

## Section 211

# The Battle of Loos

## The 1st Battalion - 25th to 29th September 1915

*Prior to the Battle of Loos the infantry battalions were to be employed on all manner of tasks, one of which was carrying to the front some mysterious cylinders which were officially known as 'accessories'. The lads of the 1st Battalion knew they were carrying gas cylinders and that this was to be the first time our side was going to use it. Continued from 201*

### The Battle Opens 25th September 1915

The Battalion was in reserve as part of 2nd Division when the battle started on September 25th. They were in trenches at Cuinchy which they had been working on since the 19th June.

Zero hour was 0550 on the 25th September 1915. The bombardment was complete and the troops prepared themselves to cover the ground. The gas was released from the cylinders that had been fixed in the parapets a few days earlier and promptly blew back into the faces of the 2nd South Staffs and 1st Kings Liverpools who were the attacking battalions. They had been attacking along the La Basse railway embankment. The gas caused the attack to grind to a halt.

At noon the 1st Battalion were sent up to relieve the Staffords and Liverpools and to hold the defensive trenches in case of a counter-attack and spent some time bringing back some of the S Staffs wounded. They suffered some losses from the counter-bombardment and the gas. Capt Wheeler, the CO of A Coy was killed by a whizz-bang at Portland Place. The 2nd Division had hardly got out of their trenches and their part in the offensive was a disaster.

That evening at 23:30 they were ordered to hand back to the South Staffs and go immediately to Annequin to form part of a provisional brigade. The hand over was completed at 03:30

### The Provisional Brigade 26th - 27th September 1915

In order to try and exploit some gains further down the line, a Provisional Brigade was formed on the 26th September made up of the 1st King's Royal Rifle Corps, 1st Royal Berkshire, and 2nd Worcestershire, under the command of Lt Col BC Carter CMG of the 1st Kings and thereafter referred to as Carter's Brigade. It was

attached to the 7th Division for an attack on the quarries between Hulluch and Fosse 8. The 2nd S Staffs were left to hold the Cuinchy line.

The 1st Battalion's role was to go through the assaulting battalions when they had reached their objectives to capture the La Basse Railway Triangle Redoubt.

They marched behind the lines and ended up in a village called Vermelles which was near the centre of the battlefield behind the British lines. At this point they prepared for battle once again. They were to attack an area known as the Quarries between the Hulloch Road and a coal pit head known as Fosse 8. The attack was scheduled for the 27th but was called off at 16:30 because the Germans had driven the British out of Fosse 8, thereby leaving the attacking troops open to fire from the flanks.

While they were getting into position the men had been ordered to wear smoke helmets and as a result many lost their caps.

Instead of attacking the battalion found itself working to improve and consolidate the trenches they were occupying.

### Into Battle at Fosse 8 28th September 1915

It then fell to the 1st Battalion to capture Fosse 8 so that the attack could proceed as soon as possible. The situation was desperate and Capt. Radford went to Brigade HQ to explain that the Battalion was scattered and that the approaches were strange to the officers. They received a personal message from Gen. Gough of I Corps that

owing to the situation the attack must go ahead and could not be delayed

At 00:30 on the 28th therefore the word went out that all the working parties were to report back immediately. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the Battalion got itself together, formed up and commenced the attack. The problems were not helped by the moonlight and the Very lights that were up. There must have been a few Royal Berkshires on the ground wishing they were elsewhere.

The attack, was made at 02.30 on the 28th in bright moonlight. The Berkshire companies at that hour moved

in file to the rendezvous, and formed up in company columns. They had to pass over eight hundred yards of captured German trenches, now occupied by British troops, to their objective, Fosse 8. They were still four hundred yards from the Fosse when they were seen in the moonlight and heavily fired on. A, B and C Companies pressed steadily on, but the fire was so heavy that they were held up by rifle-fire when still seventy yards from the slag heap. D and part of C, meanwhile, advanced and manned the British front trench.

### 2Lt Turner's VC

Not being happy with the delay at this point Lt. Turner decided to bomb his way into and along the Fosse which he did with great effect, winning the Regiment's first Great War Victoria Cross. He was later to die from wounds received during this action.

