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Artillery

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Title: 26th Battery, Australian Field Artillery

May 1918



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- 25th April - Shortly after 8 a.m. a heavy hostile shell gas attack was made on or about the Village of HEILLY. At the new Wagon Lines position horse lines etc were erected and the men set to work to dig in. The hill is terraced and lends itself admirably for this. The bank being cut into and the excavated earth thrown up on either side made good cover. The simple process of throwing a waterproof sheet or canvas cover over a ridge pole made a fairly weatherproof home. The horse and wagon lines were situated on the terrace above. The Immobile Wagon Lines joined the main body during the day. The gun teams remained forward near HEILLY in charge of Lieut. WATT. Capt. GLOVER, Lieut. NIVISON, Lieuts HOGARTH & BINNIE remained with the guns, Capt. COLQUHOUN taking charge of the Wagon Lines assisted by Lieut. CODY. No. 31664 Gnr. ASHMEAD was gassed and sent to Hospital.
- 26th April - Weather dull and very misty. Rain fell toward the night. The battery was relieved to-day by 108th R.F.A. Brigade B. battery mobile, and guns were taken over. The 26th Battery fell back into reserve occupying the positions evacuated by the 108th Brigade R.F.A. This is on the hill top above the recently evacuated Wagon Lines (Sheet 62D France, J.l.a.05.95.approx).
- 27th April - Weather was still bad with poor visibility and in consequence there was practically no artillery activity on either side. Crosses made by 26th Battery were erected to-day over the graves of Lieut-Col. CHURCHUS, Capt. GREENSHIELDS & Lieut. RADFORDS.
- 28th April - Very little activity on either side of the line. Usual Wagon Line routine was carried out including improvement of horse lines and building of revetments.
- 29th April - Weather was dull in the morning. In the afternoon the clouds lifted somewhat and low flying aeroplanes flew over our back areas. Artillery was very quiet during the day but at night a heavy bombardment was put down by the enemy. To-day a fine piece of work was done by an Aust. Air Flight. Three of our planes swooped from the clouds on to a Hun Plane at low altitude forcing him to descend but not before he had made a determined effort to break through. The machine landed near our Wagon Lines practically intact. The pilot who was a mere lad of about 18 years burst into tears when captured.
- 30th April - The day was very wet and foggy and there was very little artillery activity. Wagon Line routine was carried on as usual.
- 1st May - Weather conditions cool and misty. The guns being in reserve little firing has been done with the exception of ranging. There was some activity in the air during the morning and hostile machines flew over our lines at low altitudes.
- 2nd May - The day was fine and warm. There was a noticeable increase in artillery shooting and aircraft took full advantage of the favourable conditions. A game of Baseball has been arranged by Bdr. ROHU between C. Coy. 6th Regiment American Engineers who are billeted in FRECHENCOURT and a team selected from 7th Brigade, the idea being to stimulate a fraternal feeling and for us to learn the finer points of the game.

- 3rd May - Fine weather continues. The front was very quiet and there is nothing special to report. Usual Wagon Line routine was carried out.
- 4th May - The day began fine after a heavy rain storm which continued throughout the night. This rain has made the Wagon Lines very muddy. Hostile guns heavily shelled villages near the line and this brought forth a strong retaliation. A series of cricket matches, an inter-battery competition was begun to-day the 25th Battery playing the 107th Batty. The game was played immediately in rear of the 26th Battery position and the 25th won scores being 68, 27.
- 5th May - To-day the Baseball match was played at the Wagon Lines near FRECHENCOURT. The game proved very interesting and novel and a large crowd attended. The 26th was granted a half-holiday. A heavy thunderstorm caused the match to be abandoned when the scores stood - Yanks 5, Aussies 4 with an innings in our favor. The visiting team was entertained to tea and a return match arranged.
- 6th May - During the night a raid by 3rd Div. Infantry was highly successful. The 7th Brigade "stood to" during the operation. This raid took place between the Rivers SOMME & ANCRE South West of MORLANCOURT. Our line was advanced $\frac{1}{2}$ mile on a front of approximately 1 mile in spite of strong opposition from the enemy whose losses were heavy. Over 150 prisoners, 2 Machine guns and a Trench Mortar were captured. Our casualties were slight.
- 7th May. - Heavy rain squalls throughout the day. The front remained quiet. Col. JAMES returned to 7th Brigade Headquarters from Hospital. The 7th Brigade Battery positions were inspected by Gen. Sir. W.R.BIRDWOOD to-day.
- 8th May - Weather fine and warm though misty. The afternoon was a half-holiday on account of the return baseball match being played. The game proved to be an exciting one and was strongly contested, but the 7th Brigade were out-classed in the latter part of the game. The final scores were 13 - 3. There was a large crowd of spectators, Gen. GRIMWADE, Major NICHOLLS and other Staff Officers being present. The Americans entertained the 7th Brigade team in the evening. Through these games a healthy friendship has sprung up between the two Units and further contests are looked forward to.
- 9th May - The 26th Battery went into action again to-day, taking over guns and position of 8th Battery Mobile A.F.A. The position is open and on a crest, the guns having camouflage thrown over them when not in action. The slope of the hill is formed by three terraces, the one below the guns being cut into to form dugouts for the gunners and below that again the control and cookhouse. The other Batteries of the Brigade were also along the crest. All round this position were many Howitzers and heavy guns and these kept up a ceaseless fire on the enemy. Our guns ranged during the day and set to work at night sending over a goodly number of shells in various operation orders. The limber lines also moved up to-day, taking their positions in the open country between the villages of BAIZIEUX & BRESLE on the Northern side of the BRAY-AMIENS-ALBERT Road. The guns stand on the outskirts of BRESLE about a kilo from the above mentioned Road the Ancre River now being in front of us

