

CHAPTER 5.

HEILLY - VILLERS BRETONNEAUX - BRAY - PERONNE - HERVILLY BELLECOURT - MONTBREHAIN - BUSSIGNY - MAZEMHEIM.

In conjunction with the 3rd. Australian Div. Infantry patrols, the guns were taken into position in some fields to the north and east of Heilly, the guns were unlimbered, the poles of the firing battery wagons were dropped alongside their respective guns for ammunition supply, gun limbers were unloaded and retired to a spot not far from Franvillers, where forward limber lines were established.

In readiness for an immediate move, horses always stood by fully harnessed, and communication was continually maintained with the guns both by day and night. It was a time of great moment, great anxiety, the personnel of the brigade knew but little of previous happenings, and "hold on for forty eight hours at all costs" was a warning and an indication of "breakers ahead."

Batteries were given a full hand to engage all opportunity targets and to seize every opportunity of killing the enemy as well as to harass him and his operations day and night. The brigade quickly adapted itself to these conditions and the position was soon firmly established.

The expected attack came to pass on the 30th. March; when Fritz prepared for a further advance on our right by putting down a very extensive area shoot with artillery on all kinds. A battalion of the 10th. Australian Infantry Brigade was holding this sector which withstood the brunt of the attack. The 7th. Brigade batteries lent valuable help in smashing up the attack by switching their guns around 70 degrees right and pouring an enfilading fire into the masses of German Infantry which were making every effort to break through. Several companies of the enemy succeeded in reaching our front line, but were subsequently driven out by the 3rd. Australian Div. Infantry. Fritz suffered heavy losses without gaining any territory.

On the 1st. April, Brigade Headquarters was very heavily shelled, and unfortunately, the C.O. Lt. Col. W. Churchus D.S.O. the adjutant Capt. G.J. Greenshields and the orderly officer, Lieut K.C. Radford, were killed by the same shell. That afternoon, a new headquarters staff was appointed, consisting of Lt. Col. T.B.W. James D.S.O. C.O. Lt. R.R. Smith M.C. adjutant and Lieut. W.R. Bates orderly officer.

During these days, the last few days of March and the early days of April, the batteries constantly shelled the enemy. Hundreds of rounds were poured over every day and the guns were never silent nor the men ever silent. The villages were, of course, deserted, and as the domestic animals and birds, pigs and chickens and such like were roaming around homeless and friendless, the "Wagon-line Kings" appropriated them and made profitable use of them. It was just as well that Providence had sent them along, as many a time the "lads" had known what it was to be downright hungry, and also the "menu" chiefly consisted of bully and biscuits. Chicken made a pleasant break.

These were busy days for the batteries, day and night they poured the shells into Fritz and gave him no peace. Three hundred shells had to be fired each day by each battery in addition to special shoots and gas bombardments ordered, which were frequent.

The 21st. March marked "The end of cavalry Captain Baron Von Richthofen." This account is by Flight Lieut. Malcolm Sheehan, an Aussie.

"As you know we are a two seater squadron - R.E. 8s, the Fords of the air. We are what is known as a Corps squadron, that is we carry out corps work - reconnaissance, photography, bomb-dropping, low strafing, contact patrol, flash reconnaissance, co-operation with artillery and infantry and any special jobs which Corps H.Q. require. For months we have been promised better machines and some day they will turn up. You will see our special feature is not aerial combat, but although only a side line, one never does a patrol without a scrap or mix-up with a Hun or Huns of some description. The reason it is a side line is that officially we are not supposed to look for bother, and our machines are not the healthiest in the world to take into a mix-up. Last Sunday we had a day out. On the down patrol, my Flight Commander met three Hun scouts, well over Hun-land. After a tidy scrap he sent one down in flames, the other two pushed off and we got home safely. At 11 a.m. two of our machines were taking photos of the Corps Front when five Hun red triplane scouts declared war. The leader who was very bold left his formation and after a short mix-up with one of our busses, was seen to have more than his issue of .303 and go down and crash on our side. The other machines did not fancy further scrap on our side, so they beat it for home and reported this. Next we heard by telephone that the Hun triplane which was seen to crash, was none other than Cavalry Captain Baron Von Richthofen.