

## Section 233

# The Somme

## The 1st/4th Battalion

*The first major engagement the 1st/4th took part in was in the Battles of the Somme. They were part of fourth army, VIII Corps, 48th Division, 145th Brigade. We pick up as they leave Flanders (from 223)*

### On the March

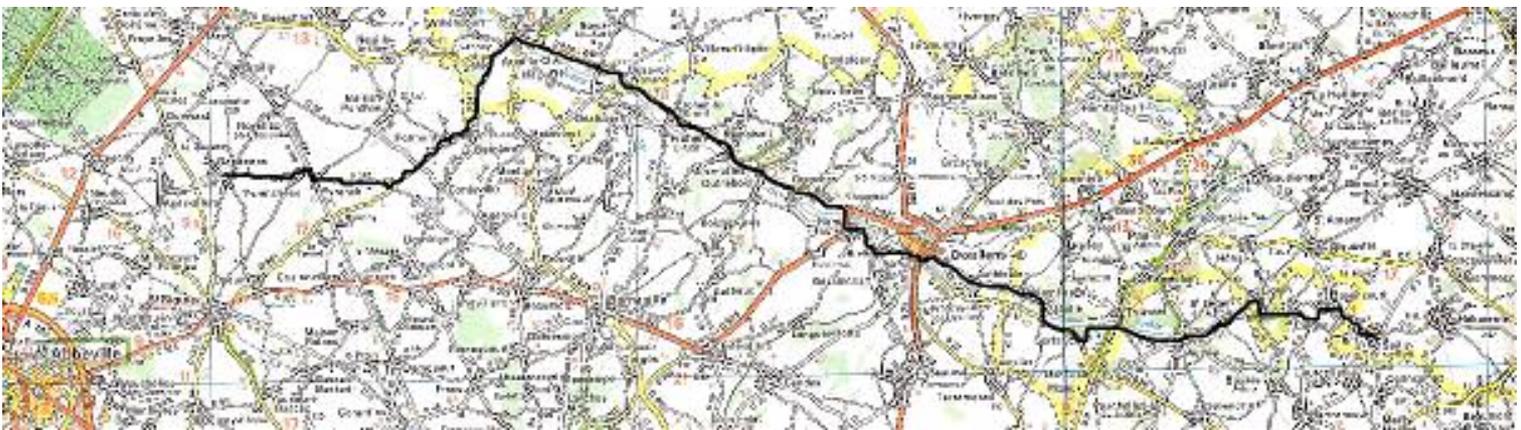
**10th to 12th June 1916**

The long march to the Somme was about to begin. They were in huts at Gapenne a village about 7 miles northeast of Amiens and had been practising with the rest of 145 Brigade for some days. At 04:40 on the 10th June 1916 they set off for the Brigade rendezvous at Yvrencheux about a mile to the east. The first battalion moved off at 05:00 and as the 1st/4th were the second battalion they did not have much time to rest. The route eastwards took them through country lanes via Yvrench and Hiermont to Auxi le Chateau and then down the main road to Doullens (now the D938). They had a halt from 09:30 to 15:00 a mile west of Frohen le Grand making for billets at Outrebois whence they arrived at 16:05. Just before they arrived the heavens opened and they all got very wet. Eighteen men fell out mainly with foot problems but fourteen of these caught up by 17:00.

It was off again at 05:30 next morning, first to the Brigade rendezvous at Occoche and then skirting Doullens they led the Brigade along the D938 to Sarton where tea was served at a three hour rest before striking off alongside the River Authie via Thievres, St Leger to Couin. For a change it was a lovely day and the men seemed to enjoy the countryside and the march was buoyed up by singing accompanied by a mouth organ. At Couin they went into huts. The next morning they marched on to bivouac near Saily au Bois where they found a waterlogged campsite with trench duty almost immediately as four detachments were sent to Hebuterne in charge of 5 NCOs However 1689 Pte William Harry Naxton was able to write to his grandmother. Extracts from his letter were published in the Berkshire Chronicle of 9th July 1916:

Private William Henry Naxton who, for a number of years has been in the Territorials, is now with the 1st/4th Battalion of the Royal Berks Regiment. Recently an appeal was made through the columns of the Chronicle for mouth organs. Private Naxton's grandmother, who resides at 3 George Street Reading, on reading it, at once forwarded an instrument to her grandson. This reached him on the eve of the march in which the Battalion has just been engaged and he writes to Mrs Naxton saying how acceptable the mouth organ has been and how it was appreciated by the men whilst marching.

Private Naxton says:- We have been marching for three days. The weather has completely changed. Just before we had to start marching it rained every night and of course the going was very hard. What with the packs and heavy roads it was rotten and a lot of chaps are laid up with sore feet. The 5th Berks have taken our place.



*The march from Gapennes to Saily au Bois*

Private Naxton says that owing to the quick move all leave has been stopped. [TX02008]

Pte Jack Newey wrote home on July 4th:-

I expect you have been wondering why i have not written a letter lately. The reason is that we have been doing the 'wandering jew'. In other words for the last few days etc we have been on the march. We have left our old home and are marching, we do not know what for. All we know is that we are marching.

It has been very interesting though and the surrounding country we have passed through is very much better than where we came from. The place where we are staying for the time is a little village and we are billeted in it. The people are much more Frenchified and it is much more like civilisation than the other places.

Of course I cannot tell you actually where we are but I do not suppose that they will mind me saying that we in a district where some of the most terrible battles have been fought.

I am sorry that you expected to see me home on leave because only two per company went and those only the senior sergeants and they were married men. Still if the war lasts for another few years I might stand a chance. - Am still in the pink and going strong [TX02007]

## Sailly au Bois

**13th to 16th June 1916**

The weather was very wet and the nights very cold in the tents and during the days the four parties were out again working on the trenches at Hebuterne. In addition another party of 3 officers and 150 men were deployed on trenches in H Sector and 230 were sent to Corps Headquarters at Mailly Maillet to work there. At this point Father S J Gosling arrived as their RC Chaplain. On the 14th an issue of one blanket per man was made - badly needed and at midnight the clocks were advanced one hour as daylight saving time came in. The baths at Sailly were allocated to the Battalion on the 15th but it is not clear how many men actually got a bath.

## Hebuterne Trenches

**16th to 22nd June 1916**

On the 16th the Battalion relieved the 5th Glosters in the trenches in H Sector near Hebuterne. This was completed by 12:25 with D and B Companies in the line, C Company in Battalion reserve and A Company in Brigade reserve. A and C plus 150 men from the 5th Glosters were kept busy digging communication trenches. The CO had spent the previous few days at a commanders briefing at Flixecourt and he returned on the 17th.

It was all very busy in the trenches as supplies arrived and new dugouts built. Special parties were being equipped with smoke candles and all the time they were under fire from enemy guns, however casualties were light with one man dying of wounds on the 19th and another being wounded. Two men are recorded as dying of wounds on the 20th Albert Goodship of Pewsey and 3199 Albert Bourton of East Hendred and as Goodship was buried at Couin we presume he is the one referred to.

On the 20th a British aircraft was forced to land behind the enemy lines near Pusieux and large crowds of Germans were seen gathered around it.

Briefing conferences were held at Brigade, Battalion and Company level on the 22nd as they were relieved by the 5th Warwicks and retired back to the huts at Couin.

## Couin

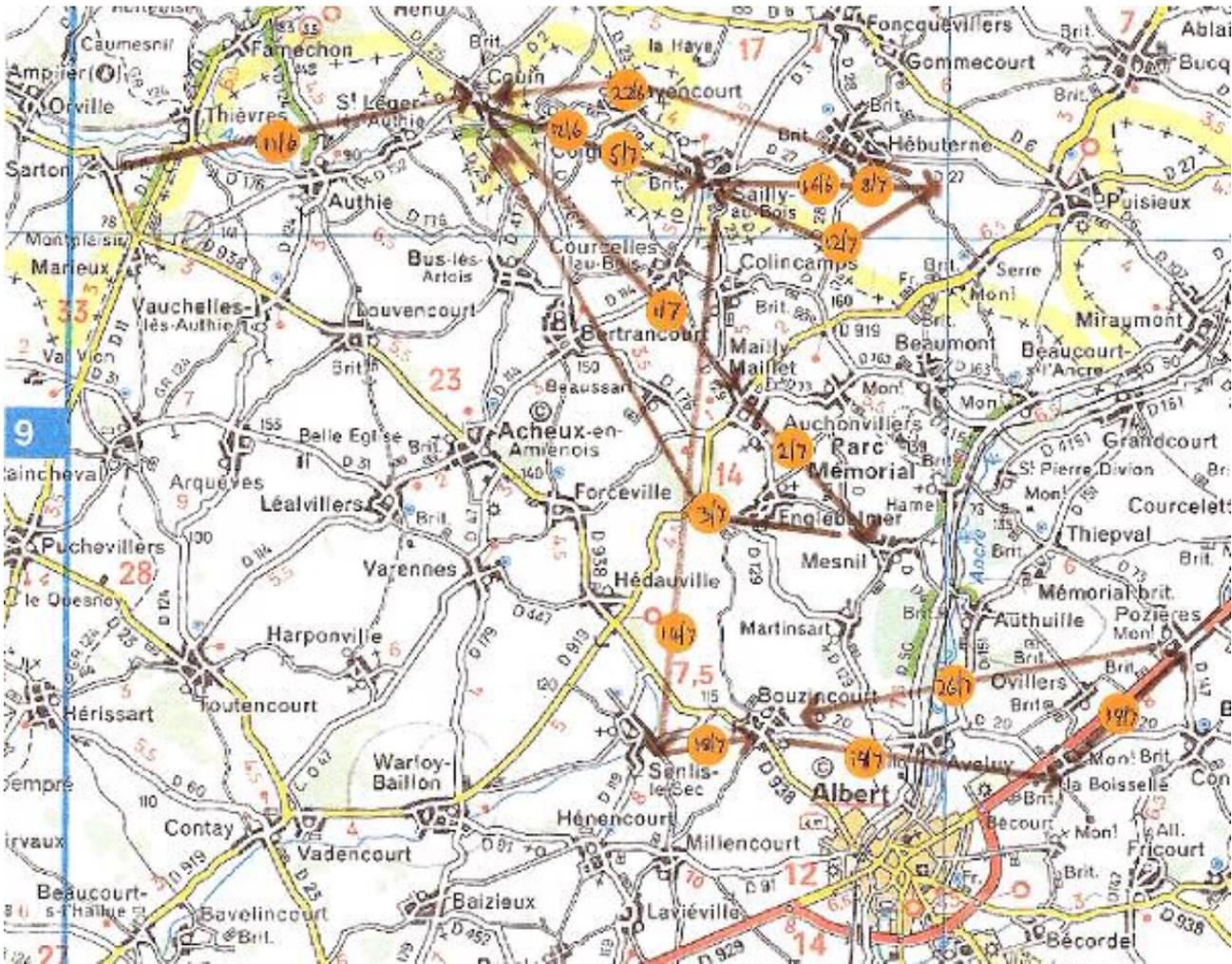
**23rd June to 1st July 1916**

At Couin Captain Cruttwell continues his account:

The damp, ill-ventilated and crowded huts were responsible for a good many cases of sore throat and rheumatism. But there was little time to be sick. In the interval between working parties, bayonet fighting and wire-cutting, the last and most significant preparations for attack were made. The CO gave a lecture to the battalion in the afternoon of the 24th on consolidation and the new method of bayonet fighting.

