

## Section 264

# Interlude III - 2nd/4th Battalion

**April - June 1917**

*After a winter spent mainly in the back lines the 2nd/4th were beginning to feel left out. Much of this period is covered by surviving battalion orders which give considerable insight into how marches and reliefs were organised. Continued from section 244*

### 1st April 1917

During the 1st April, when working at the Vermand defences, five men were killed and fifteen wounded by shell fire. On that day orders were received for an attack next day on the line Bihécourt-Ponne Copse.

## Bihécourt-Ponne Copse

### 2nd April 1917

In this attack A Company of the 2/5th Gloucestershire, acting under the 2/4th Royal Berkshire, was on the right, with Bihécourt as its objective. On its left were the Royal Berkshire with the 2/1st Buckinghamshire on their left.

The bombardment began at 05:00 on the 2nd April, and by 05.45 the whole of the objective had been carried. The enemy made some opposition with rifles and machine guns, but it was not very determined. His position was defended only by one-man posts thirty yards apart, and was at once consolidated on a line just east of the Bihécourt-Vendelles Road. The Gloucestershire and Royal Berkshire took two machine guns, twelve unwounded, and ten wounded prisoners.

Patrols pushed out to the château at Vadencourt, N.E. of Bihécourt, reported that it was unoccupied, but the enemy was still in Maissenay just south of it. In this affair the Royal Berkshire lost eleven other ranks wounded, of whom three died of their wounds.

That night the battalion was relieved by the 2/5th Gloucestershire and next day received the congratulations of the Brigadier on its success.

### 3rd - 5th April 1917

For the next day or two it was very busy in the neighbourhood repairing the damage done by the enemy as he retreated in order to hinder the British advance.

### 6th April 1917

At 20:00. on the 6th an attack was made by the 2/5th Gloucestershire, and two platoons of D Company were sent up to take their place as they advanced. The other two platoons were lent to them for carrying. The Gloucestershire was supported in the attack by C Coy of the 2/4th Royal Berkshire under Captain Whitaker, acting under orders of the O.C. 2/5th Gloucestershire Regiment.

The attack was held up by uncut wire, and the Gloucestershire returned to the starting point, now held by the two platoons of D. The 2/4th Royal Berkshire was ordered to relieve them before dawn. C had one killed and one wounded.

### 7th April 1917

This relief began at 02.30 on the 7th on the line east of Vadencourt Château. C (Capt. Whitaker) took over the posts south of the Vernand-Bellenglise Road from the 13th Platoon of D, whilst D (Capt. Reeves) occupied those north of the road. A (Capt. Willink) was in support at Bihécourt, and B (Capt. Allen) in reserve in the railway cutting.

After a quiet day, two patrols went out at night to see if the trench which had been attacked unsuccessfully was still held by the enemy. One patrol of ten men of D, under Second-Lieutenant Wilmot, went out south of the Bihécourt-Bellenglise Road and found that the wire, though badly damaged, was still a serious obstacle in front of the enemy, who still occupied the trench. Second-Lieutenant Robinson, with ten men of C north of the road, found the wire uncut and the trench occupied like that on the right. There was a bright moon which made reconnaissance difficult.

### 8th April 1917

The artillery was busy trying to cut the wire during the 8th, but was unsuccessful, as was discovered by patrols in the ensuing night, which found matters in the same condition as the night before.

### 9th April 1917

At 02:00. on the 9th, Second-Lieutenant Robinson, with twenty men of C, went out again to try and enter the enemy's trench. They succeeded in entering it south of the road, and found it now unoccupied. One platoon of

C and two of A were sent forward to consolidate.

Second-Lieutenant Wilmot, with twenty men of D, acted similarly north of the road, and got into touch with the 2/1st Buckinghamshire. Yet another patrol of C, under Captain Preston, reconnoitred as far as the "tumulus," which they found unoccupied at 07.30.

By 10:00 they were forced to leave it, owing to the manoeuvres of about two hundred Germans endeavouring to surround it. Second-Lieutenant Robinson, with his patrol of C, found the Mareval Copse unoccupied, and one platoon was sent up to hold it.

The village of Pontru having been reconnoitred by Second-Lieutenant Brain and found empty, Sergeant Shephard endeavoured to obtain touch with the brigade on the right. Crossing the Omignon stream, he found Berthancourt unoccupied, but could not find any troops on the right south of the stream.

A Company moved up to the Vadencourt Château, and B to Bihécourt, whilst C and D were entering the enemy trenches east of these places.

At 20:00 Second-Lieutenant Mullins and one platoon of A established themselves in Pontru, whilst the rest of the company helped C and D in wiring the old German trenches, which now became the British main line.

### 10th April 1917

Early on the 10th Second-Lieutenant Carter and a patrol of C again found Berthancourt empty, but were still unable to gain touch with troops on the right. Another patrol, under Second-Lieutenant Mullins, occupied the "tumulus" at 06:00. Pontru was now in charge of two platoons of B, under Second-Lieutenant Worlock, who were busy filling in a crater east of Bihécourt.

That evening the battalion was relieved by the 19th Durham Light Infantry and marched back S.W., via Monchy Lagache, to Voyennes and Offoy on the Somme.

The details were given in Battalion order no 65:-

ORDER NO 65.

April 10th 1917.

1.The Battalion will be relieved in the line by 19th Bn, Durham Light Infantry on afternoon, 10th inst, and will march by Companies independently to TREFCON. Signallers and Lewis Gunners will march with their Coys.

2.ROUTE:- VERMAND – CAULAINCOURT – W.5.c – W.11.a – W.10.b.

3.GUIDES:- 1 Guide per platoon, 1 Adv HQ, 1 Medical Aid Post will report to 2/Lieut Stevens at BINECOURT Cross Roads at 2.45pm.

