

On the 4th of November 1918, Australians took part in one of the last actions of the War, and Australian soldiers were killed, wounded and won decorations during the action. Because the Australian units involved were allocated to British forces, the action gets scant attention in Australian Official histories.

SECRET

1st Divisional Engineers Battle Instructions
5th Series ----- No. 1

1. (a) On a date Z. which has been communicated to all concerned the 1st Div. is forcing the passage of the SAMBRE – OISE Canal between Petit – Cambresis and Catillon, Zero hour being in the early morning.
(b) The attack is to be carried out by 2nd Inf. Bde on right & 1st Inf. Bde on the left; the 3rd Inf Bde is carrying out a subsidiary and simultaneous operation to capture CATILLON and to form a Bridge Head there.
(c) Map issued herewith shows objectives, inter-divisional boundaries, and inter-brigade on 1st Div front.
(d) 46th Div is in Corps reserve and its head is to be on the line of the MAZINGHEIN – BAZUEL Road by zero hour on Z day.
Its role is to move by bounds as the 1st Div progresses with a view to relieving the 1st Div either on the red objective or after any immediate exploitation which may be ordered during the operations, had been completed.
2. (a) 2nd Inf. Bde group includes 2nd Inf. Bde and 409th Field Coy R.E.
(b) 1st Inf. Bde group includes 1st Inf. Bde and 23rd Field Co, R.E.
(c) 3rd Inf. Bde group includes 3rd Inf. Bde and one section 26th Fd Coy. R.E.
(d) Under C.R.E.
26th Fd Coy R.E. (less one section)
6th Welsh Reg. (Pnrs)
One section 1st Aust. Tunn. Coy. A.E.
(e) D.E. H.Q. – VAUX – ANDIGNY
Adv. Div. Report Centre – BELREVUE x.13A. to which messages to C.R.E. will be sent after zero plus 2 hours on Z day.
3. (a) The assembly of 23rd and 409th Field Coys and the section 26th Field Coy attached 3rd Inf Bde, will take place under instructions issued by B.C.s concerned.
(b) 26th Field Coy R.E. (less 1 section) will assemble in the neighbourhood of W.24, to be in position by zero plus one hour on Z day.
(c) The pontoon equipment vehicles, fully loaded of all Field Coys will be brigade 1 and will come under the orders of O.C. 26th Field Coy; they will assemble at the same place and time as that Coy.
(d) 6th Welsh (Pnrs) will be ready to begin work from zero plus one hour on Z day.
(e) Section 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy, A.E. will assemble X.5.d.7.3. They will not reach assembly position before 03.00 nor later than 06.00 on Z day.
(f) Strictest attention to march discipline and correct distances will be enforced in all assembly movements.
4. (a) The details of bridging operations in connection with the attack are contained in the project already issued by C.R.E. 1st Div.
(b) Section of 26th Field Coy R.E. attached 3rd Inf Bde will be responsible for the construction of Infantry foot bridges at Catillon. The construction of transport bridges at this place is being undertaken by IX Corps.

FORCING THE CANAL de la SAMBRE de OISE
4th November 1918

1st November

On the 1st November, 1918, No. 4 Section of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company (1ATC), Commanded by Captain Oliver Woodward, was advised that they would be attached to the Royal Engineers of 1st Division, British Expeditionary Force, in the task of Bridging the Canal de la Sambre de Oise, on or about the 4th November.

The Bridging was to be carried out at Lock No. 1, situated just ahead of the Village of Rejet de Beaulieu. The 409th Field Company, Royal Engineers, were allotted the task of constructing light bridges, to permit the Infantry to cross, and then follow on the Bridges for light transport, while No. 4 Section was entrusted with the task of building a bridge capable of carrying Tanks.

On that fine and warm November 1st, a warning order was also received by the 10th Australian Field Artillery Brigade (10FAB) stating that they were to go into the line – battery positions were therefore chosen in L22c&d with a HQ at Pommereuil L27.d.0.9 and nine wagon loads of ammunition per battery were dumped at the positions.

The 11th Australian Field Artillery Brigade (11FAB), having received their warning order for the same action, considered the day fine and cold, with fair visibility, when their C.O. and all Battery Commanders reconnoitred new Battery positions in L28 in view of the approaching storming of the Oise-Sambre Canal. Enemy artillery has been fairly active throughout the day and mostly scattered. Battery areas coming in for a good deal of attention.

From 5pm to 7pm all Batterys carried out harassing fire on main roads and approaches and areas R12a and M15a&c, aeroplanes having reported much movement in these areas during the day. Throughout the night the usual harassing of roads, points of activity, machine gun positions and farms was carried out. Brigade Headquarters came in for some attention during the night. Capt. Stanhope was posted to this Brigade as Vet(?) Officer to replace Major C.J. McKenna who had been evacuated wounded.

11FAB War Diary records:

Ammo received	400A, 500Ax,	100AS	528Bx
Ammo expended	126A, 118Ax,	6Ax (106)	100Bx

The Tunnellers received the news of their task with mixed feelings, yet were very pleased that they were to be attached to a Division of the British Army which had such a glorious record as had the 1st Division. There was no mistaking the fact that they were in for a 'sticky' time. Normally this would have been accepted as a matter of course, but it must be remembered that conditions at this time were not normal. There were all kinds of rumours regarding an Armistice, and such might happen at any time. Here they were faced with the hazardous task of Bridging in what appeared certain would be the last battle of the War.

2nd November

32nd Division Artillery issued Instruction No. 12 on 2 November 1918:

TENTH AUSTRALIAN ARTILLERY BRIGADE

Headquarters
2nd November 1918

SECRET

32nd Div. Arty. Instructions No. 12

1. In the forthcoming operation the IX Corps will force the passage of the SAMBRE-OISE Canal, connecting on the right with the 1st French Army (XV Corps) and on the left with the XIII Corps (25th Division).
The first objective of the 25th Division is Landrecies, where their right flank will rest at O.23 Central.
2. The Northern Corps Boundary is Landrecies - - Harbaix all inclusive
The Southern Corps Boundary is Bergues - - Beaufort all inclusive
The First Division will attack on the right.
The 32nd Division will attack on the left

Inter-Divisional Boundary, main road Catillon all inclusive to 32nd Division
3. The 14th Infantry Brigade will attack on the right.
The 26th Infantry Brigade will attack on the left.

Inter-Brigade Boundary

27th Infantry Brigade will be prepared to continue the advance on Zero plus 1 day.
4. Crossings of the Canal will be effected by the 14th Infantry Brigade, between and the Southern outskirts of ORS, by the 95th Infantry Brigade between (*grid ref?*) and the bend in the Canal at G.26.c.6.9.

