

A War Story.

This incident is described by Mr. Birks as one of the most interesting and exciting of his War experiences. The Germans had broken through in their remarkable Lagincourt raid, before daylight. They already occupied the adjoining valley, and their flares were showing in the right rear when the 104th Battery were called up. The majority of Mr. Birks's gunners were raw recruits, but his guns were the first in action in the neighbourhood of Noreuil. The subsequent action was a model of defence and counter-attack, and illustrated the high standard of discipline and training of the A.I.F. at that time. It was unusually interesting, too, because all operations were visible from one point a very rare occurrence in modern battles. The Germans advanced over the ridge on the right front in short rushes; every man "stood-to" in defensive positions, and artillery and machine guns opened up with "direct fire." All "second line" men and "reserve" infantry turned out and doubled up to the front absolutely spontaneously: the disorganization on the right precluded the issuing of orders in the ordinary way. When the Germans were on the outskirts of the village, Mr. Birks selected sacrifice crews for his guns with orders to fire to the last, and sent surplus gunners to join the infantry. He then prepared to "shoot up" a certain sunken road as soon as the Germans should enter it. The engagement was then stationary for half an hour or so, our men being constantly reinforced from the rear, and the Germans firing from shellholes. General Gellibrand was the Senior Officer at Noreuil and stood close by the 104th guns, like a more or less disinterested spectator, throughout the action, with a couple of Lewis guns barking at his feet, and stray "Fritz" bullets dropping about him. The counter-attack was eventually launched, apparently by common consent, from the sunken road covered by the 104th guns, and the prisoners were soon pouring in and doubling to the rear. A general advance to the original frontline was made by about 9 a.m., and the fugitive Germans were caught on their wire in front of the Bullecourt line. This little victory, complete in itself, and attended by few casualties, came at a time when the A.I.F. had just suffered one of its worst setbacks, in the first abortive attack on the Bullecourt line. It had a remarkable effect on the spirits of all ranks, and the men were never in better humour than while bringing in the wounded and collecting souvenirs for the rest of that day.