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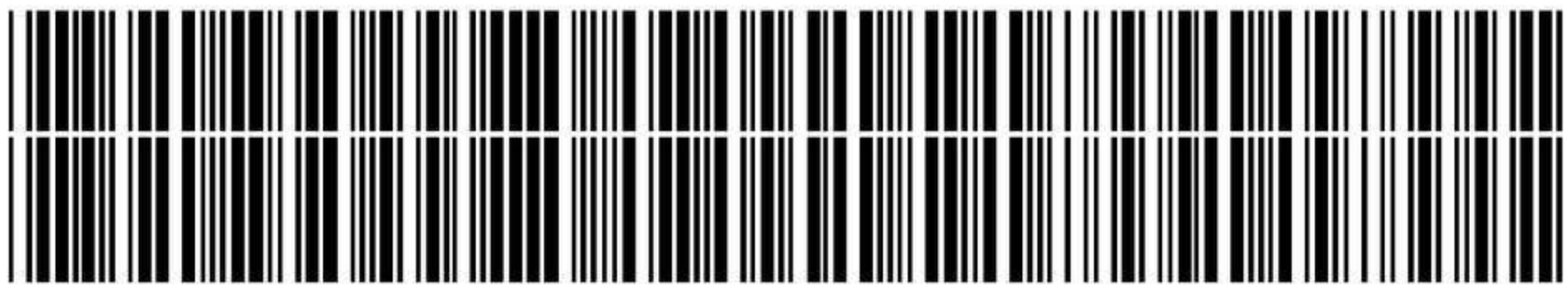
Official History, 1914-18 War: Records of C E W Bean, Official Historian.

Diaries and Notebooks

Item number: 3DRL606/169/1

Title: Notebook, September - October 1917
Includes references to the 25th and 27th Battalions, Malt Trench, Lagnicourt, Bullecourt, Broodseinde, Passchendaele and Warlencourt.



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DIARY NO. 169.

AWM38

3DRL 606 ITEM 169 [1]

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.

C. E. W. BEAN.

49

27 Bn.

20 Sept. jumped off from forward slope of Westhoek Ridge abt 150 yds in rear of furthest outpost. Tapes were laid in front of trench Sapleu on crest & Bn jumped off in 4 waves – 1 Coy mopping up. 50th bn J.O. position abt 3. am.

25 Bn were in front (being for almost in Hannebeek mud) at Objive. 27 bn up on its. Shelling was fairly heavy but no barrage

49.

came on to 27 Bn. This shelling became lively abt jump off time.

25 Bn had gone no distance before they saw Germans — 30 prisoners were on Westhoek Ridge within 10 mins of zero.

They were in odd shellholes abt 50 yds beyond British front line.

We were well in front of German Barrage — it moved up after the Bn & At Albert ~~Barrage~~ Redoubt during the second halt the Germ Barrage

H9 very nearly coincided with ours.

27 Bn was for the 2nd Objective. The mud was met on Hanebeek as soon as they started; it was a belt of shellholes 100 yds wide round wh they had to pick their way.

On 1st Objective most of line had moved too far left. This was corrected.

[28 Bn which was for Green line ~~formed~~ up behind Westhoek ~~r~~ moved up at time when 27 Bn jumped off from Red line; they went thro' 27 Bn on the

D C B A

H9 line later. Very few Germs. were seen between these objectives; but when Bn reached the Cross Roads on rt of Blue line there wd a row of blockhouses facing them about 50 yards away. Though these were just in 1 Barrage line, intermittent m.g. fire wd coming from there - & A Coy rushed the blockhouses & obtained 1
Lt Lapthorne & some others pushed straight
[altogether 9 mgs. were taken; 2 were brought out & sent to base].

49 forward, put Smoke bombs into / back o / dugouts, & / Germ. gave up. They thought / smoke bomb was gas. The m.g. had to firing thro' an embrasure.

[They included an N.C.O who was ~~pushed on~~ by Col. Slaney from H.Q. to Worthemir at Bde H.Q. who all ~~that~~ were of heavy mgs in these dugouts & th / enemy had debussed beyond / butte at Polygon wood.]

The fringe of our barrage was a little ragged & forward troops in Albert Redoubt-

* This screen was afterwards punched into 1 door way by a shell – it was the Coy HQ of Lieut. McCann, who had to be shifted.
Two 4·2 guns were onto this dugout, & got 4 direct hits running within a few minutes.

