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An account of the battle of Pozieres, July – Aug. 1916

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Posieres. 'Cadmus'

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In writing this narrative I have been forced to deal with the story as it appealed to the average soldier. Tactics and statistics which do not come within his ken have therefore been ignored whilst minor happenings unimportant from the Historian's point of view have been included. The Official Reporters with the A.I.F. and the English papers have spoken of the broader outlook of the Somme offensive. They have described and re-described broadly the various battles that occurred from July 1916 to May 1917 but, as all their descriptions have been necessarily general, I have determined to make this as near personal as is consistent with desire not to appear egotistical.

The general knowledge I have of the campaign of 1916 has been gained from the papers and from reading "The Battle of the Somme" by Thomas. This source of knowledge is open to all but the individual happenings in any one of these attacks, the thoughts and sensations of the man participating in the attack itself can only be gained first hand, and it is to give these that I have set myself the task of telling the story of Pozieres

## (The Immediate Sphere of Action)

The actual area under observation by a soldier during a charge is very circumscribed. It is bounded on each side by a few yards; more especially is this so when the attack takes place at night, as this one did. The participator in the charge, then, has first hand knowledge only of very little that occurred in the attack, for the rest he hears stories from his comrades. These he pieces together till the story of the whole lies within his clasp. This is so in my case.- My knowledge is mostly bounded by what my Company was doing and it is mostly from this standpoint that I will be speaking.

In my mind when I think over the events of July and August 1916 I always involuntarily break it up into periods. These are as follows:- (a) Preparation.- The time from the reorganisation of the battalions in France till we marched to Warloy, but more especially the times we occupied the line at Laventy and Fleur Baix. (b) The march from Warloy to supports and the actual preparations for the attack. (c) The second term in the line in August.

When the Australians arrived at Tel-el-Kebir the old divisions were broken up and new ones formed. New reinforcements went to make up the strength of the depleted old Divisions and the newly formed units. This meant that the majority of the men in all battalions had never seen action and so were really an unknown quantity from the fighting soldier's point of view. But they had the traditions of the Peninsula behind them, they had the same material as the Anzacs on which to build and it therefore depended on training what the future should bring forth. Training was hard but we had inculcated within us a feeling of esprit du corps. We learned to take pride in the names of our battalion, to vow within our hearts that the new

name in France would be such that it would rival the old Gallipoli. Then we came to France still untried soldiers but filled with a sure knowledge that we would make good. We were sent to trenches at Laventy and then Fleur-Baix. These were quiet spots and we were gradually broken into life under fire, but still we were untried men. We were inured to a slight amount of danger but actual attack had not seen and we were still an unknown quantity.

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It was while we were holding the trenches at Fleur-Baix that we first received rumous of the offensive to be carried out on the Somme. There was no reason to doubt that we would have to take pur part in the affair and we were not loth. We were awaiting the test, knowing full well that the result would add laurels to our name.

This absolute sureness that we would make good is I think one of the strongest characteristics of the Australian soldier. I have never observed any great stress laid upon this particular trait of the Australians' mind and yet to it I attribute at least 50% of his success. I have taken part in a few of the actions in France and in all of them this same sure knowledge of success has been the most conspicuous point I have noticed.

In looking forward to going over the top I have never heard doubts expressed as to whether we would capture the position. All knew that success would be ours; all knew that some must go under but none doubted that on the morrow we would be occupying that part of the enemy's line which was our objective. This absolute belief in our own success has played a big part in the making of those successes which invariably came our way.

Another characteristic of our boys had its growth perhaps in this sureness of success but was not altogether synonymous with it. When we went over the top into "No Man's Land" every man knew that his comrades were with him. The average Australian did not allow for such things as stragglers. Every man was sure of himself and being sure of himself was sure of the man next to him and so on throughout the platoon, the Company, and the Battalion. If a man was missing when the objective was attained we knew he was either a casualty, had lost his way, or was with another Company further along the line. This too made for success in attack.

(Fleur-Baix)

When we were relieved from Fleur-Baix we went back into billets awaiting orders to move. Rumours there were in plenty but knowledge none. Some days we were going to attack Armentieres, other Ypres' and then we received orders to go south to the Somme. The journey from Bailleul to Candas is unimportant but the route marching from Candas to Warloy added that finish to the splendid condition which was ours on the night of the attack. The spirit of the fatigue party too at Candas showed the spirit of the battalion. Trains were unloaded in record time and in between times singsongs were held by the boys. All were as happy as though going home instead of moving up to take part in the biggest attack that had ever taken place in History up to that time.

At Warloy we at last were given real news of what was to happen. We were to take the village of Pozieres, a place of sinister name and tragic happenings. Here at Warloy we first saw the wounded coming from the battle front. This made us think. "They hurt one another up that way" said some. or " Well, I hope I'll be in one of those cars with a nice Blighty in a few days" said others, but all knew that we were soon to be tried by the test of blood and fire and all knew what the result would be.

