

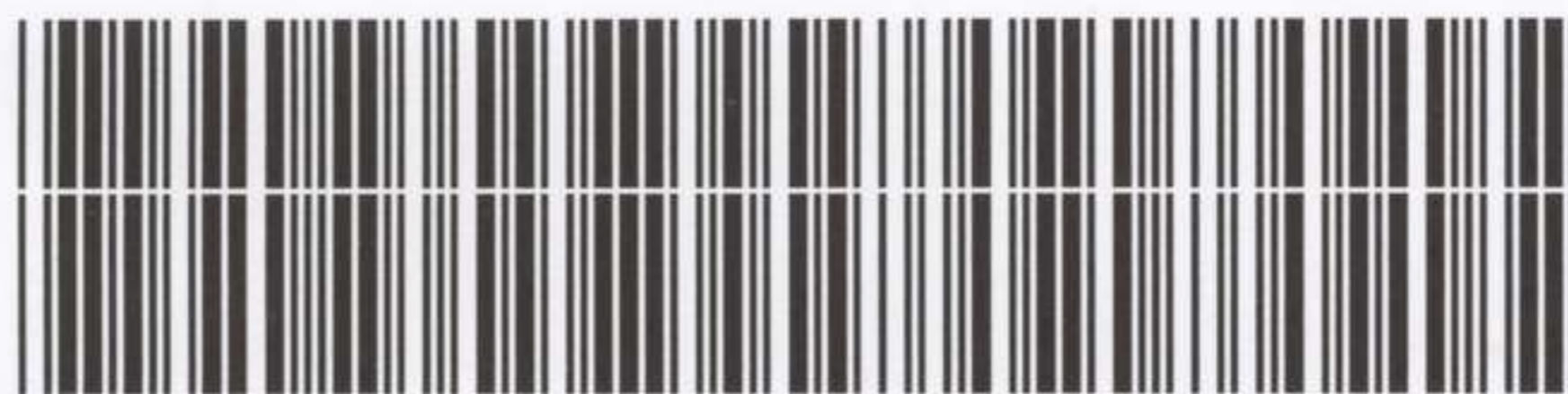
**AWM4**  
**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,**  
**1914-18 War**

Engineers

**Item number:** 14/25/26

**Title:** 6th Field Company, Australian  
Engineers

December 1917



AWM4-14/25/26

# WAR DIARY

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.

## INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Erase heading not required.)

6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	1.12.17.		Major HARRIS rejoined from A/CRE. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aust Div. Lieut THORPE rejoined from Heavy Bridging School AIRE.	
	3.12.17.		Major HARRIS made reconnaissance of CORPS DEFENCES with acting G.O.C. 6 <sup>th</sup> Brigade and Lieut THORPE. The outstanding feature, was the lack of any coherent second zone system, and a request was at once made for the D.M.G.O. to accompany Major HARRIS over the area to discuss a framework for a Corps Defence System. This proposal was rejected by G.S.O. I. who thought that the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Aust. Div. were certain to hand over a suitable scheme on which we could commence work.	
	1/15.12.17.		<p>During this period the Company was employed on:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improvements to 7<sup>th</sup> A.I. Brigade Transport Lines. This work could not be completed owing to lack of materials.</li> <li>2. Refilling - point of 15<sup>th</sup> A.A.S.C. reconstructed and repaired.</li> <li>3. 1 N.C.O. and 9 Sappers were detached with 4<sup>th</sup> A.F.A. Brigade and continued on improving billets etc.</li> <li>4. 1 N.C.O. and 6 Sappers were employed for 1 week and erected 4 "NISSEN" HUTS at 14<sup>th</sup> Battery HQ at G 10. B. 5.6. (Sheet. 36.)</li> <li>5. Lieut DAVIES and 2 Sappers were detached with 6<sup>th</sup> A.I. Brigade for 1 week giving instruction in map-reading etc.</li> <li>6. 4 N.C.O.'s and 4 Sappers were detached with 6<sup>th</sup> A.I. Brigade instructing Battalions in rapid wiring.</li> <li>7. 1 N.C.O. and 1 Sapper were detached with 6<sup>th</sup> A.I. Brigade instructing Battalions in construction of snipers posts.</li> </ol>	

