

Section 202

The Build up

2nd Battalion May to September 1915

The 2nd had retired to Croix Blanche after the attack of May 9th Continued from section 192.

Estaires

17th to 24th May 1915

After the costly action of the 9th May at Fromelles the command was held at first by Captain C. Nugent, the senior surviving officer, who on the 17th gave place to Captain G. P.S. Hunt who rejoined the battalion.

Returning to its billets at Bac St. Maur, the battalion was busy reorganizing till, on the 16th May, it moved to Estaires.

Men were continuing to be sent to hospital with 14 men going in this period and only one returning. Two new Lieutenants (C W Battye & R L H Simmons) and two 2nd Lieutenants (R B E Upton & R H G Trotter) joined on the 22nd

A few men died in this period:

- 15515 - Ernest Budd of Swallowfield (17th)
- 7265 - Lionel John Penny of Peckham (17th)
- 9039 - Walter Charles Perkins of Reading (17th)
- 9208 - William George Stapleton of Preston Bissett (17th)
- 8474 - William Charles Cox of Bucklebury (20th)
- 8659 - Harry Robert Smith of Oxford (24th)*

Those marked * were killed in action

Neuve Chapelle and Laventie

25th May to 25th June 1915

The month from the 25th May to the 25th June was spent in occupying trenches at Neuve Chapelle for six days at a time alternately with the 2/Lincolnshire Regiment. The system at this time was to have one battalion in the front trenches, and the reserve battalion distributed with two companies in close support and two in billets at Laventie.

Their periods in the trenches were: 24-27 May, 30 May-3 Jun, 6-12 June, 18-25 June The trenches occupied by them in June were in front of the road leading south-east from the Rue Tilleloy to Neuve Chapelle, at the end nearest the Rue Tilleloy.

The pattern of men wounded and coming to and from hospital persisted although as the weather improved the numbers going to hospital for trench feet declined.

A draft of 27 men rejoined from hospital on the 1st June. A further draft of 71 men arrived on the 13th. Another draft of 25 arrived on the 23rd with Lt G F Gregory

On the 13th June the support billets at Lavantie were shelled and a thatched farm house burned down. the Battalion lost 8 rifles and some other equipment in the fire. The next day 8 were wounded by shrapnel who were sheltering in some trenches, Two more men were killed by shell fire on the 17th.

Those who died were:-

- 10468 - John Henry Lovett of Limehouse (25th)
- 8413 - Frederick William Faulkener of Oxford (27th)*
- 6439 - John Gardiner of Reading (30th)
- 6484 - William Miller of Chieveley (1st)
- 11512 - Cecil Trenfield of Lewes (2nd)

9787 - William Gray of Camden Town (3rd)*
 9501 - Thomas George Franklin of Hounslow (8th)*
 16297 - Thomas Charles Davies of Warley (10th)*
 10049 - Edward William Skelts of Shadwell (10th)*
 8422 - Edward Crook (17th)*
 9145 - Joseph James Smewing of Abingdon (17th)*
 16759 - Francis Jesse Brown of Wallingford (19th)*
 15796 - Albert Ernest Barefoot of Sandhurst (20th)*
 11492 - Edward Henry Cole of Holloway (21st)*
 15733 - A E Giles of Reading (21st)

Fleurbaix

25th June to 2nd July 1915

On the 25th June the brigade having been relieved by the Jullundur (Indian) Brigade, the 2nd Royal Berkshire went into billets near Saily. At 09:00 on the 26th they formed up and marched away to Brigade reserve at Fleurbaix, During this time two companies were billeted in Fleurbaix and two in support trenches. The companies switched around regularly.

On the 2nd July their medical Officer, Capt A P O'Connor RAMC left them.

Bois Grenier and Fleurbaix

2nd to 8th July 1915

After this there followed a long period, to the 23rd September, during which the 2nd Royal Berkshire and the 2nd Lincolnshire Battalions worked in conjunction defending the trenches at Bois Grenier. They were in the trenches 2-8 July, 14-20 July, 26-31 July, 4-8 Aug, 12-16 Aug, 4-7 Sept, 10-13 Sept, 16-19 Sept and had two spells in Divisional Reserve at Bac St Maur

Two deaths were recorded:-

9167 - George Henry Howell of Dover (4th July)
 10237 - Arthur Richard Sapsford of Bow (7th July)

Bac St Maur

8th to 14th July 1915

In this first spell in Divisional Reserve they had to provide working parties and suffered a few casualties as a consequence.

