

Section 222

Interval I

2nd Battalion - 22nd November 1915 to June 1916

The 2nd Battalion had suffered considerable casualties at Bois Grenier and were now to spend a miserable winter mostly in training.

When the battle of Loos was finally called off on the 14th November the 2nd Battalion were in brigade reserve at Fleurbaix. Continued from section 212.

Sercus

22nd November to 23rd December 1915

On the 22nd November the battalion marched with the brigade via Vieux Berquin to the 1st Army Reserve Area about Sercus, where it settled down in huts, and later in billets, for a long period of relief from trench work, and to vigorous training in all branches.

On this day Lieut.-Colonel G.P.S. Hunt, having been appointed to the command of an infantry brigade, was replaced in command of the battalion by Major A. M. Holdsworth.

There was break in the training between the 20th and 23rd December, by a tour of divisional manoeuvres.

The Second Christmas

24th December 1915 to 8th January 1916

On this second Christmas Day of the war there was no repetition of the informal truce of 1914, but a dinner was provided for the men of the battalion from Regimental funds. The year 1915 was finished at Sercus. During all the period spent in the 1st Army Reserve Area the battalion was busy training and replacing its recent losses. It was accommodated sometimes in huts, and sometimes in billets.

In and out of Trenches

9th January to 27th March 1916

On the 9th January 1916 the battalion again returned to the trenches, marching on that day to Estaires, and on the next relieving the 12th King's Liverpool Regiment in the trenches near Croix Marechal, and, on being relieved there on the 14th by the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, it went back to Brigade reserve billets at Fleurbaix, about one mile north-west of Croix Marechal.

During this period the Division was host to units freshly arrived from England. A new Battalion was allocated to a seasoned Brigade with one of its companies attached

to each of the four regular battalions of that brigade. These were all extra hands to do the duties required of a front line battalion and the new men soon learned their way around.

One of the side benefits was that it released some of the front line troops for more relaxing pursuits such as attending performances given by the 'Sailly Empire' - this was a variety and cinema group which had started up in November 1915 and whose performances were greatly appreciated.

From the 15th January to the 27th March the battalion, working with the 2nd Lincolnshire, was defending the trenches near Croix Blanche, with the usual intervals in Brigade and Divisional reserve.

The Division were given an extra sector to defend on the 15th Feb when the 3rd Guards Brigade were withdrawn.

So far the battalion and the 8th Division had been almost continuously in the area west of Lille, a low damp country in which the state of the trenches in wet weather was a constant misery for the troops condemned to them. Motor pumps had been installed near Dead Dog Farm to try to lower the water in the front line system and dump it into the River Laves. They were quite useful when working but somewhat temperamental. However the very heavy rain and snow of February and March were too much to handle.

It was now about to move to a less waterlogged and flat country in the area of the future Somme battle. Rumours had run through the Division in the third week of March and confirmed when 34th Division arrived to take over the left sector of the Divisional front. By the 28th the 8th Division were on their way to join II Corps of 2nd Army.

On the Somme

28th March to 12th June 1916

On the 28th March the 2nd Battalion marched to Lestrem, where it entrained, and at 01:00 on the 29th detrained at Longueau near Amiens, and marched to Flesselles some 9 miles north of Amiens.

There it halted till the 4th April, when it moved on to St. Gratien, and next day to billets in Divisional reserve at Millencourt. Divisional HQ was at the Henencourt Chateau and next day the Division took over from 32nd Division the La Boisselle to Thiepval sector overlooking the River Ancre.

Here the accommodation was greatly superior to what they had just left. The trenches were generally dry with deep dug-outs and good views of the German positions. Billets were good and on occasions men with no right to horses could be given riding lessons in Aveluy Wood.

From the 8th April it was defending various sectors of the area held by the 8th Division to the east of the River Ancre, north of Albert, extending from La Boisselle on the right to Aveluy Wood on the left.

Its tours of Divisional reserve were either at Millencourt or Henencourt Wood. At the latter place athletic sports were held.

German artillery was sporadic and certain spots like the glory hole at Ovillers were particularly targetted. However neither side could fail to observe the build up of supplies and the preparations being made opposite them.

There was a raid by the enemy on the 1st Irish Rifles on the right of the 2nd Royal Berkshire which reacted on the latter. Lieutenant E. M. Medlicott and one man were killed and three wounded.

During this tour the officer casualties were:

Killed: Capt. A. J. Bowles, 2nd-Lieut. H. Davies (both on 10th April). 2nd-Lieut. E. M. Medlicott (11th April). *Wounded:* Capt. S. H. Hugo (19th April). Lieut. A. J. G. Goodall (21st May). 2nd-Lieut. R. Fidler (8th May).

