

DIARY OF PRIVATE YEOMAN

Private Wilfred Charles Yeoman served in the 201st Machine Gun Company of the 46th Battalion NRRF - a relief force designated to secure withdrawal of the Allied occupation forces from North Russia. He took part in ferocious fighting in summer of 1919, which preceded the departure of the interventionists. His diary is written by a simple Australian soldier unaware of big politics. Reading them one can understand once again, the Allied intervention was absolutely useless and the collapse of the counter-revolutionary efforts in the North of Russia was only a matter of time...

Saturday, July 19th. Go so far by train, then trolley our guns up for ½ a mile then carry them about ½ a mile further. Get the 4 guns set and put a 2 belt each gun barrage on the Bolshie front line. He returns about a dozen shots nearly hitting Jackson with one of the shots. Each gun fires another belt on his back area, then pack up and return to camp at 7-30. Have tea, clean up our guns and fill belts. Go on guard at 11 p.m. and go off at 1-30 a.m.

Monday, July 21st. Expect Ruskeys to rise tonight so have all our guns in readiness and everything in marching order. Word comes - a party of Russians killed their officers in a village 14 miles west of our camp.

Tuesday July 22nd. Awakened out of a sound sleep at 5-30 a.m. by a crackle of rifle and bullets whizzing through our camp. Get dressed and grab rifle and bandoleer and get outside of tent to see what's doing. At first I think of the Russians on the revolt but find that the direction of fire is coming from the wood on other side of railway - the Ruskeys have their MG going in full swing and the French do some fine shooting. The shrap bursting just below the tops of the trees. After about 25 minutes the Bolshies give it best. Our team go by armoured train on patrol towards the front line but only get to 449 - 6 versts and train stops owing to the B[olsheviks] blowing up the line in two places. Hear Bolshie has had a go at 448 but doesn't do much damage. Return to camp by 8-30 and at 10-30 a.m. a party of us go up by train to do a patrol. At 449 train passes over where the rail is broken and we nearly come grief walk to 448 which is being shelled by Bolshies, trying to knock out our artillery but their shooting very bad - hear from here that 3 block houses have been taken by the B. and when leaving there our artillery had commenced to shell them. Return to our train which brought up everything to mend the line. An armoured train comes on the scene and in a hurry to go forward so we all turn to and take a couple of rails from the rear and fix up where they are broken.

Return to camp by scooter and on arrival at station see three Bols who have given themselves up. Gun teams busy all day making MG possies. Object of attack seems to be that the Bolshies and the front line Ruskeys had made it up to join and clean up all the English in reach of them. Some of the ring leaders being shot for being disloyal the day previous and front line relieved by fresh troops last night other wise things wouldn't have gone too well for us. Our casualties only amount to one Ruskey. NZ flag in front of our tent gets 3 bullet holes through and the Aussie flag manages to get one. After tea go to pictures.

Thursday, July 24th. Our gun team and N1 get called out at 12-15 a.m. and go on the scooter to 448 to see if the line is clean. Just reach 448 and stop about ½ a minute in which time Bolshie lands half a dozen shells close to the scooter. We then return at full speed and turn in and just get nearly settled and get called out again and on the scooter. Get as far as 450 and find the telephone wires cut and two rails blown up. The Ruskeys set to work and start mending the wires and we act as covering party. James and I are told off to join the front party. Proceed about 100 yards and see the front party are engaged with the Bolshies. We rush up but on arrival the B. (about a dozen) after firing a Lewis and few rifle shots disappear. We then keep going till we reach

448. We hear thee that the Bolshies had attacked in strong force all the front line and have a go at 448 but are repulsed.

Friday, July 25th. Patrol gets up at 4 a.m. Nine of our section, about 90 of Fusiliers go out to look for Bolshies. They streak off about 3 or 4 miles to the left of 450 and strike the Bolshies about 350 strong in their camp. They have a good go in killing 70 Bolshies, capturing a RE dump and 5 machine guns. Our casualties 5 wounded.

Do nothing all morning and sleep all afternoon. Hear result of the Ruskie battalion that revolted. The first train bolted from the front line thinking they are going right through to Archangel are in great spirits and laughing and singing most of the way. Our right section get into position and train their guns on to the train as she pulls up at Obozerska where a Russian Colonel tells them the situation, orders them to leave the train without their arms and line up in two ranks. The Colonel demands the names of those responsible for the rising but not a word spoken, so he tells off every tenth man (making a total of 18) who are marched off under a strong guard of Poles. The 2nd train load who take longer than the others to decide are treated the same way and all of them shot at 5 next morning each one digging his own grave. One of the O[fficers] gets a photo of the ex[ecution].

Sunday, July 27th. Up at 8 oc. At 9-30 a.m. 8 Ruskies (revolters) including two sergeants get shot on the edge of the wood. Our chaps escort some B. over to dig their graves. The diggers got the wind up thinking they are digging their own graves. After dinner have a sleep for a couple of hours and after tea I and Jacks go down to the rifle range and do a bit of shooting. Go to pictures at 8 oc.

Wednesday, July 30th. Up 7-30 and all in 9-30 with gas helmets and go with the 46th details by train down to 478 post. And get full details of the new gas used by us and have a test through it with our helmets. This gas was ready just a little to be used against Fritz. It's very powerful and even our present masks are not proof against it. It renders one perfectly helpless and making one go quite silly for the time being. Also causes constant coughing for 3 days. Return to camp in time for dinner, read all afternoon.

