

## Section 261

# Interludes III and IV

### The 1st Battalion May to November 1917

*The 1st Battalion was still organised in two companies throughout May and June 1917 when it was in reserve trenches at Arleux and Oppy. From June to the 7th September the battalion held the right of the Brigade front in the Cambrin Sector alternating with the Kings Royal Rifle Corps. They missed out completely on the mud and slaughter of the 3rd Battle of Ypres which began in June and continued to November 4th with the capture of Passchendaele. Continued from section 251*

#### St Aubin

**29th to 31st May 1917**

The battalion were relieved by the 1st Kings at 10:00 on the 29th and moved off to billets at St Aubin with the last platoon arriving at 03:00 on the 30th.

They were able to get baths at Ecurie on the 30th and held swimming races in the Scarpe in the evening.

The battalion were still very much understrength and organised in two companies only: no 1 Coy under Capt Pugh and no2 under Capt Green. Both were running at between 110 and 140 men for the next few weeks, barely enough to satisfy the War Office's minimum requirements for a n operational unit. Battalion HQ was kept at a minimum at around 100 men including 20 drummers who were fully employed on carrying duties.

#### Arleux

**1st to 8th June 1917**

After the church parade on the 30th they moved back into support relieving the 23rd Royal Fusiliers. The heavy rain of the previous day had caused many of the trenches to become badly flooded.

The next day (1st) 100 men from no1 coy were set to work to dig sumps to drain Z trench under the supervision of the East Anglian coy of the RE. The remainder of the battalion were improving 'Kent Road' trench which was being badly shelled resulting in three men being injured and one killed (16299 Pte Eaton Walters of Penrhiwhy).

The work continued over the next two days but the clay soil and low lying position raised considerable difficulties in getting the water to drain away leaving parts of

the trenches quite impassible. However the weather was now warm and fine.

On the 4th battalion HQ was shelled heavily with 5.9" shells coming over at 60 second intervals between 13:00 and 15:00.

At 23:00 they began moving into front line trenches to relieve the 1st KRRC with no1 coy on the right and no2 coy on the left. A heavy ground mist helped to conceal movement and the relief was carried out with incurring any casualties.

During their spell in the front line they were under heavy artillery fire which killed one man (6441 Pte Richard J King of London) on the 6th and 16 other being wounded. A thunderstorm on the 6th brought back all the flooding.

At 01:30 on the 8th the Germans began lobbing gas shells in the British lines from Oppy Wood. At 22:30 the 22nd Royal Fusiliers arrived as relief and the 1st Bn were able to get clear by 00:30 next morning reportedly losing one man killed although none show on the records as having died that day.

#### Roclincourt

**9th to 11th June 1917**

At Roclincourt they were in reserve and used to carry supplies to the front line and help digging at night.

They were relieved again by 1st KRRC in the evening of the 11th and moved back to St Aubin. No 1 coy took the opportunity to have a bath at Ecurie on the way.

#### St Aubin

**12th to 13th June 1917**

At St Aubin no2 Coy got their bath in the Scarpe and everyone got some entertainment at the Divisional Horse Show at Ecurie where the battalion won first prize in the heavy draft horse competition.

After training on the morning of the 13th they moved to Leeds Camp, displacing the 14th Royal Warwicks.

#### Leeds Camp

**13th to 19th June 1917**

On arrival at Leeds Camp 250 men were detailed to work on Tired Trench under the direction of 491 Coy

RE. They had similar duties for most of the next few nights.

During the day time the men were able to rest although they had some training on the afternoon of the 15th.

On the 19th news came that their time in the Arras area was ending. 2nd Division was transferred from XIII Corps to XI corps. Busses arrived to take the several brigades to Bethune.