Blue hearts, the distinguishing mark of the Battalion, were sewn on to the back of the steel helmet cover, and tin triangles affixed to the haversack, which was to be worn on the back in fighting order. This was to enable the Berkshires to recognise each other. The CO designed the badge and the cost was met from the Christmas fund.

It may be of interest to give in detail the equipment with which the men went into battle. Two sand-bags were tucked in front of the belt; one Mills bomb was in each of the bottom pockets of the tunic; 50 extra rounds of ammunition were slung in a bandolier over the right shoulder. In his haversack each man carried one iron ration, cardigan waistcoat, soft cap, and pair of socks; the waterproof sheet was folded and strapped on outside, and the mess-tin fastened to the lowest buckle of the haversack. Every other man carried a pick or shovel slung; and the Brigade, with a more intimate solicitude, advised all ranks to carry a pipe,



*The moves of the 1st/4th on the Somme between 11th June and 26th July 1916*

matches and tobacco.

The bombardment began on the 25th, and night after night from the hilltop at Couin watchers saw with exultation and confident expectation, reflected in many letters, the great shells picking out the enemy's lines with fire.

Many of the men had been suffering from a throat infection, caused it was believed by the darkness and damp of the huts but with plenty of work outdoors they were recovering rapidly.

On the 23rd and 24th first D and then B Company supplied a working party of 2 officers and 100 men for work at Coigneux. A and C Companies were given the use of the range on the 24th and the Battalion signallers transferred to Brigade control.

C Coy made up the work party on the 25th as the rest of the Battalion held a church parade and A Company did the job on the 26th. The baths were allocated to them on the 26th between 14:00 and 17:00 and 130 an hour went through

By the 28th the rain had become even heavier and both baths and working parties were cancelled. In anticipation of the battle to come the Diary for June was closed off on the 29th and the paperwork sent on its way. By this date the Battalion strength was at 736.

## The Battle Opens

1st July 1916

The battalion were not to be engaged on the first day as they marched off in full battle order at 10:00 on the 1st. They went first to Mailly-Maillet where bivouacs awaited them and they sat around waiting for orders. The weather had turned hot but the ground was still very wet.

**Capt Cruttwell:-**

On July 1st the 48th Division were in Corps Reserve, and took no part in the battle, with the exception of the 5th and 6th Warwicks, who covered themselves with glory in Serre, though suffering terrible losses, which included both their commanding officers. The Division was concentrated for the day round Maily-Mallet, which we reached about 1 p.m. after numberless checks in the encumbered roads. Detachments of Indian Cavalry were resting their horses by the roadside as we passed through Bus. The rest of the day was spent in bivouac in an open field; the guns around fired incessantly, including a 15-inch howitzer close at hand, but no hostile shell fell near. We were about 3 miles west of Beaumont Hamel, where the 29th Division were so furiously engaged.

All the good news of the morning, the taking of Gommecourt Cemetery and of Serre, had fired expectation, and the disappointment was correspondingly bitter when it was known at nightfall that the 8th Army Corps were everywhere back in their original front line.

## **Orders to attack**

### **2nd July 1916**

Next morning the Brigade received orders to attack early on the 3rd, their objective being south of Beaumont Hamel and beyond the Ancre brook, a piece of country which none of them had seen before. The Brigadier, with the Commanding Officers, tried to get forward during the day and pick up the lie of the land, but the shelling, smoke and dust made observation impossible.

Two battalions were scheduled to attack, Berks and Glosters with the Oxfords in Brigade Reserve and the Bucks in Divisional reserve.

Beginning at 19:00 the Brigade, less the Bucks Battalion, moved up to Mesnil, a small ruined village one mile behind the line, very much in the dark as it was 21:00 before they arrived.

**Capt Cruttwell**

As they moved in, many smelt for the first time the curious fragrant odour of lachrymatory gas, which seemed to come from the flowers of some wayside garden until the pricking and watering at the eyes proved otherwise. The Company Commanders went forward into the trenches to find out what they could; to their right loomed a great black mass, and they debated whether it was a hill or a cloud. Suddenly an array of lights and a flicker of rifle-fire running along the top revealed it as the steep western slopes of Thiepval.

A Company was just filing into the trenches around 22:30 when a rumour was brought by Lieut. Hughes that the attack was cancelled; inquiries were made and its truth confirmed. The Battalion returned the way it had come and bivouacked again in Maily-Mallet at daybreak. The men, who had moved out in high spirits, were greatly cast down by this conclusion. It is, however, a matter for congratulation that the Battalion was not called upon to make its first attack under circumstances so unfavourable on positions which had defied the elaborate preparations which preceded the assault on July 1st.

The men of the Battalion were very disappointed - as the War Diarist put it:

We returned to our bivouacs at Mailley-Maillet about 3 am (3/7/16), the battalion being very disappointed. They had moved out from their bivouacs in great spirits, feeling that the time for attack had come after all the many months of trench life.

One man had been wounded.

### **Maily-Mallot - 3rd July 1916**

Next day guns and limbers passed in a steady stream going south - a sure indication that all efforts were being concentrated in widening the breach already made. That evening at 18:30 the Battalion returned to the huts at Couin arriving 21:30, much depressed at the prospect of taking up again the drab monotony of trench life after hopes in the last few days.

### **Couin and Saily - 4th to 8th July 1916**

The weather now became very bad with almost incessant rain in the afternoon of the 4th. On the 5th it was fine and the first company moved out of the huts at Couin at 09:15 with the others following at quarter hour intervals. They bivouacked at Saily and were employed in carrying up smoke candles to the trenches between 09:45 and 14:30. Most men returned having been wading through water up to their waist.

The COs of the brigade held a conference at 16:30 on the 6th at Brigade HQ

### **Trenches at Hebuterne - 8th to 12th July 1916**

It was back to H Sector and trench duty when they relieved the 5th Glosters between 04:00 and 06:45. It was very heavy going as the rains had filled the trenches with water and mud up to waist level and there were very few pumps

available. The trenchwork had been badly damaged by the bombardment, and affording the depressing view to right and left of the dead of the 31st and 56th Divisions lying out unburied. They were disposed with A as the right company in Carency and Raglan trenches, C as the left company in Alsace and Pusieux Road trenches, D were in support at Fort Grosvenor and B remained in Divisional reserve at Saily.

Meanwhile a great show of activity was kept up to foster among the enemy the idea that further attacks were intended; new stores of smoke bombs were sent up with instructions when and how to let them off, which were invariably cancelled before performance. 2000 P type grenades were sent up late on the 9th with orders to let them off at an hour's notice. The few pumps available were kept hard at it continuously and gradually conditions improved.

The companies rotated on the 10th and another assaulting trench was dug by the Brigade, running some 700 yards south of that already described, for which the Battalion supplied a small covering party of 50 men, who suffered a few casualties in the bright moonlight. 2176 Frank Garrett of Reading was killed and two men wounded on the 10th and five wounded on the 11th. The weather fortunately improved, and we were able to hand over the trenches to the 5th Gloucesters on July 12th dry and in good repair.

## **Saily**

**12th to 14th July 1916**

They were back in bivouacs at Saily by 09:30 on the 12th and 96 men of C Coy were detailed to work under the RE at Hebuterne. That afternoon a concert party called "The Curios" came over to entertain the rest of the men.

Next day 100 men went over to see the 5th Battalion in the Bois de Warnimont. Thirteen months ago they had come to the Battalion for their first experience of trench warfare. Now only a small remnant was left who were resting from their attack on Ovillers, where every officer except the C.O. had been killed or wounded.

At 11:00 on the 14th orders were received for the Battalion to move on. It was 14:00 before they left their bivouacs but then the lorries that were to meet them on the Saily to Coigneux road were even later and they did not set off for Senlis until 18:25 arriving at Senlis via Bertrancourt around 20:00 to find that the billets were very dirty and the Town Major had got all the allotments wrong.

## **Senlis**

**Senlis 14th to 18th July 1916**

While at Senlis the weather was mostly fine but with showers in the afternoons. For a change there were no working parties, only the usual inspections. The officers took the opportunity to take a look at their surroundings. The company commanders went over to the Ovillers area on the 15th with the CO and brigadier inspecting the trenches and the others looking at the lie of the land. They were followed next day by their Seconds in Command. on the 16th the CO and Brigadier visited Albert and La Boisselle. The latter was utterly desolated, no wall of the village was left standing, all the trenches had been blown up, all the wire cut and the ground was littered with debris with bodies, equipment, weapons and rubble everywhere. The village had been captured from the Germans a few days earlier and the devastation was testimony to the efficiency of British artillery fire, but looking at the fortifications the Germans had built there were deep forebodings of the difficulties of future attacks on German positions.