H9 & the above mentioned* dugouts had to work in the fringe of our barrage – this was not bad; the barrage was very good this day. * This probably saved us from his getting the m.g. out – he wd have had 8 mins. That m.g. could have enfiladed left flank of 27 Bn & 5 Bde.

There was a wicker screen* only covering the entrance of this Pill box & the Germans had this covered from Polygon Butte by another m.g. Overman

H9. was wd there when they played out it.
A marsh ran into left centre of
line betw. Iron X & Albert Redoubts.
There were some enormous shell holes at
Albert redoubt in one of wh was the
signal station. There was one battered
concrete position (alt 1 in 4 of these all
two were smashed) – but rest was
wicker revetted & mostly smashed
up with broken down underpt dugouts.

49. We took shell holes & joined them up – SP on either flank a little in rear of front posts; & joined up w 12 Bn on right.

A S.P. was afterwards built by 7th F. Coy on the height a little in right rear & was shelled by one or two of our 9 in guns. [There was one heavy gun firing short all time through barrage].

During Sept 21 the Blue line was

49 thinned, & shellholes consolidated & joined up abt 100 - 150 yds in rear making support posts.

[All these arrangements were in view of the expected c-attack, wh stood no chance. As the barrage lifted the supports cd have reinforced front line - & men were in great heart.]

The artillery was so heavy in front of each

HQ. objective & stayed there so long th offrs & men had opinion th this torrent of shells was wasted on enemy's small garrison. They cd have done it, in this weather, in half time.

The two heavies in question were firing betw 3 & 4 pm & later – lengthened range 100 yds but were still firing between Green & Blue line. The enemy's barrage was scattered & did little harm.

28 Bn moved thro' 27 Bn during consolidation.

49 Casualties:

	K.	W.
Offrs:	—	4
men:	34	c. 150.

Capt. Elder "A" Cy. M.C. (Scotsman who had been in SA some years as a physical culture expert.) — was wd by a shell while forming up at Westhoek. This was at 2 am. He went back & dressing stn, was fixed up, rejoined his Coy, & carried on until the line had been capt & consold. Bar to M.C. for this.

H9 Lt Hunter, R.C. Intell. Offr. who went up to Blue line att Q.A.M. for information wd hit by a shell & wd.

Lt Dowling, DA. wd in neck on the Blue Line.

Lt J B Maclean, shell fragment in L. leg on the Blue Line after Semmo had started to retaliate.

Lt Harris slightly wd in hand (now back w unit) at the Jump Off & carried on till sent back after consolidn.

Relieved night of Sept 21 by 23rd Bn.
Back to Halifax; 23rd Remingtelot.

49 This was where 28 Bn & 7 M.G. Coy were bombed.

Sept. 30 moved up to near ~~Swan~~ Chalon Belge.

Oct 1 into line, moving 8.15 p.m. to Westhoek Ridge; 1 Coy went forwd to Anzac Ridge.

On Evg. of Oct 3. ordered to move into positn for new attack.

49. 4 Oct: at 4 a.m. were in position from Sans Souci to Poly line in an old trench, in support to 28 Bn.

The German was bombarding earlier -

27 Bn had to wait till Zero + 70 & then move to D 22 Central. There we a fairly thick but erratic barrage. The Bn moved across country in lines of sections in file over very heavy country. Last nights shower made

49 it sticky. The Bn went right thro Zonnebeke
wh Germs were shelling, esp. the Church &
between Church & Lake.
Casualties were very light up to
this.
When Bn arrd at waiting position
in rear of Thames Wood, Capt Gould
i/c of B. Coy learned the 26 Bn had
had heavy casualties & were held up
by m.g. fire from Daisy Wood.
26 Bn had edged left a bit, &

× a very fine officer.

49 there was a gap between 26th right & 23 Bn. Acting on this (from 26 Bn. Capt B..... senior off. left in this line) A Coy 27 Bn was pushed up to fill the gap on flank & Capt Goulds× Coy "B," moved up to help 26 in front of Daisy Wood.

At the same time "C" Coy began a Counter by under Capt supervision from Redline (1st Objive).

B Coy was left in the line till 8 p.m. Octy when A Coy was withdrawn & their sector

49 taken over by "B". (i.e. 26 Bn moved over some distance to right, & B Coy expanded to cover ground to 23 Bn.)

