

## Section 191

# The First Counter Attacks

## 1st Battalion November 1914 to May 1915

*After the Battle of First Ypres the 1st Battalion was to spend an uncomfortable winter in the mud and to be marginally involved in a number of raids and other operations. Continued from section 181.*

### In Reserve

#### 15th November 1914 - Westhoek

On the 15th the brigade was relieved by French troops and went into divisional reserve at Hooze, moving on the 17th to Ypres, and on the 18th to billets at Caestre in the back area, where the battalion remained refitting and training till the 21st December. It had had many compliments on its recent behaviour from everybody up to the Corps Commander, which culminated in the Brigadier's words, as it marched past him into Caestre, "*Splendid! just as you have always fought.*"

Capt Lucas

*November 15th.*- C and D in trenches and badly shelled again. Rain and snow. The French relieved us in our trenches, relief took from 9 p.m. till 1 p.m. We marched to a dirty farm near Hooze. The Brigade Headquarters were there and had the only decent rooms. Our Mess was in a tiny bakery and we slept in the loft. C and D Companies in a barn, A B and Draft slept in wet dugouts in a wood. The General asked for our recent casualty list, they were from October 24th to November 15th, 450, including 14 Officers and 45 sick. He then remarked that the finest thing about it was that we fought as well at the end of it as at the start.

#### 16th November 1914 - Hooze

They remained in dug-outs in the wood for most of the day with one company in the farmhouse. At 21:00 they all marched off to billets at Ypres.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 16th* - Wet and cold. A few shells. General Munro came round and saw the men and made nice remarks about the Regiment. We marched at 9 pm to billets in north-west corner of Ypres. We got very good billets thanks to Isaac and Bishop, who had gone on ahead. They broke open a private house which had been vacated, it had a bathroom and stoves in all the bedrooms. O'Keefe has the Legion of Honour and well deserves it.

#### 17th November 1914 - Ypres

They were ordered to be ready to move at 16:00 but this was later delayed by 12 hours. The Machine gun section

was sent to join 1st Division.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 17th* - Had orders to march at 4 p.m. towards Hazebruck, order cancelled later and we were told to be ready to support the 3rd Division. Later orders received to continue our march at 4 p.m. tomorrow. Ypres shelled by heavy guns all yesterday and to-day

9886 Pte Alfred Collins was killed on the 17th. Berkshire Chronicle 29/1/15:-

Particulars have already appeared in the Chronicle of the death of Private Alfred Collins, the son of Mr and Mrs D Collins of 23 Lower Armour Road, Tilehurst who was in B Company 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment. It transpires that he met his death having performed a self-sacrificing act. He took a wounded Belgian back to the dressing station and on his return had to pass an open space. It was then that he got shot.

#### 18th November 1914 - Caestre

They set off at 04:00 marching to West Outre where there paused for breakfast at 10:30. They continued the march to billet in Caestre

Capt Lucas:-

*November 18th.*--Marched off 4 a.m. Order of march, K.R.R., South Staffords and ourselves. Our destination was Caestra, where we are to have our rest. it was an 18 mile march, and a fairly stiff one considering the roads, and that the men came straight from a month in the trenches. The General waited to see us march in. His comment was "Splendid, just as you have always fought."

#### 19th November 1914

They rearranged the billets and set up a recreation room for concerts etc. The men were able to relax with some football games. The Medical Officer (Capt O'Keefe), the Adjutant (Lt Leggatt) and Lt Bishop were granted 5 days leave to England.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 19th.*- Caestra. Changed some of the billets for the better. Sergeants' mess and recreation room in houses. General Fanshawe went round our billets and told the men that it was always a great relief to have the Royal Berks in the trenches, as he then knew that that part of the line was safe.

#### 20th November 1914

The day began with an early morning run for all and then parades. Afterwards two companies went off for a

route march and the other two had drill and musketry.

Sgt F May took charge of the newly arrived draft and gave them extra drill and musketry practice in the afternoon.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 20th.* - General Munro came round and spoke well of the Regiment. A and B had a smoking concert, C Played D at football. Leggatt, Bishop and O'Keeffe start on five days' leave.

#### **21st November 1914**

Lt Methven from the 3rd Bn arrived and Lt Woods went off on leave.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 21st.*- A and B football match, C and D smoking concert. Met J. R. Collins. Saw Ready in the Brigade Office. Woods goes on leave.

#### **22nd November 1914**

As it was Sunday the men were allowed to rest. Capt Bird arrived with a reinforcement of 12 men.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 22nd.* - Sunday no parades. All companies pay out.

On November 22nd Pte Fred Stevens of Maidenhead received wounds from which he died at Nottingham in January 1915.

#### **23rd November 1914**

Capt Lucas:-

*November 23rd.* - Church Service in school. About 180 men inoculated.

#### **24th November 1914**

The Copmmander in Chief came to visit and inspect the Battalion and expressed his appreciation for all they had done in the campaign so far. In the afternoon battalion HQ played their counterparts from 6th Brigade at football.

*November 24th.*- Sir John French inspects the Battalion outside billets at noon. Defaulters digging sample trenches and dugouts for C.R.E. Bathroom fixed up in the Maririe. All A Company had hot baths. -

#### **25th November 1914**

*November 25th.* - Sample trenches and dugouts finished and inspected. B Company had hot baths.

#### **26th November 1914**

*November 26th.* - Walked round our various farms to look at the transport animals. Isaac has collared five farms to put them under cover, most horses of other regiments are out in the open.

#### **27th November 1914**

About 60 men were inoculated and Lts Fullbrook-Leggatt and Bishop returned from leave. Capt Lucas passed command to Capt Bird and went on leave.

Capt Lucas:-

*November 27th.* - Ordinary parades. Leggatt and Bishop turned up about 7 p.m. in a car from the 1st Division. Started with Isaac, caught 9 p.m. train at Hazebruck on leave.

*With Captain Lucas on leave we lose his illumination of the day to day affairs of the 1st Battalion.*

#### **28th November 1914**

There was a concert in the evening

#### **29th November 1914**

There was a church parade at 09:30 for 100 men at the Mairie. Lt Belcher went on leave.

#### **30th November 1914**

A new draft of 149 men with 2/Lts CS Searle and RBS Upton. This was the 6th reinforcement. Also Capt C G Hill DSO arrived to take over command of the Battalion as the replacement for Col Graham. 2Lt Stokes went on leave.

A supply of new clothing turned up and it was decided to start with A Coy. Each man was given a hot bath and then a complete change of outfit.

The brigade was put onto standby to move at an hours notice to form a flying column.

#### **1st December 1914**

The flying column never materialised so B Coy were re-kitted and parades were held as usual. Capt Wyld from the 3rd Wilts and Capt Radford arrived from 2nd Battalion.

#### **2nd December 1914**

The news came through that Lt Fullbrook-Leggatt had been awarded the DSO

#### **3rd December 1914**

The battalion marched to West Meterten for an inspection by the King and the Prince of Wales at 11:30.

