

Section 096

Summary

The 6th Battalion

In this section we summarise the activities of the 5th Battalion in WW1

The 6th Battalion was raised at Shorncliffe by Lt Col Foley in September 1914 as his 5th Bn had become full. Command was soon passed to Lt Col A J W Dowell. They moved to Colchester in October 1914 to join 53rd Brigade, part of one of the New Army Divisions, the 18th. They trained at Colchester until May 1915 when they moved to Codford St Mary on Salisbury Plain ready for embarkation.

They arrived in France on the 25th July 1915 and sustained their first casualty when Pte S Danby was wounded by a shell whilst they were practising trench warfare. Their first real job was holding a front line trench opposite Mametz which began 22nd August 1915. They missed the battle of Loos being kept in the Somme sector and doing spells in and out of the trenches until withdrawn for their training for the Somme offensive on the 29th April 1916. They were fortunate in being under the command of Major General Ivor Maxse whose training methods were perhaps the most forward thinking in the British Army.

The First Day of the Somme, July 1st 1916 saw the 6th Battalion on their first major engagement. They were very close to the huge mine that was exploded at Casino Point and a few of the 6th were injured by flying debris but the effect on the Germans was devastating and the survivors surrendered to the 6th in droves. The 18th Division was one of the few to completely attain all their objectives that day and the 6th advanced over one and a half miles in the day.

Their second engagement was at Delville Wood on the 19th July where they served as part of the 9th (Scottish) Division. They were desperately trying to plug the gap caused when the South Africans were driven out of the wood so there was very little planning and great confusion about lines of command. The 6th lost 27 killed and 127 wounded.

The third engagement, also on the Somme on the 26th/27th September saw the 6th in mainly a supporting role in the battle for the Schwaben Redoubt just by Thiepval.

The winter of 1916/17 was spent variously resting in billets and in and out of trenches in the Ancre Valley. The 17th/18th February saw them in action again in the battle of Boom Ravine when again they met all their objectives but had to withdraw as they had got too far ahead of the rest.

Their final engagements were at Third Ypres. They moved north on the 3rd July 1917 and on the 31st they made their move against a background of flawed intelligence reports and 30th Division having taken a wrong direction. Consequently when they approached Sanctuary Wood they came under strong German MG fire. However they achieved their objectives and in the course of the battle, their Medical Officer, Captain Harold Ackroyd earned a Victoria Cross for the way he attended to the wounded under the hottest fire. He had no less than 23 separate commendations.

The final action was at Poelcapelle on the 9th October when their CO, Lt Col H G F Longhurst was killed. After that they spent a miserable winter around Houthulst Forest.

In February 1918 the order was given to reduce each Brigade to three rather than four Battalions and the 6th were dropped from 53rd Brigade and disbanded, most of the men going to other Royal Berks Battalions.