[B Coy was left there night 4/5 Oct & all 5 October.]

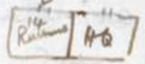
While this C.T. was being dug Maj. Fredericks & Lieut. Matters were wd. both by shellfire - before dark on Oct 4.

Next day this C.T. was finished by C. Coy under Lieut SS Woods. It was very quiet this day till 3 pm - the Germs

Oct 8

Gould (architect from Malvern SA (old 47 Bn)) was an original Officer – (C.M.F.).
He went from Gallipoli w Enteric & dysentery, went to Aust., rejoined Feb. 1916; was ~~wd~~ adjt. during beginning of Somme winter; wd at Warlencourt on Feb. 27 – a shell landed betw his legs, blew him into the air, & found himself sitting in the shellhole. Rejoined on July 13 – He was hit almost direct by this shell at Broodseinde.

49 being very disorganised; but abt 3 pm the German opened up very heavily on Zonnebeke & feeling for our front line. There was a better field of fire from near the top of the road & Daisy wood was ~~therefore~~ avoided – we did not go too close to it. [Capt Gould had gone out to the objee. It was too close to the wood, & there was a better field 80 yds back. He ordered his Coy to dig in there – He had a mixed lot of 26 Bn under him as well as his B Coy of 27 Bn.].



Abt 4 hits on this pillbox this
Evg. 7pm Oct 5 – aftr dark.
One shell hit edge of door
of half in wh were abt 14
runners – No one hurt but stunned
+ a german flare dump outside ignited
a man was hit inside H.Q. dug out by a
piece + a piece hit Maj. Chalmers on cheek.

49 The Germans put up a good bombt again abt
7pm. Oct 5 till 8.30pm + poured shells
into Zonnebeke near church, gasometer, &
the rd to Broodseinde + Thames wood.

abt midnight 5/6 Maj. Holmes
brought up 17 Bn to relieve. After relief
27 Bn moved back to Anzac Ridge.

On ~~morning~~ nights of Oct 6/7 Bn (with
orders to move in Rs of 19 Bn as
marked) took over in rly cutting from
2/6 Manchesters + H.Q. Nofrly opposite Thames
wood. The night was fairly quiet

49 as ws 7th Oct.

at 6.30 pm Germans opened an intense bombt. His main barrage line ws Zonnebeke, Thames wood, Rly. They blew in front line in several places & there were 40 or 50 casualties.

Gould & others thought ~~to~~ this ws / preliminary ~~to~~ a big attack - durg aftn of 7 Oct. 30 German planes had been flying very low over our front line & / Germs had been registering. The trench

H9 there was a good trench in sand.

This bombt lasted till abt 7.30pm. Oct 7.

abt 2am. Oct 8, Maj. Holmes 17Bn relieved 27th. They moved back to Rly wood where they were in tunnels & trenches. They spent Oct 8 in these 26.

9 Oct - abt 3am. 27Bn was moved to Anzac Spur & held there in support to 5 & 6 Bdes.

49

at 11 a.m. orders were recd to move to the front line at the old position of B Coy in front of Daisy wood.

This trench was found to be crowded out by portions of 6 Bde (21 Bn had 4 omen left there; 26 Bn were there, — & shaps from other Bns). The 27 Bn was heavily shelled there. Capt Gould, 2/Lt. Jury, & 2/Lt Organ were killed thereby shells & 2/Lt Coulter was mortally wd & died at dressing station.

49 ~~Betw 15 & 20 men~~ 14 men were killed ~~& abt 40 wd~~ 15 wd.

28

They withdrew C & D Coys to the 27 Bns old Red line ~~to pos~~ waiting position in D 22 Cent.

B & A Coys still in line.

The Germs kept up a continuous bombt on front line & this to De Knoet Fm. & Zonnebeke — steady & thin.

[The 7 Bde was supporting during this fighting.]

The men were very much done. During day & night of 9th mig. fire

49 we coming from Dairy wood.
(not Daisy)

Oct 10 3 a.m. Reld by 49 Bn
under Col. Denton & moved
back to Ypres barracks.

Night of Oct 10 Embussed for Steenvorde.

