

Section 267

Interlude III - 7th Battalion

April - June 1917

At the beginning of March 1917 the 7th Battalion were in Reserve on the Doiran front. Continued from Section 247

In Reserve

April 1st to April 23rd 1917

During the first three weeks of April front and reserve positions in C sector were held alternately. After the stabilization of the line in August 1916, operations on the Doiran-Vardar front had been confined, in the words of General Milne's despatch of the 14th November 1917, to "*minor operations undertaken with a view to continually harassing the enemy, entrenched in mountainous and rocky country, and to inflicting as much loss as possible, both in material and personnel.*" Now, under instructions from the Allied Commander-in-Chief, General Sarraill, offensive operations were to be commenced.

Attack at Doiran Lake **24th April 1917**

The Plan

Offensive operations were not found possible till the latter end of April 1917. On the 24th there occurred a serious attack on the enemy trenches on the right, south and south-west of Doiran, where they formed a marked salient which it was desired to reduce, especially by the capture of Pip Ridge. The front of attack extended from Doiran Lake on the east as far as the point P 5 to the west. P 5 was the southernmost of the five peaks on Pip Ridge.

The attack was to be made in two stages. It was to open with an advance by the 26th Division on the space between the lake on the right and the Jumeaux Ravine (inclusive) on the left, a front of some 3000 yards. This attack would be taken up on the left by the 22nd Division, from the Jumeaux Ravine to the point P 5. The objective of the 26th Division was the line Doiran Hill to Seton Hill; Hill 340 to Hill 380 (exclusive).

The arrangements within the 26th Division were for the 79th Brigade to attack on the right, as far west as Mortar Ravine, from which point the front of the 78th Brigade would extend westwards to Jumeaux Ravine. The leading battalions of the 78th Brigade were the 7th

Royal Berkshire on the right, touching the left of the 79th Brigade at Mortar Ravine, and the right of the 11th Worcestershire of the 78th Brigade at Sabre Ravine. The 9th Gloucestershire were in support, the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire in reserve.

The operation was preceded by three days of bombardment by the British artillery for the purpose of cutting the enemy's wire. On the third day the general assault on the enemy trenches was to commence simultaneously along the whole line after dark, with the exception that the 7th Royal Berkshire was to wait till twenty minutes after zero hour before crossing the Jumeaux Ravine at point O 5½ in the Bulgar trenches, the passage and assault on its right being made simultaneously by the left of the 79th Brigade; in fact, the outer flanks of the two brigades were to advance twenty minutes before the two centre battalions on their inner flanks, thus breaking and turning both flanks of the enemy position before the commencement of the assault on his centre.

The barrage at these points would also lift twenty minutes later than in other places.

The positions to be attacked were those on the hill known as Petit Couronné south-west of Doiran town. In front of these positions was a natural ditch formed by the great Jumeaux Ravine which runs in a curve round their S.W. and S. side and continues till it reaches Doiran Lake S.E. of the town. General Milne describes it as "*a deep and difficult obstacle with steep sides which separated the opposing lines.*" Into this great ravine there ran from the north two ravines, "Mortar" on the east, and "Sabre" on the west, which, as already noted, formed the right and left boundaries of the Berkshire Battalion's area of attack. Points Z 42 and 43 are on the east bank of Sabre Ravine. Z 40 and 41 are farther east in the direction of the west bank of Mortar Ravine.

The 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire were mainly employed in carrying ammunition, etc., for the Berkshire and Worcestershire Battalions, but they appear to have sent reinforcements to the right of the Worcestershire, and they suffered considerable casualties eighty-one in all. None of these reinforcements appear to have joined the 7th Royal Berkshire.

The British forces seemed to have been hard up for ammunition for the heavy guns which were under the command of Col O C Williamson Oswald of the Royal Artillery. For each day's work he allotted only 200

rounds to every 18-pounder, 175 to each 4.5in howitzer, 150 per 6in howitzer and 100 per 60 pounder and 6 in gun.

The attack was to be launched at dusk and this was eventually fixed at 21:45 on the 24th April.

The Advance Begins

The advance of the 7th Royal Berkshire began at 21:45, with D Company leading on the left, on points Z 42 and 43, and C following through it to attack points Y 15 and 16 higher up the left bank of Sabre Ravine. A Coy on the right, took its direction on points Z 40 and 41.

C and D Coys succeeded in capturing their objectives, though they encountered a heavy enemy barrage as they advanced on them. A Coy was less fortunate, for it was held up at point K on the farther slope of Jumeaux Ravine. Beyond this it was unable to progress.

