

War Diary extracts 1917-1918

AWM - Arthur William Mansley, my grandfather

This is a summary, recording the main points in the Battalion War Diaries – the main omissions are mentions of officers joining or leaving the battalion. Most entries are actually brief so little has been omitted. The entries were hand-written by a variety of battalion commanders, some more easy to read than others! Some place names are particularly hard to read.

Nelson Battalion (November 1917-April 1918)

AWM joined battalion 14 November at Helsthaege after training in England.

[Helsthaege unidentifiable on-line]

November 1917

14 – 5 officers (named) and 243 OR arrived from reinforcement depot, on inspection they seemed to be a very fair draft physically and the majority of them having had 14 weeks training in England.

15, 16, 17- platoon training

18 – Church parade

19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 – training

27 – Cleaning up training area preparatory to move

28 – Battalion left at 8.30am for Le Nouveau Monde area arriving at 2.30pm. 28 men dropped out.

29 – Left at 8.15, arriving at road camp at 11.20am. 1 man dropped out.

30 – Cleaning and reorganizing

December 1917

1, 2, 3, 4 training – orders to relieve 32nd Division. Orders cancelled late at night.

5 – Battalion to be ready to entrain at short notice. Training ceased and all ranks prepared to move.

6 – Training continued. Operation orders for move issued by Division.

7 – Trains cancelled – training continued.

8 – Training. Orders for move received.

9 – Church parade. Cleaning up camp.

10 – A Company left at 1am, remainder at 5am. All billeted at Barastre by 9pm

11 - Foot inspection and scabies inspection by MO. Order for move received.

12- Battalion moved to Etricourt

13 – Advance party reconnoitred the line

14 – Battalion moved into the line between 5.30 and 8.30pm, relieving Royal Irish Rifles.

15, 16, 17, 18 – consolidation of trenches, wiring, patrols and clearing out of fire and communication trenches. Duckboards found in practically all the trenches when cleaned out.

19 – Battalion relieved by Hood battalion.

20 - Battalion in reserve trenches

21 – Scabies inspection

22 – Battalion billeted in Metz

23 – Enemy aeroplane brought down near Battalion HQ 3.30 pm. The wreckage soon surrounded by battalion. Advanced Party set off for the line at 6.30pm. Our right flank in line 400 yards NW of La Vacquerie.

24 – Battalion relieved Drake battalion in front line.

25, 26 – Consolidation of trenches. Wiring, working on new Communication and Fire trenches. Patrols. Very quiet all the time. No signs of enemy attack.

27 – Men were well fed with hot food. Very few casualties with trench feet.

Lieutenant Purcer sniped and killed while touring the line amongst his men.

28 – Sub Lt White with 7 Other Ranks killed by shell falling into dugout. Relieved by Drake battalion. Battalion moved into support trenches.

29 – Reconnaissance of dugouts in area occupied by battalion. Three found, all with one entrance. Party of 20 men working making dugouts at Brigade HQ. Shelled during night. Sub Lt. Boys wounded.

30 – A heavy enemy barrage was laid by enemy apparently on whole of Divisional Front. Order received to reinforce Drakes with one company. The enemy had penetrated our front line trenches but were held up by Drakes.

2.15pm – battalion counter-attacked. Over the top. No artillery barrage. A few men succeeded in gaining the objective but the right was held up by machine gun fire. At the same time a bombing party bombed up the trench meeting considerable opposition. Splendid gallantry was shown by Sub Lt Clerk who, although severely wounded, did not relinquish his command until forced to do so through weakness and loss of blood.

4.30 – further attacks entirely successful, reoccupied trenches. The enemy put down a very heavy barrage but fortunately we had very few casualties.

Food, water and ammunition in ample supplies were carried up to the front by as early as 7.30pm.

The remainder of the night – intermittent shelling and great activity of enemy Trench Mortars, snipers and machine gun fire. The work of the battalion stretcher bearers during the operation and under cover of darkness enabled us to evacuate all our wounded by 8am of the 31st.

Casualties during operation of 30/31 December – Sub Lts Clerk, Bennett and Coburn wounded.
Other Ranks – approx. 100 killed, missing and wounded.

January 1918

1 – Very busy consolidating front line reoccupied in operation of 30/31 December. Trench in very bad condition following heavy bombardment.

2 – very quiet in the line.

AWM admitted to 150th Field Ambulance on 2nd January, then to General Hospital Rouen with severe trench fever, leading to two months hospitalization and further convalescence. He rejoined Anson battalion in April 1918.

Anson Battalion (April-August 1918)

April 1918

AWM joined Battalion 4 or 5 April when it was at Englebelmer near Varennes

4 – Artillery active on village

5 – Battalion moved forward to banks east of village about 3pm. Enemy artillery still active. Mixture of yellow gas shells and high explosive. Sub-Lieutenant Gowan to hospital (gas).