2/Bn Casualties

		k	wd.	m.
	Offr	1 (3rd)	1/6 (3rd)	-
Oct 4/6	or	24	114	4
7/8	Offr	-	-	-
	or.	9	20	-
9/10	offr	3 d of w	-	-
	or.	7	15	-
		7 d of w.		
		52	156	4

49 25 Bn. While 25 Bn was waiting for the attack of Oct 4 a Lewis Gun post in front reported that it cd see Germans moving in numbers. Major Page went forward, with a scout (or his batman? I forget ch) & stealing past the L. G. Post was grabbed by 15 Germans.

Wrong

See Book 170 p.55

The Germans have an order that big rewards will be given for prisoners

49 ~~+ seeing~~ ~~t~~ he ~~was~~ an officer they ~~dared~~ bayonet him but held him there. Presently one of our shells, not in 1 bombt, fell near + scattered them. Two ~~remained~~ hanging onto Pages belt – he had a Sam Browne belt on so they knew he was an officer. His pistol was on his lanyard but when he tried to seize it, they held it. Somehow he managed to ~~shoot one~~ + clear himself of the others. He got back ~~to our~~ lines.

He now knew there was to be

49 a German attack – & there was 5 mins. to go to the British starting time. He was in a dreadful dilemma, wondering whether he ought to put up the S.O.S or to wait. He carried 1 whole weight of British army on his shoulders for five minutes, & waited. Down came our barrage – & the Germans were crushed.

(This is from Col. Slaney 27 Bn & needs checking as to small details) checked later see Bk 170 p. 55.

49 27 Bn. Malt Trench.

For a couple of days before Malt Y the 27 Bn had to reconnoitre it by day & night. The authorities thought it was held only by a few mgs & scattered posts.

Lt Davies & a patrol was sent there during 1 night, up Lonpart Rd. This

The 27 Bn scouts reconnoitred the wire, found the gaps, & paced them, before the attack; & were thanked by the Brigade.

49 we crossed the wire. They reached the wire & then must have been heard; for first one rifle, then another, started all along the trench. Then before they knew where they were – bang bang a couple of bombs in the road. They got close in to the bank & got out.

Next day a party was intended to go straight at it over the top, I believe;

49 a party of the 5th Bde did this, & were badly punished. They sd they were ordered to do it & were going to do it.

In the Malt Cy fight a party of a Cpt 5 with Lt Davis went down Malt Trench at a tremendous rate from Loupart Rd working right.

49 One man was completely cut off by
1 Germans but got back.

The 27 was (?later) driven back &
the Germans cheered – our people
heard the cheer as 1 Germans got 1
trench back.

When we finally moved down it
~~the~~ 27 Bn met the 5 Bde. What happens
first was ~~it~~ a Stokes mortar bomb (they
didn't know what it was) landed in 1

49 trench near a dugout & blew
one man into the air, dead & wd
another. Maj. Devonshire sent a
man round over the back to see
where the 5 Bde were & then went on
down the trench. Rounding a traverse
he at last found an officer of the 5 Bde
— & there were some strong words. Devonshire
told the officer what he thought of having

49 Stokes Bombs into them; the offr
sd: "But you hit us w rifle grenades"
wh was true. 1 was killed & 1 wd on each
side, apparently.

Lagnicourt.

At Lagnicourt the
27 Bn scouts had their pegs all properly
~~pitd~~ in & were standing by in shallow
sunken road to direct 1 companies

49 out to them – & did it splendidly.

The men had to be placed in positn – they were cold until 1 fight began.

They got to about the crest – their right near the Windmill Stump wh 1 Germans had beautifully registered.

The Germans came out of Noreuil & got up to within 40 – 100 yds of them. They were led by an officer. When this offr was shot by an Australian private

49 the heart seemed to go out of them.
They lay down & did not come on.
Col Slaney got given the ~~couple of guns~~ battery
of Maj. Sinclair to work for him – &
? St Clair a direct line; & he put it to enfilade
the German line.

The rifles of part of this line of ours
were so choked to mend it in one
case – I post near I mill – there was in use only one
German rifle; out of 15 of ours all were choked.

49 The post near / mill was afwds shelled by / Germans so heavily tt we had to leave it.

Cherry was in touch w them tt day.

Bullecourt. 27 Bn was 19 days in / line holding / posts on / right. One platoon in / post nearest / German line was pretty well wiped out; but / rest of / bn had few casualties.

Strictly Private and Confidential.

C. E. W. BEAN. **Book No.** 169.

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