Single-handed he drove the occupants of a German communication trench before him for one hundred and fifty yards, though they were all the time throwing bombs at him. In this gallant effort he was mortally wounded, and the Victoria Cross which was awarded to him was posthumous. The following account of his exploits was written at the time to his father (Major C. Turner, of Thatcham House, Thatcham, Berks) by Captain Frizell, who had succeeded temporarily to the command of the battalion:

About 2 a.m. on the morning of the 28th September, we were ordered to attack a strong German position. After having got up to our objective, we had to retire about 60 yards. During the latter part of the attack your son did one of the bravest acts I have ever seen. The Germans were bombing down a communication trench on our right towards our line. Lieut. Turner, who was near there, single-handed bombed them back for a distance of over one hundred and fifty yards, thereby relieving the German pressure on that part.

It was while he was performing this very gallant act that he received a rifle bullet in the abdomen. He was helped back to our dressing station almost at once, as it was impossible for him to stay where he was, and sent back to the collecting station on a stretcher. The next news we heard of him was that he had died at the clearing hospital at Choques near Béthune. . . .

I cannot tell you how much we all miss your son ~ He was the soul of generosity and a very brave officer, and was loved by all of us. I have sent a full account of his very brave deed to the Brigadier, who, I know, has forwarded it on.

In another letter it is stated:

My Company-Sergeant-Major says he saw Turner do several deeds each worthy of the V.C., which honour he will probably have awarded to him.

The following is the Gazette notification of the circumstances under which the V.C. was awarded:

"For most conspicuous bravery on the 28th September 1915 at Fosse near Vermelles. When the regimental bombers could make no head-way in Slag Alley, Lieut.

Turner volunteered to lead a new attack. He pressed down the communication trench practically alone, throwing bombs incessantly with such dash and determination that he drove back the Germans about one hundred and fifty yards without a check. His action enabled the reserves to advance with very little loss, - 'and subsequently covered the flank of his regiment in its retirement, thus averting a loss of some hundreds of men. This most gallant officer has since died of wounds received in this action."

### The Second Attack

Major Bird had been wounded, and his second-in-command, Captain Radford, D.S.O., killed. Command was taken by Captain C. W. Frizell, who was with the rear company.

The troops found themselves at the foot of a towering slagheap unable to move.

At this juncture Colonel Carter, commanding the Provisional Brigade, coming forward and finding the leading companies checked, ordered Captain Frizell to charge with all the men he had left. With Frizell at their head, the men made a desperate effort which carried them half-way up the slag heap.

The attack was doomed to failure. Beyond that they could not get; for the enemy were throwing bombs down on them from the top. Forced to fall back, they retired to the front British trench one hundred and fifty yards in rear.

It was now nearly daylight and Colonel Carter decided not to attempt a renewal of the attack. He ordered Capt Frizell to reorganise in the old trenches

### Fred Hiscock

Private Fred Hiscock was one of those killed. On the 1st November 1915 Fred's wife received a letter from CQMS Brown on behalf of the O/C "C" Company stating

"He was seen after the attack having been hit in the wrist, most probable he is in one of the many hospitals in France and is unable to write. If anything more serious had happened we would have known by now"

It would seem that CQMS Brown was being kind. She made many attempts to find what had happened to him via both the Division and the Red Cross. A year later she received confirmation of his status as 'Missing, believed killed'

### Casualties

The casualties were

**Officers.** *Killed:* Capt. M. C. Radford, D.S.O. *Died of Wounds:* 2nd-Lieut. A. B. Turner, V.C. *Wounded and Missing:* Lieut. G. F.M. Hall (Killed). *Missing:* Capt. E. N. Getting, 2nd-Lieuts. P. C. Rawson, R. A. Summers, J.W.V. Blazey (all now recorded as killed). *Wounded:*

Major L.W. Bird. Capt. and Adj. C. St. A. Fullbrook-Leggatt. Lieuts. E. F. Eager, D. E. Ward. 2nd-Lieuts. R. Haigh, W. S. Mackay.