The 7th reinforcement of 173 men arrived under Lt C P Grindle. Also Lt C O Green of the 3rd Bn and 2Lts Shute and Weston of the 3rd Warwicks arrived.

#### **4th December 1914**

Capt Lucas returned from leave and 2Lt Gregson-Ellis went off on leave. The news came through that Cat Birt, Lt Hanbury-Sparrow and Lt Nicholson had been awarded the DSO

#### **5th to 21st December 1914**

The whole period was spent in billets at Caestre. Inoculation of all the men was completed.

The weather was so bad that very little training could be done. Special attention was paid to training specialists,

eg machine gun teams, range finders and telephonists. Large amounts of supplies and gifts were arriving from England and every man got a complete new outfit. They all got a hot bath twice a week at the Mairie and there were concerts and football matches to keep the men occupied.

Every 4 days they were put on standby for the flying column and there were church parades at the Mairie every Sunday.

During the period 2Lt Leach and 2Lt Lancaster joined from the 3rd Dorsets, the latter moved on to the Norfolks.

On the 19th Capt Lucas gave a lecture to officers and NCOs on the campaign since October 19th. and on the 21st Lt Fullbrook-Leggat filled in the period from the outbreak of war

## Trenches at Givenchy

### 22nd December 1914

On the 22nd December the battalion left the Ypres neighbourhood for that of Bethune. Travelling by motorbus, beginning at 08:00 it was at Bethune at midday, a journey of 40 miles. They marched to Beuvry where orders for A & B Coys were received for them to take over from the Scots Guards and London Scottish. at Givenchy in trenches in front of the village; C and D were to be in reserve but they were sent to be in support of A and B. The first night was fairly quiet with the occasional sounds of bombing and rifle fire.

The mud and wetness of these trenches were a shock to the battalion, as to every other unit which entered them for the first time. Headquarters had to be fixed in the damp and muddy foundations of a ruined farm.

### 23rd December 1914

Both C and D improved their dug-outs and dug a communications trench to link them together.

There was a brigade conference in the evening where the tone was distinctly in favour of offensive action.

87th Battery were active later, throwing shells onto the enemy trenches.

### 24th December 1914

There was a hard frost overnight and the day was very quiet. Captain G R Wyld [WY0004] (3rd Wiltshire, attached) was killed in a support trench by a stray bullet.

### 25th December 1914

Christmas does not seem to have been celebrated by any of the fraternisation with the enemy which occurred elsewhere on the front; on the contrary, the day was chosen for the commencement of sapping towards the German trenches by A Company. However CQMS W

King did report that it was a quiet day.

In the morning the CO went around the trenches and gave each man a Christmas card from the King and Queen. They also received a congratulatory message from the GOC 2nd Division.

Capt Wyld was buried in the garden of one of the houses.

Pte L F Dyer (8216) of A Company wrote an essay later recalling the first Christmas in the trenches:-

"It was the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Outside, where a bright moon in the sky that was full of stars and was making the snow covered landscape almost as bright as day, curious shapes were moving, sometimes very slowly, at others in short spurts from shadow to shadow. There was very little noise about these movements; just the light metallic rattle of equipment, or the whisper of orders being passed.

The houses in the village had been shelled out a few weeks before and there was no sign of life in any of them. The destination of these moving shapes was the end of the village, where once had been the line. The road ran straight out into open country, quite bare, except for a few clumps of small bushes and several straight lines of men frozen into grotesque shapes in the mud. They had been cut down with machine guns as a binder out wheat, a few days before.

Snow covered everything. The bright moon, the stars and a glitter of frost made a perfect Christmas scene "Peace on Earth."

A corporal and three men had been detailed to a detached post in the last house on the left of the road. Well, not exactly a house; two walls in the form of an L with a heap of coals still burning in one corner where the coal shed had been. There was a small trench on one side in case of accidents, or unexpected guests. It was about ten feet long and four feet deep, the digger either having been very short or his spade had worn out. It was muddy in the bottom so a floor had been put in; there were lots of spare rations in those days -No Coupons- and he had made a good tiled floor with tins of bully beef which had to be dug out. Six feet is a lot more healthy than four, and anyhow they might want to eat the bully or use it as ammunition.

The best find was a half full jar of rum, together with a pewter mug. This made the prospect of Christmas look a good deal brighter.

Water -? a pump or tap and some nice dry straw to sleep on were the only things left for Santa Claus to provide. Two of the men went back into the village to forage, but the only straw they could find was frozen so they decided to see what the houses contained. From a large old fourposter bedstead they stripped a prince of feathered mattresses. It was so thick that they were unable to roll it up, and the only way they could carry it was to get underneath, bow their shoulders and let it hang down on either side.

The corporal who saw it coming thought it was an attack by elephants from the rear and never recovered from the shock; he was shot between the eyes by a sniper a couple of weeks after so that it really didn't matter. The men also salvaged a black and white striped umbrella

and after a large tot of rum in a small amount of tea, made on the coal fire, the three who were not on sentry went peacefully to sleep with all the comforts of home on a lovely feather bed, with a black and white umbrella for a snow break.

Waking up on a bright fresh Christmas morning with the same kind of headache they would have got at home, they wished each other "A Merry Christmas."

#### **26th December 1914**

Next day the 1st Royal Berkshire went back into billets at Essars, being relieved by the Northhamptons and now in Corps Reserve.

#### **27th December 1914**

After a church parade gifts from Princess Mary arrived.

#### **28th December 1914**

The companies went on a short exercise.

#### **29th December 1914**

They moved one and a half miles to new billets at Les Choquaux. The farmhouse that D Coy were occupying burned down at 19:00 as some men lit a fire too close to a barn.

Lt Boshell arrived with the 8th reinforcement of 60 men, of whom half were described as from 'Kitcheners Army'

#### **30th December 1914**

Back to training all day - marching, bayonet fighting etc.

Capt LH Birt arrived back from sick leave and took over command of C Coy.

#### **31st December 1915**

In the evening orders were received to be ready to move in an hour.

## **In Trenches at Festubert**

### **1st to 3rd January 1915**

The order on the 1st January was to move to Beuvry to act as reserve for 1st Division who had been attacked by the Germans near Givenchy, They were in position in billets at 13:15 on a half hour standby.. At 23:30 they had new orders, and at 09:15 the next day were on the move again, marching back to 6th Brigade reserve at Le Touret.

### **4th January 1915 - Le Touret**

On the 4th January 1915 Captain Lucas went to England to be employed on the staff of the 88th Brigade in Gallipoli, and command of the battalion was taken by Captain C. G. Hill, D.S.O. [HI0002]

The battalion was still at Le Touret, and they set off at 17:00 to the front-line trenches at Festubert, where C & D Coys took over the line with the South Staffordshire on its left and the South Wales Borderers of 3rd Bde on its right. A and B went into reserve billets at Festubert.

### **5th January 1915 - Festubert**

German shelling was very heavy, and one shell, which pitched on the Headquarters of C Company, caused thirteen casualties, including Captain L. H. Birt, D.S.O., who was killed outright on Jan 5th. [BI0007] They tried to improve and repair the parapet with sandbags but the soil was too wet. To add to the misery the telephones were not working and one company was without communications all day.