On the morning of the 19th July we were issued with pink squares. These were to be sewn on the backs of tunics and marked one more step on the road to Pozieres. We all managed to sew them on, mine was nearer a triangular than a rectangular shape when the task was completed. After the colour patches had been fixed we were given orders to stand by ready to move at five minutes notice. Tea came on and just as we had issued it out it was time to move. We stowed as much away as possible and in a few minutes were on the road to Pozieres.

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That march to Pozieres still lives in my memory. We had not gone far ere the church tower of Albert became visible. The falling Madonna with child clasped in her arms fixed itself in our imagination and today the word Albert still conjures up a picture of the Church with the falling statue suspended in mid-air overlooking the battle front. We passed through many batteries and marvelled at the amount of artillery behind us. We soon saw shells bursting far ahead. We had had enough experience to differentiate between H.E. and Shrap and took a delight in watching the feather-like burst of the shrapnel in the air.

About six o'clock we stopped on the hill overlooking Albert. Here we had tea and then my old platoon, 13-platoon, gathered round for one last singsong before going into the line. All the old favourites were sung, "Mary", "Thora".  
"I Want To Go Home " and "The Devil's Ball".

Soon the word came to move and once more we were on the track. Down the road, through Albert, under the Madonna and out on to the Camrai Road we marched, singing as we swung along, little recking of what lay before and wishful of impressing the Tommies with our martial ardour. Out of Albert we rested again. There were many troops hereabouts and they gave us some inkling of what to expect. Then a shell over and landed rather close. Again we went on but moving off the road towards "Gordon's Dump" we broke into single file. It was here, while halted to allow various parties to attain the requisite distance between each other, that a Tommy was heard to remark "Well, if you Anzacs can take and hold Pozieres we'll believe all we have heard about you". –"We'll both take and hold it" said one, but the others told him to let the "skite" alone. "Wait till we come out" said they. In another place we saw a few men together a roll being called and all the signs of a first roll after an attack. "That's all that's left of such and such a Brigade" said our officer.- "That sound healthy" was the only response he got. Now it was dark and we found it difficult crossing old trenches and going across country. But soon we reached "Gordon's Dump". The communication sap was not far from here.

Things were warming up now. Shells were flying fairly thickly and it looked odds on that we would have casualties before long. We arrived at the communications sap but did not enter it, we moved along the top in a parallel direction. Here an alarm of gas arose. Some put on helmets but the majority decided to "bide a wee". The alarm was false and once more we moved on. We decided to pass along the trench, and it was just as well, for the enemy put down a fairly heavy barrage. We had reached the corner where we were to turn to the left from C.Sap before we had our first casualty. We had just climbed out of the trench when "bang" a shell landed nearby; one man directly behind me was wounded, later he died. A few yards and we turned to the left. We spread out and were told this was our position and were ordered to dig in as fast as possible. We did. A half hour and we were down far enough for protection but we went further and soon averaged six feet. This was just completed when down came the enemy barrage. Shells of all calibres landed near by. Shrapnel burst overhead but the range was not just correct and so our casualties were few. We had about four during the night.

Next day there was a good deal of movement in and around the trench and the enemy observed it and from then till the 22nd we had to put up with shells all fired with more or less precision. Sixteen Platoon was nearly "non est" before the night of attack. Some were evacuated with gas poisoning, some with injuries from being buried by shells. Some were killed and altogether we began a sort of nightmare existence which lasted for the next week..

The life in this support trench was not all that could be desired. Fatigues were heavy, we had to go back to Gordon's Dump for water and rations, we had to carry water and ammunition, sandbags and other materials to the front line. At night the shelling was usually heavy

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and when we returned from fatigues it was often impossible to get even a few minutes sleep..

But we had one occupation of which we never tired. We would sit on the parapets of the trench and watch our shells burst over Pozieres. Shells of all calibres were used. Shrapnel beautifully timed, huge H.E. shells and one shell in especial, a shell that burst with a sheet of flame towards the ground made the life in the German lines a perfect hell. Little did we think that in a few days we would be occupying that position under a similar bombardment from the enemy. (Hun)

We had been told that the attack was to take place on Friday, the 20th July, but we were afterwards informed that it had been postponed. In the meantime we were issued with sandbags which were sown under the shoulder-straps of the tunic, bombs which were fused, an extra hundred rounds of ammunition and 48 hours iron rations. Our packs were stacked in a dug-out in this trench which we had come to call Casualty Corner and we were all ready for the last phase. We were beginning to wish that the hour for attack would come. Waiting plays on a man's nerves. Too much time to think is bad for a hot-blooded action.

