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NEWS FROM FRANCE.

2nd FIELD ENGINEERS.

(Extract from "N.Z. Chronicle," Nov. 22, 1918.)

Ehoa,

How the time does fly. A fortnight has flittered since I last wrote. But in the interim momentous happenings have come to draw the glorious Peace nearer—the principal, of course, being the armistices with Austria and Turkey, and the victorious advances on the Western Front. Dame Rumour is at her best, and her ladyship has for us many reports, weird and wonderful, true and untrue, mostly the latter, of course. The statements anent an armistice with now lonely Germany are eagerly awaited, and Divisional notice boards scanned daily by excited Pig Islanders. I wonder how it will end!

This is hardly Company news, friend Ehoa, but you will pardon me mentioning what claims practically our whole attention. Being on Divisional Reserve, we are precluded from active participation in front line work, but we have been doing our share in erecting such essentials as baths, and repairing bridges and roads, water points and so forth. No. 3 Section have completed their laundry, and the Diggers can now rely on an ample stock of clean clothes—washed at their own factory.

We have had several changes of venue since I last wrote, but we are still fortunate in being able to reside in pretentious biviies. In the present "home" I believe the officers have some place. The furniture is of solid oak, and all beautifully carved. The maison boasts of two pianos, but it's rather a pity they possess no handles! Oh, but the conservatory! Just off the hall is a large glass building wherein grow beautiful palms and other plants. It also sports marble-topped tables, though they are rather out of season. It's some ranch believe me, Ehoa.

My comrades join me in congratulating Lieut. D. Doake and Sergt. J. Ward on being awarded the M.C. and D.C.M. respectively. Lieut. Doake gained his decoration for excellent work during hot fighting for a certain canal. The genial Joe has always discharged his duties efficiently, and his coolness under fire has always inspired the confidence of his men. Lieut. W. Hulbert has rejoined the Company. Driver W. Wapp carried away with him our best wishes and the best of luck on his departure for New Zealand. Kia Ora.

J.D.S.

AFFAIRS OF THE 1st L.T.M.B.

Things have been buzzing along on the chain-lightning principle of late, as compared with the snail-like progress prior to the whizz bang tactics employed by France's most gallant son, General Foch.

After your last notes of the Battery's doings, Havrincourt Wood and after occurred, and the Stokes did some good work against Jaeger position. Two corporals won the M.M. for good work. Both are popular with their mates and deserve their decorations. Bos'un, whose sole qualification to his nautical nickname is the possession of a cutty pipe of the ancient and honourable kind and baccy which beats the — brand, salvaged a huge Fritz dog and cart, used no doubt for machine-gun work. Fritz dragged the vehicle and a lot of Bos'un's friends' equipment out from the line.

RUGBY.

After some days of rest and quiet the men of the Division perked up a lot, and football was played in fields which had been fought over but a short time before. The 1st and 2nd Wellington Battalion match was a fast and attractive display of Rugger, the 1st winning well and deservingly on the play, 11—0. 2nd Auckland beat 1st Auckland easily by 13—0 (too superior all round), and then 1st Wellington beat 2nd Auckland, after a hard even game, by 8—0. This good and bright footy pleased the men immensely.

On a lesser scale we played and beat the 1st Field Ambulance after a hard even game which see-sawed a lot, 6—3; drew 1st West Coast 3 all in a game our men took too easily, and were getting well beaten at the end for their laziness; and then we beat a good Ruahine Company side by 9—0 in a bright, open game, where our men seemed to always be a shade the better on the play. In these matches Schofield (Wellington), J. P. Ryan (West

Coast), Yardley (Auckland), and Delaney (Auckland) showed great form. Billy Wilson (Wellington and West Coast) was great in the battalion games, but is always too well watched by his opponents; and, of our boys, McQueen and E. McCall were out on their own. It is wonderful, what with the hardness of trench life, how well and fast the men can play.

BACK TO THE LINE.

Then, on a sudden, news came through to be up and doing, toeing the ball along against the Hun in the game of war, where scrum and open movement, with life and liberty as the goal, are the attractions, and the spectators sit not on the bleachers. Leaving somewhere near Bapaume in the dark of an early morning, and travelling in motor transport (shades of past route marches!), we came to Bertincourt early in the day, and waited there until 5 p.m. in the evening. Got away on the march and wound round through ruined Metz and past Havrincourt Wood, where a little time before the Dinks had roughed Karl and Ludwig to some tune; then on up the long road just past the newly-acquired Trescourt, the way being congested with limbers and transport, and the noise and din being terrific. One officer's cart with chairs and tables was having a rough passage, but eventually got through and wended its way God knows whither, perhaps to Berlin. The night was made awful by bombing planes going to and fro (ours and Jerry's), and the searchlights gave a display, making the night weird in the extreme. After a while, with our ammunition ready and carriers for the same, we made our way to an assembly in newly-gained trenches, where Diggers were packed on the sardine principle. It was intensely cold, though gloriously fine (thank heaven), as compared with Passchendaele, almost the same time last year. A further wait, and we crossed the railway line the Tommies had cut in their small but necessary advance that day. Seeing the hard position they had won—through Karl's great switch just after our push—we gave them the glad hand for their one day's work.