### **6th January 1915**

The 6th was a very quiet day and the Battalion was relieved by the 2/Staffords at 17:00 and returned to billets in Le Touret.

### **7th January 1915 - Le Touret**

The following day it was again very wet, they tried to provide all men with a hot bath. However there was a great deal of sickness, mainly described as rheumatics and 17 men had to go to hospital.

### **8th January 1915**

On the 8th they were back in the front line, relieving the Staffords at 17:00. However by now the trenches had deteriorated further and the men had to stand knee-deep in water.

Captain E M Hilfrey arrived with the 9th reinforcement of 25 men, but 26 more men were admitted to hospital including Lt Grindle and two men who had been injured during the relief operation.

### **9th January 1915**

At noon on the 9th ten shells fell close to Battalion Head-quarters just as the adjutant was calmly playing Tosti's "Good-bye" on a piano.

Because of the atrocious conditions and the increasing illness the GOC decided that they could risk reducing the strength of the front line as he reasoned the Germans would be able to attack only along roads, even if they wanted to. As a consequence two platoons were placed guarding the road and the rest of two companies were able to retire to billets.

### **10th January 1915**

Lionel Mackinder, the former actor was killed by a sniper on January 10th. The following report appeared in the Berkshire Chronicle of 22nd Jan 1915

It was at eight o'clock on Sunday night, January 10<sup>th</sup>, when the last platoon of the regiment was being moved out to the reserve trenches that a sniper's shot from the enemy's trenches brought him down. The German may have overheard the men talk as they moved out. When the platoon commander asked if anyone was missing it was found that Mr Mackinder, the most popular soldier in the regiment, was not with them. With three volunteers, the captain returned to look for the missing soldier, and another man was shot during the search.

Mr Mackinder was found with a wound in his throat, and

when his captain, helping him up from the ground, where he lay in the dark, asked him if he was much hurt, he simply answered "I don't know", rolled over and died.

Next day his comrades carried him three miles and buried him besides one of the officers of the regiment (probably Captain L H Birt DSO) who had been killed last week. A small cross was placed above his grave.

Twenty-two years ago he and his wife made their debut in pantomime together at Brighton.

#### DRAMATIST OFFICER'S TRIBUTE

Mr Dion C Calthrop writes to the "Daily Mail" as follows:-

Sir, - Those who have decried the actor recently will be glad to hear that the stage can provide real heroes. It is not easy to write of my wonderful and dear friend Lionel Mackinder, who has laid down his life for his country, and I should not do so if it were not a public service.

What he has done as an actor for the profession is well known and applauded; what he has now done for the profession is beyond applause. He gave his service quietly and without applause or advertisement. His best notices are in the papers reminding an ever-forgetful public that a fine friend has made his final exit. He had the gift of tears as well as of laughter.

He refused a commission in order to be out of the limelight, and to fight with the men. He was humble, honest, and had the just sense that at this time, above everything else, the country came first. I speak out of my sense of honour to this art to which he belonged and out of my heart for my love of him. Men like Mac do not die

The British guns opened up at 13:30 to cover an attack by 1st Division and the two line companies, A and B were ordered to open rapid bursts of fire at intervals during the day to keep the Germans on their toes.

At 17:30 they were relieved again by the Staffords and retired to reserve billets in Le Touret

#### 12th January 1915

Cpl A Passingham [8724] was hit in the chest on January 12th while taking up his position as a signaller. He died a few days later on January 16th. This time it was C and D Coys in the front line as they took over again from the Staffords at 17:00

#### 13th January 1915

A and B swapped over with C and D in the firing line. During the day they observed some movement of enemy staff officers.

#### 14th January 1915

Early on the 14th, just before the battalion was relieved, Lance-Corporal Bacchus [U29534], hearing some Germans working at wiring about 100 yards in front of the line, lined up his men silently, fired a Very pistol, and opened fire, with the result of killing eight of a German working party of twenty.

At long last the Brigade was relieved and the 1st HLI took over from the Battalion at 17:30 and they all marched to Corps reserve billets at Les Choquaux.

## Corps Reserve

### 15th to 20th January 1915

While in Corps reserve the battalion engaged in section drill and other training. On the 15th belated Christmas presents arrived.

Company Quartermaster Sergeant W King of the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Berkshire Regiment writing under the date January 17<sup>th</sup> and reported in the Berkshire Chronicle of 29th January:-

"We are now having a very quiet time visiting our old friends, the Germans, at intervals, losing either officers or men at every visit, but our casualties are very low now compared with those of a few months back which were very heavy about the month of October.

The regiment was in the trenches for Christmas Day but everything was very quiet. We are at present keeping fairly well, although the trenches are very wet, making everything very miserable; but of course we have the satisfaction of knowing that our friends have got to put up with the same difficulties, if not worse.

On the 17th two detachments of 250 men each had to be sent to Rue De l'Epinette about five miles away to dig a redoubt and on top of that the battalion was called upon to guard a bridge and Brigade HQ. The CO complained bitterly that:-

These conditions do not allow of the dictum that energetic training of all branches is to be carried out during the periods of rest to be fulfilled.

The 10th reinforcement arrived on the 19th with Lt G W Getting and 70 men.

## Front Line

### 20th to 31st January 1915

The rest ended on the 20th with A and B Coys marching off at 12:30 to Rue de l'Epinette to take over billets from the 3rd Coldstreams and C and D Coys going to the front line to relieve Guards Companies but still in very limited strength manning just 8 small posts on a 500 yard front.

On the 22nd a Territorial RE detachment arrived to fit four of the breastworks with steel loopholes which gave much better protection for men engaged in sniping at the enemy.

They were relieved by the Kings Liverpools at 17:00 on the 23rd and retired back to the billets at Le Touret.

They were woken up with a bang on the 25th as the enemy were attacking the 1st Division at Givenchy at 07:30. At 08:00 the Battalion was put on alert and ordered to move off at 09:15. However after a short distance the order to return was given and they returned to billets at 10:15

Later that day Kt Carr arrived with the 11th reinforcement of 50 men. About half were reservists and a half

Kitchener volunteers with a few returning wounded.

On the 26th the CO inspected the new arrivals and a 30 yards range was constructed to test rifles and rifle periscopes.

The 27th was the Kaisers birthday - it was not known whether the Germans were celebrating but it was a quiet day.

The 28th was Court Martial day - there were 4 cases, one of drunkenness and three of conduct prejudicial to good order.

Later that day it was back to the front line, relieving the Kings Liverpools. However the CO felt confident enough to let 4 NCOs and 3 men go off on leave to England

On the 29th they built four low shallow trenches, each about 100 yards long to provide shelter for reinforcements. There was a light fall of snow and every movement was very conspicuous to the enemy, especially to their aircraft which were very much in evidence. During the evening an explosion behind the German lines was heard, followed by shouts and groans.

Two further explosions followed the next day from the German lines and they were observed repairing their wire. The RE tried to construct roads to bring up reinforcements but despite bridging dykes it was too wet to be effective.

