

## Section 192

# The First Counter-Attacks

## Second Battalion March to May 1915

### Holding the Line

*After enduring an almost unbearable winter, so unlike India, the 2nd Battalion were ready for action and the Generals were anxious to get on the move. (continued from section 184)*

### The Battle of Neuve Chapelle

10th to 15th March 1915

The Battalion's first real bleeding came at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. On the night of 8th/9th March they marched from their billets at Riez Ballieul to take up positions astride the road leading from Rue Tilleloy to Neuve Chapelle.

Sgt Hanks:-

We marched out of our billet about 10:30 pm on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> and proceeded to Neuve Chappelle about 6 mile away. We were served out with hot cocoa about 2 mile behind the firing line. At this spot was the last time I saw and spoke to my brother Tom. I never saw him again until I saw him at Portsmouth on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1915 after recovering from his wounds.

Just before daybreak we found ourselves at Neuve Chappelle where we were packed into and behind the earthworks we had made while we were back resting. We used to come up every night and dig them it was not much of a rest but we did not mind we were all eager to get at the enemy. [TX00999A]

#### 10th March 1915

By the morning of the 10th they were ready for the attack with two companies in front of the breastwork and two behind it astride the Chimney Crescent Road. During the bombardment which preceded the attack the 2nd suffered several 'own goals' from British artillery shooting short. One shell alone buried 12-15 men several of whom were killed and the rest badly wounded.

The advance commenced at 0805 on the 10th and they easily took their first objective, the German front line trench which was secured and fortified. On their right a party under Lt A D Gordon held off the Germans in the remaining part of the trench. Lt Gordon himself was severely wounded by a German who had previously surrendered.

Sgt Hanks was wounded and evacuated later by train:-

At any rate, when all was ready at 7.30am on the 10<sup>th</sup>

the bombardment opened and oh! I shall never forget it seemed as if the world was made of glass and had fallen down and broken and all the devils in hell had been let loose. The faces of our men was terrible to look at, their eyes were flaming, oh! awful was their look, yet they were calm.

The shells were dropping so close we were being covered by mud etc. At last one big one dropped right in amongst us it buried me and killed about 6 or 8 men and wounded a lot. I struggled out the best way I could, and when I did get out the sight that met my gaze I shall never forget, there were men cut to pieces dead and wounded all mixed up together, they were covered with blood from head to foot, there was about 4 places like this just by us, before we advanced.

At last, at 8.05 am the artillery lifted their fire on to the village and then the order came to charge. Oh the feeling. We cheered the first line over shouting "Maiwand" and "Go on the Berkshires". Men were falling like ninepins and the cry of the wounded and dying was awful but we took no notice, by now we were mad. Down came the order for us to charge, up we went and came up in line with the first line, oh! the sight: hundreds of dead lying in the first German trench. We jumped this and still on we went under a blinding machine gun fire from the left.

After reaching and taking the third German trench I was ordered by the Colonel to take about twelve men back again to the old British trench and fetch up picks and shovels. I got hold of the men and took them back and brought as many as we could carry but by the time we got back I had lost 3 or 4 of my men. My Platoon Officer, Mr Saunders, such a nice gentleman and quite a brave man shouted to me "Down here, Sgt Hanks". Knowing what he meant I at once ordered the men to lay down. I asked him if we should dig ourselves in where we were and he said "No". He would go and find Capt. Harris who was to supervise the digging of the new trenches. He then turned away and took about 2 paces from me and was instantly killed, with a bullet through his brain.

I, of course, was then in command of the Platoon and got to work under the orders of the Company Commander, Captain Townsend to dig in as fast as we could. Oh, by this time we had suffered heavy losses, both by Officers and Men. One particular Officer Capt. and Adjutant Alsworth laid alongside of us while we were digging shot through the heart. By this time I was exhausted and collapsed entirely with an injured back caused by being buried with a shell before the advance. Also I expect with shock. I rolled into a big shell hole the men continuously asking me where I was hit etc. One, poor old George Smith [9407 George Herbert Smith of Newbury], No. 13 Platoon Sgt. asked me where I was hit and about 2 minutes later his feet was hanging over the side of the hole. He was shot

through the brain.

At last the order came for more men to go back again for tools. I tried to pull myself together and get back with them which I did but when I reached there I could hardly move so I remained in the Old British Trench until the Doctor sent me back to the dressing station. By now I had learned that my brother had been killed but was unable to find out if he was or not. I reached the dressing station with Sergeant Major Godfrey [4737 Charles Godfrey of Plymouth], who had been wounded in the foot. The doctor sent me to the next dressing station where I was conveyed by the ambulance to number 26 field hospital, where I was examined and given bovril, and conveyed to number 6 Clearing Hospital Merville where I stopped for the night. [TX00999B]

[Sgt Hanks' account is continued in section167-04]

A sergeant of the Rifle Brigade who was wounded in the battle later reported:-

On the night of March 9th, the 25th Rifle Brigade moved into position behind Neuve Chapelle. Our objective was the village. There were two phases in the attack. The Royal Berkshires were on our right and the Lincolns on our left. The Berks and Lincolns were to take the German trenches after a bombardment.

Our first bombardment was begun at 7.55 am by 100 guns. The area of fire was 2,000 yards. It was terrible. The shell fire was tremendous. The Germans were practically stunned by it. Their shelters and trench supports were knocked in. When the Berks and the Lincolns advanced they met with some slight opposition from a machine gun and some riflemen who had not copped the shells.

A second bombardment, equally terrible, on Neuve Chapelle was the second phase. The village had been put into a state of strong defence by the Germans. From our advanced position we could see the Germans retiring into a wood. They brought up field guns and opened fire on us. Our heaviest guns played on their position.

I saw an instance of German bravery. Two guns were served by an officer and a man who brought ammunition from behind a ruined house. They would fire and then run behind the house.

Germans with heavy guns started playin on our supports and fire trenches. By their fire they tried to stop our reinforcements.

A soldier from Oxford gave his account. It would seem he too was with the Rifle Brigade.

Have just come partly through the most glorious scrap our army has had. It was the mornimng of March 10th. Dawn broke with a heavy frost and the crisp air made one feel ten years younger.

When the thrilling hour arrived for us to attack at seven o'clock, our artillery opened the most violent bombardment which was continued for an hour, when it became steadier. Two companies were in the trenches and we were waiting behind earthworks, 100 yards in the rear. I cannot mention the names of the regiments. We made a move forward simultaneously. My platoon was leading the battalion and when the order came to fix bayonets and lead on, our blood rose to fever heat. Forward we went like an avalanche, each man striving

for the honour of being in at the death first. It was simply a magnificent sight to see the men in front charging through whoever tried to impede their way.

We joined the Berkshire's right at the German's third line of trenches and went forward to the village of Neuve Chapelle together. There we had to halt while our artillery finished shelling the village and then it rested with our battalion and another to clear the Germans out of it. Through each house we went and down into the cellars after them like a pack of hounds after a fox. Our artillery had made it too hot for them to wait for the cold steel cure. We captured quite a lot of prisoners but more were killed than captured. Our artillery made no mistake and dropped their shells where they were wanted. A few shakings up like this and the Germans will soon be hurled back to their own country.

The Brigadier's Report on the day's activities was as follows:-

By 5.0.a.m. units had assembled, without hitch, in the assembly trenches opposite the points of attack, in the positions shown on the attached plan.

The two leading battalions, charged with the assault of the enemy's forward trenches, had their first lines assembled in trenches so prepared in front of our breastworks, that the first and second lines of assaulting troops could jump up at once and cross the space between our lines and those of the enemy, directly the order to move was given. Ladders had been provided to enable the troops formed behind the breastwork to climb over, and paradoss had been erected to protect them from their own shell fire.

During the night 9th and 10th, all our wire in front of our breastworks was very carefully removed, in order that the suspicions of the enemy might not be aroused. No posts or cheveaux de frises trestles were removed, the wire being merely stripped off them.

At 7.30.a.m. the artillery bombardment started, lasting half an hour, the enemy replying with shrapnel. The wire cutting effect of the bombardment was sufficiently effective to enable the assaulting troops to reach the enemy's trenches without any serious check.

At 8.05. a.m. the assaulting columns of the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment led by Captains Harris and Fraser (both wounded) on the right and those of the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment led by Captains Eager (wounded) and Bastard on the left, dashed forward gallantly to the assault and passed over the first line of trenches (72), (34), (33) and, after some opposition reached the line assigned as their Objective, viz (40), (39), (42), (69)

At the same time, blocking parties on the right under Lt. Gordon (2nd Royal Berkshires (wounded) and, on the left, under Captain Peake (2nd Lincolnshire Regiment (killed) made good the communications with the enemy's trenches between (35) and (81), (58) and (9), (26), (69) and (39), (38) and (17), (40) and (46), bombing forward on either flank and driving the enemy on the right, into the Indian Corps and on the left into the 23rd Infantry Brigade.

At this juncture, the Lincolns suffered somewhat from enfilade fire from the hostile trenches in front of the 23rd Infantry Brigade.

As soon as I saw, from my observation post and Pont

Logy, that our troops were in the enemy's trenches, I moved forward to close to point (14), so as to better superintend.

At 8.15.a.m. when the first Objective had been gained, the Officers Commanding 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment and 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, pushed up both at once and started reorganising their units, which had been a good deal disorganised by moving through the thick network of trenches. The leading platoons of the 2nd Rifle Brigade and 1st Royal Irish Rifles started to move into position behind the foremost captured trenches, the former passing through the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment and the latter through the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, ready to move forward at 8.35.a.m. on the second Objective.

At 8.35.a.m. the 2nd Rifle Brigade moved forward through the line, (26), (43), (62), and, after some slight opposition reached (29), (49), (24), and, after they were seen to be well on their way the 1st Royal Irish Rifles were pushed towards (18) and (65). They dashed forward gallantly led by Captains Biscoe (wounded) and O'Sullivan, Lts. Graham (wounded) and Burgess (killed). The Battalion suffered severely from Machine Gun fire from (22). (18) was seized, but the battalion could not advance within 100 yards of (65) owing to our guns still bombarding the triangle (18), (19), (55), (31), (50), (66) and (65).

9.0.a.m. The Royal Irish Rifles reached and captured the line (18), (65), (66), and pushing on from there, made a partial wheel to the right and reached, and made good (31), (50) and the Chateau near (29). They temporarily took up the line of the old Smith Dorrien Trench.

Their left was echeloned back to provide against flank attack, for they had not been able to establish touch with the 23rd Infantry Brigade.

At 9.05. a.m. I had sent an Officer forward to report on the position of the right flank of the 23rd Brigade, and he had reported, about 9.30.a.m. that the Scottish Rifles had reached (17,) but I had no news of their further progress. There were indications that the enemy were still holding on towards (22), for there was considerable hostile fire from that direction.

At 10.00. .am. I sent a message (B.M. 29) to G.O.C. 23rd Infantry Brigade informing him of the position of my left. I was on the point of pushing up two Companies of the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment to cover the left flank of the Royal Irish Rifles, when the O.C. East Lancashire Regiment informed me that he had received orders to push up into the gap, between my left and the right of the 23rd Infantry Brigade: The head of his Battalion had just reached our breastwork at (14). This at once had an effect and reduced the hostile fire from this direction.

At 10.0.4. a.m. a message was received from Divisional H.Q. saying that it was reported that the 23rd Infantry Brigade was held up in front of (76) and (21). The belated messages, one of which was sent off from 23rd Infantry Brigade at 8.55.a.m. and the other at 9.26.a.m. were received by me at 11.0.5. a.m. and 11.35 a.m. respectively, these showed me that the position of their right was more or less where I had placed it.

But it was only at this latter time that I became aware that their left attack had failed.

Meanwhile the 2nd Rifle Brigade had established touch with the Bareilly Brigade (Indian Corps) on its right.

At 9.25.a.m. I gave orders to the Officer Commanding 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment to send up tools to the 2nd Rifle Brigade, and at 9.35.a.m. to the Officer Commanding 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment to send tools to the 1st Royal Irish Rifles.

Both Battalions ( 2nd Rifle Brigade and 1st Royal Irish Rifles) started to entrench themselves on the line, (19), (55), (31) (80) and on a line running there to (80) inclusive. In this they were assisted by two sections of 2nd Field Company, under Captain Pears, which I pushed up at the same time.

At 10.50.a.m. the enemy delivered a counter attack against the Royal Irish Rifles from the direction of (93). This was however easily thrown back.

At 12.04.p.m. the 23rd Infantry Brigade had come up on my left and were in touch with the Royal Irish Rifles at (19).

At 2.0.p.m. A message timed as sent off at 1.30.p.m. from Divisional H.Q. was received, notifying an order to the 24th Infantry Brigade to assemble and prepare to advance.

At 5.0.p.m. notification was received from the 24th Infantry Brigade that they had moved forward on Points (85), (86), (88).

At 5.12.p.m. orders timed as sent off at 3.20.p.m. from Divisional H.Q. was received, that under orders from V1th Corps, the 24th Infantry Brigade were to move as soon as ready on (85), (86) and (88) and that 25th Infantry Brigade was to cover the advance with fire. Orders were issued accordingly to 1st Royal Irish Rifles.

The rest of the day was taken up in consolidating and fortifying the position won.