Meanwhile, C and D Coys had begun consolidating the positions they had taken when they were violently counter-attacked. By this time they had run out of bombs and had had three of their Lewis guns destroyed. In the circumstances they found themselves forced to retire.

Though the 22nd Division on the left had succeeded, with heavy loss, in taking and holding their objectives, the 79th Brigade on the right had failed to capture theirs. At 4.30 a.m. orders were received to abandon the attack and retire to the trenches, south of Jumeaux Ravine, from which it had started. The casualties in this unfortunate action were very heavy in the battalion.

The Berkshire Chronicle reported on 28th June 1918:-

The following description of the doings of a battalion of the Royal Berks in Salonika will be read with interest:-

On April 24th 1917 the Berkshires participated in the attack on the Bulgarian positions and succeeded after severe fighting, in reaching their objectives. In his description Mr John Buchan said:- "On April 24th the British, after a long bombardment, attacked the Doiran fortress which was of formidable strength. The first enemy line had Pip 4½ as its western sentry. Its principal bastion was a bare sugar loafed hill called the Petit Couronné. In front of it along the whole length to complete the likeness to a mediaeval castle ran a moat, the deep gully called the Jumeaux Ravine. The British troops crossed the parapets at 9.45 pm - the latest hour at which any battle in the campaign had begun. On the left all the enemy's first positions were taken from Doldzeli village to Pip 4½. In the centre and on the right the difficulties of the Jumeaux Ravine were so great that only a few of the Devons and Berkshires reached the other side and, during the night, that handful was driven back by counter-attacks. The end of the battle left us with the western half of the enemy's first position which we succeeded in securing and holding"

How terrible were the tasks which faced the Beekshires and the other troops may be gauged from the following description: "The foremost line of all, the whole of which we entered, though we were forced back from the right

hand sector of it unde desperate counter-attacks, has a principal bastion, a bare round-topped sugar-loaf hill called the Petit Couronné. But running along almost its whole front, exactly like a mediaeval moat is a deep and forbidding nullah called the Jumeaux Ravine. When the infantry attacked this particularly difficult sector went over their parapets at a quarter to ten o'clock at night they had first to clamber into this ravine under a hail of machine gun bullets to ford, often waist deep, the cascade at the bottom and then to scale the steep slop on the other side with the Bulgars waiting for them in their trenches along the top. As soon as the first wave of our men went over the Bulgar trench mortars started dropping a barrage which was absolutley dead in its accuracy into the ravine and to this barrage was added the bombardment by 8 in howitzers of our front line trenches and the ground before them. From a quarter to ten until nearly eleven o'clock shells were dropping along the lengthe of the nullah and the effect was exaggerated by the fact that when they burst on a rock they splintered into clouds of stony shrapnel. Soaring Very lights and two powerful enemy searchlights kept the bare ground under a ghastly illumination. Heavily though we shelled the Bulgar front line his men had found secure shelter in the ravines close behind and they were now rushed up to the trenches where they fought with fierce determination"

Official recognition of the great devotion displayed by the Berkshires was forthcoming in the dispatch of General Milne who made this striking comment: "During the night several determined hostile counter-attacks were repulsed with heavy loss but eventually after several hours hard fighting the attackers were forced back to their own trenches. This operation was carried out with the greatest gallantry and determination by representative battalions of English County Regiments among whom the Devonshire Regiment and the Berkshire Regiment deserve special credit for their dash and tenacity" praise such as this naturally gave great satisfaction to the men in the terrible difficulties which they had to face.

The following are some of the Berkshire officer casualties:-

KILLED

Capt Donald Currey, Monmouth Regiment attd Royal Berks

MISSING BELIEVED KILLED

Sec Lieut G M Day Worcester Regiment attached Royal Berks

WOUNDED AND MISSING

Sec Lieut H B Thompson MC

WOUNDED

Capt J B Marks

Lieut S J Dale Suffolk Regiment attached Royal Berks

Sec Lieut A C P Lunn

and some subalterns of the Bedordshire Regiment who were attached to the Royal Berks.

Capt Donald Currey

Capt Donald Currey was wounded as he was leading his men to capture a trench held by the Bulgars. Though wounded he still cheered his men on until he was again wounded fatally. His dash and coolness in action won the highest praise from his fellow officers and his men.