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	4/15.12.17		No 4 Section with Lieut THORPE. were accommodated at T4 C.4.4 (Sheet 28) and with assistance of Infantry parties were employed on burying and making frost-proof, SOUTH KEMMEL water pipe line. 200 Infantry daily were supplied by 22nd Battalion and averaged 50% more pipe frost-proofed per man per day than was being done by 2nd Pioneers.	
	10.12.17		Lieuts ELSUM and GILLESPIE made a reconnaissance of new area.	
	12.12.17		Major HARRIS reconnoitred new area with O.C. 11th Field CoAE. This company was living at T10. 2.5.9 (Sheet 28) with horse lines at NIEPPE and working chiefly on Sunpits and artillery shelters over the whole divisional front, pipe burying and camps. It was decided, on relief, to keep at least one section at NIEPPE for work on right brigade sector.	
	14.12.17		No 1 Section moved to T10. 2.5.9. (Sheet 28) exchanging with one section 11th Field CoAE. No 2 " " " B16. 2.1.4. ( " 36)	
	15.12.17		Balance of company moved to T10. 2.5.9. (Sheet 28) and took over from 11th Field CoAE. Disposition of company was now as follows:- Coy. H.Q., Nos 1 and 3 sections and small portions of transport were accommodated at T10 2.5.9. No 4 Section remained at T4 C.4.4. (Sheet 28) No 2 " and main portion of transport were accommodated at B16 2.1.4. (Sheet 36)	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	16.12.17.		<p>I.N.C.O and 3 Sappers were detached for duty at STEENWERCK. R.E. DUMP.</p> <p>No 2 and 4 Sections took over artillery works in Southern and Northern sectors respectively. Work consisted of improving accommodation for artillery personnel and construction and improvement of gun-pits and construction of ammunition dumps for various field batteries. There was still much work required to be done but progress was greatly limited by small amount and spasmodic nature of labour supplied by the batteries. All men from No 2 and 4 Sections were put on, but at least half of the sappers were doing unskilled work. For this reason, arrangements were at once made with 6th A.I. Brigade to attach two officers and 100 r's. 1 Officer and 50 r's from 23rd Battalion reported on this date and were accommodated with No 2 Section. Lieut GILLESPIE being detailed to organise the works of any of this party which were not required for artillery work. No 1 and 3 Sections were put on necessary improvements to camp at TH 5.9. and erecting bomb-proof walls round huts.</p>	
	17.12.17.		<p>Work continued as on 16th.</p> <p>Lieut GILLESPIE with 3 Sappers and 30 Infantry were put on draining PLOEGSTEERT-LE CHEER Road. Work which required immediate attention, as this road was the main traffic route for Southern sector. The road was flooded in a number of places owing to blockages in a covered brick drain through PLOEGSTEERT village.</p> <p>Lieut SWANTON and 50 r's from 22nd Battalion were accommodated in a farm near Coy H.Q. for work chiefly with No 4 Section on Northern sector.</p>	

