



Van Arty Assoc and RUSI Van Members News Dec 16, 2014

I am taking a short break over the holiday period. I will send out an abbreviated newsletter each week keeping the two war journals updated, printing urgent articles only. Next regular newsletter will be published on Jan 7th.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you and your families.

Wednesday Lunches

Mess is closed for the holidays. The first lunch of 2015 will be Jan 14th.

From the Journal of Capt Fred G Coxen RFA - 1914

Dec 13th: Marched to PONT DE NEIPPE and billeted in a farm just outside the village. [We] could hear the old familiar sounds in the distance, the rockets from the trenches.

Dec 14th: Marched through PLOEGSTRESTTE, [sic] and took up position beside the 35th Btty, behind a ruined chateau, on the grounds of which had once been a beautiful garden. We ran our line beyond the chateau to some ruined houses, from where we had a good view of the German trenches and MESSINES beyond. On my way back, I went into a partly wrecked house and was surprised to find a young woman and her brother, and her five little children. The baby I took from its bed, for it reminded me of my own, she gave me some hot milk. As well as I could I tried to induce her to go away to a safe place, but she would not. She told me her husband, a soldier, had been killed. I was rather upset I think over the poor little kiddies – I gave them my peppermints and odd money and came away. I never had time to go that way again, but I thought of the kiddies very often.

Dec 18th to 20th: Remained in position for a bombardment of MESSINES. Did little firing until 20th, when the bombardment took place – it was horrific, but we had nothing much at the guns in return. The wagon line was shelled out in the morning, but fortunately only one man was wounded. We left position at 5 o'clock and marched back to our rest billet.

Dec 21st to 23rd: Remained in rest billet until morning of 23rd, then marched to BETHUNE and billeted in a school house. George and I having no blankets, resolved to find a bed somewhere, and while asking a Frenchman in our best French, his daughter came along and invited us to their house, which was only a little way down the street. They were very poor, but treated us

handsomely. The mother, an elderly woman, doted on us, [and] gave us as much as we could possibly eat and drink. [She] made us up a bed on the floor, she called us at 3:15 am and had coffee ready for us. On leaving [she] was indignant when we went to make payment. We marched at 4:30 am towards LA BASSEE to take up position. It was Christmas Eve – a very grim Christmas Eve, and my thoughts were far away.

World War 2 - December 1939

John Thompson Strategic analyst quotes from his book "Spirit Over Steel"

Dec 11th: The League of Nations has some fortitude for once and agrees to intervene in the Russo-Finnish war. Meanwhile the Finnish 9th Brigade envelops the 163rd Division at Suomussalmi.

Dec 12th: The Finns begin a series of counter-strokes against 8th Soviet Army in the Kollaa Sector; mauling the 139th Division and causing heavy losses to the 75th.

Dec 13th: A glorious day for the Royal Navy: The cruisers Exeter, Ajax and Achilles attack the Graf Spee in the battle of the River Platte, forcing the German pocket battleship to retire into Montevideo harbour. Meanwhile, in the North Sea the British submarine HMS Salmon damages Leipzig and Nuremburg, both cruisers are out of action for many months.

Dec 14th: The League of Nations kicks the USSR out. That oughta show ‘em...

Dec 15th: Finnish troops retake Suomussalmi, but the Soviets capture Petsamo on the Arctic coast of the country.”

Dec 16th: The Soviet 7th Army advances to the Finn’s Mannerheim Line and start bashing away at it to little effect with a series of clumsy frontal assaults on the Finn’s thick belt of defences.

Dec 17th: British deception operations about a massive buildup outside the River Platte fool the Captain of the Graf Spee – who is required by law to leave Montevideo but scuttles his damaged ship rather than getting his crew killed in a hopeless battle. Later, when Captain Langsdorf learns he was fooled, he takes his own life. Finnish troops cut off the 44th and 163rd Soviet rifle divisions; starving them of supply and leaving them strung out along several roads.

Dec 20th: Another Soviet division (122nd) is cut off and isolated by the Finns, and attacks on the Mannerheim line are running out of steam. It’s an ugly aircraft, but will seem like an avenging angel to hard-pressed Soviet troops in the coming years: The first Ilyushin IL-2 Shturmovik takes to the air. In time, over 36,000 of this tough ground attack aircraft will be in service and Stalin – in a very threatening letter to a tardy manufacturer – will describe it as being as necessary to the Red Army as air and bread.

Dec 22nd: Having suffered appalling casualties, the Soviets stop attacking the Mannerheim line. Besides utilizing a well-sited network of well-built and camouflaged bunkers, the common Finnish tactic of staging hit and run counter-attacks at night from out of the forest is causing heavy casualties. The Soviets are also finding that the average Russian no longer knows how to survive outside in winter conditions. The first flight of the Petlyakov Pe-2: Equivalent to the Mosquito or the Ju-88, this fast slim plane was the Soviet's multirole combat aircraft throughout the entire war.

Dec 23rd: The Pan American Conference sends complaints to both Berlin and London about the battle of the River Platte and are ignored. The British can breathe easier, the first Canadian troop convoy arrives in the UK with 7,500 men of the 1st Canadian Division.

Who is it?



Last Week: This picture was taken between 1969-72, when Barry Clemons (crouching in front) was Commanding Officer. Not sure of the occasion, it could be at a Levée (although there is no sign of Christmas decorations) or a ceremonial parade. Perhaps when Lt Col Clemons took command. I must have been working that day.

Rear row- L-R: Ian Newby, Mike Bennett, Ian Seymour, ??, Barrie Hamilton, Vic Stevenson, Pete Dwillies, Wayne Davidson, Ron Abbott.

Front row L-R: ??, Peter Barton, Gary Woloski, Dave Upton, Gary Bailey, Bill Wickett