10th May - The Battery position and Wagon Lines were now located as follows:-

Battery - D.15.a.9.0.
W.L. - C.18.a.2.8.

At daybreak a number of hostile bombing planes made a raid on our back areas and in spite of a steady M.G. fire from the guns in the many wagon lines they persisted in flying at low altitudes. One was brought down in flames near the Battery position. Bombs fell in the vicinity of the position but caused no damage to personnel or guns.

The guns on our left opened a heavy bombardment which lasted several hours and later on the Hun retaliated on the surrounding villages.

The weather remained fairly fine though dull and cool,

11th May - To-day is the 2nd Anniversary of the 7th Brigade's departure from SYDNEY. A half-holiday was granted this battery and a cricket match was played between 10th Battery 4th Aust. F.A.Bde and 26th Battery. The latter won by an innings and 28 runs.

At the Battery the gunners were kept busy carrying out operation orders, most of the firing being done during the hours of darkness. The enemy's guns are by no means silent the villages along the line receiving considerable attention. So far no shells have fallen alarmingly near the Battery position.

12th May - The weather was fine but misty. There was little aerial activity, and hostile artillery was fairly quiet on our part of the front.

13th May - Another bombing raid was made at daybreak by hostile machines. Both forward and back areas were bombed. Four machines flew over the Battery position circling round and making observations. At dusk these planes dropped bombs on the left flank of the 26th Battery and not far from the right flank of the 27th. Others fell on a battery a little distance further forward whose guns did not cease firing ~~the~~ when the planes came over. The German machine gunners opened fire on the Batteries from their machines.

The village of RIBEMONT which lies to our right was continually strafed to-day.

Rain set in during the day and fell steadily.

No. 714 Gnr. BOULTON was evacuated to hospital with injuries caused through a kick from a mule.

The following message was addressed to the Brigade by the Division Commander to be promulgated to the whole of the troops of the 3rd Div.

"

D.H.Q.

13-5-1918.

" The Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief paid a visit to the Division a couple of days ago in order to personally express to me his thanks for the valuable and decisive services rendered by the Division from the date of its arrival in this theatre of war on March 27th, up to and inclusive of the operations of May 6th & 7th

The Commander-in-chief desires me to convey to all ranks, services and Departments his keen appreciation and gratitude for the work they have done."

(Sgd) JOHN MONASH Major-Gen
Commanding, 3rd Aust. Div.

(Sgd) R.E. JACKSON Lieut-Col.
A.A. & Q.M.G. 3rd Aust. Div.

14th May - Fine but dull. Batteries in position on either flank were shelled out to-day, this being the result of aerial observation by hostile planes last evening. No shells fell on our gun position. The 26th Battery was relieved in the line to-day by 11th Battery 2nd Brigade A.F.A. and pulled back to join the rear lines near FRECHENCOURT. Preparations were immediately got under way to make an early start for a move in the morning. It is rumoured that the 7th Brigade is to go out for a few days spell. The 26th Battery Canteen which was started at STRAZEELE in January, 1917 is now to be wound up. All regimental canteens are to come under the control of the A.I.F. The 26th Canteen was proposed by Major PLAYFAIR who purchased a number of shares and these with shares bought up by the other Officers and men put the business on a financial footing. A Committee was formed and Bdr. ROHU selected as Canteen Manager. The profits went to the Men's Mess Fund, thereby enabling extra foodstuffs to be purchased which were not to be obtained in the Army issue. When in the firing line or in the country where there was little habitation the canteen proved a great boon. The men were allowed from pay to pay. The loss of the Canteen at WITTERNESSE on the route march from BELGIUM to the SOMME was keenly felt at first and for some weeks there was a great difficulty in procuring even small quantities of goods. In one instance tobacco was so scarce the troops had to fall back on "Woodbines". Now, however, another French cart has been "borrowed" by the management and a new canteen starts afresh to-day with a small stock. When on the march the Battery will not own this "buckshee turnout" and it will have to travel by devious byways.