Two new machine guns arrived on the 30th and next day they were set up in front of Hindoo Village. When they saw the German reliefs marching up at 19:30 they gave the new guns a test. When it was all quiet the Germans made it plain they had broken a convention and called out rude comments

## **Rest at Le Preol**

### **1st -19th February 1915**

At 17:30 on the 1st Feb the Battalion was relieved by the 129th Dogras and the Black Watch forming the Barielly Brigade. They marched back first to billets at Vendin les Bethune where their MO since mobilization, Capt O'Keefe RAMC left them to join 4th Field Ambulance. Lt Large took over as MO.

The 2nd was taken up with hand grenade practice and a visit from Cpts Collins and Orr from 1st Corps HQ.

On the 3rd they set off at 11:45 to march via Bethune and Beuvry to Le Preol . D Coy were sent to forward billets at Givenchy along with two of the Battalions machine guns.

They were stood to arms on the 4th at 06:30 but later were able to fit in some musketry practice.. A party of 50 men was sent up to Givenchy village to build a second line of defence at 21:00.

### **5th February 1915**

The activities were repeated next day (5th). Later in the day Lt E E N Burney arrived with the 12th reinforcement of 40 men. This brought the Battalion strength up to 941.

### **6th February 1915**

Another redoubt near St Maire Givenchy was dug by a party of 100 from B Coy on the 6th and the Guards Brigade straightened the line somewhat by recapturing about 100 yards of trenches.

## **Trenches at Givenchy**

### **7th February 1915**

Again they were stood to arms at 06:30 but relaxed to hold Sunday services at 10:00.

At 15:00 they began relieving the Kings Liverpools in Givenchy village, they were impeded by a lively German bombardment but suffered no casualties. Battalion HQ and D Coy took over The Keep. B Coy were on the right, only 50 yards from the enemy, A Coy in the centre and C Coy on the left. The Staffords were on the right of B Coy and 1/KRRC on the left of C Company. For a change the new line was dry except for the section held by B Coy.

### **8th February 1915**

The day was spent improving the parapet and digging better communication trenches. In the evening they began digging two saps and a mine tunnel towards the German.

Around 21:30 Germans were heard near the listening post in the Orchard and a party was sent out to bomb them. A Coy scored a success by hitting a sniper.

### **9th February 1915**

Four men were slightly wounded in the afternoon when the Germans shelled the centre section. Later D Coy relieved A Coy who had borne the brunt of the shelling.

### **10th February 1915**

A second sap towards the Shrine was started. There was a lot of aerial activity from both sides and an active exchange of gunfire.

### **11th February 1915**

At 15:00 the Kings relieved the Battalion who suffered one slight casualty in the process. Work had continued on digging trenches and saps and the Germans had been observed driving in piles near the Ducks Bill. B C and D Coys returned to Le Preol

## Le Preol

### 12th to 14th February 1915

For a change they had a fairly uneventful rest. There was a concert on the Saturday night (13th) at which a lot of hidden talent was discovered and the usual Sunday parade took place on the 14th

## Back at The Keep

### 15th February 1915

As the 1st Royal Berkshire were taking over the line from the 1st Kings Liverpools, the enemy burst two high explosive shells over the "Keep" which wounded several men who were chatting in the courtyard. Second-Lieutenant G. H. Stokes [ST0020] who was attached from the Royal West Kents had his right leg broken and three fingers of his right hand blown off, Lieutenant and Quartermaster Boshell [BO0002] has a flesh wound in the arm and Lt Caldwell of the RFA had a flesh wound in the shoulder. Five men were also wounded, most of them severely.

Here the battalion held the position known as the "Orchard" with posts at White House, Red House and the "Shrine"

### 16th February 1915

The 13th reinforcement arrived with 2Lt Taffs and 40 other ranks.

### 17th February 1915

They found that the Germans too had been digging towards the British lines and they actually had a post right in the Orchard. There was a maze of trenches littered with the dead of both sides, but the British position was regarded as strong enough.

### 18th February 1915

These posts were temporarily driven in by bombing on the 18th starting at 00:15, but were regained with the aid of heavy fire opened by C Company. One of the German dead was found to be wearing an Iron Cross.

### 19th February 1915

C Coy and the KRRCs had a go themselves at the Germans, throwing five bombs in quick succession, but to no apparent effect. The 1st Kings Liverpool returned to relieve them in the afternoon and they marched back to billets at Le Preol.

## Storming the Germans at Ducks Bill

### 20th February 1915

On the 20th a minor operation was undertaken against a salient of the German trenches known as the "Duck's Bill" It must be remarked that the British and enemy lines were very close to one another in this neighbour-

hood.

For this operation B Coy of the 1st Royal Berkshire supplied:

- (1) A storming party of Lieutenant E. E. N. Burney [BU0009] and thirty others.
- (2) Support—Second-Lieutenant E. N. Getting [GE0002] and twenty men.
- (3) Local reserve Captain L. W. Bird [BI0002] and two platoons.

A similar force was provided by the 1st South Staffords and a demolition and there was a blocking party of the East Anglian RE.

Captain C. G. Hill, D.S.O. [HI0002], was in general charge of operations.

At 16:50 the storming and support parties moved to the flanks so to leave the "Duck's Bill" open to artillery bombardment from the 17th Batt RFA with 47 howitzers and 1st Siege batt RGA, which began at 17:00 A quarter of an hour later they assembled opposite the extreme point of "Duck's Bill" as the bombardment lengthened range.

At 17:20 the order to begin the assault was given. Lieutenant Burney, leading the stormers, reached the German trenches with trifling loss, and his men spread right and left along them, shooting, bayoneting, and bombing their occupants. Here Lieutenant Burney was badly wounded, and command of the party was taken by Sergeant E Burgess [8070], who had himself been wounded. The R.E. officer accompanying the assault could find no traces of mining operations, and at 017:40 the signal to withdraw was given.

The object of the attack had been to ascertain if the enemy were mining. The RE officer declared he could find no trace of German mines

As they withdrew the Kings Liverpool and S Staffs reoccupied the trenches. At 19:00 Brig Gen R Fanshaw declared his satisfaction with the raid and thanked all the participants

The casualties in this affair were five other ranks killed, one officer (Lieut. Burney) and five other ranks wounded. The loss was chiefly from enfilade fire from the flanks. Lieutenant Burney was carried in by Private J. Penny [7265] (B Company), who received the D.C.M. Burney and Sergeant Burgess were also recommended for reward.

## Billets at Le Preol

### 21st to 23rd February 1915

Three days rest with routine training followed. Lt Fullbrook-Leggatt was taken to hospital on the 21st seriously ill with pneumonia.

They went back to the trenches on the 23rd...

## Trenches at Givenchy

**24th to 27th February 1915**

The 14th reinforcement of 50 NCOs and men arrived on the 24th.

Work on the saps continued and the line was shortened somewhat so that only two Companies were need to hold the Battalion's front.

