convalescence ~~was~~ were used in connection therewith. 75 gunners were transferred in connection with this on 4th. Jan. 1917.

A draft of 60 men were selected from the R.B.A.A. at Lark Hill to further augment the strength of the above battery.

The officers of this battery were Major. A. W. Bates, Capt. Tomkinson, and Lieuts. C. H. Morley, C. F. W. Bernard, and L. C. Wade.

On the 23rd. March. 1917. 338 Battery left Stowlangtoft for Borden Camp, Hants, for training. They left Borden for the Siege Depot, Lydd, where the battery was put through a severe course of training on 6" 26 cwt. How. It was known and acknowledged as the smartest battery that had trained there for some time. The battery moved to Hilsa Barracks, Portsmouth, and then again to Shorncliffe, finally embarking for overseas in June, 1917. About this time 54 and 55 Batteries were increased from 4 gun to 6 gun battery strength, and in view of this 338 Battery was absorbed in the other two to make them up to the required strength, and thus passed out of existence as a separate battery.

On the 7th. Jan. 1917. a draft of men was sent from Stowlangtoft overseas, and on the 15th. Jan. 1917. Lieut. Russell left to join the 104th. Siege Battery, R.G.A. from which later on he was transferred to 54 Battery. On 19th. Jan. a further draft of 25 men were sent overseas.

At various times men were coming into the depot having come from France sick and wounded, and after passing through hospitals, convalescence, sick leave, and various A.I.F. training camps, they were, if classed as fit, sent on to France again at first opportunity.

On 2nd. Feb. 1917. the 9th. reinforcements from Australia arrived at Stowlangtoft. 28 men comprised this draft.

A call was made from the batteries for telephonists, and on the 9th. Feb. six gunners, trained as telephonists, were despatched accordingly.

On the 16th. Feb. 1917. ten men marched in to the Depot from various A.I.F. Depots in England. These were mostly original battery men and were followed by odd ones now and again.

On 16th. March. thirty men were drafted to France, as men were needed badly - the extreme cold having played havoc with the men in the batteries.

On 23rd. March. six gunners were transferred to 338 Siege Battery, and six gunners were transferred to the Depot from 338 Battery.

One gunner marched out of the Depot for Weymouth on 26th. March, having been found unfit for further service in the unit.

From 10th. to 19th. April men were marching in to depot daily from other depots etc.

On the 19th. April ten men, all of whom had seen service in France, proceeded overseas.

On the 23rd. April the 10th. reinforcements, comprising 28 men, together with three returned men, marched in from Parkhouse Camp, Perham Downs.

On 3rd. May 15 more men were drafted overseas to France, in response to a demand from the batteries.

On the 4th. May a Bombardier from 338 Battery was transferred to the Depot and subsequently found unfit for further service overseas.

From the 9th. to the 14th. May 9 gunners marched in to the Depot. These were also men returned sick and wounded from the batteries.

On the 15th. May a Corporal was transferred from the Depot to 338 Battery in consequence of a Cpl in that unit being evacuated to hospital and not likely to be with the battery when it proceeded overseas.

On the 22nd. May 2/Lieut. A.E. Harris of the 25th Batta. A.I.F. was attached to the Depot for duty.

The weather had now become much milder, in great contrast to the extreme cold, snow, etc. of a short while before.

Smaller calls were still being made on the Depot for men to fill the gaps in the batteries, and on the 25th. May a draft of twenty gunners proceeded overseas. This draft consisted principally of the 10th. reinforcements, just recently arrived from Australia.

It being necessary to keep the strength of the depot up and the reinforcements from Australia not coming regularly to hand, it became necessary to obtain men from the Reserve Brigade of Australian Artillery at Lark Hill, and in consequence a draft of 36 gunners was selected from that unit. These were a well set up crowd of men. They arrived at the depot on the 31st. May.

On the 11th. June another draft of ten gunners was received from Lark Hill.