## Noyelles

**20th to 27th June 1917**

Their new billets were to be at Noyelles. They left Leeds Camp at 10:00 on the 19th arriving at huts at Acq at 13:20. 99th Brigade's turn to move came on the 20th, the first stage was a march to Ecoivres starting at 08:45 and then boarding buses at 10:30 to take them via Canblain L'Abbe, Hersin and Noeux les Mines to Bethune where they took over billets from the 17th Middlesex at the orphanage.

The 1st Battalion went into Brigade reserve at Noyelles where they took over huts from the 2/5th Manchesters. The other three battalions taking over the front and support lines.

Mornings were generally taken up by training but afternoons were for sports. On the 23rd the officers beat the men at cricket by 10 runs and on the 25th the battalion beat the 24th Royal Fusiliers by 75 runs. They finished the cricket by beating the 483rd Coy RE on the 26th. There were sports competitions on the 24th and boxing in the evening of the 26th.

As this was a new area for them company and platoon representatives went off to visit the 1st KRRC on the 26th to see what the ground looked like. At 17:30 on the 27th the relief began.

The 2nd Division History sets the scene:-

A continuous chain of mine-craters exists, however, along almost the whole length of the battalion front; these craters are deep and impossible to cross except in one or two places. ...The only part not thus protected is the left, where a small gap exists in one place. The front line is held by three companies, and consists entirely of posts. Forward of the reserve trench communication is maintained by a complicated system of tunnels, lit by electric light, which have their exits in the posts themselves. Into these tunnels the major portion of the garrison is withdrawn by day, only gas sentries being left to guard the post against surprise. Once in the tunnel one is completely lost, and should anything happen to any of these posts, and Germans succeed in gaining an entrance, some most unpleasant and intricate underground fighting would ensue." [TX00601A]

"and he reports that the last fortnight has been extremely quiet. In the previous twenty-four hours only 47 shells had fallen in the whole Divisional area, and we return about 1,000 daily! What a different tale from

December 1914 to May 1915 ! " [TX00601B]

Each infantry brigade was ordered to prepare for a raid with the object of destroying mine-shafts, machine-gun emplacements, and causing casualties amongst the enemy's troops; prisoners were to be taken for identification purposes; active patrolling was to take place "so that every part of No Man's Land is systematically visited "; a Divisional system of observation and sniping was organized, and the vigorous use of medium and heavy and Stokes mortars ordered.

The 2nd Division had taken over the line quietly, but its arrival had evidently been noted by the enemy, for it was not long before he also began more active patrol work and a series of raids along the Divisional front. [TX00601C]

## Cambrin

**27th June to 3rd July 1917**

The line at Cambrin was held by a series of posts connected by tunnels so they were able to take over from the 1st KRRC without loss.

On the 28th a few gas shells fell early in the morning and some mortars in the evening but otherwise it was fairly quiet.

The news arrived on the 29th that LCpl Welch had been awarded the VC for his actions on the 29th April at Arleux.

Two Alsatian deserters crossed over to the British lines on the 29th

There was some desultory shelling and mortar activity and the British artillery responded on the 1st July.

On the 3rd July 2nd Lt Matthias Groves Roberts of Briton Ferry was killed as the battalion was being relieved by the 1st KRRC and moving to support at Annequin..

## Annequin

**3rd to 9th July 1917**

Annequin was the reserve area behind Cambrin. No1 Coy were at the Reserve Trench and No2 at Factory dugouts.

2Lt Roberts was buried on the 4th at Sailly La Bourse in the afternoon.

During the week they were in reserve they had to find work parties to work on the trenches and there were also opportunities to get a bath.

On the whole it was warm and quiet but they were subjected to a 10 minute shelling attack on the 6th.

## Cambrin

**10th to 15th July 1917**

At 17:30 on the 9th they began moving back to the front line trenches at Cambrin, relieving the 1st KRRC

The weather continued warm and there was comparatively little enemy activity. Trench mortars and gas shells came over on the 12th and some machine gunning on the 13th. Only one man (34066 Pte Albert Harvey of Camberwell) was killed on the 10th.