15th May - Reveille blew at 4 a.m. The day turned out with a clear blue sky and a hot sun. The Brigade moved out about 8 am and travelled via PONT NOYELLES ALMONVILLE POULAINVILLE COISY BERTANGES ST. SAVEUR LE CHAUSSEE BELLOY-sur-SOMME and occupied Wagon Lines in the evening on the outskirts of a small village named BOURDON. The column made a wide detour of the City of AMIENS which could be seen nestling in the Somme Valley with its noble Cathedral standing boldly out against the lesser buildings. The country through which we travelled was very picturesque and fertile. For miles the Road followed the Valley of the Somme River, in many places only a string of large water holes. Now and again we came to the swift running Canal. Rich young crops of velvety green grew right to the roadside, and the fields were divided by luxuriant hawthorn hedges and here and there woods of tender green cast deep shadows and formed cool glades. The air was laden with the scent of flowers, the lilac, the elder and acacia all bloomed along the country lanes and in the cottage gardens. Throughout the morning enemy planes kept coming and going over the back areas and a constant firing was kept up by the anti guns. In spite of this disturbing element the War and its trials were soon forgotten as we wound our way through some of France's most beautiful scenery. After leaving the Village of POULAINVILLE the road passed thro' an extensive aerodrome, and here the air was filled with the hum of scores of planes, some practising, others alighting after a trip over the German lines. Some of these bore marks of battle, bullet and shrapnel holes showing in their wings and fuselage. As we passed, a wounded aviator was being taken from his plane after pluckily bringing it home. About 2 p.m. the column halted and the horses were watered from the water pools in the valley thro' which the road ran. Further on a short halt was made for lunch.

- 15th May (cont.) - On arrival at the Wagon Line at BOURDON no time was lost in getting everything finished for the evening. Then swimming in the river and the estaminets in the Village claimed the troops till bed-time.
- 16th May - Reveille at an early hour. The column was on the move at 8 a.m. The weather was hot and still. The Town of FLEXICOURT was passed through and then the route followed the line of the Somme River again. The country gradually grew steeper and with the exception of thick woods was all under young crops. We finally came to rest in the village of COCQUEREL after passing thro' the town of LONG. COCQUEREL was the end of our march and horse and wagon lines were established. The site selected for the camp was in the depths of a wood on a hilltop overlooking the Village and the River. The horses were picqueted along shady avenues of firs, and the mens shelters erected in the Timber nearby. The Officers were billeted in the Village. After work was done there was a general rush for the River and for the first time in many months everyone was able to enjoy a long swim.
- 17th May - Reveille was not blown until 7 a.m. To-day the weather if anything was hotter than yesterday. In the afternoon the men were free till 5 p.m. and these hours of freedom wer spent by the majority in the River or rather in the Canal. The stream is deep and fast running and averages 30 yds. in width. A tow-path follows the river bank which is over-hung with heavy foliage. At the lower end of the Village the canal is spanned by a bridge. The Village itself is ancient and tumble-down and the inhabitants' methods of earning a living are far from up-to-date. Their farming implements are driven by horse power and also dogs working a treadmill or similar contrivance. (In the majority of French and Belgian towns dog-drawn vehicles are a common means of transport.) This place also employs a town-crier, who morning and night summons the townsfolk by rattling a kettledrum and when a sufficient crowd have collected reads out the latest ' war news '. In spite of being far behind the times in most things there is one thing that the natives can boast of and that is an excellent electric light service. Every cottage and hovel seems to be supplied with this convenience.
- 18th May - Usual camp routine such as vehicle and harness cleaning and watering and feeding horses was carried out. The hours between 2 and 5 each afternoon are set aside for recreation. Being a hot day swimming is first favourite.
- 19th May - Usual camp routine was carried out. Leave to ABBEVILLE some 15 kilos distant has been granted to N.C.O'S and men.
- 20th May - Summer weather continues. A programme of work has been made out and is to be followed by all batteries of the Brigade. Signalling and Lewis Gun Schools have been formed and the Batteries are to be trained for Mobile warfare. Laying, driving and battery manoeuvres are to be practised. Sports have also been arranged. A Baseball match was played in the evening between 25th and 26th Batteries. The latter won, 6 - 1. No. 18624 Sgt. G. AINSWORTH left for St. John's Wood.
- 21st May - An inspection of the Battery at Field manoeuvres was made this morning by Gen. GRIMWADE and Staff. Lieut-Col. T.B.W. JAMES D.S.O. leaves the 7th Brigade for R.B.A.A. to-day, his place as C.O. being filled by Lieut-Col. KING C.M.G., D.S.O. from R.B.A.A.

