

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

Diaries and Notebooks

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Title: Diary, May 1917

Includes references to Fifth Army Headquarters, Lone Pine, Sir John Gellibrand, and Lord Birdwood on the Germans at Lagnicourt.



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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 ^{AUSBRAG}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.

OPEN

Diary 79
16 May.

7
 May 16th 1917. This
 day I went to stay with
 Jelliband. Late ~~in~~
~~evening~~ I got hold of
 the report of yesty
 morning's attack — &
 it turns out to 1 German
did attack us heavily
 on night & 54th Pn
 pushed them out &
 200 dead were counted
 (Hun sd literally counted)
 in 1 trench & about
 them.

Just as I was
 leaving with little
 Townsend (going to America
 to get his Officers uniform
 — newly promoted in the
 AAG's Office) he told

7 me the 1 message had
the moment come in that
1 German had evacuated
- & the our men were
walking abt outside
1 front line.

Later rang up Butler
who sd the Germans
had evacuated in front
of 1 British at Bellecourt.
Machine guns etc remained
in front of us.

Gelley has had great
difficulty to get a
line abt his battalions
& their performances.
He has been screwing &
screwing the C.Os to
try & get it. Davies

7 of 22nd has had to
 go - his chief shortcoming
 was overlooking hard
 drinking in his battalion
 - he sd it was just
 cheery conviviality.
 Jolly sd to be just
 roughly knew what
 had happened - not
 more.

May 17th. The British
 have taken 1 German
 prisoner who remained
 in Bullecourt ^{so long} - a
 very brave defence.

We were going to
 gas them ^{heavily} tonight but
 did not as 1 wind

4
changed at dusk & is
now blowing from
Germany.

Sir Newton Moore here -

May 17. Our 1st Army

maps are really very
good. We always have a
1 in 5000, 10,000, 20,000, 40,000,
100,000 & 250,000 map
& sometimes 1 in 2500.

We are the only corps I know
of (certainly only one in
this army) which publishes
a ~~daily~~ situation map -
The aeroplane photos are
taken say by 9 or 10 am.
100 copies may have to be
supplied with 20 copies
each - i.e. 2000 copies.
This can't ^{all} be done the same
day. So as soon as the
plane comes in the men
whom this corps has down

5

There studies the prints,
gets down 1 new work
(Lucas is a ~~regular~~ ^{very trained} expert)
sends it down to the
Corps topographical section
at Poitiers; they put out
their old map in a different
colour (blue) - & by 12 p.m.
the units have this map
with all new trenches &
additions on it.

May 28 (Friday)
Went up to see St. Paul
& found them in the
Hinderby line still -
Paul H.Q. in Soubert Rd.
near Rly.

He came forward me
& we found Middley
sniping Germans over
1 parapet - great
Sport, he sd. He had done

big game shooting but
 this was better. Stearne
 observed for him - &
 he certainly made them
 run across a wheatfield
 & get down into shellholes.
 Some German was sniping
 back.

Midgley took us on
 - myself only half keen -
 to a dugout between
 our bombing block & 1
 German block - in
 the O.G. 2 trench - there
 were 3 or 4 dead Germans
 there, some burnt
 dugout; ^{then} a dugout
 which they had stacked
 with stuff - overcoats,
 & waterproof sheets

At one point Midgley told us to keep
 low (I was getting rather too exposed) as
 the Germans could see us down the
 road (he sd) from Rincourt, & ~~keep~~
 sniped & fired with a m.g. down it.

C. B. S.
 30.7.30.



There is a small post here, deserted - 5 or 6 rifles lying together against 1 side of 1 trench; left there exactly as when 1 post was withdrawn.

I don't think the trenches had been filled in. But they were badly battered.

O.G. 1 may have been filled in. We seemed to hold two big shellholes or round posts at 1 end of it.

79 bombs, & surgical dressings.

Opposite us - ten yds away - was a low parapet of sandbags - beyond that a turn of 1/2 a mile you could clearly hear 1 German hammering at something like wire stakes beyond.

