

Volume 2 Section 357-04

Officer's Reports of Capture

Capt Harold Raymond Fenner

Introduction

Harold Raymond Fenner was born in March 1889 at Rarawai Mill in Fiji. He was educated at King's School in Paramatta near Sydney and joined the staff of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. When war broke out the Governor of Fiji was asked to nominate suitable young men as officers and Harold went to England in January 1915 and joined the 9th Royal Berkshire Regiment as a 2nd Lieutenant on the 2nd March. He became a Lieutenant when he was posted to the 8th Battalion on the 22nd March and a Captain on the 1st April 1916.

Wounding on the Somme

He was wounded twice, the first time on the 27th August 1916, receiving a gunshot wound in his right knee and right buttock. He had been serving as Machine Gun Officer for the Battalion at Mametz Wood. The Reading Mercury of the 16th September 1916 included a report of the Battalion's action and reported:-

Capt H R Fenner (now wounded) displayed great bravery all through. His pluck won the admiration of all; he led his company splendidly.

He was shipped back to England via Le Havre and Southampton on the 2nd September 1916 and spent some time in Lady Meynell's Hospital in Lennox Gardens SW and was sent to Torquay to recuperate in December at the Hospital for Officers in Burr Ridge Road. He went before a medical board 2/1/1917 and rejoined the 8th Battalion on the 8th June 1917.

Prisoner of War

His second wounding occurred on the 21st March 1918 when he was shot at close range in the head and left shoulder which resulted in his arm being paralysed for five weeks. At the time he was commanding C Company when the 8th were overrun in the Kaiser-schlacht.

Report of capture

The report of his capture was written 31/1/1919 when he was staying with a friend, Mr G A Murray at Elstree Cottage, Elstree, Herts. It is to be found in Fenner's papers at the National Archive (WO339-25687) It read

Within half an hour of the start of enemy bombardment

about 4 m 21st March 1918 my company were in position behind MOY – ST QUENTIN RD awaiting the attack. My company was in reserve to the Battn & was detailed for counter-attack duties. On account of the fog I organised for an all round defence considering that this should eventually be our work, which proved correct. The enemy attacking waves reached my line in large numbers about 10.30 am. My men fought splendidly and the attack was beaten back in front of our line, although the enemy on either flank must have advanced unhindered. A second attack was launched about 11 am & was similarly repulsed. Many enemy died & wounded were seen lying in front of our position. Shortly afterwards the enemy brought up Trench Mortars & MGs which they installed on either flank. It was when sniping to try to prevent these trench mortar men from taking up their positions, that I received a bullet wound in the head which rendered me unconscious. I do not remember anything more until some hours afterwards when

German stretcher bearers dressed my wound. Shortly after the attack commenced my CO & his staff fell back on my line and I have since heard that he collected the remainder of my company with stragglers & fought their way back to LY FONTAINE the same evening.

I should like to take this opportunity of bringing to your notice the valuable assistance lent me by Lieut Williams C Company (killed during the fight) in organising the defence of our position.

Every man in the company fought with the greatest gallantry & I do not think that any of them were captured unwounded.

Postscript

He spent about a month in hospital at Bachant and another month at Cassel. Thereafter he was at Stralesund Camp and finally at Rasstat. He left Germany 9/12/18 returning via Leith where he arrived 18/12/1918. He was discharged 30/6/1919. and returned to Australia to continue his career in the sugar business. He got married in 1926 and died in 1938

Bibliography

WO339-25687 officer's papers

Reading Mercury

CSR booklet

Lt Randall's recollections

Correspondence with several people