4.TRENCH STORES:- All Trench Stores, including Trench Shelters and SOS grenades will be handed over and receipts obtained in triplicate. Receipts will be sent in to Bn HQ, VERMAND on completion of relief. BSM will hand over Ammunition Dump at BIHECOURT.

5.PETROL TINS, Etc:- All Petrol tins and Rum Jars will

be brought out of the line and dumped outside Rear Bn HQ near Crater.

6.TOOLS:- All Tools will be dumped at BIHECOURT Cross Roads by 1.0pm.

7.MARCH DISCIPLINE:- OC Coys are reminded that when on the march, all men will be with their Companies. There must be no small parties marching independently.

8.Code for Completion of Relief:- "MORE SNOW".

ACKNOWLEDGE

BY ORDER

C R Allen

2/Lieut & A/Adjutant [TX00667]

Battalion order no 66 gives the final details:

ORDER NO 66.

Reference Maps.62.c. & 66.d. 1/40,000

April 11th 1917

1.The Battalion will march to VYENNES tomorrow, 12th inst.

2.STARTING POINT :- W9b.9.3.

3.TIME :- 9.15 am.

4.ROUTE :- TERTRY – MONCHY LAGACHE – LANCHY – UGNY L'EQUIPEE – DOUILLY – TOULLE – OFFOY – VOYENNES.

5.ORDER OF MARCH :- Signallers, Drums, Headqrs, C. D. A. B. Coys. A distance of 100 yards will be maintained between Coys. Transport will march 100 yards in rear of the Battalion. Cookers will be with Transport. Haversack Ration will be carried and Dinners served on arrival in Billets. Steel Helmets will not be worn but will be strapped to the packs. Halts will be made at 15 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour. A Halt will also be made at 1.30 – 2.0 pm. For consumption of Haversack ration.

6.BAGGAGE :- Officers Valises and Mess Boxes will be stacked outside Bn HQ at 8.0 am. 1 NCO per Coy will form Rear Party to hand over Billets to incoming Battn, and will obtain a certificate that Billets were handed over in a clean condition. This party will rejoin Battn at earliest opportunity.

7.WATER :- for cookers will be drawn before 6.0 am. from Water Carts.

8.Battalion HQ will close at TREFCON at 9.0 am. after which hour reports will be made to head of column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00668]

## Divisional Reserve at Beauvois

### 11th-22nd April

After being at Offoy from the 11th till the 17th April, it went into Divisional reserve at Beauvois on the 18th as the following battalion order:-

ORDER NO 67.

Ref Maps.66d. & 62c.1/40,000

April 18th 1917

1.The Battalion will march to BEAUVOIS tomorrow, 19th

inst.

2.Starting Point :- VOYENNES CHURCH.

3.Time :- 9.10 am.

4.Route :- BUNY – MATIGNY – UGNY – LANCHY.

5.Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, D. A. B. C. Coys. Cookers will march with Transport. Steel Helmets will not be worn. Halts will be made at 15 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour.

6.Billeting :- 2/Lieut. G.W. de St Legier and CQMS's will leave VOYENNES CHURCH at 7.0 am. and proceed to BEAUVOIS to take over billets from 2nd KOYLI.

7.Baggage :- Officers Valises and Mess Boxes will be stacked outside QM Stores by 7.45 am. and 8.0 am. respectively. 1 NCO from "C" Coy and 2 men per Coy will report to QM as loading party. Lewis guns will be loaded in Limbers and Handcarts by 8.15 am. Billets will be left scrupulously clean.

ACKNOWLEDGE

By Order Issued at 7.45pm. [TX00669]

On the 19th they moved on to Brigade reserve at the Wood of Holnon.

ORDER NO 68.

April 19th 1917.

Ref Map 62c.1/40,000

1.The Battalion will march to ATILLY tomorrow, 20th inst.

2.Starting Point :- Road Junction, W.23.a.2 ½.8 ½.

3.Time :- 1.15 pm.

4.Route :- VILLEVEQUE.

5.Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, A. B. C. D. Coys, Transport. Distance of 200 yards between Coys. Steel Helmets will be worn. Cookers will march behind their Coys. Dinners will be at 12 noon.

6.Billeting Party :- CQM Sgts and representative HQ (detailed by RSM) will report to 2/Lieut G. W. de St Legier at Bn HQ at 11.30 am. and proceed to ATILLY to take over billets from 15th Lancashire Fusiliers.

7.Baggage :- Officers valises will be dumped at Bn HQ by 11.30 am. Mess boxes will be dumped at Bn HQ by 12.45 pm. 1 NCO from "D" Coy and 2 men per Coy will report to RSM at 12.45 pm. as loading party. The Lewis guns will be packed by 1.0 pm.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00670]

## Holnon

### 23rd - 29th April 1917

On the 23rd the battalion, less B Company, took over from the 2/1st Buckinghamshire at Holnon as right support battalion.

ORDER NO 69.

April 23rd 1917.

1.The Battalion, less "B" Coy and 1 Platoon "C" Coy, will relieve the 2/1 Bucks as Right Support Battn in Holnon.

"B" Coy & 1 Platoon "C" Coy will relieve "A" Coy, 2/4 Oxfords in Front Line and will march by Platoons as under, starting 7.30 pm. They will be under orders of OC 2/1 Bucks.

2.Companies will march by platoons at 200 yards distance.

3.Starting Point :- ATILLY- HOLNON Road.

4.Time :- 8.15 pm.

5.All Trench Shelters will be handed over to 2/5 Glosters in Railway Cutting and receipts obtained.

The 2/1 Bucks will hand over Trench Shelters and Stores in HOLNON and receipts will be given for same.