### **Annequin**

**15th to 21st July 1917**

They exchanged positions again on the 15th with the 1st KRRC and returned to Annequin.

On the 17th Lt Col Hunt moved over to take command of 99th Brigade. Several new 2nd Lieutenants joined during this period. There had been a steady trickle of new officers over the previous few weeks and the battalion was creeping back towards full strength.

This time at Annequin they were able to get in some training which included time on the firing range at Quesnoy. On the 19th they held a firing competition.

On the 21st a film cameraman arrived to take pictures of the men. and that evening they moved back to the trenches again.

### **Cambrin**

**21st to 27th July 1917**

This was another fairly quiet turn of duty in the trenches. It was enlivened by a diversion on the 23rd for a raid which was taking place on the battalion's right. At 21:10 they released smoke and put down a grenade barrage on the German front line. The Germans retaliated with heavy artillery, trench mortar and Machinegun fire and three men were injured. Further injuries were sustained on the 26th when a German barrage was launched to retaliate for a raid on the left.

### **Annequin**

**27th July to 2nd August 1917**

The relief by the 1st KRRC went smoothly and in very hot weather the battalion retired to support trenches at Annequin.

The next few days were spent mainly resting with a few men detailed for working parties to support the 99th Trench Mortar Battalion

The hot and sunny weather turned to dull and showery, on the whole it was fairly quiet but on the 31st the German artillery focussed on Annequin Fosse and brought the chimney stack to the ground.

At the end of July the strength of the battalion was reported as 39 officers and 658 other ranks but with a ration strength of only 25 officers and 490 other ranks.

### **Cambrin**

**2nd to 8th August 1917**

Again they swapped positions with the 1st KRRC on the 2nd but found that the recent rain had damaged the trenches at Cambrin, necessitating a lot of repair work. An enemy pineapple came over on the 3rd wounding one man and killing Pte Isaac English (37668) of Bristol

The next day the 8th Sherwood Foresters on their right mounted a raid on the Germans and the battalion was asked to support them by rifle grenade fire on craters opposite the Germans. They fired 269 grenades all told suffering one wounded and two killed :- Pte William Henry Roadnight (33402) of Maidenhead and Albert George Wright (27538) of Lechlade.

On the 5th 2Lt O'Dell was sent out to reconnoitre the enemy line.

The 6th was marked with a barrage of 77mm shrapnel shells fired near to battalion HQ - they all either failed to explode or exploded without doing any damage. The only casualty was Cpl Rivers who was in fact hit by a spent MG bullet and slightly injured.

On the 7th the 139th Brigade on their right came under gas attack but the Berks were unaffected.

### **Annequin**

**8th to 14th August 1917**

This time when they swapped with the 1st KRRC they moved back into reserve on the 8th and had billets for a change.

The 9th saw them trying out their new 'Green Tiger' helmet covers with a working party of 20 ORs employed on clearing out water courses near Fountains Keep.

On the 10th C and D Coys were put to building new communication trenches in the Cambrin sector while A and B got in some training which mainly consisted of marching and manoeuvring while wearing box respirators. The next morning they swapped roles, but were able to enjoy swimming sports in the La Basse canal in the afternoon.

Training continued on the 12th with musketry on the ranges at Le Quesnoy in competition for the 2nd Division trophy. Col Hunt went off on leave with Major C Nugent left in command.

### **Cambrin**

**14th to 20th August 1917**

Trench warfare resumed on the 14th as they relieved the 1st KRRC and the 23rd Royal Fusiliers took over the billets.

Lt RCS Baker with 16153 Pte George Barnes of Shrivenham crossed the Hogs Back craters on a valuable

and daring daylight reconnaissance. At 23:30 on the 15th a special company from the Royal Engineers released 10 tons of lethal gas on the Germans at Fosse 8, getting a very feeble response.

Lt Baker with Private Barnes carried out another daring daylight patrol on the 16th, this time 37618 [?] Pte Harris was with them. They entered the German lines at Mad Point and succeeded in bring back much valuable information. Casualties were incurred later that day when a pineapple fell on L6 post wounding two men and killing 37078 Pte Harold Dodd of Barrow.

