

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

Medical, Dental & Nursing

Item number: 26/91/2

Title: Australian Infantry Camp, Suez

December 1917 - April 1918



AWM4-26/91/2

MEDICAL

WAR DIARY

of

AUSTRALIAN INFANTRY CAMP. SUEZ.

December 1917

to April 30th 1918

On December 10th 1917 the camp was opened at Suez, for the accommodation of "Australian Troops, Reinforcements to A.I.F. in France" during their stay in Egypt, whilst awaiting re-embarkation.

The Camp was situated about 2 miles North West of Suez, being adjacent to the Wabour-el-Maya siding. at which there was a platform for troops entraining.

The Camp site was a good one, but owing to the fact that it had been used by all sorts of troops at different times since the outbreak of war, it required a vast amount of structural alteration. to render it suitable for its new use.

Very short notice had been given and the early days were strenuous ones.

As soon as troops arrived, large parties of men were employed in pulling down old buildings, erecting new ones, digging soakage pits, and carrying out all the various necessary work to prepare a camp, which could hold up to 6000 men.

CONSTITUTION.

The Medical establishment of the camp consisted of, an SMO. (Major C. LOWTHER CLARKE) who had been appointed a D.A.D.M.S., a Medical Officer to act as Camp Sanitary Officer, one (1) N.C.O. i/c of Medical Stores, and six (6) privates for sanitation and Venereal Prophylactic work.

In practice it was found possible to dispense with the Camp Sanitary Officer, his duties being performed by one of the Medical Officers "In transit", and of the six (6) privates allowed, one or two were found sufficient.

The A.A.M.C. Reinforcements "In transit" provided the personnel for the "Early Treatment Hut", and the sanitation was supervised by a Camp Sanitary Sergeant, who was subsequently added to the establishment of the Camp.

HYGIENE & DIETETICS.

The Camp was situated on hard sandy soil. Dust was not abnormally prevelant and the experience of 5 months has shown the ground to be very suitable for a large Camp.

During the winter months the climate was remarkably healthy, rain and damp weather being very rare.

Water was laid on throughout the camp and large mess-huts, constructed of wood & matting, were available in sufficient numbers, to enable all troops to have their meals under shelter, sitting down at tables.

New Kitchens were erected each capable of supplying 1500 to 2000 men. These Kitchens were provided with large ovens, constructed by surrounding large iron boilers (bought out of Regimental Funds) with mud bricks. 400 gallon tanks, in which water was heated for cooking & washing purposes, were placed at each Kitchen.

In these Kitchens it was possible to prepare food in the very best manner.

Supplies of extra fresh vegetables were bought daily from Regimental Funds and other articles, such as eggs etc, were added to the dietary from time to time.

Speaking generally the feeding of the troops was excellent.

Generous leave was granted to the men during daylight, and restricted leave in the evening.

SANITATION.

The sanitation of the camp presented no difficulties. The care of latrines, removal of excreta and the burning of all excreta, camp rubbish and kitchen refuse was carried out by Egyptian natives employed under the O.C. 90th Sanitary Section, Port Tewfik. This Section also undertook all new sanitary constructional work.

The relations with the O.C. 90th Sanitary Section were at all times most amicable.

Soakage was not good, but the construction of a drain running through the camp into a main channel which flowed to the sea, rendered the use of soakage pits, with one or two exceptions, unnecessary.

The Kitchens being close to the drain, greasy water was passed through specially constructed double grease traps into the main drain.

Good ablution platforms were provided at four (4) spots, but the supply of water did not allow of shower baths for the men.

Urinals of the ordinary funnel type were used and no difficulty was experienced in this respect.

As regards the troops passing through, the men were found to be either ignorant or careless in sanitary matters, and it was necessary to employ numerous sanitary & water picquets to ensure the proper use of conveniences provided.

HEALTH OF TROOPS.

It is quite impossible to arrive at any average percentage of daily sick, owing to the great fluctuation in the number of troops in camp, for instance on January 22nd 1918 the number of "Australians in transit" sick in Hospital was 3.2% of the total of such troops in Egypt, whereas 2 days later (troops having embarked in the meantime) the number in Hospital was 85.7% of the total.

Again, the amount of sickness varied greatly on different ships.