6.Officers valises will be dumped on Road opposite Bn HQ by 5 pm. Mess boxes will be dumped in the same place by 7.30 pm. "B" Coy will not take packs. They will be dumped on the ATILLY – HOLNON Road by 6.30 pm.

7.14 Petrol Cans (filled) will be taken by "B" Coy and any cooking utensils required by Officers taken up in Sandbags. Rations for this Coy for 24th will be carried on the man.

8.All water bottles will be filled before moving off.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00671]

B Company was lent to the 2/4th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, the outpost battalion, and was employed on the construction of the "Brown Line" east of Holnon, where, on the 25th, Second-Lieutenant D. A. Hutchings was wounded whilst working on the line.

### 30th April 1917

On the night of the 29th-30th the 2/4th Royal Berkshire relieved the 2/4th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in front line.

ORDER NO 70. April 29th 1917

1.The Battalion will relieve the 2/4 OXFORDS in the Front Line on night 29/30th as under :-

"A" Coy 2/4 BERKS relieve "A" Coy 2/4 OXFORDS.

"B" Coy do "B" do

"C" Coy do "C" do

"D" Coy do "D" do

Guide per platoon and one for HQ will be at the gap in the wire about S.3.b.8.3 at 9.0 pm. Companies will march by platoons at 200 yards distance. A. B. C. D. Coys, Hdqrs.

2.BAGGAGE :- Officers valises and mens packs will be dumped at Coy HQ by 4.0 pm. for collection by Transport. Mess boxes will be dumped at Coy HQ by 7.30 pm.

3.1 Representative per Coy and HQ will go up in the afternoon and take over Stores (except SOS Grenades).

4.The spare Lewis guns with Companies will be carried forward and utilised in the Posts.

5.Trench Shelters and Stores (except SOS Grenades) will be handed over to 2/1 BUCKS and receipts obtained. Receipts will be made out in triplicate for all Stores (except SOS Grenades) taken over from 2/4 OXFORDS and sent to Bn HQ by 6.00 am. 30th inst.

6.Rations for 30th will be carried on the man. Companies will carry their own Petrol cans (filled) for 30th.

7.Code for Completion of Relief :- "HANKEY PANKY".

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00672]

A patrol, under Second-Lieutenant Hinchcliffe, went to ascertain if Cépy Farm, which had been shelled, was clear of the enemy. A patrol had reported it empty, but had been driven out later.

The British guns were then again turned on to it, and it was after this that Hinchcliffe's patrol went out. He was fired on from the farm buildings into which he saw twelve Germans go. He again went out at 07:00. on the 30th, and returned at 09.30, reporting that he had seen or heard no movement from the farm.

At 21:30 Lieutenant Willink of A, with Second-Lieutenants Hinchcliffe and Watson, fifty other ranks, five Lewis guns, and two Vickers guns, went out again to Cépy Farm. They moved forward as soon as the barrage on Cépy and the valley beyond it stopped.

At 22.50 they were back again, reporting that the enemy had fled as they approached the trenches north and east of the farm. They had searched the buildings and bombed the cellars without finding any trace of the Germans. They had left a standing patrol there, but, as soon as the main party retired, this standing patrol was attacked by about fifty Germans and compelled to retire to a point about one hundred yards west of the farm. Two strong listening posts were pushed forward to look out for any attempt by the enemy to occupy in strength the farm, or the valley beyond it.

### 1st May 1917

At 4.30 a.m. on the 1st May, Sergeant Denton and ten men again worked forward to the farm, where no sign of the enemy was seen. The casualties in these operations were only one man wounded and one shell-shocked.

### 2nd - 12th May 1917

The battalion was relieved by the 2/6th Gloucestershire on the 2nd May, and for the next ten days was training and working at Germaine. A boxing tournament was held on the 6th.

They found time for a lot of training, for example on the 8th all companies spent two hours training to deal with low wire entanglements while rifle grenadier sections were being instructed in the use and tactics of rifle grenades. Signallers too were being taught station work by the signalling officer. In the afternoon it was musketry practice with competitions for Fire and Outpost under rules framed by 184th Brigade.

The battalion carried out a full scale practice on the 11th south east of Germaine with two objectives between which was a strong point which had to be dealt with. The GOC 61st Division had specified the exercise and he turned up to witness it.

On the 12th it was time to move on. The orders for the move to Nesle station were issued

ORDER NO 71. March 12th 1917 [MAY 12th]

Ref. Map Sheet 66d 1/40,000

1.The Battalion will march to NESLE area tomorrow, 13th inst.

2.Time :- 5.0 am.

3.Starting Point :- Road Junction, E.17.a.6.8.

4.Route :- FORESTE – DOUILLY – MATIGNY – BUNY – VOYENNES.

5.Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, A. B. C. D. Coys. 200 yards distance will be maintained between Coys and 300 yards between Battalions. Halts will be made at 15 minutes to the clock hour and march resumed at the clock hour. There will be a halt at 6.30 am till 7.15 am for Breakfast. Cookers will march in rear of Coys and one water cart in rear of each half-battalion.

6.Baggage :- All Officers valises will be dumped at QM Stores by 4.0 am. (13th inst). Mess boxes will be dumped at QM Stores by 9.0 pm. tonight (12th) for collection by Transport.

7.Billets :- All billets and the immediate vicinity of same will be left absolutely clean. OC Coys will send in a certificate that the billets have been inspected before moving off and left clean and in good order.

8.Lewis Guns :- The Lewis Guns of all Coys will be packed by 9.0 pm tonight under orders of 2/Lieut HINCHLIFFE. The Lewis Gun limbers will be at yard by Battalion billets by 8.30 pm.