On Saturday night we went out on fatigue. This night's work appealed to us at the time as the height of impudence. We crossed the front line and constructed a communication sap two-thirds of the distance to the enemy line. The shelling was heavy though not intense but the shells landed either in front or behind us. No man's land was the safest spot as far as shell-fire was concerned. We completed our task and arrived back at supports about 1am. We were advised to get as much sleep as possible for it was problematic whether we would be able to get any more for the next three or four days. We slept well under the circumstances but were early awake.

### Sunday 22nd

Sunday the 22nd July was a beautiful summer's day. The sun shone and if it had been under different conditions one would have been filled with the "Joie de Vie" but as it was one's mind was fixed on the immediate future. What did the morrow hold for us? – would protrude itself on our mind. Would we be alive and able to enjoy the sun on the morrow?- Would we be in hospital minus limbs, or suffering from wounds? These thoughts would persist but they were not subjects of conversations. Each man knew that his comrade had such thoughts but each man knew that he was expected to talk and behave as though such a thought had never come within the sphere of his consciousness. I suppose we all think deeply of what may be, when we are to make an attack, but on the other hand we all feel bound to cover such thoughts with a cloak, and the average conversation carried on is merely a matter of jests. Stories are told and then as the whistle blows one might casually remark-"Well so long old chap" and away we go.

Early on Sunday morning rolls were made with all the information required, next of kin, etc.- This again brought home new thoughts of the possibilities of the morrow, but though each new act, that showed more clearly the character of the work that lay ahead, was given its true significance by the boys, and though every hour brought more certainly before us the uncertainty of the future, yet this new realisation of the instability of existence once over the top did not lessen our desire to make good or shake our knowledge of the fact that absolute success would be ours. All it conveyed was this:- on the morrow when the success had been attained, some of us would not be there. It did not affect our will to do or die. It did not detract one iota from the dash of the charge. It simply gave us knowledge and new thoughts,- that was all.

Sunday was spent in fatigue work. Parties were passing up and down all day from Gordon's Dump to the front line. Water parties,

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ammunition parties and fatigues, ration fatigues, trench mortar carriers streamed across the flat and up the road that led to Pozieres or along Sausage Gully.

Sausage Gully has fixed itself on the Australian imagination here and at home. When one mentions Pozieres one at once recalls the sinister name of Sausage Gully. A picture is conjured up in the mind of a long depression winding its sinuous course towards the front line. On the left is a high land and at the base of this high land is a trench not deep but just enough for shelter. On either side one pictures shells bursting or later he sees Sausage Gully as it was three days after the attack, but he will see that later

Across the flat that separated supports from the slight rise behind the front line was what we had learned to call the "Chalk Pits". Here there were always parties resting before once more starting either way with their loads. These chalkpits were usually under fire and I saw a fair number of casualties there.

Fatigue parties on the Sunday were not altogether picnics. The enemy shelled the approaches all the time but we had very few casualties. About 3pm we were all back in our trenches and making final arrangements. Sandbags were firmly fixed, all gear that could be dispensed with was put into packs. Ammunition was evenly distributed in the Equipment; rifles were cleaned and assurance was made that they were in perfect working order. Machine guns were prepared in readiness for the "stunt" and then we had tea, after which we sat down to wait to move to the "Hop Over Trench". In the meantime we had a few songs, told a few jokes and lived very much the ordinary life as we would have done were it just a "promenade" we were about to take.

About 9.30 pm we received orders to prepare to move. At 10 pm we moved off. In front of the trench was a dump and as each man passed the dump he was given something to carry. Some had a stack of sandbags, others packs with stores, some wire and others water. All had something to take up to the front line which lay perhaps half a mile ahead. We did not pass along Sausage Gully but kept to the left of the rise along the road that ran to Pozieres village. The shell-fire during this trip was heavy but by a great run of luck we arrived at the front line without a casualty. Here, just as we turned the corner and gained comparative safety, a stretcher bearer was wounded in the leg. This was the first casualty in the actual stunt. We passed along the trench and lined the parapet. Bayonets were

fixed and we awaited the hour to come. It was here that we heard the attack had been put back an hour and instead of opening at 11.28 it opened at 12.28. This meant an extra hour's suspense.

It would be impossible to give one's thoughts during that hour. They ranged over everything. It would also be wrong in my case at least to say I did not feel nervous, but it was not a nervousness that caused a hesitation when the hour to move comes along but rather just nervousness that comes to anyone who has the gift of imagination.

At 23 minutes past twelve the word was passed along-"5 minutes to go" – three minutes later "2 minutes to go". Prepare to move and then as our barrage crashed down on the enemy trenches the order came to "Move". Not a seconds hesitation,- a few seconds and we were all out in "No Man's Land. About fifteen yards we walked and then lay down. Here we adjusted ourselves, put ourselves at correct intervals, and became accustomed to being without the protection of the trench.

Each company had its own objective to take but we soon became thoroughly mixed and the first objective was taken by all hands.