On the 19th. June 3 officers (Lieuts. G.F. Mays, H.H. Downey, and F.J. Saunders,) of the 3rd. Divisional Artillery marched in to the depot and were attached to the unit.

Owing to 338 Siege Battery being rather under strength owing to various causes, on the 24th. June 33 gunners were transferred from the Depot to that unit.

It became necessary to again draw on the R.B.A.A. for men, in consequence of the demands being made, and on the 25th. June 3 Bombardiers and 33 gunners were transferred from the former unit.

On the 30th. June Capt. H.C. Bundeck of 55th Siege Battery, who had been wounded, marched in to the Depot.

On the 5th. July. 1917. the Depot was once again moved, this time to Yorkshire, and was stationed at "E" Lines, Scotton Camp, Gatterick Reserve Centre. This was a very big camp, comprising all arms of the service, quite in contrast to the small depot which had just been left.

At this depot all types of guns were used for training. Gun Drill, Knotting & Lashing, Signalling, etc. were all carried out accordingly to the weekly training programme laid down. Church parades were well attended on Sundays. Physical Training was a special feature at this camp. It was known as the strictest in the north of England. The social wants of the men were well catered for by the different organisations at the camp.

In Darlington, a large town situated about 15 miles from the camp, the R.A.A. won a good name for the Australian soldier, vide extract from local Press, Aug. 1917.

"There are few soldiers of finer physique than the Australians. The Cornstalks are not only good to look upon, but they are great favourites. Their 'Devil may care attitude' towards things in general is quite refreshing in a town which is inclined to be strictly circumspect and proper".

The C.O.C. Catterick Reserve Centre, Maj-Gen. Remington, of Remington's Scouts of South African fame, welcomed the R.A.A. and on their departure from Scotton Camp for Plymouth spoke very feelingly of the great pleasure he had in commanding such a fine well-trained body of men.

Two Officers and twentyfour Other Ranks, the surplus of 338 Battery after its absorption by 54 and 55 Batteries, were temporarily attached to the Depot from Hulsea Barracks at Portsmouth, and when the two officers and eleven of the Other Ranks proceeded overseas to join the main unit, the remainder were taken on the strength of the reinforcements.

The C.O. of the 36th (Aust) Heavy Artillery Group, as the brigade was now known, would not sanction the taking on strength of the three Bombardiers of the Australian Field Artillery who had been transferred some time previously, and in consequence these three men were re-transferred back to R.B.A.A. Lark Hill on 18th. July.

Lieuts. G.P. Mays, H.H. Downey, and F.J. Saunders, accompanied by a Sgt and a Cpl proceeded overseas on 23rd. July.

On the 28th. July 52 O.Rks. of the 11th. and 12th. reinforcements from Sydney marched in from Perham Downs.

The 12th. reinforcements were attested at the School of Gunnery, Sydney, on 1st. March. 17. and left for overseas on 10th. May, distributed on different transports as follows:- S.S. Marathon, 10 men. S.S. Benalla, 10 men. S.S. Ulysses, 10 men. S.S. Port Sydney, 10 men. The men were used as gun-crews on these transports, and on the arrival of the Marathon, Benalla, and Ulysses at Devonport, about the 23rd. July, the men entrained for Salisbury Plains, eventually arriving at Scotton Camp, Catterick, on 28th. July. The 10 men on the Port Sydney were landed in Egypt, and had a fine trip through Italy and France, to finally reach England and the Depot at Plymouth.

Lieut. G.J. Brookes, R.A.A. the O.C. of the Depot, proceeded to a Battery Commander's Course in Siege Artillery at Lydd on 28th. July, and 2/Lieut. Harris was appointed acting O.C. during his absence.

From End. Aug. to 5th. twentyone men, returned from overseas, etc. were taken on the strength of the depot from different A.I.F. Camps.