The positions held at the end of the day, at 6.0.p.m. were as follows:-

Brigade H.Q - About 120 yards east of point (14)

2nd Rifle Brigade holding the line of trenches from (80) to (29)

1st Royal Irish Rifles from Rifle Brigade left by (31) to (56)

2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment in area (26), (62), (37), (58)

2nd Lincolnshire Regiment in area (41), (40), (37)

13th London Regiment on our own breastwork from (14) southwards

2nd Field Company R.E. H.Q. and two sections on Rue Lilleloy and two sections in Neuve Chapelle.

Throughout the latter part of the day the Brigade was subjected to heavy bombardment.

Casualties	Killed and Wounded		
	Offs	ORs	Total
2nd Lincolnshire Regt	12	205	217
2nd R. Berkshire Regt	10	178	188
1st R. Irish Rifles	7	202	209
2nd Rifle Brigade	4	112	116

13th London Regt	1	35	36
Brigade Headquarters	1	7	8
Total	35	746	781

General remarks on the day's operations:-

The bombardment of the enemy's line of trenches undoubtedly had a great effect: a number of the enemy came out and surrendered as our infantry charged forward, but there was still sufficient resistance to cause us very considerable loss.

I attribute the success of the assault, also, partly to the complete concealment of the troops and to the fact that the leading ranks of our assaulting parties were able to get easily and quickly from our trenches.

The rapidity of the advance was due partly to the effect of the bombardment and partly to the fact that units were kept well in hand and under control. This was undoubtedly facilitated by having separate battalions for the work of dealing with the 2nd Objective, as the leading battalions got much scattered in taking the trenches and required time to reorganise.

The blocking parties, with their grenadier detachments worked most successfully under Lt. Gordon and Captain Peake and soon cleared the flanks. The use of a distinguishing flag was invaluable and saved collision with the parties of the 23rd Infantry Brigade and Indian Corps.

Troops were kept well fed with ammunition and tools.

Communication was constantly interrupted and depended, between Brigade and Units, practically on orderlies only. [TX01003A]

The Brigade report read:-

At 8.05. a.m. The Assaulting columns of the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regt., led by Captains Harris and Fraser (both wounded) on the right and the 2nd Lincolnshire Regt. On the left dashed forward, passed over the first line of the trenches 72, 34 and 33 and, after some opposition reached the line assigned as their objective, viz: 40, 39, 42, 7 and 69. At the same time, blocking parties on the right, under Lt. Gordon, 2nd Royal Berkshire Regt (wounded) and on the left, under Captain Peake, 2nd Lincolnshire Regt., (Killed) made good the Communication with the enemy trenches.

At 8.15.a.m. when the first objective had been gained; The enemy front and support trenches opposite B Lines (The Royal Berkshire Regiment on the right frontage from a point on the breastworks of B Lines, 100 yards S.W. of Chimney Crescent to a point 60 yards N.E. of that road - Objective: The capture of enemy trenches 69 and 39 to 42) the O.Cs., 2nd Royal Berks Regt. And the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, pushed up both sides at once and started re-organizing their units. The leading platoons of the 2nd Rifle Brigade and the 1st Royal Rifles started to move into position behind the foremost captured trenches, the former passing through the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regt. And the latter through the 2nd Lincolnshire Regt, ready to move forward at 8.35.a.m., onto the 2nd Objective - The Eastern edge of Neuve Chapelle Village on the right to Orchard No. 6 and the Moated Grange on the left. [TX01008A]

The Berkshire Chronicle reported on 26th March

THE 2ND BERKS IN ACTION

At 8.5 (on March 10th) the guns lifted from the German trenches and poured on the village of Neuve Chapelle proper. The Berks and Lincolns clambered over their breastworks, using little ladders previously placed in position, and raced for the German trenches, bayoneting all who still had resistance left in them and taking prisoners those whom the bombardment had left limp and apparently lifeless. With them went other regiments, and in an incredibly short time three lines of enemy trenches were in our hands. Well before nine o'clock we had taken these positions, finding mostly the men who had been manning them either dead or dying, and in many cases buried under blown-in sections of the dug-outs. Those of the enemy left alive, most of them great brawny Bavarian giants, seemed too stupefied to say or do anything, and could not even hold up their hands in token of surrender, and it was a long time before this sense of dazedness wore off.

#### WINNING THE VILLAGE

So far, with the exception of one regiment whose attack was hung up owing to the fact that the guns had failed to cut a part of the enemy's wire entanglements, our losses had been comparatively nil, but the battle had only just begun

The fog had by now disappeared and a warm sun shone in the skies, which were white flecked with blue. In front of the trenches a melancholy sight met the eye - hundreds of dead bodies scorched and fearfully mutilated

Once in the trenches our men proceeded to organise them for defensive purposes. Shells were now flying thick and fast over Neuve Chapelle. Houses were being blown up in the air, walls could be seen toppling and enemy redoubts being dissolved into dust. Sometimes a shell would strike the red roof of a building and a cloud of red dust would ascend; at other times one could see nothing but the yellow smoke of the lyddite whose pungent odour smote the nostrils.

#### A DESPERATE RALLY

The order was 'Take the village' and gallantly the men responded. They drove the enemy before them, capturing stragglers all the way. Where resistance was met the bayonet, quick and clean, forced a passage. As our men fell so others took their places, but our casualties were still few. To the north-east of the village, however, a formidable stand was made. Here the roads leading from the village met and our advance was contested by fierce rifle and machine gun fire, which made great inroads in our ranks. The enemy at this point showed the utmost bravery, and it took us the better part of three hours to dislodge them. Driven from one place, they fell back on another. Many of the enemy crowded into the cellars, and thence sniped at our men, and only hand grenades cleared them out.

After a sanguinary tussle in the village our men reached the German army corps stores where they found a huge quantity of ammunition, thousands of bombs, engineering stores, trench and sapping tools, bridging material and facines for putting in the bottom of the trenches. Towards the afternoon the whole of the village was in our hands, and we had reached the line of trenches originally occupied by the British in October last.

In the advance the men were cheered up by seeing the pink flags of the Indians on their right. The Indian corps

had had equal success with the enemy, and the men carrying the pink flags had been told off to account for any enemy communication trenches. The Gurkhas could be seen going about their work in a very business-like fashion.

We had every reason for congratulation on the day's gains. We had carried the whole of the village and had extended our front line quite close to the formidable Bois di Biez, taking by storm several positions and redoubts which the enemy had considered impregnable. The fiercest fighting occurred in the south of the village, where a deadly fire was poured into our attacking parties, who, however, came gallantly on and made way for the bayonet. [TX00301B]

In a letter in the Reading Mercury of 17/4/15 a private of the 2nd Royal Berks Regiment wrote:-

We took the first trench in less than five minutes and swept on to the next. Men were falling on every side, shells were bursting all around us and the air seemed full of shrapnel and bullets. But our boys were magnificent, no one man wavered even for a second. Nothing could have stopped that charge - it was irresistible and the second trench was soon ours.

We were all feeling pretty well fagged out by this time but on we went for the third line which was more difficult as there was a thick hedge and some barbed wire and we were fully exposed to the fire from the village. But the boys would not be stopped and in a very short time the third line was won.

We set to work with our entrenching tools and soon consolidated our new position.

The Rifles now came on to take the village and they gave us a cheer and a shout of 'well done Berks' I have always been proud of my regiment but never so proud as after that fight. [TX00291]

In *The Great World War Vol 3 Page 23* is the following terse account:-

The line of trenches had for the most part been blotted out by the terrific bombardment. What remained of them were half-filled with dead and dying and the survivors for the most part had no heart left for further fighting. By 11 a.m. practically the whole of the elaborate series of trenches guarding the village, and then the village itself, were captured. Here the primary assault was delivered by the 2nd Lincolnshires and the 2nd Royal Berkshires, both of which greatly distinguished themselves. [TX00895]

Deaths on the 10th were

10025 Christopher George Brean of Arborfield Cross  
 9875 Charles William Burrett of Chiswick  
 11724 William James Cordery of Ascot  
 6426 Charles Fisher of East Garston  
 9258 Frederick George Godden of Boxford  
 10097 Arthur George Gordon of Maidenhead  
 5646 William L. Gradden of Maidenhead  
 10019 Bernard Henry James Hatcher of Reading  
 9267 Bartholomew William Heath of Bracknell  
 9267 Bartlett William Heath of Bracknell

9267 Maurice Thomas Heath of Bracknell  
 7711 George Henry Herbert of Newbury  
 7921 Francis Edward Ilsley of Reading  
 8545 Harry Lawrence of Durham  
 7114 Alfred Mabbitt of Baldock  
 9232 Sidney Joseph Neal of Abingdon  
 9186 William Charles Norris of  
 10018 Horace John Pearce of Oxford  
 10021 Frederick William Peck of Wokingham  
 9726 Robert Henry Porter of Maidenhead  
 -5 Albert Brainerd Raynes of Nottingham  
 -5 Alfred Hewgill Saunders of Camberley  
 11996 Hugh Sexton of St Albans  
 9158 William George Sibley of Cowley  
 10153 Alfred Joseph Small of Pangbourne  
 9525 Francis William Smith of  
 9774 William Smith of Holloway  
 11982 Harry Spriggs of Winchester  
 8277 Albert Edward Taylor of Reading  
 8083 Thomas Henry Weddle of  
 8300 Albert Wheeler of Thatcham  
 10115 Edward Joseph Willis of Newbury

### 11th March 1915

Deaths on the 11th were:-

2Lt Thomas Rupert Aldworth of Frilford  
 5817 William Finnis  
 5827 Henry Prince of Winterbourne  
 10402 Alexander Mitchelson Ravenor of Newbury  
 10402 Thomas Ravenor of Newbury

The Brigadier Reported:-

In accordance with Divisional Operation Orders the Brigade concentrated as detailed in Brigade Operation orders No 12.

Location of Units:-

2nd Rifle Brigade on Line - (26), (43) ( there was a delay in the 2nd Rifle Brigade occupying this line, as they were in position (29), (7), (80), owing to the West Yorkshire Regiment having failed to relieve them.)

Royal Berkshire Regt in rear of them

Royal Irish Rifles on Line

Lincolnshire Regt in rear of them

At 10.25.a.m. orders were received from the G.O.C. Division to meet a counter attack from the Bois du Biez. The relief of this Battalion by the West Yorkshire Regiment was accordingly stopped. The O.C. Rifle Brigade was ordered to call up what supports he required from the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment and, when he had repulsed the enemy to follow him up and capture points (97), (98) on the edge of the Bois du

Biez. The 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment was to be held in readiness just west of Neuve Chapelle. The O.C. 1st Royal Irish Rifles was ordered to reconnoitre towards (94) and to be ready to strike in this direction should occasion arise.

The 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment was directed to support the West Yorkshire Regiment. The 13th London Regiment was held in reserve.

No counter attack took place.

At 1.20.p.m. notice was received from Divisional H.Q. that the 24th Infantry Brigade would shortly attack (85) & (86), preceded by half an hour's preliminary bombardment. The time of which would be notified.

In accordance therefore with Divisional Operation Order No. 13. I ordered the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment to move at once to area (84), (52), (22), (41), (18) to be ready to support 24th Infantry Brigade, and instructed the 1st Royal Irish Rifles to be ready to support this movement.

At 2.30. pm. I sent a message to the G.O.C. 24th Infantry Brigade asking when the attack was to take place and informing him that two Battalions were ready to support him.

At 3.20.p.m. I received a message from Divisional H.Q. informing me that Dehra Dun Brigade was pushing forward and directing me to co-operate and gain possession of (93), (95), (97). At about the same time Captain Braine G.S., 8 Division, joined my Headquarters..

I accordingly directed the O.C. 2nd Rifle Brigade to co-operate and attack (93) & (97). The 2nd Royal Berkshire Regt was asked to co-operate.

In order better to superintend the attack I proceeded to Neuve Chapelle and arrived there about 3.45.p.m. The O.C. 2nd Rifle Brigade informed me that the attack of the Dehra Dun Brigade had taken place and had failed.

I accordingly decided, after a personal reconnaissance, that it would be useless to attack (23) & (97) single handed, and instructed Captain Braine to inform the Divisional Commander to this effect.

I wrote to the Divisional Commander at the same time and suggested an attack on the Bois Du Biez in conjunction with the Indian Corps for the following morning. In anticipation of this I issued, at 10.15.p.m., a preliminary order for the assembly of the Brigade on the line (31), (29), (49), (80).

At 9.30.p.m I received orders to come into Divisional Headquarters at Red Barn for a conference with the G.O.C. Division.

The Brigade suffered a great deal from the heavy bombardment of the enemy.

The casualties during the day were as follows:

	Offs	ORs	Total
Brigade H.Q.	Nil	Nil	Nil
2nd Lincolnshire Regt	2	27	29
2nd R. Berkshire Regt	Nil	9	9
1st R. Irish Rifles	3	55	58
2nd Rifle Brigade	Nil	12	12
13th Kensington Battalion	Nil	36	36

totals 5 139  
144  
[TX01003B]

The Berkshire Chronicle report of 26th March continued:-

The next day, the 11th, the enemy, as was expected, made fierce counter-attacks, but our artillery kept them from massing in any great strength and our progress was continued, though we had to pay dearly for every ten yards we advanced. The main counter-attack was yet to come and our troops were well prepared. [TX00301C]

### 12th March 1915

They stayed where they were from the end of the 10th until 0345 on the 12th when they were ordered forward to support the 2nd Rifles in an attack to the east of the village. The attack was postponed and the 2nd Berks returned to their newly captured trench. They were almost immediately ordered forward again but again the attack, retimed for 1000, was postponed. The 2nd Rifles finally attacked at 0515 on the 13th but such was the ferocity of enemy fire they were unable to cross the open ground. The 2nd Berks stayed on the east of the village for the rest of the night and although not engaged managed to lose 2nd Lt RGR Hogen (killed) and Capt W B Thornton, Capt RGT Moody and 2nd Lt J W Hilyard (wounded).