More shelling on the 26th knocked out the wall of what had been the officers mess, and Capt Bird was wounded while digging a new trench around 21:00

Relief came on the 27th in the person of the 1st Kings Liverpools and within an hour they were back in billets at Le Preol by 20:00

## Billets at Le Preol

**28th February to 3rd March 1915**

On the 1st March the officers beat the sergeants at football 1-0.

The 15th reinforcement arrived on the 3rd in the form of 25 NCOs and men.

## Trenches at Givenchy

**4th to 7th March 1915**

The Kings Liverpools had been relieved again at 10:00 on the 3rd.

In the afternoon of the 4th the Germans opened up with a Minenwerfer but apart from some damage to the parapet and to an MG emplacement the mines had little effect. The Battalion responded with their trench mortar next day doing little damage to the German trenches, but when the Germans responded with another minenwerfer the Royal Berks' right trench was blown in.

On the 6th orders were given for a demonstration to support the French who were attacking at Notre Dame de Lorette at 15:00. The demonstration consisted of about an hour of rifle and artillery fire and was repeated at 23:00 and 01:00 next morning.

## Billets at Le Preol

**7th to 9th March 1915**

After being relieved by the 1st Kings Liverpools on the 7th they returned to billets in Le Preol.

The next day they went in groups to Bethune where every man got a bath, was given a clean set of underclothes and had their uniforms fumigated.

The 9th was spent training for assaulting enemy trenches

and at 17:30 they got the order that they were to do just that next day.

## Attack on the Keep

**10/11th March 1915**

An attack on the German trenches near the Keep was planned for 10th March by 6th Brigade. The 1st Royal Berkshire was at first in reserve with the other three battalions attacking. They left Le Preol at 04:30 and took up their allotted positions

The attack began at 08:10. when the South Staffordshire Regiment on the right succeeded in reaching the enemy trench, but were unable to establish themselves there owing to downhill machine gun fire and enfilade fire. In the centre the King's Liverpool Regiment were stopped by uncut wire, and could not reach the trench. On the left, the first line of the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps reached the trench, but their supports were unable to get up, owing to machine-gun fire on their flanks.

All three battalions had suffered heavy casualties when, at 08:35, the Berkshire men were ordered up. A Company (Lieut. J. H. Woods [WO0004]) at once moved to Givenchy dugouts, to the aid of the South Staffordshire, whose C.O. kept the company there.

Meanwhile, the assaulting columns had been forced back, and a renewal of the attack was postponed pending a fresh bombardment. A was in the trenches leading to the Mairie, half of B Company occupied Givenchy dugouts, and the rest of the Royal Berkshire were in reserve in their original position.

At 14:15 the second bombardment began and the Royal Berkshire were ordered to attack, if the wire had been cut, from a point N.W. of the "Duck's Bill" In order to find out if the wire had indeed been cut; Captain Hill sent out Private F A Wood [11850] of B and another man to reconnoitre at 14:35. Wood, leaving his companion half-way, went right up to the German wire, but received wounds of which he died later. Nevertheless, he managed to crawl back to his comrade. whom he sent in with a message that the wire was uncut and the German trenches strongly held. In consequence of this report the assault was put off. Private Wood's gallantry and devotion probably saved many lives and an unsuccessful attack.

Late that evening a message was received from Gen Sir Charles Munro commanding I Corps:-

I feel confident that the bravery and steadfastness of the 6th Brigade was today what it always has been ever since I have known them.

To which Maj Gen H S Horne of 2nd Division had added:-

When the 6th Brigade do not succeed, no other troops can - they have made a great effort.



A fresh attack was ordered for the 11th, to be led by D Company (Capt. M. C. Radford [RA0001]) on the left, from the neighbourhood of the "Shrine" His left to be about Observation House. They were brought up at 08:00 to their positions. C Coy (2nd-Lieut. W. G Cox [CO0022]) were in immediate support in Village Trench and its communications trenches. B Coy (Capt. G. Belcher [BE0009]) in local reserve near French Farm and A Coy (Lieut. J. H. Woods [WO0004] ) were in reserve, near Givench dugouts.

The morning was so foggy that the preliminary two-hours' bombardment could begin only at 09:00 and lasted two hours. At 11:10 the 47th Battery reported having made a gap in the German wire, but, as it turned out to be only five yards wide, and the British trench from which the assault was to start had been badly damaged. Brig Gen Fanshawe came up personally to inspect the gap and agreed with Capt Hill - so the operation was postponed. The battalion were relieved by the Irish Guards and returned to their overnight positions. Later word came through that 6th Brigade were to be replaced by the 4th Guards Brigade so the Battalion returned to Montmorency Barracks in Bethune.

They were joined there by the 16th reinforcement of 2/Lt A J Bowles and 55 men.

The Berkshire Chronicle reported on the 17th September 1915:-

It is interesting to mention here that though the 1st Royal Berks were not employed in the actual attack on Neuve Chapelle they were rendering their comrades of the 2nd Battalion assistance by keeping the enemy engaged in another part of the front. On the morning of March 10th the 1st Corps attacked from Givenchy. The 1st Battalion were on the right of the line acting as reserves to the remainder of the 6th Brigade.

The attack was opened with a heavy bombardment for about an hour, but the wire entanglements were not sufficiently cut and the Kings Liverpool Regiment and Kings Royal Rifles who led the attack, were compelled to retire. The 1st Berkshire were taken up to try and break through at night, but owing to the formidable wire obstacles the attack was cancelled.

Private Barlow recalled from his hospital bed on the 20th August:-

Shortly after this the Battle of Neuve Chapelle commenced and we were on the right of the line in this attack, acting as reserves to the remainder of the brigade. We opened with a terrific bombardment for about an hour. The attack was then made by the Kings Liverpool Regiment and the Kings Royal Rifles, but these found that the enemy wire entanglements were so thick that it was impossible to get through and they had to retire. These entanglements were heavily bombarded all day and our regiment was taken up to try and break through at night, but so formidable were the entanglements that the bombardment made no impression on them and our attack was cancelled for that day.

The bombardment was carried out all next day with the same results. Then the attack was cancelled, but we had

done our 2nd Battalion a lot of good by drawing the enemy reserves from there; the position was very important and if it had been taken would have been the means of the enemy losing La Bassée.

After this trench warfare was the order again and we were being continually bombed by the trench howitzers I have spoken about, but our troops were used to them now and did not take much notice. One way we found stopped them more than any other, was to give three hearty cheers and jeer them well over it. After a while they almost stopped, finding they made no impression on us.

## Billets at Bethune

### 12th to 21st March 1915

After the events of March 10th/11th the battalion was in billets, at Bethune, training and keeping itself in spirits with boxing, football, etc.

The 17th reinforcement arrived with Lt G Searles, 2Lts H D Steed, E Baseden and H J Clarke plus 20 other ranks.

The two new reinforcements were inspected on the 12th. For the first two days they were on orders to be ready to move but these were cancelled on the 13th and they moved temporarily to Beuvry for the night.

A football match between the officers and the men was hotly contested on Sunday 14th. It was won by the men 2-0

The Battalion joined with the 1st Kings to put on a concert on the 16th attended by Maj. Gen Horne and Brig Gen Fanshawe.

