

AWM4

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

Supplies & Transport

Item number: 25/35/2

Title: 1st Australian Railhead Supply
Detachment

October 1918 - May 1919



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1st Australian Railhead Supply Detach.,
(Formerly. Railway Supply Det.,
11th Coy., A.A.S.C.)

Oct 1918 — May 1919.

Duties and subjects Summary of events and information.

On 8th, October & 8th, October Captain Antill accompanied by 4 other Ranks left the Detachment at Corbie for Bray-sur-Somme to join a party of other 1914 Officers and men who were proceeding on Six months furlough.

From 9th October Lieut. Frankel assumed charge of the Unit as O.C. First A.R.S.D. and R.S.O. Corbie,

At this date the strength of the Unit was One Officer ~~11~~ ~~or~~ 14 other Ranks and the Detachment was distributing 20,000 Rations daily, this Total being made up as follows;

Details British	12,000
Do. Chinese	5,000
Do. Prisoners of War	5,000.

On 3rd. November 1918, One N.C.O. and 5 Men arrived from 6th. A.M.T. Coy. on loan to assist the Detachment to assist the Detachment in response to requests by the O.C. for men to make the Unit up to its necessary working strength.,

On 21st. November this Party was relieved by 5 other men who were transferred from 1st. Div. Train.

About the end of November the Corbie Railhead became part of 3rd. British Area by reason of the 4th. Army having moved forward ~~occupation~~ as an Army of Occupation.

On 13th. December 1918 word was received notifying the O.C. to hand over the Corbie Railhead to the O.C. No. 53 R.S.D.

The Stocks were duly handed over and instructions were awaited from Army as to movements,

On 16th. December 1918 instructions were received from 3rd. Army to proceed to Le Quesnoy by rail and the Detachment's equipment was duly loaded into two trucks at Corbie. The same afternoon the Members were divided into the trucks and arrived two days later at Le Quesnoy, after having stayed en route at the Regulating Station at Rome's Camp.

Le Quesnoy was at that time the limit of the broad gauge Railway in that direction as all Railways and Bridges had been destroyed by the Germans in their retreat,

Two days were spent at Le Quesnoy awaiting instructions as to further movements from 4th. Army, which were received to the effect that the Detachment was to move by two Motor Lorries to Beaumont, Belgium.

On 20th. December 1918 the O.C. took over Beaumont Railhead from an Imperial Detachment. The Beaumont Railhead was not by any means an ideal place, as the Yard is small and very muddy.

The Belgium Railways were in a very bad state after their experience under German control. This was not helped by the fact that all Belgium Railway Employees who had worked for the Germans during the War were replaced by those who had refused to do so. As a result of these circumstances and the Railways in the invaded portions of France being in a bad state the Ration packs were in the habit of arriving from 24 to 48 hours late.

The Units drawing at Beaumont Railhead were 2nd. and 5th. Australian Divisions and 6th. A.M.T. Company, a total of ~~322~~ 30,000 Rations.

The weather was very bad during the latter part of December and as Issues were irregular the Unit had a very difficult time. It is instanced as an example that on 24th. December the Pack due two day's earlier arrived at 4 p.m. and the Issue continued until well after mid-night. On the 26th. December two Packs arrived and it looked as if the Railway tangle had straightened out, but on the next day the lee-way was again lost, as no Pack arrived. This happened several times until the system was adopted of waiting one full day whether the Pack arrived or not, and generally it did not.

On the 29th. December the O.C. was instructed by Army to send portion of the Detachment under an N.C.O. to Thuillies, a Station about 10 Kilometres distant from Beaumont. to

16/12/18
Unit leaves
Corbie and
proceeds to
Railhead at
Beaumont.
Work at Beaumont
Railhead.

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to open a Railhead for the 2nd. Australian Division at that place.

Accordingly on 30/12/18 a Corporal and three Men proceeded to Thuillies and opened a Railhead. During the first half of January the Detail strength drawing from Thuillies Railhead was only about 100-

On 24th. January 1919 the 22nd. Wing Royal Air Force Squadrons numbering 10 with the strength of about 1,600 men were instructed by Army to draw as Details from Thuillies.