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	18 12 17		<p>Work continued as on 17<sup>th</sup>.            Definite orders were received for a start to be made on the construction of a Corps Defence system. G.O.C. 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to be responsible for the system with Lieut Col CLOGSTON, RE. to assist and this company to organise the work.            Detailed reconnaissances were commenced at once and tactical points of resistance selected for the various systems of the second zone.            The principal features in the sector were HILL 63 and PLOEGSTEERT WOOD, and the defence system ultimately decided upon was based on a decision not to defend the wood except by two small posts in front of it. Three fairly strong lines were selected north of PLOEGSTEERT WOOD, and south of the wood where the flat ground made siting less important, existing works were to be utilised as far as possible with additional wiring. Nothing was done on the whole sector however, to determine the positions of Machine Guns.            As there was a shortage of wiring materials, and wiring was in my opinion, the first job to be done, a start was at once made on engineer reconnaissance for old dumps of wiring materials. The principal source of salvage was the old Divisional "SHRINE" Dump at T.I.E.C. 3. 8. (Sheet 28.5.W.)</p>	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	19.12.17		<p>Work continued as on 18<sup>th</sup> except Lieut RENSRAW with 2<sup>nd</sup> Section and 75 infantry began salvaging wiring stores for Northern sector of Corps Defences.</p> <p>I.H.C. and 6 Sappers were detached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Aust Div Reinforcement Camp CAESTRE re-laying walls around huts for protection against bombs.</p> <p>Owing to the magnitude and importance of Corps Defence Works, a request was made to C.R.E. for relief from artillery and other small works in hand.</p> <p>Light Railways were made use of for moving salvaged wire etc from T18.C.3.8. to RACINE DUMP, and a train of four trucks was allotted for three days.</p> <p>Major HARRIS moved to 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ and Capt COGLAN to Coy HQ. Brigade HQ was alongside three battalions on the STEENWERCK-NEUVE EGLISE road, and this re-arrangement greatly simplified organisation of the work.</p> <p>21<sup>st</sup> Battalion was finding nucleus garrisons for posts in second zone, with H.Q. and 2 companies at CATACOMBS (HYDE PARK CORNER). Arrangements were made to commence work with these two companies, and to supplement them by parties from the other battalions which could come up daily by light railway from CANTEEN CORNER (CONNAUGHT SIDING).</p> <p>Light Railway arrangements on the whole, worked very well throughout.</p> <p>No 3 Section moved to BULFORD CAMP (near 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ) to organise work on sector of Corps Defences from PLOEGSTEERT WOOD to GUNNERS FARM both inclusive.</p>	

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	20-12-17		<p>work in hand continued, and a start was made by A<sup>21</sup> Section and one Company of 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion on wiring northern sector Corps Defences. Nucleus garrisons also commenced works, where Sappers supervision was available, on accommodation for themselves.</p> <p>Lieut C.W.H. SEXTON rejoined from Hospital (England)</p> <p>Lieut GILLESPIE returned to Coy HQ to organise work on wiring Front System 2<sup>nd</sup> zone. Northern sector - one Company 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion being allotted for this work.</p>	
	21.12.17		<p>work in hand continued, and A<sup>23</sup> Section commenced work on Corps Defences with one Company 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (86 strong)</p> <p>Owing to the large amount of wiring which had to be done, it was decided to standardise an entanglement less easy to pass than ordinary double apron, and after trying several types, that shown on Appendix I attached was adopted. This requires about 50% more labour and materials than a double apron entanglement and is about 200% better as an obstacle.</p> <p>Lieut SEXTON with 4 Sappers undertook construction of a Maps Office for Counter battery group at T.G.C. 05.50.</p> <p>1 Company 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion with Lieut GILLESPIE commenced work on Front System 2<sup>nd</sup> zone by moving sufficient materials for 800 yds wire to site from RACINE DUMP.</p>	<p>Appendix I</p> <p style="text-align: right;">MCS</p>

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	22.12.17		<p>Work in hand continued. No. 2 section with attached infantry not otherwise employed were diverted to preparatory work on extreme south of Corps Defences, which chiefly involved salvage and transport of wiring materials, as work to be done had not yet been definitely decided upon.</p>	
	23.12.17		<p>Work continued as on 22<sup>nd</sup>. About this time the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion less nucleus garrisons, was concentrated at CATACOMBS, and 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion took over their nucleus garrisons in Southern sector. Arrangements were at once made with 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion to allocate posts definitely to companies and to select sites for Coy H.Q. for each group of posts. This was carried out by Major CROWTHER (A/C.O. 21<sup>st</sup> Bn.) There were nine posts in his sector which he divided into groups of three. Each post was allotted to a platoon leaving a platoon in each company for specific jobs, and a spare company which carried on with Lieut GILLESPIE on Front System wire. Platoons allotted to posts were made responsible for defensibility and improvement of their posts and were given rather assistance especially for accommodation work.</p> <p>This arrangement worked out admirably largely owing to Major CROWTHER'S support. It should perhaps be stated here, that partly owing to the lack of any M.G. dispositions, and partly owing to Lt Col. CLOGSTON'S instructions, the wire entanglements were not laid out tactically in the northern sector. The defence system was consequently not ideal. Two switch lines in the north were proposed in order partly to overcome this weakness, but were not agreed to.</p> <p>On this date, Lieut DAVIES' party was reinforced by a second company from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Bn and this company was now organizing the work of about 600 men daily.</p> <p>Transport stopped owing to horse dipping at STEENWERCK.</p>	