They were put back on a half hour standby to move next day. This effectively precluded any of the planned activities. However they held a boxing tournament in the theatre with a very enthusiastic audience - only 130 men could squeeze in. The tournament was continued on the 19th.

The 18th began with a route march at 10:00 and in the afternoon the Battalion played the Glasgow Highlanders at football and lost 0-2. The Battalion team was:

Capt M C Radford

Capt A P Strange

2Lt Shute

2Lt Carr

2Lt Clarke

CSM Sumners

Pte Buckingham

Pte Heath

Pte Absworth

Pte Bossum

Pte Walsh

The Highlanders went on to win the Brigade tournament

on the 20th.

## Trenches at Cuinchy

### 21st to 25th March 1915

They took over the front line trenches from the H L I in the morning of the 21st. They left Bethune at half hourly intervals by Company starting with A at 08:00. The section was known as The Brickfields and the trenches were in splendid condition.

The next morning they put on a demonstration of rifle fire from 01:00 to 01:30 to help an attack being mounted by the French.

Tofrek Day" was kept on the 22nd. which was fairly quiet with sporadic shelling. Considerable work was done on new dugouts and trenches. A patrol was sent out by B Coy who found that two of the German trenches were unoccupied.

On the 23rd it began to rain and the trenches deteriorated rapidly. Another patrol was sent out to capture some Germans but they didnt send anyone out. The 18th reinforcement arrived made up of 12 machine gunners.

The new communication trench started on the 24th was christened 'Berkshire Road' They tried again to catch a German but without success.

Starting at 09:30 the 1st Kings began to relieve the Royal Berkshires who marched off back to billets at Beuvry.

## Beuvry

### 25th - 29th March 1915

The rest at Beuvry was pretty well the same as before; cleaning up, bathing and inspections.

From the 25th Territorial units were attached to the regular battalions for familiarisation with trench warfare. The first to join the Royal Berks was the 7th Kings Liverpools who came one company at a time until 7th April.

The Brigadier came over to see A Coy at drill on the 27th and General Monro came over at noon on the 28th and spoke to all the men.

There was an outbreak of influenza and three officers had to go to hospital (Capt A P Strange, Lt Gregory and 2Lt Cox)

## Cuinchy

### 29th March to 3rd April 1915

It was back to the trenches at Cuinchy at 08:00 on the 29th to relieve the 1st Kings Liverpools. A shell killed one man [11835 Henry Tanner of London] and wounded

three others.

1st April was Bismark's 100th birthday and everyone was in a high state of readiness awaiting a German attack, however nothing happened. The 19th reinforcement of 33 other ranks arrived.

There was a suspicion that a German armoured train had just arrived as on the 2nd a dozen 6 inch shells fell on the British lines. Although it did no damage a retaliatory raid was mounted. Two men from B Coy volunteered to crawl out after it was dark to cut the enemy wire with a Bangalore Torpedo each. These were tubes packed with explosive about 6 feet long and 4 inches in diameter. They were exploded at 21:20 and made a very satisfying bang.

The Royal Engineers had recently introduced the new technique of digging tunnels beneath the German lines to plant mines and many former coal miners had been recruited for the task. As both sides were running short of ammunition for the big guns the new tactics did offer some relief to the infantry.

The next morning the RE decided they too would join in and exploded a huge mine they had dug under the German lines for about 70 yards. In order to attract the German's attention and get them to man their trenches a continuous rifle and machine gun fire was rained on them from 04:00 to 05:50, when the artillery's 18 pounders joined in. At 05:00 the firing ceased and at 05:05 the mine was fired and the air was filled with great masses of earth. It was not possible to estimate the German casualties but they must have been considerable.

Under cover of the gunfire the Royal Berks had been withdrawing to be replaced by the 1st Kings. All but the firing line moved back between 02:00 and 05:00 and at 06:00 the firing line companies were relieved.

## Beuvry

### 3rd to 7th April 1915

Just as they got back to their billets they got a telegram to say that General E T Dickson, the Colonel of the Regiment was to visit them. He arrived at 14:45 inspected all the Companies, had a word with the men and departed at 16:00. It was very noteworthy that although the men had only just come out of the trenches and had had little or no sleep for several days, they were all shaved and well turned out for the General's inspection.

On the 5th and 6th the rain was so hard it was difficult to do much training. They had lectures and practised bomb throwing

## Cuinchy

### 7th to 11th April 1915

When they relieved the 1st Kings on the 7th they found that the trenches were very wey owing to the heavy rain of the previous few days. They were suspicious that the Germans were preparing a mine in revenge for the 3rd. but no definite proof could be found.

They now had the 20th London Regiment attached to them for familiarisation and it meant work on the trenches could proceed apace, they built a lot of dug-outs and made the parapets bullet proof. One of the 20th London's was wounded by a shell on the 9th when part of a working party.

On the 10th the artillery exchanges hotted up. The Germans put 68 six inch shells near Cuinchy church, wounding four and killing one man [10020 Pte Christopher Newell of Marlow] A portion of the British trenches was blown in and immediately repaired. The previous day a German trench mortar had weakened a brickstack and it was feared it would collapse so attempts were made to pull it down with ropes - but with little success.

They were relieved by the 1st Kings again on the 11th.

## Beuvry

### 11th to 15th April 1915

They were back in billets in Beuvry by noon on the 11th. In the afternoon the Germans shelled the town wounding a child and ten civilians.

It is not much more than mine warfare where we are now. Of course we have just a few shells over to liven us up or we should begin to think there was no war on - to see the civilians walking about just behind the firing line and people living well within rifle-shot range and farmers ploughing up their fields, no more afraid of shell and rifle fire than we are. Of course there are times when they get under cover and that is a few minutes after our Long Toms and the French 75s have been in action and the Germans answer them. [8020 L Cpl J H Styles]

There were reports that night that the Germans had exploded a mine in the French lines and the Battalion was put onto immediate alert to proceed to Tourbieres but this order was later cancelled.

The 20th reinforcement arrived on the 14th with 20 other ranks.

## Cuinchy

### 15th to 19th April 1915

This was a very quiet turn in the trenches. The weather had improved greatly which made life much more bearable. The usual artillery exchanges took place but the Minnenwerfers were the only weapons which caused

and serious damage.

## Beuvry

### 19th to 24th April 1915

Again the 1st Kings relieved them, but this time on their right the relieving battalion was one of the Territorials - the 6th Londons.

The weather was now magnificent so training could cover many areas previously put aside. On the 21st A Coy practised putting up wire entanglements and there was a staff ride conducted by Brigadier Fanshawe.

The 21st reinforcement of 2 officers and 50 other ranks arrived on the 21st.

### Letters Home

The inaction of the period gave the men time to write home. Extracts from several letters were published in the Reading Mercury of 24th April. One over-riding theme was the resentment felt at those who had failed to volunteer.

