

Section 226

Interlude I

The 6th Battalion - November 1915 to July 1916

The 6th Battalion spent all of this period in the Albert area engaged in basic trench warfare with spells in the trenches alternating with rest periods behind the lines.

November 1915 to 2nd Jan 1916

They had been in and out of trenches near La Boisselle since the 23rd October and remained there until the 2nd Jan 1916 when they were able to rest at Mericourt.

2nd Lt StJ B Matthews was wounded by a rifle grenade on the 25th November and died after an operation.

On the 15th December Private JE Jones (16562) displayed great gallantry in rescuing the wounded Pte E Harmsworth (11236) and carrying him 200 yards under heavy fire near La Boisselle He was awarded the DCM. [RM 29/1/16][BC 28/1/16]

On the 19th December 1915 at 0445 a patrol of three led by 12508 Sergeant P Lynch left via the listening post in trench 117 and made for the German lines. When they got close they found a slightly sunken grass road along which they moved for a short way before turning left into the German trenches. They came across a big pit about 6 yards in front of the German trench. They could not see the end of it, but it was 15 to 20 ft wide and 10 to 12 ft deep. They re-traced their steps but realised that, as dawn was breaking, they would be seen if they continued. So they hid themselves in a ditch under the German wire. They heard the Germans talking whilst they worked on digging a sap head. The Germans sent over some 'sausages' and one of their officers stuck his head over the trench to see where they were landing.. The Berkshires lay quiet all day, had a cigarette and, when it got dark, returned to the British lines via the listening post in Trench 116. They brought back a good deal of useful information about the enemy's sniper positions and wire.

During this period the CO, Lt Col AJW Dowell, the Adjutant, Capt WP Hewetson and (12487) Sgt GH Thomas of the Machine Gun Section were all mentioned in despatches.

Parchment certificates were awarded to (10141) Sgt T Bowley, (16491) Corp W Moore and (12900) L/Corp GT Stanners all of 'D' Company. A bombing party had occupied a crater created by the explosion of a British mine and a German trench mortar exploded nearby and blew a man out of the crater. Sgt Tom Bowley climbed

out of the crater to rescue the wounded man under enemy rifle fire and bombs, getting to within 20 yards of the enemy parapet. He could not bring him back by himself and crawled back flat on his stomach. Together with Cpl Moore and L/Cpl Stanners they dug out towards the man and succeeded in rescuing him but he died that night. On the 16th Jan it was announced that they had been all been awarded the DCM [BC 17/3/16] [RM 11/3/16 & 18/3/16]

2nd Jan to 13th March 1916

A certificate was presented to Pte T Redfern a 'B' Company sniper for lying outside the trenches all day and shooting an enemy sniper.

Pte William Povey [15403] of Newbury was on sentry duty when he was shot and killed by a sniper on the 14th Feb. [BC 3/3/16]

2Lt RJF Remnant had a narrow escape. He was in a dug-out with two fellow officers one of whom was Lt Traill when a shell landed nearby. He was blown through the door and buried but emerged "peppered all over" but relatively unscathed. He was listed as wounded and invalided home with dysentery but soon returned to the trenches. [BC 10/3/16] [RM 4/3/16]

13th March to 29th April 1916

On the 13th March 1916 the Battalion moved from the Albert area to new billets at Corbie in the southern area. They took over trenches in the defensive lines round Maricourt and in the Redoubt. This was not a pleasant experience as

'The Redoubt was left in a deplorable, dirty and unsanitary condition' by its previous occupants. They were in position ready for training for the forthcoming Battle of the Somme.

Pte HS Freeing of the 6th Battalion wrote home:

Germans have got the rats, Will Povey has been shot through the head by a sniper.