We were sniped at regularly from Queant as we came back but 1 rang us long, & as long as you didn't show 1 German (to be close to you) he had nothing to go by.

Big guns are going away from back to Albert, and further.

Apr. 10

9
- A part of the history of the 1st attack on Bellecourt is that after the abortive arrangements of [?]May 10 a conference was held at 5th Army H.Q. in Albert at which Birdie outlined ^{some local} ~~some~~ objections to the attack. However it was made clear that it was part of a big scheme of Haig's - & it had to go on as part of it.

as to tanks: The army & tank commanders were confident that at least 75% would reach 1 enemy's trenches - we were new to them.

When 1 German made their attack on Haguenourt

10
on May 15th & Birdwood
was told of it he wrote:

"The enemy issued from their
trenches & thro' their own
wire, & as soon as I heard
of attack & that they were
coming on in numbers
I at once said "Capital!
we ought to scupper
whole lot of them before
they can get back again."

"I felt confident" he adds -

"It even tho' they were
making a strong attack,
it was unlikely they
wd attempt to establish
themselves beyond their
Heidenberg line, so I
felt pretty sure there wd
not be the real heart
in it, as is the case
with men who know
they have definitely gone

11
forward w no question
of retirement - & such
I am glad to say proved
to be correct.

... I had be compelled
to advance a considerable
number of guns to what
undoubtedly was
dangerous proximity to
German $\frac{1}{2}$, but this was
absolutely essential
to enable 1 field guns
to deal w 1 trenches at
an effective range. I always
felt it was possible th 1 Germans
might make attacks on us
from time to time, & in
going round outpost
villages I always impress
upon every command
th I shall never say a

word if small posts are
overwhelmed by superior
numbers, as long as they
have all arrangements ready
for launching a ~~attack~~
at once to regain positions
& inflict ^{heavy} losses on enemy.

- As a matter of fact
in this attack if our 17 or
19 Bn had acted promptly
they wd have cut off &
captured (whole of the enemy
who attacked Noreuil &
probably more. But 5th Bde
did nothing of this
sort. Little Plant, Bde major
of 6 Bde went down to

13
See these Bnos. one
after Lotter and asked
"aren't you going to do
anything?" & they said
"No" — not till their
Bel made up its mind
& ordered them to
do whatever it decided.
It is not to Jellibrand
back

But 2nd Div never
even informed Jellibrand
of what was happening.

May 15/17

4. in 5 min.

2 2nd Guards Div. 7 356

2 1st Lulu Regt.

Bomb

30 yds left of Rd.
29

30 yds S.

We called w bomb 7th bayonet

at 11-30. Scott says 250 are there

They have counts 2000 7 2 1 1

14

17 Dec 2005 240

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.

They put a gas S

4 2. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.

Starts at 8.10-9

10.30 - midnight.

Gas S largely in

1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1.
wh on 14 Bde HQ
mess.

We got pocket book
+ papers - shown to *

Quietest day in sent.

Lone Pine

When Jellibrand was having the bodies buried (abt 150 were dragged out) he cd not induce the Captain of the Company of Connaught Rangers wh was doing 1 work to come into the Pine w him. "I cant possibly" - "Take my subaltern" He said. Jolly told him that he must come along w him. When they got to B5 sap the C.O was sick - & when they got thro' it he had disappeared. Jolly simply left him - & set 1 subaltern to work.

He told them where to dig at Browns Dip - & so he left them he

17
He said. "That is where to
dig 1 graves - and I'd advise
you to dig them quick -
you may want to get into
them before you're done."

They found 1 earth
stone - & so they ceased
abt for soft earth & dug
up 1 graves wh had be
filled in 1 day before.

They then filled them
in again & left.

"Blue" Harper & a party of
20 BN recruits (sent to
Anzac by mistake) were
set to work & Jilly
found th Blue w's most
use than anyone - tho'
the first Coy of Comms
Rangers were good.