

**AWM4**  
**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,**  
**1914-18 War**

Engineers

**Item number:** 14/20/26

**Title:** 1st Field Company, Australian  
Engineers

February 1917



AWM4-14/20/26

WAR DIARY

Army Form C. 2118.

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INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Erase heading not required).

1st Field Coy AB.  
1st to 28th February 1917

387

VOLUME VII

Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
1. 2. 17. BAZENTIN.	<p>Arrangements made about commencing a Com<sup>o</sup> trench from YARRA RESERVE to YARRA BANK, to be called the GABY GLIDE - Lt HIGGINS reconnoitred the location of this in day light - Other works proceeding satisfactorily. No 1 Section caught in heavy enemy barrage on their way to work at YARRA BANK, and had three men wounded, Sapper Baldwin dying of his wounds the next night -</p>	(Vide Appendix "A.")
2. 2. 17. do.	<p>All works proceeding with as usual - work commenced on GABY GLIDE. Major DYER, returned from furlough to C.R.E. Arrangements made for him to leave for School of Instruction the following morning - Great aerial activity during the day -</p>	
3. 2. 17. do.	<p>The Brigadier-General wished two or three of the forward saps from YARRA BANK to be pushed on quickly in view of the projected assault on the "MAZE". Capt STEVENSON inspected the locality together with the Staff Captain, and decided to push on with saps 1, 3, &amp; 5, and eventually connect them up with a trench for assembly. All other works being proceeded with -</p>	

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4.2.17. BAZENTIN.	<p>Arrangements made for 8 of No 1 Section to take up their quarters in deep dugouts at YARRA BANK, &amp; 12 to live at HEXHAM CORNER dugouts -</p> <p>All works in line continually interrupted during night by "Stand To", gas alarms &amp; gas shells - Major DYER returned to Company, having missed the motor, his only chance of getting to the School.</p>	
5.2.17. do.	<p>Instructions received from C.R.C. to dig out RESERVE LINE. Major DYER with three officers fixed position of three Strong Points on left portion of Brigade Sector - 17 of No 2 Section went to live in HEXHAM CORNER dugouts, bringing the total number of sappers living in forward dugouts up to 51.</p> <p>Heavy enemy shelling considerably hampered all works in line -</p>	
6.2.17. do.	<p>Rest of Reserve Line in Brigade Sector located - The <del>work</del> erection of benches in HEXHAM CORNER dugouts being proceeded with satisfactorily.</p> <p>Works in line again interrupted during night by enemy shell fire - Much aerial activity by both sides during the day -</p>	

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7.2.17. BAZENTIN	Nothing to report.	
8.2.17. do.	Works in line being continued as usual - work on Divisional Baths, <del>proceeding</del> at BAZENTIN-LE-PETIT, which were put out of action by the frosts, are being proceeded with as fast as possible - Lt FITZGERALD left on 10 days furlough to England.	
9.2.17. do.	Nothing to report - all works being proceeded with - Lt McCONNEL returned from furlough	
10.2.17. do.	Works proceeding satisfactorily - 4 <sup>th</sup> Battalion attempted a raid on the MAZE, which however was a failure on account of enemy wire not being sufficiently cut - Capt STEVENSON attended a lecture on "Censorship" by Capt. GRAY (Base Censor, Calais) - The weather is now getting a shade milder -	
11.2.17. do.	All works being carried on as usual - medical inspection by M.O. of all ranks in camp - Reported all free from Scabies, and particularly clean - weather much milder, indications of approaching thaw -	3

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12-2-17. BAZENTIN.	Works in line delayed owing to Brigade Relief and heavy bombing of FRONT LINE by enemy. There was also a gas alarm and stand to during night on Brigade sector.	
13-2-17 do.	All works progressing satisfactorily - much aerial activity during the day. One of our planes, shot down in vicinity of HEXHAM C. Plans progressing very slowly -	
14-2-17 do.	Nothing to report.	
15-2-17 do.	Work at YARRA BANK and forward part of GABY GLIDE interfered with by heavy enemy bombing & shelling - This seems like retaliation for our aerial torpedoes which are endeavouring to cut enemy wire - Several gas alarms during evening.	
16-2-17 do.	Decided that work be commenced on Reserve Line by No 3 Section, under Lt LAWRENCE & HIGGINS - The work on GABY GLIDE, previously being done by No 3 Section, to be carried on by No 1 Section under Lt LYDDON - Exceptionally heavy enemy bombing	
17-2-17 do.	Work commenced on RESERVE LINE in evening - Party of 100 Infantry from 2 <sup>nd</sup> Batta, under Lt WALLER	