Capt Cruttwell:-

Soon after arrival at Senlis the officers went over to La Boisselle. This first sight of the devastated area created the deepest impression. Afterwards such complete destruction became common enough; but till then no one had seen a village literally blown away. Not only the walls, but the very brick dust had vanished; its site could be fixed only by reference to the map and to the board stating "THIS IS LA BOISSELLE."

Every kind of battle-wreckage lay about, including many dead bodies, ten days unburied in the midsummer heat. But though the guns had done their work so well, enough remained of the wonderful fortified labyrinth to suggest the difficulties of attacking troops.

Orders were received to move to Bouzincourt on the 17th but these were cancelled and the move did not take place until the 18th.

## **Bouzincourt and La Boisselle**

**18th to 21st July 1916**

They left Senlis at 06:45 on the 18th moving first to bivouacs in a field north of Bouzincourt. After a Brigade conference the tents had to be packed up and moved to the east of Albert starting at 21:00 with A Company given the additional task of carrying for the Oxfords. It was a very cold night and there was hardly any sleep. They were

left in their bivouacs for most of the 19th and with some fine weather were able to get some rest. From 17:00 they began taking over trenches to the west of Pozieres from the 7th Warwicks. It was lightly held with only two platoons of B Coy in the front line and two in support, C Coy were in support while A and D were held in reserve at the bivouacs. Battalion headquarters were in La Boisselle- War Diary:-

HQ were in an old German dug-out in LA BOISSELLE, very well made, and it gave one some idea of all the work the enemy had put in during the time they had been holding their front. The whole village ruins were very foul. The trenches were in a very bad state, parts of them very shallow and the dead were unburied - some of them had probably been there for 10 days.

Their Guns were very active all the evening and night, chiefly 15c and 21c.

Their lines appeared to be very strongly held and they were very alert.

Capt Cruttwell:-

The Battalion moved up by degrees, bivouacking on the 18th east of Albert in support of the Oxfords; and taking over trenches west of Pozieres next night from 7th Royal Warwicks. Only two platoons of B Company, held the short front line; which was naturally of a rough and ready description, shallow and blocked in places by earth or bodies.

The enemy, in hourly anticipation of attack, were very restless; their infantry, who appeared to be very thick on the ground, sent up showers of lights and fired at intervals throughout the night hours. Their guns, mostly 5.9-inch and 8-inch, fired almost incessantly; even a comparative lull, it was remarked, would have been counted a heavy bombardment in the old quiet days. Many gas shells were used, mainly on road junctions and assembly points in the rear.

We had only some seven casualties from this source- our support and reserve companies moved up or down constantly in accordance with the ever-shifting situations.

A party from the Oxfords came to hold clear trenches and carry supplies on the 21st but owing to the level of German artillery fire which included many gas shells it was difficult to do very much. A patrol under Lt Down went out to reconnoitre the SW corner of Pozieres on the night of the 21st but it was very dangerous work.

Capt Cruttwell

The 21st was a day of great activity, stores were brought up all day, and the trenches improved for the attack as far as intense enemy fire would permit. Lieut. Downs that night took out a patrol from the right, who explored the south-west corner of Pozieres in spite of the extreme alertness of the Huns, and returned safely with the most valuable information for which the Anzacs, over whose attacking frontage the patrol had gone, were most grateful. Everyone was glad to have them on our flank, for they were splendid men, full of confidence and keenness.

Some casualties were recorded - 2923 William Cannon of Caversham died of wounds, 15 were wounded and 7 gassed on the 19th, 8 were wounded on the 20th, Ernest Saunders also of Caversham died on the 21st with 17 wounded and 6 were wounded on the 22nd. However there were two reinforcements, one of 44 men on the 19th and another of 102 men on the 21st.

Capt Cruttwell:-

The successful night attack of July 14th eat into the third German line between Longueval and Bazentin-le-Petit on a front of some three miles. The principal British efforts for the next six weeks were consequently directed towards getting more elbow-room on both flanks. On the north progress had been greatly hindered by the stubborn resistance of the Prussian Guards at Ovillers, which was not cleared up until July 11th.

Our line now skirted the southern orchards of Pozieres, running westwards just north of Ovillers and then curving sharply back to the old front line near Authuille. All this sector was, to our great disadvantage, overlooked and enfiladed by the height of Thiepval; and progress, though steady, was for the most part slow and heavily bought.

### Preparing for the Attack - 22nd July 1916

The 7th Warwicks came up to help on the 22nd and battalion HQ joined the Oxfords HQ in a more forward position after dark on the 22nd. A conference for Commanding officers was held at 14:30 at Brigade HQ and everyone was very busy

Capt Cruttwell:-

Next day detailed orders were issued for the attack of the 145th Brigade. The two assaulting Battalions 4th Oxfords and 5th Gloucesters, were allotted a frontage of about 500 yards a-piece. The right flank of the Oxfords rested on the Anzacs at a point some 500 yards west of Pozieres. We were in support to the Oxfords, and, therefore, concerned only with their objectives.

To understand the events of the following day it is necessary closely to study the map. The irregular curve of Sickle Trench, prolonged along the north side of the main road, constituted our front line. The Huns held a somewhat similar line, with a marked southward bulge; the Oxfords had orders to take the whole of this trench from Point 81 to Point 11. The difficulties of a simultaneous attack on such a pronounced salient are obvious, and were increased by the trench running southward from Point 81 for 150 yards, which terminated in a hostile strong point at 97.

## Attack at Pozieres

23rd July 1916

The Brigade attack began at first light, the Oxfords leading but they came under intense flanking fire and rumours came back that that were in dire trouble. The Berks had come into position under cover of darkness and were deployed along a 250 yard stretch by 03:30 to the west of the Oxfords line. They awaited orders but sent out two men (2646 Cpl William Cooke of Streatley and 3043 Pte Ralph Mitchell) to reconnoitre. They came back to report a critical situation. By now it was 03:55 and Captain Aldworth of B Coy took it upon himself to launch the Berks' attack without waiting for orders and sent B and C Coys to help the Oxfords. For this he was awarded the MC as it was clear that his prompt action secured the success of the operation.

Capt Crutwell gave his account of the battle:-

The two Companies now advanced into the captured trench, losing some men en route from shell fire, especially on the right, where 2nd Lieut. Clayton was killed. During the advance B Company got split in two, Nos. 5 and 8 Platoons being divided by C Company from Nos. 6 and 7, who entered the left of the trench with Captain Aldworth. The congestion of the men of the two Battalions in the centre of the shallow trench was great, and there could be no security until the flanks were cleared and made good. Point 97 was soon gained, and Lieut. Downs pushed resolutely forward beyond 81, endeavouring to get in touch with the Australians. He reached the heavily wired German second line, which ran north and south through the outskirts of Pozieres, but was forced back. Returning with about 20 men from all three Companies he barricaded and secured Point 81, after killing 11 Germans in hand-to-hand fighting and capturing 2.

Meanwhile, Point 11 was attacked on two sides. When the left of B Company got into the trench some Germans were still in view running away towards the left, one of whom Captain Aldworth bayoneted himself.

Lieut. Tripp at once followed them up and bombed them out of Point 11 with the assistance of a party under Lieut. Wakeford, who jumped out of the centre and led them fearlessly over the open to the disputed place. Lieut. Wakeford was shot dead just as he reached his objective, but his action was entirely successful.

By 6 a.m. the situation was reported safe, and the men still crowded and mixed up, were able to start consolidating and deepening the trench.

At 6.30 a.m. about 200 men appeared over the brow of the hill on the left, where it dips down towards Owillers, advancing with fixed bayonets. It was a Company of the Bucks moving in perfect order and with great fire. As they reached the trenches east of Point 11 the Huns could be seen coming out of their dugouts and flying in all directions, many with their hands up. A Lewis gun from C Company opened on those who tried to bolt back northwards, but soon stopped, as it was clear that they could not escape the Bucks.

Captain Lewis went up to meet the Bucks officer, and they decided on Point 11 as a division between the two Battalions. The morning passed quietly, with no more than intermittent sniping on both sides, in which Sergt. Giles [Sgt Fred Giles 200080?] accounted for several Huns. Thanks to the excellent organisation of Captain Attride, parties from D Company brought up all that was required in the way of bombs, sandbags and so forth. By 10 o'clock the trenches had been reduced to a decent order, and the men were able to eat their breakfasts.

At noon the Oxfords, who had been moving away to the right, took over from 81-97; B Company carried on the line to a large bush near 28, which had escaped the bombardment, and from there C Company extended to the Bucks right flank. This sorting out had scarcely been accomplished when the enemy started a heavy bombardment, which lasted until 5 p.m. For the last two hours in particular it was of extreme violence, and fell chiefly on B Company. Here in the improvised trenches very great damage was done, and more than 50 per cent. of the Company were put out of action.

Many of the carrying parties from D Company had also been hit, and lay in the open. Private C. J. Sadler, [2594] from Wokingham, a Company Stretcher-Bearer, dressed them all, and put them into shell holes until nightfall. In the performance of these very brave actions three of his ribs were broken by a shell. He was subsequently awarded the D.C.M..

Private Frederick William Harvey of 5 Woodstock Street Reading was killed by a machine gun bullet whilst carrying provisions to his chums who were in the trench. Aged 30 and a native of Reading, the deceased enlisted in April of last year. Prior to that he worked for Messrs Broadbent Brothers. (BC 8/11/16)

The situation was still very confused but touch had been established with the Anzacs who had been seen in the morning by D Company making their way through the ruins of Pozieres; and later lighting fires there to fry their bacon, which had drawn heavy shell-fire on the whole area. But it was not until the afternoon that a more or less continuous line was linked up.

Colonel Clarke was able to make his arrangements for artillery support direct with the artillery through Major Todd, the forward liaison officer. The batteries concerned gave a five-minutes intensive bombardment with wonderful accuracy in the darkness. This, however, was the only part of the attack which was destined to go smoothly, for the enemy replied at once by a furious artillery and machine-gun fire, causing many casualties, and made it almost impossible for the attack to develop.

