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Tape 249

Mr H V Palmer

IT IS JUNE 1974 AND THIS IS MR LIDDLE OF SUNDERLAND POLYTECHNIC TALKING TO MR H V PALMER OF 10 GEORGE STREET, RICHMOND, NELSON, NEW ZEALAND WHO SERVED AS A PRIVATE IN THE CANTERBURY BATTALION, FIRST NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE DURING THE PENINSULA CAMPAIGN IN 1915.

MR PALMER WAS BORN IN 1890 IN THE NORTH OF SOUTH ISLAND. HIS FATHER HAD BEEN A FARMER. HE HIMSELF WAS A FARMER AND HAD BEEN IN THE VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE VOLUNTEERS BECAME COMPULSORY AFTER KITCHENER'S VISIT. HE VOLUNTEERED FOR SERVICE OVERSEAS IN AUGUST 1914 OUT OF A SENSE OF ADVENTURE AND I WOULD AT THIS STAGE LIKE TO DRAW ATTENTION TO ANY RESEARCHER LISTENING TO THIS TAPE THAT HIS ORIGINAL DIARY LIES IN OUR ARCHIVES IN THE NEW ZEALAND GALLIPOLI SECTION AND TYPESCRIPT MEMORIES WILL ALSO BE IN THE GALLIPOLI SECTION OF THE BOOKS.

Now Mr Palmer tell me please about your training in New Zealand and then in brief about your voyage out to Egypt?

I was trained in The Volunteers in the early days and I became of age and I joined up with The Territorial Forces which was compulsory. I had 3 years to put in but as I had already done 2½ I completed my full 3 years and then went into The Territorial Forces. Whilst in The Territorial Forces I took up a very active part in rifle shooting. My Father was a great rifle shot. He was one who fought against the Maoris and it was mainly through him being away and talking of adventure that took me away.

That is fine. Now the voyage, I know something about because you joined up after some delay with The Australian convoy. Met them at Hobart and then Albany, round to Colombo and then to Egypt?

Yes.

What about the severity of the New Zealand training in Egypt?

Well, the training in Egypt was really severe. Some of our marches. We had as many casualties as we had when we were in the war. We were taken out in dust storms. We were taken out to what they called The Third Tower which was 15 miles out and 15 back.

Which camp were you in?

Zeitoum Camp.

Was it Lady Godley who was inspecting you, do you remember that?

Yes, I remember Lady Godley coming along on the horseback and inspected us while we were going on this route march and I noticed when we got back to our camp we had all the bands there. There were 11 bands all from the different Regiments who had all gathered together. They took us out so far and they marched us back in again.

Now when you got to Mudros you did a certain amount of training of disembarkation into boats down rope ladders or rope nets or wooden ladders down into the boats, taken into the shore and then you had to run up the

beach and that sort of thing. Do you remember this?

We went down rope ladders and got into boats and trained but we never went ashore at Lemnos.

Alright. Well then, I would like to come to the morning of April 25 and would you tell me what equipment you were carrying?

I had 200 rounds of ammunition. A full pack of clothes, oil sheet, our rifle and all our rifle gear. I think it weighted between 60 and 70 pounds.

Did you have any kindling wood?

No, we didn't take no kindling wood with us there but we had kindling wood when we went from Anzac Cove down to Cape Helles when we fought down there and to get it, in that book of Malthis, you will see where we got into the French quarters and we pulled the boards off the old forts for a bit of kindling wood and that was the French quarters. The French doctors and this interpreter the writer of that book, he had to call our officers together. He was only a private at the time. He called them together and he was the only one who could speak French and he had to tell our officers, we had to stop us from taking the wood but when we got back to our trenches there I said to my cobber. I said, well we have got plenty of water. Yes, he said, but don't drink that water and I said, why and he looked round and saw about 7 blown up Turks in the creek just after we got our water out of it and we started to have a drink. He said, don't drink that until you have boiled it and I remember we did boil it.

