

Section 091

Summary

The 1st Battalion

The 1st Battalion was a regular battalion formed in 1881. In this section we summarise their activities in WW1

The 1st Bn was at Aldershot when war was declared. They departed for France on the 12th August 1914 and participated in the retreat from Mons as part of 6th Brigade. Their first major action was at the Bridge on the Sambre 25th/26th August. The end point of the Retreat was reached on 7th September when they reached Le Poteau. The flow of fighting was reversed on 9th September when they crossed the Marne and then the Aisne on the 14th. They then settled into trench warfare based at La Metz Farm. One of the first executions of the war took place there on 26th September when 9641 Pte George Ward was shot for cowardice. The Bn were involved in the 1st battle of Ypres from the 22nd October to the 13th November.

They went into Divisional reserve on the 15th November and spent the winter in and out of trenches, mounting attacks at Ducks Bill (20th Feb 1915), The Keep (10/11th March) and Richebourg (15th May) On the 16th May they retired to near Béthune to receive drafts from the 3rd Battalion. The summer was spent in and out of trenches before they participated in the Battle of Loos on the 5th September where they lost 288 men in one day.

The winter of 1915/16 was spent recuperating and the inevitable spells in trenches. They were preparing to join in the Battle of the Somme and their major action there was on the 27th July at Delville Wood. This time they lost 8 officers and 256 other ranks. They saw little more action until the 14th November when they attacked near Serre..

After that they were withdrawn to a back area where they remained until the 4th Feb 1917

when a small party launched an attack at Courcelette and achieved the odd result of taking prisoner exactly the same numbers of German officers and of men that the party itself consisted of. Further attacks were made at Miraumont on the 15th Feb, and Oppy Wood on the 29th April where LCpl J Welch won a VC. By the 1st May there was only enough men left to form two companies of 4 officers and 100 ORs each which was joined with the 23rd Royal Fusiliers to form a composite battalion. At the end of a second action at Oppy on the 3rd May they were down to 2 officers, both wounded and 94 other ranks. They were restored to a complement of 38 officers and 694 ORs by the end of August

They were back in action for the Battle of Cambrai near Bournon between the 26th and 30th November 1917 as part of 99th Brigade. The 99th smashed two German Divisions with very little assistance from other units of 2nd Division. After this it was back to the rear areas and then to the rest of the winter in the trenches.

They were in Corps reserve at Manancourt when, on the 21st March, the German offensive began. By the 23rd the Germans were upon them and they were forced to retreat suffering heavy casualties. They fought rearguard actions until the 27th when they were relieved. April, May and June 1918 were fairly quiet months, but in early July the great influenza epidemic struck. Attacks began again on the 21st August and the Battalion were involved in numerous actions until the Germans were retreating rapidly and it was mainly a case of following them and dealing with rearguards actions. Quite heavy casualties were incurred during this final phase of the war and they were at St Hilaire when the armistice was signed on November 11th

They formed one of the units to first occupy the Rhineland and were then withdrawn back to England and then in April 1919 were sent to India and on to northern Persia to repel the Bolsheviks. They left Persia on the 22nd May and reverted to peace-time activities.