The Brigadier Reported:-

At 5.30. a.m. Divisional Operation Order No 14 was received. In accordance I issued Brigade Operation Order No. 12. By these the Brigade was to attack, at an angle, (95), (98), (93). The Royal Irish Rifles being directed from (50), (31) against (94) & (93) and the 2nd Rifle Brigade on (95) & (93). A preliminary bombardment of this area was to begin at 10.0.a.m. and the Infantry attack was to start half an hour after.

At 6.15.a.m. the 2nd Rifle Brigade were counter attacked, but this was easily driven back.

At 10.15. no bombardment had begun and a message was received from Divisional H.Q. directing that the attack was to be postponed for two hours.

At 12 noon the bombardment took place and was not effective. The Infantry attack was delivered and failed, the 2nd Rifle Brigade and the 1st Royal Irish Rifles suffering severely. On receiving news of this I proceeded from my "Place De Commandment" to Neuve Chapelle Church to organise a fresh attack. After consultation with the Commanding Officers I came to the conclusion that a frontal attack could not succeed in daylight, the enemy's trenches being well wired and very strongly held with many machine guns.

I sent a message to the Divisional Commander stating this opinion and suggesting waiting till dark to renew the attack. At 4.0.p.m. I received an order to attack at once at all cost. At 4.30. pm.

I accordingly gave orders to prepare for this and asked for a preliminary bombardment from all the Divisional Artillery for half an hour. This bombardment was ineffective, very few of the shells striking the enemy's trenches. The attack which followed failed completely, both Regiments losing heavily.

It was nearly dark so I warned Units to be prepared to renew the attack at 9.0.p.m. and sent back Captain Braine, of the General Staff, 8th Division, to ascertain the wishes of the Divisional Commander. At 8.00.p.m Orders arrived to discontinue further attacks.

Casualties during the day were:-

Killed, Wounded or Missing

	Offs	ORs	Total
Brigade H.Q.	2	4	6
2nd Lincolnshire Regt	1	50	51
2nd R. Berkshire Regt	1	100	101
Royal Irish Rifles	8	125	133
Rifle Brigade	8	214	222
Kensington Battalion	4	56	60
Totals	24	549	573

General remarks on the day's operations:

The ground over which the attack, from (31), (80), were delivered is particularly exposed and open: The trenches north of (94) and between there and (95) appeared to be strongly constructed and protected with wire entanglements. They were strongly held with many machine guns [TX01003C]

The Berkshire Chronicle report of the 26th March continued:-

The promised counter-attack came at four o'clock in the morning of the 12th. Patrols came running into the trenches to report that the Germans were advancing and we could see them four hundred yards away advancing in columns as coolly as though they were route marching.

**HUNDREDS OF DEAD**

Our troops poured a devastating fire from rifles and machine guns into their midst and simply mowed them down. Twelve rounds were poured into them before they broke, leaving hundreds of dead and wounded on the ground. Only a few armed with grenades reached our barbed wire and they never got back. However they continued to bring up reinforcements, but each fresh wave was met with a deadly fusillade that swept it back. [TX00301C]

Deaths on the 12th were:-

2Lt Robert Garrett Roche Hogan

9407 George Herbert Smith of Newbury

### 13th March 1915

At dawn on the 13th they returned once more to their trench but at dusk were back again to relieve the 2nd Rifles east of Neuve Chapelle. The next morning Col Feetham was appointed to command the 24th Brigade and command of the battalion was handed over to Lt D

A McGregor.

The Brigadier reported:-

The Brigade was now distributed as follows:-

2nd Rifle Brigade from (80) along a line about 150 yards east of road (49), (29) to a Point on ditch, which runs in prolongation of road (97), (95)

1st Royal Irish Rifles from the left of the 2nd Rifle Brigade to Point (31)

2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment in support, in area (62), (26), (73), (33)

2nd Lincolnshire Regiment in support in area (40), (41), (74), (72).

13th London Regiment (in reserve) on old breastwork South of (14)

2nd Company R.E., 1 section with 2nd Rifle Brigade, 1 section with 1st Royal Irish Rifles, 1 section in work 400 yards west of (28).

At 2.34 .p.m. a message was received from Divisional H.Q. to look out for a counter attack.. Orders were accordingly given to O.C. 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment to be prepared to protect the right flank of the 2nd Rifle Brigade if necessary.

No counter attack took place. Work was continued on the defences and consolidating the position generally.

The enemy continued throughout the day to shell our positions heavily and we suffered some loss in spite of a careful distribution under cover.

Casualties -Killed, Wounded, Missing

	Offs	ORs	Totals
Brigade H.Q.	Nil	Nil	Nil
2nd Lincolnshire Regiment	Nil	12	12
2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment	Nil	13	13
1st Royal Irish Rifles	Nil	8	8
2nd Rifle Brigade	Nil	6	6
Kensington Battalion	Nil	15	15
totals	Nil	54	54

[TX01003D]

Deaths on the 13th were:-

9809 John George Brown of Stanford in the Vale

11919 Henry George Davis of Southall Green

9476 Sidney James Edwards of Tilehurst

9252 Albert Jeffs of Bow

8350 Joseph Shepherd

### 14th March 1915

The Brigadier reported:-

At 12.45.p.m Divisional Operation Order No. 15 was received and orders issued accordingly.

The reliefs were to take place on the night of the 14/15th and under the following distributions:

2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment to take over the first line trenches and supporting works from (80) to (31)

inclusive.

2nd Lincolnshire Regiment to take over the trenches of the 23rd Infantry Brigade from (31) exclusive to (87) inclusive

Half Battalion 13th London Regiment, to take over that portion of the 23rd Brigade Trenches from (870) exclusive to point on water ditch between (89) and (91)

2nd Field Company R.E. Distributed as on the 13th Instant.

During the day, the enemy still maintained a vigorous bombardment of our trenches.

Casualties - Killed - Wounded - Missing.

	Offs	ORs	Totals
Brigade H.Q.	Nil	Nil	Nil
2nd Lincolnshire Regt	Nil	4	4
2nd Royal Berkshire Regt	Nil	17	17
1st Royal Irish Rifles	Nil	2	2
2nd Rifle Brigade.	Nil	Nil	Nil
13th London Regiment	1	11	12
Totals	1	34	35

[TX01003E]

Deaths on the 14th were:-

7029 James Carpenter of Watford  
 8446 Frederick William Chandler of Tilehurst  
 8993 Ernest Cleeton of Sunningdale  
 9221 William Henry Clifton of Upper Brailes  
 8196 Charles Cobbett of Brighton  
 9112 Job Cripps of Bradfield  
 8461 Albert James Curtis of Reading  
 8876 Henry Harding of Westbury  
 9877 William Ernest Tarry of Twyford  
 8712 Charles David Taylor of North Kensington

on the 15th

9458 Frank Andrews of East Hendred  
 5304 Enoch George Baker of Bristol  
 8510 Robert Henry Baker of Abingdon  
 8617 John William Barker of Barnes  
 9521 George Barnes of Battersea  
 8467 Ernest Victor Batty of Pangbourne  
 9857 Alfred Boxall of Chichester  
 5144 Charles Brackley of Wokingham  
 9460 Henry George Bushnell of Mortimer  
 8962 Ernest Duffield of Kentish Town  
 10163 Arthur Charles Feltham of Battersea  
 9198 Albert Gardner of Westburn on Severn  
 9032 Henry Joseph Gilmore of

9428 Ernest Glead of Godalming  
 9519 John Harvey of Stoke Newington  
 9063 George Henry Matthews of  
 11721 Frederick Pocock of Binfield Heath  
 9847 John Thomas Prior of  
 8495 Alfred William Saville of Ball Common  
 11742 William Seymour of Theale  
 9477 Henry Percival Skippers of Buksar  
 8557 Alfred Edward (Edwin) Smith of Wheatley  
 7784 William George Smith of Benson  
 10030 Albert Henry Steel of Ardington  
 8535 Owen Stone of Hackney  
 9048 Henry Walley of Reading  
 7427 William Warner of Wantage

They were relieved on the 16th and retired about 400 yards west of the village.

During the period 10th to 15th March the casualties had been:

	killed	wou	miss
Officers	1	3	
OR	75	220	17

## Overview of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle

The Brigadier wrote:-

General observations on the whole operation

I cannot speak too highly of the magnificent spirit shown by all ranks. I owe grateful thanks to my Brigade Major - Captain Dill and the rest of the Brigade Staff for their able assistance and to the Officers Commanding Units Viz:- Lt. Col. Feetham, 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment, Lt. Col. McAndrew, 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment (Killed), Lt. Col. Laurie, 1st Royal Irish Rifles (killed) and Lt. Col. Stephens, 2nd Rifle Brigade, for the way they handled their battalions. Captain Pears, Commanding, 2nd Field Company R.E. gave me the greatest assistance, both before and during the operations, and it is due to his able execution of my orders that the troops were so well concealed before the assault. 2nd Lt. L.C. Harding R.G.A., 5th Mountain Battery, made a gallant attempt to bring his two mountain guns up into Neuve Chapelle, in support of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, but the detachment suffered severely.

The names of officers and N.C.O's who I especially wish to bring to notice are on attached schedule.

Sgd A Lowry-Cole, Brigadier General, Commanding 25th Infantry Brigade [TX01003f]

The 8th Division report read:-

9/10 -3-1915 23rd and 25th Brigades marched from their billets to rendezvous about 1 mile in the rear of the assembly trenches. From the rendezvous two Battalions from each Brigade moved into B Lines, 25th Brigade from Points 28,14.

Right attack, 25 Brigade - 1st Objective, House at 27 and trenches immediately west of it, thence the German trenches to the road 14, 17 and 18 exclusive. 2nd Objective the village of Neuve Chapelle.

During the night of 9/10th the troops in B Lines removed the wire in front of our line and placed ladders in position to enable the assaulting troops to leave the trenches.

Operations began at 7.30.a.m. with a heavy artillery bombardment. At 8.15.a.m., 25th Brigade, with the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment on the Right and the 2nd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment on the Left gained the 1st Line of German Trenches without much loss. Blocking parties secured the German Trenches on the flank, then bombed along the trenches causing numbers of the enemy to surrender. Meanwhile the village itself was subjected to a further bombardment of 30 minutes and the supporting battalions, 2nd Rifle Brigade on the Right and 1st Royal Irish Rifles on the Left moved into position in the rear of the captured line.

At 8.35.a.m. the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade advanced and, after slight opposition, reached the line 24, 29. The 1st Royal Irish Rifles advanced towards 55 and 18 and, although the Battalion suffered severely from machine gun fire from the Left Flank, it pushed on gallantly and at 9.00.a.m. had reached the line 66, 65 and 18. By a further dash forward it captured and occupied the Chateau near 29 and Points 50 and 31, thus establishing touch with the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade on the Right.

At 10.50. a.m. the enemy delivered an unsuccessful counter attack on the 1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles from the direction of 98.

The 25th Infantry Brigade had now reached its 2nd Objective

On their Left the attack of 23rd Brigade was less fortunate. The artillery bombardment of German Trenches from 15, 77 had been ineffective. The moment the men of the 2nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment, which formed the Left of the assaulting column attempted to leave their trenches they were mown down by rifle and machine gun fire. The Battalion made three gallant attempts to assault, but each time were driven back with severe loss.

Meanwhile the 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles on the Right was also subjected to a severe flanking fire, though to a lesser degree, but pressed on and was able to reach the front line of the German Trenches about 17, 74 and at once became engaged in a severe struggle with the enemy so that the ground captured was held with difficulty

The 2nd Battalion Devonshire Regiment was ordered up in support and a report on the situation was sent to Divisional H.Q. with a request for a further bombardment of the trenches.

The report was received at 9.40.a.m. and a further bombardment was at once ordered. This was extremely effective.

Realising that, owing to the 23rd Brigade having been checked, while the 25th Brigade was pushing into the village, the flank of the latter Brigade was dangerously exposed, the 24th Brigade was ordered to send a battalion to 18. This movement was carried out by the East Lancashire Regiment which, on reaching 18 came

under machine gun fire from 85 to 86, but was able to maintain its position, and close the gap between the two Brigades.

When it got dark operations were discontinued and the troops entrenched themselves for the night, with the intention of renewing the advance the following day.

At 7.0.a.m. 24th Brigade was ordered to advance on to Cliqueterie Farm, 23rd Brigade was ordered to hold its present line and to relieve 25 Brigade on line 24, 29, 7 7 31.

25 Brigade was ordered to be prepared to support 24th Brigade.

The position of 25 Brigade at 3.0.p.m. was:-

2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade on Line 100 yards east of 49, 80.