6 - Battalion moved to close support in railway embankment, west of Aveluy Wood. B Company took over part of front line held by 1 /4 Bedfords.

7 – Battalion relieved RMLI in front line in Aveluy Wood

8 – Enemy machine guns and snipers very active. Sub-L Southgate killed in action, S-L Stacey and Mallett wounded.

[8- AWM to Field Ambulance 148 according to his Service Record; 10th to General Hospital at Aubengue with NYD.N (shell-shock)

Reference to gas on 5 April only mention while AWM in action.

May 1918

AWM rejoined Battalion on 16 May in 'Hamel Left' sector, Reserve Line.

16 – Cleaning up, baths and medical inspection, training.

17 - Cleaning up, baths and medical inspection, specialist instruction

18 - Training and specialist instruction

19 – Church. Battalion relieved 2nd Royal Irish in support line

20 – Hostile artillery and aircraft active

21 – Increased enemy artillery and aircraft

22 – Situation unchanged

23 – Battalion relieved 2nd Royal Irish in front line

24 – Quiet day. Battalion carried out raid on enemy positions. 15 officers, 500 OR took part.
Captured enemy - 1 officer, 22 ORs and 6 machine guns.

Lts. Parkes, Henry, Hawkins wounded; Sub-L't Crowther killed; OR – 9K, 42W, 8M

25 – Enemy artillery very active. Battalion relieved, moved to billets in reserve.

[AWM Service Records says admitted to General Hospital at Le Treport on 30 May with 'mild' bayonet wound to scalp suffered on 25th – more likely to have been on 24th.]

July 1918

AWM rejoined battalion 26th July at Arqueves.

26 – Cleaning up, kit inspection, bathing

27 – Training and bathing

28 – Church

29 – March to Authie via Raincheval

30, 31 – Training

August 1918

1, 2, 3 – Training – practice in taking up assembly positions.

4 – Church, bathing. Leave Authie, march to Vauchelles, take over from Hood Battalion

5 – Vauchelles to Acheux Wood

6, 7 – Training

8 – Training , night march to Contay, settled down in field on Contay-Beaucourt Road

9, 10 – Inspection, rest

11, 12, 13 – Training, firing range, bathing

14 – Night march to Henu. Camped in orchard. Only 42 tents for battalion.

15, 16, 17, 18 – Training, inspection, rest

19 – Firing range. Move to Chateau de la Haie Switch, HQ in Souastre, preliminary orders for attack on 21st.

20 – Reconnoitre assembly positions in trenches

21 – Battalion to assembly positions. HQ in top trench following capture of Ablainzeville by 37th Division.

Objectives: sunken road, railway line

Thick mist – first objective gained but held up 200 yards beyond first objective by heavy infantry fire. Attack resumed at 5.30 pm without tank or artillery support. After suffering heavy losses line advanced within 50 yards of objective when a field gun opened fire at point-blank range. Line withdrawn about 250 yards and took up outpost line in shell holes. Casualties heavy including Killed – Sub Lts Dewdney and Nesbitt; Wounded – Sub Lts Fox and Lawson

22 – Enemy counter-attacked three times. Repulsed with heavy losses. Relieved by 13th Rifle Brigade.

23 – Battalion in reserve position in Baden Av, west of Ablainzeville. Rested and reorganized.

24 – Breakfast at 4am, moved later to jumping off position SW of Grevillers, NE of Loupart Wood. Battalion ordered to attack at 7.30pm.

Objectives – 1. Main Albert-Bapaume road, 2. Thillooy.

Operation postponed to following morning. Night in open.

25 - 6am attack opened on front between Grevillers and Loupart. Heavy mist. Left Royal Marines, right New Zealand troops.

1st objective gained, line advanced to outskirts of Thillooy but forced to withdraw to sunken road.

Enemy counter-attacked in afternoon and again at 9pm. Beaten off with heavy loss, our artillery doing particularly heavy damage. A number of prisoners taken including a staff surgeon and medical officer.

26 – Attacked Thillooy from sunken road at 7.30. After advancing 200-300 yards were forced to withdraw to original line being subjected to heavy machine-gun fire from front and flanks. Officers and men very tired.

Casualties during operations 21st-26th very heavy

[AWM Service Record– gun-shot wounds received 26/8 led admission to hospital at Abbeville and to left leg being amputated]

The battalion was relieved on 28th. A note on 28th estimates casualties 21st-28th as 416 [battalion full strength between 800 and 1000 men] and lists the names of 3 officers killed and 10 wounded.

A later list identified 19 men of the battalion awarded the Military Medal for bravery during the period 21st August-2nd September