... with you I think there are some slackers at home, but probably they don't realise the magnitude of this struggle and if they could only see the wrecks of towns and villages out here they would alter their minds. [4803 QMS W H Bodie]

I suppose some of them prefer a comfortable home to a little hardship while helping their country. That of course is selfishness [Pte H S Webb]

I quite agree with you that they should send some others out and give us a chance, for the continued noise and strain gives a man's nerve a testing. It is not a pleasant job on sentry go [Pte H Chapman]

Pte T Barlow [7964] was also angry at the attitude of railwaymen. As an NUR man himself he was ashamed of his former colleagues who had gone on strike.

The men were in good heart however and looking forward to completing the job they had been sent to do:-

I am glad to tell you we are all happy and cheerful. As we go to and from the firing line we are singing and playing mouth organs. [14002 Pte P Bridgeman]

We have not been very active lately only in and out of the trenches since December and it is much better now for the water is drying up a good lot so we shall soon be on the move once again and bring this terrible war to an end which will be good news for everybody especially our loved ones at home [6675 Pte W Lawrence]

We have been waiting for the fine weather so as to get a move on and then the boys will make them move I will bet [8748 Pte A Harvey]

The greater majority of the boys of the old regiment are in fine health and in the best of spirits, only waiting to add fresh laurels to the regiment's honour when we start on the great advance. [8020 LCpl J H Styles]

There were regrets at the number of men the Battalion had lost:-

We have a lot of new blood in our regiment now. You

know that our Battalion came out here in the first place 1300 strong. Now out of that amount there is not above 300 serving. I suppose our Battalion has lost over 2000 during this bit of fighting we have had and we are ready to lose another 2000 to get for poor little Belgium her rights. 8020 [LCpl J H Styles of the MG Section]

I am pleased to hear that the Reading people think a good deal of the old regiment but still we have only done our duty the same as the rest of them. [6675 Pte W Lawrence]

We have a few Terriers with us in the trenches just to get them used to it and they behave very well although of course they haven't had anything like a christening yet. [8748 Pte A Harvey]

## Cuinchy

**24th -28th April 1915**

When it was at Cuinchy, for the third time in this month, the line was thinned, in order to avoid heavy losses from German mines. One company was sent back and there were other small alterations to the manning of the line.

Fears grew of a new type of asphyxiating gas in use by the Germans. A solution of bi-carbonate of soda and masks were provided for each man.

There was much activity at this time of mining warfare and on the 26th the suspicion was renewed that the Germans were mining towards the railway embankment. On the 27th one of the miners at the head of the British shaft discovered a small bore hole coming from underneath which had been stopped with webbing. This was probed and he could not find a bottom. Added to which a sweet unpleasent gas was coming up the hole and they could hear distinctly the Germans working below. The engineers were called in and it was decided to blow a British mine before the Germans could blow theirs. In a race to complete the British charge was laid in record time and exploded at 19:05 on the 27th. This blew the German mine below and again threw great masses of earth into the air. The resultant crater was 30 feet deep and 22 yards from lip to lip. It was occupied by Lieutenant Searle [SE0002] and ten men but they had to retire at midnight on account of the German "minenwerfer"

The crater was again occupied at 01:00, and before it was finally evacuated the Royal Engineers laid a mine in the bottom of it to blow up any Germans trying to occupy it.

An unfortunate explosion of some bombs were being counted on the 28th, prior to handing over the trench to a relieving battalion, caused the death of three men: 7562 Pte Jesse Sweetzer, 10221 Pte J Dillon and 9968 Pte G Lay.

As well as the mines however the men were subject to all sorts of German weapons:-

We were in the trench on Good Friday and were chaffing over not having hot cross buns when I suppose the Germans thought they would cheer us up a bit and they sent over a few Johnsons which we could very well have done without, for I give you my word they are not very pleasant chaps to have burst just behind you. They have another little gun which they get in the trench and which keeps you ducking your head down. We have nicknamed it the Witchback and it is too!. [Pte H Chapman]

## Bethune

**28th April to 1st May 1915**

This time the billets were at Bethune. This gave the opportunity for more relaxed training and to meet with other units. Several officers were invited to dine with General Sir Charles Munro on the 30th He was the officer commanding I Corps. The 22nd reinforcement arrived on the 28th with Lt R D Apps and 38 other ranks.

## Cuinchy

**1st to 3rd May 1915**

Their final duty in the Cunchy trenches began on the 1st when they once more exchanged positions with the 1st Kings Liverpools.

That day an underground explosion was heard on the German side at 18:30 - possibly they had had an accident with one of their mines, but no damage was done to the British workings.

On the 3rd Maj Gen H S Horne (2nd Div), Brig Gen R Fanshawe (6th Bde) and Col Vaughan (2 Div staff) visited the trenches at 06:30.

They were relieved by the 2nd Worcesters at 15:00 and returned to Montmorency Barracks at Bethune.

## Bethune

**3rd to 9th May 1915**

Everyone had hoped for a long period of rest but there was still a deal of uncertainty and they were kept at their training. The weather broke on the 4th with a very heavy thunderstorm in the afternoon.

They left Bethune at 05:45 on the 5th to practice storming trenches at Vert Bois Ferme under the watchful eye of Brig Fanshawe. They were back at 13:00.

The next day from 07:30 to 14:30 they took part in a Brigade exercise which was 'very instructive'.

It was their turn to bath on the 7th. They were all given a change of clothing and then told to be ready to move. This latter order was cancelled and they put on an impromptu concert with the CO Major Hill, Capt Radford and Lt Cox singing.

Training and football filled the 8th.

Pte T Barlow:-

At last we were relieved and went back to Béthune to have another rest after six months trench warfare, but we had only been at rest eight days when we had to parade at midnight one Saturday and were marched out to reserve trenches at Festubert. We wondered what was going to happen, but we soon knew early next morning by a terrific bombardment of the enemy's trenches all along the line. We stayed here all day but were taken up to the advanced trenches at night to relieve portions of regiments which had taken part in an attack that day, but had failed. We had to hold ourselves in readiness for an attack any minute. We were in these trenches two days and were heavily bombarded.

## An Abortive Attack

9th - 14th May 1915

At 01:00 on the 9th May the Battalion marched to Le Touret as part of 2nd Division who were being positioned to exploit the gap to be made in the enemy line by 1st Division who were attacking the line from Illies - Lorgies - Rue de Marais. The 1st Division were attacking from their breastworks in front of Richebourg l'Avoue but after three attempts which had failed to penetrate the German trenches they were ordered at 19:30 to be relieved by 2nd Division who were to deliver a forth assault at 20:30.

This put the Battalion in an impossible position. They were given one hour to march two miles, get into trenches which were totally unfamiliar to them and assault across ground which they had not reconnoitred in the dark when they had not the faintest idea of even the direction of the enemy trenches let alone their position. Thankfully common sense prevailed and the assault order was cancelled. The Battalion merely relieved the 2nd Glosters in front of Richebourg at 23:00.

At 03:30 on the 10th the order came for the assault to be launched at 15:00, preceded by a 4-hour artillery bombardment scheduled to commence at 11:00. All preparations had to be complete before daybreak but as it was already getting light when the orders were received this was impossible. At 11:00 the cancellation order came and that 6th Brigade was to be relieved by 5th Brigade. This began at 22:00 and by 03:00 on the 11th the Battalion was bivouacking in trenches around a farm at Le Touret.

