

**A brief diary of Sapper V.S.L. Sanderson
No 2 Section
2nd Aust. Div. Sig. Coy**

To the readers.

Please excuse briefness . Owing to the war, economy in ink & paper must be studied.

In commencing I will go back to July 17th 1915 on which day I traveled from Pt. Augusta to Adelaide for the purpose of presenting myself before the recruiting staff at Currie Street. After a Dr commented with another Dr on the teeth I have not lost they came to the conclusion I was a fit and proper person to be member of the AI Forces. After spending a few days in the said city I returned to Pt. Augusta to fix up what I had left undone.

On August 9th I found myself again in the train going to Adelaide. On the 11th I again visited Currie Street. After a considerable wait I was sworn in & marched off to the Exhibition Camp. There one received blue dungarees white hat blankets & various other items. We were drafted off into sections & shown into our sleeping quarters which were marked Prize Cattle. Everything was white washed & looked clean so one soon settled down to a recruits life. Well readers I won't dwell on camp life too much longer. After a course of training forming fours route marching etc. at the said camp at Morphettville I went to the Mitcham Camp to the Signaling School after a course of flag waving, buzzer practice & lectures. Time passed until we find ourselves in the month of Dec 1915. About the middle of that month our O/C asked for 5 volunteers for the 2nd Div Sig Coy

The writer stepped out with others and four others and self were chosen. We were informed we would probably have to go immediately without our leave. Luck had it however we got our Xmas leave. I again found myself home dressed in H.M. uniform. After spending a few happy days home Dec 28th arrived on which day the sun didn't forget to rise too and needless to mention made its presence felt on the journey back to Adelaide. Arriving somewhat tired and hot I searched in the city for a bed for the night. After a considerable hunt I found a vacant room in a hotel. If I remember rightly it was the Black Bull or John Bull. However I didn't worry about the name as long as the bed was clean which I proved was.

On Dec 29th at 4pm or thereabouts we were seated in the Melbourne Express waiting for time. Our party were 10 all fine fellows. Some of them had their people down at the station to say farewell to them, a sight I don't like witnessing. "Hour" the whistle blew. Seats please said the guard. The green flag was shown to the driver and we waved farewell to the folk remaining on the platform.

On the morning of the 30th I awoke in time to get a bit of breakfast at Ballarat. A sausage and piece of bread and cup of tea. "2/- please" "Thank you", good morning and we proceeded arriving in the city of Melbourne about 10.30am.

After waiting about on the station for some time we were marched off to the Domain camp. We immediately applied for our final leave, but that unfortunately was not granted us. However the O.C. Signals gave us practically most of our time in Melbourne off with the exception of about a couple of Musketry parades and rifle shooting at Williamstown.

And so the old year dies out and new year of 1916 comes in. Very quietly and orderly (were) the streets of Melbourne on the early morn of the new year.

We 10 S.A. Took advantage of our time in Melbourne and saw as much as we could of that city. The people seemed very kind. I visited St. Pauls Cathedral, also places of amusement.

On Active Service

January 5th 1916 arrived. Up bright and early kits packed. Fall in roll call quick march to the station we go, entrain and proceed to Pt. Melbourne, disentrain and march to the pier. Citizens are crowded each side (of the) road as we march down. We arrived on the pier and there awaits our transport A19.

We embark and steam off at midday (to) the waving and crying on the wharf of the parents and sweethearts of the boys who were leaving. To the writer they were all strangers but still he cannot forget it.

We steamed for some hours and then anchored off Queenscliff whilst some repairs were done to gear. Whilst waiting, motor boats, sailing boats, rowing boats came around us all full of cheerful folks of the fine sex.

About midnight our transport steamed off again and thus we steamed. It was on the 11th that we again sighted land. Some excitement as we thought we going to call at Fremantle. We were disappointed however as we awoke next morning still steaming and it was on Jan 22 at 5.30pm land was again sighted. Great excitement again at 6.30am on the 23rd we steamed into the Port Colu.