2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment at 57

2nd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment at 22, 47

1st Battalion Royal Irish Rifles at 21, 17 and 15, 14. [TX01016]

The following account of the battle appeared in the Berkshire Chronicle of 26th March 1915. It was written within days of the battle, almost without censorship and gives considerable insight into the mood of the time.

The battle of Neuve Chapelle advanced our line less than a mile, and it cost us a heavy toll in dead and wounded. Yet it will live in our history as one of our greatest triumphs. The greatness of Neuve Chapelle rests not in the territory we gained, for it was inconsiderable, not in the losses we inflicted on the enemy, but in the marvellous staff preparations, which permitted a splendidly defended and elaborately fortified series of positions to be taken under circumstances making victory absolutely assured.

The battle was won by the assemblage at the right moment of all the conditions which are vital to success. The co-ordination, almost without flaw, of 50,000 combattants of all arms gave us Neuve Chapelle, and this co-ordination sprang from the display of an infinite capacity for taking pains on the part of the Headquarters staff. Not the overwhelming masses of artillery, not our superiority in numbers, not the ascendancy of our air service won this historic battle, but the harmonious combination of all was effected by wonderful attention to detail and to exhaustive preliminary rehearsal. That was the miracle of Neuve Chapelle and that is why the epic of Neuve Chapelle will compare with any story of British hardihood in the language. [TX00301]

The writer then describes the artillery bombardment by 350 massed guns and then goes on to describe the 2nd Battalion's role. It continued

The fighting on the 10th, the 11th and the 12th reduced the enemy's effectives by about 18,000 men; our losses were nearly 10,000. The effect of such a heavy wastage would have shattered the resistance of an enemy less determined than the Germans. His enormous losses, however, only spurred him to greater desperation. Every standing building was turned into a miniature fortress, each requiring a furious attack at close quarters before it could be

captured.

Our attacks had to be made in face of a formidable machine-gun fusillade, which played havoc in our ranks, but it was the only way we could clear up the position and render our possession of Neuve Chapelle perfectly secure. In these hand-to-hand combats we lost as many as the enemy, and the casualties among our officers in particular were very heavy. They were shot down gallantly leading the men on to the attack and although one mourns their loss it is true to say that but for their heroism and the inspiring example which they gave to their men our victory at Neuve Chapelle would not have been complete.

#### LOSS OF OFFICERS EXPLAINED

In view of the heavy loss of Berkshire officers at Neuve Chapelle, the following comment by 'Eye Witness' is interesting. "of the gallantry of regimental officers throughout the fighting it is unnecessary to speak. The casualty lists tell the tale. The heavy toll among them was largely due to the fact that in advancing over the intricate country intersected with hedges and ditches, the platoon commanders had to go forward to reconnoitre the ground and discover the best way to circumvent or cross these obstacles without getting their men crowded together in narrow places such as gaps in hedgerows and bridges. This naturally entailed exposure. The success achieved and the extraordinary spirit shown by the troops are the best proofs of the qualities displayed by their leaders. [TX00301D]

A further account appeared in the Reading Mercury of 24/4/15

It was from the centre of our attacking line that the assault was pressed home soonest. The guns had done their work well. The trenches were blown to unrecognisable pits dotted with dead. The barbed wire had been cut like so much twine. Starting from the Rue Tilleloy the Lincolns and the Berkshires were off the mark first with orders to swerve to the right and left respectively as soon as they had captured the first line of trenches to let the Royal Irish Rifles and the Rifle Brigade through to the village.

The Germans left alive in the trenches, half demented with fright, surrounded by a welter of dead and dying men, mostly surrendered. The Berkshires were opposed with the utmost gallantry by two German officers who had remained alone in a trench serving a machine gun. But the lads from Berkshire made their way into that trench and bayoneted the Germans where they stood, fighting to the last. The Lincolns against desperate resistance eventually occupied their section of trench and then waited for the Irishmen and the Rifle Brigade to come and take the village ahead of them.

Meanwhile the second 29th Garhwalis on the right had taken their trenches with a rush and were away towards the village and the Biez Wood. Things had moved so fast that by the time the troops were ready to advance against the village the artillery had not finished its work. So, while the Lincolns and the Berks assembled the prisoners who were trooping out of the trenches in all directions, the infantry on whom devolved the honour of capturing the village waited.

The Berkshires were held up by the machine guns from a bridge over the River Des Layes. Dealing with this the writer says " It was clear on March 13th that the preliminary to any successful advance must be by

the destruction by artillery of the three German strongholds - the two on the Pietre road and the bridgehead over the River Laye. But the weather allied itself with our existing difficulties. The clear atmosphere prevailing during the last day of the fighting had given way to mist impeding the artillery observation work and making it increasingly hard to distinguish friend from foe amid a network of trenches which in some places were only fifty yards apart.

The 13th was a hard day for our Army. The troops were worn out with three days fighting in many cases they were in very insufficient cover, though they worked feverishly, dog tired as they were, to entrench themselves efficaciously. The new trenches were very wet and a biting wind added to the general discomfort. In many cases the men fell asleep standing up at their loopholes and a sergeant tells how he went down the line of his trench after dark, tugging at a leg here and there to make sure that the men were still awake. More than once he found himself plucking the boot of a dead German. On the 14th most of the troops which had taken part in this historic engagement had been relieved. [TX00293]

## Neuve Chapelle & Croix Barbee 16th to 20th March 1915

They were relieved in the front line trenches on the 16th but retired only 400 yards to the west of Neuve Chapelle where they continued to give support to the Rifle Brigade.

A draft of 10 men joined on the 16th and Lt Col Feetham returned on the 17th relieving Capt Macgregor of the command.

C and D Companies remained to provide the support but the rest of the battalion moved to billets in Croix Barbee on the 18th

Deaths in this period were:-

- 9053 Alec Goddard of Reading (16th)
- 9108 James Wood of Ealing (16th)
- 7951 Harry Venn of Bagshot (17th)
- 9344 George Wallis of Maidenhead (17th)
- 8358 Edward Thomas King of Oxford (19th)

## Neuve Chapelle Trenches 20th to 23rd March 1915

At 19:00 on the 20th they returned to the front line relieving the 2nd Rifle Brigade.

The next day a draft of 300 men arrived from 3rd Battalion in Portsmouth. They were under the command of Major R P Harvey with 2/Lts G E Hawkins and G D Lomax. They had left Portsmouth at 11:30 on the 18th, embarking at Southampton at 19:00. They arrived at 8th Infantry Base Depot at Le Havre at 17:00 on the 19th and next day entrained at Montevillers for Abbeville. The 21st was a Sunday most of which was spent on the train. At each stop the Railway Travel Officers each

gave conflicting advice but eventually they arrived at Merville where the RTO accompanied them as far as Le Gorgne whence they were able to march the 4 miles to Croix Barbee where they were met by Capt Lickman.

Major Harvey kept a diary for the few weeks he was with the Battalion and the entries are most illuminating about life in the front line.

March 21

Abbeville 6.30. Sunday. Spend all day in train, each RTO gives different instructions and says the last one was an ass. Cook water at Bergenette. At Merville last RTO meets me, and accompanies us to Le Gorgne whence we march 4 miles with a guide to Croix Barbee. Lickman meets us, puts us into farmhouse billets and we then dine with Mr. Quick, Hawkins and Lomax. I then accompany Lickman to Battn HQ. and meet Col. Feetham in cellar of ruined house in Neuve Chapelle. He tells me to come up next day and look round. I return with Lickman.

March 22

Stand to arms 4.30 - 5.30. Coffee. Sleep till 7.45. Shave, bath in yard, inspect billets, warm up everybody. Capital breakfast - Lawrence a splendid cook. Parade 10 - 1., attack formation: "Ground unhealthy" says a French artillery officer. I find the Germans have been shelling that particular area all day. I shove off. Aeroplanes shelled by Germans - a Taube comes over us, but is too high to squirt at. A "coal Box" drops 200x away, so we march home in artillery formation. Capital practice for the men. Stop at an enclosed work. originally made by the Germans and lecture to men on different forms of revetments and dug-outs. Capital dinners.

Parade 3 -4 .telling off men to Companies in the Battn. I command A Company. At 4.30 pm start to trenches with guide. Tell the men I am going to engage seats for them and enquire if they want stalls or dress circle. This meets with a general chorus that they would prefer the pit! I carry full load and British Warm in addition. Get on to La Bassee road. House at cross-roads was hit a week ago killing 24 men of East Lancs. Grave outside. Road being shelled then - my orderly seems to like it, I don't. Men under verandahs much appreciate me ducking as shells scream over. One man gets knocked over about 200 x ahead. Somebody calls out "Stretcher Bearer" . Everybody laughs. My orderly says this happens every day, as they usually shell Headquarters about this time. "Where are Headquarters?" "That house ahead". Bang! again. "Thanks, I'm off" and I run like a rabbit under cover. Am met with roars of laughter by a group of officers. Recognise Gardner, and Brodigan of the Glosters, who ask me to tea. They say they are coming up to meet Col. Feetham at 5.30 pm, but propose to postpone till shelling stops.

However I am due at 5 pm. so thank them and push on. At a sharp turn where trolley-car starts for the trenches men are sitting pretty close together under cover of the houses.

However I don't see any use in stopping, so get through houses and feel much relieved at seeing a sapper, sitting on the exposed side eating bread and cheese and reading the "Winning Post". Shove on across country, shells still come over occasionally. As

we approach the 1st line of the British old position, a noise like an express train or swarm of bees comes tearing towards me. I saw my orderly for the first time show some consternation and disappear into the ditch. I throw myself flat where I was. Crack! Crack! two shrapnel burst almost on top of us, and the case of one fell close by. A right and left I suppose. A shower of dust, gravel and bricks, but that was all. No use stopping, on we went. At the next line of trenches we meet a big working party coming back. Bang! the same thing again. Two more shells and we bolted into the dug-out. We stayed a few minutes, but now keeping away from the road, we struck across some entanglements and pushed on to the ruined house, our headquarters, where I reported to the Colonel that at any rate I had not been bowled out first ball! There was a good deal to settle regarding our relief tomorrow and shortly before 6 pm the 2nd Glosters officers rolled up, and about 7 pm we all went round the fire trenches. Young Colbourne and 3 men had been hit that morning and they could not be moved till dark. All sniped from one house. They were still where they fell. Everybody was very cheery. The men had all been there without relief since the fight 12 days ago, when we lost 14 officers and 320 men.

Many old friends came up and shook hands. The breast works were wonderfully made, our men being past masters at digging. Braziers everywhere, dug-outs, blankets, wooden floors, everything very comfy. By now it was dark, except for incessant flares, shot up by both sides. Guns and rifle fire skittered on each flank, occasionally bullets pinged into our breastwork, when Tommy grinned. The German dead lie thick in front of us still. The battn carried everything before it, whilst those on the left and right were not so successful, and we had to fall back in line, but those bodies are tributes still to the lads from Berkshire, and as one remarked "we always did like pitching", No doubt the haymaker's lift stood him in good stead on the 10th.

Colbourne had been carried off when I reached his dug-out, but a fellow was lying very still behind the parapets. I touched his hand and it was quite cold, and I recognised an old Khartoum comrade whom I had last seen at Aldershot, when I recommended him a post in the G.W.R. He was quite dead. There was a deep stain on his temple, I said a little prayer, and next moment was joking with the Battn. marksman, a man in my Meerut Company, who assured me he was using his abilities daily, while half a doz. men were cooking tea and joking a few feet away. It was all very simple and ordinary. At last I got to "A" Company which I am to take over, and I soon found a lot of old friends and N.C.Os. whom I had lately trained at Portsmouth. The men were all very busy, filling up sandbags and putting up wire. Most of this work is done in the dark.

Neuve Chapelle is simply blown to pieces, both sides have shelled it from time to time, and our trenches run in front of it. You have no idea what a jumble of roofless houses, smashed transport and wrecked furniture, shell craters everywhere.

I had hoped to have remained the night with my Company, but my Colonel wanted me to go back to the draft; however a small show had been arranged for 11.30 pm and he told me I could stay for it, and go back afterwards. We all dined in the Headquarters

cellar, and at 10 O'clock I went back to my trench.

German working parties had been very busy for the last few nights, and we intended to wake them up a bit. At 11.30 pm the guns were to fire a salvo and then every rifle and machine-gun was to give them What-ho! rapid fire. On arrival, I found my Company had a party out burying the German dead, who lie very thick there, and are getting a bit unpleasant. I went out with a corporal to bring them in, but met them outside with a few trophies. At 11.20 men's rifles were all ready on the parapet, and I went round depressing the muzzles, and selected one for myself. Two of the burying party had a German rifle each and were sending the German bullets back home!

Then we set our backs against the parapets and waited with the pistol flares at hand. A flicker of light in the sky told us the salvo was fired, three miles behind us. The screams of the shells and the bang as they landed above the German lines was our signal to open fire and I fired my first round against the Kaiser on the 30th anniversary of Tofrek. Up went our flares to see the damage; whether the bodies had been added to I could not say, but of course the men claimed a considerable bag. The Germans evidently thought we were attacking, for their flares, (much better than ours) illumined our lines for hours. By 12.15 am I was back in the cellar. The Colonel had been on his way to another trench, but had run into barbed wire, and lighting his torch to free himself drew considerable fire from the German lines. However he was not touched, thank goodness. He is a fine C.O. It was nearly 2.am before I got back and I was then ready for bed having stood to arms at 4.am. So ended my first day at the Front.