A draft of 13 men arrived on the 12th.

Two deaths were recorded:-

9530 - Frederick Harvey of Bermondsey (12th July)
 9278 - Alexander Joseph Cotterill of Englefield Green (13th July)

Bois Grenier and Fleurbaix

14th July to 16th August 1915

On the 29th July Second-Lieutenant G. G. Paine was wounded whilst observing with his field glasses, which were smashed by the bullet which wounded him. The same day two men were wounded by shrapnel bursting over the trench and two by stray bullets. Edward Mills was killed while in a listening post in front of the line.

Next day Second-Lieutenant B. Russell, with a patrol crept out through the grass in daylight and brought in two German iron wire posts of a new pattern. Going out again at night, he threw grenades into an occupied German listening post, and, after some firing, returned safely.

On the 31st July Captain N. B. Challenor was killed whilst observing with a telescope, and the bullet which killed him also wounded Lieutenant C. W. Batty. Challenor was buried at 16:00 at Battalion HQ.

It was at this period that the work of the battalion snipers was facilitated and improved by the introduction of rifles

with telescopic sights. An immediate effect was a reduction in the enemy's sniping.

Two men were wounded on the 1st August by stray bullets when they were practising responding to an alarm at Fleurbaix.

During August half a company of cyclists and a considerable number of the 12th King's Royal Rifle Corps were attached to the battalion for instruction. Both groups were from 20th Division, part of Kitchener's Second Army and they had only just arrived in France. Some of them went with the 2nd Lincolns in the front line and others with the 2nd Royal Berks for instruction at Fleurbaix.

Deaths recorded were:-

- 5635 - Charles Maunders of Sheffield (16th July)*
- 10228 - John Michael Healey of Broadstairs (17th July)*
- 9116 - Lipman Polack of Mile End (20th July) *
- 8983 - Edward George Mills of East Ilsley (29th July)*
- Capt Norman Bowen Challenor of Abingdon (31st July)*
- 9389 - Ernest Charles Oliver (4 Aug)
- 16681 - Leonard Green (13th Aug)*
- 8715 - James Edward Bishop of Edmonton (15th Aug)
- Capt Donald Alastair Macgregor of Oban (dow in Germany 15th Aug)
- 16473 - Leslie Wall of West Bromwich (15th Aug)

Bac St Maur

16th Aug to 1st Sept 1915

The second spell in Divisional reserve in billets at Bac St. Maur was the longest respite from the front line work so far enjoyed.

The general appearance of the Battalion met with the approval of Lieut.-General Sir W. Pulteney, commanding the 3rd Army Corps when he inspected it on the 23rd August.

During this period they had to provide working parties for digging trenches

Major Hunt went on leave on the 27th August leaving the Battalion in charge of Capt G H Sawyer.

Another draft arrived on the 27th with 2Lt H B Phillips and 30 men.

Bois Grenier and Fleurbaix

1st to 24th Sept 1915

Major Hunt returned on the 4th. He was promoted temporary Lt Col on the 8th.

On the 24th they took up positions for their role in the Battle of Loos.

Deaths recorded were:-

- 9688 - James Edward Copsey of Pimlico (9th Sept)
- 9566 - Ernest Thomas Thurmer of Winkfield (9th Sept)
- Lt Frederick Henry Way of Maidenhead (11th Sept)*
- 9440 - Francis Alfred Carter of Newbury (12th Sept)*
- 6196 - John Davis of Pewsey (13th Sept)
- 10032 - Albert Edward Charles Gruenbaum of Leytonstone (16th Sept)

The total casualties among other ranks between the 10th May and the 24th September were:

Killed or Died of Wounds 26. Wounded 172.

Sources

Petre pp 75-76, War Diary