

**AWM4**

**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,  
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Artillery

**Item number:** 13/72/10 Part 1

**Title:** 26th Battery, Australian Field Artillery

April 1918



AWM4-13/72/10PART1

WAR      DIARY

26th Battery

1918.

- April 1st - The 7th Brigade suffered a great loss to-day. Our Headquarters which are in an advanced position were shelled by the enemy, and resulted in the death of Lieut-Col W.CHURCHUS D.S.O., Capt. GREENSHIELDS, Adjutant and Lieut. RADFORD, Orderly Officer. All three were killed by the one shell - a 5.9 which evidently burst in the room occupied by the Officers. The villages behind our lines were all treated to Shrapnel, H.E. and in one or two cases of gas shells during the day. A harassing fire was kept up by our guns at irregular intervals, working parties, enemy transport and hostile movement were fired at frequently with good effect, casualties being observed from the O.P.
- April 2nd - During the night 4.2 shells fell in close proximity to the mobile Wagon Lines. Our guns did good work firing on enemy troops, working parties and transport. A number of fires were observed behind the enemy lines one being in the Town of ALBERT. Enemy aircraft were inactive. The men at the Immobile Wagon Lines who were billeted in an empty house on the outskirts of BEHENCOURT were ordered by the Area Commandant to immediately leave the Village, for the reason that this Village was in the area allotted to British troops for billeting. This treatment was harsh and unwarranted but being an order had to be obeyed. A temporary line was made in an open field alongside the road close to the lines taken up on the night of 27th March when the Battery went into action. Improvised shelters were hurriedly rigged up as rain began to fall.
- April 3rd - Major Tristram JAMES, O.C. 25th Battery is now acting C.O. of the Brigade. A fairly quiet day all along our front. Hostile movement was fired on by our guns whenever observed. Visibility was indifferent and rain fell most of the day. The Immobile Wagon Line moved to a more sheltered position in the rear of a wood and near to the Village of LA HOUSOYE.
- April 4th - Throughout the night rain fell and a very damp body of troops turned out the next morning. At 5.30 a.m. the enemy commenced a very heavy bombardment of our front line and back areas. This lasted till 8 a.m. and then slackened somewhat. At 10 a.m. the enemy attacked on our Right advancing South of the Somme Canal and pushing N.E. towards HAMEL. At 2 p.m. the enemy was reported to be massing again and he continued his attack occupying the Villages of HAMEL and BOUZENCOURT also the Bois de Vaire. Owing to the Bosche taking ground it was necessary to switch the guns of the Brigade at right angles to the usual front and so enfilade his hard won position. Infantry report that our fire was very successful and the enemy lost heavily and was dislodged.

5th April - Early this morning our Infantry advanced and established M.G. posts on the outskirts of BOUZENCOURT. From information obtained from a prisoner captured yesterday it appears likely that the Hun intends making an attack at ALBERT and ROYE converging on AMIENS. Our guns have been very active, carrying out programmes of harassing fire on roads, woods and valleys to disperse enemy troops massing.

The day was foggy and visibility very bad. The valley below the Mobile Wagon Lines was shelled with H.E. and gas from 6 a.m. until 10.30 a.m. A very heavy fire was reported over the whole of our Sector. There was no Infantry action.

The enemy was driven from the ground he gained yesterday on our right, and in addition was pushed back 500 yards by our Infantry. At 11 a.m. the enemy was reported to be sniping at movement in our trenches with a 77mm gun. At 1.15 a fairly heavy bombardment opened up on both sides of the line. The Bosche is believed to be using some of our 18-pdr guns against us. He also flies across our territory in lately captured planes. Orders have been issued to fire on machines bearing certain numbers. Hostile planes passing at low altitudes have been dropping colored lights over our Infantry. A heavy concentration of artillery fire follows.

The vicinity of the recently vacated Immobile Lines near BEHENCOURT was shelled for an hour and half this morning. A nearby wood sheltering tanks and troops was also shelled and the troops driven out.

The Village was also shelled with Shrapnel and H.E. at irregular intervals throughout the day.

The total ammunition expenditure for our guns during to-day's operations was approx 900 rounds.

6th April - The day was fairly fine. Our back areas were again shelled.- The Mobile Wagon Lines are very muddy owing to recent heavy rain. The dug-outs on the hillside are more or less dry, but the horses in the hollow are standing knee-deep in mud. There is much mud about the gun positions, the gun-trails often being buried necessitating much strenuous labour when a large switch is ordered.

