

Section 098

Summary

The 8th Battalion

In this section we give an overall summary of the activities of the 8th Royal Berkshires in WW1

8th Battalion

The 8th Battalion had been formed by the end of September 1916 and was designated as part of K5, Kitcheners 5th Army. Lt Col W C Walton took over Command at Codford Camp in the first week of October. They were not allocated to one of the New Army Brigades and so tagged along with the 7th Battalion for most of their time remaining in England. They moved to Hutments at Sutton Veney near Warminster on the 7th May 1915 after having spent most of the winter billeted in Reading with headquarters at McIlroys Department Store. They suffered their first casualty while in England when 2nd Lt Harold Cohen was accidentally injured and died of blood poisoning.

They left for France on the 7th August 1915 and were allocated to 1st Division to replace one of the Guards Battalions in 2nd Brigade. This was one of the original BEF Regular Divisions and the 8th were expected to meet Regular standards with no allowances made for their volunteer status. They began their service in France with 27 officers and 765 other ranks. For the next two months they were in training for the forthcoming Battle of Loos, based in the Ames area. They set off on the 21st September and were in position on the 24th.

The Battle of Loos opened on September 25th and the 8th attacked Hulluch village. One platoon fought its way into the village and captured two German field guns as well as a number of machine guns. 2nd Lt Lawrence won the MC for his exploits. The casualties however were enormous. The 8th lost 493 and was reduced to 2 officers and 184 men. Many of the wounded were returned and on the 5th and 10th October, reinforcements arrived from the 9th Battalion. They attacked again on the 13th October, losing nearly another 140 men

and were then withdrawn to Lillers where they spent the winter.

Their next action was on the Somme on the 14th July 1916 when they attacked the two woods at Bazentin. This was followed up by an attack on Mametz Wood on 18th August and at High Wood on September 3rd. They were withdrawn from the line on 2nd October and spent the winter and spring in and out of trenches in the Albert area.

On the 18th June 1917 the battalion moved back north to the Belgian Border to guard the Yser Canal and familiarise themselves with coastal defence work. They were withdrawn to Le Clipon camp near Dunkirk just after the Germans launched a major attack on their former positions and destroying several battalions. At Le Clipon they trained on amphibious warfare as they were designated to be part of the British force to land on the Belgian coast as the follow up to the 3rd Battle of Ypres. Thus they missed most of the horrors of Passchendaele, arriving there on the 30th October.

In the great re-organisation of the army that took place in February 1918, the 8th were sent to join the 18th Division, taking the place of the 6th battalion in 53rd Brigade in the St Quentin area. Thus they were at the sharp end of the German offensive on the 21st March and had a large number of men taken prisoner. The remnant of the battalion withdrew gradually to Nampcel where they were formed into a composite battalion with remnants of the Royal West Kents and the 53rd Trench Mortar battalion. Together the three battalions had only 23 officers and 433 other ranks. They formed part of the defence of Amiens on 4th April and later withdrew to St Fuscien where they began to receive drafts of men from other units.

The final British offensive began on the 8th August with the Battle of Amiens with 8th in action at Gressaire Wood. They captured the great crater at La Boiselle on the 24th. They were in action again at Trones Wood on the

27th August and at St Pierre Vaast Wood on 2nd September.

There was a tragedy on September 5th when a train load of new conscripts arrived at Mericourt Station. As they were disembarking a shell exploded accidentally killing 31 and injuring 25.

The pursuit of the Germans resumed at L'Empire on the 19th September, at L'Eveque Wood on the 23rd October, at Mount Carmel 26th October and Mormal Forest 4th November. The war ended with the 8th at Le Cateau.

Here they remained, clearing up the left overs of war and collecting salvage. They were burying dead animals and trying to identify booby traps as part of their regular work. There was plenty of time for sport and recreation and gradually men were discharged back to civilian life. The Battalion was reduced to cadre and disbanded on the 12th April 1919.