During the afternoon we had a few hours ashore. We purchased some bananas coconuts & visited the Barracks and other places in the short time we had ashore. We were disappointed next day we were not allowed ashore. On the 24th at 10.30pm we again proceeded on our voyage and nothing of interest to report. We passed through Hells Gate on the morning of February 3rd to the Red Sea. During the day the SS Borda passed us with SA troops on in charge of Col Powell. We signaled to her with flags and found out that much information.

On waking on the morning of February 8th we found our transport anchored in Port Suez and we remained anchored until the morning of the 10th. At 4pm we entrained and journeyed to Zeitoun. The journey from Suez to Zeitoun was not very picturesque. Camps were all along the line. On the canal side there were green patches.

At 11.30pm on the 10th we arrived Zeitoun. My first duty was next morning to send cable home to the effect that all was well. Our first place of visit was to Mary's Well tree and church. Evening Heliopolis 12th visited Cairo. I took advantage of my time in Egypt and visited all I possibly could of the ancient places. Pyramids, Mosques, Citadel etc. On March 7th our late pal Bert Siddell took bad and taken to hospital on March 15 our mate died. On the 16th our friend's remains were buried in the Cairo cemetery. I meet his Bro at the grave and went back to Cairo with him.

Volunteers were called to go away, no-one knew where. 14 were required. I was one of the fourteen and it was on the wee hours of morning March 21st we marched out of Zeitoun Camp to a siding to entrain. Our trains left at 7.50am and at 8.10a we again proceeded and each one was guessing where we were going. However at 1.30pm it was quite clear we were going to embark as we steamed into Alexandra. Transports were plentiful in the Port and at 2.30pm we were on board our transport TG062 or the name SS Oriana. At 6pm ropes were set free and we steamed out. Everyone seemed satisfied we were on our way to France and thus we proceeded with an escort some distance from us. On the 24th we stopped outside of Malta waiting orders but soon proceeded on our journey again. The food was very poor compared to what we received on our previous transport the "SS Afric". Our hunger has perhaps increased.

We were steaming in zig-zag course to dodge submarines and wearing our life belts all day.

Submarines however kept away from us I am thankful to say and so we are in Marseilles 5.30pm on the 26th March quite a pretty entrance. We stayed on board that night and on the following day at 12-15pm we marched off the wharf and entrained 2pm.

Our destination in France was still unknown to us so we journeyed on through beautiful country and important railway centres. French people appeared delighted to see us waving as we pass through the various stations. It was a station called St. Roch that I had my first snow ball fight and our journey went on until 10.15pm on the night of the 29th when we disentrained at Etaples. On arriving there Tommies were practically the only troops there and Australians were somewhat a novelty. On April the 6th our friend Norman Wauchope got the mumps. Which to our sorrow we in the same tent were isolated for a term of 21 days.

On the 12th Scotty got mumps and out time dated from the 12th and on the 24 another member got them and so we stayed on. On 25th we were all calmly sleeping about midnight there was a terrible explosion followed by others. On poking our heads out of the tent Mr Zepp was dropping some of his iron pills however although he was close to the Hospital no damage was done. It was on June 13th that we were released from isolation camp making our stay there of 75 days. During that time there is nothing of interest to relate.

Parades and route marches were our daily routine not forgetting stew for dinner every day. Since we came out of isolation we were anxious to join our unit and we tried very hard to get away. On July 15th we proceeded to ABBEYVILLE and somehow that relieved us as we were tired of ETAPLES.

We arrived at Abbeyville about 9.30pm. This town was rather a nice place and very pretty. We were under the Tommies there and the base staff were of a good kind. There were NZ, South Africans, Australians, Canadians and Tommies. Quite a variety but all worked well together. It was on July 28th anniversary of the date of my enlistment that I proceeded to AMEINS to see my Bro(ther) Sapper GEO Sanderson and needless to mention we enjoyed ourselves for the short time we were together.