There was a great deal of aerial activity. Three hostile planes were brought down by our machines and A.A. fire. One of these fell close to the Battery. A number of enemy planes had been bombing the forward area during the afternoon and evening.

Our guns were in action continually, 630 rounds being fired

7th April - Capt. H.J.H.GLOVER D.S.O. formerly of the 6th Army Bde. was taken on strength of 26th Battery as Battery Commander.

Rain was continuous throughout the night and the day continued showery. Villages and traffic routes received attention from hostile artillery and there was much aerial activity in spite of unfavourable weather. Gothas dropped a large number of bombs.

The gun limbers have now returned to the Mobile Wagon Lines from their position close up in rear of the guns. Owing to the mud the horse lines had been moved to higher ground.

The country round about HEILLY has now been taken up by horse lines and camps, heavy batteries have pulled in and the whole presents a scene of activity.

To obtain water for drinking and cooking has been rather a problem, the Battery and Mobile Lines being dependent on the water-cart which takes up fresh water daily from BEHENCOURT a distance of approx. 16 Kilos there and back.

- 8th April - Capt. COLQUHOUN has now taken charge of Mobile Wagon Lines.  
 During the day 72 rounds were expended by the Battery in ranging and 180 rounds fired on a Group Order. Rain fell all day and the living conditions are not all that could be desired.  
 The cooks of the Battery have earned great praise by their efforts to keep the troops supplied with hot meals. Having no cookhouses they have had to work in the open. A bombardment was opened by the guns on this front at 7 a.m. but drew no retaliation.  
 Visibility was poor and there was little aerial activity on either side.
- 9th April - Hostile batteries fired on our position this morning, and kept the shelling up at frequent intervals during the day. Two men were seriously wounded, a shell bursting at the entrance to the shelter they were occupying.  
 18701 Bdr. MCLEISH J.E.  
 24572 Gnr. COCKBURN C.E.  
 both original men of the 26th Battery.  
 One gun, "C" Sub, was put out of action and was taken to Ordnance Workshops for repairs.  
 There was a general bombardment along the front. Visibility was indifferent, misty and dull and a light rain which cleared off toward midday.
- 10th April - A quiet day. A programme of harassing fire carried out by our guns. Hostile fire practically nil. The visibility was indifferent a fog making the atmosphere very thick.
- 11th April - The morning was dull but the weather changed to bright and warm at midday. The fine change was responsible for a big increase in aerial activity and several battles took place over the lines. A British machine was brought down in our territory.  
 Bombing raids by Gothas occurred during the night the Battery areas and Villages being the targets.
- 12th April - The day turned out to be cloudless and hot, and quite like a summer's day. Everyone took advantage of the sunshine and blankets and clothing which had been wet for the past week were spread out to dry. Observation balloons and aircraft were numerous. The night was cloudless and there was a new moon. Hostile planes flew over in numbers our Anti-guns and machine guns failing to turn them, and many bombs were dropped. Our machines were also very active over enemy lines.
- 13th April - A sudden change from yesterday's fine weather. A very cold North wind blew fiercely across the country and the sky was heavily overcast. Dust and a thick haze interfered with the visibility.  
 The day was quiet along the line and there was no hostile shelling.
- 14th April - The cold change continues and a strong wind is still blowing. Hostile artillery was again inactive. It is quite likely that some of his guns have been withdrawn and taken North.  
 Since going into action on 29-3-1918 the ammunition expenditure has amounted to 6200 pounds.  
 C sub. gun returned from workshop and is now in action again.