The Berkshire Chronicle of 4/8/16 reported the affair and the Reading Mercury the following day carried a shortened version of the same account:-

An interesting story of the part which has recently been played by a battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment [1st/4th] which is largely composed of Reading men, a number of whom as reported elsewhere have fallen, was supplied to our representative by one who took part. He said the battalion was in reserve to the London Scottish on July 1st and twelve days later took over the trenches. Within a few days they went into action, the attack being made at 2:30 in the morning following a tremendous heavy bombardment on both sides.

"We were fighting with the Aussies" our informant continued " and it was at [Pozières] where the attack was made. C Company was deputed to take the first line with the ANZACS and it was arranged that B Company was to occupy the second. The first line was found crowded with Germans and fully half an hour elapsed before we captured it. The fighting was of a most severe character and we inflicted great loss on the enemy. We lost several but our casualties were at that point not nearly so heavy as those of the Germans, many of whom were killed by our bombers. We had the misfortune to lose Second Lieutenant Teed who lost his life at this stage of the attack.

"When the Germans were ultimately driven out B Company advanced to take the next line. Here the fighting was more severe than ever. It took about an hour and a half to take the line. The Machine-gun fire of the enemy was most deadly, whilst they fought with great desperation, but for all that our men stuck to them most pluckily, and attained their object. A Bucks battalion [1st/4th Ox and Bucks LI] then followed on the attack, but found the third and fourth lines practically deserted, the Germans having retired into the village, which the last mentioned battalion with the Anzacs entered.

"A and B Companies of the Berks, who had been supplying us with ammunition, the same night went into the village, where, I am told, the fighting was again very severe. Although I suppose we must have advanced fully half a mile. The enemy showed our wounded no mercy, many being killed as they lay on the ground. Second Lieutenant Kenney was wounded when going over the first line and Private Warren [3216] was killed after displaying great bravery. Under heavy shell fire he dug up many who had been buried, ultimately losing his own life in serving others, He died the death of a hero."

Another member of the same battalion writes:- "We were on the left of the Anzacs and we went up to the front line of trenches last Saturday night. July 22nd, to go over the top and it was about 2 o'clock Sunday morning that we went over. We got two lines of German trenches. It was perfect hell all the morning, they were shelling us to blazes. About 12 o'clock Sunday dinner-time I had a piece of shrapnel in my arm just above the wrist and it was about 4 o'clock when I got out of the trenches and to the dressing station. I thank God from the bottom of my heart to be here and well. You know the Huns are awful cowards; they will stand and fire at you from close distance and then when they have no ammunition left they throw up their hands for mercy" [TX01144]

The violence of the shelling suggested a counter-attack after dark, which it would be difficult to repel with the greatly reduced forces available. There was great joy, therefore, when Captain Aldworth returned from a journey to Battalion Headquarters at 6.30 p.m. with the news that the Battalion would be relieved that night by the 5th Warwicks.

The two Companies stood-to from dark onwards, but no attack developed. There was an anxious moment for C Company when a bomb exploded close to 2nd Lieut. Beazley in the trench. He had just come up to join his Company and was hard at work digging. A light was sent up and showed the ground in front to be clear; the bomb had evidently been buried in the trench and went off when struck by a shovel. Lieut. Beazley was fortunate to escape with some severe bruises.

The relief was begun at 10.30 p.m., and the weary men were able to get a short rest by sleeping in the old German line south of Ovillers.

Lt Col Clarke put in his recommendation for Capt Aldworth's MC but army bureaucracy got in the way and he had to repeat the request three times. On the 13th August. He wrote to Bde HQ:-

With reference to your A324 - Recommendation for award Capt J N Aldworth.

The original evidence was verbal. Cpl Cooke and Pte Mitchell were sent forward to ascertain the situation about 3.30 am. and returned with the information that it was critical. The Oxfords can confirm this. Their cheering when the support arrived showed how much they were in need of help.

His coolness and bravery during the attack was reported to me by several of his Company and Captain Lewis reported on his behaviour after the trenches had been captured.

They were joined by a further replacement of 46 men

The final tally of casualties was that two officers were killed (2Lt Norman Clayton of Colchester and 2Lt Wakeford, 23 men killed and 103 wounded including 23 with shell shock. The Territorials reported as being killed that day were:-

Abery Leonard Henry of Reading 4716  
 Allum Frank Sidney of Reading 2633  
 Attridge George James of Clewer 2409  
 Ayres Frederick John of Windsor 1883  
 Bacon Percy George William of Reading 2714  
 Bloomfield Clement Irving of Greenham 4920  
 Cooper George A of Bracknell 2770  
 Cummins Frederick H of East Woodhay 3571  
 Dean Herbert Sidney of Maidenhead 1807  
 Didcock Frederick of Drayton 2327

Evans David of Reading 5208  
 Filmore Horace William of Reading 3271  
 Grant George Robert of Reading 4939  
 Greenhough Ernest James of Lockinge 5092  
 Harvey Frederick William of Reading 4759  
 Jones Thomas Henry of Wallingford 5147  
 King Henry Amos of South Moreton 4880  
 Legge Albert Edward of Childrey 1767  
 Mitcham William Charles 2691  
 Morgan Thomas Charles of Windsor 5068  
 Morton Thomas William of Beenham 5422  
 Mulford Reginald Cyril Arthur of West Hendred 2293  
 Papps Austin Conrad of Tewkesbury 2701  
 Pike Walter A of Lambourn 3456  
 Pinnell Henry John of Bracknell 1773  
 Pratt Reginald Edward Victor of Reading 2713  
 Somerville Stanley of Reading 1690  
 Street Harold Sidney of Wokingham 2635  
 Vickers James of Windsor 5193  
 White Richard James of Dereham 4795  
 Wiltshire George of Faringdon 5412

### 24th July 1916

The battalion hardly had time to draw breath as they were back in the trenches by 13:30 relieving the Bucks, immediately to the left of their former line. They were allotted a frontage of about 400 yards, spanning the head of the shallow valley running down to Ovillers; between the lines ran the almost obliterated tracks of a light railway. A were manning the front line with D in support and B and C in Reserve. About 200 yards north of the left of the line a German strong point on higher ground looked into and enfiladed the whole of the captured ground, and D Company was ordered to attack it at 01:50 next morning, supported by two companies of the Glosters

Two men were killed and 43 wounded, of whom 9 had shell shock. Also 2/Lt Henry Teed was killed while organising resistance to the attack and 2/Lt Kenny wounded. The men were

2653 Atkins Frank of Hyde Heath  
 3216 Warren Philip of Thornton Heath  
 2017 Webb Walter Ernest of Reading

### 25th July 1916

They were relieved by the 5th Glosters at 11:00 on the 25th and by 13:00 the whole battalion was back in bivouacs near Albert. They were very tired but bucked up somewhat after a hot meal and later that afternoon they crossed the road and set up their tents a little closer to the river.

Capt Cruttwell summed up his conclusions on the battle:-

One bombing party pushed forward a few yards, only to lose every man but two from a concentrated shower of rifle grenades. The Germans, in fact, were in great force, and held every approach to the strong point resolutely. All chance of surprise had gone, and the C.O. therefore refused Captain Attride's request to be allowed to make a new attack.

Indeed, at daybreak the German bombardment, which had died down, restarted with a violence which kept on increasing until 5.15 a.m., when a bombing attack was made on 13 and 14 Platoons at the road barricade. 2nd Lieuts. Taylor and Cooke (the latter having come up with supports) kept up a hot fire with rifle grenades and by their action and example drove back the enemy.

C.S.M. A G Rider [200005], who had joined the Battalion not long before, had the first opportunity of showing that combination of bravery and capacity which afterwards earned him a M.C.

After the counter-attack had been repulsed there remained only a few hours to hold on until the 5th Gloucesters relieved us, and we were able to get back to bivouacs near Albert to enjoy a hot meal and fall asleep.

Out of 650 men who began the battle on the 23rd 230 became casualties but only 27 of these had been killed, a surprisingly low figure.

The special order of the day on these operations by Colonel Clarke, whose words of praise were fully endorsed by the Divisional and the Corps Commanders. read:-

'It will be a matter of great pride for all who know or are connected with the Battalion to hear of the gallant way in which the Company Officers led the attacks, and the able way in which they handled their various commands; of the contempt for danger and ready resource shown by all the N.C.O.'s, and the bravery, extreme steadiness and coolness in which the lines advanced across the open to the attack or held the captured trenches under the heavy machine-gun fire, and during the counterattack.'

## **Reorganisation**

**26th to 30th July 1916**

The attrition through casualties had been quite uneven between the companies and most of the new arrivals were men who had had very little training, many having been conscripted in March. Many of them had never even practiced with a rifle, as broomsticks were used in training, let alone having fired one in anger. They had not been taught to march properly or turn and had had no instruction on bombs. Even worse in many ways, a number of them had no idea as to how the army handled sanitation. By the end of July they were back to a strength of 828 with new NCOs appointed and men allocated to companies to give a judicious mixture of trained and inexperienced.

On the 26th they moved after breakfast to Bouzincourt where packs were loaded into lorries and they were able to rest until 13:15 when it was time to set off marching to Arqueves where they arrived at 16:30. Here they had two days of rest and were joined by a further draft of 34 but on the 28th it was on the march again at 07:50 to Beauval with only six men falling out - all recent draftees - although the last three miles were very tiring in the hot sun. They went back into the billets they had occupied previously and were warmly greeted by the townsfolk who recalled their excellent previous behaviour. They arrived at 10:45 and were able to spend a quiet day enjoying the lovely weather.

On the 29th they set off again at 08:00 with the 5th Gloucesters and marched to Cramont via Beaugesne. It was very hot and tiring and they had two half hour stops arriving at 13:45. 125 men fell out, 96 of them recent draftees. While they were marching the GOC of the Division inspected them and on arrival General Morland, the Corps Commander met them and congratulated Col Clarke on the way his men had fought.