23rd

Hear Colbourne is not too bad, shoulder and lung perforated. Stand to arms 4.30 am. till 5.30 am. Then bed till 8.am, musketry and digging 9.30 till 1, find billets very clean and tidy. Nugent, who was wounded on the 10th, has rejoined and limps back, very plucky of him, hit in 3 places most would have gone home. Dig from 3 -4, then write. Rain. Nugent rolls up, he was wounded in 3 places at the fight. Jolly plucky of him. Rain.

Deaths in this period were:-

9517 William James Logan of London (20th)

5412 Charles Hall of Guildford (21st)

5727 Harry Cherrill of Dorchester (22nd)

9001 Albert Herecombe Silver of Reading (22nd)

8287 Joseph Crutchfield of Eversley (23rd)

6365 Frank Edward Parker of Kennington (24th)

9699 Henry John Phillip Lowther of Hammersmith (29th)

## **Bac St Maur etc**

**23rd March to 4th April 1915**

At 19:30 on the 23rd they were relieved by the 1st Glosters and moved to billets near Rouge Croix. The next day they marched on to La Flinque and on the 25th to Fe de Bretagne. Their march was completed on the 26th when they arrived at Bac St Maur.

Major Harvey:-

24th

Fill in trenches at 4.30, then pack up, and draft joins companies at Rouge-Croix. Billets shelled on and off all day. One of ours set on fire, bits of shrapnel just miss Hawkins. I am beginning to get accustomed, and don't bob every time. Find that a shrapnel splinter cut my pack on 22nd, my enamel plate turning it. Use Nan's thread to mend the tear. Spend morning chatting with men and meeting old friends, and reading the papers to them. A splendid lot, 200 fighting men, most of whom had been in the fight and in trenches for a fortnight. March off to La Fligne at 5pm and get into the Battn's first billets in October. Very comfy, long night, no stand to arms.

25th

Move off along ponds of mud at Ilam. Have a wash at my billets, down-stripping as usual. When I open my eyes quite a gallery of ladies! Pass through Estaires, not much damaged. Billets in lofts of large farm. Tear my mackintosh on a nail, but Madame mends it beautifully. Have thorough examination of men's gear and write. A most capital dinner cooked by Madame. Promise of another good sleep.

26th

Capital sleep, inspect ammunition, rifles and emergency rations, then go into question of filling up vacancies in N.C.O's caused by the last battle. Such a lot! My Sergt.major had a bullet through his cap. We hear we are to stay here a day or two, so there will be little more news to tell. It is now 1.pm.

27th March.

Train men in the morning and ride to Merville to see Colbourne, having my lunch beside him. Nancy's lavender bag. Very glad of my spare shirt and pyjamas. Billets Bac St.Muar.

28th Sunday.

Not much difference to other days, but a padre gave us a service at 3.pm.

29th

Train men in attack and rapid firing. Pay out.

30th

Hear from Napier that Major Grant is C.R.E. Go and call and get promises of several R.E. stores.

31st March

Visit new trenches with Feetham, make map. Tea with General Lowry-Cole. Lickman gets stores from R.E.

The Colonel of the Regiment, Maj Gen E T Dickson held a full inspection on the 1st April. On the 2nd the permanent appointment of Col Feetham came through as Commander of the 1/1st Staffordshire Brigade and he handed over command of the Battalion to Major R P Harvey who had joined on the 21st March.

Major Harvey:-

1st

General Dickson and Major Ready arrive to inspect. Feltham is given a brigade and I am appointed C.O. We move to Brigade Reserve billets at Croix de

Blanc. I stay with H.Q.

On April 1st they moved to new billets at Croix Blanche to join 25th Brigade Reserve. A Coy were moved up to provide close support to the front line.

Major Harvey

2nd

Stand to arms 4.15. am. sleep later, to 6.am. See Feetham off. Visit Major Cox of the Linco1ns, and are shown the works. Padre lunches. Service at 2.pm. Good Friday. Go to Section 2 H.Q. and meet General, get back, send up one Company, write later.

3rd

Platoon drill for the young Coy. Commanders. Visit trenches, trouble over straw for billets! Go out with working party.

## Rue Petillon and Croix Blanche

4th to 12th April 1915

From the 5th to 12th April the battalion alternated between billets at Croix Blanche and trenches near Rue Petillon with the 2nd Lincolns.

4th Easter Day

Holy Communion under rifle fire, our batteries firing over our barn. Go to Brigade Office. Pack up kit and Battn. parades 7 pm. to go into trenches. I reach HQ at 7.30 pm. Companies effect relief at 10.30 pm. Go round with adjutant. Frontage nearly a mile. Leading guide gets shot thro' the thigh to start with. seems very pleased.

Take nearly 6 hours going round, very dark, plenty of sniping. One sapper killed, try and pull him out of the way, another shot thro' abdomen, cheerfUl spot! Dead Sapper blocks trench, where no breastwork exists, can't get at him except by the boots. Young Lindley gets him by the shoulders, others pull and shift him at last, shooting pretty lively. Some sniper, if we can take a bearing on the flash, we will blow him out tomorrow. A platoon of my Company work all night and build the breastwork im the night. Two more wounded. Cpl. Hopson gets killed, looking through periscope at dawn, without keeping his head down though warned about it. Fall into water up to my waist, Covered in mud, never had such a day. Go out in front with adjutant to visit detached post, no bally good, men only 70 yds from the Germans, might easily be rushed, and can't shift out by day. Will ask R.E. to chuck it and hold breastwork behind when completed. Get back 3.45 a.m. stand to arms 4.15 am. then sleep till 8.am., sleeping on top of wet clothes which dries them.

5th

Spend morning with map and assimilating orders and instructions Select site for cemetery and view HQrs. defences. Major Vesey R.E. arrives to talk, send the adjutant round the works with him and tell him to return for lunch. Chat on 'phone with Coys. Commanders. General says he will go round defences 2.30.pm. Vesey to lunch, friend of Napier's. General arrives, we go round together, very pleased with our work last night, find Cpl Hopson's body. first man of my draft to be killed. Bullet bang thro' the periscope and

forehead. Object lesson to others. Take remaining glass to mend my own which got broken. Kneel beside him. I shall probably bury him at dawn.

Stop at artillery observation post. Officer very pleased. The probable house where sniper was has just had 4 shells through it. Hope it mopped him up. Get back 6.45 pm, mud from head to foot. Indiarubber gloves over thick leather ones capital. Lawrence washes me down with a brush and bucket. arrange fatigues for tonight. Shall go round again tomorrow after day-break. Oilskin coat and waders absolutely splendid. Letters from home, No.6, and Meg and Russell. Wet night, very dark. Just as I turn in, a knock at the door. a big man comes in with his arm covered with blood. "Hullo" I said "damaged yourself" "Not exactly, Sir, the other blokes". He had a bandage put on, said he was a sapper and must get back to his trench pump! These R.Es. are splendid.

April 6

Start round at 4.am. with a compass and make a map of our section. Meet a wounded Lincoln who dies on the road. I bury him and Cpl. Hopson later in the morning. Get back at 9.am. and spend a quiet morning learning about bombs and "Archibald", a trench mortar.

I got back from my early morning round about 9.am, and after a good breakfast at the farm, had a wash and fixed up a burial service at 11.am. The R.A. potentes call about our section defence, and I entertain 3 full Generals in my shirtsleeves. They soon clear off, and then another Brass Hat arrives with a big VIII on, his sleeve in red. He called himself D.A.Q.M.G. and seems keen on sanitation. I tell him so am I. It turns out this area has been left in a horrible state, but we had been at work for 2 days. He seemed very agreeably surprised. I invite him to the obsequies of 5 dead hunns but he hurries off. The Padre then rolled up and we have a small service for two of our brave men in a field where many Canadian Highlanders lie. I had marked out a little cemetery for our battn., and asked him to consecrate it. Rifle and gun fire the whole time. Next callers were RE experts, friends of Napier's, and I then sent for one of our Bombers, and had a lecture on every kind of Bomb. I shall have a pyrotechnic display shortly. We have a whole lot of "hairbrushes!" a German infernal machine, and a trench mortar known as "Archibald". I complete my map of our lines after lunch, and then dressing up again spend the afternoon watching the work in the trenches, getting back at 8.pm. Lickman takes letter NO.8 for me. Glad of bed.

April 7th

Stand to arms 4.15 am., then visit forts. Raise General Hades in two where things are not as they should be. Have a magnificent cold bath in courtyard. Sentry looks very shocked! Very wet again. Major Boxer of 2/Lincolns comes to see our trenches which his corps will occupy, so start round, get back at 2.pm making careful inspection. Two more men killed, both chance shots. They look very peaceful, men all around quite unconcerned. They are taken away always at dark. On return, hear General is coming at 2.30. Adjutant will take him round I think! General arrives, goes round and sends most complimentary messages to me. Spend quiet afternoon climbing to an observation post and watch R.H.A, shelling German lines. Pack up

and write diary. Letters from Ellie and Napier. Lincolns arrive and take over, and we have a great discussion tactically. They possess themselves of all my maps and plans to copy. A compliment I suppose. We get to billets a mile further back about 10 pm. No more casualties. We gave them a belt from the maxim gun which infiltrated their trench at 900 yds just before we left, from our point 70 yards from their trench. We had a delightful night's rest and I had a bath in the garden this morning, after 2 hours sleep and stand to arms at 4 am.

April 8th

Not much to do in the morning, but mail arrives with a small hamper from Russell, yours, and one from Mrs. Anderson. Inspected billets and wrote. Parade for subalterns and settle new organisation for bombers and grenadiers. Napier comes to tea and we have a great quack. He leaves a magnificent telescope. He looks so well. The quarter-guard turns out to him. He motors me back to our old reserve billets, and there I get my horse from transport lines and ride home. Write, early bed.

April 9th

Rest after stand to. Practice blocking and bombing parties after a race across ploughland and water jumps, then write most of the morning. Cropper mine expert, nearly shot last night by Lincoln sentry. Cropper lunches with us. Read papers, then go out for long ride to get cap chin strap altered. Afterwards, see West and Cox about work being done. Cropper and Major Williams RE. drop in.

April 10th

Practise blocking parties, and method of crossing entanglements, then go off to Brigade Bombers and throw bombs and grenades. Great fun. Write letters, then go into orchard and make a wire bundle. Pioneer goes back to fetch my axe, and just returns when another shell bursts in the tree! We relieve the Lincolns in trenches, who lose a man killed. A Territorial Battn. making too much noise loses three. We escape without any.

Sundav. April 11th

Quiet day, but we wake them up in the evening with guns. Heavy firing at night, read service by myself in our little cemetery. 2/Cameronian Officers come round and view trenches. GOC calls. Early bed, very heavy firing "wind parade" we call it. The 1/City of London are the culprits.

April 12

Warm and sunny, inspect breastworks and get patrol reports. Cameronians call and make further arrangements and carry off my map. Major Vesey R.E. to: lunch. I show him Capt. Rose's R.E. grave. Write all afternoon and after completing arrangements for the relief take a last look at the trenches, and curse young Waugh for not baling out Communication trench. Hear young Bouchier and 3 men are slightly damaged by some ass holding a bomb too long. Relief gets fixed up and everything goes well. We only lose one man slightly wounded through the calf.

## Bac St Maur

13th to 18th April 1915

On the 12th the Battalion went to Divisional Reserve at Bac St Maur. Next day on the 13th it moved to Brigade Reserve at Fleur Baix

Major Harvey:-

April 12th (cont)

Get to new billets about midnight. Sir John watches us march incognito. We get into comfortable billets. Capt. McGregor and I occupy the private house of the manager of some big jute mills, where the men are quartered.

April 13

Long sleep and capital breakfast. Orderly room, then go round billets. G.O.C. VIII Div. Gen. Davies calls, looks round, very complimentary, then invites me to dine tomorrow. Get mail and capital leather gloves for wire from Ellie and Maggis. Ride out and find good parade ground, then return to lunch and write afterwards. Are inspected by Brigadier at 5 pm.

13th.

Brigadier Lowry-Cole inspects us, congratulates me on commanding a battalion "one of the finest in France".

On the 14th a burial service was read over the battlefield at Neuve Chapelle presided over by Major Harvey.

14th

Companies left and then commanders. I collect some evergreens, laurel, yew and bay from C.R.A's garden and make a cross, in the afternoon Macgregor and I with orderly ride over to Neuve-Chapelle to read burial service over Tom Aldworth and those who fell. We got there without accident, though batteries on both sides were very lively. I was shown the actual positions of our companies and where our officers were killed. All had been buried where they fell, no time for any service, or even looking in their pockets. Our killed totalled nearly 100 in four days. Tom and Saunders lie together side by side. Hogan some 300x ahead beside the man who tried to carry him in. Our cross looked quite nice and a doubled postcard tied with royal blue ribbon reads "In loving memory of Capt. and Adjutant T.R. Aldworth from Major and Mrs. Dick Harvey." I read the service and we said the hymn "My God my Father whilst I stray". As we finished 3 shells screamed overhead from one of our batteries, so he was not without military honours. A good many bullets come flying about, so we did not go up to Hogan's, as it lies almost in the trenches. We looked into our old headquarters cellar, a bit changed since we left it - it looked as if a high explosive had burst in the room above. The 1/9 Gurkhas were here living in dugouts, and gave us warning regarding certain ground on our way back, and later on a head popped out with a pipe in its mouth and a voice drawled "I don't want to hurry you chaps but they are pretty busy with their 'whizzbangs' just where you are standing". We moved on. The place was full of war correspondents being shown over the battlefield by some territorials who had not

been there! They did not seem to be enjoying themselves. It rained hard on our return, and that evening Macgregor and I dined with the Divisional General Davies. He sent us home in his motor.