9.2/Lieut BRAIN will remain behind to hand over to the French all information with regard to sanitary arrangements, water supplies and billeting accommodation and shew them their billets.

10.Water :- For the purpose of watering horses on the march tomorrow, each wagon will carry two filled petrol tins from the Battalion establishment and the Maltese Cart and Mess Cart one tin. Both water carts will move filled and the petrol tins carried on the crates.

11.Battalion HQ will close at GERMAINE at 5.0 am. after which hour reports will be made to the head of the column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00680]

## Tilloy

### 13th - 31st May 1917

They set out on the 13th, marching via Foreste-Douilly, Matigny, Buny and Voyenne to Herly which they they reached at 13:30.

ORDER NO 72. May 13th 1917

1.The Transport will march tomorrow by road at about 5.30 am.

2.The dismounted personnel of the Battalion will proceed by train between 6.30 and 7.30 am on morning of 15th inst. A limited amount of Transport will be available to take Dixies, Mess boxes and Officers small kits to the station. Everything that is not absolutely essential must be sent on the baggage waggons. In this connection Mess boxes kept to a minimum hand the remainder being placed on the baggage waggons. Officers kit will consist of a pack containing necessaries and two blankets or sleeping bag rolled in a ground sheet, the remainder in Valise will be dumped at HQ by 4.45 tomorrow. Anything

more bulky than this will be left behind. OC "A" Coy will detail one NCO and 8 men to report to RSM at 4.30 am as loading party.

3. Lewis Gun Handcarts containing as much Lewis Gun equipment as possible will go in the train. The remaining Guns and equipment will be loaded in limbers by 4.45 am. (14th). OC "A" Coy will detail L/c VASS to see that this is done.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00679]

The battalion rested on the 14th although they did have a full inspection but the transport section marched to the Rouyouy area.

ORDER NO 73. May 14th 1917

Ref. Maps. Sheet 66d1/40,000 AMIENS 1/100,000

1. The Battalion will march to NESLE Station tomorrow, 15th inst.

2. Time :- 5.10 am.

3. Starting Point :- CHURCH, HERLY.

4. Route :- FAUBOURG ST LEONARD.

5. Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, B. C. D. A. Coys. Companies will march at a distance of 200 yards. There will be no halts on the march from billets to NESLE Station, irrespective of the time of start.

6. On reaching LONGEAU the Battalion will detrain. Guides will meet the Battrn at LONGEAU Station and load them to new billets.

7. Lewis Gun Handcarts will be loaded on the covered waggons under L/C Vass and 6 men of "A" Coy who will unload them at LONGEAU.

8. All Officers small kit and mess boxes will be dumped at Bn HQ by 4.45am. OC "B" Coy will detail 1 NCO and 8 men to load these on lorry which will call for the kit etc, and convey it to the Station.

9. Rations will be dumped at the Station at 6.0am. OC "C" Coy will detail 1 NCO and 10 men to load them on the train and unload them at LONGEAU

10. Mails will be dumped in the bags at NESLE Station at 6.0 am. These will be taken in the train and not distributed till new billets are reached. Postal Orderlies will see that their bags are put on the train. OC "D" Coy will detail 1 NCO and 8 men to load them on the train and unload at LONGEAU.

11. All water bottles will be filled before departure.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00678]

On the 15th they marched to Nesle station where they entrained for Lonquea whence they marched to billets at Camon. They had another rest day on the 16th although again they had a training session for company attack and reorganisation afterwards.

ORDER NO 74. May 16th 1917

Ref. Map. AMIENS & LENS 1/100,000

1. The Battalion will march to TALMAS tomorrow, 17th inst.

2. Time :- 5.45 am.

3. Starting Point :- Battrn HQ.

4. Route :- RIVERY – POULAINVILLE – VILLERS –

BOCAGE.

5. Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, C. D. A. B. Coys, Transport. A Distance of 200 yards will be maintained between Companies. Halts will be made at 15 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour. There will be a halt from 6.30 am – 7.30 am for breakfast. Cookers will march in rear of their Companies. One Water Cart will march in rear of each half battalion. The Lewis Gun Handcarts will follow "B" Coy.

6. Baggage :- All Officers valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped outside their respective messes ready for collection by Transport by 5.0 am.

7. Billets will be left perfectly clean.

8. Battrn HQ will close at CAMON at 5.45am after which reports will be sent to head of column until arrival at TALMAS.

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00677]

They marched to Talmas on the 17th via Rivery, Poulainville, and Villers Bocage. They spent three days here resting but with training for part of each day.

The GOC 61st Division arrived in the afternoon of the 20th to present Military Medal ribbons to 200791 Sgt R Denton and 202370 Pte D Rogan.

ORDER NO 75. May 20th 1917

Ref. Map. LENS 111/100,000

1. The Battalion will march to BARLY tomorrow, 21st inst.

2. Time :- 4.30am.

3. Starting Point :- Road junction "OXFORD" & "CHEAP-SIDE" near the pond.

4. Route :- BEAVAL – GEZAINCOURT – HEM – RISQUETOUT.

5. Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, D. A. B. C Coys. A Distance of 500 yards will be maintained between Battalions and 10 yards between Companies. Halts will be made at 10 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour. There will be halt from 7.50 am to 8.50 am for breakfast. Transport will march in rear of the Battalion, but with Cookers in front of the first line Transport, followed immediately by Water Carts and Lewis Gun Handcarts.

6. Lewis Guns :- The Lewis Guns will be loaded on the limbers tonight (20th) by 7.0 pm. L/Cpl VASS ("A" Coy) will be responsible for the loading of limbers and handcarts.