### **Cramont - 29th July to 9th August**

Cramont was described by the diarist as 'a very pretty village and all the billets were clean. The peacefulness was most restful after what the Battalion had passed through'. Here, for ten days in glorious midsummer weather the Battalion enjoyed the peacefulness of a charming village, with green fields and trees, almost beyond the sound of the guns. There was a church parade on the 30th but little else. However it was back to work on the 31st. The correspondence book for the battalion has survived for the period 31st July to 27th August. It offers a tantalising glimpse into the minutiae of battalion life.

The whole of this period was allotted to Company Training, and many hours were spent in bayonet fighting and bombing. Every man, indeed, threw at least two live bombs, a practice which proved of the greatest value in the August fighting ahead.

### **31st July 1916**

The Battalion had been asked by HQ 135th Bde to supply names of candidates for CO of the newly formed machine gun companies. They put forward the names of Capt E S Holcroft as an instructor and Caopt G H W Cruttwell and Lt D J Ward as commanders.

The commanding officers of the four 1st/4th companies were told to post sentries over the wells in their area to stop both the well and the water from being wasted or misused. The transport section were told they could draw their water from HQ between 3pm and 5 pm daily.

The quartermaster was told to draw supplies of 'shrapnel helmets' together with khaki paint as presumably they came unpainted. 27 were needed for A Coy, 23 for B Coy, 22 for C Coy, 23 for D Coy and 10 for HQ Coy.

### **1st August 1916**

A heavy draft horse had become available and the OC Transport was told to collect it from Divisional train at La Haiefernie.

### **2nd August 1916**

A Lewis gun had apparently gone missing. The adjutant, Lt D J Ward informed 145 Bde HQ

Lewis gun No 5035 is not in our possession

The administration had been slow in dealing with promotion recommendations. Col Clarke wrote to Bde HQ:-

No 382 Sgt Derby J S

No 1547 Sgt Goodenough L T

The above two NCOs application recommendations for commissions in this battalion were sent in some months ago. They have been detailed to attend a course of instruction beginning on 27th September next. I now request they be granted their commissions forthwith as I consider them quite fit for their duties and vacancies exist in this battalion.

### **3rd August 1916**

A party was to be sent for Lewis gun training at Vignacourt. Buses were arranged for the next day at 04.30 and men had to carry two days rations with them.

4 NCOs per company and one from HQ were sent off to Abbeville each day, presumably for 36 hrs leave. Their names had to be handed into the orderly room by 20:00 and they left on a GS Wagon from the cross roads by B Coy mess at 07:30. Overnight accommodation was provided and they had to leave at 19:00 to be back in their regular billets by 21:30.

### **4th August 1916**

Evidently the Ordnance who were responsible for supplies were being awkward as the adjutant had to write to 48th Divisional HQ:-

The Commanding Officer would be glad if you could let us have a supply of the following:-

Salt - to place in tub for hardening feet

Soap - washing clothes

The ordnance will not issue the above. Can you please make it a special issue.

### **5th August 1916**

Major Barron's cinematograph unit appeared on the 5th and the ASC put on a film performance in a field near B Coy mess at 21:30. Men who were allowed to go had to be marched there by a senior NCO

### **6th August 1916**

In response to an enquiry from 145th Bde HQ the adjutant replied:-

We have two hand carts now with battalion. Another two at dump at Covin. These two here are hand carts, wooden wheels and lighter than Stokes Gun carts.

A bicycle had been allotted to the medical sergeant and a man was sent to collect it from B Coy who had seemingly appropriated it.

### **7th August 1916**

The Divisional Band made their reappearance on the 7th playing from 18:00 to 20:00 in the village.

Probably in view of the impending court martial, the battalion was asked to list the officers with legal experience. The list was:-

Barrister at Law

Lt Graham Harvey (att Reserve Coy)

Solicitors

Major Battcock

Capt Lewis

Capt Blandy

Capt Holcroft

Capt Attride

Capt Cruttwell

A discussion on the efficacy of braziers was underway. The adjutant wrote:-

It was found during last winter that the 5 gallon drum made satisfactory braziers, the 3 gallon drums being too small.

Buckets and odd tins make easily good braziers. The fuel supply was generally short an adequate quantity being rarely obtained,

the supply of fuel is of more importance than the shape of the brazier.

### **8th August 1916**

All clothing except greatcoats received a much-needed disinfecting from a travelling thresher which operated from 06:00 to 18:00 on the 8th handling 76 sets an hour and the MO devised an ingenious system for baths which was reported as being very economical in water.

All holes dug for the purpose of bombing practice or baths were ordered filled in. The adjutant was not quite sure of his instructions from Brigade. He wrote to the Brigade staff captain:-

Your memo refers to holes dug for the purpose of bombing. We have dug long trenches on bombing ground that will take considerable time to fill in. Has this to be done?

Lt Wix was given the job of filling in the holes with 25 men from D Coy and 12 from each of other three companies. He was specifically ordered to fill in only those holes dug by the battalion. The OC transport section was asked to provide a tool limber to be at the church by 14:00. Another limber was sent to Bde HQ at Fransu to pick up a supply of 40 boxes of no 5 grenades.

### **9th August 1916**

The Royal Berks Depot seem to have been concerned that they were not seeing war diaries from the 4th Battalion. The adjutant informed them that all war diaries and other operational papers were sent in a bundle to Lt Col Ewing at the Territorial Centre at St Mary Butts every month.

Orders for the Division to move were received on the 8th and the Brigade set out on the 9th at 07:15 led by the Berks.

## **On the March Again**

The first stage of the march to Beauval was very hard. They began at 07:15 and the majority arrived at 12:15. The roads were dusty and it was very hot. 79 fell out, most of these dropping with heat exhaustion. They occupied their old billets again.

### **10th August 1916**

Orders were received for a move to Bouzincourt on the 10th Buses arrived at Beauval Church at 01:00 and each company was ordered to bring their packs to the buses with two men to be allocated as loaders. Waterproof sheets had to be carried. The main contingent left at 05:30 arriving at Varennes at 11:00 a march of around 10 miles in ordinary times but they had to make a wide diversion as part of the original route was unfit for traffic. The sick had been sent ahead by bus and only 4 fell out. They arrived at Varennes to find the billets very crowded and dirty. They were supposed to have moved on at 19:00 on the 11th but these were cancelled at 20:45 and fresh orders to set out at 07:30 the next morning came in at 22:30.

### **11th August 1916**

Bouzincourt was only about five miles away, a journey they covered in two hours from 07:00 to 09:00 the billeting party under Lt Taylor having left at 06:30, Lt Taylor being provided with a horse. The mess cart, buses and the horses for the cooker and water cart were ready by 06:35. Officers valises had to be ready by 06:50 at the Quartermaster stores. They set off with a rearguard of a Corporal and 6 men from A Company. The billets were also very crowded and there was cellar accomodation for only 150 of the Battalion so at noon they were told to vacate what they had and move on to bivouac alongside the Bouzincourt to Senlis road.

A lorry went around the companies and the three horses (for the cooker, water cart and medical cart) were tethered by the bivouaks. Sgt Cuthbert and his pioneers were ordered up in the early afternoon, presumably to dig latrines.

By now the weather had changed and it was sultry and wet although it cleared up somewhat on the 11th; but they were once more within range of German long range guns.

### **12th August 1916**

They were allowed to rest on the 12th while the commanding officers of the Brigade held a conference to discuss details of taking over the line from 35th Brigade. The Division was returning to exactly the same sector west of Pozieres, where the 12th Division had been operating during their absence. The difficulties of the uphill advance may be estimated by the fact that the line had been advanced barely half a mile during that period.

On the night of the 12th, however, the 5th Royal Berks, taking the Huns by surprise, won an important success by taking Ridge Trench or 6th Avenue, at the crest of the long slope, with a view northward and eastward. This they accomplished at the incredibly low cost of three casualties.

## Ovillers

**13th August 1916**

The bivouacs were left at 05:30 on the 13th and they marched to Ovillers, arriving at 07:45. The Brigade were taking over from the 5th R Berks, the 7th Norfolks and the 9th Essex of 35th Brigade. The handover was rather complicated as six companies of 150 men were to take over from 5 companies of 100 men. It was solved by sending two of the Bucks companies back and the Berks just about found room in the dugouts. They were in support for the Oxfords.

The adjutant wrote to 145 Bde HQ:-

Our Btn has had great difficulties in finding accomodation in support lines and we have now filled up all the dugouts on 1st, 2nd and 3rd Streets. The Bucks Btn here still has 3 Coys to put into the area and I understand they are waiting on the Ovillers Road. There are two battalions of artillery in our trenches

At 14:15 six men per Company were set to collecting bombs. Sgt Evans was in charge of identifying places to dump them.

The first hint of trouble came at 21:30. that evening, when a message from the Oxfords stated that the enemy were trying to bomb them out of the trench. An hour later the Brigade ordered bombs to be sent up, and Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons, under Lieut. Garside, were sent forward. It was, at that time intended that the Oxfords themselves should undertake the counter-attack; but Sergt. Taylor went to the Oxford Headquarters to maintain close touch between the two Battalions.

**14th August 1916**

At 00.50 D Company were similarly put by the Brigade under the orders of Colonel Bartlett, and left with a further supply of bombs. Colonel Clarke realised that the situation was becoming more serious, and that further help might be demanded of him, though he was at present assured that one Company would be sufficient. The other two Companies were accordingly warned to be in instant readiness, and Captain Lewis moved C Company out of their dugouts into one of the communication, trenches leading up to the Oxfords' Headquarters, which were in the line captured by the Bucks on July 23rd.

Here they waited after bombs and a bandolier a-piece had been served out. Two hours passed in uncertainty. But at 02.50 an unwelcome message was received from Colonel Bartlett, asking Colonel Clarke if he would undertake the counter-attack. The latter most naturally refused, on the ground that Colonel Bartlett was on the spot, knew the ground (which our Battalion had never seen), and had his own Battalion with 1½ of our Companies. The Brigadier, however, finding that the Oxfords were not in a position to take the action required, owing to their losses, made a virtue of necessity, and ordered Colonel Clarke to do so as soon as possible. Col Clarke therefore sent out the following message to his companies:-

A Coy - Please take up your remaining two platoons to make up your Coy with the two already at point 11 using 2nd Ave.