**Other Ranks.** *Killed* 17; Wounded 115 ; Missing 143.

**Total:** 13 Officers and 275 Other Ranks.

Among the dead were:-

SERIAL	SURNAME	XNAMES	HOMETOWN
17145	Adaway	Albert	Burnham
7815	Bailey	Ernest Edgar	Maidenhead
10407	Barrett	Henry Stephen	Mortimer
12176	Barton	Henry Charles	Hoxton
14001	Baseley	Herbert William	N Kensington
17202	Bass	William Joseph	Peckham
5825	Belcher	Harry	Stanford In The Vale
16209	Bell	Ernest Alfred	Wokingham
16215	Bellinger	John	
8170	Bird	Sidney	Beenham
BL0005	Blazey	John William Victor	Reading
11456	Bosworth	Charles Leonard	
9544	Bowley	John Douglas	Speen
17204	Brooks	Albert	Reading
8228	Brown	Ernest James	Wallingford
8867	Burberry	Victor Thomas	Teddington
9992	Burness	William	Poplar
11810	Cripps	Stanley	Henley OT
17010	Davies	Charles Ernest	Clerkenwell
8354	Dean	Charles Henry	Oxford
7191	Dinnadge	Albert Harold	London
9083	Dobson	Arthur Alan	Aldworth
15824	Draper	Stephen	Hurst
8721	Dunn	George Bertie	
16344	Field	Frank	Hungerford
10045	Fisher	William George	Wokingham
17028	Fisher	Harold Victor	Maidenhead
6997	George	Joseph	Harlington
GE0002	Getting	Eric Noel	St Leonards On Sea
11628	Giles	Arthur	West Ham
7690	Gosling	Thomas	Abingdon
10409	Hack	Harry	Woking
16557	Hall	Frederick	Eynsham
9614	Hall	Frederick George	London
17148	Hallett	Alfred James	Kentish Town
7028	Harris	William	Witney
15147	Harris	W	
17133	Harris	George Thomas	Banbury
11525	Hiorns	William Nelson	Oxford
17183	Hiscock	Frederick	Headley
16226	Hoare	Charles Herbert	Fosbury
15838	House	William John	Tilehurst
11943	Hurst	John Joseph	London
7937	Iremonger	A T	
11814	James	Francis Sydney	Sandhurst
15880	Jordan	Edwin Ernest	Reading
15867	King	Frederick	
16254	Lewis	Francis George	Newbury
8269	Marshalsea	Harry Burgess	Camberley
5734	Mason	Rupert	Newbury
16320	Painter	Leonard Robert	
9658	Painter	E mest Edward	Buckland
6448	Perris	John	Newbury
RA0001	Radford	Maurice Clive	London
16453	Ravering	Stephen	Earley
RA0007	Rawson	Philip Colin	Sherborne
16034	Richardson	James	Bracknell
9736	Roblett	Henry Edward	
9706	Rothery	A J	
5834	Smith	Arthur	
6277	Spooner	W H	
SU0003	Summers	Ranulph Augustus	
11408	Teear	William Arthur	
7561	Tilby	Frank	Harwell
8021	Tilly	Herbert Henry	
10528	Townsend	George	Reading
11576	Turner	Roger	Canning Town
8064	West	Herbert	Basingstoke
9795	West	James Alfred	

5440 Westall A J

### Aftermath

Captain Large, R.A.M.C. the medical officer of the 1st Battalion formed a dressing station and sent parties out to search for the wounded. They were untiring in their efforts to bring in the wounded and evacuate them.

Colonel Carter now went to command 35th Brigade, his brigade of three battalions were temporarily handed over to the 22nd Brigade.

Capt Frizell was left with virtually no officers other than Lt Jerwood who acted as adjutant, but hearing of the casualties, Captain Gregson-Ellis and Second-Lieutenant Blackburn discharged themselves from hospital and rejoined. Four Lieutenants, Hilliard, Stokes, Green and Nicholls, together with 16 NCOs who had been left in reserve at Vermelles also rejoined.

They spent the rest of the day trying to reform companies as parties of men returned. The men had been manning the forward trenches as the attack on Fosse 8 was pressed by the Buffs and the Royal Fusiliers.

### 29th September 1915

Next day Captain Frizell was at Vermelles reorganizing the shattered battalion as best he could. They cleaned up the trenches and the adjutant went over to see the 5th Battalion Kings Own Lancasters who were due to relieve them.

Two fatigue parties were found of 75 men apiece to carry bombs and sandbags up to the 1st KRR and 2nd Worcesters. Also a party of six bombers were sent up to support the 1st S Staffords.

At 21:30 the relief was completed and the Battalion marched out to billets at Le Quesnoy via Annequin and Beuvry. They were given hot soup as they left Vermelles and tea as they arrived at Le Quesnoy.

### Sources

Petre pp 22-24

Soldiers Died in the Great War

*Continued in section 221*