Here they stayed for two more days. During this time officers were sent to reconnoitre the line before 5th Brigade and to check on supplies and equipment.

In the evening of the 12th they practiced a night attack with the 7th Kings on the left, KRRC in the centre and 1st R Berks on the left. They were supposed to leap across ditches which were too wide and the whole exercise was a bit pointless. They were back in bivouaks at 21:30.

At 16:30 on the 13th HQ, C and D Coys moved to billets near Richebourg St Vaast with A and B Coys going back into the trenches before Richebourg l'Avoue

The assault was again scheduled for the night of the 14th/15th but at 16:30 on the 14th the assault was postponed 24 hours after the Battalion had sustained over 30 casualties from shell fire.

## Assault at Richebourg

15th May 1915

The assault was once more ordered for 23:30, this time on the 15th, and this time it really came off. They had from 15:50 to make final preparations.

Major Hill's dispositions were as follows:

C Company (Capt. E. M. Allfrey [AL0007], and 2nd-Lieuts. C. S. Searle [SE0002], H. R. H. Hilliard [HI0004] and R. Haigh HA0015)) was to lead the attack, carrying two hundred and fifty bombs.

D (Capt. C. W. Frizell [FR0006]; Lieuts. G. Gregson-Ellis [GR0006], C. R. Taffs [TA0006], and E Baseden [BA0021]) were to pass through, on the capture of the first German trench and to take the second.

B (Capt. G. Belcher [BE0009], Lieuts. C. W. Green [GR0002] and E. N. Getting [GE0002], and 2nd Lieut L H Alison [AL0012] to follow to the second trench and start consolidating. They had to carry 90 shovels and 70 picks.

A (Lieuts. W. G. Cox [CO0040], 2nd-Lieuts. G. T. S. Weston [WE0023], H. G. Clarke [CL0013] and R. D. Apps [AP0003]) to go as far as the first trench and consolidate the ground taken by C They were to carry 90 shovels, 10 picks and 400 sandbags.

Lieut. E. L. Jerwood [JE0003], with two sections and two machine guns, to accompany B

Ammunition carriers were to follow A Coy and bring up the periscopes.

A dressing station under Capt S D Large RAMC was established half a mile to the rear.

The battalion was in the centre of the brigade, with the King's Liverpool on its right and 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps on its left. The objective trenches were S. by E. of Richebourg l'Avoue, at a distance of about four hundred and fifty yards from the starting point.

All companies, except A which was sniping the German trenches, were to get out and lie fifty yards in front of the British trenches before zero hour (23:30). Captain Radford [RA0001] was in charge of the two assaulting columns, A being kept in his own hands by

Major Hill.

The men were dressed in what was described as 'fighting order' and every man carried three sandbags. 'Fighting order' was defined thus:-

The pack is discarded

The haversack is placed on the back in the position where the pack is normally carried.

Each haversack contains the following articles

1 day rations

2 canteen, ie messtin

3 soap towel shaving kit

4 spare pair of laces

All water bottles filled

Each man carried his mackintosh cape rolled on his belt fastened in the centre of his back

A spare pair of socks carried inside mackintosh cape

Each man carried 200 rounds of ammunition except grenadiers who carried 100 rounds and 6 bombs each

By 23:15 all had moved out in single file and lay in the open, with D behind C and B behind D. The night was fairly dark, and C were about one hundred and fifty yards forward at zero before the enemy opened on it with rifles and machine-guns. They raced over the remaining 200 yards and bursting into the first trench, they bombed its defences, and in some cases were in such close contact with the enemy that they seized hold of the German rifles and shot their owners.

Meanwhile D had come up through a storm of fire and pushed on for the second trench, eighty yards farther on. B too, arrived with tools and began consolidating; it had been somewhat delayed by Captain Belcher [BE0009] being killed early in the advance.

At 23:45 Major Hill brought up two platoons of A and ordered the other two to follow. By this time the battalions on the flanks had consolidated, but the 7th King's Liverpool had edged too much to their right, leaving part of the trench filled with Germans whose enfilade fire caused considerable loss to the Liverpools on the right and the Royal Berkshire on the left. About two hundred of them surrendered in the morning to the Liverpools.

Thus by midnight the whole Battalion had been launched into the attack which was magnificently timed and magnificently executed, although not without heavy losses.

Pte Barlow finished up being wounded and wrote from the VAD Hospital in Goring

We moved from here to Richebourg to some more trenches when we were told that the enemy were going

to be bombarded for three days and an advance was to be made. A heavy bombardment was kept up by both sides and caused us a lot of casualties. Shells were coming over amongst us very heavily but our artillery were doing some marvellous work compared with the enemy.

On the third day we were given our orders to get ready to make an advance. Whilst getting prepared for this I was hit by a splinter of a shell and left for England after ten months of one of the worst wars in history.

### Casualties

The Berkshire casualties in this successful attack were terribly heavy:

Officers.

Killed (4): Capt. G. Belcher M.C. [BE0009] Lieuts. W. J. Cox [CO0022], C. R. Taffs [TA0006], H. J. Clarke [CL0013].

Wounded (3): Captain E. M. Allfrey [AL0007]. Lieut. E. Baseden [BA0021], 2nd-Lieut. C. S. Searle [SE002].

Missing (2): 2nd-Lieuts. L. H. Alison [AL0012], R. D. Apps [AP0003]. (Both are recorded as killed.)

Other Ranks. Killed 49; Wounded 290; Missing 75.

Total: 9 Officers, 414 Other Ranks.

### Medals

Three DCMs were awarded:-

**7409 Acting Sergeant S Summers:** For conspicuous gallantry and ability. On the night of May 15-16 1915 at Richebourg l'Avoué Sgt Summers was instrumental in bombing the enemy out of a communications trench and repelling two counter-attacks on an advanced post which he held with five men while the troops on the right were falling back. He reorganised two companies, when most of the non-commissioned officers had been wounded and showed great bravery and devotion to duty. [BC 13/8/15]

**8139 W H Wilson:** For conspicuous gallantry from May 15 to 17 1915 near Richebourg l'Avoué when he carried frequent messages under heavy shell and rifle fire. On May 17 during a heavy bombardment he went forward to the firing line of another battalion and brought back important information. During his return he stopped, rallied and sent forward men who were falling back in confusion under heavy shell fire. [BC 13/8/15]

**9421 Pte T Giles:** For conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty on the night of May 15-16 1915 near Richebourg l'Avoué. During an attack on the enemy's trenches he assisted to lay a telephone

wire from our trenches to the farthest captured German trench under heavy rifle and machine gun fire. Although wounded he remained at his post all day [BC 13/8/15]

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### **Notes**

Wherever possible each individual mentioned has been identified within an associated database. Where known their regimental number is given. For officers a pseudo number is used developed from the first two letters of their surname followed by a 4-digit number. Where no other identification is possible a record number of the form Uxxxxx is given.

*Continued in section 201*