The strength of Officers in the unit was augmented by the arrival of three Royal Australian Artillery officers from Australia. These were Capt. G.R. Manchester, G.W. Firman, and Lieut. H.W.C. MacBride. They arrived on the 3rd. Sept.

Lieut. Brookes returned from the Siege Course at Lydd on 5th. Sept, and resumed command.

A further draft of the 11th. and 12th. reinforcements marched in to the depot on the 7th. Sept.

A Sgt and a Cpl of the Royal Australian Naval Bridging Train were at this time attached to the unit pending being transferred but as they were unwilling to revert to the rank of gunner, this being the only rank on which a transfer would be approved by the C.O. of the Group, they marched out to No. 2 Command Depot, Weymouth, for return to Australia, on the 2nd. Sept.

Whilst the Depot was at Scotton Camp, Catterick, the discipline, health, and general conduct of the R.A.A. was all that could be desired. Practically no crime, and V.D. was absent from the sick reports—a feature that any unit might be proud of. Summarised, four men were admitted to hospital, whilst five were discharged, three of whom were of the 11th. and 12th. reinforcements. Two men only were committed to detention, and both of these were sent to Stafford Detention Barracks, and one awaiting Court-Martial, which latter was ultimately disposed of at Plymouth.

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Just about this time a sad event happened at the Catterick Aerodrome, an Australian and a New Zealand aviator, whilst training, collided in mid-air; both came down and were killed. The R.A.A. attended the funeral, which was carried out with full military honours.

Bright exhilarating weather was experienced here with the exception of a few wet days, and although it was only September, heavy frosts began to be experienced on that highly situated camp site, and accordingly it was decided, after due consideration by the A.I.F. authorities and the Director of Billeting, to move the depot to Plymouth, the climate being much milder and therefore much more suitable for Australians. A move was therefore made on the 14th. Sept. in a special train for Bull Point Barracks, St Budeaux, Devonport, where the R.A.A. arrived on the 15th. Sept. This place proved to be the best camp the unit had yet been in, it being a stone barracks, and within easy reach of Devonport and Plymouth. The administrative organization in this area was much better than in any previous place where the depot had been. The training centres were within easy reach. The various schools of instruction were in close proximity to this depot and free use of same was made as instanced; 33 men were selected to attend a course of Signalling at Fregate Signalling School and Fort Renney. One Officer selected to attend an advanced course in Anti-Gas Measures at Chisleton, and several N.C.O.s were sent for courses in Physical and Bayonet Training, and lectures in Anti-Gas Measures.

No demand had been received from the batteries for men for some time, but at this time, owing to severe casualties from gas, bombs, and shell fire, a series of demands for drafts to be sent overseas commenced, and from Oct. 4th. to Nov. 7th., one hundred and fiftyfour men were drafted to the batteries.

Great attention was paid to Physical Training by the Headquarters of this Garrison, and in consequence three Bdrs of the Royal Field Artillery, who had passed through a complete course at the Aldershot Gymnasium and elsewhere, were attached to the unit as instructors.

Realising the necessity for the prevention, and believing that prevention was better than cure, it was decided to establish an Early Treatment Depot and Pte. McCabe of the 1st. Aust. Derm. Hospital, Bulford, was attached to the unit in connection with this matter. This step, coupled with lectures to the point of bluntness by Lieut. Brookes, Capt Hagan of the A.A.M.C., and Archdeacon Ward, left no room for any man to contract V.D. in ignorance.

Several men had from time to time arrived back to the depot from overseas unfit for further service, owing to the severe strain on the system that Siege work entails, and in consequence of this on the 11th. Oct. six men marched out to Weymouth for return to Australia after having been pronounced unfit by a medical board.

On the 11th. Oct. Capt. Manchester, and Lieuts. MacBride and Brookes proceeded overseas to join the Group, and the command of the depot was taken over temporarily by Capt. Firman.