- 21st May (cont.) - Camp routine was as on previous days and the afternoon given to sports. Numbers of hostile bombing planes flew over at night and dropped bombs on the Town of ABBEVILLE.
- 22nd May - A very hot day which finished with a light thunderstorm. 26th Battery held a swimming carnival in the afternoon. Major GLOVER acted as Starter, Capt. COLQUHOUN and Lieut HOGARTH Judges. Bdr. ROHU organised the carnival which turned out very successfully. The Divisional Horse races are to take place on Sunday next. ABBEVILLE and neighbouring towns were bombed again during the night. No. 19323 Dvr. B. MARGRIE was evacuated to hospital suffering from injuries.
- 23rd May - An inspection of the Batteries was made by Lieut-Col KING during the morning. A baseball match played by a team from the 7th Brigade against a team from an American Unit, 137th Regt. resulted in a win for our Brigade. The scores were 18 - 1. The visiting team was entertained to tea. Eliminating horse races were run off this afternoon for the Div. meeting. Lt. HOGARTH 1 first, Sgt-Major TREVANNION 2 firsts. Their horses will compete on Sunday.
- 24th May - A wet change and cool. Inspection of Battery personnel by Lieut-Col. KING. Lieut. A.B. LAING was attached to this Battery to-day being transferred from 2nd Div. A Brigade swimming carnival had to be postponed owing to the inclemency of the weather.
- 25th May - The weather was again fine. A Brigade signalling competition was held to-day in the Chateau Grounds. The final results were :-
- | | | |
|---------------|----|--------|
| 107th Battery | 69 | points |
| 26th " | 68 | " |
| 27th " | 62 | " |
| 25th " | 20 | " |
- First and Second prizes were 70 and 30 francs respectively. The usual half-holiday was spent swimming in the River.
- 26th May - The 3rd Division Race Meeting took place at EPAGNE this afternoon. It was attended by a large crowd of Aust. troops. Nurses and W.A.A.C'S from the Hospitals at ABBEVILLE were invited. 26th Battery horses did not succeed in pulling off any of the events. Major PLAYFAIR had two wins both on grey horses. Lieut. NIVISO was one of the Committee. In the evening a Brigade Concert Party gave an entertainment in the Chateau Grounds.
- 27th May. - Weather fine and hot. Battery drill and usual camp routine carried out. Hostile planes bombed towns along the Somme at night. A Brigade Concert Party entertained patients of the Hospital at night.
- 28th May - A cool day. Usual camp routine carried out.
- 29th May - Orders to the effect that the Brigade moves back to the line on 31st have been received. The Brigade baseball team were defeated by 6 - 4 in the return match played with the 137th U.S. Regiment.
- 30th May -

30th May - Preparations are being made for to-morrow's move. Another baseball game was played against a team from the 83rd Div. Americans the 7th Brigade winning 5 - 2. The return to the firing line is viewed with much regret. The few days rest and recreation were easily the most enjoyable the men of this Battery have so far had. The weather on the whole was beautifully fine, and added to the pleasantness of the holiday in no small measure. An extensive bombing raid was made by Hostile aircraft at night. COCQUEREL was probably considered too insignificant to be treated to any of Germany's explosives. There is a general evacuation of the civil population from all of the large towns each evening to the woods on the outskirts. The morning sees business resumed as usual.

31st May - Lieut. NIVISON, Sgt. C.E.HARRISON, Cpl. COGLE, and Dvrs L.L.MCCARTHY & J. DEER left 26th Battery this morning for R.B.A.A. HEYTESBURY. The 7th Brigade left COCQUEREL at 10 a.m. and travelled via FONTAINE & ARRAINES to HANGEST-sur-SOMME and occupied Wagon Lines between the last mentioned place and SOUES.