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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	24.12.17		<p>Work in hand continued and parties on northern sector were reinforced by a company of 22nd Battalion working with Lieut THORPE on accommodation and wiring support system. 2/Lieut E.A.D. HILL rejoined from ABZAC CORPS SCHOOL and was at once allotted to supervise works of right front company 21st Battalion and two left front platoons 23rd Battalion.</p>	
	25.12.17		<p>Works proceeded as usual in spite of Christmas Day, but sappers had a memorable dinner in the evening, chiefly due to remittances from 6th Field Coy Womens Workers Society in Australia.</p> <p>Arrangements made to return attached infantry to battalions as the specific work on which they were employed was completed and they would still be just as available for work while the whole brigade was at our disposal.</p>	

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	26.12.17		<p>Work continued as usual with addition of 1 Company 24<sup>th</sup> Bn which commenced wiring on extreme right (south of LE BIZET) from River LYS in prolongation of STATION AVENUE. As several M. G. positions had been decided upon here, it was possible to make this wire much stronger tactically than was the case in the northern sector.</p> <p>Portion of 22<sup>nd</sup> section was employed in making furniture for Div Gas School. Furniture was required by 22<sup>nd</sup> <del>XXXX</del> but materials could not be drawn until 26th.</p> <p>Throughout December, the R.E. material organisation was extremely bad, and transport was wasted daily through authorities to draw on the Corps R.E. Dump being issued far in excess of available supplies. In addition, there was always considerable delay in obtaining authority to draw materials which were urgently required and actually available.</p>	
	27.12.17		<p>The wiring stores salvaged by the Company were now sufficient in quantity to permit of the employment of the full working strength of the 6th Brigade, i.e. the whole of 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalions and two companies each of 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Battalions.</p> <p>At this period, about 3000 yards wire entanglement (double apron and triple fence) was being erected daily, in addition to a considerable amount of work on accommodation and salvage.</p> <p>Responsibility for Divisional Artillery work was now handed over to Capt WAGSTAFF who was given an H.C.O. and 3 or 4 men from each Field Company for technical work and local supervision.</p>	

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6TH FIELD COMPANY ENGINEERS A.I.F.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
MESSINES SECTOR.	28.12.17 to 31.12.17		Works in hand continued.	
	28.12.17		Capt COGLAM proceeded to R.E. School for Field Company Commanders at BLENDRECQUES.	
	31.12.17		Lieut THORPE and Corporal H. DONALDSON proceeded to Aust. Engineer Training Depot for a 6 months tour of instructional duty.	
			<p>During month of December 1917 -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Officer rejoined from Hospital</li> <li>12 other ranks rejoined from Hospital</li> <li>7 other ranks joined from Reinforcements</li> <li>1 other rank joined from another unit.</li> <li>1 other rank was transferred to another unit.</li> <li>1. Officer was seconded with A.E.T.D. BRIGHTLINGSEA England.</li> <li>1 other rank was placed on supernumerary list.</li> <li>1. other rank was returned to AUSTRALIA for 6 months furlough.</li> <li>1. other rank was evacuated to Hospital wounded.</li> <li>7. other ranks were evacuated to Hospital sick.</li> </ul> <p>Strength of Company on 31.12.17 = 8 Officers. 231 Other Ranks.</p> <p>General conditions as regards comfort of personnel and horse lines were many times better than during the previous winter.</p>	
			<p style="text-align: right;">McNamara Major i.c. 6th Field Coy AE</p>	

## Appendix

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C. R. E. 2nd Aust Div.

With regard to experience gained by this company in recent operations —

1. Attached infantry did not join the company until four days after our arrival in the forward area.

During this period no working parties were obtainable from the 47th or our own division, except ~~for~~ one party of 50 on the third night for work on the Divisional Ammunition Dump.

Consequently for the first three days I was compelled to employ three sections solely on digging and carrying, and very little progress was made with forward R.E. preparations for the attack.