On the 13th. Oct. Capt. Firman and Lieut. Downey proceeded to a Siege Course at Horeham, and the command was taken over by E/Lieut. Harris for the time being.

One gunner of the 12th. reinforcements reported from No. 1 Command Depot, Sutton Veny, he having been left in Egypt sick, and had come on by a later transport. This was the last man of this reinforcements.

On the 9th. Nov. Lieut. J.F.W. Wegener of the 3rd. Pioneers, A.I.F. was attached to the Depot pending taking over the command of same. Capt. Firman had in the meantime returned from the Siege Course on the 5th. Nov. and on the 15th. Nov. Lieut. Wegener assumed command of the Depot.

Capt. Firman proceeded overseas on the 21st. Nov. to join 55 Battery.

On the 22nd. Nov. one private was transferred from the infantry at Hurdcott Camp, having been claimed by an elder brother.

During Oct. Nov. and Dec. sixteen men returned from overseas marched in to the Depot.

Drafts were being still asked for, and as soon as men reported to this depot from the various camps they were despatched overseas as soon as possible. On the 15th. Dec. nine ~~gunners~~ Other Ranks proceed-



Lieut. H. H. Downey left for overseas on 28th Dec. and subsequently joined 55 Battery.

The constant demands still being made for men for the batteries practically emptied the Depot of all "A" class men. The few "B" class men remaining were taken as a class of N.C.O.s and given lectures daily, coupled with practical demonstrations in various branches of technical artillery instruction, and in due course were made use of as N.C.O.s. for instructing new drafts marching in.

The men passing through this Depot from time to time were put through every phase of training that would fit them for the work before them in France. Drill in Anti-Gas Measures was a feature that was paid particular attention to.

Many surprise inspections took place at Bull Point from Sept. to Dec. 31st. and not on any occasion was fault found with the cleanliness of men or barracks; discipline was commented upon and praised.

An historic event took place when H.R.H. Field Marshal the Duke of Connaught paid an unexpected visit to the Depot, accompanied by Mrs. Astor, a lady very kindly disposed towards Australians. His Royal Highness expressed great pleasure at the smart way in which the parade was formed up and put through various movements, and when the trumpeter blew the Royal Salute His Royal Highness fairly beamed—it was so unexpected. H.R.H. was taken up so greatly with the bearing and appearance of the men that he chose a Guard of Honour to accompany him on the Plymouth Hoe when he distributed medals and inspected various units on behalf of the King. H.R.H. shook hands on departure from the Depot with the Depot Sergeant Major and complimented him on the general appearance and discipline of the troops.

From Sept. to the end of Dec. the health of the men passing through the Depot being remarkably good; V.D. practically nil. Conduct and attention to work engaged upon excellent, and as the custom wherever the R.A.A. have had the Depot, many solid friendships have been made with the local residents.

The weather during the period Sept. to Dec. was very unsettled; much rain fell and the year closed with very cold and frosty weather, but this part of England being regarded as a mild part of England the wisdom of selecting it as the location of the Depot was seen when reports were received of heavy falls of snow two feet and over at Catterick, Yorks, the location of the Depot just prior to Sept. for a few weeks.

Although the unit had been in existence since June, 1915, no steps had been taken by the Defence Authorities to have a distinguishing colour patch for the 36th (Aust) Heavy Artillery Group. A move in the matter was therefore undertaken in Nov. 17. by this Depot to endeavour to have colours allotted to the unit, and after one or two suggestions had been put forward by the unit here and by the Headquarters of the A.I.F. Depots in U.K., the D.A.G., Australian Corps authorised a colour very similar to that worn by the Royal Artillery. This colour came out at about the end of Dec. 17.

Christmas and New Year were spent very quietly by the troops. A certain number were allowed Xmas leave on application and also at New Year. The A.I.F. Comforts Fund supplied a half a pound of Xmas pudding but this unfortunately did not come along in time but was eaten for New Year.

*James G. Smith*