Should marshy ground West of the Canal on the 14th Infantry Brigade front make passage impracticable, the 14th brigade will cross at ORS and North of it.
5. 1st Objective. "Yellow Line" Road from M.16.a.0.4 to R.6.c.2.0. to O.23 central.
2nd Objective. "Dotted Blue Line" along road to (*grid ref?*) central
The 1st Division "Dotted Blue Line" runs from (*grid ref?*) central along the road to (*grid ref?*)
3rd Objective. "Blue Line" Both Divisions swing forward their inward flanks and join up at(*grid ref?*)
4th Objective. "Red Line" Road Landrecies and continued thence by First Division to(*grid ref?*) central.

3rd and 4th Objectives will be taken without Creeping Barrage.
6. The opening line of the Field Artillery barrage which will fall at Zero hour will be the Eastern Bank of the Canal, where it will stand for five minutes; then lift 300yds and stand for 30 minutes; thence to the Yellow Line the Barrage will move Westwards at the rate of 100yds in 5 minutes. On reaching a line 300yds W. of the Yellow Line it will stand for 15 minutes. It will then re-open on a line (*grid ref?*) and move Westward at the rate of 100yds in 5 minutes till reaching a line 300yds E. of the dotted Blue Line where it will stand for 15 minutes, East of this Line Field Artillery action supporting the attack to the Blue Line will be arranged direct between Infantry Brigadiers concerned and their affiliated Artillery Group Commander.

Barrage Table will be issued tomorrow.

Flank Barrages

During the advance to the dotted Blue Line the 161st Brigade R.F.A., will put down a Protective Barrage on the Area between the 14th and 96th Infantry Brigades.

O.C. Left Group will arrange Protective Fire on the Left Flank, in conjunction with 96th Infantry Brigade.

IX Corps H.A., will form a Protective Barrage on the Right Flank between RUEVERT and CATTILLON.
7. ACKNOWLEDGE.

Lieut. & Adjutant
For C.O. 10th Aust. F.A. Brigade.

The day was dull and wet with occasional showers and low visibility. 10FAB Headquarters and Batteries moved into action and were located at L27.d.0.9 and L22.c respectively. 11FAB were at Q24.a.27. The weather favoured preparations for the forthcoming attack and the carting of ammunition had been able to be proceeded with throughout the day to the new Battery positions. Hostile artillery had been less active during the day and between 6pm and 8pm that night all Batteries carried out harassing fire on roads and approaches and areas R12a and M9b&d. 200Rounds. Throughout the night bursts of fire were put down at irregular intervals on roads and trenches in M18a and M1d; on Machine Guns in M13d and M14c and on hostile batteries in M8d.

Lieut. C. J. Peech of 41st Battery was slightly wounded but remained on duty. 30 reinforcements from 4th D.A.C. were transferred to the 11th Brigade and were equally distributed amongst the Batteries. Most of these were new men but, according to the diarist "looked very promising and of good physique".

11 FAB recorded:

Ammo received	608A, 228Ax, 1104Bx
Ammo expended	126A, 124Ax, 100Bx

On the afternoon of 2nd November, Woodward reported to Colonel C.E. Sankey, Chief of Royal Engineers, and with his staff and Major G.C.E. Findlay, Commanding Officer of 409th Field Company, R.E. discussed the details of the Bridging operations in connection with the forcing of the Canal on the morning of the 4th November. The Conference did not finish until 6 p.m. and then in heavy rain Woodward left with Colonel Sankey to visit the Tank Corps Depot at St. Benin, in order to check up dimensions of the Tanks. Sankey and Woodward then went on to the Corps Dump at Bohain to insure that the Bridging material was available. Woodward got back to Camp at 10.30 p.m., the heavy rain not assisting him to feel particularly cheerful.

It will be of interest to briefly outline the design of the Bridge. Due to the wonderful ordnance plants of the French Army, the Section was able to obtain the fullest particulars of the No. 1 Lock. It was 120 feet long and 17 feet wide, formed of concrete, with a masonry coping stone about 12 inches deep. Thus, if the coping stones were removed there would be good shore abutments for the Bridge.

In design the Bridge was very simple. It consisted of two sets of 10 inch x 6 inch rolled steel joists, and in each set there were six joists placed side by side. Thus, each set of joists in effect gave a solid girder 3 feet wide and 10 inches deep. The two sets were placed at 6 foot 6 inch centres, and on these would come the caterpillar treads of the Tanks. On top of these girders a timber decking was placed, the decking board being 9 inches wide, 3 inches deep, and 10 feet long. On the bottom of these decking boards cleats were fitted, so that a recess was made into which fitted the two sets of joists. A guide-rail was placed longitudinally on the decking, one on each side. Thus, with the coping stones removed, the decking of the Bridge would be approximately level with the ground from the Lock.

The Lock at which the crossing was to be effected lay to the left of the Rejet de Beaulieu-L'Emertage Road. The overhead Bridge by which this Road crossed the Canal had been destroyed, so in order to reach the Lock it was necessary to turn off sharply to the left from the Rejet de Beaulieu Road and follow the Tow Path for about 50 yards, until the Lock was reached. Similarly, after crossing the Lock it was necessary to follow the Tow Path until the road to L'Emertage was reached. This was a disadvantage as it meant a hair-pin bend. To the right of the original overhead Bridge the position was difficult, as on each side of the Canal and separated from it by the Tow Path were two Reservoirs, used to adjust the water level in the Canal System.

On the German side of the Lock, and immediately facing it, were three buildings, that on the right facing it being the Boilerhouse, the middle one the Pump Room, and the other the Lock-keeper's residence. To the left of that section of the Rejet de Beaulieu Road nearest the Canal, the ground was low-lying and comprised an orchard and old field.

The battle instructions issued to Woodward included:--

“The 2nd Infantry Brigade attack will be carried out by the 2nd Battalion Kings Royal Rifles on the right and the 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment on the left.

The operations will be covered by Artillery, Machine Gun and Stokes Mortar Barrage, which will open the line of Canal at Zero. The Artillery Barrage will stand on this line for 3 minutes, to allow the storming parties with Bridging material to get close up to the Lock, after which it will lift 100 yards off the Lock but continue to fall within safety on the Eastern bank of the Canal in order to cover Bridging Operations. It will remain on this line for a further 3 minutes.

The advance of the Bridge Crews to the Lock will also be covered by a Covering Party of 2nd Royal Sussex.

Four 18 pounders have been held off to deal by direct fire, at Zero hour, with the Houses on the Lock.”

Woodward was advised by the C.O. 1st Aust Tunnelling Company that a Box-car and 5 carpenters would be available to him at 07.00 on 3 November, and that 3 lorries and 5 G.S. wagons would be available to move the special party to La Vallee Multare at 12.00 that day. 3 G.S. wagons would also be available and would be dispatched with a guide to La Vallee Multare at 07.30 to report to O.C. 23rd Company R.E., 200yds over the Railway Line on right (W.19.b.8.0).