Apart from Measles and Mumps which were brought to the Camp by every ship, the health of the troops in camp was good.

During April 1918 "Diarrhoea" was prevalent, and it is considered probable that troops arriving from Australia during the summer months would invariably be subject to this disease while in camp.

The disease causing the most trouble in camp was MEASLES, although fortunately the cases were not of a severe type and serious complications were rare.

SEGREGATION OF CONTACTS.

Immediately a case of Measles was found, the tent mates of the patient (the custom was to allot 8 men to a tent) were removed to a Segregation Camp about 1 mile North of the Main Camp. These contacts were isolated for 7 to 8 days, and then returned to the Main camp after careful examination. Although this short period of segregation seems utterly inadequate, it was found quite satisfactory in practice. No case of Measles occurred amongst these contacts after they returned to the Main camp.

The reason for this short Isolation was the fact that the primary consideration was to get these reinforcements through to the United Kingdom as soon as possible and the exigencies of the service demanded a relaxation of the usual hard & fast rules as to Isolation of contacts. For this same reason the contacts of Mumps cases were not segregated, the average stay in Hospital of a patient with Mumps was 21 days, and it did not appear justifiable to render seven other men non-effective for 3 or 4 weeks as contacts, while the man contracting the disease was only non-effective for 3 weeks.

Training facilities for the troops in Camp were so poor that if men were laid up in Egypt for Medical reasons the service suffered to a serious degree.

MEDICAL ARRANGEMENTS IN CAMP.

At the opening of the camp it was intended to hold sick for 24 to 48 hours in camp, and the equipment of the camp Hospital was obtained, but it was soon seen that owing to the want of permanent A.A.M.C personnel, this system could not be carried out efficiently. The Camp Hospital equipment was returned to Ordnance after a few weeks.

Patients requiring Hospital treatment were collected by a Motor Ambulance twice daily and taken to the Government Hospital. Suez.

The camp inspection tent and dispensary were staffed with A.A.M.C.

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DENTAL.

Some of the transports carried a Dental Officer or Officers, and also Dental equipment, during the stay of such Officers in camp Dental treatment was carried out.

For about 2 months a permanent Dental Officer of the A.I.F. E.E.F. was attached to the camp, but owing to the fact that the amount of work did not justify his retention, this Officer was withdrawn early in February 1918.

Troops should be Dentally fit when they leave Australia and very little Dental treatment should be required in this Camp.

VENEREAL.

Fifty-three (53) patients suffering from Venereal Disease were sent direct from Ship's to Hospital during the period under review, out of a total of 9019 troops disembarked.

Fresh admissions for Venereal Disease from Camp totalled 18, exclusive of re-admissions of men discharged from Hospital. Of these admissions in only 8 cases had the disease been contracted in Suez.

Prophylactic treatment was carried out, a hut being erected at the entrance to the camp, and fitted with Irrigators & other appliances sufficient to treat 3 or 4 men at a time. Troughing was erected leading to a soakage pit, and two (2) orderlies were in constant attendance.

The number of men attending at this hut varied considerably, reaching as high as 85 for one evening.

Out of the 9019 troops passing through the camp, only 8 men contracted Venereal Disease in Suez and not one of these men had used the "Early Treatment Hut".

INVALIDING.

A few men were landed from each ship, who were in the opinion of Medical Officer's on board, Permanently Unfit for Active Service.

These men were sent to Hospital, and after a period of treatment and observation were presented to a Medical Board if the P.M.O. and the Medical Officer who was in charge of them concurred in this opinion.

The Board consisted of the D.A.D.M.S. of the Camp as PRESIDENT, and two A.A.M.C. Officers from the Hospital as MEMBERS.

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The question was a difficult one, because all troops had presumably been carefully examined before leaving Australia and to disagree with the verdict of the examining Officer's prior to embarkation excepting very obvious cases, might reasonably be expected to give rise to friction and argument.

On this account several cases were sent forward to the United Kingdom who would certainly never be fit for service in the field, but might prove fit for "B" class work.

During the period under review there were 437 admissions from camp to Hospital, this total including 119 Measles cases, and 55 Mumps cases.

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During the period 3rd to 16th March 1918 Major C. LOWTHER CLARKE, was relieved by Major MAX YUILLE, the former having been detailed to attend a school of instruction for Medical Officer's.

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