Battalion will attack 6th Ave at 4.45 am - A, C & D. Each company in two lines (two platoons each line) A on right, D centre, C left  
Captain Pickford of the Oxfords will arrange forming up place about 150 yds from 5th Ave. Our own guns will open intense bombardment previous to attack under which lines can be formed up.

B Coy will be in support about point 11. OC B Coy can meet at point 11 to make final arrangements. The attack must be pushed forward. The enemy are reported to be holding the trench in some force. The right of 4th Ave is in touch with Anzacs.

It was now 03:00; the Oxford Headquarters had already told us that 1½ hours would be quite sufficient to get the Battalion into its assaulting position. The attack was therefore fixed for 04:45., and a 7-minutes barrage arranged with the artillery. C Company and the remaining two platoons of A began their journey forward with all speed, though time was found to give each man his tot of rum before starting.

They reached Point 18 on the place of assembly (which will be remembered as the junction between Bucks and Berks on July 23rd) about 04:15. Here Colonel Clarke found the Company Commanders with Captain Pickford, of the Oxfords. The latter gave them the disastrous information that another hour would be required to get into position instead of the half hour previously estimated. Colonel Clarke instantly went back to Oxford Headquarters to make the necessary alterations with the artillery, and to secure a barrage commencing at 05:15.

Meanwhile the Companies doubled up, with C leading and A in the rear. The need for haste was most urgent, for the day was breaking and the trench was seriously battered. The men crouched low as they ran, but the Hun probably saw their heads, for shrapnel was sprinkled along the communication trench, causing a few casualties.

As Captain Blandy (O.C. A Company) approached the head of the communication trench in broad daylight, he looked at his watch and found it was already 05:10 His remaining two platoons were waiting for him, lying low in the trench, very weary, for they had been carrying all night. They got up and followed along at the rear of the Company. Turning right-handed they entered a vacant and much broken fire trench. A man looked over the parapet and exclaimed: '*There are our boys going over on the right.*' These were C and D Companies.

An officer of the Oxfords came along at the moment trying to straighten things out, but he had no detailed orders, and did not know where the flanks of the Companies were to rest. Moreover, there was no barrage.

Thus the three Companies went over most bravely, in face of almost certain failure. They had 250 yards of absolutely unfamiliar ground to cover. The rifle and machine-gun fire was intense, and terribly accurate. The Huns, having no shells directed at them, stood up in their trenches aiming deliberately at each man in the broken and thinning lines. Short rushes were made from shell-hole to shell-hole, each rush proving very costly in casualties. Few, if any, of the men got within 100 yards of the enemy. Captain Attride had been wounded in the body, and Captain Lewis in the thigh, and hardly an officer was left.

It was evident that no bravery or determination on earth could turn failure into success. The men began, therefore, in accordance with orders to edge into a shallow communication trench only half finished, which the 5th Berks had started from their old line to 6th Avenue. It was a poor shelter, but offered a chance of safe return.

Captain Lewis reached it with his orderly's help, and, though grievously wounded, was brought back.

Captain Attride was shot through the head as he reached the very edge, and pitched forward dead. He had commanded D Company for nine months with the greatest tact and ability; his many friends mourned the best of comrades.

Captain Blandy was shot through the face and blinded for the time while stepping out of the way of a wounded man lying at the bottom of the trench.

Some men still lay out scattered in shell-holes, not daring to move, for the Hun still aimed at every living thing, picking off the wounded if they stirred. After a while a British aeroplane flew low over the scene, sounding its horn. Sergt. Page [Sgt Albert Page 2171?] resourcefully lit some flares, which he had with him, and the pilot flew back. He proved a good friend in necessity, for almost immediately our 9.2's. opened on 6th Avenue, the heads of the Huns disappeared, and the survivors made. quickly for the communication trench. One of them, in entering, stepped on the body of an officer; he turned him over) and saw that it was Captain Attride.

The casualties were naturally very heavy. Besides those officers already mentioned the killed were Lieut. O'Hara (1st East Surrey Regliment, attached), 2nd Lieut. Beasley (whose little son was presented with the M.M. which his father had won by the King when he visited Reading in March, 1918), and 2nd Lieut. Bartram.

2nd Lieut. Taylor was wounded and lay out for 48 hours, tended throughout that time with wonderful devotion by Sergt. A G Westall [405], who well earned a bar to his D.C.M. This sergeant, the bravest of the brave, when with the 2/4th next autumn near Arras, was last seen in a shell-hole close to the German wire, during a daylight patrol, laughing at the Huns, who were firing rifle grenades at him, but has since returned safely from captivity in Germany. His citation for the bar to his DCM was gazetted 14th January 1916 and read:

For conspicuous gallantry in action. When an attack by two companies had been held up by very heavy machine-gun fire, he remained out for a long time helping the wounded. He crawled from shell-hole to shell-hole, bandaging and giving water to those who could not move.

Casualties were heavy at 140 men of whom 28 were killed and 31 missing.almost all of whom were later reported dead. Their names were:-

5654 Ayles Edward Henry Joseph  
5789 Bateman James of Chieveley  
201556 Bath Frederick Charles of Abingdon  
12 Beasley Albert William  
2962 Beckett Albert John of Reading  
5843 Bird Frederick of Holyport  
1473 Blade Henry Robert William of Wallingford  
5731 Boddy Nenean of Balsall Heath  
2076 Brown Charles John Frederick of Reading  
202104 Buckingham Harry Tressillian Probyn

201856 Butler George Henry of Henley OT  
 4969 Buxcey Albert Edwin of Beedon  
 3267 Buxton William of Maidenhead  
 2510 Cocking Edward George of Windsor  
 5648 Collacott Francis Ernest Victor of Bristol  
 3148 Cox Cyril Wilson (William?) of Reading  
 5601 Dyke Godfrey Arthur of London  
 201908 Elwick Christopher George of Chavey Down  
 3250 Filbee William Hugh Francis of Hitcham  
 2947 George Reginald William of Newbury  
 4983 Gibbons Charles Ernest of Reading  
 5641 Giles Edgar Stanley of Bristol  
 201412 Gould Arthur of Ongar  
 202023 Guy John Frederick  
 5178 Hays John of London  
 5688 Higgins Arthur Herbert of Totterdown Northants  
 2718 House Oswald Leopold of Reading  
 2616 Knott Arthur Thomas of Reading  
 1470 Lambert Arthur John of Windsor  
 3078 Langford Albert Brown of Reading  
 5709 Liddiard Edward of Birmingham  
 2152 Long Dennis of Clewer  
 2607 Loving Henry George of Reading  
 5566 Maggs Frederick George of Bristol  
 2034 Mills George  
 2951 Muggridge Frederick John of Cookham Rise  
 2442 O'Dell Edward Victor of Reading  
 1637 Perrin Clement Edward of Abingdon  
 5672 Plant Albert Victor  
 3450 Rackley Frank of Woodley  
 5803 Reason William John of Curry Rivel  
 44 Reddrop Reginald Thomas of Caversham  
 3033 Shackelford Arthur Frederick of Reading  
 4908 Sharpe Frederick Henry of Newbury  
 201921 Shearman Walter Thomas of Eastville  
 5142 Taft John of Boyne Hill  
 5665 Tanner Edward Stanley of Greenbank  
 1159 Turner Frank of Oxford  
 1937 Watson Frederick William of Reading  
 5844 Wells Alfred of Maidenhead  
 5197 Wheeler Frederick of Abingdon  
 2662 White John Henderson  
 3341 Wicks Thomas Francis of Reading  
 5143 Wicks William Charles of Reading  
 5638 Williams Arthur George of Bristol  
 2395 Wilson Richard George  
 5675 Wright Arthur Vernon of Clifton

What is strange about this list is the number of men who are assigned their 200,000 series numbers in the official records.. These were not allocated until late August and not borne by any of the men before around March 1917. One can only surmise that these are men who were originally reported missing and only much later confirmed dead.

### 15th August 1916

The order for the relief came late in the evening of the 14th.

The Battalion will be relieved by the Bucks Battalion as a soon as possible this morning and moved to Albert-Bouzincourt line (W21a)

No company will move out until the remaining two companies of the Bucks Battalion have treached Owillers.

Mess cart will report at X14 C29 as a soon as possible and mess boxes should be dumped there, one man being left in charge.

Lewis gun limber will come up as soon as possible to entrance to Owillers. Officers chargers will be met on Owillers road.

The attack was to continue on the evening of the 15th and although the 1st/4th were not directly involved one company of B Coy was attached to the 5th Glosters in case they were needed but in the event they weren't and

remained in no 3 Street at Ovillers. A company under command of Capt Lacy provided 100 men for a carrying party to support the Glosters.

#### Operations order

145th Infantry Brigade will continue the attack tonight. Objective to complete the capture of end of spur in X2b - approximately points 59, 48, 44

Bucks Battalion will attack with one company up trench 99, 59, 48. 1st objective 59, 2nd objective 48.

Glosters will attack with two companies. 1st objective line points 78-74. 2nd objective point 48 where they will join hands with Bucks. Glosters will also push bombing controls up German trench moving NW from just west of point 81 (in 6th Ave)

In the event of Glosters attack being not fully successful the attack will be renewed at an hour to be notified from Brigade by two more companies. For this purpose one coy of R Berks will be attached to the 5th Glosters and will report to OC 5th Glosters under arrangements made direct between OCs concerned.

B Coy is company detailed to co-operate with Glosters if required. All orders will be issued by OC Glosters to OC B Coy direct. The company will be in position 3rd Street by 11.00 pm

The white DNL distinguishing mark will be worn by all assaulting troops. Flares will be shown one hour after mist lifts in the morning or at 5.30 am if there is no mist and again at 8.00 am and 12 noon. The position will also be marked for the artillery at the same hours.