The O.C. of No. 1 Section, 1st Aust Tunnelling Coy., was informed to detail Lieutenant Thomson and 25 Other Ranks to report to Captain Woodward at 12.00 on the 3rd November for work on the canal bridge. They were to carry picks and shovels for digging-in. They were to obtain rations to midnight 5 November from the R.Q.M.S.

He was also instructed to ‘double deck’ all bridges over La Salle River in accordance with the C.R.E.s advice.

3rd November

Woodward left Camp at 7 a.m. on 3rd November and took all available carpenters to La Vallee Multare, the Headquarters of the 409th Field Company. These carpenters were to prepare the Bridge Decking. After seeing them well started on the work, Woodward went to Vaux Audigny and reported progress to Colonel Sankey, and eventually got back to Camp at 10.30 a.m. In the meantime the Divisional Engineers had arranged to transport the Rolled Steel Joists from the Corps Dump at Bohain to the assembly point at La Vallee Multare. At noon, with Lieutenants Sawyer and Thomson and 95 other ranks, Woodward moved off for the assembly point. At about 3.30 p.m. the Pontoon Waggon carrying the Rolled Steel Joists arrived and 4 Section were on time to move off to their battle position at 4 p.m.

Just prior to leaving their bivouac Camp on Sunday morning, November 3rd, for their forward assembly point, Corporal Davey, regarded by Capt. Woodward to be one of his best N.C.O.’s, came to Woodward and asked whether Woodward would take care of his personal belongings and post them to his wife should anything happen to him. Woodward was feeling rather despondent himself and Corporal Davey’s outlook on the future did not help to cheer him up. Woodward spoke firmly to him, told him not to be foolish, and imagine he was going west. All stood that chance, and had to keep cool and collected. Davey replied, “Captain, nothing you can say will remove the conviction that I will be killed. Will you please do me the favour I ask?” Merely to ease his mind Woodward consented and took charge of his personal effects. Before daylight broke next morning, Corporal Davey had made the supreme sacrifice, and had gone west. He was killed by a shell while the Section were lying out waiting for Zero. This incident left Woodward somewhat dazed and greatly impressed. In temperament Corporal Davey was of the calm type, he was a soldier who was as fearless as any soldier can truly be in War, had never failed in

carrying out his duties in a most efficient manner, and inspired the confidence of his men. There could be no suggestion of fear or panic causing him to act as he did in coming to Woodward. He knew his call was coming. Why should this have been?

The stage was set. At 4 p.m. in company with the 409th Field Company, 4 Section left La Vallee Multare to reach their battle positions. Their route lay through Ribeauville and Mazinghein, which was reached just after darkness had set in. Marching from Mazinghein to Rejet de Beaulieu the road was subjected to heavy sweeping Artillery fire, and the 409th Company lost one officer and several men wounded. Just before reaching Rejet de Beaulieu, they turned off the main road and travelled on a 2nd class road to a point about 100 yards from the Lock, which was reached at 8 p.m. The men unloaded the Bridging material from the Pontoon Waggon, the drivers of which were then instructed to retire, an order which was appreciatively received and quickly acted upon. The next task for 4 Section was to carry the Bridging material to a point about 300 yards from the Lock. Try to picture the task. A pitch black night with a steady fall of rain, an area of country on which none of them had ever set foot, country filled with shell holes, and about 5 tons of rolled steel joists in 20 ft. lengths to be transported over a quarter of a mile before midnight, at which hour all troops were expected to be in their assembly position. As far as this section of the work was concerned, the 409th Company had an easier task than 4 Section, as they had light timber bridge in handy form for carrying.

Each of the girders weighed about 800 lbs. and they were carried by 10 men, five on each side. At this hour the area through which they had to pass was being continually swept by Artillery Fire and occasional bursts of machine gun fire. The men had to march slowly forward, insuring that each step was on firm ground before taking the next. There could be no flinching when a shell burst, no matter how close. With an 800 pound girder carried on the shoulders a false step or a faltering when a shell burst could easily cause as much damage by broken limbs as a bursting shell would inflict under all these disadvantages, the men worked without a sign of faltering, and just before midnight had carried all the material to the forward assembly point.

The weather on 3rd November was a fine, bright morning and early afternoon with fair visibility, but becoming dull and showery towards dusk. 10FAB batteries finished carting ammunition and completed preparations for the attack. During the day battery positions and their vicinity were well straffed by the enemy. Observation Points and forward positions were reconnoitred by all Brigade Commanders.

11 FAB started the day at Pommereuil L27c6.7. At 8am 14th Bde R.F.A. took over defence of the line from when the 11FAB Batteries pulled out and moved up to their new positions in L28. At 10am the Australian Artillery became part of No.2 Sub Group consisting of 5th Army Bde R.F.A., 10th Aust F.A.B. and 11th Aust F.A.B. Lt. Col. Sparge, 11FAB, was placed in Command of No.2 Sub Group. At 10.30 Brigade Commanders met in conference at Group Headquarters (4th A.D.A.) when the proposed operations for taking of the Canal on the 4th were discussed – followed by a conference of Battery Commanders at Brigade HQ. Batteries remained silent during the day and night and the carting of ammunition was completed. German artillery active during the afternoon and night on Roads and Pommereuil, both coming in for attention. It rained heavily that night.

11 FAB reported 2029 Gunner John ELLIS, 24, killed in action and buried at Highland Cemetery, Le Cateau, France. Their ammunition status was recorded as:

Ammo expended	150A, 150Ax,	110Bx
Ammo received	2518A, 2742Ax, 249AS,	1510Bx

4th November

The Tunnellers took up their battle position, which was in a sunken portion of the road from Rejet de Beaulieu, running almost parallel to the Canal. The longer they remained in this sunken road the more uncomfortable Woodward felt. It seemed to him a certainty that when the Allied barrage opened the enemy, having retired over this ground, would know of the existence of this sunken road and would drop his counter barrage on it.

Since the Section were not to attempt the erection of the Tank Bridge until the Infantry had crossed the Canal, this meant that they would be in this position for some time after Zero. Eventually Woodward decided to shift their position and his decision was not heartily approved by his officers, and still less by the men. The Section moved across on to the low lying land opposite the Lock and here they selected shell holes, or dug holes themselves. After they had completed the Bridge, the Section came back through this sunken road, and for quite a distance had to step over bodies of Infantry men who had occupied the Sections position immediately after they had vacated it. It is not hard to imagine what would have been the Sections fate had Woodward not acted upon his judgement.

