

## **HAROLD SNAPE:**

### **ROUGH DIARY NOTES for 15 to 19 JULY 1916 (the lead up to the BATTLE OF FROMELLES)**

transcribed from a very worn, closely written, hand-printed double-sided Foolscap sheet.

**Mon. 15<sup>th</sup> July 1916 (Day No 408, days out from Port Phillip, Day 102, days in Artillery).**

Up at 6.30 a.m. to load limbers with Ammunition. The D.A.C. (Divisional Ammunition Column) brought it in G.S. wagons. Parade after dinner with Gas and Shrapnel helmets. Orders read out about the amount of kit we are allowed to carry. Unless I can stow a few things in the Signaller's pannier, or some such place, I will have to dump a lot of gear especially as Joel Hobs has given me a fairly decent tunic. It is rather rough on us (Spooks) only being allowed to take such gear as will go on the horse. Rumour has it that we are going into Action almost immediately. I got the "good oil" shortly after dinner when the O.C. got me to do a little mapping job for him. He told me that a stunt was coming off near FROMELLES and that batteries of every description from 18 pounders to 12 pdrs would be there cutting wire, etc.

After tea I saddled up my steed with director, plane table, etc. When ready, he looked like a camel..... and I was wondering how I'd manage as I'd never ridden the horse before. Anyhow, the O.C., a Galloper and I moved off about 7 p.m. and all went well, but when we moved, at no more than a walk, I expected (it all) to fall to pieces the way the gear was flapping about.

We rode through SAILLY (which later became our forward wagon line) and stopped at a farmhouse about 2 miles further on. The Galloper then took the horses back & the O.C. and I went across to our position which was in the open and in front of a hedge. We marked the positions for the guns and the O.C. then scouted round to have a look at the country. There were a few stray bullets kicking about so I sat in a shell-hole (which we afterwards made into a telephone dugout) and awaited his return. About ¾ hr later he blew onto the scene with the following remarks, "Standby with your Gas helmet. The Tommies have been sending over some gas but the wind seems to be blowing it back over our own trenches. The road is thronged with transports and wounded men and an officer has just galloped down the road to warn everyone. We will never be able to bring the guns up. You can see the Gas just there." Here, he pointed to what I reckoned, and still think, was a slight mist (the night was inclined to be foggy) about ½ ml away. "It is a hell of a mess up. The whole thing is simply bloody."

Needless to say, the above was just a bit of talk, and the whole battery arrived on the scene about 9.30 p.m. There were a few shells passing over and the Drivers didn't waste any time getting out of the road. They just left the Guns and Amm. Slung the gunners' gear off the

wagons and "imshied" (cleared off). The O.C. sent me to look for the Cook's cart & I bought it round and had all the gear put in some old Gun-pits that were in good order about 100 yds from our position. The "spooks" then gave a hand to put the Guns in position and dug a small funk-hole for the Amm alongside each Gun. We are not far from old position and have same O.P.

**Sun. 16<sup>th</sup> July 1916. (409 – 103)**

There was a bit of work, but there was hardly room for the Gunners to work. The Spooks got out of the road. I left at 2.30 a.m. and lay down alongside some others under an apple tree. I got up again about 5 a.m. but as the Gunners were just knocking off I turned in again until the O.C. hauled me out with him to assist in laying out lines of fire. Our part of the stunt is to cut wire entanglements, etc. (4" bursts almost on gauze) and we opened at 10 a.m. firing on and off til 1.30 a.m. Expending 199 rounds. The spooks had to work all day converting the shell-hole I spoke of into a Telephone-pit.

Fritz was sending some big shells over into a field near us. (It is marvellous how far these pieces will fly). There were about 65 spooks working with picks and shovels in a space you could hardly swing a cat round in with the result that one of them chipped a bit out of T.S.' hand with his pick. T. bluffed the Bty that he had been hit by a piece of shrapnel.