We visited the cathedral and purchased some photo of the cathedral and posted to Dad. My pass was only made out to Ameins Station and not for the town and naturally the military police kept wanting to see my pass. They had to be satisfied by seeing my railway warrant.

At about 9pm I arrived back at Abbeyville quite pleased with myself and I knew that the folks at home would be pleased too that I had the good luck to meet Geo. From Abbeyville I posted 5 or 6 booklets of PCs (postcards) home to Dad. My time was quite enjoyable at Abbeyville and one had a good opportunity to learn.

It was on August 2nd 1916 I came back on a cable wagon at dinner time and looked on the board to see who were to go away that day. Anderson, Sanderson, Daniels and Barns are to go to 2nd Div Sig. Co. They will report 1.30pm to orderly room to see equipment is complete. At 5pm we go down to the station and wait there until 10.30pm when our train leaves. I didn't need much rocking that night. We laid down on the seats and awoke next morning still on the move. The distance from Abbeyville is between 30 and 40 kilometers. A good train would make the run in an hour but 24 hours found us at our destination making it now 10.30pm on 3rd. That night we slept out in the open. Somewhere the guns were going their hardest. Flares were going up. Aeroplanes and balloons all gave us the idea there was a war on.

Only too true there was. On the 4th of August we reported to 2nd Div HQ. The OC gave us instructions to go to the 5th Brigade. A motor car was brought around for us. So we four found ourselves going along in style per motor car. And so we traveled until the car could go no further without being observed. Shanks Ponies were to complete the rest of the journey and so we started going through Sausage Gully.

There was a continual Bang Bang Bang and retaliation was Whiz Bang shrapnel. High explosives were bursting all around us. We had no steel hats. We were passing wounded going to the dressing station until we came to the 5th Brigade H.Q. which was a cellar. After reporting we looked for dug outs for sleeping. I eventually found one with a sheet of iron and some sand bags on. Was making myself comfortable when bang and poof a shell just landed and dug a dead Fritz up. The smell was anything than a bunch of violets. We reconciled ourselves to the fact that we were at war now and not reading of it and of course these minor details pass unnoticed now.

We were soon put on duty. I was allotted Telephonist duties. It was on account of four or five of Section being Gassed that we came to reinforce. That night they gave our head Quarters a good shelling including a gas shell. Sleep was out of the question as one had to have gas helmets on and off most of the nights. Our boys attacked that night and captured a ridge which was of great importance to us.

About midnight on the 5th our Brigadier came out. I was not sorry as it was a very hot initiation and not many had a hotter one. Prior to going to the Somme the Aust were up North and it was quiet then and they got gradually broken in to the shell fire. We arrived at Tara Hill in the wee hours of the 6th.

About midday General Birdwood addressed us and we marched off via Albert to Warloy and needless to say was glad to be back a bit.

On the 8th we packed up and marched off to LAVICOGNE. It was a 12 mile march and very hot too. Next day on the march again to PERNORS. This was another hot march. We enjoyed our few days at PERNORS.

On the 16th we again were on the march to LAVICOGNE. Next day 17th on the march again. We arrive at VADENCOURT full kit and rapid march no fun this weather. The 20th arrived and away we go again on the march arriving at ALBERT. Heavy bombardment going on. We leave ALBERT about 8-30p arriving at SAUSAGE GULLY 10pm. We stayed there that night in a big dug out what was once a Fritz.

On the 23rd we proceed further up to our advance Brigade HQ. Pretty lively time reaching there too. During the night he kept up a continual bombardment up. The linesmen were kept busy all night mending wires.

24th still subject to shelling including four hours gas shelling. Very unpleasant having to sit and wear helmets. I fell off to sleep with mine on in the dugout. We had a pretty rough time in shelling. Thanks to one of Fritz's deep dug outs it stopped shrapnel and H.E.

It was on the 27th when the 7th Bde relieved us and at 6.30pm we made a start to go out. The Fritz made a start too by shelling so we stayed for a while until he cooled down a bit. However we arrived at Brick field about 8.30p tired. On duty 12 midnight to 4 am. Very cold in the dug out.