After settling into their new position, the Section had to lie and wait for Zero hour, and throughout the time of waiting a heavy Scotch mist was falling. For the first couple of hours the enemy's shelling was very consistent, and the men were kept on the alert. Their first casualty was the death of Corporal Davey, referred to earlier. At about 4 a.m. the enemy Artillery eased down and matters were comparatively quiet from then on until Zero.

The day broke fine with visibility good, but became foggier. Zero hour was at 5.45 a.m., and at that hour the peacefulness of the morning was broken by the roar of guns of all calibre. The attack had been launched and the next hour would tell whether it was to be successful or not. The enemy Artillery and Machine Guns were not long in getting into their stride, and soon the battle was fairly under way.

At 5.45am the 11FAB barrage opened, remaining on the Start Line for 5 minutes, then lifting 300yds where it remained until Zero plus 35 minutes. It then crept Eastwards in lifts of 100yds per 6 minutes to the Yellow Protective Barrage and remained on this line for 15 minutes and then stopped firing.

At Zero plus 134 mins the barrage reopened on the line marked 134-140 with 35% 18 Pounders and 45 Howitzers superimposed and in depth. 11FAB remained on this line for 6 minutes and then crept Eastwards in lifts of 100 yards per 6 minutes to line Dotted Blue Protector, remaining on this line for 15 minutes and then stopped firing. During this latter operation, 5th Bde R.F.A. established a flame barrage "A" firing 10% smoke. Reports were received that the left Battalion were meeting with strong opposition on our front from Machine Guns on the East of the Canal and great difficulty was being experienced in erecting bridges to cross Canal. At 7.20 am light retaliation was directed on Battery areas, but was very scattered. 3357 Gunner Carl Frederick De Arden GERLER, 21, was killed in action and 3 other ranks were wounded & evacuated from 43rd Battery.

7.55 am it was reported that the Right Battalion were crossing the Canal by bridge near the ORS Church and working North along the East side of the Canal. The Left Battalion was digging in on the West bank of the Canal. The Canal bank opposite the Left Battalion was lined with Machine Guns. At 8.25am the enemy were reported to be barraging between L30c5.1 and the Canal. Visibility became bad.

At 8.30am. it was reported that The Yellow Line had been reached on right. From L36c7.2 to G36c8.7 the Infantry were still held up on the Canal. At 9am orders were received at 11 FAB from Group to drop barrage to Zero plus 59-65 minute line for 15 minutes at 1 round per gun per minute and then ½ round per gun per minute till further orders. At 9.10am, one Company of the Left Battalion was reported on West bank of Canal at G27c5.2 to G27b9.2; a second Company was on the High Spur in G27a and a third Company was in support on the West of the railway line in G27a.

Reports were received at 10am that good advance was being made by the 25th Division on the left and the 1st Division on the right and that prisoners were numerous. At 10.25am the Protective Barrage was lifted to Zero plus 101-107 minute line at the same rate of fire. Much opposition was still being met with from the spur in G32a&b. At 12.50pm, the 111th Howitzer Battery searched the area 500yds East of the Barrage Line and at 1 pm the same Battery engaged Machine Gun nest at G32a4.5. At 1.05pm instructions were received from D.A. for Battery Commanders to reconnoitre positions for one Section per Battalion in L24a. At 1.30 pm Orders from D.A. to cease fire. The Batterys stood down on last line as provisional S.O.S. Prisoners continued to come in freely. The afternoon was quiet and planes reported later that night that the Boche was in full retreat all along the front and roads were congested with traffic going Eastwards. All Batterys with air recuperator buffers fired 100 Rds per Battery on these roads during the night up to extreme range. Night passed quietly.

11FAB recorded:

Ammo expended	3004A, 2214Ax, 218AS, 1730Bx, 106BS
Ammo received	1194A, 1520Ax, 289AS, 750Bx, 200BS

At 0645 am 10FAB batteries fired a barrage in accordance with barrage map. The weather was misty until about 0900 but afterwards became warm, fine and bright and continued so all day. Batteries were not engaged by enemy batteries so that there were no casualties all day within the Brigade. Officer patrols from each battery and Brigade Headquarters kept in constant touch with the Infantry and the front line. A determined stand was made by the enemy in the bend of the canal at G26c&d all day and nearly a battalion was lost in trying to cross here.

Other troops however got across without much resistance and pushed on and were reported to be practically on their final objective. The enemy were well dug in on the Eastern bank of the Canal and were heavily manned with machine guns. Most of the troops crossed by improvised bridges of petrol tins put out while our barrage rested on the canal bank.

Approaches to the canal were very wet and boggy. A bridge for heavy traffic was put across at R5b7.3 ORS during the morning and pontoon and lighter bridges were put across at other points.

At Zero plus 15 minutes, Woodward went forward with Sergeant Hutchinson, just in time to see Major Findlay, Commanding Officer of the 409th Field Company brilliantly lead his men across the Lock by jumping across on the partly open Lock gates. With bombs he stormed an enemy Machine Gun crew, who were located in the Boiler House. It was a magnificent sight and for his brilliant and fearless work Major Findlay eventually was awarded the Victoria Cross.

When the excitement died down a little, Woodward found that the 409th Field Company had suffered heavy casualties, so offered 4 Sections assistance to Major Findlay, which offer was gladly accepted. It was not until 7.30 a.m. that Major Findlay, under whose command the Section was, considered it safe to commence the Sections task. Even at this hour the area around the Canal was subjected to terrific bombardment, but fortunately the Machine Guns close handy had been silenced. The Section had to pass through the barrage in order to bring their Bridging material forward and the manner in which the men, together with Lieutenants Sawyer and Thomson, moved forward and back through this shell swept area was magnificent. As mentioned before the Lock was the only spot at which a crossing could be effected, and the enemy knowing this concentrated on the area. On either flank little shelling took place. With Sergeant Hutchinson, Woodward crossed the Lock and prised off the coping stone. The launching of the first 20 ft girder across this 17ft. span was a slow job, and it had just been placed across when the enemy dropped a shell practically at Woodward's feet. It was a small high velocity shell; of the seven Section members on the enemy side of the Canal, three were wounded. Once the first girder was safely across, the work was much easier, as the Section was able to slide the other girders across this one.

The Tank Bridge was eventually completed 4½ hours after Zero, and as the work did not start until about 2 hours after Zero the work was done in good time.

The success of the attack will be appreciated by the fact that at about 10 a.m. the enemy Artillery suddenly ceased fire, probably in order to withdraw the guns to escape capture.

At 11 a.m. the Section was ordered to retire. It then took stock and found they had lost three killed and five wounded. The latter had been attended to by the Stretcher Bearers. The bodies 8271 Sapper Charles BARRETT, 40, 7680 Sapper Arthur Robert Dudley JOHNSON, 39 and 5518 Corporal Albert DAVEY, 31 were located, the Padre of the 409th Field Company was found, and they were laid to rest in the Village Cemetery of Rejet de Beaulieu. A fourth member of the Section, 8279 Sapper Frederick Nelson KNIGHT, 40, died of his wounds at the 20th Casualty Clearing Station on the same day. He was buried in the Premont British Cemetery, 8½ miles South West of Le Cateau.