April 15th

Lovely day, inspect billets and administer toko all round, especially to our medical officer who is a fat, slack chap. I do wish O'Keefe were here. Hear yarn that our Divn. is composed of hardened Indian troops - we may have a chance to get to the Mediterranean. All rot I expect. Company officers look after companies and I ride up to Croix du Bac and bump into HQ of another Division. Nugent discovers a good bathing place in the Lys. In afternoon men bathe and Adjutant and I ride out to find a manoeuvre ground for attack practice. return go to Brigade Office where all C.Os. meet and get information about our new section of defence. A bottle of Hunting Port arrives. Macgregor and I determine to visit our new trenches tomorrow.

On the 16th the units which had been engaged at Neuve Chapelle were inspected and addressed by the CinC Sir John French.

Major Harvey:-

April 17

Nothing much to do, so decide to ride to Armentieres after orders, but mistake about horse prevents me, so go for short ride. C.in C. inspects in afternoon at 2.30 pm. Battn. drawn up in hollow square. We give a splendid General salute, shakes hands with me, glad to meet me again! says "Is this the Battn. that was at Colesburg?" I answer "Yes, Sir, at McCracken's Hill". He thanks the Battn. for services at Neuve Chapelle and refers to damnable reports spread by liars who should be shot, that the fight was not the success it was, and that many of our men were killed by our artillery. Tells us to deny all such rumours emphatically. He shakes hands again and congratulates me on commanding so fine a Battn. I say "Thank you very much, Sir". Then stand easy! Caps off! 3 cheers for the Commander-in-Chief. The men cheer well. Afterwards another short ride and early bed.

## **Fleur Baix and Bois Grenier**

**18th to 25th April 1915**

On the 18th they left their billets at Bac St Maur and marched off to Fleur Baix to go into Brigade Reserve.

Major Harvey:-

18th

Ride to Armentieres and find out a territorial division has arrives, and our volunteers, the 4th Royal Berks are in the trenches. Get my hair cut at a nice barber's. 4th and 6th Glosters in the vicinity but can't find them. Get back at 11.30 am in time for our church service. We move at 3.30 pm. and fetch up into comfortable billets behind the trenches about 1 mile. The Huns are trying to hit Flembaix Church, and we watch the shells pitch and miss, only half explode. Everybody laughs. Mail comes in. Lavendar bag and Maggi; also medicine from Mabel. Early bed as we stand to arms at 3.30 am.

19th

Primrose Day. Something has disagreed! Tum-tum much upset. Stroll up to Lincoln's headquarters dug-out, a sort of underground colony made by the Canadians, all walls covered in canvas Lovely day, very hot sun, conclude on return home it will be a capital move to be violently sick. AM. Lunch time, no thanks, lie down. Laurence administers hot maggi, hot water bottle and toast. Have a dose of medicine sent by Mabel, sleep. Wake up at teatime quite well. A case of the 19th Hole arrives - only taken 10 days to come from Bristol. Lickman and Quick depart with a bottle for their mess. There has been some very heavy firing for the last 48 hours on our left. Hope the Huns are attacking. After tea, keep quiet and write letters. Lincolns had an officer shot through calf last night, had only just arrived from England. Football against R.I.R. Build a big trench to practise blocking parties tomorrow. The weather is glorious, the country stinks a bit. Lavendar bag, hooray.

They relieved the 2nd Lincolns at 19:30 on the 21st in trenches near Bois Grenier and swapped again with them on the 24th

Major Harvey:-

21st

Did some French in bed before getting up, felt quite fit again, practise bombing parties and go round billets. D Coy's billet shelled, only one man hit. Have to attend important conference of C.Os. at Brigade. We move into trenches to relieve Lincolns, that night relief goes off very well. Lincolns lose one guide killed by chance bullet. I start going round posts at 9pm, finish at 1.30 am. Tremendous noise all round Ypres. Find Colonel Hilton in trenches.

22nd

Stand to arms 3 am. bed 4 -7.45 am. Busy on map and Bde. orders all morning. Go round trenches 2 - 5.30 pm. Young gunner called Mayne comes in to dinner. Study orders and maps. Hear Ransom has to lose a leg. Gerry Hunt very annoyed he can't come out yet. Letter from Ellie and Betty.

23rd

Visit works at 3.am and get back to bed about 5.am for 3 more hours, sleep. Find in our old cellar two rather nice porcelain vases which now hold cowslips in my dug-out. I must present them to old lady in billets. G.O.C. comes round our trenches, and is very pleased at our work done. Have great fun with Napier's periscopic rifle. Some Germans start digging new line, whom our guns tickle up. Quiet evening.

24th

Have quite a busy day showing various Staff officers round our lines from a Territorial Division. Our own G.O.C. had already expressed great satisfaction at the work we had done, especially one danger spot over a stream, which I had covered with a deviation traverse. About 3.30 I was escorting another General and his Brigade Major when salvo after salvo went off over our heads from the artillery, at the same time a roar of rifle fire opened from our trenches a mile on our left. I was explaining that this was evidently a "wind parade", some regiment evidently having got the jumps, when I saw dust kicked up by dropping bullets just on our left. Making them keep low, I tried to make

out what was happening, for the German trenches were in a whirl of flames and smoke from our shells, and the rifle fire was increasing on both sides. We were in a communication trench, so telling him they had evidently prepared a show for his benefit, we pushed into the breastworks.

The regiment next to us was now letting drive, but our men were standing to, under the parapet, the sentries with their eyes glued to their periscopes. The German guns were crashing into our parapet or flying overhead, but there was no sign of infantry advancing on either side. After 20 minutes, firing ceased. It had had the desired effect. I found out afterwards it was necessary to discover the positions of four batteries, and one whole section of defence was ordered to open fire and draw response. The flashes were seen and the heavy guns got the information they wanted. That evening we were relieved having had only 2 men wounded during our 3 days in the trenches - quite a record! We got back to Brigade Reserve last night and were met by Moody Ward who wants to be remembered to all at home. His arm is now quite well, and he is now Adjutant in place of Macgregor who takes over A Coy.

### **Bac St Maur** **25th to 28th April 1915**

After being relieved by the 2nd Lincolns at 20:30 on the 24th they returned briefly to Fleur Baix and then next day returned to Divisional Reserve at Bac St Maur.

Major Harvey:-

25th.Sunday.

I managed to get to Holy Communion in a barn close by, and at 11.am. we held service in a farm house to a good many men of the battalion. The General joins us. We were then suddenly ordered to go back to Divisional Reserve, and came to Bac St. Maur in our old billets in that village. Moody Ward and I stroll round billets after our arrival, and I inspect Transport lines and collect a saddle-bag. Mr. Quick gives me some hints as to horse kit on the march and what to fix to the saddle. Mail in write to Napier. Two chickens for dinner, bottle of Hunting Port arrives, merry dinner.

26th

Moody Ward comes round billets at 7.am, and sees Coys on parade. Conference with Company Commanders, and then Macgregor and I go off on horseback and spend 4 hours in our old trenches and observation stations, spying out the land with telescopes, periscopes, and peritelescopes. Tea and lunch together at 4.pm. met Cropper the mine expert who invited us (,,,,,,,,,) Jolly hot, brave men at a shilling a day. Asked him to lunch. Met the General on our return. Very heavy gunfire all night.

Here a draft of 139 men arrived on the 27th

Major Harvey:-

27th

Inspect companies in early morning, parade, then see Battn. in "fighting order" no packs, mess tins and bottles on their backs. Cropper comes to lunch. We hear we are suddenly going to take up the Battalion's

old trenches in which they were for four months before Neuve Chapelle. Rather looks as though plans had been altered. Ride over to Mippe to see 4th Royal Berks., but just missed them. Get back at 6.30 pm., to find a big draft of 140 men has just arrived, nearly all serving soldiers, many Neuve Chapelle wounded, a splendid crowd. This makes us up to 1150. I bet the Deutchers will know it. Nice mail, letters from Ellie, Jeanie, Gerry and Hopton.

28th

Spend morning with orderly in breastworks and observation stations, examining ground to the front. Get back in time for conference. After lunch hear that our billets are now altered, and we go back to our old trenches at Fanguisant for a bit. March off at 6.15 and get into billets at about 8.pm. I go up to the forward work where Hodgson has found a company of Territorials ahead in possession. Hodgson takes his company to another work, and after visiting the billets of the other Coys I turn in early.

### **Levante and Fauquissart** **29th April to 5th May 1915**

The 8th Division took over lines again on the 29th and the 2nd Berks alternated in Brigade Reserve at Levante and trenches at Fauquissart

Major Harvey:-

29th

Have a very good cold bath in a wash tub in the conservatory. They don't seem to know what a bathroom is in this country. Go round companies at exercise, and ride up to see Hodgson, On return, the Germans fire some dozen big shells at the Church, of which little remains. Everybody seems to regard it with great interest. I was buying some tape for my mask when 2 shells fell some 100 yds up the street! In evening go round the trenches which are now held by the Rifle Brigade. The houses nearby are terribly knocked about, but the breastworks are capital. Write letters at night.

30th April

Very hot day, busy with inspection all the morning, write letters in the afternoon, and stroll out in fields by myself. Just like a hot midsummer day. Flanders is going to be a hot place in the middle of summer. We move into trenches about 8pm. relieving the 2/Rifle Brigade, and get in without Casualties.

1st May.

Heavy shelling after standing to arms, and the whole line prepares for a fight. All Ella's bicarbonate of soda had been issued to the companies the night before, the medical supply not having been sufficient. After firing about 2000 shell of all sorts both sides desisted. It turned out the Germans thought we were advancing on the Neuve Chapelle line, and proceeded to shell vigorously the lines of support. Our guns answered, blowing great holes through their breastworks. The Germans then turned on dense smoke, which, however, blew back on themselves. Tommy was delighted! No one was damaged in our lines, but one man was killed during the night by a stray bullet. When shelling was over, I went back to bed and slept

for a couple of hours. Went round trenches three times during the day watching the work on the parapets and dug-outs, very little damage was done by shell fire. Located a sniper in a house about 1000x away, and arranged with a gunner to blow it up tomorrow. Moody Ward and I try to get some stagnant water to run away, a good deal of which is still hanging about. Huns begin dropping mortar bombs into our trenches and the Scots Guards. Hodgson asks for artillery support to stop it, so I pull the observing officer out of his dug-out and he promises to fire next time a bomb is fired.

Meet the Sgt-Major who tells me young Wright has been killed in front of the German wire while on patrol. A man comes up to tell me he was killed under the wire, and that a subaltern and 4 men who had tried to carry him in had had a maxim tamed on them. Sounds jolly. get hold of a Company officer on phone, who tells me he is being carried down now. He is badly knocked about, a bullet through forehead, which has been bound up, but I find one through the heart and arm. No good calling the doctor, so corporal and I take contents of his pockets and make a list. Nice boy, one of the lads I had trained at Portsmouth. Very bad luck, he had crawled up to reconnoitre and had I suddenly wanted to cough, stifled it for some time, but then told his Sergt. he could do so no longer. Up Went a light and. he was fired at by about 20 rifles. Sergeant could not lift him, but crawled back and a subaltern and 2 privates came out and carried him back on their backs. No maxim had been opened on them, but Tommy when rattled is a proverbial liar

Lie down for a bit when bang goes another bomb. Think I hear field guns reply, but come to the conclusion there are more bombs. Go out to curse the Gunner officer, but find him in altercation with his major on the phone. Hodgson has just phoned its new position, and six shells smother it. It has not been used since. Three more men hit. Those hit in the head always seem to make a noise tho' quite unconscious. Move round trenches at daylight and see an unexploded bomb which is treated with much respect and solemnly buried. Rather a disturbed night.

May 2nd. Sunday

Spend quiet morning, and go with R.A. officer to watch "Mother" fire. The effect is tremendous on farms selected. Hope there were plenty of Huns where she settled. Have to be at Conference with Bde. at noon, very interesting and return to Headquarters on bicycle and have to come along a road on 100x ahead so push on hard knowing two don't drop on same spot as a rule. Air seems full of brickdust and smoke, but I keep on at my best pace. One more lands some distance in rear and I arrive at Head-quarters some 200x ahead. and demand lunch as soon as I can extract my cook out of the cellar. It appears they were shelling for 2 hours, and a message sent by Moody-Ward to me to avoid this road had not got thro' before I started home. Some men who were watching the road said they saw me some distance off. The first shell blotted out everything till I emerged, and the second made a very fine red and black background. Of course they always look and seem so much closer than they are.