Getting Ready for Battle 12th to 29th June 1916

The order to move came on the 12th June:-

SECRET. 12th June 1918.

8th DIVISION ORDER No. 303.

1. The 8th Division will be transferred by rail from the IX Corps Area to a destination in the ENGLISH Zone in accordance with the attached entraining Tables "A", "B" and "C".

2. (a) Units will not be grouped for purposes of entraining except that Field Ambulances and Train Companies will entrain under the orders of the Brigades to which they are affiliated.

(d) There will be no restrictions as to routes to the entraining stations.

(e) All transport will arrive at the entraining station 4 hours before the time at which the train is due to start.

(f) All dismounted personnel will arrive at the station one hour before the train is due to start.

(g) All horses will be watered under unit arrangements immediately before entraining.

3. Supply and Baggage Wagons will entrain with units and will be loaded.

4. (a) Permanent loading and unloading parties of 3 Officers and 150 men each will be detailed as follows and will work in two shifts.

Loading.

Unloading at Destination.

SEZANNE.	22nd D.L.I.
R.E.	

FERE CHAMPNOISE	23rd Bde.
25th Bde.	

Loading parties will report at the entraining stations 4 hours before the first trains are due to start and will proceed by the last trains leaving their stations.

Unloading parties will rejoin their units when the last train had been cleared.

(b) The C.R.A. will arrange that sufficient men are available for loading and unloading vehicles of all R.A. Units.

5. (a) The C.R.A. , 23rd Brigade and 24th Brigade will each detail 2 Officers, if possible not below the rank of Captain, to report to the R.T.O at the entraining station 4 hours before the first train is due to start from that station. These Officers will supervise and will be in charge of the entraining, and one of them will always be on duty on the Platform until all units of the Division have entrained. These Officers will proceed in the last train of the Division and on arrival at the other end will rejoin their Units.

(b) 2 Officers each will also be detailed for similar duty at the detraining station by the C.R.A., R.R.E. and 25th Brigade. They will proceed by the first train leaving their stations and when the last train had been cleared they will rejoin their units.

6. Billeting parties of all units will proceed by the train leaving six hours before the unit and will take bicycles with them.

7. The 8th Divisional Signal Company will detail one despatch rider to the R.T.Os at the entraining stations 3 hours before departure of the first train from those stations and remain there at the disposal of the Officers mentioned in para 5.

Also one despatch rider to proceed by Train No. 1 for similar duty at the detraining station.

8. The A.D.M.S. will detail one motor ambulance to be on duty at FERE Station during the period of entrainment. Also one ambulance to be on duty at one of the detraining stations, the name of which will be notified to him later. These arrangements will rejoin the Division under arrangements to be made by the A.D.M.S.

9. Units going by Trains Nos. 1 to 6 inclusive will have with them on the train rations

For consumption on 13th and 14th instant and will refill at the detraining station for consumption on the 15th.

All other units will entrain with rations for consumption on 14th and 15th instant and will refill in new area for consumption on the 16th.

Details as regards refilling points will be notified later.

10. Orders re motor vehicles will be issued later.

11. The D.A.Q.M.G., 8th Division, will be at FERE station during the period of entrainment.

12. Divisional Headquarters will close at PLEURS at 12 noon on the 13th June, 1918, and will reopen at an hour and place to be notified later.

(Signed) Fielding

Lieut Colonel

A.A. , & Q.M.G., 8th Division [TX00713]

This was supplemented by Brigade order 11

SECRET 12th June 1916.

25th INFANTRY BRIGADE ORDER No. 11.

1. Reference 8th Division Order No. 303 attached:-

Para: 4 (a):- Unloading party will be detailed as under –

2/E. Lancs. R. – 1 Officer and 50 O.R.

2/R. Berks. R. – 1 Officer and 50 O.R. , 1 cooker & team.

2/Rifle Bde. – 1 Officer and 50 O.R.

Cooker to report at Entraining Station at 1.13a.m.

The Senior Officer will be in charge of the whole party.

Para: 5 (b):- 2 Officers not below rank of Captain will be detailed as under –

1 Officer – 2/E. Lancs. R.

1 Officer – 2/R. Berks. R.

Names to be submitted to this Office forthwith.

Para: 6. Billeting parties as under to report to Lieut A.G.C. RICE at Bde. H.Q. at 3.0.a.m. and proceed by No. 2 Train

Each Battalion – 1 Officer and 3 O.Rs.

25th Field Ambulance – 1 N.C.O.

No. 4 Coy, Train - 1 N.C.O.

Brigade Headquarters – 1 N.C.O.

3. Personnel and Transport will march to Station in order as laid down in Entraining Table "B" of Division Order.

Transport of 1st Unit – 6 ¼ hours before Train leaves.