28th went into ALBERT Fritz bombarding all day. HE and shrapnel on roads. Balloons and planes busy.

In the dug outs I was sleeping rats and frogs were also sharing it. At 8.30am moved off again arriving at WARLOY sometime during same day. On the 31st General Birdwood addressed us and presented decorations to some. At 1.15pm on same day we marched off for BEAUVAL a 15 miles march on a hot day with full pack. We arrived at BEAUVAL at 7.45pm needless to say very tired. Spr. Daniels took ill during night and taken to hospital where he died during our stay at Beauval.

On Sept 4th or rather the 5th at 2.30 a.m. we awoke and left BEAUVAL at 3.30am for DOULLEENS

arrived at 5am entrained and left at 6.20am arriving at a siding called Hopoal or some such name. However we hopped out and marched to POPERINGHE very miserable day.

Went down the street. Was having a feed of chip potatoes and eggs when bang. bang. Fritz put a couple of long range shells over. The women folk got down the cellar and shut up their shops. I found myself outside and the civilians running all ways. It caused some amusement amongst us boys as the shells fell a considerable distance from the town. On the 6th I met Harry Norrish, Had a good yarn. POPERINGHE was a nice large town. Enjoyed ourselves there, The flemish folk appear very nice and mostly talk a little English.

On the 9th at 9.30pm left POPERINGHE for EPYRES per train. Arrived at 9.30 am detrained and march to our Bde HQ reaching there at 10.15am. Very comfortable HQ in Ramparts. On duty midnight to 4am.

We stayed at EPYRES until the 6th October. I won't dwell on each days routine but it was a lovely HQ. Best we have had. Our position was in a Salient and of course the enemy had a good view from the hill so to walk about during the day it was not the safest.

I visited the ruins of Ypres. It is a large town but simply ruined now by shell fire. Aeroplanes were very busy on this sector and we often witness air duels. Shelling was intermittent. Weather was of a variable nature. Plenty of rain during our stay there.

On the 6th of October at about midnight we left Ypres entrained 1am arrived some siding or other too dark to see the name. However our legs were once more on the march and we arrive at STEENVOORDE tired and sleepy. This town quiet and of nothing important.

We stayed there until the 12th October when on that day we are on the march again with full pack. Arriving at POPERINGHE 1.30pm only to leave there again on the 15th October for RENINGHELST. Plenty of rats in that vicinity. Wrote letter on the following day. Next day 17th move to the right in forth form fours and right quick march and away we go again back to STEENVOORDE tired of course.

However we awoke next morning packed up and marched off again for a long pad bad weather rainy and cold. We arrive at ARNEKE only a small village. On our march to this hill a Castle looked pretty right on top of a hill on the right of the road we were marching on. Visited the Church there built 307 years ago.

The 20th inst we voted in reference to conscription in Australia.

On the 21st we were on the march again and quite a long one too. We arrive at NORDAUSQUES about 6pm. I had a lovely blister on my feet however it didn't beat me. I stuck to the march until about quarter of a mile from the village then could not bear it so came along at my own time.

Received a letter from Olive then cheered me up somewhat. The village was not of any importance. Posted Xmas cards home and visited field ambulance and had heel bandaged.

On the 24th we were on the move again entrained at Port REMNEY at 3.40 pm via CALAIS and BOULONGE. Too dark to see those places as I would of liked to. At midnight I found we arrived at BALLANCOURT and soon made my bed on the nice cold floor made from concrete. This village was only a small one about 6 kilos from Abbeyville. The weather was very cold and bleak. No fun at all. On the 26th at 6am we had breakfast ready to march a few kilos to continue our trip via PICQUENCY and AMIENS per motor transport arriving at PIREMONT about 10pm same night. A very cold ride it was too. It was needless to guess that we were back to go on to the "Somme" front again.

