Copies of the letters sent to J.F. Downer, Esq., who was inquiring about above:

30-4-18

In the field

3rd Australian Tunnelling Company

Dear Mr. Downer,

Your wire of 27th inst. was received by me this morning to which I replied as follows: -

“Regret am unable to give any information at present - will advise you later.”

I would have written to you ere now but wished to make every inquiry regarding Neil’s disappearance. It was with great grief that I had to report on 22.4.18 that Neil was “missing”. I cannot give you all the details yet but briefly the circumstances are as follows:-

The Section of this Unit to which Neil belonged had for some time been employed on a part of the front about 20 miles away from Headquarters. I had purposely placed him with this detachment, as it was engaged on field engineering work, thinking that it would give his eye a better chance to improve than if he were working all the time in artificial light as in the tunnels. When I saw him last on 7/4/18 he told me that his eye had improved wonderfully. He was in charge of the detachment his Section Commander not then having returned from leave.

Some few days later the enemy attacked in the vicinity of his work. Neil with another very capable officer [Lt John Dow] and his detachment joined up with an Infantry Brigade for the purpose of stopping the enemy advance. He was ordered to take up a certain position with his men and portion of another Unit, bringing the combined strength up to about a Company and was subsequently put in command of this X Company. The Battalion to which this X Company was attached had its Headquarters close to this position. For some reason or other, it is not quite clear, Neil wished to see the Battalion Commander (up to this time the enemy attack had not reached them), and placing his Company in charge of the next senior officer [Lt John Dow], he set off to Battalion Headquarters, only about 200 yards distant. He had only disappeared out of sight a few minutes, when the enemy appeared in very strong force and exceedingly heavy fighting took place. At this point the enemy was repulsed with great losses, but as he made progress on each flank it was found necessary to withdraw from the position.

As they were withdrawing a careful search was made by the officer and men of this Unit for Neil. At great personal risk, Lt. Dow took an orderly and went to the building which had been Battalion Headquarters, and examined it and the vicinity without getting any sign of Neil. The fighting had previously reached this building and the advanced forces of the enemy were then ahead. Lieut. Dow with the rest of the detachment fought their way back to the British line and continued in the fighting for several days until relieved.

Owing to the continual fighting which has been going on I have not been able to get into touch with anyone, other than my own men, who may have possibly seen Neil during the heavy fighting which took place. As soon as it is possible to do so I can assure you every enquiry will be made.

While a large number of Huns were killed and some made prisoners a certain number of our own men unfortunately shared the same fate. Whatever befell Neil is at present only a matter of conjecture but I know that he was a too brave and gallant fighter to allow himself to be taken prisoner.

His absence is keenly felt by his brother officers and other ranks of this Unit, all of whom loved him very greatly for his soldierly and gentlemanly qualities.

It is so easily possible for him to have been wounded and taken away, that we have not yet given up hope. I will advise you later of any further particulars.

Yours very sincerely

(Sgd.) Alex. Sanderson

Major

(O.C. 3rd Australian Tunnelling Co.)

P.S. I am sending this to an address Neil gave to me when in London, hoping that it will reach you early.

A.S.