When the attached infantry did arrive, the forward work was somewhat hampered by large ammunition carrying parties.

Had the attached infantry moved to the area with the company we could have laid two good duckboard tracks to WESTHOEK ridge before the division took over, thus making subsequent carrying parties considerably more efficient.

2. The company programme, apart from the divisional ammunition dump, involved

- (1) Construction of 4.2 proof shelters for 120 men (crowded) in JACOB TRENCH.
- (2) Re-construction and completion of duckboard track from HOOGE to WESTHOEK, and if possible its duplication by another track further North.
- (3) Construction of 2 R.A.P.'s and 60 splinter proof shelters behind WESTHOEK ridge.
- (4) Miscellaneous work on improving dug-outs, extending existing R.A.P.'s and accommodation in YPRES, etc.

This programme was more than completed in most respects and somewhat less as regards the second duckboard track and the cutting of rear entrances into two concrete pill-boxes.

The duckboard track would have been finished but for the inefficiency and slackness of a casual working party. The concrete work could not in my opinion have been finished in the time. There was heavy reinforcement to contend with and suitable tools which I ordered a fortnight ago have not yet been obtainable.

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The above programme was sound, I think, but had more time been available, I should have advocated the construction of a 20 ft dry weather track from 112.6.8.2. to WESTHOEK and the erection of more shelters behind WESTHOEK ridge.

3. The relative value of permanently attached infantry to casual working parties is about 3 to 1 judging by results.
4. Early information regarding practice barrages by our artillery was most valuable and enabled me to employ all parties for a full working day without excessive casualties.
5. Some units, when laying duckboard tracks appear to consider that by laying them around shellholes instead of in a series of straight lines, they are making enfilade fire impossible. This idea is believed to be erroneous, and if the practice could be stopped, there is no doubt that there would be a considerable saving in manpower, - particularly as regards carrying parties and stretcher bearers.
6. Motor transport was disappointing as the off-loading point was seldom reached. G.S. wagons which could be used more extensively by day gave much better results under the conditions of the last operations.
7. Throughout the preparatory work, I kept a section in JACOB TRENCH, their duty being to carry out practically all engineer work forward of BELLEWAARDE RIDGE. Sections were relieved every three days, and the arrangements worked fairly well.
8. All working parties going to WESTHOEK RIDGE had to carry either picks, shovels or sandbags and leave them there. But for this, there would have been practically no R.E. battle dumps.

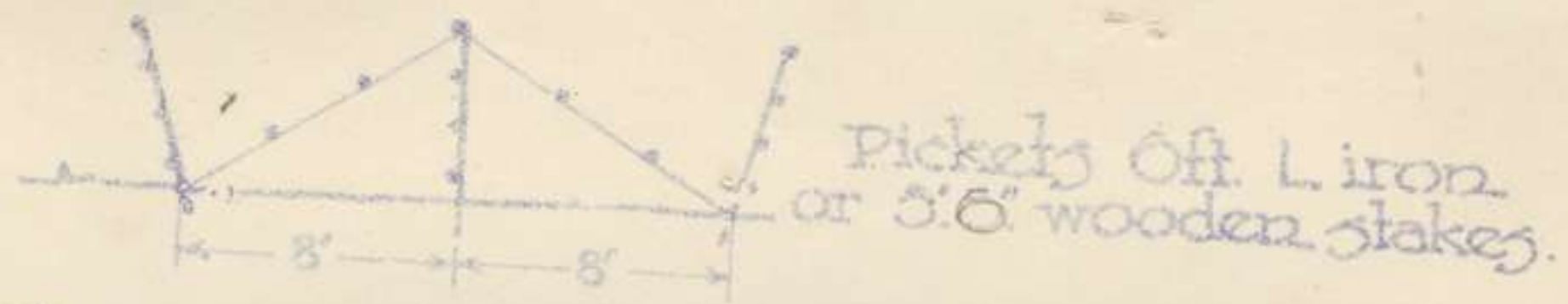
It is considered that the formation of RE battle dumps should be the responsibility of brigades, carrying out the attack, in consultation with their affiliated field companies. This procedure was definitely adopted for the BULLECOURT operations with results that were more satisfactory than in this case.