On the 28th I was busy looking for these beastly "Chats" in my shirt when who should come in my elaborate billet built to keep the French cows in on peace times. Never mind it was a covering and that wasn't too bad as long as the floor was dry.

Yes as I mentioned who should come in but "George" my Bro. and needless to say I was so pleased to see him. So I wasn't on duty we went for a walk together and had a few cups of coffee at a "Cafe" and a good yarn.

The next day I paid him a visit at Hailly where he was billeted. After having a piece of toast and a cup of tea I had to go back as the weather was looking very unsettled. He walked down the road with me for some distance and we said farewell again and so time went on with very cold and wet weather.

November 4th arrived and we form fours and march off again with packs up and it was some march too not to be forgotten too soon. The mud was terrible bogged up to the knees all over the place.

We arrive at MONTAUBAN. What was once a village but not a sign of a building can one see now not even a brick.

On the 6th it was another move closer to Fritz this time and the march in the mud before we reached our HQ was no fun besides dodging shells and shrapnel. Our HQ was in the valley of death.

We relieved the 7th Bde who made an attack, but were not too successful.

On our arrival the stretcher bearers were busy carrying wounded. There were many evacuated with trench feet too. The trenches were terribly full of muck and impossible to have dry feet.

On the 14th our Bde charged and gained their objective. Fairly heavy losses captured prisoners two of our linesmen were wounded and one killed. The shelling was very heavy. Our food was scarce and tea made of dirty shell hole water. Did not give it a good flavor. It was absolutely one of the worst positions I have been in as far as food and sleep and comfort is concerned. On the 15th we went back in reserve and for those ten days it is hard to forget. We had practically no sleep during our time at FLERS or VALLEY of DEATH.

On the 18th we left MONTAUBAN and went back to our same position relieved the 7th Bde. They lost the ground we won and our Bde had to regain it.

About 11.30pm on the 21st we were relieved by the 2nd Bde of English forces and terrible dark night we had to go out bogging all the way. However we found ourselves at Carlton trench wet through laid down in a bit of a shelter and went to sleep very tired and miserable.

Awoke at 6am next morning to proceed a few kilos and entrained and proceeded to the other side of ALBERT and then marched about five miles arriving at RIBEMONT about 1pm had dinner and scraped some mud off our clothes.

We were at Ribemont until the 30th and during our time there the weather was miserable and cold. We wrote letters and received letters however on the 30th we were once again on the move. The roads were fairly good for marching. We arrive at RAINNEVILLE about 5pm. I met Harry Norrish. His Bde the 3rd marched out and we took their places.

On 1st Sunday in advent on Dec 3rd I with others proceeded on bikes to AMIENS. After a fall in the street of Amiens one of the wheels of my bike got caught in the tramline and the consequence the bike refused to go and I had to pick myself up from the ground. I left my bike or at least it was mine while I had it, at YMCA. After looking over the town I got my bike about 4.30p and proceeded on my homeward journey.

I took the PERONNE road to go back and all was going well until when I was going down a hill. The bike didn't need any pushing down the hill in fact it was going too fast for my liking I went to put the break on but it did not act and the next thing I knew I found the bike on top of me. I picked myself up with the loss of some skin and the gainer of some bruises. I was too sore to get on the bike again so lead it back to RAINNEVILLE to the amusement of all the boys. I might say that is the last ride I have had on a bike I am not all that friendly with free wheeled bikes now.

We were at Rainneville until the 17th Dec it was only a small village. The billet we were at the old "Damme" used to come and count the rafters in the shed we occupied in case we burnt any.

On the 17th we were on the march again from 9.30am arriving at DURANCOURT sometime during the afternoon. On the 19th we were on the march again to the once was village of FRICOURT but no sign of any village now. On the 20th left FRICOURT and arrived at MONTAUBAN very cold camp not quite so muddy. On 22nd we left MONTAUBAN at 8am arriving at our HQ at Sun Valley about 1/2 mile from DELVILLEWOOD.