Well, first of all have you any recollections of your few days at the landing before you move down to the Helles end of the peninsula and The Second Battle of Krithia?

Well, the first few days we landed we had rather an uneasy time because we got ashore a little bit late in the afternoon. Our boat was towing 2 water barges and one of them got roped round the propeller and we couldn't get it off when we left Lemnos. So, I think we then went under probably one propeller to get there.

Let us come to Helles. What do you remember of the attack in which the New Zealanders distinguished themselves but lost heavily in the attack across the Daisypatch?

Well now, we went across the Daisypatch after trying to influence the Turks going up on the left. Instead of that we made a complete turn to the right and went up over the Daisypatch and I was in number 9 Platoon alongside of my Colonel and he said number 9 over the top and away we went. I got up there and saw one of my old mates and I also saw the writer of that book was there and on my left there was a little bit of a bunch of scrub and we were in open country. Four hundred yards away from the Turks and I looked at them and saw 5 men there dead and I thought I am not getting that way. Machine guns and I ducked across the other way. I laid on the ground and I laid quiet. I couldn't get any further because I could see that the frontline was full and they were all getting shot all round me. As I laid on the ground, a bullet passed under my fingers there and came out in the elbow and didn't touch the skin. I put my entrenching tool over my head and laid flat on the ground and one hit that and I thought, this is getting pretty close this is. I laid there until night time and at night time I got up and walked back again and

I summed it up. I thought what fools we were. To be sent up here in broad daylight to be shot at when we could walk backwards and forwards in the dark.

What do you remember about your subsequent service at Anzac before you were evacuated in July with enteric which prevented your service again on one of the active fronts?

Well now, you want to know my.

What you remember of what you yourself had to do?

At Anzac? Well, we had come back from Cape Helles and that was the time that we had to go into action at Quinn's Post. This particular day my officer took ill and he picked on me to take him back to the beach which was about a mile. I took him back to the beach and when I got back to the unit they had gone. I scaled round the side of the hill. I got shot at all the way. Couldn't find out which direction the Company had gone and I thought I was lost. I didn't know which way to turn next. At last I met one of my old coppers and he told me the direction to go. We went into Quinn's Post. Well, our usual action in Quinn's Post was 8 days in and roughly 8 days out. While we were in close, we were in within anything from 10 to 20 yards away from the trenches and I know myself, I used to go down to the bottom of the hill every morning and lug up a thousand rounds of ammunition and 300 hand made bombs and our old doctor which was right against the front of the trench used to say Palmer, you won't have many more trips up here. You are getting weaker and I was lugging up a 1,000 rounds of ammunition. In this case up step by step to get to the top.

This old Colonel was one that was always in the frontline with us. He never stopped far away from where he had to do his work. When we were in the trenches in the early hours of the morning we used to say to each other. Well, it is 4 o'clock. If I can hang out to 6 I will be alive the next day. She used to be bombed strongly for 2 hours of daylight. Now those trenches they were full of ammunition. Fellows had been wounded and carried away and the time came when I had to go out on the left and take up a special duty of sniping and my mate and I were picked out for sniping. I said to my mate, we will go and get the bullets out of the trench and they were laying in equipment there pretty thick. We lugged them out. We couldn't carry them. We dragged them down to the side of the hill and we loaded this ammunition into old rifles and we shot at the Turkish trench all the afternoon. The 2 of us with 4 rifles. They got really hot and at the finish we undermined the lowest bank of a trench that was made up of one sack, 2 sacks, 3 sacks until it got wider and wider. I took the bottom one out and shooting at it continually and the whole trench came rolling down the hill.

We exposed the Turks. They suddenly shot into the trenches as hard as they could. As for shooting anybody, I never thought that I shot anybody but I saw the stretcher bearer put his stretcher up in the remains of the trench that was left there.

Well, Mr Palmer you have spoken very convincingly of your service and you have given me the honour, the priceless honour of preserving your original diary together with 2 other books which I value and I thank you in particular not just for this but for your trust in coming over 80 miles by road to help me in my work. Thank you very much indeed.