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~~INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.~~

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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
17-2-17 BAZENTIN	<p>for work on NEW RESERVE LINE reported here &amp; were killed in this &amp; 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Coys' billets (adjoining) and also in QUARRY dugouts, near by - The snow has now all disappeared, but ground is still hard beneath the surface, and progress on all excavation works has been considerably slower than would otherwise have been the case on this account. -</p> <p>Work of exposing frozen pipe line to Bior Baths still being proceeded with, about 30 Infantry being employed under Papper's supervision -</p> <p>Big enemy naval gun firing over our camp during the evening, doing some damage to the Railway, South of us.</p>	
18. 2. 17 do.	Nothing to report.	
19. 2. 17. do.	<p>All works proceeding satisfactorily - Experiments carried out under Major DYER'S supervision, for destroying wire entanglements. About 30 slabs of gun cotton were tied on to a flooring board, and the primers fixed about the centre slab -</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Experiment:- The board was slid underneath wire 2<sup>nd</sup> do. " " " laid on top of wire</p>	57

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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
19. 2. 17 BAZENTIN	<p><u>RESULTS</u>:- Mine in 1<sup>st</sup> experiment was cleared nearly completely for a width of 10 feet. Mine in No 2 experiment cleared for a similar width, but not so completely -</p> <p>Both experiments proved that the explosive should reach right through from rear to front of entanglement.</p>	
20. 2. 17 do.	All works being carried on as usual - Div <sup>t</sup> Batter now made ready for use -	
21. 2. 17 do.	Nothing to report.	
22. 2. 17 do.	do.	
23. 2. 17 do.	Works proceeding as usual - Major Boyer left for School of Instruction	
24. 2. 17 do.	Party of 100 Infantry detailed with us for work on RESERVE LINE recalled & instructed to report at CLARK'S DUMP - news received at Bde H <sup>q</sup> of Germans having evacuated their front line - Arrangements made with Bde to send one Engineer Officer to each	

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24. 2. 17. BAZENTIN	Front line B <sup>d</sup> H <sup>q</sup> Co, to give any assistance in view of our advancing our Front.	
25. 2. 17. do.	<p>Lt THOMPSON reported to Bde H<sup>q</sup> Co and then to Left B<sup>d</sup> H<sup>q</sup> Co (10<sup>th</sup>) at MEXHAM C<sup>o</sup> about 0215 - He arranged with C.O. for sappers to meet 1 Coy &amp; 30 Coy, and construct a strong point in BLUE CUT at M 18. C. 6-8 - He was informed by O.C. Left B<sup>d</sup> that infantry party had already started out - Capt GEDDES with 5 sappers of No 2 Section was detailed to connect with this party. He made every effort to find them and made his way as far as GIRD SUPPORT at about 0300, and after a thorough search returned and found the infantry party had only reached PIONEER ALLEY, having just reported to B<sup>d</sup> H<sup>q</sup> Co, instead of going forward - It was then too late to commence, as the instructions were not to work after day-light - At 0130, Lt THOMPSON went forward to assist the infantry to construct a Com<sup>o</sup> trench, taking 9<sup>th</sup> Coy from No 4 Section</p>	



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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
25.2.17. BAZENTIN	<p>He reported to O.C. Company in support, who directed him forward - He went forward and found an Infantry Officer and 25<sup>th</sup> R constructing a Com<sup>d</sup> Trench from our old front to HOOK SAP. (at M.17.D.5.8.) He detailed Sgt. ROCHESTER to assist with his sappers on this work - Information as to what our troops were holding was very indefinite - It seemed we occupied GIRD TRENCH - Lt THOMPSON with 4<sup>th</sup> Coy YULE investigated HOOK SAP and GIRD TRENCH to left and right and found them both in a very bad state - They were not excavated, and loads had been laid in the soft mud, which was about 3 ft. deep - He returned to where Com<sup>d</sup> Trench was being dug <sup>4 found</sup> they had got down from 3'6" to 4' for a distance of 210 yards - The enemy were shelling in the vicinity, not heavily, but continuously - The work was not hampered on that account, but was discontinued at daylight.</p>	

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25.2.17. BAZENTIN.	<p>Rt LAURENCE also reported at Bde Hqrs and then at Right Bn. Hqrs (9th Bn) at about 2430, and later at Coy Hqrs (Major NELLIGAN), YARRA BANK. The urgent need there was for a Com. Trench from CHORD(?) TRENCH forward to BANK TRENCH, which was then being occupied by 9th BATTN. LAURENCE with Cpl. ARKINSTALL then went forward with a guide from the Infantry, and reconnoitred the locality, returning later, and collecting 17 sappers of 142 Section, he started them at work on a Comm. Trench from M 24.6.1.9. along side Snaker Road, towards BANK TRENCH, which latter he had found occupied by 2 Coy. &amp; 25 Coy. The sappers were later reinforced by a party of 60 Inf. Good work was put in and about 100 yards was dug to an average depth of 3 feet - Enemy snipers were busy but work was continued until about 1200, when the mist cleared away and</p>	