DELVILLEWOOD readers you remember was where the Africans showed the huns what they could do and one could see that it must have been a big struggle to gain this position.

It was a sight I do not care to witness to see the bodies laying as they fell of the enemy and those who died gaining this position.

We relieved the 14th Bde here 24th Xmas eve. I received a nice letter from Miss Pollock. Some of the boys receiving parcels. Our batteries sending Fritz Xmas greetings.

25th Xmas day went to communion service held in a dug out. Bacon and bread for breakfast. Dinner stew flavoured of curry, tea bread and jam. Weather cold and showers intermittent shelling also. Xmas day ended with loving thoughts of home.

And so the days pass away all of which are of the same routine. It was very cold not at all like our dear Aust weather at Xmas time. 31st Dec arrived and on that day I was lucky I received 3 parcels altogether and needless to say we lived like KINGS for a while.

I had to go on duty at midnight so I naturally see the old year out and the new year in. Our batteries opened out and gave the HUN new year greetings of course. He returned some of his in exchange and thus the leap year of 1916 ends to the writer in a dug out somewhere in France and escaped all the fair sex proposals.

- 1917 -

A happy new year to you and such were our greetings to each other. I received a cake in one of my parcels and it was appreciated too. We were not being over fed during this period in the line the roads were so bad and transport was very difficult.

On the 2nd Jany I received another parcel of tobacco cigars from Miss Sharp and it was very welcome too. On the 3rd Enemy was shelling fairly heavily all day. It was on Jany 4th I meet my friend NORMAN LEVICK. We had a good yarn as we both got a surprise to see each other. He came to my dug out to get a drop of water to wash his dixie.

Jany 5th a year since I left Australia. It was a much finer day for observation. The planes were busy too and the days pass until the 8th arrives when Sapper Sims and myself were detailed to go to FRICOURT power buzzer school and so we proceed with full packs up to march arriving about 6 pm very miserable and tired.

I was feeling off color during my time there. I was off color I had no appetite and our sleeping quarters were very cold and sloppy and on the 12th we leave FRICOURT and go back to our unit and what a time we had too walking through the snow looking for our Bde HQ.

We found it at last in reserve. HQ were in a terribly deep dug out supposed to have been the Crown Princes H.Q. It was certainly a very elaborate dug out.

I wasn't feeling all that well. Some shell hole water evidently didn't agree with me. On the 12th I went and seen the Dr of the 12th field ambulance. Snowing very heavily all day. I slept there that night. Next day I was sent down to BECORDEL after going through a lot of red tape and I finally got down to BELGUE FARM near ALBERT and slept in a hut for that night. The Dr visited others and myself in the morning of the 18th. Went to bed again put on light diet. Weather terribly cold. On the 21st I got up for a while on the 22nd left the ward and went to convalescent. I remained in convalescent until the 28th of Jany. Ok and wasn't cold.

I left convalescent camp and marched to DURANCOURT and joined my Bde again and received several letters from home and friends. Next day left DURANCOURT for ALBERT. During the night Fritz dropped a few bombs over the town. On the 31st we left ALBERT for SHELTER WOOD. Why it was called Shelter Wood I don't know. No shelter and no wood. Probably before the war it was as it name suggests.

Feby 1st up at 6am breakfast 6.30am. Quick march 7.30am roads very slippery being frozen. Every two paces forward you would slip back one. We are at Villa Siding (pretty name isn't it?). There we procured two or three trucks of the ANZAC LIGHT RAILWAY loaded them with phones and the other signal gear not forgetting the cooks gear too. Harnessed ourselves to them and pulled and pushed walking in the snow.

We are at last at MARTINPUICH. Relieved the Scotties. I was sent up to a visual Stn very cold and small dug out I had too. On 2nd I received a parcel from Ella pipe tobacco and socks.

On the 3rd I was relieved from the visual and went back to the switch board. Fritz put a good few of his nasty whiz bangs. Sapper Lee stopped a piece of one and was evacuated.