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It was well nigh impossible in the dark to keep in exact formation but what we did and how we did it will appear in the next paragraph. My company, Don Coy, had to take the second objective. We were not to take part in the fighting in the first line, but to go straight on. Some of us did this, some eagerly got to work in the first line but we nearly all succeeded in reaching the second line.

To come back to the story. Once over the top we were committed to the great adventure. Our barrage was intense and we kept well up against it. Soon the enemy put down a barrage on No Man's Land. Shells crashed down and screamed, dirt was thrown in all directions. The air was lit up by the myriad flashes of the bursting shells and the driving charges from the guns. Flares too from the enemy lines added their quota of light in turning the night into day. Every now and then there would be a second when the immediate neighbourhood was lit by none of these and then the gloom that surrounded us would be more intense than usual.

In the lightening flashes one caught glimpses of phantom figures some with rifles at the slope, some with them at high port, heads held high in the air striding through the hell that surrounded them. So must the hero who freed the Valkyrie have strode through the ring of living flame that surrounded her.

Even in this wild storm of shell fire it was possible at times to differentiate between shells. One shell there was that seemed to rend asunder and pour its load of iron on the earth below. One could at times catch the swish of the "whizzbang" as it passed a foot or so overhead, one could easily pick the H.E. Shrap. of the enemy and the burst off the larger H.E. shells.

The noise overhead apart from the bursting of the innumerable shells recalled the swish of the wings of countless thousands of birds flying above. So closely did the shells seem to move, so great was the weight of metal passing in either direction, that one involuntarily wondered why one barrage did not crash into the other.

What were a man's thoughts as he walked through this hell let loose on earth. His mind was free from fear. He simply went on, not troubling about the risks, being bent on getting through and to grips with the enemy. There were times when a shell landing perhaps a few feet away brought him up suddenly with a jerk but after that he went on again. I passed an Australian and a German each transfixed by the other's bayonet. I saw a few prisoners coming back and then I was across the first objective and well on my way to the second.

Our officers who had been wonderful while they had lasted were nearly all casualties. Some of us were mixed with other Companies and each soldier was practically working on his own. There was little fighting, the barrage had been too severe. At last we reached our objective - we passed over it. The trench had been completely obliterated by the hail of shell fire. We wandered through and around the wood and then an officer came along who told us where to make our trench. We dug in and soon had ourselves in comparative safety. Just a few yards ahead on the edge of the wood was a battery of 5.9's and lying out between us and the guns was one of the gunners.

The memory of the stunt is a blur. It unconsciously calls up a picture of a terrific thunder storm on a pitch black night. One can recall the flashes lighting the sky and just a few events that happened.

Here one heard a chap calling for assistance and knowing it was contrary to orders one saw a boy walk over and bind up the wounded man. In another place the Germans had been caught in the dugout and a Mill's had accounted for them. Here several had been bayoneted

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whilst lying round were witnesses of the intensity of our barrage.

In one place I saw a German, rifle to shoulder, finger crooked round the trigger, standing in the trench, but without the slightest movement. On walking up to him I ascertained he was dead and killed by concussion and left standing as he was when the shell burst. There was no wound, apparently the shell has landed close by. His heart has given one last jump and then forever stood still.

By daylight things had quietened down. We had securely consolidated our positions and were able to count the cost. We were surprised at the few casualties we had sustained. To us, moving through and under the barrage, it seemed impossible for many to escape, yet when we counted those who were left, the percentage that had actually gone under in the passage of No Man's Land was almost negligible. We in the fullness of our conceit and the depth of our ignorance congratulated ourselves on the wonderful success we had and were not slow in saying that the magnitude of the victory was out of all proportion to the number of casualties. We were young and had much to learn. The next 60 hours taught quite a lot about attacks and the aftermath thereof.

All day Monday, 23rd July. we felt elated at our success. Parties wandered through the villages collecting prisoners and souvenirs. The enemy sent over an occasional shell but not sufficient even to foreshadow the holocaust that tomorrow was to bring. Our guns too were quiet – all were rearranging and awaiting the inevitable counter bombardment from the Germans. Monday was spent almost as a holiday. We lay on the parapets of the trench basking in the sun. Here half a dozen would be sitting down having a meal. The iron rations were in great demand. All day there was much movement in and around the trench. To us it signified nothing but the enemy were making full use of the powers of observation and we were to pay the full price of our recklessness on the morrow and the days that followed.

During the Monday night we "stood to" and once or twice an attack seemed imminent but each time it was broken up before it eventuated and so Tuesday morning dawned. Tuesday was an ideal July summer day. The blue sky above and the sun's warm rays called for a day of pleasure and we do recall that day, not because of the pleasure we had but because of the hours of untold agony we endured.

The Australians had made their name for their powers of endurance under adverse natural and physical conditions. They had "held on" the Peninsula under circumstances perhaps unequalled in the annals of this war. They endured lack of food, water, rest, and the thousand and one things that made Gallipoli the grave of so many good men; but on the 24th July they were called upon to suffer hardship of another kind. That they would endure it no Australian doubted and how they endured the story of Pozieres has told.