Sec Lieut A C P Lunn, wounded, son of Mr R P Lunn of School House Caversham was a platoon sergeant in the OTC and joined the Universities and Public Schools Corps in October 1914 and was given his commission in January 1915. In July 1916 he was sent to England with shell shock and afterwards went to Salonika. He was educated at Reading School', [TX00799]

The Brigade Diary shows the total casualties of other ranks in the 7th Royal Berkshire for April as: *Killed* 16; *Wounded* 225; *Missing* 36. Total 277. As the greater part of them occurred on the 24th, the statement affords a rough indication of the distribution on that day.

The men who died from the 24th April to the end of April were:-

24th April

14265 David Anthony
 13213 Elias Arnold
 13213 David Daniel Arnold
 23953 George E Beckingham
 36954 Albert Edwin Booth
 25581 Herman Henry Boundy
 14366 John Brett
 13572 George Charles Butler
 14405 Albert Church
 26072 John William Clayson
 Capt Donald Saunders Currey (Monmouths att)
 13319 Hubert S Davies
 2Lt Gerald Harlow Day
 10698 Joseph Leonard Fitzgerald
 13344 Sidney Garnett
 27412 Arthur Richard Harris
 19713 Percy William Hatton
 13410 William Henson
 10361 Edward Robert Holmes
 14522 David Jenkins
 23360 William Edward Mander
 15347 Alfred Marshall
 23702 Edwin Thomas Mitchell
 23496 Wilfrid Henry Morris
 32890 Charles John Norris
 23874 Herbert James Alfred Norris
 23507 Wilfred Nelson Randall
 14531 George William Sadler
 14238 Alfred William Scott
 24692 Bertie Seaman
 14668 Frank William Shear
 17310 Alfred Charles Simms
 14495 Elmer Theodore Somerville
 2/Lt Horace Brocklebank Thompson
 11403 George Thompson
 9729 Clarence Sidney Waring
 25510 Philip George Watson
 15971 Arthur Wise
 19066 Henry George Woodage

14743 Ernest York
 17209 Frank Augustus Young

25th April

14259 William E Bircher
 10276 Robert Sinclair Branson
 13970 Alfred Clark
 13318 Albert Edward Rees
 8757 Herbert Reeve
 21344 Jesse Halford Wicks

26th April

31584 William E Curnuck

27th April

15954 Henry Parker
 13759 Ernest Henry Pike
 24857 Thomas North Sidwell
 23427 Frank Spratley

29th April

13481 Joseph Edwards

The account of this affair in the Battalion and Brigade Diaries is very meagre in details. In conveying his thanks to Colonel Dene and his battalion, the Brigadier remarked that he considered the battalion had done very well in achieving all it had done with "*only six platoons.*" Presumably, he meant that only six platoons went forward beyond the Jumeaux Ravine, the difficulty of crossing which he fully realized.

General Milne's despatch, speaking of the attack on the right, says:

"This operation was carried out with the greatest gallantry and determination by representative battalions of English county regiments among whom the Devonshire Regiment and the Berkshire Regiment deserve special credit for their dash and tenacity."

On the left the enemy's front trenches had been captured and were held against many counter-attacks on a front of nearly one mile, from Hill 380 to the point P 4½ on Pip Ridge.

The Reading Mercury of the 9th June 1917 carried several reports of men who had been injured. Pte A Streams had been wounded in the foot and was in hospital at Salonika. LCpl G Hawkins lost an arm. He too was in hospital in Salonika. Pte J Nicholls died of his wounds at 21 Stationary Hospital at Salonika.

25th April to 7th May 1917

The 25th was a quiet day, followed by heavy artillery bombardment of the British trenches, which probably accounted for most of the other April losses, over and above those of the 24th, as shown in the Brigade Diary quoted above.

After daybreak on the 25th the battalion was in trenches

in Exeter, Plymouth, and Christmas Ravines, all south of Jumeaux Ravine and just west of La Tortue.

The first few days of May passed uneventfully in C sector and Vladaja Ravine.

Supporting the Ox and Bucks 8th May 1917

The battalion was in the latter position on the 8th, during the whole of which day the British artillery was bombarding the enemy. Orders were received to support the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry in an attack on O 4 in conjunction with an attack by the 77th Brigade on O 1, 2 and 3. O 4 was at the eastern end of Petit Couronné, the others between it and the Lake. Further orders required the 7th Royal Berkshire to send two companies to attack O 5 as soon as the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Battalion had reached their objective.

Originally the attack on O5 had been allotted to the 7th Ox and Bucks with the 7th R Berks and 8th Ox and Bucks to take over their trenches after they had been captured but at 17:00 the Royal Berks found they were to make the attack themselves.