And so time passed until the 5th arrived and the 6th Bde relieved us. We return to Shelter Wood after a lively few minutes. Coming out the ground still frozen arrive at Shelter Wood 7pm. Fritz plane comes over and drops a bomb on one of the huts and killed 8 and wounded 11. On duty midnight to 8am. Terribly cold.

February 9th we again make tracks to the right of Martinpuich this time. We were a little more comfortable here than on the left. Our dug out was much better too and so we remained until the 27th. During our time here like most other places in line the routine was practically the same. Our planes and his planes busy. Our shells busy, his shells busy. Sometime our boys would hop over and score a win. It was on the 24th of Feby when first we caught the information that he was withdrawing. Everything being in his favor. Foggy weather, visibility very bad.

On returning to Shelter Wood we heard that Kut had fallen and 1700 prisoners. Quite pleased with that

It was on March 6th we again move off to DEATH VALLEY. It certainly wasn't a very comfortable valley at times. Our HQ were OK though best we have had yet in the line some of our make what I mean by our make is British make. We stayed here until the 12th intermittent shelling was going on. Planes were busy. Hardly a day passed without a air duel. A cheer would go up from the boys if a Fritz plane was brought down.

At 3.30pm we left pulling a truck with gear on to go to our new position. After a lot of messing about we arrive at LE-SARS in the morning at 2.30 am very tired and sleepy. During the day the enemy shelled this position very heavily. We relieved the 7th Bde at Le Sars. Fritz was on the move again on the 14th. Our boys kept in touch with him.

On the 18th we moved our H.Q. to a place on Bapaume Road. No sign of Fritz. Our outposts were about 5 miles other side of Bapaume. Heard the enemy was on the move back on a 60 Kilo frontage. Traffic on Bapaume Road was simply marvellous. Heard on the 20th that the 26th Batallion got cut up a bit. Fritz attacked in a armoured train.

We left HQ at Bapaume Road on the 20th a place further along the road about one mile. On the 21st we move again for Bapaume this time arriving about 7.30pm. Town still burning. Heard Prince of Prussia Aeroplane brought down and the Prince captured by the 7th Bde.

Very cold and snowy still. We were lucky in not having established a Sig Stn in the Town Hall as on the 25th about 11.30pm I feel a rumble then a explosion and the town hall was gone. Fritz evidently had a mine under it. Some of our chaps were killed others buried. I was sleeping in a cellar but after that we had to leave these cellars in case they were mined too.

On the 27th we left Baupaume and went back to BAZENTIN. It was a good long march and I wasn't sorry when we reached our destination. Next day we were on the move again arriving at Crucifix Camp at Fricourt. Well there is nothing of importance to relate whilst at this camp.

On April 8th Easter Sunday I went to early communion and was inoculated in morning went to POZIERS for a walk to view the place of my initiation of gun fire on the 4th of Aug 1916. Things were different then on the night of my arrival our Bde captured the Ridge that was of great importance.

On returning back to Crucifix Camp I went to bed my arm was very sore owing to the inoculation. Next day was very cold. Arm a little better didn't have much sleep. During our time at this place it practically snowed all the time.

On the 12th we leave FRICOURT via Poziers and Bapaume. We arrive at VAUX. Needed no rocking that night. Next day at 3.30pm we are on the move again arriving at NORIEUL. Took over from the 13th Bde of the 4th Division.

It was on the early morning of the 15th Fritz made an attack and broke through at a place one of the other Bdes was holding. However he was turned back with heavy losses to himself. But it was a close shave. I expected to be a prisoner of war that morning. I was on duty at the phones and everyone else was ready to make a go for it.

The crater in Lagnicourt (beyond Vaulx-Vraucourt and near the Hindenberg line), the scene some months earlier of heavy hand to hand fighting. Lagnicourt was captured by the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade on 26 March 1917. On 15 April, the 2nd Division was struck by a powerful German counterattack, but they were immediately driven out by the 5th Brigade, who continued to hold it until their withdrawal from the Sector.