Signed. N. C. Harris Major.

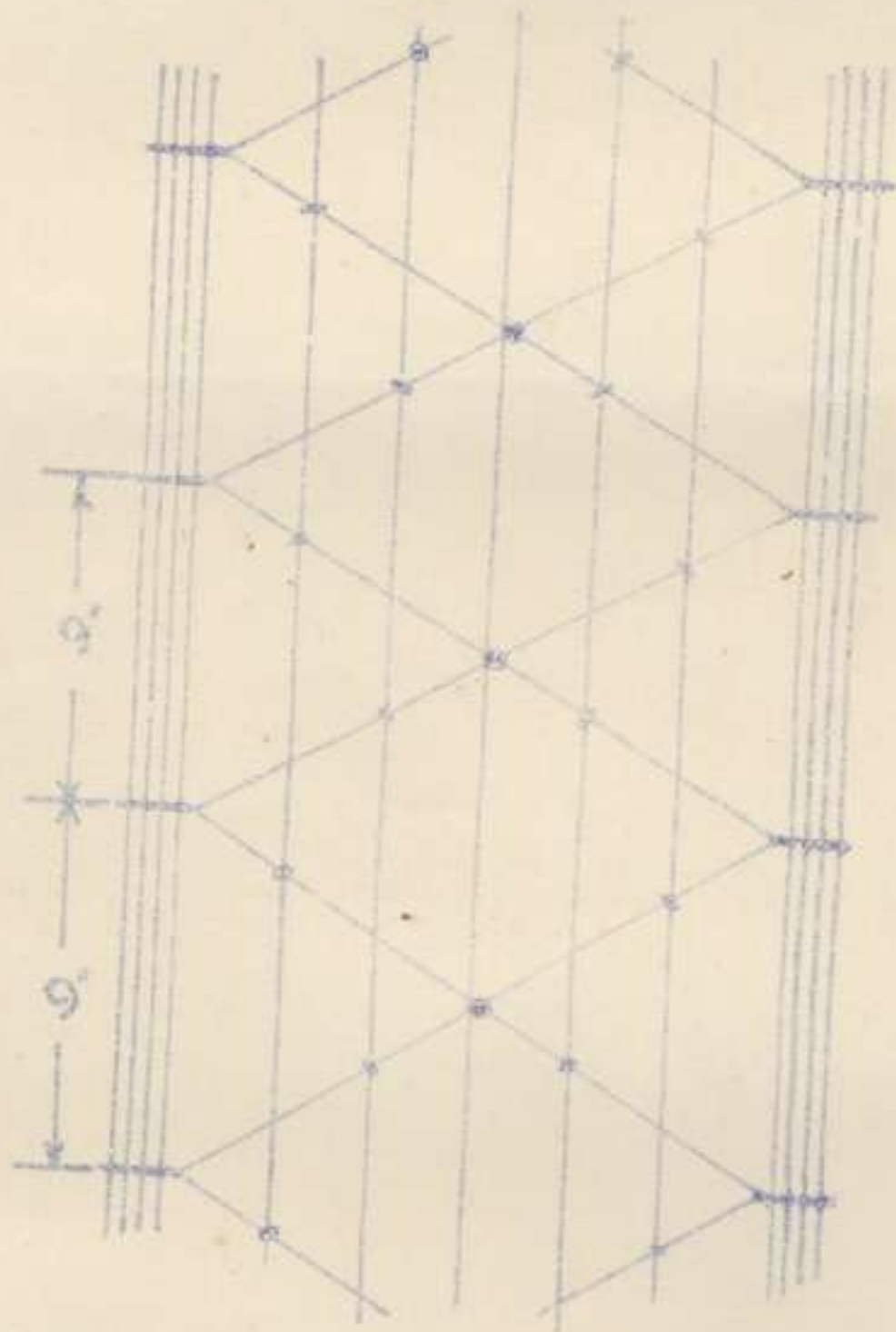
O.C. 6<sup>th</sup> Field Coy A.E.