Towards morning of the Tuesday I must have dozed a bit for my first recollection of the opening day was a couple of shells landing just over the trench. This was the beginning. The shelling never stopped. Hour after hour shells fired from the enemy batteries fell within yards of the trench or on the trench itself. I had been in bombardments but always hold the opinion that the Tuesday's bombardment was the worst I was ever called upon to suffer.

Why? Because of the precision of the shell fire. Few shells indeed went astray. Only on about two occasions was there what one would call a barrage put down on us, but for 60 hours from Tuesday morning till the time we were relieved, the shell fire was sustained unbroken. Shells of small calibre were not much in evidence. By four the greater part of the shell fire was 5.9 or larger shells and these fell with unbroken regularity throughout the following hours within a few yards of their target. We were the target.

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It was whilst getting in the trench that I saw what I always considered the "gamest" fellow in the war. It was not for an action that I remember this man but simply for stoical endurance of pain. A shell landed right amongst four men. They were shattered and bruised. We dug them out and one man came out alive. His leg was broken, his hands and arm shattered and his head was burnt, besides the shock and bruises on his body. It was impossible to take him from the trench. The way back was impassable. The communication sap had ceased to exist and to go overland was out of the question. We did what we could for him, little it was too. We laid him in the bottom of the trench and obtained a stretcher. We bandaged him as well as possible and then he had to wait the opportunity

to be carried away. For nearly three hours then he had to lie on the stretcher unprotected from flying pieces of earth and splinters.

What that means will be apparent from the following story:- I had lost my pipe about an hour previously and on orders being given to deepen the trench I found my pipe buried 18 inches in the bottom of the trench. This boy of whom I am speaking had to lie and allow all this debris to fall on his poor broken body and he was quite conscious all the time. At times it was impossible for him to stifle a groan, but when he did groan he at once turned to us boys and apologised for his weakness in being unable to stand the pain without a sound.

I have never forgotten, neither have others who saw this wonderful exhibition of self control and for long his name was the household word with us for what the Americans call "Guts"

The story of Tuesday in Pozieres is just a repetition of such stories. Men were broken and buried alive. Their comrades dug them out knowing that before the day was out some one would probably be doing the same for them. But there was never any thought of evacuating the trench. We just held on, most of us resigned to the knowledge that we would not come out of it unscathed. Our number we reduced to about thirty to the company. For yards one could walk along the trench and see nothing but equipments cast aside by wounded, or he would see dead men. At last about 7pm we were told we were to be relieved. We were to go back to supports which were just as bad as where we were but we felt brighter at the thought of a change.

"A" Company took on from us and we went back to supports. But the shell fire here was just as intense as the trench we had left. Yet so tired were we that we managed to snatch a few minutes sleep. The story of that night too is just a story of one long duration of shell fire.

On Wednesday morning we had to move to close supports. "A" company had gone further ahead and we had to act as supports. The shell fire had not slackened and added to the H.E. that the enemy were using were a great many 6 inch Black Shrapnel. The trench was just a long row of shell holes. All semblance to a trench had long since departed from it and we were ordered to repair the various parts that were destroyed. All day under a hail of H.E. and shrapnel we worked trying to keep the communication sap open and to give the support trench some resemblance to a trench. But it was heart rendering work for as soon as one part was repaired another shell would arrive and undo all that we had done. Such a story as this would be very poor if one did not mention the work of the cooks. Even under the heaviest bombardment and the worst days our rations somehow came through, and not only that but we had hot tea and hot stews in the front line. We were told the transport had volunteered to bring it up to us and we appreciated their bravery in facing Sausage Gully on that day.

I had one experience only of ration carrying and ammunition carrying at this time. We had to move a big lot of material from

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supports to the front line. This meant three trips each across what was now practically open country. We got it across alright and strange to say I think we had not one casualty .

In this time when we were working in the trenches I always picture the unbroken line of wounded passing towards the rear. All those who could possibly walk did so for they said "there are others worse than we". But there were only too many stretcher cases. It was a sight worth the seeing to watch the uninjured men in the trench clamber up on the parapet or parados of the trench to allow the wounded to pass. The unwounded thought it just the proper thing to do to expose themselves, that those already wounded should have a clear passage to the dressing station.

About 10 o'clock on Wednesday night we heard we were to be relieved and we were more than glad. We had held on under conditions we could not even have imagined prior to the battle, and yet as we thought of what we had had to live through, we pitied the poor boys who had to take over. About 12 o'clock the head of the 2nd Brigade appeared and we prepared to move out. Once on the way we lost no time. We collected our gear and passed down Sausage Gully. About the sap in the Gully were strewn dozens who had gone west trying to go up or down but we got out with a minium to casualties. We passed by Casualty Corner where we had first had casualties and soon were back at Gordon's Dump where stew and tea were prepared.