For this purpose B and C Companies were detailed under the command of Major Gillespie. Before the attack the battalion was to be at La Tortue by 23:00, with B and C Companies at Tortoise Camp south of La Tortue, whilst D was on the hill itself, and A garrisoned the British trenches.

The 7th Ox and Bucks left their trenches at 22:50 and made very good time crossing the Juneaux Ravine; but found themselves under heavy fire while they were waiting for the British barrage to lift at 22:00. They decided to go ten minutes early and informed Brigade HQ but the counter-order to wait was not apparently received and O4 was still under British fire well after 00:20 causing many casualties. The 7th Ox and Bucks realised they could not sustain their attack and were told at 02:00 to remain at O4. The 7th Royal Berks took over the attack on O5 and left their trenches at La Tortue at 01:30.

Advance on Jumeaux Ravine 9th May 1917

Of the action which followed there is fortunately a full report by Captain S. A. Pike, temporarily commanding the battalion, on which the following is based:

During the night of the 8th-9th May B and C Companies moved down Tor Ravine, leading northwards into Jumeaux Ravine opposite Point O 4. On reaching the latter ravine some casualties were incurred from enemy shells, but the advance continued up the southern slope of Petit Couronné. Here a halt was made whilst Major

Gillespie went forward to ascertain the position from the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire on his right front.

Around 03:00 a third (D) Company of the Royal Berks were ordered to make their way to O4 and Lt Col A P Dene himself led them up without sustaining any casualties.

The advance again continued to within a short distance of O 4, where the two companies were formed with B in 1st and C in 2nd line. The time was about 03:30 Both then moved to the right and formed up behind the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, who at this time were holding with difficulty a line fifty yards south of Z 27, a point slightly to the N.E. of O 4. They were suffering from accurate trench-mortar fire. The point Z 27 was in the enemy line at the top of the steep ascent on the north bank of Jumeaux Ravine.

After a short time B Company relieved the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire men in this position. All the officers of B had been wounded, and command of the company was taken by CSM. Flood who, being himself wounded, sent back to Lieutenant Cuckow (commanding C Company) for help. That officer, on coming up, found B suffering much from trench-mortar fire, as the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire had previously done in the same position. Hearing now that Colonel Dene had come up to the front, Cuckow left Second-Lieutenant J. P. Harris in charge of B and went to see his commanding-officer. The time was 04.15.

Colonel Dene asked for a British barrage to run from 04:30 to 05:00 at which time he planned to launch his attack. He then ordered Lieutenant Cuckow to prepare his company for an attack on Z 27 at 05:00. When Cuckow got back again to B Company he found Second-Lieutenant Harris had been wounded during his absence. He, therefore, left CSM. Flood to organize B for the attack on the left, whilst he himself brought up C on the left of B. B and C being now both in first line, a second line was formed by D, which had come forward by the Colonel's orders. Cuckow then met two officers of the Oxfordshire who agreed to support the right of the Royal Berkshire attack.

At 05:00. B and C advanced in 1st line against Z 27. D was formed up in 2nd line in Jumeaux Ravine, with Lewis guns on its flanks, and bombing squads in various parts of its front. So far, it had suffered no casualties. With it were some men of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. C on the right, encountered but slight opposition as it broke into Z 27 and proceeded to bomb along the trench till touch was gained with B on the left. The latter had advanced north-westwards and rapidly proceeded in the same direction along the top of Petit Couronné. The ridge was very bare and open, with no trench on it more than two feet deep, and it was found difficult to distinguish such trenches as there were from shell-holes. An attempt was made to link up some shell-

holes into a trench, and bombers were sent forward.

The attack was successful even though the troops were very tired. Practically the whole of O4 was captured and a bombing party forced its way down the communications trench leading towards O5.

At this point Captain Pike says his and Major Gillespie's routes converged and the latter, apparently with B Company, struck off north-westwards towards where some Bulgars were seen issuing from dugouts. These were all killed by bombing. Captain Pike now sent forward a group of men, who had come up with a Lewis gun, to occupy a shell-hole N.N.W. of his position, and himself bombed forward farther north-westwards.

He then saw two parties of the enemy, each about forty strong, preparing to counter-attack. To stop this he blocked the trench, and trained his Lewis gun quickly on to the enemy, whose line was only eighty yards away. The Bulgars now showed no signs of advancing; but before Captain Pike could get up reinforcements to enable him to take the offensive, the enemy had got guns on to his men. The fire was very heavy, and one 8" shell, bursting between the opponents, caused casualties on both sides. Other shells burst right amongst the British. When the smoke cleared off, Captain Pike, finding his men without support, was compelled to retire.

