



Sutton Veny Signals in Action 1914 ~ 1918

The painting was commissioned by the Royal Australian Corps of Signals Corps Committee and painted by the distinguished war artist Mr Ivor Hele CBE. It hangs in the foyer of the School of Signals at Watsonia Barracks, Macleod, Victoria, Australia.

In France, early in the spring of 1917, the German armies in the River Somme area retired to the Hindenburg Line. The Australian divisions followed up and Bapaume was occupied without resistance.

The advance in the initial stages was fairly rapid and the Australians found themselves in open country not scarred by old trenches or shell holes; so that, when the advance was held up it was decided to attack Bullecourt. It was possible to use cable wagons freely to lay cable from the headquarters of divisions to supporting artillery brigades.

One such occasion is recorded where a six-horse cable wagon not only laid cable in the open, but at a hard gallop. The diary of the detachment commander written at the time reads:

I told the lead driver to follow me at the pace I set, and the sappers cut the line as we went past the signal station. As we crossed the rise I gave the order to gallop and set off.

Before we'd covered 200 yards Fritz had spotted us and opened up on us with a field gun, but we were flat out by then and tore up the 900 yards was had to go to the artillery brigade. We slowed up to a walk as we came to the bank under cover, cut the cable and belted up the rise to the Ecoust-Beugnatre road. Damned if the Hun was not expecting us, for as soon as we came in sight again he opened up some more, but we beat him all the way as he was about 80 yards short at the time.

This incident was selected as the theme of the painting. It demonstrates that in France line telegraphy and telephony were the basic means of communication, and that the horse and cable wagon played an important part in providing these communications.

This painting Signals in Action 1914-1918 is dedicated to the men of the Signal Engineers who served during the First World War in Egypt, at Gallipoli, in France, in Palestine and in Mestopotamia.

And so they gave their bodies to the Commonwealth and earned each for himself praise that will never die, and with it the most glorious sepulchres, not that in which their mortal bones are laid, but a house in the minds of men, where their glory remains fresh to stir to speech or to action as the occasion arises.

Australian Corps of Signals Motto, "Certa Cito" [Swift and Sure]

Source: Sutton St. John the Evangelist