While the Burial Ceremony was being carried out, the area was absolutely peaceful, except for the distant rattle of Machine Gun and Artillery fire.

No. 4 Section, 1ATC, after completing their last sad rites in the burial of their comrades, marched to Mazinghein and rested in a field until lorries came from Headquarters to convey them back to Camp, which was reached at 5 p.m. As they lay in that grassy field on a bright sunny day, there was an atmosphere of sadness, more pronounced than usual. Woodward felt that this was entirely due to the fixed belief that they had taken part in the last staged battle of the War, and this thought carried their minds to their comrades who, as it were, had just been given one glimpse of the long expected Armistice, only to lose their lives before it materialised. It was a matter of a few hours, but it was not to be.

5th November

10FAB found the 5th of November to be dull and wet all day. The batteries filled echelons and carted remaining ammunition at guns to A.R.P. and then pulled out to Wagonlines at La Cateau.

11FAB also found the day to be wet with visibility low. Orders were received from D.A. that Brigade would withdraw during the day. All ammunition at guns carted to A.R.P. at Basuel and on completion Batteries withdrew to Wagonlines at Le Cateau and became IX Corps Reserve. General Budsworth M.C., R.A. visited B.H.Q. during the afternoon and congratulated the Brigade on its work throughout the operations.

The success of the Bridging operations was fully appreciated as the following Special Order of the Day of 5 November 1918 indicates.

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

by

Major General E.P. Strickland, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.,
G.O.C. 1st Division.

The task that the Division was called on to perform yesterday was one entailing the utmost forethought for every detail, the most careful and precise Staff work in all branches, a thorough and precise organisation in battalions, of the most minute, detail and gallantry, tact, and endurance on the part of all troops engaged.

The complete success of the operations is very greatly due to the skill, ability, rapidity and completeness with which the bridging arrangements were completed and perfected. I wish to pay special tribute to Lt Colonel C.T. Sankey D.S.O., his Field Company Commanders and all ranks of the R.E.s, and Section 1st. Australian Tunnelling Company A.E. for the part they have played in these operations. The cool gallantry with which they placed the bridges in position under heavy fire after long and arduous hours of

labour, was magnificent. After these severe ordeal they were engaged for the rest of the day in Bridge Building under fire.

They have very worthily upheld the very high traditions of the Royal Engineers.

I cannot sufficiently express my admiration and thanks to all branches of the Staff and to all Units in the Division for their un-surpassed efforts of the last three weeks culminating in as fine a military achievement as any Troops could have carried out.

The Division on a whole has every reason to be more than proud of their record and they could not do more than uphold, as they have done, the brilliant records of the 1st Division of the British Army.

Signed: E.P. Strickland.

Major E.S. Anderson, C.O. 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, in an Addenda to his Order Of The Day, noted:

‘The Commanding Officer wishes to place on the records of the Company the very gallant conduct of No. 4 Section which was entrusted with the construction of the heavy tank bridge over the Oise - Sambre Canal, in the face of the enemy. The Section, under the command of Captain Woodward, displayed such great courage, devotion to duty, and disregard to personal risk that the bridge was successfully built and traffic enabled to pass over 4½ hours after Zero. The Higher Commands have complimented the C.O. on the gallant feat of his unit and he therefore wishes those who actually took part in the operation to know that they not only have won the admiration of other Arms of the Service, but they have added another laurel to the Company’s record.’

To C.O.

1st Australian Tunnelling Company.

I want to bring to your notice the great gallantry and devotion to duty displayed by Captain O.H. Woodward, M.C and bar, of your Company, who was attached with his Section to the Engineers of this Division for the operations of yesterday. He had very little time for the preparation of his material, but in spite of this everything was complete, and his organisation and arrangement of work were so good that a bridge capable of carrying Tanks was erected within 4½ hours after Zero. The work was rendered very difficult by the very heavy enemy barrage, which I regret to say caused very heavy casualties. I am informed by one of my Field Company Commanders, who was present at the site, that Captain Woodward carried out his detailed reconnaissance of the Lock with complete disregard of personal danger, and superintended the erection of the bridge with great gallantry. He also came to the assistance of my Field Company when they were reduced by casualties and helped them to complete their work.

(Signed) C.E. Sankey, Col. R.E.

C.R.E. 1st Division.

Thus No. 4 Section fought their last battle of the War and as the other Sections of the Company were operating with the Infantry up to the signing of the Armistice, it is thought that the First Australian Tunnelling Company, together with 10th and 11th Australian Field Artillery Brigades, can claim to be the last of the Australian Troops to be actively engaged in the fighting.

Captain Woodward (1ATC) was awarded a 2nd Bar to his Military Cross, Lieutenants Sawyer and Thomson (both 1ATC) and Capt Sanderson (11FAB) were each awarded a Military Cross. The Distinguished Conduct Medal was awarded to Sergeant Hutchinson (1ATC).

The Official History of the World War (Bean) records the action in a single paragraph:

“On November 4th the Fourth, Third and First Armies with Debeney’s on their right drove the Germans from their line between Sambre and Scheldt.

The artilleries of the 3rd and 4th Australian Divisions were employed with the 1st and 32nd British Divisions respectively of the IX Corps. The 32nd crossed the Sambre canal after great difficulty, but the 1st and 25th on its right and left made swift progress and that evening aeroplanes reported that all roads ahead were crowded with retiring Germans. Next day the Australian artillery was withdrawn.”

The Royal Australian Engineer history contains little more:

“The 1st Tunnelling Company, now commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel E.S. Anderson, was farther south, in the Third Army area, where its No. 4 Section, under Captain O.H. Woodward, was placed under command of the 1st (British) Divisional Engineers for the crossing of the Sambre-Oise Canal east of Le Cateau. ... The forward elements of the German army were still fighting well, and the crossing was strongly opposed. In this battle, only a week before the Armistice, two R.E. company commanders won the Victoria Cross; including Major G. de C. E. Findlay of the 409th Field Company to which Woodward’s section was attached. In the course of building a tank bridge spanning the walls of a canal lock two of Woodward’s subalterns, a staff-sergeant and a number of rank and file earned decorations, and Woodward won a second bar to his Military Cross. His section lost five men killed and five wounded. These were possibly the last battle casualties of the first A.I.F.”