7. Baggage :- All Officers valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped on N side of Church by 3.45 am.

8. Loading Party :- 2 men per Coy and 1 NCO from "B" Coy will report to RSM at HQ at 3.45am. to act as loading party.

9. Battrn HQ will close at TALMAS at 4.30am after which reports will be sent to the head of the column.

ACKNOWLEDGE {TX00676}

They were on the move again on the 21st marching to Barly via Beauval, Gezaincourt, Hemy and Risquetbut arriving at 11:15. The next day they all had to try out their respirators in a gas chamber.

ORDER NO 76. May 22nd 1917

Ref. Map.LENS 11. 1/100000

1.The Battalion will march tomorrow to SOMBRIN (23rd inst).

2.Time :- 5.20 am.

3.Starting Point :- Road junction 400 yards E of BERLY Church.

4.Route :- LE SOUICH – SUS St LEGER.

5.Order of march :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, A. B. C. D. Coys.

Distance of 500 yards will be maintained between Battalions and 10 yards between Companies.

Transport will march in rear of the Battalion, but with Cookers in front of the 1st line Transport followed immediately by the Water Carts.

Lewis Gun Handcarts will march in rear of "D" Coy.

Halts will be made at 10 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour.

There will not be any long halt.

Haversack Rations will be carried.

Breakfasts will be at 4.0 am.

Steel Helmets will be worn.

6.Lewis Guns :- The Lewis Guns will be loaded on limbers and handcarts by 9 pm. tonight (22nd) under L/Cpl Vass.

7.All Officers Valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped outside Battalion Orderly Room in the Square by 4.30 am.

8.All Billets will be left perfectly clean.

9.Battalion Headquarters will close at BARLY at 5.20 am. after which hour reports will be made to head of the column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00675]

After their experiences in the gas chamber no doubt many men would have preferred a day to recover, but it was not to be. They set out at 05:20 after an early breakfast to march to Sombrin via Le Souich, Sus and St Legier.

ORDER NO 77. May 23rd 1917

Ref. Map.LENS 11.1/100,000

1.The Battalion will march tomorrow, 24th inst., to the DUISANS area.

2.Time :- 8.10 am.

3.Starting Point:- Road junction on E edge of SOMBRIN village, 300 yards NW of S in SOMBRIN, where the double avenue of trees begins on the main road.

4.Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, B. C. D. A. Coys., Transport. Distance of 250 yards will be maintained between battalions and 100 yards between Companies. Lewis gun Handcarts will march in rear of "A" Coy. Halts will be made at 10 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour.

5.Baggage :- All Officers valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped at Coy HQ ready for collection by Transport at 7.0 am.

6.6. Lewis Guns will be loaded by 6.30 am. under supervision of 2/Lieut HINCHCLIFFE.

7.Battalion HQ will close at SOMBRIN at 8.0 am. after which all reports will be sent to head of column.

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00674]

There was no respite and on the 24th they continued the march to Duisans, some 4 miles west of Arras. Here at last they were given an opportunity to clean up on the 26th but the next few days were devoted to intensive training; rapid loading and firing on the 26th, a trench to trench attack on the 27th, musketry and bayonet fighting on the 28th, and specialist instruction on the 28th

On the 30th the Lewis Gunners and rifle grenadiers had their training while the rest practiced musketry. But it was now time to go back to the trenches.

ORDER NO 78 May 30th 1917

Ref. Map. LENS 11.1/100,000

1.The Battalion will march tomorrow, 31st inst. To BOIS DE BOEUF where it will relieve the 10th Bn. YORKS AND LANCs REGT.

2.Time :- 10.25 am.

3.Starting Point :- Road junction 500 yards due N of I in DUISANS.

4.Route :- MAIN CAMBRAI ROAD.

5.Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, C. D. A. B. Coys. W of ARRAS distance of 250 yards will be maintained between Battalions and 100 yards between Companies. In and E of ARRAS, 200 yards between Platoons.

6.Transport will march as follows :- 1 Cooker in rear of each Company, 1 Water Cart in rear of each half Battalion, 1 Officers Mess Cart, 1 Maltese Cart and 1 Baggage Wagon in rear of Battalion. The remainder of the Transport will march Brigaded in order corresponding to that of respective Units. Lewis Gun Hand Carts will move in rear of their Companies.

7.Baggage :- All Officers valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped on road opposite Camp at 7.15 am. ready for collection by Transport.

8.Loading Party :- 2 men per Coy and 1 NCO from "C" Coy will report to RSM at HQ at 7.15 am. to act as loading party.

9.Lewis guns will be loaded by 7.0 am. under supervision of LGO.

10.Billeting :- 1 NCO per Coy and 1 representative for HQ will parade at 7.0 am. outside Bn under 2/Lieut J.C. MULLINS and will report to representative of Staff Capt. at 10.0 am. at 63rd Inf. Bde. HQ (Map ref. H.31.d.1.9. Sheet 51b.N.W. 1/20,000).

11.Battn. HQ will close at DUISANS at 8.25 am. after which all reports will be sent to the head of the column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00673]

The move to the trenches began on the 31st when they moved into rear trenches near Bois de Boeuf near Tilloy.

## Monchy

**1st - 6th June 1917**

On the 1st June they relieved the 13th Rifle Brigade in front line about Monchy le Preux. These trenches, including Tool Trench and others, were improved and wired by a special party of one hundred men.

The move into the line on the 1st June to relieve 13th Rifle Brigade is covered by Order no 79:-

ORDER NO 79. June 1st 1917

Ref. Map.51.B.S.W.

1.The Battalion will relieve the 13th Rifle Brigade in the CAMBRIA ROAD Sector on night 1/st/2nd June.

2.Starting Point :- Present Area.

3.Time :- 8.45 pm.