- 15th April - Harassing fire has been maintained by our guns on enemy communications and areas in which his troops are likely to mass for an attack. The gunners at the Battery position are well dug in, sleepers, rails etc., being brought to the position for this purpose.  
Weather conditions cold and wintry with some rain.
- 16th April - Visibility indifferent and bad weather still continues.  
Our expenditure amounted to nearly 400 rounds mainly in harassing fire, The Heavies in our rear have been very active but hostile artillery has been quiet. Many fires have been caused behind his lines.
- 17th April - Milder weather conditions but still some rain and wind.  
Operation Orders, registrations and harassing fire accounted for 650 rounds. Battery areas were lightly shelled by hostile artillery.  
Our guns are now firing at the unusual range of 9000 yards. This range is obtained by digging in the gun-spade and thereby getting the necessary elevation. The normal range of an 18-pdr is 6600 yards.  
Infantry patrols report that they cannot find the enemy in any great numbers and our increased range indicates that he has gone back somewhat.
- 18th April - A wet bleak day with bad visibility.  
No. 26421 Gnr. SHEARSTON was struck off strength of this Brigade and left to join the A.F.C.  
The 26th Battery has been requested to make crosses ( Battery design) to be erected on the graves of the late Lieut-Col. CHURCHUS, D.S.O., Captain GREENSHIELDS and Lieut. RADFORD.  
Throughout the day and night a constant fire was kept up. In addition to a programme of harassing fire a number of Group Orders were carried out and the total ammunition expenditure for the 24 hours was 700 rounds. Working parties sighted from the O.P. were fired on and dispersed. The guns are now concealed from aerial observation by camouflage.
- 19th April - Heavy squalls of sleet and rain during the day and also some snow. The visibility was in consequence very poor.  
400 rounds were expended by the Battery during the day.  
Of late trains have been observed running into the enemy's back areas. This shows that he has lost no time in linking up his newly acquired territory.  
At night the weather cleared and the enemy took the advantage of bombing our back areas.
- 20th April - The morning was fine and there was a heavy frost on the ground. A storm broke in the afternoon. The weather conditions lately have been unusual for in 24 hours we have experienced all the extremes of heat and cold. A heavy ground mist obscured the landscape.  
500 rounds were fired on general targets such as Roads, working parties etc.  
Reserve Wagon Lines were selected by Capt. COLQUHOUN to-day.  
The country about HEILLY is now congested with transport and Wagon Lines and Batteries are frequently pulling into action in the vicinity.  
The firing of these batteries brings hostile retaliation and casualties among men and horses are unpleasantly numerous in the Wagon Lines. Up to the present 26th has not suffered any losses. No 34151 Bdr. WOJNARSKI was struck off strength to report to St John's Wood.

- 21st April - A fine day with a strong South wind. Approximately 1000 rounds were expended in a continuous harassing fire on the enemy's roads, back areas and communications. In spite of the high wing aerial activity was great. Large formations met in battle and in almost every case the result was in our favor. The famous "crack aviator" Capt. Baron Von. REICHTOFNE who has 80 of the allied machines to his credit, was brought down to-day. Our planes forced him to a low altitude and machine gunners accounted for him from the ground. Several Batteries and Companies claim the credit. The machine fell about 1 Kilo from the Battery position. In any case the honor rests with an Australian Battery A.A. machine gunner. Unofficial foraging parties from our Battery and Wagon Lines occasionally visit the evacuated villages in the hope of discovering forgotten hen-roosts and pig-pens, not to mention wine cellars. At times the troops live well, at others the military issue of rations has to suffice. These villages close to the line have become special targets for the Hun artillery. Shells wreck houses and streets daily and before long the tidy little hamlets of a month ago will be nothing but a heap of ruins.
- 22nd April - Weather fine and warm with fair visibility. There was much activity in the air. One German plane was brought down in the early morning. Several hostile working parties were fired on by our guns. Hostile artillery was fairly quiet.
- 23rd April - A fine hot day. Visibility was good and there was a good deal of activity in the air. Much movement was observed behind the enemy lines including a number of trains. This movement was continually fired on by our guns. Explosions occurred, probably ammunition dumps behind the enemy lines. Hostile artillery was very busy on our roads. Owing to the good visibility an unusual number of German observation Balloons were up all day. "F" sub. gun camouflage was set alight during the night.
- 24th April - At 3.30 a.m. this morning hostile artillery of all calibres opened up a very heavy barrage on the Battery areas and back country. This bombardment lasted well on toward noon. Great quantities of gas shell were sent over in the 'strafe'. Our artillery opened a fierce retaliation. 'F' sub gun received a direct hit from a 4.2 smashing one wheel and putting the gun out of action. Fortunately the crew were away from the gun at the time. The entire Headquarters Staff of the 7th Brigade with two three exceptions were gassed, the affects temporarily blinding them. All were hospital cases. Casualties in the Wagon Lines among horses and men were many. 27th Battery on our right were forced to evacuate. During the bombardment enemy Infantry attacked on the right gaining some ground and driving British troops out of VILLERS BRETTONEUX. 3rd and 4th Div. Infantry were sent to re-inforce and retake the Village, which they did, capturing many prisoners and machine guns. In the afternoon, our Mobile Wagon Lines near HEILLY moved several kilos back and established themselves in the rear of a large wood on a hill overlooking the Village of FRECHENCOURT which lies between PONT NOYELLES and BEHENCOURT. Owing to Lieut-Col JAMES becoming a gas casualty, Major J.M. IRWIN is now acting C.O. of 7th Brigade.

*at the point of  
the battery &  
without  
artillery  
assistance*