Another daylight reconnaissance was launched on the 17th led by Lieut Baker. He had with him 2Lt A W Dolby, 7860 Cpl A Hainge, Pte Collins and Pte Barnes. They worked their way along about 200 yards of German trenches and investigated a number of craters.

More casualties on the 18th as a rifle grenade fell on post L13 killing 7639 Sgt Joseph Ward of Oxford outright and mortally wounding 15318 Pte Robert Stevenson of Oldbury. Three others were wounded.

The next day about 18:00 Lt Robert Cunyngham Baker was observing from post L19 when he was killed by a sniper.

At 16:30 on the 20th the battalion was relieved by the 1st KRRC and moved into support trenches at Annequin.

## **Annequin**

**20th to 26th August 1917**

At Annequin one of the first priorities was to bury Lt Baker at Beuvry. Almost all the officers of the battalion and 99 Bde HQ were in attendance.

The men were able to get a bath over the next two days. The weather was very variable with some fine days, heavy thunderstorms on the 23rd and very windy on the 24th.

The 24th was marked by a stray shell falling on the reserve trench killing 11727 Pte Charles Wood of Reading. The Co and officers from the 5th Sherwood Foresters arrived for a briefing as they were due to take over when 139 Bde relieved 99 Bde. The move began around 14:30 on the 26th when they moved to billets in Beuvry and Col Hunt returned from leave to resume command.

## **Beuvry**

**26th August to 7th September 1917**

By the time Col Hunt returned the battalion was pretty well back to full strength and his first task was to reorganise back to the traditional four company set up. In some respects the shortage of men had been an advantage as the battalion had been called upon to provide work parties less frequently than usual.

The men were inoculated on the 28th and 29th and they were lectured to by Lt McGowan on the 28th on the German Army and by the CO on the History of the Regiment on the 29th. Officers and NCOs had a lecture on musketry by 2Lt Denham on the 31st.

There were opportunities for training and musketry practice but the inoculations were making many of the men feel sick so training was somewhat limited. They were taken on a route march on the 31st marching from Beuvry to Le Quesnoy, Gorre, Le Hamel, Les Choaux to Bethune where they halted for dinner at the Champs de Mars. They marched straight back to Beuvry arriving at 14:00.

There was a concert at the cinema at Beuvry on the 30th with the men being entertained by the 2nd Division band.

By the end of August the Battalion had risen to an effective strength of 38 officers and 694 other ranks.

The weather remained variable in the early days of September. An inter-platoon football competition was organised and won by a team of drummers and stretcher bearers. Other competitions were held with 9 platoon winning the musketry event and 11 platoon the Lewis gun event.

The men were subjected to a second round of inoculation on the 3rd and suffered the consequences over the next few days.

On the 7th 99th Bde took over the front from 6th Bde and it was back to the front line trenches at Givenchy.

## **Givenchy**

**7th to 13th September 1917**

Although the four company organisation had been reintroduced each company was made up of only two platoons. When they took over the front line trenches at Givenchy from the 2nd S Staffs the companies were deployed as follows:-

- A Coy under Capt M P Pugh M/C in support in Gunners Siding.
- B Coy under Capt Steed on the right of the front.
- C Coy under Capt E P Jackson in the centre
- D Coy under Capt P Mousley on the left.