After tea we get the delightful news that 2 non-coms think they hear the Huns mining under Our trench Pleasant outlook! Evidently my day out! Telephone for

Sapper expert, inform artillery, strengthen a supporting work and put a large supply of bombs each side of supposed threatened area. If mine goes up, survivors will get to the flanks and contain the enemy in broken parapet with bombs from both flanks. Our artillery will blow him out, ~ the supporting work 300x in rear will give him "what-ho" with machine guns. Whilst awaiting Sappers' arrival I bury poor Wright. 4 Second Lieutenants carry him and head-quarter party attend. A battery of Horse Guns give unintentional military honours, whilst I read the Service, then write to his father. Sapper officer arrives with a stethoscope after dinner, and we spend an anxious 2 hours. He finally decides there is no evidence for a mine to be there, than anywhere else, probably someone driving in pickets some distance off, or men chopping wood in some boarded dug-out. Have men told off to listen all night and hope for the best. Heavy gunning to the North all the evening. Wire comes in that Major Finch is arriving early to take over command of the Battalion. I shall enjoy being his 2nd in command, but have held command for over a month.

They were relieved at 20:30 on the 3rd by 2nd Rifle Brigade.

Major Harvey

May 3rd.

Quiet night. G.O.C. inspects works in the morning, says he cannot speak too highly of the excellent state of the defences or the amount of work we have done. Write up diary. 2/Rifle Bde relieve us in the evening. On arrival at billets, meet old Finch looking so well. I am glad he has come.

On the 4th May they were back at Laventie where Major H M Finch assumed command. Immediately they moved to Bac St Maur where they remained until 8th May.

Major Harvey:-

May 4th

I take Finch round supporting works and explain various schemes. Ellie's cake and Mother's arrive together, tackle Mother's first, which is capital. Day very oppressive, we all sleep after lunch, perhaps it was the cake. I lie out in a green meadow, perfect day. Met a Garrison Gunner of the heavies, he tells me the gunners had the time of their lives at Ypres, and got splendid targets. Rain in the evening, go round Company billets and introduce officers to Finch. A magnificent box of medical comforts from Jeanie. The Eau de Cologne most welcome and useful for soaking our masks in. The Doctor very glad of the mustard leaves. Bed later.

## **Bac St Maur**

### **5th to 8th May 1915**

On the 5th at 14:30 they set out by route march to billets at Bac St Maur. They had been there only a few days when they were needed for an attack on the German lines.

Major Harvey:-

May.5th

On court-martial duty all the morning. Repack kit to make a 35lb. valise, mackintosh and British Warm on my saddle. The rest can be left behind when we move. We march through Sailly to Bec St Maur where we billet, arriving about 4.pm. Stroll out to see the Lincolns. Meet Col. Percy-Evans R.A.M.C. delighted to see me, long chat, sends kind regards to Ellie.

May 6th

Take Finch up to breastwork to look at the ground, come back later for lunch. Attend pow-wow at Brigade. General Davies comes in and says "how do you do".! Make a capital washing platform. Go up and reconnoitre the road to the assembly trenches, get back about 1.30 am.

May 7th

Wrote home, talk over orders and then practise men on parade. Pack up and hand things into store. Operations put off 24 hours so we have an extra long sleep.

May 8th

Heavy gunfire early at Ypres. In the morning I take all Company officers up in breastwork to see the ground. The 1/Middlesex are holding the line and are very bucked up. The Germans tried to surprise a guard of 5 men in a sap. Unfortunately they chose the moment when the relief was arriving so it was ten and ten. Our officer closed with theirs and got off 4 shots with his revolver, and killed him. His men killed 4 more and wounded 3, losing 1 killed and 5 wounded. Not bad for territorials. Busy learning up orders and writing till evening. mail arrives, get a little sleep and then write home to every-body. Clean up revolver and pistol. Men are singing and very cheery. We parade at 11, and then trust in God.

Major Harvey was killed in action the next day at Fromelles.

## Fromelles 8th - 10th May 1915

On May 8th 1915 the battalion assembled for an attack on the German trenches. They were in position by the morning of the 9th. The attack would be led by 2nd Rifles with C and D Coys of the Royal Berks in support and A and B Coys in reserve. The bombardment lasted from 0500 to 0540 and as it lifted 2nd Rifles advanced to face a powerful rifle and machine gun fire. When D Coy advanced to fill the space vacated by the 2nd Rifles they found that not all of them had in fact left from behind the breastworks. The ones that had were either dead or trying to take shelter behind vegetation only 10 inches high. As D Coy went over the breastwork they found more of the 2nd Rifle Brigade, 1st Irish Rifles and 2nd Royal Berks crowded into the old fire trench. They were told that orders had been given not to advance further. However no one knew just who had given these orders and there was a suspicion they had come from an English speaking German.

The officer commanding D Coy collected together all

these men from the several battalions and together with his own company ordered an advance in two rushes towards the enemy trenches. No sooner had the first rush been completed when men from the Irish Rifles and Rifle Brigade came running back shouting 'Retire at the double' D Coys commander had little option but to order his men to crawl back behind the breastwork, leaving the fire trench as a shelter for those escaping from no mans land. Orders soon came for him to re-organise the troops under his disposal which included men from the 2nd Rifles, 2nd Irish Rifles as well as from A, B and D Coys of the Royal Berks.

C Coy had a similar experience. They had got beyond the breastwork when the Brigade Commander ordered them first to stop the advance and then a few minutes later to advance to the German trenches. C Coy were just about to execute this order when they too were confronted by men rushing back shouting 'retire at the double' These men were made to halt and lie down with C Coy They then received orders to withdraw behind the breastwork.

B Coy had advanced behind D Coy but only two sections had passed beyond the breastwork, the remainder having been ordered by their commanding officer to stay put.

A Coy seems to have had slightly more success. Under Capt D A MacGregor they moved forwards and took some of C Coy with them across no mans land to the German lines where Capt MacGregor was wounded and taken prisoner. At 1110 Brigade headquarters issued an order to reinforce the men who had reached the enemy lines. This was to be done by passing down a sap and from there crawling across open space to a mine crater and then to rush the enemy parapet. This attack started at 1230 with the 13th Londons and 2nd Lincolns but when about half way to the crater an officer of the 2nd Scottish Rifles gave the order to retire. The officer commanding the 2nd Royal Berks was then in a position only to order the supporting movement cancelled and this was confirmed by Brigade HQ. At 1245 on the 10th May the battalion was ordered back to Croix Blanche having lost both its Commanding Officer and his 2ic.

Casualties in this futile action were heavy

	killed	wou	miss
Officers	7	5	6
OR	52	185	39

Only Capt MacGregor of the officers reported missing had in fact survived. Thus the battalion had lost 12 of its officers: killed: Lt Col H M Finch, Major R P Harvey, Capt R G T Moody-Ward, Lt C G Watson, Lt L E M Atkinson, Lt C G Hodgson, Lt E L Lipscombe, 2nd Lt J Druitt 2nd Lt R E Cunliffe, 2nd Lt M Day, 2nd Lt T Watkins and 2nd Lt A G Bouchier. 2nd Lts

N West, W Aldworth, L A Paterson, W R Wachter and D G L Bridge were wounded.

Lance Corporal, 9896, Willis, 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment stated in a report to the Brigadier:-

On the morning of the 9th May 1915 I was one of the blocking party with the leading Company of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. I advanced to the road beyond the German trenches, joining a party of the Rifle Brigade and Royal Irish Rifles on the road. A party of the enemy, about 80 or 100 strong was advancing towards us on our left. At this time a German general came out of a farm on our left, he was immediately shot by a man of the Royal Irish Rifles. At this time a party of the enemy was also advancing, on our right, from the wood. We then retired from the road to the German trenches, where we remained till about 2.0 a.m., on the morning of the 10th when we were bombed out. I then rejoined my party at the breastworks. [TX01008B]

The Battalion Report on the Operations of 9th May 1915 read:-

(Bas Maisnil – Fromelles – Herlies) Approx 6 miles south-west of Armentieres

At 5.0 a.m on the 9th May 1915 the bombardment of the German Trenches commenced. The 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment was the occupying two assembly trenches in rear of the Breastwork which was being held by the Rifle Brigade. There was another assembly trench between those occupied by us and the Breastwork. This was occupied by the Rifle Brigade

The Regiment was distributed as follows:-

C and D Companies in the front, A and B Companies in the rear assembly trench.

The method of moving from the assembly trench to the Breastwork and thence onwards was:- C & D Companies to advance in two ranks and occupy the Breastwork as soon as the men of the Rifle Brigade were seen to rise, A & B Companies to follow. On arrival there, and to facilitate the passage through the Rifle Brigade at points 826 & 827, the Battalion was to advance in 8 lines of sections at 15 paces interval, and 30 paces distance, sections to move in file.

5.40 a.m. The Guns lifted and the Rifle Brigade rose from the Breastworks and as soon as they appeared on the top they were met by terrific rifle and machine gun fire. C and D Companies Royal Berkshire Regt advanced over the parapets of the two assembly trenches. When D Company arrived in the Breastwork, there was still some of the Rifle Brigade there, and looking over the parapet, I saw those that had gone forward lying down amongst some crops or vegetation of sorts about 9" or 1' high. I also saw the front fire trench full of men and I sent Lts Lipscombe and Cunliffe over the Breastwork with the two leading sections of their platoons (15 7 16). They advanced over the Breastwork and being busy getting the next line ready i.e. the remaining two sections of 15 & 16 Platoons. These four sections I sent over the parapet immediately then got the four leading sections of 13 & 14 Platoons ready and Lt. Day and myself went forward with them. We rushed down and found the old Fire Trench and Sap full of men, Rifle Brigade, Irish

Rifles and Royal Berkshires. I asked some of the Rifle Brigade what Company they were and they said C Company. I asked them and some of the Irish Rifles why they were there and they told me they were ordered to remain there. I asked who they received the order from and they could not tell me, only that it was passed down from the left. I ordered them to come along with me and we (that is the two sections that had come from the Breastwork with me, also some Rifle Brigade and Irish Rifles) went forward. Before going I told them we would make two rushes of it: the first about half way. When we arrived there some Irish Rifles and Rifle Brigade came rushing back from the German Breastwork shouting "retire at the double". I stopped a man and asked him from whom the order came, he replied 'Captain Tee, Royal Irish Rifles and as it appeared to be a retirement in earnest I ordered my men to crawl back to the trench and sap where I found the 4th line of D Company, that is the remaining 4 sections of 13, 7 & 14 Platoons. I ordered them to remain where they were. I then met 2nd Lt Grey of the Rifle Brigade and we decided to get rid of the block in the old fire trench & sap, ready for the forward people to drop into them, when they retired. Four machine guns were brought out of the sap, and from the open, and taken into the Breastwork. We re-organised in the trench and went on for orders from the Brigade Major. Major Cox, then acting Brigadier, ordered me to get together the men of my Regiment that were in the breastwork. These were B Company, less two sections, A Company less 6 sections, plus 2 sections of D Company I had sent in when clearing the sap

Right Flank of Battalion, C Company Attack - Reports taken from two N.C.Os:-

Sergt Wilder states:- On the morning of the 9th inst my platoon, No. 10, advanced to the breastwork and Mr Watson, taking the first line over the breastwork, was shot and fell back. I took over the second line, and we moved forward in support of the first line. We made a slight incline to the right, making for the red house the other side of the German Trench. We passed through several of the Rifle Brigade by the wheatfield. I heard an order passed from the rear "From the Brigade Commander. No further advance" A few minutes later another order was passed "Advance to the 1st German Trench". I collected what men there were around me, and was on the point of advancing, when I saw a fairly strong group of men rushing back shouting "retire at the double". When they got to where we were lying I enquired where the order came from and could not find out, so I ordered them to remain where they were. After a while I went back to find out what was happening and was ordered to join Sergeant Matthews and re-organise: which was done.

Sergeant Matthews states; On moving from the assembly trench to the breastwork we found it full of the Rifle Brigade, and an officer was shouting for them to advance. After a few minutes my Company advanced over the parapet. We advanced at the double mixed up with the Rifle Brigade. I was buried by a shell and was pulled out, by the time I recovered, the Rifle Brigade were retiring running through my Company and shouting "Retire at the double", and some of our Regiment were with them, when just in front of the parapet an order was issued to re-organise, this was done. I now had 4 effective N.C.Os.

and 47 Men. I asked where the Company Officers were, I was told they were all shot down. I was ordered to hold myself in readiness to proceed, with Lt Hawkins, up the German Sap to reinforce but the order was cancelled and we did not go.

Last two Companies of the Battalion:-

"B" Company was to move in four lines in rear of "D" Company. Only two sections of "B" Company passed over the Breastwork. 2nd Lts Lindley and Lewis state they ordered by Lt Aldworth to stay there.

"A" Company – The first two lines under Captain MacGregor and 2nd Lt. Westland Druitt, passed over the Breastwork and moved forward towards the German Trench. Lt Druitt was killed, Lt West was wounded and Captain MacGregor was reported as wounded in the German trench ,so that some of his men must have got there with him. He also carried forward some men of "C" Company with him

Action after re-organisation in the parapet

About 11.00.a.m. Lt Hawkins brought me a message from the Brigade Major, to file my Regiment to the left, and making use of the sap, made by the 13th Kensington Regiment to crawl man by man across the open, into the crater made by mine explosions and to reinforce the people in the German Breastwork.