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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
	<p>the enemy M.C., sapping and shelling became very severe. Sappers, Infantry working party and Garrison were compelled to shelter in GIRD TRENCH and German dugouts there - Capt. STEVENSON while visiting the job, was held up by this BARRAGE till 1430. Returning to the Sappers Camp at HEXHAM CR he sent forward a relay of Sappers under Capt. McINTOCK as a relief - No relief for Infantry party was available, and when McINTOCK arrived with his sappers at YARRA BANK, it was apparent that the work was now unnecessary, in view of the further advance - Unfortunately as McINTOCK'S party arrived at YARRA BANK, another enemy barrage was put up, and one shell burst among the party, killing one (Sgt SKOW) and wounding 7 others. Besides the names mentioned Cpls. DENNING and AYTON did excellent work under difficult circumstances.</p>	

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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
25.2.17. BAZENTIN	Instructions received that evening from C.R.H. that 3 <sup>rd</sup> Co Coy would relieve the 1 <sup>st</sup> Co Coy in the line on the following day, and to report the 1 <sup>st</sup> Co Coy for duty with ANZAC LIGHT RAILWAYS.	
26.2.17. do.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Co Coy relieved the 1 <sup>st</sup> Field Coy in line. Capt. STEVENSON, called on O.C. Anzac Right Railways and arrangements were made for starting Coy at work on trambines to-morrow	
27.2.17. do.	<p>LT LYDDON and No 1 Section commenced work on maintenance of existing line on section between VILLA STN and BAZENTIN.</p> <p>No 2 Section (<del>under</del> <sup>LT. McCONNEL</sup>) was engaged on similar work between CLARKS DUMP and TURKS ROAD. LT LAWRENCE with No 3 Section is engaged relaying the existing line with <sup>heavier material.</sup> between MARTIN PUGH STN and M. 22. B. Central.</p> <p>No 4 Section under LT THOMPSON commenced platelaying with heavy rails &amp; sleepers from FACTORY CR to LUISINHOFF FM.</p>	

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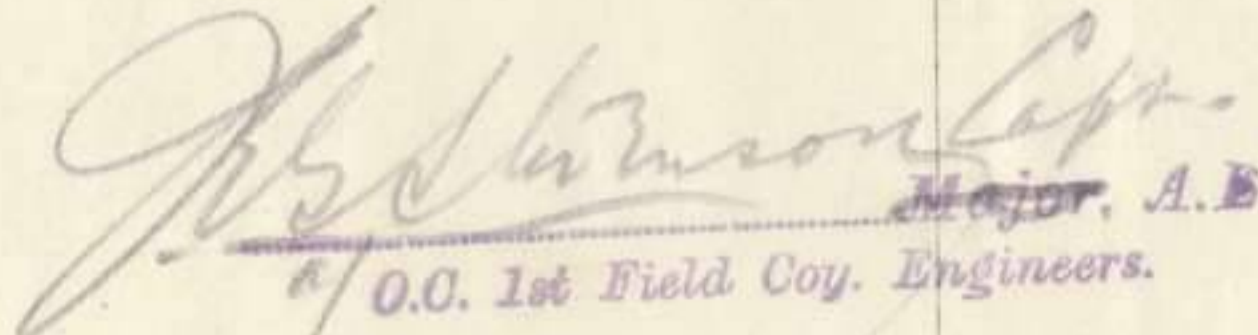
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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
	Cpt. FINNIE and 2appers took charge of 16th Batta party ballasting the CATERPILLAR LINE.	
28.2.17 BALENTIN.	<p>All works proceeding satisfactorily. St. Lydden &amp; No. 1 section taken off Villa-Balentim line, and started work at 1200 on extension of tracks towards factory corner relieving Lt Thompson &amp; his men, this work being very urgent.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>APPENDIX "A"</u>     :-     CASUALTIES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">do.     B.     :-     Bimonthly Report.</p>	

  
 Major, A.E.  
 O.O. 1st Field Coy. Engineers.