On 19th, February 1919 the strength of the Detachment actually working on the Railheads was,

Beaumont	1 Officer, 3 N.C.Os.	3 Men,
Thuillies	1 Do.	5 Do.

In addition to these, there were two men from Beaumont and one from Thuillies on leave.

A Summary of the work being done at these Railheads is interesting at this date.

Beaumont, Orderly Room of the Unit, Medical and Comforts and Bulk Stores containing 30,000 to 50,000 Men's Rations and an enormous quantity of Oils and Fodder as Reserve Rations; also additional thousands of Rations dumped as a consequence of Thaw precautions.

Two large formations (5th. Aust. Division and 6th. A.M.T. Coy.) being issued to daily, also Details consisting of Units and a Casualty Clearing Stations. Medical Comforts being issued to all Hospitals and Medical Units in a large area.

Stocks on hand as per Stock Sheet of ~~19/2~~ 19/2/19 were as follows;

Biscuits	61,371 Lbs.	Bread	1,727 Lbs.
Flour	11,869 "	Rice	2,109 "
Oatmeal	2,740 "	Fresh Meat	2,518 "
Pres. Meat	54,631 "	Pork & Beans	25,845 "
Meat & Veg.	18,763 "	Bacon	7,634 "
Margarine	2,106 "	Tea	3,807 "
Sugar	17,195 "	Cheese	6,500 "
Jam	20,608 "	Dried Fruits	5,033 "
Dried Veggies,	7,017 "	Milk (U.S.)	3,099 "
Milk (Sweetened)	1,041 "	Do. (Dried)	1,005 "
Cigarettes & Tobacco	2,654 "	Matches	2,000 Doz.
Pickles	256 "	Straw	24,922 Lbs.
Hay	320,502 "	Oats	376,268 "
Candles	448 "	Petrol (TX)	8,562 Gals
Min. Burning Oil	71 Gals.	Meth. Spirits	90 "
Lub. Oils	779 "	Carbide	1,288 Lbs.
Grease	220 Lbs.	Chloride of Lime	9,240 "
Cresol	260 Gals.	Wood Pres. Oil	175 Gals.
Coal	25½ Tons.		

Thuillies. No Bulk Store here, but about 30,000 Men's and 12,000 Horse Rations. stored in trucks and in dumps on the Railhead Yard.

2nd. Aust. Division being issued to daily and Aircraft Units three times weekly.

Stocks on hand as per Stock Sheet of 19/2/19 were as follows;

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Biscuits	22,601 Lbs.	Bread	2,680 Lbs
Bread	2,680 "	Flour	775 "
Rice	1,836 "	Dried Milk	480 "
Milk (U.S.)	504 "	Fresh Meat	2,110 B
Pres. Meat	16,165 "	Pork & Beans	9,799 "
Meat & Vegetable	5,475 "	Bacon	4,737 B
Margarine	1,997 B	Tea	1,228 "
Sugar	7,590 "	Cheese	4,297 "
Jam	8,251 "	Dried Fruit	648 "
Potatoes	1,559 "	Dried Veggies.	4,564 "
Tobacco	440 "	Matches	189 Doz
Rum	308 Gals.	Onions	578 Lbs.
Pickles	418 Lbs.	Straw	75,002 "
Hay	208,602 "	Oats	242,270 B
Grease	180 "	Candles	1,995 B
Petrol T.	5,886 Gals.	M.B.O.	433 Gals
Do. A.	5,150 "	Meth. Spirits	419 "
Lub. Oils	1,565 "	Carbide	784 "
Chloride of Lime	3,300 Lbs.	Bleach. Powder	129 Lbs
Coal	47 Tons.		

During the month of January and early February a reserve of Men's and Horses Rations for four days was issued to all Units drawing from the Railheads as Thaw Rations. A Thaw occurred on 11th. February and Thaw precautions were ordered as from 16th. February. The result of this was that Motor Lorries were not allowed on any roads except by special authority. The following process was adopted in dealing with formations during the period covered by Thaw precautions. The Bread, Fresh Meat, Bacon, Margarine and Cheese arriving by Train each morning was drawn by the respective Formations, but all other commodities of Men's Rations as well as Fodder were consumed from Thaw Reserves held by the different Formations. All commodities on the Train not taken by formations which comprised everything but the items mentioned were dumped in the Railhead Stores by Fatigue Parties. The enormous accumulation of Stocks as shown in figures quoted above is thereby explained by this procedure.