Finished the telephone pit and have now started on a big Amm. dump which will require all - or a lot of sandbags. A large quantity of Amm. came and had to be carried about ¼ ml because they wouldn't bring the wagons of the road. I was with the party building Amm. dump & the remainder came and we worked all night nearly. Guns in action nearly all day. A Tommy Officer was killed not far from our battery. The Gunners are always chipping the Drivers about having cold feet etc. and they make some of them get quite nervous, telling them to mind the stray bullets and that Fritz is always shelling, or playing a Machine Gun on the very corner they are standing near. You don't need to tell them when the wagons are empty & they almost gallop away. We have ..... (indistinct text re phone line(?)) ..... Group Hqrs & thus get fresh. We also have a line to O.P.

**Mon. 17<sup>th</sup> July 1916. (410 – 104).**

More work today. We have to fix up a couple of shelters for the officers (X'n Commanders). It is an easy job all the same and the Officers are not bad chaps (Hock & Ho (?). The gongs etc. went for a Gas alert this morning but nothing came of it. From what we can hear about the coming stunt it is supposed to be 1 round per gun per minute from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and then we lift our fire & the Inf. hop over.

Latest news. Stunt put off for 24 hrs as we are unable to get Amm. in time. It is good in one way as the Gunners are very tired but

FRITZ.....  
..... (text blurred).....

.....?..... (Name indistinct, but NOT Bob Snape whose diary indicates that he was elsewhere at the time) always worrying me to go with him to the trenches so to satisfy him I went down to the O.P. and back this afternoon. About 1,000 yds were brought up tonight and we did not finish work till after midnight. Turned in 12.30 a.m. Just after, we had 3 or 4 gas alerts within 15 mins and we were messing about with helmets on for some time. The guns burst out in 6 or 7 salvos to disperse any gas that might be about.

**Tues 18<sup>th</sup> July 1916. (411 – 105).**

Up at 8 a.m. Made a small commutator. I seem to have a roving commission here. Just after dinner, I was No. 5 on No. 1 Gun (setting fuzes). It is a very fine clear day and Fritz has a couple of planes and balloons up. They are the first we have seen for some days as the weather has been dull and drizzly and the RFC has promised to keep Fritz out of it until after the stunt. Needless to say we had to keep very still for some time. Col. King visited The battery today and ordered us to build gun emplacements which will mean doing the whole job in one night. Tea about 8 p.m. owing to Fritz and his aircraft. We started work on the gun-pits immediately after tea. It was a beautiful clear moonlight night for which we were very thankful as we worked all night filling sandbags, cutting boughs of trees for screens, cover, etc. and painting sandbags green where they were not covered by leaves. By the way, Bom. B\*\*\*\*\*n fell in for a good deal of chaffing for we discovered that he had painted his pit blue so that he had to go over it again with what was left of the green paint

**Wed. 19<sup>th</sup> July 1916. 412 – 106.**

Finished pits and turned in about 4a.m. as it was too light to bring up more Amm. then. Up again at 10 a.m. Had porridge and bacon for b'fast. I then took a turn as No 4 on No 1 Gun (loading gun). I hadn't been at it long when I was sent to O.P. to give Bom. Walker and McMahon a change on the phone while the stunt is on. It is just into my hands. Came straight back to Bty with a despatch and returned with our rations. The three of us took turns on the phone. Two being on the phone & one watching the stunt. There is a long stream of Infantry continually going into the TRENCHES.

The Bombardment started at 1 p.m. It was a grand sight and the heaviest I have seen. The whole of the country at the vicinity of the trenches was covered with the smoke of bursting shells. Our guns were firing from everywhere & you couldn't hear any of the rifle fire for the ceaseless thunder. Now & then Machine gun bullets would whizz over the O.P. upon which we promptly ducked behind the canvas which was hanging over the holes in the walls. (A person instinctively ducks behind anything). Saw a few Inf. go over about 4 p.m. It was altogether different from what I expected.