The Battalion now in billets in barns. It is snowing hard. We had 18 inches and then a thaw - it made a terrible mess. While in the trenches we had a big bombardment and the 6th sent up flares. We saw Germans leaving their trenches. 20 British machine guns opened up and all were killed. [RM25/3/16]

In preparation for the Somme offensive a reproduction of the German trenches was set up at Picquigny near Amiens. Capt T C Hincks took charge of the Battalion after Col Dowel was promoted to Brigadier and led

them in their training.

29th April to 22nd May 1916

They left the line on 29th April marching to Poulainville for training. Pte Henwood described what happened

"The Battalion had come out of the line for three months training for the attack. On the way out we stopped at Chippily Wood (Bois Celestine Camp) three or four miles from the line and then to another small village (La Housse) where there was a lot of cavalry. A long march through Amiens to a little village called Vaux en Amienois. (and then to the training camp at Poulainville, arriving 12th May) One nice summers day had a sham attack with aeroplanes. with a little signalling light fixed to the aeroplane and dropping messages. The aeroplanes also had a mock battle above our heads. The training camp was left on 22nd May [refs 18 and 25]

They were inspected by General Haig on 12th May at Poulainville.

While they were at Poulainville Capt Ackroyd the Medical Officer wrote home to his daughter Ursula on the 17th May:

At present I am living in a small village where we can not hear any guns or banging noises. We have not been so quiet since we came to France. Its really very nice but I expect it wont last long.

On the 21st May Major BG Clay of the 7th Dragoon Guards arrived to take over command of the Battalion as Lt Col Dowell had been promoted to acting Brigadier General of the 58th Infantry Brigade. Major Hincks had done a good job with the training and his promotion was well earned.

22nd May to 3rd June 1916

They left Training camp on the 22nd May and marched to Corbie and then to Bronfay Farm. It was back to the trenches on the 25th May where they stayed until 3rd June. Capt Ackroyd wrote again to his daughter on the 25th:-

We have moved about so much lately, in 7 different places in a month. How would you like to be always moving about.

Capt Ackroyd evidently had a house to live in while he was running his medical station. He wrote on the 31st:-

You would think it so funny if you could see the house I am writing in. All w..dings and with no windows; but we have a door. It is a very good door and when we open the door it lets the light in so I can see to write.

Another man and myself both live in it and we have beds with wire on instead of a mattress. It is hard at first but one soon is used to it and it is much better than sleeping on the ground.

I >ay as to tell you it has a brick floor rather than the other houses because all the ordinary houses where we are have been knocked down by the naughty Germans and all the time there are banging noises made as I am glad to say mostly by our side not as it used to be.

3rd to 23rd June 1916

On the 3rd they moved from the trenches to billets in Bray and on to fresh billets at Saily le Sec on the 11th. On the 14th they marched to Grovetown and into the line for six days from the 17th. They were relieved on the 23rd and retired to Grovetown again on the 23rd.

Private Gosling had been home on leave:

The Battalion continued in and out of the line for seven months before being relieved. In March owing to an illness I was sent to hospital. On the 29th May I went on leave arriving in England on the 1st June, having crossed the water on the night of the Battle of Jutland. On the 12th June, returning from leave to Saily le Sacq. The boys were now in training for the big offensive on the Somme.

Capt Ackroyd wrote on the 21st:-

At present I am very busy and have not much time to write so please tell mother that my letters may be less frequent even than usual but she must not worry about that as I am quite well.

24th to 31st June 1916

The 6th were on their way to the Somme. They moved up to the front on the 27th and by the 30th were north of the Peronne Road.

During this period they were subjected to a retaliatory bombardment from the Germans and the 30th June was the day the 6th Bn suffered their heaviest casualties so far. The German shelling killed five and wounded 42. The heavy casualties were attributed to the inadequacy of the dugouts.

However this period is best described as part of the Battle for Montauban - see section 236

Sources

Letters from Capt Ackroyd to his daughter Ursula

Petre pp 251/252

War Diary

Account of Pte Gosling

Account of Pte Henwood

Berkshire Chronicle

Reading Mercury