As soon as the Bulgar barrage lifted around 08:00 their infantry advanced from O 5. They were probably glad to escape as the Bulgar artillery were shelling O 5 as well as O 4.

Meanwhile, Major Gillespie, after bombing the dugouts mentioned above, had disposed his party for bombing north-westwards along the crest of Petit Couronné. As they moved on they almost ran into the Bulgars whom Captain Pike had seen preparing to counter-attack. Eventually Major Gillespie and a sergeant struck away northwards, apparently to reconnoitre. From this expedition the sergeant alone returned. Major Gillespie was missing and believed to have been killed, as has since been recorded.

As Captain Pike fell back, he found that Colonel Dene had been able to reorganize a line facing north-west in front of Point Z 27. Beyond this he did not think it advisable to attempt to advance, and therefore gave orders to retire to the original starting-point below the crest on the left bank of the Jumeaux Ravine, below Point Z 27.

Here there was some confusion, and some of the men retired by Tor Ravine, whilst others dug themselves in where they were. The enemy bombardment continued strongly till 8 a.m., when it slackened till 9.30, and then increased again. Fortunately, the steepness of the slope on which they were, saved the Royal Berkshire men from heavy loss here.

Colonel Dene being wounded and having to go to hospital, Captain Pike took over temporary command, and received orders to place himself and his men under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Robinson of the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. That officer also was wounded shortly before noon, and half an hour later Captain Pike withdrew his men by Tor Ravine, in accordance with superior orders at 11:50. He succeeded in carrying off most of his bombs, etc. by means of parties of twelve men organized for the purpose.

Thanks to the energy and courage of Captain Bryce, R.A.M.C., all the wounded were removed from the slopes of Petit Couronné. Bryce and a sergeant themselves collected the wounded from the top of the hill. There was hardly a casualty in the evacuation. The casualties in the 7th Royal Berkshire had again been severe in an attack which had failed. They were:

Officers. Killed: Lieut. P. F. Bridge. *Missing, believed killed:* Major W. R. B. Gillespie. *Wounded:* Lieut.-Col. A. P. Dene; Capt. G. F. Bate. 2nd-Lieuts. F. S. Eastwood, L. T. Rivett, L. A. Venden, Harris, Bridgland (remained on duty). *Other Ranks: Killed* 14; *Wounded* 131; *Missing* 9.

For the remainder of the day the line was held by "A" Company, the others going back to south of Valadja, where they were rejoined by A when relieved at night by the Worcestershire.

On the 14th an order was received saying that the Commander-in-Chief desired the communication to all ranks of "*his appreciation of the magnificent gallantry and of the determination to succeed, of the 7th Oxford and Bucks L.I. and the 7th R. Berks.*"

Brigadier-General Duncan, in forwarding this to the 7th Royal Berkshire, wrote:

I would like you to let the battalion know how very proud I feel at the magnificent manner in which the battalion fought on the night of 8th-9th May. The way they stuck to Petit Couronné, when subjected to such a devastating fire, and after having suffered such heavy casualties, is a splendid example of how British soldiers can put a sense of duty before any selfish thought of personal safety. The fact that the battalion only evacuated the hill when ordered to do so by higher authority is a proof of the high standard of discipline. The battalion has every reason to be proud of its action. It is sad that the hill had to be evacuated, but that was due to circumstances beyond your control. I am deeply grieved at the heavy losses the battalion has suffered."

10th May to 2nd June 1917

In the night of the 20th-21st May the 7th Royal Berkshire left the area in front of Petit Couronné and marched eastwards via Kilindir to the neighbourhood of Sal Grec Avancé, whence they looked across the Doiran Lake to the town south-west of them.

On the 22nd the 78th Brigade relieved the 9th on the Salonika-Constantinople railway. The 7th Royal Berkshire was on the left about Cakli railway station, with the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire on their right, and the 9th Gloucestershire beyond the latter.

Cakli station was north-east of Doiran Lake, at the point where the Salonika-Constantinople railway, after running north-eastwards on the east side of the lake, again bends off towards the east. This was a generally quiet area; for the Bulgarian positions were so strong as to be recognized as practically impregnable. All the fighting likely to occur consisted of encounters between the opposing outposts in the broad valley between the high Belesh Range on the north and the Lower Krusha Balkan, on the foothills of which was the main British line.