Part of their task involved initiation training for no 1 Coy of the 13th Battalion Portugese Infantry. This company's three platoons being attached to B C and D Coys. The next day (8th) the Portugese no 3 Coy arrived to swap with their no 1 Coy and confusion reigned. There were problems over language and over rations. The diarist remarked that there were no casualties during the exchange, but reading between the lines perhaps it was sigh of relief that the two sets of allied troops were not fighting each other. On the 9th

Brig Gen Kellet turned up with Colonel Felisberto Alves Pedroso the commander of the 6th Portuguese infantry brigade to see how his men were doing and later in the day Portuguese officers arrived to be shown around by the officers of the three line Companies. They left the morning of the 10th and later that day at 23:00 another Portuguese Brigade (the 1st) mounted a swift raid on the Germans without loss. On the 11th the Portuguese men were replaced with 14 officers and 300 ORs from the 2nd Bn Portuguese Infantry. More Portuguese came on the 12th from 10th Bn but they were only on reconnaissance and left on the 13th.

During the 8th a German 5.9" shell buried a British heavy trench mortar and although the men were always glad of the support of the heavies, they were relieved that they were not able to fire on the Germans as it was always the start of severe retaliation which usually caused more suffering to the infantry than to the artillery.

On the 9th the Royal Engineers started a gas attack at 02:30 firing 400 gas shells at the Germans from the Berks' lines. They repeated the exercise at 01:30 on the 13th - in neither case was there much reaction from the Germans.

Casualties were incurred on the 10th when a German 'pineapple' fell into a grenade dump. The explosion killed 33032 Lance Corporal Ernest Abrock of Coventry and 39241 Lance Corporal Amos Humphries.

The 11th was marked by a very heavy German bombardment between 10:00 and 11:00 which practically obliterated about 30 yards of Scottish Trench, luckily without causing any casualties. Starting at 12:30 the British artillery put up a spirited response with both heavy and medium trench mortars, 18 pounder and 4.5" howitzers with MG cover from 6th Bde MG Coy. Eleven hours later at 23:00 41st Bde RFA fired on the same targets.

Relief came on the evening of the 13th and after a very eventful few days the battalion were able to move to billets at Gorre Chateau leaving the line in the hands of 1st KRRC.

## **Gorre Chateau**

**13th to 18th September 1917**

Their spell at Gorre Chateau was a pleasant relief with fine warm weather and good training facilities. There was a bayonet fighting course, a bombing ground, a 30 yard rifle and revolver range and a good parade ground. Working parties were engaged on unloading barges on the canal and 'sanitary duties'

Training continued between fatigues and parades, with a respite for a spirited football match on the 16th. There were lectures for the officers and a mess dinner for the Brigadier on the 17th.

During the night of the 16th/17th a number of German 5.9" shells, intended for nearby gun emplacements, fell near the Chateau, putting everyone on alarm posts. The Chaplain at the Gorre YMCA who remained nameless, was in bed at the time. He quickly donned his clothes and reached for his helmet under the bed. When he arrived at his alarm post it was found his 'helmet' had handles.

The final bout of training was somewhat unpleasant. They all had to go through gas training with both lachrymatory and chlorine gas under the supervision of the 2nd Division gas officer. That afternoon they moved to Beuvry ready to return to the line.

## **Beuvry**

**18th to 20th September 1917**

They were in billets at Beuvry and were briefed by officers from the 5th Sherwood Foresters on the 18th.

The next day they were able to get a bath and then had what proved a very interesting lecture on the work of the RFC.

On the 20th after dinner at 12:00 they moved off via Saily la Bourse and Noyelles back to the trenches at Cambrin.

## **Cambrin**

**20th to 26th September 1917**

The battalion took over the trenches from the 5th Sherwood Foresters with A, C and D Coys in the front line and B in support. However as soon as they had taken over from the Foresters they reverted to the 2 coy system, combining A&B on the right under Capt M P Pugh and C&D on the left under Capt E P Jackson.

The weather remained fine with a fair amount of enemy trench mortar activity in the evenings.

On the 23rd Capt Steed took over from Capt Pugh and Capt Munday from Capt Jackson in charge of the company pairs.

The Germans attempted a raid at Canadian Orchard on the 24th supported by a vigorous artillery and trench mortar barrage but it was easily repulsed.

2Lt Manning was slightly wounded by a sniper at 07:00 on the 24th.