Citation

Major George de Cardonnel Elmsall Findlay VC MC, Royal Engineers

“For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the forcing of the Sambre-Oise canal at the Lock, two miles from Catillon, on 4 November 1918, when in charge of the bridging operations at this crossing. Major Findlay was with the leading bridging and assaulting parties which came under heavy fire while trying to cross the dyke between the forming-up line and the Lock. The casualties were severe and the advance was stopped. Nevertheless, under heavy and incessant fire he collected what men he could and repaired the bridges, in spite of heavy casualties in officers and other ranks. Although wounded, Major Findlay continued his task and after two unsuccessful efforts, owing to his men being swept down, he eventually placed the bridge in position across the Lock, and was the first man across, subsequently remaining at this post of danger till further work was completed. His cool and gallant behaviour inspired volunteers from different units at a critical time when men became casualties almost as soon as they joined him in the fire-swept zone, and it was due to Major Findlay’s gallantry and devotion to duty that this most important crossing was affected.” (London Gazette 15th May 1919)

Woodward

At Zero plus 15 minutes, I went forward with Sergeant Hutchinson, just in time to see Major Findlay, Commanding Officer of the 409th Field Company brilliantly lead his men across the Lock by jumping across on the partly open Lock gates. With bombs he stormed an enemy Machine Gun crew, who were located in the Boiler House. It was a magnificent sight and for his brilliant and fearless work Major Findlay eventually was awarded the Victoria Cross.

When the excitement died down a little, I found that the 409th Field Company had suffered heavy casualties, so I offered our assistance to Major Findlay, which offer was gladly accepted. It was not until 7.30 a.m. that Major Findlay, under whose command we were, considered it safe to commence our task.

Sources:

The War Story of Oliver Holmes Woodward, Capt. 1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy, A.I.F.;
[Chap. XIX - Bridging The Canal De La Sambre De Oise] (Port Pirie Recorder 1933)
War Diary – 10th Aust. Field Artillery Brigade
War Diary – 11th Aust. Field Artillery Brigade
C.E.W. Bean: The A.I.F. in France Chapter XXI - The War Ends [Oct.-8th Nov., 1918] p1050
The Royal Australian Engineers 1902 to 1919, Maj. Gen. R.R. McNicoll, C.B.E., p155

Addenda :

- I Lt.Col Dudley Johnson
- II Woodward's Report to C.R.E., 1st Division, B.E.F. & follow up work by 1st Tunnelling Company.
- III www.tunnellers.net - Despatches

Note: All Map coordinates refer to Sheet 57b, unless otherwise stated.

Captain Oliver Holmes Woodward M.C.+2Bars

1st Australian Tunnelling Company

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy on the night of 3/4th November 1918, at REJET de BEAULIEU when his section was entrusted with the construction of a heavy bridge to carry tanks (Canal de la SAMBRE at l'OISE.)

The successful completion of this work within five hours after zero was mainly due to his detailed preparations made at very short notice, and to his example and disregard of danger under intense artillery and machine gun fire. His conduct was worthy of the highest praise.

Captain William Lauchlan Sanderson O.B.E., M.C., CdeG (Fra)

11th Field Artillery Brigade

When the infantry were repulsed in their first attempt to cross the Oise-Sambre Canal near Ors, on 4th November, and the artillery barrage had to be altered, he, acting as liaison officer, handled the situation with great coolness and complete success. At one time he acted as forward observation officer, and under heavy enemy fire directed an artillery concentration on a strong point, enabling the infantry to advance and gain their objective.

Lieutenant Archie Snowden Thomson M.C., D.C.M.

1st Australian Tunnelling Company

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on the night of 3/4th November 1918 at REJET DE BEAULIEU, where this officer was entrusted with the delivery of heavy bridging material for the construction of a bridge to carry tanks. The work was of the most arduous nature necessitating the repeated passage of the carrying party through an intense Artillery and Machine Gun Barrage. The completion of the bridge within five hours after zero was largely due to the gallant conduct of this officer.

Lieutenant Stanley John SAWYER M.C.

1st Australian Tunnelling Company

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on the night of 3/4th November 1918 at REJET de BEAULIEU where he was detailed to take charge of off-loading, assembling, and despatching to the canal the heavy steel joists and material for constructing a Tank Bridge. He carried on this work all night to zero in the midst of intense shell fire, and when zero hour arrived found himself enveloped in the enemy's barrage. He still continued to work on, and he made the material available at the Bridge Head. But for his gallantry and determination the bridge would have been many hours late.

144 Sergeant Hector Barnett Hutchinson D.C.M., CdeG (Bel)

1st Australian Tunnelling Company

For conspicuous gallantry, devotion to duty, and exemplary leadership on the night of 3/4th November 1918 at REJET de BEAULIEU when as Company Sergeant Major he was entrusted with handling the details and N.C.O's constructing a heavy bridge across the canal.

All the previous night he urged the men on, and arranged his dumps under heavy shell fire. At zero hour he rushed the material forward to the canal bank only to find that a machine gun was playing on the spot, regardless of this he led his men on and got his material into position.

As soon as a crossing was effected he took a party and captured the machine gun. He passed several times backwards and forwards through a heavy barrage in order to bring up material and reinforcements.

For eighteen hours this N.C.O. carried out his duties amidst concentrated shell fire, barrages and machine gun fire, and never once faltered. The determination of the men was entirely due to the exemplary conduct of this N.C.O.

General Sir Henry Rawlinson's Army Order 438 dated 28 February 1919 lists the names of eleven men from the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company awarded the Military Medal following the action at Rejet-le-Beaulieu on 4 November 1918:

6097	Lance Corporal AMIGUET, Thomas	262	Corporal SABINE, Edward Morgan
3552	Corporal ARMSTRONG, Francis	264	Sapper SAVAGE, James
105	Corporal FIELD, William Rueben	7034	Sapper TEMPLE, John Leonard
2421	Corporal KEARNS, John	315	Sapper WALTON, Thomas William
3644	Sapper MOBBS, James Edward	323	Sapper WILSON, Harry
3358	Sapper QUADRIO, Guerino		

Addenda I

Lieutenant Colonel DUDLEY G. JOHNSON VC DSO MC 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment Sambre Canal - 4th November 1918

Dudley Graham Johnson was a regular army officer, born at Bourton on the Water, Gloucestershire, on 13th February 1884. He joined the South Wales Borderers, and served with them in France, being awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Bar, and Military Cross. He transferred to the Royal Sussex, and was commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion from March 1918 - April 1919. He continued to serve after the Great War, finally achieving the rank of Major General and was awarded a CB. He died at Church Crookham in Hampshire on 21st December 1975, and was buried there. His VC is held at the regimental museum of the South Wales Borderers, at Brecon in Powys, who often claim this award!