Zero time 12.15 am

A rather strange letter was sent out by the adjutant later in the day.

Wirecutters have always been put on in a forward position. We can attach no special reason for this as we have not tried the backward position.

They relieved the 5th Glosters at Ovillers in the afternoon with A Coy in no 2 Street, B in no 3 Street and C & D in no 1 Street. This time B Coy had to find the carrying party. They suffered shelling for most of the afternoon with two men killed and one wounded.

### **17th August 1916**

Patrols were sent out in the morning. they reported back that trench 23-69 was occupied by the enemy and not visible from VI avenue because of a slight rise in the land. The ground was much pitted with shell holes. The Oxfords had a bomb stop in trench 99-59 although the trench was very much flattened out. Trench 99-78 appeared to be in good condition and trench 78-74 was obliterated with almost no cover left. Although the land was generally level, but much pitted with shell holes, a forming up area by the bomb stop was convenient.

The rations were late in arriving and the adjutant sent an urgent message to Major Battcock to ensure that they came up earlier next day as they were to relieve the Oxfords early in the day. C Coy were due to start at 06:00, D Coy at 07:00 with A & B Coys in reserve in dugouts SW of the village carrying the packs of the other two.

## **Attack on Thiepval**

As soon as the high ridge west of Pozieres had been taken, a converging movement began upon Thiepval, a stubbornly defended height, which was not to fall until the 27th September. The 48th Division, facing half left, now began to move towards it from the south-east, whilst continuous pressure was directed from the west, or the direction of the old front line.

### **18th August 1916**

On August 18th the 143rd (Warwick) Brigade attacked on a line about 1000 yards north of Ovillers with their right secured by a bombing attack made by B Company 4th Royal Berks. The ground round here was one of the grimmest of crater fields; almost every one of the many trenches which scarred it being marked on the map as either 'destroyed' or 'much damaged.'

A patrol was sent from point 99 in a thick mist. It reported back that trench 99-59 was practically flat, trench 78-59 was unoccupied for about 200 yards with a dugout in it. Trench 23-69 apparently still occupied by posts at intervals. Flares were sent up from points between 59 and 63.

C Coy's patrol failed to make contact with the Anzacs so D Coy were asked to send a patrol along 8th street to try again.

The 143rd Brigade attacked about 17:00. The whole course of the attack was visible to the men of the 1st/4th holding the front line, who looked over the parapet cheering and shouting with excitement as the successive waves moved inevitably forward and disappeared into the German trenches. Major Aldworth (O.C. B Company) handled

his men with great skill, capturing 27 prisoners and a machine gun, and driving many of the enemy into the hands of the 6th Warwicks.

The Glosters left Ovillers around 20:30 and B Coy were asked to make a bombing attack to assist them. Rifle grenades had been sent up with A Coy and more were promised as soon as they arrived from Ovillers.

At 22:45 A Coy were ordered to dig a trench about 60-100 yards in front of 6th Avenue which was big enough to hold the platoon. It was to be at least 4½ feet deep and if possible 6 ft with a fire step.

Confused and fierce fighting went on until midnight; attack and counter-attack succeeding each other as either side received fresh supplies of men and bombs, but B Company finally held their objectives. The value of the bomb practice at Cramont was evident, for the men threw splendidly. Lieut. L. F. Ridley was killed fighting bravely at the head of his bombing party. Captains Cruttwell and Lacy, Lieuts. Wix and Smith (3rd East Surreys, attached), were wounded, the two former while getting their Companies ready for an expected counter-attack during the night. The remaining casualties amounted to nine killed and 36 wounded. The fighting strength of the Battalion had now been reduced to about 500, but it was to take one last highly successful part in the Somme fighting before being withdrawn.

### 19th August 1916

They were relieved by the Oxfords by 12:00 and returned to Ovillers. C Coy were told that a trench had been dug for them at 03:40 and they were to put a platoon there, rations being sent up.

The Division had now reached a point about midway between Ovillers and Thiepval. A deep and narrow valley separated them from the latter stronghold, which rose steeply 170 feet above: a line of broken stumps standing forlornly near the crest line, 1,000 yards away, marked where the apple orchards had run along the southern outskirts of the little village. The enemy's positions lay astride this valley, thrust forward in a pronounced salient towards Ovillers.

The whole of the Division were engaged in this attack, the 145th Brigade being in the centre, with 143 on the right and 144 on the left. The two assaulting Battalions of the 145th Brigade were 5th Gloucesters on the left and 1st/4th Royal Berks on the right.

Each Battalion had a frontage of about 300 yards, the Berks objectives being the point of the salient (79) and its eastern face, running obliquely across the hill slope to wards the valley on the left (i.e., from 79-92).

The attack was launched at 17:00., heralded by a splendid barrage of three minutes' duration. More than 50 guns were firing on the Battalion's front alone, and their accuracy was perfect. The two Companies, A on the left, C on the right; moved up close behind the barrage, in which they showed complete confidence. On the right little difficulty was experienced, the trenches had been ruined, and many of their defenders buried. But the 8th Royal Warwicks, with whom the Berks men were to join hands in the trench running north from 92 were unable to reach their objectives, thus leaving an open flank.

A strong point was therefore started at once in the heap of debris and scattered earth, known as Point 91, and a platoon of the 5th Royal Sussex, came up with the darkness and helped to dig a communication trench back to the old front line. No counter-attack developed, though shell-fire from the usual 5.9's was heavy for 12 hours, and the position was held securely until relief.

On the left there was more opposition. The key to the enemy's defence was Point 79; the trench here, and a collection of dugouts around it, had been almost untouched by the Brigade's heavy guns. One of the platoons rushed up a communication trench leading from their assembly trench to Point 79, while two others kept pace along the open, one to the right and one to left. The enemy showed plenty of fight, standing on their parapets to throw bombs and to fire at the platoon advancing up the trench, in spite of cross-fire from Lewis guns, which did great execution amongst them. They delayed, but could not check the advance, which broke through them into the disputed point.

Lance-Corp1. W Rixon [3120], of Reading, deserves much of the credit for this success. He was in charge of the first bombing party in the communication trench. When they were held up, he sprang on the parapet, and from that point of vantage directed the bomb throwers, escaping unhurt himself by singular good fortune. This gallant action subsequently earned him the M.M. A colleague wrote of Sgt Rixon in the Berkshire Chronicle of 26/1/1917

Showing an absolute disregard to danger he stood right on top of the trench in full view of all kinds of fire and at a time when the Germans were shelling pretty heavily and were also busily engaged in sniping. There he stood firing rifle grenades and it was through him that we were able to clear a party of Germans who were holding us up on the left.

Unable to retire under cover, since the available trenches on either flank were already occupied, the Germans fled back across the open down the slopes of the hill, affording a target which was not neglected. Ten only remained to be taken alive, but their dead were thick on the captured ground. The 5th Gloucesters were already in their

objectives, and the left flank was secured. A section of the R.E.'s following closely up helped to put the defences of 79 in order.

There were now, owing to casualties, no officers with A Company, but there was no lack of direction or control, thanks to Sergeant White [Sgt Stanley White 200467?], an old Territorial of many years standing. He inspired the men with his energy, and kept them constantly at work, moving up and down throughout the night under a rain of shells. He was rewarded with the DCM.

The attack had been well planned and well executed, and happily cost very little life. Thirty one men were killed or missing, and 50 wounded (including 2nd Lieuts. Garside and Buck). The men were specially pleased and proud of their success, which had been gained at the expense of the 5th Grenadier Battalion of the Prussian Guard. The latter had recently been sent to Thiepval after a commendatory speech, from the Kaiser, which, as often, had failed to ensure good fortune.

A Coy were ordered to provide guards for the Brigade bomb stores, the water tanks near the bomb store and the water taps near the church as the Glosters had abandoned their posts. They appeared to have taken the Brigadiers mackintosh with them as a bearer from the Royal Berks was sent to retrieve it from them.

### **20th August 1916**

The Battalion were relieved by the 8th Warwicks of 74th Brigade, and returned to bivouac at Senlis Mill near Bouzincourt.

The 48th Division, every unit of which had been engaged at least thrice, was to enjoy a well-earned rest. They received gratifying tributes to the value of the work; achieved, The Army Commander wrote as follows:

'The Division has fought with only very short periods of rest since July 1st. Since then it has met and defeated many different units of the German Army, and has fully maintained the best traditions of British infantry. This record shows a high sense of discipline and honour in all ranks.

The Corps Commander (Lieut.-General Jacob) G.O.C., 2nd Corps, in forwarding his message to General Fanshawe, added his own tribute:

'Will you please express my gratitude and thanks to all the units under your command for their devotion to duty, and for the way they have fought and worked. . . All ranks of artillery, engineers and infantry have carried out their tasks with such spirit and cooperation that the results have exceeded expectations. You have all done nobly and I congratulate you and your officers on the way the Division has worked. Your record in the recent operations is first rate.' Resting

### **21st August 1916**

The letters from superior commanders were read out to the men in the morning and the commanding officers held a Brigade conference at 16:30 to review the attack by 144 Brigade.

Some of the Battalion seem to have been arrested by the military police for taking vegetables from a field. In mitigation the acting adjutant, Lt O M James, wrote to the Provost Marshall of 48 Division:-

The CO wishes to say that he considers the men were under the impression that the field had been bought as they seen men and NCOs of other battalions in the field and taking vegetables before they entered the field themselves. There also had been a field officer in the field.

### **22nd August 1916**

While they were allowed to rest all day they were kept on standby in case a sudden opportunity for exploitation occurred. In the evening 'The Curios' gave a concert.

Orders were received for the battalion to take over the line next day.

Two NCOs and 34 Other ranks from C Coy were detailed to take over from a similar party of the 1st/4th OBLI the task of detonating bombs at the divisional dump. Another group of one NCO and 30 ORs was sent to the RE dump at Bouzincourt to act as loaders.

### **23rd August 1916**

Another draft of 49 men arrived and at 09:30 they moved to gunpits at the USNA Redoubt.

A return was made of 14 men from the battalion who had experience of the printing trade. It would seem that they were later transferred from the 1st/4th.