We stayed some time at the dump. Whilst there a batter of 60 pounders fired almost alongside us and it brought home to each of us how much our nerves had been strained in the last four days. Every man there jumped and for a fraction of a second looked as though he would seek cover, and many a "dixie" of tea or stew was spilt by the involuntary flinching of our over-strained nerves.

When we had had tea we fell in and marched back towards Albert. Each step as well as being a physical effort was a mental strain too. At last we arrived at the place where we were to bivouac about a mile on Pozieres side of Albert. We threw our overcoats down and ourselves on them and within a few minutes were dead to everything.

Sleep had been practically a stranger to us for a week and we needed no rocking to make us oblivious to everything just then. Men lay about in all attitudes. The dew was thick but that did not matter. We had drawn on our stock of endurance to the last ounce and now just let ourselves go, literally falling asleep.

Daylight came too soon and by 10 'clock we were all up having breakfast and preparing for what the day held. After breakfast we were ordered to fall in and now came perhaps the saddest part of the whole time.

We fell into platoons and then came roll call. Some platoons had practically ceased to exist. The companies looked like decimated platoons and the Battalion like one company. Of the thousand and more men who a week before had marched along the road beside which we were camped there remained now but two to three hundred. Of the seven or eight hundred missing, some were killed, a few were missing and the rest were wounded.

The Officers and the N.C.O's who were left to each Company called the roll and as each man's name was called, if he were still with us, he answered, but if not the question was " does anyone know anything about him". Then those who could give authentic information said " yes-he was killed at such a place"- or-"I was with him when he was wounded". But if no one could tell anything then he was placed in the saddest list of all," among the missing". At last all available information was taken. We now formed up in close order to hear the Colonel's speech.

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writing this account I have purposely avoided mentioning individual men whom I saw do great work, but it would be impossible to speak of Pozieres without eulogizing Colonel Heane. He was "the Man" of the attack and to all the old soldiers of the Bn stands as the "beau ideal" of a C.O. and soldier. He was everywhere where danger was thickest while in the line, and none of us afterwards could recollect having seen him use communication saps. It was always across country with him. He came to see us in the front line when it seemed we were all to be annihilated, and I know how his appearance there sharing the dangers with us put new heart into the boys holding the position. And so on one could talk for some time on this subject, but as I say, I have avoided doing so from the point of view that it is not for me to do so. But this I will say-"any man who was in Pozieres with Colonel Heane holds just the same opinion as I do." That he was the best soldier we have been with in a pitched battle.

To come back to our Colonels speech, the text of which was this: Officers and men of the 1st Bn., as you all know I am a hard man and hard to please, but as I look round (he looked round and the tears glistened in his eyes as he saw all that was left of his splendid battalion), I feel proud to think I have held command of such men as you. Men,-he said- this Battalion had a wonderful name at Gallipoli but today you have done work equal to if not better than anything that was ever done on the Peninsula. He mentioned those who had gone and then with a last long look round he thanked us for what had been done and dismissed the parade.

A few minutes after we were making our way back to Casualty Corner to collect our packs. This was all we did that morning. The old support line which we had held was "non est" yet the little dugout in which we stored the packs had survived the general ruin. Every now and then a shell would come singing overhead but we had no casualties.

We looked up towards the line where we had had such a terrible time and could picture the men holding onto our place. The line of trenches there was still clearly marked by the line of bursting shells. The sky was a haze of smoke just as thick as that which comes from a fiercely burning bush fire. We could see the masses of debris being flung high in the air by the burst of the big H.E. shells and could picture only too vividly the hell that reigned supreme in that haze of smoke. But soldiers learn to live in the present. Life is too often but a matter of seconds and so the soldier tries to put from his mind those things that he would rather not remember, and we tried to do so.

When we arrived back at bivouacs though, we began to have brought home to us the loss of those who had gone. Men with whom we had lived for months, men who had been the life of all the best times, good comrades, all were gone and we began to talk of how they went. But time covers all wounds. Soon they too passed into oblivion and we spoke of the present and the future leaving the dead past to bury its dead.

In the afternoon of 26th July we marched back about three kilos to the hills just outside Albert. Here we had dugouts and rested till next morning. As night came down we stood on the hill and watched the shells falling in the place we had held and we thanked whatever fate had guarded us that we were through it unscathed and with honour.

It was here we had a few conversations with the English soldiers and though it does not effect the doings of the Bn. I feel constrained to tell what was said. They were speaking of the Artillery and could not find words to express their admiration. "Chum", said they, "you boys are wonderful. They are as quick as our men and as game as the best of us. When you boys advanced they limbered up their guns and prepared to follow. "You cannot go up there" said an English officer,- "Can't we" was the reply " Our boys are there in that hell somewhere and what they can do we can do because the guns must be behind the

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infantry" and away they galloped. "Chum" said the soldiers, "it was grand, and we gave them a cheer as they galloped up towards the chalk pits". It was all we could do. That was an unsought description by British Artillerymen and I can vouch for its truth for I was one of those to whom the man was speaking.