We stayed in NORIEUL until 28th and then we moved back to FLAVUEIL for the purpose of practicing an attack. On the 30th however we find ourselves back at NOREIUL and that place is no fun. We had a fairly rough time at this place. Fritz never spared his shells it must of gave him delight to shell it as he did.

Each days routine was practically the same until May 3rd when we attacked Bullecourt as you folk have undoubtedly read about. Our boys done good work here. Fritz put in fourteen counter attacks and was repulsed each time.

May 4th the writers birthday about 10pm that night the 3rd Brigade relieved us. Fritz put a lot of gas shells over. It was on the wee hours of the morning of the 5th that we lie down for sleep at BIEFVILLIERS and there we stay in reserve until 8th.

We go to BAPAUME and entrain for ALBERT arriving there we are marched to FRICOURT and there we stay until the 17th. We are on the move again to SENLIS but our stay at Senlis is only short and sweet as next day we are on the march again to RUBEMPRE.

Here we stay until June 14th spending a quiet rest. The town is only a small one but plenty of trees and green grass and away from the guns. We quite enjoyed ourselves.

On the 14th June we march to PUCHEVILLERS for BAPAUME arriving at 6pm and then march to BIEFVILLERS where we remain in reserve for some considerable time.

I have not described each day's routine as practically they are all alike, but you all will have some idea of my doings and whereabouts as I have mentioned the date of arriving and departure at each place.

In concluding this little diary I will dwell a little further on I not we.

It was on July 21st I left BIEFVILLERS caught a train at BAUPAUME from there I find myself at BOULONGE at 7am. Next morning at 11am I am on my way to BLIGHTY arriving at FOLKESTONE at 1-30pm leaving FOLKESTONE about 2.30pm for LONDON arriving at LONDON about 5.30pm. After getting fixed up at HQ I had tea at the War Chest and feeling very tired went to bed. One day of leave gone.

23 London sight seeing

24th London sight seeing

25th London sight seeing

26th London " "

at 11.30pm caught train and proceeded to GLASGOW arriving next morning about 10am.

27 sight seeing GLASGOW

28 " " "

29 " " "

30 visited Loch Lomond

31 9.15am left Glasgow for London arriving at Euston Station 7.45pm had tea "raining" went to bed tired.

August 1st left Victoria St Stn at 7.20am arrived Folkestone 9.15am. Raining and miserable all day. Left Folkestone at 6.30pm rough trip across the channel arriving 9pm. Left Boulonge about midnight arriving St Omer 12.30pm.

3rd Left St Omer about 11am per motor transport to LUMBRES still raining after a stiff march found my unit about 3pm in a small out of the way place.

Well readers I will not mention anymore now. I have related two years travels and my book is nearly full. And the 10 days dream is over and I have settled down to my daily routine duties once again. I hope dear readers there will not be two years to continue in my next. At the present it looks safe for another winter here worse luck. Never mind. The last was the worse they had for 26 years so we survived that OK with a lot of growling at times. Please excuse the writing and I hope you will be able to read this little epistle and find a little bit of interest in it.

A few hints

A Brigade is 4 Battalions.

Each Battalion - approximately 1000 men

3 Bdes = 1 Division

A Div = 18,700 odd men of all ranks including AMC ASC Sigs etc. etc.

A Sig Co = about 250 men

Each Bde is supplied with about 30 to 40 men and the remainder are at Div H.Q.

The Sig Co are made up of the following duty men

Linesmen

Operators

Telephonists

Sig Clerks

Dispatch Riders

Wireless Operators

Mechanics

Drivers

Power Buzzer Operators

Visual Signalling by lamps flags discs flappers hands etc etc

All men are classed a Sappers other than Officers and NCO's.

I have just mentioned these few things in case it may assist you to understand more precisely.

Wishing you all the best of luck

Yrs somewhere in France

Sapper VSL Sanderson

No 2 Section

2nd Australian Sig Co

AIF France