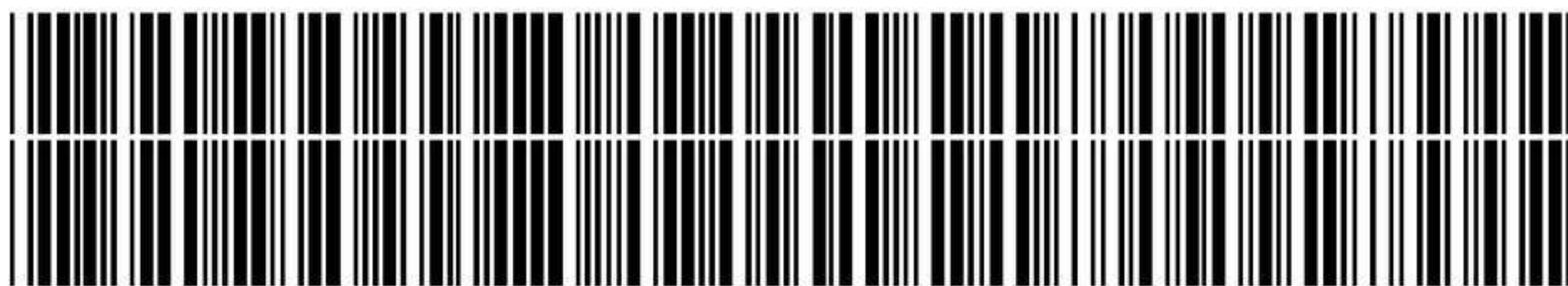


AWM38
Official History,
1914-18 War: Records of C E W Bean,
Official Historian.

Diaries and Notebooks

Item number: 3DRL606/220/1

Title: Folder, September 1918
Includes references to Bellicourt tunnel.



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DIARY No. 220

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3DRL 606 ITEM 220 [.]

DIARIES AND NOTES OF C. E. W. BEAN
CONCERNING THE WAR OF 1914-1918

THE use of these diaries and notes is subject to conditions laid down in the terms of gift to the Australian War Memorial. But, apart from those terms, I wish the following circumstances and considerations to be brought to the notice of every reader and writer who may use them.

These writings represent only what at the moment of making them I believed to be true. The diaries were jotted down almost daily with the object of recording what was then in the writer's mind. Often he wrote them when very tired and half asleep; also, not infrequently, what he believed to be true was not so — but it does not follow that he always discovered this, or remembered to correct the mistakes when discovered. Indeed, he could not always remember that he had written them.

These records should, therefore, be used with great caution, as relating only what their author, at the time of writing, believed. Further, he cannot, of course, vouch for the accuracy of statements made to him by others and here recorded. But he did try to ensure such accuracy by consulting, as far as possible, those who had seen or otherwise taken part in the events. The constant falsity of second-hand evidence (on which a large proportion of war stories are founded) was impressed upon him by the second or third day of the Gallipoli campaign, notwithstanding that those who passed on such stories usually themselves believed them to be true. All second-hand evidence herein should be read with this in mind.

16 Sept., 1946.

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ACCESS STATUS

C. E. W. BEAN.

OPEN

Draft from dictation
457-458

BELLECOURT TUNNEL

September 29th, 1918.

Lt. Brown, Gas Officer of the 8th Brigade, visited the Tunnel at Bellecourt on September 29th. He went into it about 6 p.m. by one of the dugouts entrances in which the 30th Battalion Headquarters was. He went to look for gas apparatus at the same time having a general lookround - .

He found no gas, but a few Americans. They did not know what was the position at the Northern entrance of the Tunnel at this time. Some were asleep. In one place there was an Officer in charge. The men were tired out, they had just got down the dugout and did not know the position in the tunnel at all. He took them along to their Commanding Officer, but their Commanding Officer did not anything. The Commanding Officer accompanied him to Colonel Street (?).

The second time he went down was early in the afternoon of September 30th. He got the idea that no one knew what was on the left of the position and he thought that by getting through the Tunnel, out amongst the Germans to the left, they might be able to bring back some useful information or to try to find this out through the Tunnel. He went along with an Electric Torch which he shaded with his fingers. When they were about half way through the Tunnel, he heard Machine gun fire overhead in the open. He climbed up into another dugout. He did not know whether it was our own people about or the Germans. He heard voices, and for a time he thought that they were Germans. He put the light on one side and went very cautiously. Getting nearer he found that they were Americans in this dugout also, they did not know anything about the Tunnel being below them till at all either to left or right. Brown told them it was as well to put someone as Sentry. Their C.O. realised this at once. He sent two officers with Brown along the Tunnel working further North. There is no bend in the Tunnel. There are three forts in the Tunnel one near the Southern entrance built of concrete, another about the centre of Bellecourt Tunnel three quarters built. It blocks the whole canal except its own occupants from firing there. Then North of Bellecourt was a third in course of construction. From there you could see daylight looking North. It looked like a little candlelight in the distance and got bigger and bigger as they approached. Whilst they were still on the way after the third Fort, after going some distance along with the Americans, they could see daylight fairly big ahead of them when all of a sudden it disappeared. Just for a fraction of time Brown wondered what it was, for he got the blast of an explosion and heard the noise and they were knocked over. Some of the staircases in the shafts were blown away. (There was one every 1,000 yards). This made it very difficult for anyone to be sure of escaping through the Tunnel if he got cut off there. They were frightened that another mine might blow up behind them if they waited and so they cleared back along the tow path for all they were worth.

There are not many boats along that part. There is also a big pumping machine down there for pumping water up. After the mine blew up there was no light down there - the entrance was fairly blocked for it was all dark. The third fort is another like half way along the Tunnel and yet immediately after passing it they could see daylight. Brown, therefore, understood that there was no break in the Tunnel.

Brown had his hand over the light so that he himself was in shadow; the Germans probably saw the light coming along and thought that we were going attacking through the Tunnel, or else, it might have been a chance that they blew it up just then. The Americans

were about half way. This party of Americans had
relieved another American Unit in the dugout above. Below
in the Tunnel there was nobody North of Bellecourt.