4.Order of March :- Hdqrs, C. D. A. B. Coys. 200 yards distance between platoons. All Companies will be formed up outside their present shelters ready to move by 8.40 pm.

5.Guides :- 1 per Platoon, 1 per Coy HQ and 1 Officer Battn HQ will meet the Battalion at the Road Junction N.8.d.6.5 at 9.30 pm.

6.All Trench Maps, Sketches, Aeroplane photographs, defence schemes, SOS Signals and Trench stores will be taken over and receipts given for same.

7.Lewis Guns will be carried by Coys as arranged with Lewis Gun Officer.

8.Rations for the 2nd will be carried on the man.

9.Companies when in position will send 2 Runners to Battn HQ, one of whom will remain there permanently while the Battn is in the line.

10.Companies will take up 8 Petrol tins filled, in addition to the filled water-bottle on the man.

11.Relief complete will be reported by wire to Battn HQ. Code for relief complete :-

"A" Coy – ARCADIANS

"B" Coy – KING GIRLS {I think}

"C" Coy – CHEEP

"C" Coy – DAMAGED GOODS

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00688]

The relief was completed by 01:00. C Coy on the right were under the command of 2/Lt Knott, D Coy in the centre under Capt Reeves, A Coy on the left under Capt Willink and B Coy under Capt Allen acted as carrying party in support.

One OR was wounded on the 2nd, 5 on the 3rd, 2 on the 4th, 6 on the 5th and one on the 6th, with another shell shocked. Four men were killed:-

3rd 202755 Frederick Pusey of Abingdon

5th 200902 William Herbert Crook of Princes Risborough

6th 201471 Frederick Hayward

6th 202576 Edgar Vernon of Liverpool

Men were put to deepening the trenches and a special wiring party of 110 men under 2/Lt G L Warlock commenced a systematic wiring of Saddle Trench which was the support line. This was completed on the 5th with an entanglement of two rows of concertina and apron wire with loose wire thrown in for good luck.

Four sniper posts were set up on the 3rd about 100 yards in front of the posts. They claimed two victims during the day.

Battalion HQ had been established at La Fosses Farm and on the 4th it was subjected to a concerted artillery barrage. between 500 and 600 shells fell between 07:00 and 13:00.

Relief came on 6th with the reverse operation ordered:-

ORDER NO 80 June 6th 1917

Ref. Map. 51.b. SW.

1.The Battalion will be relieved in the line by 2/4 OXFORDS tonight, 6th/7th. Only 2 Coys of 2/4 OXFORDS will relieve the 3 Coys at present holding the line.

2.Guides :- 1 from each Post, 1 Coy HQ. (except "D"), 1 Support Coy, 2 each from SPADE, SADDLE and KNIFE TRENCHES and 1 Bn HQ will be at N.10.c.9.8., just behind Bde HQ at 9.45pm but will report at Bn HQ at 8.30 pm. The Posts will be numbered throughout and each guide will be informed the number of his Post. The Guides for the Right Coy of the OXFORDS will lead in order of Posts, followed by their Coy HQ then Guides for Left Coy Posts and Coy HQ followed by Guides for KNIFE, SADDLE and SPADE TRENCHES. All guides will go via PICK TRENCH.

3.All Trench Stores, SOS Signals, Aeroplane photos, Maps and Sketches etc., will be handed over to relieving Battn. And receipts obtained in triplicate.

4.All receipts will reach Battn HQ by 5pm, 7th inst.

5.Relief complete will be reported to Battn HQ as under :-

"A" Coy – ALDERSHOT

"B" Coy – BIRMINGHAM

"C" Coy – COLCHESTER

"D" Coy – DROITWICH

BY ORDER

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00687]

## Wancourt-Feuchy

**6th - 9th June 1917**

On the 6th the 2/4th Royal Berkshire went into reserve on the Wancourt-Feuchy line.

200249 Frederick Jack Preston of Newbury died of his wounds on the 7th

200371 John Absalom Middletoncross of Reading was killed on the 8th and

220030 Thomas James Vincent Rice of Birkenhead died of wounds on the 9th

While in reserve they practised musketry and bayonet fighting and all companies had to find carrying parties.

They returned to the line on the 9th to relieve the 10th Durham Light Infantry.

Order No 81 June 9th 1917

Ref. Map. 1/20,000 ETERPIGNY

1.The Battalion will relieve the 10th Durham Light Infantry in Right Support Trenches tonight 9th inst., HQ will be established at N.24.C.1.5.

"A" Coy will relieve "A" Coy 10th DLI in BUZZARD TR(SOUTH).

"B" Coy will relieve "B" Coy 10th DLI in EGRET TRENCH

"C" Coy will relieve "C" Coy 10th DLI in BUZZARD TR(NORTH)

"D" Coy will relieve "D" Coy 10th DLI in CURLEW TRENCH

2.Starting Point :- Present Area.

3.Time :- 10pm.

4.Order of march :- HQ, B. D. A. C. Coys. 200 yards between platoons. All Companies will be formed up outside their present billets ready to move 9.55pm.

5.Guides :- 1 Officer Battn HQ, 1 guide per Coy HQ and 1 guide per platoon will meet the Battn at N.22.d.5.6 (Old HQ 41st Inf Bde) at 10.30pm.

6.All trench maps, sketches, aeroplane photos, SOS signals and trench stores will be taken over and receipts given for same. Receipts retained to be sent to Battn HQ by 12 noon, 10th inst.

7.Lewis guns will be carried by Coys as arranged with Lewis Gun Officer.

8.Rations :- After taking over, Coys will send ration parties to Battn HQ to draw rations not earlier than 12.30am

9.Companies when in position will send 2 runners to Battn HQ one of whom will remain there until 8.0am the following morning, 10th inst.