Transport of 2nd Unit – 6 hours before Train leaves.

Personnel of 1st Unit - 3 hours 5 minutes before Train leaves.

Personnel of 2nd Unit - 3 hours before Train leaves.

Starting Point where track crosses BANNES- FERE CHAMPENOISE Road due North of S in BANNES.

3. Brigade Headquarters will close at BANNES at 10 a.m. 13th inst and re-open at a place and on a date to be notified later.

ACKNOWLEDGE.

(Signed) R. Roy Stone

Captain, Brigade Major, 25th Inf. Bde.

Issued at 7p.m. through Signals. [TX00712

The train time tables referred to give much interesting detail:-

ENTRAINING TABLE "A" to accompany 8th Division Order No. 303

Entraining Station – SEZANNE.

Train Unit.	Date.	start
1 2nd Field Coy. R.E.		
490th Field Coy. R.E.	13th	5 a.m.
4 Hd. Qrs. R.E.		
15th Field Coy. R.E.	13th	9 a.m.
7 24th Inf. Bde. H.Q.		

24th Inf. Sig. Sect

24th T.M. Battery.

1st Sherwood Fors: 13th 1 p.m.

10 Divisional Hd. Qrs.

H.Q. & No. 1 Sect. Signal Coy.

Div. Employment Coy. 13th 5 p.m.

13 1st Worcester Regt.

24th Field Ambce 13th 9 p.m.

16 No. 3 Coy. Train.

2nd Northants Regt. 14th 1 a.m.

19 8th Bn. M.G. Corps

14th 5 a.m.

22 57th Battery R.F.A.

1 G.S. Wagon and 5

Limbered Ammn Wagons

Of 2/Sect. D.A.C. 14th 9 a.m.

25 22nd Durham L.I. 14th 1 p.m.

Entraining Station – FERE CHAMPNOISE. Detraining Station –

Train Unit. Date. start .

2 ½ S.A.A. Section D.A.C.

3 Offrs, 150 men and

1 cooker & team

25th Inf. Bde. 13th 5.13 a.m.

5 ½ S.A.A. Section D.A.C.

15th Mob. Vet. Sect.

8th Div. Reinforcement

Wing. 13th 10.19 a.m.

8 25th Inf. Bde. Hd. Qrs.

25th Bde. Signal Sect:

25th T.M. Battery.

2nd East Lancs Regt 13th 1.13 p.m.

11 2nd Royal Berks Regt

25th Field Ambulance 13th 5.13 p.m.

14 No. 4 Company Train .

2nd Rifle Brigade.

R.A., Hd. Qrs. 13th 9.13 p.m.

17 23rd Inf. Bde Hd. Qrs

23rd Inf. Signal Sect:

23rd T.M. Battery.

2 nd Middlesex Regiment. 14th 1.13 a.m.

20 2nd Devonshire Regt.

26th Field Ambulance. 14th 5.13 a.m.

23 2nd West Yorks Regiment.

No. 2 Company Train. 14th 9.13 a.m.

26 2/8th Composite Battalion.

3 Officers., 150 O.Rs,
1 cooker and team of 23rd Bde.14th 1.13 p.m.

[TX00714]

Entraining Station – SOMME SOUS.

Sources

Train	Unit.	Date.	start .
3	33rd Bde RFA. H.Q. Hd. Qrs. D.A.C. No. 1 Sect. D.A.C. (less 4 G.S. wagons and 23 limbered Ammn. Wagons	13th	6 a.m
6	32nd Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon and 6 limbered ammn. Wagons and teams of No. 1 Sect. D.A.C.	13th	10 a.m.
9	33rd Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon and 6 limbered ammn. Wagons and teams of No. 1 Sect. D.A.C.	13th	2 p.m
12	36th Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon and 6 limbered Ammn wagons and teams of No. 1 Sect. D.A.C.	13th	6 p.m.
15	55th Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon and 5 limbered Ammn wagons and teams of No. 1 Sect. D.A.C.	13th	10 p.m.
18	45th Bde. R.F.A. Hd. Qrs. No. 2 Section D.A.C. Less 4 G.S. and 23 Limbered ammn. Wagons. No. 1 Company Train.	14th	2 a.m.
21	1st Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon and 6 limbered ammn. Wagons teams of 2/Sec. DAC.	14th	6 a.m.
24	3rd Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. and 6 limb. Ammn. Wagons & teams of 2/Sec. D.A.C.	14th	10 a.m.
27	5th Battery R.F.A. 1 G.S. wagon & 6 limb. Ammn. Wagons & teams Of 2/Sec. D.A.C.	14th	2 p.m.

Petre pp78-80

History of 8th Division pp59-64

War Diaries and orders of 2nd Bn, 25 Bde and 8 Div

Continued in section 232