We were set out in open order—both 1st and 2nd Brigades—on the rising ground just over the railway running between Cambrai and St. Quentin. About 5 a.m., in intense darkness, came the jump-off for an objective calculated to make Heiney turn bald did he but know the Pig Islanders were near and about to storm that quarter, the last of his chosen and hard-thought-out lines of defence. At the start we, with our gun, were behind 2nd Taranaki, but we were following a general mixture of N.Z.'s before we finished a few hours later. Belts of wire and hidden positions were responsible, but with all the mix the digger fighters kept on going in their happy-go-lucky way. There is not the slightest doubt that in this advance the officers and diggers combined, put up their most magnificent performance of the war. Auckland, racing along, collared a large number of guns, including a battery of 5.9's. They had to fight well for their booty, and retained same. Next day they fought their way over the Canal, through a hot village corner, and in general played havoc with Fritz in this game of movement.

I was going to write something about the "Stokes," but the infantry had things all their own way. The gun and team who were with West Coast had a hard time in a welter of machine-gun work for a couple of days, and later in the village approaching and verging on the only canal crossing. In our new advance the other day we saw evidence of Fritz's determination to let no one cross there. On our way we lost our carriers through wire and wounds, and later on (our second day) must have astonished Hun machine-gunners by roaming around in the early morning in front of the canal looking for West Coast. A machine-gun at length opened on us, and convinced us that just a little track over the ridge was a good spot. After that convinced us that just a little back over machine-gun emplacement he had commenced to build, though he had not quite completed the underground work. In the early advance on the first day an officer of ours chased a Fritz artilleryman round a ruined building into the arms of some astonished diggers, who grabbed the wily one and promptly executed upon the whizzbangy one the honoured order of rat-

ting. Looking across from a good position we had chosen for breakfasting, we beheld twelve Boches come across to surrender to a pair of diggers coming down the hill. The shovel-pushers kept their rifles ready, but Heiny wanted to finish war all right, and so, these two worthies rattled the prey and got beaucoup souvenirs. We missed by a whisker a possie which had had as luxuries a lot of cherry brandy and cigars, and we have not quite recovered from the disappointment. This strong point fell with much rejoicing to some signallers.

We were out for a short rest with the Dinks and a part of the 2nd Brigade, and, on the news of their evacuating a big strip of country, we moved on again after Hindenburg's men. The Dinks had given him "stouch" with a vengeance round the new country. We saw evidences of this in our journeying through some fine, almost unshelled, villages in a new sweet land which yielded up pumpkins and other vegetables in profusion. After the old world of the trenches and the novelty of being in practically virgin country, undisturbed by the contraptions of the war god, it is hardly a matter for wonder that the boys are so happy and feel a different set of men.

Further up and over a new river, the enemy resisted the advance, but the Maori-landers crossed the obstacle and they were relieved, and so ended the umpteenth stunt of the N.Z. Division, with a lot to spare over their ancient, sauerkraut-eating, slave-driving opponent. I saw for the first time people released from the clutches of the beast, coming into the safety of our lines, pleased beyond measure. We came back to rest in a town where Heiney used to quarter his troops for resting. No wonder stationary trench warfare used to suit the blighter when he had homes like this to come back to.

Oh, Bos'un lost the dorg, as Fritz must have found a mademoiselle and gone for a honeymoon, and the great Bos, who swung it well in Codford for a twelve-month, is back at the front again. Some of ours who left for the Tank Corps stunt came a g—t, and returned to the soldiers again.

A BRIEF HISTORY.

Our losses, thank goodness, have been light. We lost in the famous Mailly-Maillet stunt the good old skipper, who had guided and led the Battery from its formation at Armentieres in 1916. Then, Stokes was a mystic thing, and no end of curiosity was manifested about it. Captain Morgan gathered round him some great talent in N.C.O.s; and that Sergeant's Hunter, Bill Keywood, Nat Robinson, Mc-Caw, and Bill Brierley, have recently gained their commissions is a thing in our records we feel proud of. All these were Gallipoli and Egyptian men from our force.

You know how the unit distinguished itself at Fiers, when two guns retrieved for the Black Waten a critical situation, threatening to hold up the peerless Jocks. Then in Sailly and Fleurbaix in November-January, 1916-17, came the period of slamming old Fritz's line to pieces, rendering sniping a hazardous occupation for Fritz. Off to Le Bizet, where we gave an account of ourselves in trench work which the Hun was not slow to forget, then along to Hill 63 and Ploegsteert, where more important work was carried out, and Fritz's bombing always answered. Then we moved to Neuve Eglise, where we had a torrid trench-mortar war with the enemy, and, along with the 18-pounders, broke up an early morning raid on the 1st Auckland. During a rest which followed we specially rehearsed for Messines, in which action the guns were carried forward just behind infantry platoons, the infantry lending us special carrying parties, with six shells (about 75lbs) in sandbags swung over the shoulder. Thus, when the infantry had reached their objectives and dug in, plenty of bombs were available in case of counter-attack; a plan which has been followed with small variations ever since. Much more trench warfare again round Warneton was followed by the La Basse Ville stunt, in the awful mud. Had a rest, and then back for a short while until relieved. We moved into Watterdal, Belgian back area, for more rehearsals for pill-box attacks, as Passchendaele was pending. More good work was done at Passchendaele, where we lost, amongst others, a great N.C.O. in Corporal Jeffries, who was one of Skipper Morgan's most trusty N.C.O.s and an M.M. We had severe losses at Messines and Passchendaele, and the stunts were hard and the demands on everyone strenuous. At the Sugar Refinery affair at Colincamps, Corporal Stewart gained the D.C.M., Lieut-Col. Steve Allen requesting this for a fine shoot, in which he greatly helped the infantry, who were held up.

"Billy Popgun."

The Waimatuku River Board has decided to make application for the £8000 loan approved of by the ratepayers.

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