The two parties on bomb disposal were relieved by men from 144 Bde. However only one returned to C Coy and

Major Battcock was asked to find out where they were

#### **24th August 1916**

The new draft from the provisional battalion was divided 50% to D Coy and 25% to each of B and C Coys.

Sgt Banks of A Coy was told to bring a digging party to Battalion HQ to dig trenches for the OBLI. B and D Coys had been asked to supply an officer and 75 men for the purpose; but owing to incessant shelling not much work could be done.

Military Medals were awarded to the following men

Corporal Rice

Corporal Cooke

Lance Corporal Russell

Private Mitchell

Private Smith

#### **25th August 1916**

It was planned to move the battalion to Ribble Street to relieve the 5th Glosters. D Coy left at 07:00, C at 07:10, B Coy at 07:20 and A Coy at 07:30. Officers mess boxes were taken by mess cart at 07:30. The Brigade dump was placed at Ovillers with an advance dump which was to be guarded by A Coy to serve both the R Berks and the Glosters. The move was completed at 07:55

C Coy provided a party of one NCO and 30 ORs for sanitary work at Crucifix corner and an NCO and 12 ORs for traffic control duty.

A and C Coys sent a party of 62 men with an officer to the bomb dump at Ovillers to bring up trench mortars.

In the relief of the Glosters in support at Ribble Street they incurred two men killed and three wounded.

#### **26th August 1916**

They moved up from support to front line relieving the 4th Oxforths with B and D in the front line holding very narrow sectors, A in support and D in reserve with HQ. There was very little to do other than clear up the trenches although the enemy kept up a steady artillery bombardment all day with 5.9s and 8s.

Some German documents were found on a shelf at the new HQ dugout and sent up to Brigade HQ

Working parties were provided by B and D Coys for night work.

Fighting strength was reported as 12 officers and 520 ORs

5 electric torches were received for searching dugouts.

50 Euphanmite grenades were issued to B Coy to hurl at the Hun under the supervision of Sgt Evans.

#### **27th August 1916**

The weather broke and instead of the sunshine they had to endure heavy rain all morning which made the trenches very uncomfortable. The day was spent in preparing for an attack that evening.

It was noted that the enemy dug every night on trenches 31, 79 and 91. It was arranged therefore that at 01:00 on the 28th a 5 minute field gun barrage would be aimed there. Men on working parties and in posts nearby were ordered to lie down at the bottom of their trenches. Patrols were to be delayed until a window between 01:05 and 02:00 occurred.

Privates D Phillips and Gutteridge were selected to attend a Lewis gun course. They left at 13:45 from the church at Bouzincourt by bus to Acheux Station. They were given an advance in pay and 2 days rations.

#### **28th August 1916**

After the attack 74th Brigade took over from 145th Brigade with two battalions taking over the Berkshires sector.

They moved back to Bouzincourt into bivouacs with a strength of 728.

Military Crosses were awarded to Capt J N Aldworth, 2/Lt W O Down and 46 CSM AG Rider with a DCM going to 2594 Pte C J Sadler.

## **Resting at Bus**

**29th August to 6th September 1916**

The Battalion now moved back to Bus leaving Bouzincourt at 07:15 on the 29th and arriving 10:00. Thankfully all their packs were carried by lorry and only two men fell out of the march. Bus was a shady village with its white chateau so long used as Divisional Headquarters in the old days. Not much could be done on arrival as it was pelting with rain for all of the 30th but on the 31st and 1st they were able to get in some practise with bombs and bayonets. 50 men were sent off to Gezaincourt to work on the railway there with another 30 following on the 1st.

Here, on the 2nd, General Fanshawe inspected the Battalion, addressed them on their late exploits, and presented Military Medals to Privates S. Smith [144] and T. Russell [2629]. He spoke of the importance of practising open fighting, which he said, might be the next task of the Battalion, a prophecy which, as we shall see, was fulfilled when they fought at Ronssoy in the German retreat next April. He added that the responsibility of officers and N.C.O.'s would be even greater than that in the late fighting where all realised by experience how much depended upon them.

The remainder of their time at Bus was taken up with range practice for the recent drafts, a church service on the 3rd and generally crouching in their bivouacs to escape the rain.

## **Trenches at Auchonvillers**

**6th to 10th September 1916**

On the 6th they moved to Mailly-Mallet to support the Oxfords who were holding the line. The billets here were described as 'good - with cellar accommodation - standing room only - for all' The village itself had been pretty well evacuated on account of the sustained shelling which continued night and day. 300 of the battalion were able to get a bath in the afternoon of the 6th. They were joined by the 30 members of the working party from Gezaincourt on the 6th with the remaining 50 under 2/Lt Gregory returning on the 7th.

On the 8th a short spell of 48 hours in the trenches followed in front of Auchonvillers, facing the coveted spur of Beaumont-Hamel, which was to fall in November. Here they sustained their only casualties during the month, one killed and one wounded, a happy contrast to August, when 286 men were put out of action. They were defending a front of only 600 yards with A and C manning the front from Broadway to the junction of Hunter and Marlborough trenches and D taking the cover to Beaumont Road. B were in cellars at Auchonvillers with their Lewis gun team in 86 trench and C providing one platoon to support each of A and C with the rest in 88 trench.

On the 9th the CO of the 12th Sussex came up to make arrangements for them to take over and 13 balloons crossed the line from the German side dropping pieces of paper.

Cruttwell writes:

During this tour the Huns loosed a number of small balloons, which drifted behind our lines, scattering leaflets. These effusions, written in French for the benefit of the civil population, commented with brazen and comic impudence on the action of French aviators in bombing innocent German towns. The German military authorities, they amusingly remarked, believing that the French were incapable of such barbarity, thought that the airmen must have mistaken their objectives. But, no! The origin of these crimes is now known. They were expressly ordered by M. Poincare, 'the slave of England.' (This new title for the President is printed in thick black type.) They are part of a devilish plan, conceived by England to revive the dying hatred of France against Germany, by forcing the latter Power to reprisals on French civilians, reprisals which she would be most reluctant to take. This illuminating specimen of German psychology deserves, I think, to be recorded.

The relief by the 12th Sussex occurred on the morning of the 10th and they moved back to the transport lines for dinner and then marched to huts in the Bois de Warnimont.

Awards were published for Sergt S White (DCM) and Lance Corporals E L Davies and W Rixon (MM)

A draft of 42 including 26 new men arrived on the 10th.

## **Beauval**

**11th to 18th September 1916**

On the 11th the baths at Bus were put at the disposal of the battalion and each company was allotted 40 spaces per

hour between 08:00 and 12:30. At 14:40 they set off for Beauval via Marieux and Terra Mesnil. The roads were in good order and the diarist described it as 'one of the best marches we had done since we were in the country' They arrived at 18:00 to a warm reception from the locals.

The 12th was spent in the usual round of practises and a draft of 25 men including 19 new men arrived.

On the 13th Private Depper was executed at 06:10 (see below)

Twelve officers from the 5th Norfolks, the 3/4th Northants and the 10th Middlesex joined on the 15th and 15th.

## **Execution**

**13th September 1916**

Just before an attack August 14th, Private Charles Depper [5715] left his rifle and equipment in the reserve trench where he was serving and made his way to Amiens where he was arrested the next day. He told the Military Police that he was on his way to catch a boat for England as he was tired of serving in the trenches. On the 22nd August an escort was sent out from the battalion to get him back from APM Amiens. They were allowed to ride up in the sanitary lorry leaving at 08:30

He was back with the battalion on the 26th but nothing could be done until the papers from the APM Amiens were received giving details of the arrest.

Depper was brought before a court martial. He was found guilty of desertion and sentenced to be shot and the sentence was carried out at the village of Beauval near Doullens where the Battalion was resting. The execution party was under the command of Lt Hampshire who was the officer of the day and the execution was witnessed by 40 men of the Battalion. It was a wet 13th September and 6.10 am when the execution took place. Just after noon the Commanding Officer called the battalion together and announced the execution although details had leaked out beforehand.

## **Candas**

**18th to 29th September 1916**

The remainder of the month was spent at Candas, a new village, whose inhabitants, with a curious naiveness, imagined that the blue hearts, which the Battalion wore as distinguishing badges, were the hallmark of a dangerous brand of Storm-troops, and signified their desire to have the hearts of their enemies. So strong was this conviction among them that they locked their houses and refused us an entry until matters were explained. The barns allotted to the men were found half full of the produce of the harvest.

The battalion left Beauval at 10:25 but it was hard marching as the rains had made the roads very muddy. When they arrived another 5 officers joined them on attachment with a sixth on the 19th. Another draft of 65 men arrived on the 24th but with only two or three exceptions none had more than three months service or previous military training. Further drafts of 10 joined on the 28th and 29th

Any man who had not been inoculated in the previous six months received their jab between the 20th and 21st except for the QM Stores and Transport section who were done a week later. Capt Bayley Butler organised baths for the men and increased the rate to 25 every half hour.

Military medals were awarded to Sgt Shorter, LCpl Sellwood, LCpl Ross and Pte Wernham on the 20th. and DCMs to Sgt A T Wright and Sgt T Rogers on the 28th.

They had two ranges at their disposal, one being used by the Lewis gunners, also an area set aside for bomb throwing practice.

At Candas there was a camp for German POWs and on the 27th Capt Holcroft was sent off to take temporary command of it.

Cruttwell wrote:

The usual work was carried on; new drafts arrived steadily, men of good quality, but of little experience, though always with a leaven of old 1st/4th men returning after wounds and sickness. A number of new officers, 17 in all, also joined the Battalion from a variety of regiments, 5th Norfolks, 4th Northants, 4th Royal Sussex and 10th Middlesex, no supplies from our own Reserve Battalion being at the moment available.

Further awards also of decorations won during July and August kept coming through with gratifying regularity. Finally the C.O was awarded the D.S.O. to the delight of all ranks, who trusted him implicitly, knew how minutely he studied their comfort, and how much of their success was due to his untiring thoroughness in every detail of organisation.