Tuesday, August 19th. Up about 8-30. All the officers' with 7 or 8 of our section do patrols. Clean the Vickers and after dinner go down to the aerodrome to see sport held by the Russians. Cossacks do some good trick riding. Village folk turn up rigged out in their Sunday best wearing the gaudiest of imaginable. After tea go down to the range and shoot, and win 10 roubles.

Monday, August 25th. Up at 7. After breakfast pack up everything and clean up. Leave Obozerskaya (474) at 10 oc and reach 455 at 11-30. Stop half an hour and then proceed to 448, where we unload all our stuff and billet in the large stockade blockhouse with Tommies and Ruskies... Rheumatics very bad in knee this last week.

Generals Ironside and Rawlinson visit 448 and the surrounding blockhouses. Turn up about 9. At Obozerskaya before leaving. General ? interviews [Harcourt](#)'s force and tells us we are going to attack Bolo and take his guns at 441 in conjunction with the Ruskies...

Wednesday, 27th August. All the guns around the camp including armoured train and [Kolchaks](#) going at full pressure from 3 to 8 a.m. Bolshie plane comes over booking all day. 8th Batt MGrS bring us 15 horses and our section looks after them. A lot of Russian troops from the Dvina arrive, also French. All blankets and kits taken back to Obozerskaya so have to sleep with waterproof only tonight.

Thursday, 28th August. Up 6-30. At 2 o'clock we march from 448 and go east along a bridle track for 2 hours, then south then east and south again. Finish marching about 9 p.m. and camp alongside the slashing. Do a perish all night only having a waterproof and ground very swampy. Have 15 horses carrying our gear.

Friday, August 29th. Up 2 oc a.m. and start at 3 along the slashing. Open up at 5-30 and soon have the position taken. About 40 prisoners taken (7 wounded), 4 killed. We are at present 3 versts behind his line. Ruskies take his front line. We capture 4 machine guns and a trench on a siding which runs to center of camp. Newbold takes the gun position we were supposed to take and we take his. About nine dugouts, also a pom pom. Later on Bennet gets about 30 Bolo prisoners o to the pom pom and ammo wagon and puts into action against Bolos armoured train which gets cut off about 1 verst up from here. Armoured train mounted with 6 guns and plenty of machine guns. Ruskies have a couple of goes at it but get beaten off. During the day well over a hundred prisoners come into camp from different parts of the wood. From the front line and all other 700 hundred prisoners taken. Employ Bolos carrying wounded and doing fatigues.

Our section ... does rear guard and as soon as we rush the possie I'm put on charge of the prisoners and wounded. After 2 hours of that the doctor comes into camp and tells us that while back were we camped for the night a number of Bolos attacked them. Sgt Logg kills one and the Dr captures 3 with his revolver. They bring 7 prisoners with them. Sgt Oliver, Baverstock, Smith, Allison and I get told off to go and round up the Bolos but after 2 hours return without striking any.

Go over to headquarters for water and on return take one of the pack horses back for a drink. Bolo shelling all along the rail way line. I near run into a big gazump with the pony getting back to camp. Major may gets a bullet through each thigh, [Sgt Pearce](#) gets killed. Do guard from 1 to 2 a.m.

Sunday, August 31st. Do guard from 7 to 8. At 11-30 our section leaves camp and march down to 442 then camp in Bolos old front line. Kolchak has about half a dozen 6 inch guns ready to open up as we pass as Ruskies are going to storm Emtsa. Our section get to work. I make a bivvy out of sawn timber from the railway line. After tea we take a walk for about a mile along the trenches. Position a very strong one being a continuous series of log dugouts, breastworks and specially made blockhouses for M. Guns. The whole position well defended by barbwire. Find three machine guns. Hear from Bolo prisoners that when the attack was made all the officers cleared off and the whole camp (400) cleared off into the woods. Climbed observant tower and in the distance can see Emtsa burning. O on guard with Baverstock from 12 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Monday Sept. 1st. Up 7-30. Bennet and Oliver have a bit have a bit of a scrap and both put under arrest. Kiwi and McBabe go to have a look at Emtsa. Place all in ruins. We al move camp. About 200 yards further along we take up our position in a large blockhouse. Get to work and clean it out. In a very dirty condition so decide to sleep in a bushwood bivvy nearby. Heavy rain comes on and we get swamped out so change our minds and sleep in blockhouse. Word comes that two battalions of Bolos are marching towards this way so get our old Bolo gun fixed up and everything ready. Do guard from 9 p.m. to 11. Very dark, but nothing doing.

Thursday, September 4th. Do guard from 1 a.m. to 3 a.m. Just come off guard and hear shots fired by some crowd nearby with the wind up. Hear that crowd o Bolos that were seen attacked Bolsh. Ozerky but were beaten off...Drizzly rain all morning... Bolo Batt commander taken prisoner and taken with diary in his possession showing that he ordered 4 Ruskie and 2 English prisoners to be shot. He is led out by 4 Ruskie officers at 448 and finished off with their revolvers...

Tuesday, Sept 9th. Up 6-30. After breakfast take all our stuff including Bolos M.G. and at 1-20 leave 447 for Obozerskaya. Reach Obozerskaya at 3. Play cards all evening.

The material was received from the Australian War Memorial