On 4th November 1918 the 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex were participating in the Battle of the Sambre - Oise Canal. Their objective was to cross an area of fields, bordered with high hedges, and then cross the canal at a point where there was a Lock House. The Germans defended this position with machine-guns, and several rifle teams. The 2nd Bn advanced on the canal, with the advance elements commanded by Dudley Johnson reaching the canal. The Royal Engineers attached to them placed small foot bridges across the lock, while some Royal Sussex Regiment men actually climbed up onto the lock gates - one firing a Lewis Gun from the hip as he went! Johnson and his men cross the lock, took the Lock House and pushed on to their final objectives near the Etreux road.

This was the last Royal Sussex VC of the Great War.

Today the Lock, Lock House and area around the canal are very much as they were in 1918. In the mid-1990s two 2nd Bn veterans placed a small memorial on this site, commemorating the action and their former commanding officer, Lt Col D.G.Johnson VC DSO MC.

Citation from the *London Gazette*, January 6, 1919

"Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Johnson D.S.O., M.C., South Wales Borderers, attached 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex, for most conspicuous bravery and leadership during the forcing of the Sambre Canal on November 4th, 1918. The 2nd Infantry Brigade, of which 2nd Battalion Royal Sussex formed part, was ordered to cross the lock south of Catellon. The position was strong and before the bridge could be thrown, a steep bank leading up to the lock and a waterway about 100 yards short of the canal had to be crossed. The assaulting platoons and bridging parties Royal Engineers, on their arrival at the waterway were thrown into confusion by a heavy barrage and machine gun fire and heavy casualties were caused. At this moment Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson arrived and realising the situation at once collected men to man the bridges and assist the Royal Engineers and personally led the assault. In spite of his efforts heavy fire again broke up the assaulting and bridging parties. Without any hesitation he again organised the platoons and bridging parties and led them at the lock, this time succeeding in effecting a crossing after which all went well. During all this time Lieutenant-Colonel Johnson was under heavy fire, which, though it nearly decimated the assaulting columns, left him untouched. His conduct was a fine example of great valour, coolness and intrepidity, which, added to his splendid leadership and offensive spirit that he had inspired in his Battalion, were entirely responsible for the successful crossing."



Lt-Col D.G.Johnson VC DSO MC
1919

Major George de Cardonnel Elmsall Findlay VC MC, Royal Engineers:

He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in January 1910. All four of the Findlay's sons served in the Great War. In June 1917 he was a Captain in the 409th (Lowland) Field Company, Royal Engineers, Territorial Force. His actions at the Battle of Passchendaele saw him awarded the Military Cross and bar for gallantry.

Victoria Cross Citation from the London Gazette of 15th May 1919:

“For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the forcing of the Sambre-Oise canal at the Lock, two miles from Catillon, on 4 November 1918, when in charge of the bridging operations at this crossing. Major Findlay was with the leading bridging and assaulting parties which came under heavy fire while trying to cross the dyke between the forming-up line and the Lock. The casualties were severe and the advance was stopped. Nevertheless, under heavy and incessant fire he collected what men he could and repaired the bridges, in spite of heavy casualties in officers and other ranks. Although wounded, Major Findlay continued his task and after two unsuccessful efforts, owing to his men being swept down, he eventually placed the bridge in position across the Lock, and was the first man across, subsequently remaining at this post of danger till further work was completed. His cool and gallant behaviour inspired volunteers from different units at a critical time



when men became casualties almost as soon as they joined him in the fire-swept zone, and it was due to Major Findlay's gallantry and devotion to duty that this most important crossing was affected.”

Addenda II

C.R.E.,
1st Division, B.E.F.

No. 4 Section
1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy

I have to advise that the Tank Bridge which was to be erected by this Section was successfully erected by 10.30 4/11/18.

The bridge was constructed to plan as per your amended plan of 4th inst. Except that 13 girders, 20' 10" X 5" R.S.J. were used instead of 14 as shown in plan.

The level of bridge was brought to that of lock opening by removing coping of same. Shore transoms were laid on 2' solid brickwork forming sides of canal.

A departure was made by substituting 9" X 3" timber in lieu of 10" X 10" for ribbons as the latter I thought would be of greater value to enable the Field Company R.E. 46th Division to construct a Tank Bridge over the stream before the lock proper was reached, as I know them to be short of adequate material.

The general outline of action was followed as per your verbal instructions and I wish to be allowed to bring to your notice, the excellent conduct and assistance of the C.O. of the 409th Company R.E. I feel sure that this Officer's conduct, by his personal attention to his own company's work and the work of this Section under most adverse and dangerous conditions, was such that he inspired confidence in all Officers and Other Ranks of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy. who were associated with him in the operations.

I have to advise that 80 T.N.T. high explosive charges were removed by this Section from the foundations of the building on the West side of the bank.

(Sd) O.H. Woodward, Capt. A.E.
Officer in Charge
No.4 Section
1st Aust. Tunnelling Coy.

C.R.E. IX Corps Troops
For your information please

(signed) Capt. A.E.
For C.O. 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy.

4-11-18

[hand-written note]

O.C. 1st Austn Tunnelling Coy
The Tank bridge requires a notice board and Direction boards from main roads at both ends of the "Oise". The bridge over the stream West of Lock does not appear very sound & the approaches to it are very bad. These points should be seen to by your party detailed to work the "Lane".

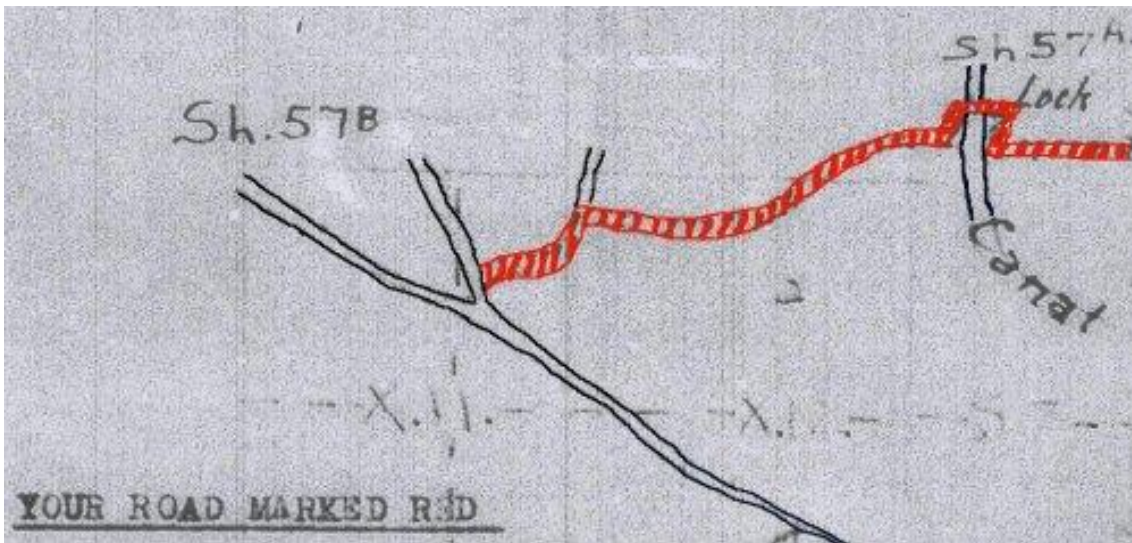
5/12 C.R.E.