Between 05:00 and 06:00 on the 26th the Germans fired a large number of large calibre gas shells on the artillery positions but the front line troops were unaffected.

They were relieved by 1/KRRC that evening and retired to support trenches at Annequin and Vermelles.

## Annequin

**26th September to 2nd October 1917**

When they got back to Annequin they found that on the previous night the enemy had pumped poison gas down the mine shaft at Fosse 8. The gas had then spread throughout the complex system of tunnels around Bethune trapping a number of British troops and French civilian miners. The 170th RE Tunnelling Coy organised a rescue party with 1st Royal Berks keeping guard. The MO Capt D S Cassidy went with the rescuers and the Berks signallers maintained communications. 8187 Pte S H Stamp of East Twickenham went down with Capt Cassidy as his orderly and was awarded a DCM for his efforts. His citation read:-

When a party of men were imprisoned in a mine he went down with a medical officer at great risk from gas, in an attempt to rescue them. He remained at duty throughout the night, though seriously affected by gas. He showed great courage and devotion to duty.  
[TX00387]

They were both suffering badly from the effects of gas when they returned on the 27th and had to be sent off for medical attention. By the 28th the men were still trapped and hope of rescuing them was abandoned. The body of one of the RE rescuers was retrieved on the 30th.

During their time at Annequin they were subjected to a fair amount of artillery attack including gas shells but suffered no casualties from this. At midnight on the 1st/2nd October the gas attack was particularly heavy with a new gas Diphenyl Chloramine suspected. This caused a lot of sneezing.

At the end of the month the effective strength was 38 officers and 708 other ranks. The replenishments had been mainly men returning from hospitals and casualty stations.

For the last two days Battalion HQ had moved over to the support trenches at Cambrin with a rear HQ at Beuvry. On the 2nd they relieved the 1st KRRC in the front line.

## Cambrin

**2nd to 5th October 1917**

At 16:00 on the 2nd the battalion began their final relief of the 1st KRRC at Cambrin. After an uneventful day with the Germans unusually quiet, they were informed on the 4th that the 2nd Division was being withdrawn to be replaced by 25th Division. Later that day officers from the 9th Loyal North Lancashire Regiment arrived for their reconnaissance and briefing..

At 23:30 on the 4th the British launched a huge gas attack against the Germans. Stokes Mortars were used to launch the gas shells from the Berks' front and on their left 1178 cylinders were released from the ground. In all

the Division discharged 112½ tons of gas with 46 Division next door joining in as well. It was one of the biggest gas attacks of the war. Although the attack went off without a hitch the gas experts did not believe it was very successful as the wind was too strong.

On the 5th October the battalion was withdrawn to Béthune with the 9th Loyal North Lancs taking over by 14:00.

## Bethune

**5th to 6th October 1917**

At Montmorency Barracks in Bethune a large reinforcement of 253 men arrived made up of 100 men from the Ox and Bucks and other men drafted in from the ASC and some harbour units. The batch seems to have been given Royal Berks' numbers in the range 38231 to 38484 with the Ox and Bucks men getting 38380 to 38479.

The next day was thoroughly miserable and wet. The 99th Brigade marched off from the barracks to billets in Auchel and Raimbert in the order: 1st KRRC; 99th MG Coy; 22nd Royal Fusiliers; 23rd Royal Fusiliers; 1st Royal Berks, 99th TM Battery, no 2 Coy Train. The new reinforcements marched as two separate coys.

## Auchel

**6th October to 5th November 1917**

When they arrived at Auchel they found the billets scattered and unsanitary. There was nowhere suitable for a battalion mess so they had to set up three smaller ones for A&D Coys, B&C Coys and HQ.

On the 7th the new reinforcements were inspected by the CO and allocated to their new companies. This required the full four company system to be reintroduced, each with a strength of around 200 men. This all called for a reorganisation of the billets to keep each company together.