From the lifting of Thaw precautions, the Formations again commenced to make up their four day's reserves from stocks accumulated on the Railheads.

It is noted as an interesting item and one which occasioned the Staffs of these Railheads a great deal of work and worry, that during the ~~my~~ sojourn of the Detachment at Beaumont and Thuillies a great deal of pilfering had taken place from the Packs before their arrival at the Railheads. On one occasion a truck arrived at Thuillies from which amongst other things 117 Gallons of Rum had been stolen and it is also quoted as an example that a truck arrived at Beaumont from which 18 out of 20 Cases of Margarine in the truck had been stolen.

This state of affairs was typical of all Railheads in the Area and may have been a result of the very great scarcity and consequent high prices of anything in the shape of feed. It was facilitated by the slowness with which the Trains made their trips also the long stops at unguarded Stations. After repeated requests armed Guards travelled with all Supply Trains and the discrepancies became less noticeable. At the Railheads armed Guards were also posted, but Goods disappeared from the Dumps in spite of this fact, and in some cases because of it, as a Sentry was on one occasion detected on Thuillies Railhead with 60 Lbs. of Margarine in a sack which he was in the act of stealing. At a subsequent Court Martial he received a sentence of Three years in prison.

At the end of February the Detachment was further reduced by One man proceeding to England on non-military employment, also Two N.C.Os. returning to Australia for early Repatriation.

As the strength of the Detachment was now below 50 per cent and distributed over two Railheads, reinforcements were urgently

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urgently required. These were forthcoming during the first week of March, Twelve other Ranks being sent by Australian Corps Headquarters. Two of these were use- less for the work and were immediately returned to their Units.

4/4/1919-

Beaumont ~~was~~ closed down and Stocks sent To Thuillies.

From March 17th. the Supply Train arrived at Thuillies on alternate days only.

Beaumont Railhead was closed on 4th. April, the whole of the Stocks being transferred to Thuillies by Rail with the exception of Medical Comforts and Oils which were sent to an advanced Supply Depot at Montignies Section 8 (2nd. Aust. Division) was being sent to Marchienne Est and Section 129 (5th. Aust. Div. and Corps Troops) going to Thuillies.

Owing to Demobilisation, the strength of Formations had decreased considerably, viz. Aust. Corps Troops 4,599, 5th. Aust. Division 4,800- Details 1,800 and Prisoners of War 2,400 were also being fed from Section 129.

On April 7th. a change was made in the titles of Formations, B. Divisional Group being substituted for the formation hitherto drawing as 5th. Aust. Division and A. Divisional Group for 2nd, Aust. Division.

On 20th. April B. Div. Group was transferred to Marchienne Est leaving a very small Pack to come to Thuillies, Corps Troops being reduced to a strength of 3,000.

24/4/19-

Thuillies Railhead closed,

On April 24th. Thuillies Railhead closed, Details drawing from Charleroi. The whole of the Stocks were now transferred to Marchienne Est.

The Detachment was now ~~waiting~~ awaiting instructions from No. 4 Area, here-to-fore known as 4th. Army.

2/5/19-

Detachment moves to Marchienne Est.

On April 30th. instructions were received to proceed to Marchienne Est to take over that Railhead. The first Issue by this Detachment was made on 2nd. May.

The Pack (Section 8) was being received on alternate days for a strength of 30,000 British and 4,000 Prisoners of War.

The whole of A.I.F. in this Area were now drawing as one Formation.

Demobilisation was now proceeding rapidly, consequently the strength of Pack was diminishing to a like extent, about 3,000 weekly.

On 12th. May all Prisoners of War and British Troops formerly drawing from Section 8 were transferred to R.S.O. Charleroi.

The last Pack was received on May 22nd. for the strength of 5,000 (double Pack) and the last Issue made on May 23rd.

This Unit was now free for Demobilisation and was despatched for England on May 31st.