Captain Bowry of the 1st Aust Tunnelling Coy was advised on 5th November that four lorries would be available immediately after lunch to take at least half of No1. Section plus Lieutenant Thomson's party to Rejet de Beaulieu and billet there on 6th November. If further lorries were available, part of No. 3 Section would also be moved and billeted with No. 1 Section and would be detailed to work under Bowry.

The men were to be equipped with road scrapers and shovels to improve the road on either side of the Canal bridge at S.1.d.3.4. A stone dump was at Catillon and 12 G.S. wagons of the 18th Auxiliary Horse Transport would report to Rejet de Beaulieu.

Work Order No. R/33

The Road to the Bridge at Lock in S.1.d. is a very bad narrow lane with very little metal. It starts beside the church in BEAULIEU and is NOT as shown on 1/40,000 map. 1/20,000 is better.



Take cutting tools and use Brushweed under bricks in muddy places. Make some passing places and assist transport when it sticks. There are three horse transport bridges :

- (1) M.31.d.4.4
- (2) S.1.b.3.7
- (3) S.1.d.2.8 (Wassigny Sheet)

Patrol these and maintain them in passable order.

(Sigd) W.T. Traill Lieut. Col.
C.R.E. C.T.

5-11-18

On 6 November, Lieutenant Hill was instructed to move the whole balance of No.1 Section to Rejet de Beaulieu on the 7th November when a lorry would be available at 0700. Lieutenant Thomson was to take the Notice Boards and Direction Boards for St Marbin River and Canal Lock Bridge and place same in position if ready. He was also asked to reconnoitre a camp site for his Advanced Headquarters with a view to shifting on the 6th November.

Addenda III

The descendants of Lt-Col D.G. Johnson organised and held a commemoration service at the Canal de la Sambre de Oise on 4th November 2008, the 90th anniversary of the forcing of the Sambre Canal.

The family invited the laying of wreaths by other units involved with the action and members of the Sapper Association North Queensland expressed an interest in having the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company represented at the service.

If one believes in serendipity, or that the Tunnellers up there are keeping an eye on things, it will come as no surprise to learn that 4 days before this inquiry, one of the North Queensland Sappers had made contact with Robin Sanderson, the grandson of Major Alex Sanderson DSO MC, Commanding Officer of the 3rd Aust. Tunnelling Company.

Robin lives in Paris. Robins' great uncle, Capt William Sanderson OBE MC CdeG(Fr), 11th Field Artillery Brigade, A.I.F., won his Military Cross at the Sambre Canal on the 4th November 1918.

Arrangements were made and two books were laid on the day, one on behalf of North Queensland Sappers, and one on behalf of the descendants of Australian Tunnellers of WW1. Robin laid a book on behalf of his great uncle.



Descendants of Maj. Gen. Dudley "Gubby" Johnson VC, CB, DSO+Bar, MC at the Sambre Canal Memorial
4 November 2008



The books were donated to Schools in Catillon and Rejet-de-Beaulieu in honour of the Australian Tunnellers graves at Rejet-de-Bailleau – Casper Sanderson presents books to the Mayoress of Rejet-de-Beaulieu. Casper is wearing the medals of his great grandfather, Maj. Alex Sanderson DSO, MC+Bar, C.O. 3rd Aust. Tunnelling Company.

2015 Developments:

On 10 November 2015 an email found its way into our system:

*“An Australian person put a card 7 years ago. I live near to this stele. Maybe you could help me to contact this person just in order to give some news.
France, Rejet de Beaulieu, Canal de la Sambre.
Cordialement.*

Fabien Lallemand”

He attached photos of the card and of himself with the Engineer wreath still in place.



We contacted Fabien and he wanted us to know that he had placed a flower on the monument last week and because tomorrow was November 11 he was going to place a flag on the memorial. It is hoped he will be able to attend the 2018 commemoration.

November 2018 :

10 years of planning came to fruition on 4 November 2018 when the family of Dudley Johnson again gathered at Lock No.1 on the Sambre-Oise Canal to commemorate the centenary of the events of 4 November 1918.

We were again invited to be part of the event and were pleased to have made contact with families of two of the Australian who fell that day who were included by way of grave cards and dedications.

As Australia was unable to provide any official representation, the Australians who took part in the battle were represented by Chris West, a descendant of Lt.Col. Dudley Johnson.

French and English school children from Rejet-de-Beaulieu and Bouton on the Water gathered at the site and provided a fitting choral escort to proceedings -

To you from failing hands we throw

The torch; be yours to hold it high

- and later marked the graves of Australia's fallen at the Rejet-de-Beaulieu Cemetery, reading personal dedications for each.



the Mayor of Rejet-de-Beaulieu, Madame Augustine Noirmain



Following a service at Lock No.1 the commemoration party moved to the Rejet-de-Beaulieu Cemetery to honour the fallen.

At the Cemetery, books were laid in tribute to the Australian fallen and the Australian National Anthem was sung in company with the British and French National Anthems.





Australian graves at Rejet-de-Beaulieu Cemetery
4 November 2018

Tribute cards were placed on behalf of the families of the fallen and of this website. Wicker crosses and poppy rosettes were also placed at the graves.

Chris West, representing Australia, lays books at the Great Cross, Rejet-de-Beaulieu Cemetery on behalf of families of the Australian fallen.

The books were donated to the Rejet-de-Beaulieu and Bourton on the Water schools



French colour party in period uniform with a KRRC Officer representative wearing the Rifle Green Regimental Blazer and the bugler from The Rifles



2nd Royal Sussex Regiment soldiers at the graves of the nine King's Royal Rifle Corps soldiers who died on 4 November 1918

A painting of the forcing of the Lock, commissioned by the Trustees of the Royal Welsh Regiment Museum at Brecon, was unveiled at a post-commemoration gathering and a copy was presented to the municipality of Rejet-de-Beaulieu to be hung in their new town hall.

Painting by David Rowlands of "The Crossing of the Lock". The picture depicts two VCs being won at 06.10 hrs on the morning of 4 November 1918.



The week-long commemoration of Dudley Johnson's service began at Lock No.1 on 4 November and culminated at Bourton on the Water a week later with the unveiling of the plaque at the Bourton on the Water War Memorial commemorating the awarding of the Victoria Cross to Lt.Col. Dudley Johnson for his actions at the Battle of Sambre.



Photos courtesy Andrew Larpent and Chris West