The next few days were spent in training in order to assimilate the reinforcements into platoons and section. They went over to Raimbert rifle range on the 9th where the new recruits could try out their musketry. The range was also the site for the first stages of the Divisional Riflemans and Lewis Gunner competitions which was just for 99th Brigade. In both competitions the 1st KRRC came first with the 1st Royal Berks coming second. The Berks got their revenge winning the football competition, beating the 23rd Royal Fusiliers 3-2. They then went on to defeat the rest of 99th Bde 1-0 on the 21st.

There was quite an emphasis put on the rifle training as the new recruits seemed unable to combine rapid fire with actually hitting a target. By the end of their period at Auchel practically everyone could do both at around

13 rounds per minute and a substantial number meeting the pre-war standard of 15 rounds a minute. The training also focussed on attacking pill boxes and isolated strong points, which had proved to be such a fearsome obstacle in the past. The new tactics were so successful that thereafter the Germans rarely stopped to argue and abandoned their posts at the first sign of attack according to the GOC of the Division after the war.

The Divisional Commander held a conference at Auchel Cinema on the 11th for COs 2ICs and intelligence officers and reviewed their recent experiences. They were told to expect to move north back to Ypres in the near future. This message was reinforced on the 15th when the Army COC, Lt General Horne arrived for a Brigade inspection and march past.

The 18th was marked by a route march via Floringhem, Aumnerval, Amettes, Bellery, Ferfay, and Cauchy à la Tour. Only one man fell out as the condition of the men was generally good. However many men had spells off sick due to influenza.

There was a large scale exercise on the 25th involving the whole Brigade. They had begun rehearsing by company on the high ground north of Raimbert on the 22nd. Especially they were using the new tactics for taking strong points. While at Raimbert the men had been able to use the pithead baths. Over the next few days each company had to endure a gas test.

The remainder of their time at Auchel was spent in a mixture of training, recreation, concerts and lectures, including a demonstration of how to fire German machine guns by Capt G H Pocock.

At the end of October the battalion strength was reported as 39 officers and 930 other ranks with no casualties for the month.

## **On the Move**

### **5th to 9th November 1917**

The move north to the Ypres area began on the 5th, marching as a brigade to Robecq. When they arrived at 13:00 after a fairly easy march they found their new billets were poor and scattered over a mile of road between Robecq and Busnes.

It was similar next day. They led the Brigade and marched to Neuf Berquin - again the billets were very scattered along the road between Neuf Berquin and Estaires. By now however it was beginning to rain and the next day as they marched from Neuf Berquin to Eecke they were faced with poor roads churned up to mud and more scattered billets.

They finally arrived at Herzelee at 13:30 on the 8th. The weather had improved somewhat but the roads were still in a dreadful condition. Again the billets were very

scattered.

## **Herzelee**

### **8th to 24th November 1917**

The next day, the 9th, it was very wet and they rearranged the billets to make them a little less bad. Training was very difficult over the next few days as the weather did not start to improve until the 15th.

They were able to bath at Wormhoute on the 13th and 20th and, as the weather was better, have a cross country race of 3¼ miles on the 15th with each platoon entering a team of 6.

On the 19th they tried out some new parachute SOS signal grenades which worked successfully in daylight.

On the 21st volunteers were called for as potential transfers to the Tank Corps. There was a very large response from both officers and men.

At 23:00 on the 22nd the news finally arrived as to their real destination - not Ypres but Cambrai. - An advance billeting party of an officer with 5 NCOs left for Cambrai at 04:45 on the 23rd and as the Divisional General had gone on leave the commanders all moved up a step. Brig Kellet moved up to command the 2nd Division, Col Hunt to Command 99th Bde and Major Nugent to command the battalion.

At 19:00 on the 23rd D Coy marched off to Esquelbecq station followed at intervals by the other companies. Their train departed at 04:00 on the 24th.

## **Sources**

Petre pp 36-7

Soldiers Died in the Great War

2nd Division History

Berkshire Chronicle

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

*Continued in section 291*