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Hour, Date, Place.	Summary of Events and Information.	Remarks and references to Appendices.
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>APPENDIX A.</u></p> <p><u>Killed</u> :- 29R.</p> <p><u>Wounded</u> :- 99R.</p>	

Appendix No. A

387 Bi-Monthly Report ①

8 2 17

Report 'A'Front Line System3. Communication Trenches(b) PIONEER ALLEY

Since taking over from Northumbrian R.E. Coys. on 26.1.17 the following work has been completed:-  
 About 130 yds. have been deepened by 1'6" and widened by 6". Of this distance, 75 yds have been revetted with 'A' Frames & Muddles etc. the remainder being ready for revetting. In several places where the sides of the trench had fallen in, the earth has been cleared away and the trench deepened so as to obviate the necessity of having the benches.  
 Progress was delayed for the first three days as the revetting material ('A' Frames etc) was frozen into the mud & crow bars were found necessary to remove them before the work of deepening could be carried out.

YARRA RES. TRENCH

Work was commenced on this trench on 2/2/17. To date 400 yards have been deepened to a minimum depth of 4'6". 60 'A' Frames with a revetment of Muddles have been put in. Owing to the frozen nature of the ground, progress has been slow. The material for the work has been carried by the working party from Turk Dump.

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②

Report A (Continued)

3. Communication Trenches (Cont.)

YARRA BANK

Work on deeping, widening & extending the 5 saps in YARRA BANK was commenced on 1/2/17.

The existing work has been improved and the revetting (with A Frames, Hurdles etc) has been extended 45 feet.

1060 cubic feet of earth have been excavated in dressing, widening, deeping and extending the saps.

No 2 & 4 saps were abandoned for the time being on 5/2/17, work being proceeded with on No 1, 3 and 5, having on to forward posts 20, 21 etc.

The ground has been frozen to a depth of 12 inches in these saps during the past fortnight, rendering work extremely difficult.

2 Fire Trenches + Strong Points.

(b) Support Line

PIONEER SUPPORT

Work was commenced upon the night of 30<sup>th</sup> 31<sup>st</sup> January. Upon this night tools etc were taken out to the site & preparations for the commencement of the work made. Before actual excavation was commenced it was found necessary to thoroughly clear the existing trench of the debris buried in it. This, consisting as it did of coils of barbed wire, pumps, three layers of duckboards, the remains of a bomb store & several smashed dugouts, all of which were embedded in the solidly frozen ground, proved a slow & difficult task. In addition the work has also been hindered by the fact that only small infantry parties have been supplied & these very often from men who had just come off duty.



Five Trenches & Strong Points (Cont.)b. PIONEER SUPPORT (Cont.)

In all berzards have been deepened 2 feet and some widening has been done in places. Also a number of A. frames have been prepared for the job in readiness to be put in place.

5. Mined Dugouts.Front Systems(b) LEFT BATT' H.Q.

Work has been commenced at Left Batt' H.Q. and up to date 9 bunkers have been completed.

R. John Bygo.

Report 'A'

(1)

22B. Fire Trenches and Strong Points

22/4/17

(b) Support LinePIONEER Support Line

Since the last report this trench has been transformed from a shallow, broken up trench to a deep fire trench.

The whole length of the trench, (approximately 160 yards) has ~~been~~ deepened and widened to take 'A' frames and hurdles, and of this length 50 yards have been 'A' framed and hurdle revetment inserted.

TURK SUPPORT LINE

Work is in progress on this fire trench. The unrevetted portion (about 70 yards) has been cleared out in preparation for revetting it with 'A' frames and Hurdles.

(a) YARRA BANK

The fire trench forward of YARRA BANK is held only in detached posts. Clearing, deepening + revetting have not been started on the fire trench owing to enemy activity here with bombing during the past 10 days.

3 saps from YARRA SUPPORT LINE to the FRONT LINE have been revetted and extended viz:- 50 feet to the full depth required (6 feet), 65 feet to an average depth of 30 inches, 65 feet have been widened by 9 inches and 170 feet run of saps have been revetted with 'A' frames + Hurdles.

Report 'A'

This copy returned to you, only required in single form.

22/2/17

W. Mathew Maj.  
A.P.C.E.

2. Fire Trenches and Strong Points (cont.)(C) Reserve Line

Work on the Reserve Line has been commenced at Strong Point No 3. The line is to consist of 20' of fire trenches and 75 yards of communication trenches to the rear coming out at a point on FACTORY ROAD.

Up to date 20' of fire trenches has been excavated to a depth of 4'6" and 3 feet wide. Material has been carried from TURK DUMP for the use of a party from 1st Pioneer Battalion who have completed approximately 100 yards of wire entanglement.

