

During the period occupied in the two sectors, Warneton and Armentieres, the offensive nature of our operations greatly increased and continually harassed the enemy. All enemy movements were quickly detected and as quickly stilled. During this occupation, the 25th. Battery suffered a heavy loss. While exercising horses near Steenwerk, a Gotha passed over, dropped a bomb, and the battery had six casualties, one death.

A new scheme was introduced on this front. A single gun per battery was run out to a forward position in the morning, shoot all day, and return to the original positions at nightfall. On one occasion only did the enemy appear to pick these guns up, but all succeeded in regaining their permanent positions without loss or damage.

During these operations the idea of attaching infantry officers to batteries for four days experience in artillery work was introduced and proved successful. It was one of the innovations that served to solidify the comradeship of these two important arms of the service.

An English F.A. Brigade relieved the batteries on the 4th. and 5th. January 1918, and on the 6th. the Brigade again took up "Column of Route" and marched to wagon lines at Steente-Je, a little village of some dozen dwellings, about three kilos from Bailleul. Here the brigade was held in reserve and "Blighty" leave was instituted. A Roster was established, and an allotment of seven men per week made. This leave gave an incentive to the men, and all anxiously looked forward to a few days again in the gaiety of Piccadilly or the romance of the Scottish Glens.

At this time the ground was frozen and horses had great difficulty in maintaining the upright position, although their shoes were fitted with frost nails.

It would be forgiven perhaps, to digress for a moment and remind civilisation of what they owe to the horses. The horses are the legs of the artillery. Without horses, field artillery would be about as useful as toy pop guns. From the day of landing in France, the burden of the work fell on the horses. Moving from position to position, conveying ammunition to the guns either in wagons or packs, often tethered in open air lines with the mud up to their withers, the horses had an unenviable time, and the horse being closer to the ground than the driver often fell a bleeding, mangled victim to shell fire, while the driver escaped. The horse gradually grew to scent trouble, and it was often pitiable to see them, tied in the lines, while bombs were falling about them on a dark wet winters night. Poor speechless brutes they couldn't "tell their troubles" like the men! They couldn't growl and curse and swear and thereby gain some measure of relief in the manner adopted by their masters.

They were well looked after. The drivers loved their horses, though they cursed them more often than not. It is a truism that if one is attached to a section of war service containing horses, there can never be any real rest for the men. Yet, the drivers treated their foster children well, gathered for them armfuls of grass or crop if the opportunity presented itself, and during the illness of a horse, a driver was most attentive and solicitous, nay, tender, and it is that trait in the Australian character, that trait of latent tenderness which despite the rough, devil-may-care attitude usually displayed to the world, comes out in hours when an animal or a man is suffering, makes him so loveable, so powerful, so irresistible.

That a man would steal for his horse was proved every day, every hour of the campaign, but with all the attention drivers could give, the horse had an unhappy time, and for their work, their silent work of suffering and pain and misery, let us - take off our hats and remember that man did not win the war alone.

On the 8th. January, Lt.Col.H.D.K.Macartney D.S.O. handed over command of the brigade to Lt.Col.W.G.Churchus D.S.O., Lt.Col.Macartney going to Australian Corps Headquarters. Lt.Col.Macartney left the brigade to the brigade's regret. His quiet unostentatious personality, his gracious treatment of all, irrespective of rank, gained for him a place in all hearts, and we saw him go with sorrow.

The period from 9th. to 29th. January was occupied in training. The casualties had been so heavy, that signalling and gun laying courses were instituted to fill up the many vacant places among the qualified men.

On the 30th. January, the brigade returned to the neighbourhood of Warneton, Hill 63, and as aerial activity was daily becoming more intense, an addition in the shape of a Lewis gun with ammunition was issued to each battery, and rifles were also kept in gun pits for the purpose of driving off aircraft.