We rested on night on the hill in a storm of rain and wind and in the morning marched to Warloy Wood where General Birdwood visited us and thanked and congratulated us on our work. At Warloy Wood we received a few reinforcements and after a couple of days rest we marched by stages to Holloy where we stayed for a few days. At Halley too we received more reinforcements and learnt we were again to go to Pozieres, information which the reader may be well assured did not appeal to us with just the same amount of pleasure as a notification that we were going to Blighty on leave would have done.

I do not wish to expatiate on the rout marching and preparations that ensued between the time of being relieved from Pozieres on the 25th July till we went back about three weeks later. It is enough for me to say that we were reorganised and though far below full strength had enough men to make it possible to do all that was asked of us.

It was on August 15th 1916 that we again looked over the Pozieres front. But the Battalion in this period did not take part in any attack. My company went into supports on the left of the old supports position so well remembered. Centre way communication sap ran into the old position we knew as Casualty Corner and we were well round to the left near the 18

pounder batteries. This position was comparatively quiet, very little shelling being suffered here, but it was our home for two days only.

The story of the second turn in the line is a story of a fatigue after fatigue. The fall of night saw us always set out for the front line to carry on with pick and shovel. The first night we did not arrive at the position at which we were to work. What the trouble was I could not say but anyway after making a journey of several hours under heavy shell fire we had to turn round and return to our dugouts. We had several casualties on this night and our tempers were anything but nice. The remarks that passed along the line would have made an artists fortune if they could have been produced as patter.

On the following night we set out to construct a sap leading out in front of the position occupied by the 3rd Bn. We passed along the old road straight up towards the line and when well out past the old front line (from which we had made the first attack), we turned to the left. Here we began to get mixed up with the enemy artillery and we soon had casualties. The officer in charge of the party was one of the first to be wounded but we did not stay looking on while he was attended by the S.B's. We went straight on through the old site of the village of Pozieres till we came to the 3rd Bn. We reported here and were shown what was to be done. It was one of those tasks where a certain amount is set out and when that is finished the party is free to return home. We set to and soon had the work finished.

Here let me digress a little. Fatigues are the bugbear of the soldier but even in the doing of them he has his likes and dislikes. Now I always found the average Australian much prefers when being told off to construct a sap that he has a certain set amount to do. If he is told "you have 12 feet or 6 feet of trench to dig and then are finished" he sets to work and works with a will. But when put on a place and told you are to keep going till 3a.m., I always found that he did not work at all hard. Why? Well the average soldier considered that under the former way of doing a fatigue it was impossible for a man to impose on his mates, also he saw that the quicker he worked the sooner he got back to bed. Consequently he put heart into the doing of the task. But in the second instance there was no incentive to work fast. The more one did the more one had to do and so a government stroke was

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the order of the day. Some officers saw this trait in the soldiers character and laid out their work on that plan, well knowing that each man's share would keep him going until the appointed time and all the men were satisfied. Our work in Pozieres was always high pressure work though, and needed no incentive to make us get below the surface "toute-de-suite".

To come back to the story. We completed the task, but the various parties had become separated and so as each party completed its work set out independently for home. One gets used to calling the spot where he happens to be staying "home". We passed along Centre Way. It seemed miles and every step we were entangled underfoot or overhead in telephone wires. For weeks afterwards we could hear the refrain "Wire overhead", "Wire under foot", etc., but at last

tired out we arrived at supports and after a cup of tea slept the sleep of the just.

Next day we moved up close to supports. Nothing exciting happened on the trip, it was just one long argument between our feet, our rifles and telephone wire. Centre Way Trench was, I think the best communication sap I have seen in France and the Pioneers who constructed it deserved all the encomiums that were lavished upon them for the work. Much of it was under direct observation and I have passed through them digging there in the daylight with shells falling all around. Many a time we blessed them for the protection their sap afforded us and, as I have said before, we thought their Centre Way Trench the best of its kind we have experienced.

We turned off the C.W. to the right at a sap called Tramway Avenue, this led to close supports which continued into the old communication sap through Sausage Gully. We no sooner got rid of our packs and superfluous gear than we had to fall in to go on ration fatigue. This was one of the wildest trips I have ever had. Perhaps the only one in any way to compare with it was marching to the tapes for "Hop Over" October 4th 1917, near Paschendale. The party was composed of all that were left of "D" Company and the Bn. Machine Gunners.

The ration dump was at chalk pits perhaps a mile or more behind us. The shelling was not very heavy and we did not expect any trouble in getting the food up. We arrived at the dump alright and then had to wait. We sat down under the shelter of the chalk pits talking and telling tales. We pointed out where this man or that mate had got his issue and then at last the rations were ready.