Work has been commenced on Strong Point No 4. Approximately 30 yds has been excavated to a depth of 18". This work is in vicinity of Cobham Corner.

3. Communication Trenches

(b) In hand

A communication trench is in course of construction from Strong Point No 3 in the RESERVE LINE; It is to be 75 yards long and come out in the rear of S.P. No 3 in FACTORY ROAD. Up to date 60 yards of trench have been excavated to a depth of 1 foot and 15 yards of trench to a depth of 2 feet.

PIONEER ALLEY.

Since the previous bi-monthly <sup>reported</sup> <sup>its function with</sup> 150 feet of PIONEER ALLEY between BLUE CUT and the FRONT LINE has been deepened by 2'6" and widened by 1 foot. Of this distance 50 feet have been revetted with A Frames and hurdles. Of that portion of the trench between BLUE CUT and Battalion H.Q. 270 feet has been deepened and widened. A distance of 210 feet has been revetted with A Frames + Hurdles. In addition, 5 pumps have been installed to keep the trench well drained and clear of water.

YARRA RESERVE

Since the previous report 60 feet of YARRA RESERVE has been deepened, widened and revetted with A Frames + Hurdles. 126 feet <sup>of revetment</sup> have been partially completed and 250 yards have been excavated to a depth of 5 feet, but is in poor condition. A further 190 yards have been excavated to a depth of 2'6".

(4)

### 3. Communication Trenches (Continued)

#### (b) GABY GLIDE

The southern end of GABY GLIDE is 4'6" deep but in poor condition. A new cut from the duckwalk track has been started. ~~100~~ 100 yards averaging 12 inches deep, then 40 yards 18" deep, 350 yards 4'6" deep, 100 yds pot holed and the last 50 yards to YARRA BANK is an old trench 4 feet deep, but in poor condition.

The total excavations for since the last report have been 166 cubic yards.

### 4. Overland Routes

#### (b) GLISSADE WALK

Working has been ~~not~~ in progress on this track. 600 yards of wire netting have been laid on the double duckwalks from its junction with the Decanville railway leading to FACTORY CORNER and the COUGH DROP.

The whole of the duckwalk track running approximately parallel to PIONEER ALLEY, has been relaid.

~~1st~~ 1st Diesel Baths all cylinders, pipes and fittings which had been burst by ice have been thawed and repaired. Ice removed from overhead tanks. Pipeline from the main exposed, thawed & replaced, and the Baths made ready for use on 20.2.17.

R. John ~~by~~ <sup>new</sup>

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Report 'B'(1)  
Front Line System

22/1/17

1. General Condition of Trenches(a) Front Line

The Front Line is has an average depth of about 3 ft. 6 ins. and is in poor condition.

At present it is held in posts in YARRA BANK. ~~only~~ The saps leading out to these posts are in good condition and revetted for part of their length.

(b) YARRA SUPPORT LINE is good condition behind a high bank.

PIONEER SUPPORT LINE is new in good condition. The trench is perfectly dry and well drained.

TURK SUPPORT LINE is only in fair condition.

It has been cleaned out for a distance of about 70 yards.

(c) Reserve Line has been commenced at Strong Point No 3 which adjoins "W" M.G. emplacement. At present it is only 4' 6" deep for 30 yards & in fair condition.

The position of the line between S.P.s Nos 3 & 4 has been marked out with screw pickets, placed approximately 50 yards apart, and the inner edge of the proposed entanglements has been marked out in a similar manner. Wiring has been commenced in front of S.P. No 3 and 100 yds (approx.) completed.

(d) The communication trench from S.P. No 3 to FACTORY ROAD has just been commenced and is at present only averages 1 foot deep.

PIONEER ALLEY provides good cover to PIONEER SUPPORT LINE for its whole distance. From Batten. H.D. forward 180 yds is in good condition having been revetted with A. frames etc. Close to the Support Line about 17 yds have been revetted with A. frames etc and this portion of

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Report B (continued)  
Front Line System (Cont.)  
General condition of Trenches

2) (Cont), of the work is being pushed forward as fast as possible.

A considerable portion of this communication trench had been revetted prior to taking over, but A-frames were not used. It is proposed to clean this old revetment out, renew it using A-frames. A considerable quantity of water will tend to accumulate in the trench from time to time but pumps have been installed to keep the trench as dry as possible.

YARRA RESERVE & GABY GLIDE AVENUE are in a generally poor condition for the whole of their length and require a good deal of work to complete.

3. Amount of Accommodation in Deep Dugouts Completed

Bunking accommodation for 30 men has been erected in the HEXHAM ROAD Dugout and is at present being used by sappers from this Coy.

R. John Dyer