Deaths in May were:-

1st May

25565 Frank Bressington

2nd May

17032 Frederick Thomas Charles

8th May

Lt William Robert Beauchamp Gillespie

9th May

15925 James Albury

15925 James Albury

23614 Mark Bellison

14778 Harold Bradshaw

23446 Percival George Brown

14615 Herbert Churchill

36514 George Frederick Cooper (Webb)

13365 George Drew

27224 Robert Flood

14070 Albert Stratton Harland

15568 Arthur Thomas Heath

23478 William D Kew

10055 Albert Edward King

14210 George Leggett

13961 Henry Reuben Lewington

13076 Francis Arthur Lovett

13422 Christopher Molloy

23366 William Newman

13526 Joseph Showler

25611 Percy James Stevens

23415 Leslie Harold Tovey

23394 Charles James Waldron

12th May

13854 George Frederick Russell

24th May

15019 James Nicholls

30th May

17508 William Cornelius Nobes

Reconnaissance in Cakli Wood 3rd to 4th June 1917

On the 3rd June the 7th Royal Berkshire prepared for a strong reconnaissance of the Cakli Wood, in conjunction with the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire on their right. A and D Companies were detailed for this work, and took up positions of readiness on "Clapham Common" and at Rabovo.

They started at 04:20 on the 4th June with "A" on the right and D on the left. The boundary line between the 7th Royal Berkshire and the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire ran N.E. through the Cakli railway station, past the N.E. corner of Cakli Wood, at the S.W. end of which was Cakli Village. To the west of the town was another wood-St. Stephen's.

By 05:10. A Coy pivoting on its right on the railway, had its left at a point N.W. of St. Stephen's Wood. At this point a flanking party was left, whilst the rest of the company, after being reorganized, advanced on Cakli Village

D Coy meanwhile had occupied Cakli Village without opposition, save for a few rounds of rifle fire and bombs by some Bulgars in the most northerly house of the village.

The two companies, shortly before 6 a.m., were on a line facing N.E., with their left in Cakli Village and their right; A Coy touching the 7th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire on the boundary line south of Cakli Wood.

A Coy now advanced against the southern edge of Cakli Wood, from points in which it was sniped. It then pushed on about fifty yards into the wood, throwing out a party to search the rest of the wood to the N.E. corner. It was still in the wood at 07:15. when orders were received to withdraw.

By 09:00. both companies were back again well south of the railway. The country north of the railway had been found to be very thick, with grass waist high, interspersed with bushes six feet high. Movement was difficult, and it was rarely possible to see more than thirty yards, owing to the brushwood and hedges. Moreover, owing to the extension of the front, it was difficult to keep touch along it. It rained heavily during the reconnaissance and this, as well as the straggling formation of Cakli Village, made visual signalling impossible. As the last platoon in the retirement was entering Rabovo, the village was shelled by the enemy.

During the advance the railway station had been cleared

by the left of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and the advance by its two companies northwards continued in a line of skirmishers on the right of the 7th Royal Berkshire. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire encountered practically no opposition, and only had one man wounded. The losses of the Berkshire Battalion were one man killed and two wounded. Altogether, only about ten of the enemy were seen.

The Reading Mercury of 18th August 1917 reported:-

Private S C Sayers, [23955] Royal Berks of 8 Town Place Reading was killed in action in Salonika on June 4th. He had been in the Army thirteen months and was 33 years of age. Prior to enlisting he was employed at Messrs Huntley and Palmers. His officer, writing to his wife says:- "Your husband was killed in action on the morning of June 4th as he was advancing with the company through a wood. He was shot and instantaneously killed by a sniper concealed in a tree. We all truly miss Sayers for he was one of the cheeriest men I had in my company. Please let me offer you my sincerest sympathy and I trust that you will find consolation in knowing that he died bravely doing his duty.

5th to 30th June 1917

The 78th Brigade was now again about to move to a new area nearer the Vardar. By the 13th June, marching by night, the battalion had reached Hirsova on the metalled road running well behind the front between Lake Doiran and the Vardar. The march was difficult and fatiguing.

From the 14th to the 30th the battalion was at The Crag north of Causica, and three miles or more behind "J" sector of the British line.

Deaths in June were:-

4th June

14473 William Price

23955 Sidney Carlton Sayers

15th June

15229 Edward Alderman

16305 Frank Canning

14659 Walter Dyas

21st June

25576 William Gilbert Stitfall

Sources

Petre pp295-305

Reading Mercury

Official History pp324-328

Berkshire Chronicle

Continued in section 287