10.Companies will take up 16 Petrol Cans filled, in addition to the filled water bottle on the man.

11.Relief complete will be reported by phone and runner to Battn HQ. Code for relief complete :- COLLEGE

12.The following will report at Battn HQ at 1.15pm today (9th inst) where a Battn guide will take them to 10th DLI HQ. Further guides will be furnished from there.

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00686]

## Trenches

**9th to 10th June 1917**

Their time in the trenches was very short and they were relieved by the Queen Victoria Rifles on the 10th

ORDER NO 82. June 10th 1917

Ref. Map. 51.b and 51.c. 1/40,000

1.The Battalion will be relieved tonight in the Right Support Trenches by QUEEN VICTORIA RIFLES. On Relief, Companies will march independently to Trenches near BOIS DES BOEUFs, via shortest route. 100 yards between Platoon will be maintained.

2. Guides :- 1 OR for Battn HQ

1 OR per Coy HQ

1 OR per Platoon

(NOTE. Each Coy will send guides for 4 platoons)

will be at N.22.d.5.6. (Old 41st Inf Bde HQ) at 9.30 pm, but will go via KESTREL LANE. Outgoing Coys via SHIKAR TRENCH.

3. All Trench Mats, Sketches, SOS Signals, Aeroplane photos, will be handed over to relieving unit. Receipts in triplicate for Trench Stores will be obtained (one of which must be on AFW 3405 enclosed herewith and which should be retained) and for Maps, Sketches etc., on separate sheets. All receipts will reach Bn HQ by 12 noon 11th inst.

4. Relief Complete will be reported to Bn HQ by phone and runner by Code-Word "PACKS".

6. All Box Respirators will be worn in the ready position.

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00685]

## Bernville

**11th to 23rd June 1917**

They returned to Bois de Boeve after relief and went into billets for the night. They moved next day to Bernville.

Order No 83. June 11th 1917

REF. MAP 1/40,000 51.B. & 51.C.

1.The Battalion will march to BERNVILLE this afternoon and go into billets.

2.Dress :- Battle Order.

3.Route :- ARRAS – DAINVILLE – WARLUS.

4.Starting Point :- Road opposite bivouacs.

5.Time :- 4.35 pm.

6.Order of March :- HQ, Drums, A. B. C. D. Coys. A distance of 500 yards between Battalions and 200 yards between platoons or equivalent bodies will be maintained in and E of ARRAS At the first halt after ARRAS, 100 yards between Companies will be maintained. There will be no regular halts until clear of the Railway W of DAINVILLE. Units will arrange to halt so as not to block the road or other units in rear. After crossing the Railway there will be a halt of 15 minutes before each clock hour.

7.Transport will march Brigaded. Cookers will march in rear of Companies, and Watercarts, Maltese Cart and Officers Mess Cart in rear of Battn. No extra distances will be maintained for the Transport accompanying the Battalion.

8.Battn HQ will close at BOIS DES BOEUFs at 4.20 pm after which reports to head of column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00684]

The 12th was spent cleaning up and having a bath, followed by an inspection by the medical officer and quartermaster.

Over the next few days there was some sort of training every day except Sunday 17th when there was a Church service followed by a sports day to select competitors for the forthcoming Brigade sports competitions.

ORDER NO 84 June 21st 1917.

1. The Battalion will march tomorrow 22nd inst., by road at about 4.30 am and will billet at REBREUVE – BOURET Area.

2. The dismounted personnel of the Battalion will proceed by train on 23rd inst., entraining at FOSSEUX LOOP (Q. 1. A. Sheet 51.c. 1/40,000) at 10 am. A limited amount of transport will be available to take dixies, mess boxes and Officers valises to the new area. Everything that is not absolutely essential must be sent on the baggage wagons. Mess boxes must be kept to a minimum, the remainder placed on a baggage wagon. All stores, Orderly Room Boxes, etc. must be dumped at QM Stores by 1.0 am. OC "B" Coy will detail 1 NCO and 8 men to report to QM Stores at 1.30 am as loading party. A lorry will report on early morning of 23rd to carry stores direct to new area. All lorries will be given written orders as their destination.

3. The Lewis Guns and magazines will be loaded on limbers in Transport Lines by 4.0 am. 22nd inst., under supervision of LGO. The LGO will detail 2 NCO's to accompany the guns.

4. Billeting Party :- 2/Lieut J C Mullin and 3 NCO detailed by each of OC "A" and "B" Coys. This party will be on the WARLUS – WANQUETIN Road just outside WARLUS at 8.15 am where there will be a lorry at the rear of the column of [unreadable] detailed to carry 1/5 CORNWALLS, to carry Brigade advance party to NOEUX. The party will parade at "A" Coy Mess at 7.45 am. The interpreter will accompany the party. Billeting party will be responsible for meeting the Battn at AUXI-LE-CHATEAU at about 1.30 pm on afternoon of 23rd, and guiding them to WAVEMS.

5. Rations :- Transport Billeting Party will carry with them rations for 22nd and 23d.

BY ORDER

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00683]

The Transport section duly set out for Bouret with the rest of the Brigade transport and they were followed on the 23rd by the rest of the battalion.

ORDER NO 85. June 22nd 1917.

Ref. Map. Sheet 51.c.1/40,000

1. The Battalion will march to GUOY-EN-ARTOIS Station (P.17.b.) tomorrow, 23rd inst, and entrain there.

2. Time :- 6.20 am.

3. Starting Point :- Battalion Headquarters.

4. Route :- BEAUMETZ – MONCHIET – GOUY – EN – ARTOIS.

5. Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, D. A. B. C. Coys. 250 yards will be maintained between Battalions and 1000 yards between Coys. Halts will be made at 15 minutes to the clock hour and the march resumed at

the clock hour.

