

These foraging expeditions allowed us to forget the bitterness of the cold sleety rain and snow, and gave a spice to the operations. Almost always, the story was told of the figure darting from one room to another in the lonely dark house, the inevitable and ubiquitous spy. The cold at this time was intense. English papers averred it was the coldest winter within human recollection, we believed them. After these long night pilgrimages to the guns in rain, frost or snow, fingers and toes became almost insensible, though every movement hurt. The cobble stones made riding and driving dangerous, unsteady, and frost made stones slippery and full of peril, but there was that spirit of "devil may care" exhibited through it all. It was all in the days job, of course, we growled, (what soldier never growled!) but the work seemed to get done just the same.

We had only been in the line a few days, the 23rd. of January when the 27th. Battery was spotted, registered by aeroplane, and shelled with 4.2 and 8.9 H.E. about 120 rounds being poured into the battery. One Gunner-G.C.Cameron was killed, and two others wounded, Gunner J. Mitchell and Lt. J. Graham. One pit was partially destroyed and its occupying gun slightly damaged. These were the first casualties sustained by personnel and material actually at the gun positions, though the first man wounded was Gunner F.M.Fowler, 26th. Battery, hit in the leg while walking up to the line. Immediately prior to taking over the sector, the infantry had carried out one raid, which had been successful from an intelligence point of view, though the objective, the enemy front had been reached and found to be unoccupied.

It was now decided that raids should be carried out on an average of one per week. In order to permit of this, additional guns were brought to bear on the sector and a redistribution of groups made. The 7th. Brigade now became the centre group, the 8th. on the left or north, the 175th. R.F.A. on the right or south, the whole being under the command of Brigadier General Grimwade C.M.G.C.R.A. 3rd. Divisional Artillery.

The brigade supported the 10th. Australian Infantry Brigade in a successful raid on the 28th. January, and an unsuccessful one made by the 11th. Australian Infantry Brigade on 1st. February. A partially successful raid was made on 19th. February by the 11th. Australian Infantry Brigade, but the trenches were unoccupied and full of water. On the 24th. February, the 9th. Australian Infantry Brigade bombed and destroyed nine enemy dugouts in a successful raid and captured some prisoners, while three days later, a composite battalion in another successful raid, captured searchlights, machine guns, stores etc., as well as seventeen prisoners. On 13th. March, the 11th. Brigade undertook another raid which was unfortunately not very successful.

It was by means of these raids that the Infantry gradually built up the supreme confidence in their own powers that is one of the essentials in the launching of operations on a large scale.

Briefly, their objects were these:- By constant repetition to practise our troops in methods of assault and build up and crystallise their morale, to obtain material for the Intelligence section, documents, prisoners etc., to harass the enemy and weaken his morale, to inflict casualties upon him and destroy his material. Raids meant an enormous amount of work for the Artillery in support, shooting had of course to be of extreme accuracy, errors in synchronisation of lifts in the barrage reduced to the mere fraction of a second, and as the operation usually took place in a limited section of trench, many fresh registrations had to be made. Consequently, they were of inestimable value from the view point of the work to be performed in the later great offensives.

After the raid on 13th. March, the situation remained quiet, the only incident of note being the destruction by fire of the Brigade Headquarters in the Rue Denis Papin. This fire was occasioned by a too large fire in one of the rooms, and broke out after most had retired, but fires and floods were now regarded as rather daily occurrences, and we were not deeply stirred at Headquarters being burnt out.