28.9.17

Appendix I (Original)

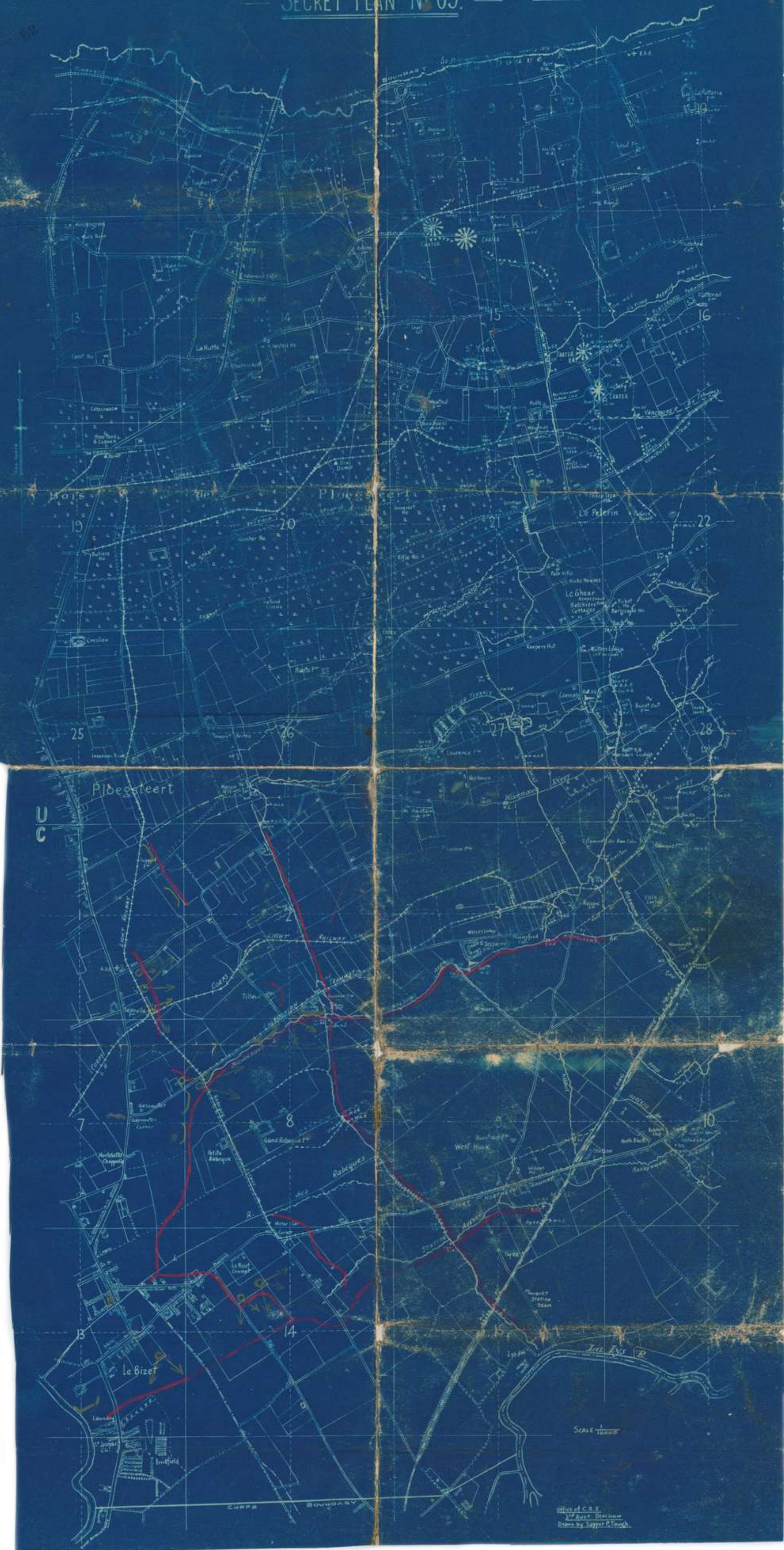


END ELEVATION



PLAN

6th FIELD CO A.E.  
 STANDARD TYPE, RAPID WIRING.  
 SCALE: 10 ft. to in.





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D  
D.O.  
At the back towards D.C. Farm

Map to accompany  
WAR DIARY for  
DECEMBER 1917