6. On reaching AUXI-LE-CHATEAU the Battalion will detrain. Guides will be at AUXI-LE-CHATEAU Station to conduct Battalion to billets at WAVENS.

7. All Officers kits, mess-boxes, etc. will be dumped at QM Stores by 5.45 am. 23rd inst.

8. Rations for the 23rd inst, will be carried on the man.

9. All water bottles will be filled before departure.

10. OC Coys will render a certificate that all billets have been left in a clean and tidy condition.

11. Battn HQ will close at BERNEVILLE at 6.20 am. after which reports to the head of column.

ACKNOWLEDGE. [TX00682]

## Wavens

### 24th to 27th June 1917

On the 23rd the rest of the battalion marched off to Guoy en Artois via Beaumetz and Monchiet to get a train for Auxi le Chateau whence they marched to Wavens.

On Sunday 24th there was a voluntary church service but otherwise the men were allowed to rest.

Specialist training and drill was the order of the day for most of the men while at Wavens, but officers and most of the NCOs went riding each day.

ORDER NO 86. June 26th 1917

Ref. Map LENS 11.1/100.000

1. The Battalion will march tomorrow to PONCHEL (27TH inst).

2. Dress :- Full Marching Order.

3. Time :- 8.30 am.

4. Starting Point :- Cross roads outside "B" Coys Billet. "A" Coy will join the line of march outside the Chateau.

5. Route :- AUXI-LE-CHATEAU.

6. Order of March :- Signallers, Drums, Hdqrs, B. C. D. A Coys. Transport will march in rear of the Battalion. Halts will be made at 10 mins to the clock hour and the march resumed at the clock hour. Steel helmets will be carried.

7. Lewis Guns :- The Lewis Guns will be loaded on limbers by 9.0 pm tonight (26th inst) under L/c VASS.

8. All Officers valises and Mess boxes will be dumped outside the Chateau by 7.30 am. "A" Coy Officers Valises and Mess Boxes will be dumped outside the Chateau by 8.0 am.

9. All billets will be left perfectly clean.

10. Battn HQ will close at WAVANS at 8.30 am. after which hour reports will be made to head of column.

ACKNOWLEDGE [TX00681]

## Le Ponchel

### 28th June to 26th July 1917

Ponchelle was reached via Auxi le Chateau on the 27th. June. The routine of training continued, enlivened somewhat by Brigade competitions like upon the 3rd when they competed for the best company in attack, won by B Coy who went on to represent the Brigade in a Divisional competition.

On the 28th all staff, company commanders and platoon sergeants went for a ride leaving company 2ics to practice trench attacks. The next day they made a mock attack on a village near Bachimont.

The 7th saw a more light hearted competition with the 184th Brigade Horse Show. The battalion secured first prize with Cooker as the best show horse and gained several seconds and thirds in other events. At the close of the day csm Brookes of the Ox and Bucks was presented with his Victoria Cross won on the 26th April.

Finally the time came for them to make the last leg of their journey to Ypres. The 24th July was treated as a holiday with a shooting competition won by the officers with 832 points, the privates came 2nd with 787, the sergeants 3rd with 745 and the corporals last with 675. Next day the order was posted:-

ORDER NO 87

July 25th 1917

Ref Map AUXI-LE-CHATEAU 1/20,000

LENS & HAZEBROUCK 1/100.000

1.The Battalion (less "B" Coy, 1 Cooker and Team, 3 Officers and 100 OR. of "?D" Coy) will march to AUXI-LE-CHATEAU Station tomorrow, 26th inst, entraining as under, and detraining at ST OMER.

UNIT	Start time	Dept train	TRAIN no	SERIAL no
A, C, D coys - cooker & team	10.15	14.20	21	6134A
B Coy -	10.15	14.20	21	6134A
Transport less - Cooker & Team	13.30	18:20	24	6134
Battalion less B Coy, 1 Cooker Team & 100 OR D Coy.	13.30	18.20	24	6134

Start point Road Jun A.18.b.31

2.Order of March:- Sigs., Drums, HQ, A.C.D. Coys. "B" Coy, after detraining, will remain at ST OMER to await arrival of the remainder of Battalion. The detraining Officers will arrange temporary billets if necessary. A distance of 10 paces will be maintained between Coys to AUXI-LE-CHAREAU Station. The 3 Officers and 100 OR of D Coy will rejoin their Coy at AUXI-LE-CHATEAU Stn

and travel by last train (18.20). After leaving St OMER Station a distance of 200 yards will be maintained between Companies. All Transport will arrive at the Station of Entrainment 3 hours before departure of Train. The 3 men per Coy trained as Pack animal loaders will report to Transport Officer at Transport Lines at 1.pm for duty during the move.

3.Lights :- No lights will be lit in any Train after dark. The fires of cookers will be drawn before entrainment

4.Water-bottles :- All water bottles will be filled before entrainment, and also both water carts.

5.Valises & Mess Boxes :- All Officers Valises and mess boxes will be dumped at QM Stores by 12 noon.

6.Lewis Guns :- The Lewis guns of B.C. and D. Coys will be loaded on limbers at Church by 6.0pm tonight. "A" Coy will load theirs independently.

7.Billets :- All billets will be left perfectly clean and certificate rendered to Orderly Room that this was done.

8.Battn HQ will close at LE PONCHEL at 3.30 pm after which hour reports will be made to head of column.

J S Darby

2/Lieut and A/Adjutant

2/4th Royal Berks Regt [TX00689]

## Sources

Petre pp 181-185

War Diary

Battalion orders

*Continued in section 274*