I moved down the breastwork with a guide and reported to Major Carter Campbell, 6th Scottish Rifles ,who were holding the Breastwork at that point. There was a large party of the Lincolns there, with some crawling over to the crater. The ground to be crossed was very open and beaten by Machine Gun and Rifle fire, so that it was impossible to double over without losing the majority of the men (The way over was out through the opening in the parapet, across about 15 yards open ground, down into an old Communication Trench, then into the old Fire Trench – These were up to the hips in water – from them over the original parapet and then about 90 yards over the open into the crater.)

Captain Thurston had led the Lincolns over and they cleared the opening about 12.30.p.m., I crawled out followed by my men ,and each man carried an extra 300 rounds of ammunition for the people forward. When about 3 parts of the way to the crater, the Kensingtons retired with a rush on the left. The men of the Lincolns in front of me rose as one man and rushed for our Breastwork. I shouted to them to lie down and it was some few minutes before I got them all down. A few of them were getting back without arms and I made them lie still. I asked why they were retiring and was told that the order had been passed back by an officer of the Scottish Rifles (This was afterwards verified by the officer himself, later on). I was watching the crater mouth and saw men coming out of it, and crawling back, so I ordered my men to back quietly and wait in the Breastwork. In the first rush many were killed and wounded by the machine Gun which kept up its fire for some considerable time. When I got back to the breastwork I reported the circumstances to General Pinney who ordered Major Carter Campbell to stay the movement of reinforcing the German Trench. My party were ordered to occupy the Breastwork prolonging the left of the Scottish Rifles ,where we remained until 12-45,am on the 10th May 1915, when I received orders to assemble at Croix Blanche. I arrived there at 2.30.a.m.

During the afternoon of the 9th I got into visual communication, with Captain Thurston, occupying the German Breastwork who asked for ammunition and reinforcements. I sent 6 men with 6 bandoliers each, over and 3 became casualties. In the meantime I reported the message to General Pinney who decided to evacuate the trench and instructed me to send a message to Captain Thurston to retire from his position by degrees.

Message sent – Retire from your position by degrees.

Reply – What time ?

Message – As early as you like.

The signaller sent 'as early a possible' and when the first lot of men were coming over, about half were bowled over. A Seargent who succeeded in reaching me said that Captain Thurston wanted to wait till it was dark. I knew that the message left it open to his discretion as to the time and I asked the Signaller what he had sent, with the above result. An amended message was sent and the reply was "Shall I retire as soon as it is dark, do you want me to cut the barbed wire in front of their trenches" I reported this to General Pinner

Answer – "Yes, and cut the wire, if not dangerous to you"

The next message was "I shall retire before 8.0.p.m."

At 7.30.p.m. there was an intense fire and. Looking over the parapet I saw our men coming back from their position, so I cleared the bayonets from our own parapet and made ready to pull the Lincolns in when they arrived. I had previously informed the units right and left of the retirement with instruction not to fire.

After this nothing of importance happened in front of me.

(Sd) C Nugent – Captain, 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment – 11-5-15 [TX01011]

The Divisions report read:-

The general scope of the operations of the 1st Army will be:

To advance onto the ridge - Le Plouich la Cliquetrie and the push forward in a southerly and southeasterly direction via Herlies and threaten La Bassee form the north and the east.

8th Division Will break the line at Rouges Bancs, on a frontage of about 600 yards, and gain a position from our line on the left in the neighbourhood of La Cordonnerie Farm, through Fromelles to La Clercq Farm to Point 292 to Point 300 and back to our line again.

25 Brigade - The Left Brigade, Commander Brigadier General A Lowry Cole, C.B., D.S.O.- starting from the left of the Right attack, will attack on a frontage of about 250 yards, from Point 826 exclusive to 828, inclusive, and including the defences round Point 827, and extend its flanks so as to secure Points 879 and 879.

In order to safeguard the Left flank of the Division and to prevent reinforcements coming from the east, it will be necessary for the Left brigade to drop detachments as it advances to secure, and to hold supporting points in the neighbourhood of the Rouges Bancs - Fromelles Road.

The 2nd Objective to be allotted to the Left Brigade will therefore be to secure the trench running east from Map Square 15 and localities at 816-832 and 834, while the Brigade pushes on to Fromelles.

The final objective of 8 Division will be to place the reserve Brigade (23rd Brigade) in Fromelles, the Right Brigade (24th Brigade) along the railway and the Left Brigade (25th Brigade) connecting up to the present trench line near Le Cordonerie Farm - a total frontage for the Division of about Two and a half miles.

Map Sheet 36 S.W.

8 Division observations on the operations

The failure of the operations may be attributed primarily to the strength of the enemy's works, which were very different to those at Neuve Chapelle.

It has been ascertained from prisoners, and from Officers and men who were in the German trenches, that the front parapets varied in thickness from 15 to 20 feet and were provided with bombproofs capable of keeping out any but the heaviest nature of shell. In rear of the parapet was a second parapet of parapets, which the Germans were able to man in the few cases where their front parapet was breached.

The protection afforded to the garrison of the German trenches was so complete that, the moment our artillery fire ceased the parapets were lined with rifles, and machine guns opened a cross fire, and, even during the bombardment, heavy fire was kept up on our breastworks.

It is also reported that the enemy made use of a new and thicker form of wire for the entanglements, which may account for the smaller amount of effect than was anticipated from our wire cutting guns. A new type of wire was seen by the 2nd Rifle Brigade on the Fromelles Road and it was stated to be too thick to be dealt with by the ordinary wire cutters.

Our artillery appears to have caused considerable execution in the German rear trenches and on the roads by which reinforcements were brought up. The greater part of the guns were, however, of too small a calibre to make an impression in the time allotted on the German breastworks.

The loss of an officer of Brigadier General Lowry-Cole's capacity for command would have been serious at any time, but was a double misfortune at the critical moment when it occurred.

Under the title *Dashing Attack near Bois Grenier* The Great World War - Vol 4 Page 197/8 gives the following account

In the course of this prolonged struggle east of Ypres the 5th Corps, though forced back to its original positions, captured 2 officers and 138 other prisoners, besides holding the Duke of Wurtemberg's army to its ground while the main attack was proceeding elsewhere.

Similar demonstrations with the same object in view were made along the whole front of the Second Army, as well as by those units of the First Army occupying

the line north of the Bethune-La Bassée Canal. While the enemy was distracted by the deafening bombardment at so many other points, a dashing attack was delivered from the British front below Bois Grenier, which lies just south of Armentières. Here the initial charge, with the Berkshires in the centre, and other battalions of the Rifle Brigade and Lincolns to right and left respectively, went perfectly, we are told by Reuter's correspondent, save at one point, where the oncoming troops were suddenly revealed in a chance flash from one of the enemy's search-lights. In an instant the German machine-guns rattled out a decimating fire, holding up the attack at this point, and leaving an ugly and dangerous wedge in the British line as it swept on victoriously to left and right. "All the regiments engaged played a gallant part", wrote Reuter's correspondent. "The Rifle Brigade did magnificently." Having carried the first line, their strong force of bombers at once extended and captured the second line as well, while our guns "lifted" on to the enemy's third line. The wedge in the centre, unfortunately, proved a stumbling block to effectual cooperation with the troops on the left, and as soon as the enemy had recovered from the first shock, and hurried up his reserves, he made the most of this fatal advantage. By 10 a.m. the Germans' second line had become untenable, the Rifle Brigade being now back in the first line, where a counter-attack was repulsed with heavy loss. The Berkshires and Lincolns in the meanwhile were playing their unselfish parts sacrificing themselves that others might win - no less stubbornly. The Berkshires, in the centre, who stormed a strong redoubt familiarly called the "Lozenge". and the Lincolns, on the left, who carried the stronghold known as Bridoux Fort and took eighty prisoners, held on like the Rifle Brigade until shortly after 3 p.m., when the order was given for the general retirement to our own lines, the main object of the attack having by this time been accomplished. There were some exhilarating moments in the course of the fight, [TX00902]

## **Bac St Maur** **11th-17th May 1915**

Command was left with Capt C Nugent and he gave way to Capt G P S Hunt on the 17th. The battalion returned to its billets at Bac St Maur to rest and reorganise, moving to Estaires on 16th May.

A draft of 110 arrived on the 11th.

Deaths were

9596 - Leonard Roberts of Marlow

15668 - William Henry Boyles of Donnington

9068 - Arthur Richard Smith of Chilton Foliat

9697 - Frank Vince of Bracknell

9552 - Robert Henry Blackburn of Chiswick

9170 - George Hazell

8280 - Henry George Knibbs of Twyford

8646 - Walter Hedges of Maidenhead

8646 - Walter Hedges of Maidenhead  
8646 - Walter Hedges of Maidenhead  
11737 - William Thomas Gilkerson of Bracknell  
9707 - William Beaver of Binfield  
9769 - Albert Edward French of Hungerford  
9172 - Percy White of Feltham  
9425 - Richard Newton Bracey of Winchcombe Glos  
-5 - Thomas Wright of Sleaford  
9769 - Harry Sly of Plaistow  
8984 - Charles William Adair of Reading  
-5 - Lionel Edward Mapletoft Atkinson of Weymouth  
5285 - William Bellamy of Birmingham  
5410 - Edward Berry of Fleet  
9565 - James Robert Bodie of Deptford  
10230 - Charles Bolton of Maidenhead  
-5 - Arthur George E Bouchier  
9871 - James Boxell of Yiewsley  
8371 - Oliver Brettell of Oxford  
10065 - Francis C G Buckland of Aldermaston  
8616 - James Bullock of Devizes  
8456 - John Henry Busby of Kidlington  
9631 - Edward Charles Canning of Newbury  
8439 - William Carter of Newbury  
15698 - James Casson of Lozells  
9586 - William Frank Chiles of Henley OT  
15736 - John Claydon of Haverhill  
15700 - George Edward Clayton of Cheltenham  
8789 - Edwin Albert Clilverd of Kensington  
6017 - John Collett of Maidenhead  
8388 - George John Cooling of Reading  
11489 - Robert Charles Crome of London  
-5 - Robert Ellis Cunliffe of Radlett  
-5 - Maurice Day of Sandwich  
9401 - William Day of Bracknell  
-5 - E Joseph Druitt  
15760 - James Ellison of Cippenham Green  
9287 - Harry Alfred Fiddler of Eton  
11822 - William Foster of Pebworth  
13639 - James William Gill  
9485 - Stephen Goddard of Windsor  
9524 - John Gosling of Beech Hill  
5993 - John Grove of Maidenhead  
15767 - Percy Hall of Compton  
8219 - Albert Charles Hamilton  
-5 - Richard Prentice Harvey of Nailsea  
15787 - Frank Hicks of Freemantle  
10215 - Harry Higgins of Knowl Hill  
14027 - James Hillier  
-5 - George Graham Hodgson of Chertsey  
15772 - Joseph Sidney Hunt of Hungerford  
11791 - George Jewell of Barnstaple  
8479 - Maiwand Alfred Jones of Reading  
9124 - Albert Kendall of Windsor  
11462 - Arthur Kitchener  
8261 - Alfred Edward Lambourne of Reading  
9639 - Arthur Henry Lawrence of Barking  
15737 - William Charles Lewin  
9290 - Albert Machen of Bagshot  
11501 - Hugh McArdle of Glasgow  
15476 - William Richard McGrath of London  
8913 - David Middleton  
8851 - Jesse Reuben Mitchell of Wokingham  
-5 - Richard Guy Torrington Moody-Ward  
8644 - Ernest William Newman of West Challow  
10078 - Sidney Norton of Faringdon  
15621 - Sidney James Oliver of Reading  
11757 - William Parrett  
9879 - Ralph Charles Peters of Teddington  
8477 - Albert Phillips of Yattendon  
6019 - Walter Fitzgerald Phillips of Luton  
9234 - Charles William Pink of Poplar  
6638 - Thomas Jocelyn Price of Reading  
11614 - Harry Purland of Blackfriars  
9648 - Albert George Roberts  
15810 - George Thomas Smith of Woodcote  
11546 - Alfred James Snell of Peckham  
15859 - Ernest Somner of Welwyn GC  
9054 - Alfred Tame of Windsor  
8265 - William George Tame of Windsor  
5805 - Albert Victor Taylor of East Dulwich  
8147 - Charles Cecil Taylor of High Wycombe  
11980 - William Joseph Townsend of Canonbury

5638 - George Turner of Reading  
9536 - Sidney James Washington of Hammersmith  
-5 - Thomas Watkins of Reading  
-5 - Cedric Gordon Watson  
8341 - Fred Watts of Baulking  
9225 - Gilbert Joseph West of Pamber  
8120 - Percival Charles Wharton of Great Haseley  
8905 - Oliver Alfred Woodland of Cove  
9310 - Ernest Herbert of Kintbury  
11548 - George Thomas Wayman of Dulwich  
11562 - Martin Wilfred Cox of Upton Park  
11554 - Richard Charles Snooks of East Dulwich  
15793 - Horace Barrett of West Hanney  
8381 - Alfred George Busby of North Stoke  
9788 - James Hughes of Redhill  
15515 - Ernest Budd of Swallowfield

### **Sources**

Petre pp 69-75

Berkshire Chronicle 26/3/15, 7/5/15, 11/6/15, 13/8/15,  
3/9/15, 17/9/15, 24/9/15.

Reading Mercury 24/4/15

Major Harvey's Diary

Sgt Hanks Account

2nd Battalion War Diary

25th Bde War Diary

8th Division War Diary

*Continued in section 202*