We fell in, each man carrying two bags or a dixie of tea or stew. Just as we prepared to move –"Whizz! Bang!",- a shrapnel burst a few yards to the side of us. Down went several and we took cover. The wounded were attended to and the extra bags were distributed among the uninjured and once again we set out. The shelling increased till every step was marked by a falling shell. We were doing very well- the party was not suffering and the rations getting nearer the to the men in the line, when suddenly a shell landed almost on the sap. Some of us beat the burst but others were too slow getting below the parapet and more casualties occurred. This meant more bags and more weight for those left. There happened to be only two left in the vicinity and so we shouldered the new burdens after attending to the wounded. We passed on and picked up six more of the party having a rest. We changed loads and it being too dangerous to remain where we were, we decided to go on. Just at this time our party of eight men did not comprise an N.C.O., but the party held on and by more ordinary good fortune arrived at the line with the food. Much of the tea and stew was spilt but the boys were quite satisfied at getting anything through that barrage.

We rested a few minutes and during that time the enemy increased his barrage till it was almost a drum fire. We were told that the trench was already overcrowded and were asked would we try and make

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our way back. When one considers that for distances of 20 to 30 yards there was no cover at all one can see what going back through such a barrage meant. But we got through without one of the eight sustaining a scratch and were home and asleep hours before the rest of the fatigue party could get through.

Thus it always was in the line no matter what the barrage of fire was like, those with ration parties, whether officers, N.C.O's or men, allowed nothing to stop them getting the food up to the men in the front line. I have described this trip with rations, not because I wish to draw attention to our party, but because I do wish those who do not know what it means to take rations up to the line in places as Pozieres, Bullecourt, Ypres, and a hundred other places, to get a real conception of the peril and endurance such a trip meant. The men on these parties always had dangerous work and as a rule if only two or three were left they would get through to the men in the line with what they could carry, and often the whole thanks of the Battalion were due for food and the wherewithal to beat back counter attacks to such men as these. I have seen the saps lined with dead men killed on just such fatigues and yet the stream of ration carriers or ammunition bearers never wavered on their way through the hell above and the death below. Every attack has held not one instance but hundreds of such parties winning through and it would be superfluous to enumerate them.

Our next serious fatigue was trench digging. We went up and spent the night clearing the sap towards the front line for under the hail of shell that forever beat upon this sector, trenches were ever being destroyed. We worked all night and saw a ration party pass by. We passed a few jokes with them and they with us, but two hours after we passed several of them lying stiff and stark where they had fallen victims to a German shell.

The succeeding night saw us out in No Man's Land working at the highest pressure possible. Here we were preparing a system of "Hop over trenches" for the 4th Bn. We set to work with a will and soon had a hole deep enough to sit in if danger threatened. Just as we thought we had ourselves in safety we had to move and this we did three times during the night. Next

evening we continued the work but this was a most unfortunate fatigue.- We lost half the party by shell fire before we had gone halfway and when we did get to the position the enemy put down such a heavy barrage that we could do nothing. We could not go forward or back and so we sat down for two hours, each minute seeming as though it may be our last. Yet we escaped and when things at last quietened down we returned to supports. Next day the Battalion told to make the attack went over from the system of trenches we had constructed and, though casualties were heavy, succeeded in taking the celebrated Moquet Farm position. We were soon after relieved by the 2nd Division.

In the march out through Centre Way we escaped without casualties but the Battalion relieving us had very heavy losses taking over. We bivouaced outside Albert that night and then by stages made our way to Doullens where we entrained for Poperinghe. Thus the first phase of the Australian 1st Division's activity on the Somme closed.

For us who had been through it, the name Pozieres held mixed memories. We were proud to have taken part in the battle but missed the good comrades who had gone and many a story grew about the names of the men who had gone under in the great adventure.

The end of the story we thought was told when in July 1917 we went to the unveiling of the memorial to the heroes of the Somme. We concurred with the remarks that were made and as we wandered on the old battlefields we told and retold the story of various events. We visited the Gully and the trench we had held and then set out for Lavieville, leaving, we thought, the old battlefield and ( to paraphrase Brookes) a part of Australia for ever.

All agreed this was the end but it was not so.- The March offensive

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of the Germans once more made the old trenches resound to the firing of guns and the bursting of shells. But the Hun was quickly repulsed and once again today Pozieres remains sacred to the memory of the Australian lads who gave their all for liberty. " He has never lived who has not only felt at some time that his life belonged to Humanity"- and surely these who not only felt but gave their lives for humanity had lived in the fullest sense. They lie enshrouded by the soil they saved and ever they live in our memory "as men, men whose fathers were men" men whose praises shall go resounding down the ages while yet men love and rever liberty and honour bravery.

[Transcribed by Trish Barrett for the State Library of New South Wales]