

Section 284

Interlude IV - 2/4th Battalion

August - November 1917

The 2nd/4th finally escaped from the horrors of Passchendaele but stayed in the Ypres area before moving to Arras. Continued from section 274.

During this period two men were wounded and 220017 Pte Lionel Brough was killed on the 12th. They were relieved by the 5th Kings Own of 55th Division on the 14th September.

Brandhoek

25th to 30th August 1917

After their attack on the 22nd August the battalion remained refitting and resting at Goldfish Château until the 25th when they marched to the Brandhoek area and took over Derby Camp from the 2/6th Warwicks.

Here they were in support and spent most of the time either reorganising or training. The CO, Lt Col G P R Beaman, set up a competition whereby each platoon had to attack a strong point - this was won by no 4 Platoon of A Coy under 2nd Lt G W de St Legier.

Goldfish Chateau

31st August to 10th September 1917

In the evening of the 30th they exchanged places again with the 2/6th Warwicks and returned to Goldfish Chateau.

On the 3rd September a party of 150 were detailed for carrying duties and had one man killed and seven wounded. The man killed was 17615 Pte John William Cavill of Dalston. A further two casualties were incurred on the 7th for a similar operation.

Col Beaman went on leave on the 5th leaving his 2ic Major I M M Anderson in command.

Training continued with the odd lecture. On the 7th the battalion was turned out to watch the 2/5th Glosters make a mock attack on a strong point christened 'Gallipoli'

Immediate Military Medals were awarded on the 8th, the recipients were:- 200187 Sgt H Hosier, 6869 aCpl A Hancock, 18910 Pte S G Pill and 201721 Pte R Millard.

Wieltje

11th to 14th September 1917

The battalion was again sent up into support trenches at Wieltje, where it found the artillery of both sides particularly active. They relieved the 2/5th Bucks on the 10th. and had 4 days doing little more than consolidating their position and watching the German and British artillery exchange salvos. Overhead aircraft from both sides were very much in evidence.

Wormhoudt

14th to 19th September 1917

After their relief at Wieltje they marched back to Ypres where they loaded their machine guns and baggage onto limbers and marched on to Vlamertinghe Camp for the night.

Next morning (15th) they set off in buses for Watou where the Battalion all got a bath on the 16th and were inspected by the Medical Officer and quartermaster.

A reinforcement draft of 3 officers and 30 ORs arrived on the 16th.

The battalion was back in the Wormhoudt area on the 17th, and here the honours awarded for the action of the 22nd August were distributed: 2Lt G W de St Legier, 2Lt H W Jewell and 2Lt G C Mills got the MC and eleven men the MM. In addition to these, Captain G O W Willink received the Military Cross for his conduct on the 21st August

Agnez les Duisans

19th to 24th September 1917

On the 19th September the battalion marched to Esqwl-becq station and went back by train to Agnez-les-Duisans, in the back area of the Arras front, where it was to remain training for the rest of the month and into October.

The award of the DCM to Sgt Shackelford came through on the 21st. when a further draft of an officer and 10 ORs arrived. The next evening an officers dinner was held to celebrate the awards announced recently.

Hull Camp

24th September to 4th October 1917

On the 24th the battalion marched to Hull Camp in the St Nicholas area via Duisans.

Here for a week and a half they were in training with some range practice.

On the 30th a football tournament was organised and in the final HQ Coy beat D Coy 2-1.

Gavrelle Switch 4th to 10th October

On the 4th they moved up to Gavrelle Switch to relieve the 2/4th Glosters in support.

On the 6th October command of the battalion was assumed by Captain (A/Lieut.-Colonel) J. H. S. Dimmer, C., M.C. to replace Lt Col Beaman.

A further reinforcement of 39 men arrived on the 7th. Here they were detailed for working parties every night.

Greenland Hill 10th to 16th October 1917

On the 10th they moved back into the front line, relieving the 2/1st Bucks in the left subsector. D Coy under Capt Field took the left flank, A Coy under Capt Willink the centre and B Coy under Capt Shields the right. C Coy under Capt Knott were in support.

It was all pretty quiet and they spent most of the time improving their trenches. On the 13th however one OR went missing.

On the 15th 2Lt G L Worlock led a raid, two men were wounded, one of whom, 201857 Pte Alfred Wood of Windsor, died of his wounds on the 16th.

The orders for the raid read:-

VERY SECRET Copy No 2

NOT TO BE TAKEN OVER OUR PARAPET.

2/4TH BATTALION, ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT

OPERATION ORDER No 28 dated 12/10/16.

Ref. Trench Map &

Enlarged Map.

1. INTENTION.

To attack enemy trenches at M.30.a.8 ½.5, and hold area bounded by Points B.C.E.D. (M.30.a.7.5 - M.30.a.9 ½.5 - M.30.a.9 ½.3 - M.30.a.7.3 ½) until ordered to return.

2. OBJECT.

To kill Germans, obtain identifications, destroy dug-outs, mine shafts and Machine Gun Emplacements, and remain in the enemy trenches for one hour.

3. DATE.

Night 14/15th October, 1916.

4. ZERO TIME

Will be between 1.40 and 2.0 a.m. on October 15th.

5. POINT OF ENTRY

M.30.a.8 ½.5.

6. ATTACKING PARTY, under 2/Lt G.L. Worlock (O.C. Attack).

B Sgt Gilhooley and 10 O.R.

No. I 2/Lt Hutchings and 12 O.R.

II " Daniels and 14 O.R.

III " Watson and 10 O.R.

IV " Hinchliffe and 12 O.r.

V " Worlock and 20 O.R.

6. COMPOSITION & DUTIES OF PARTIES:-

B. Bangalore Party. Sgt Gilhooley, 8 Carriers, 2 R.E. To carry out two Bangalores and Point of Entry, place in position, and return to Point of Assembly - X, and join their respective parties.

Note. Their party must go out and return with the greatest caution to avoid being seen.

I. 2/Lt. Hutchings, 4 Bombers, 8 Bayonet men (4 of whom will carry mats). Turn Left and go to Point B. double block and hold on, leaving 4 men to attack M.G.E. in case it is occupied.

II. 2/Lt Daniels, 4 Bombers, 8 Bayonet men, 4 Dug-out guards, Turn Left and go to Point C. (M.30.a.7.3) and hold on, dropping a Dug-out guard at the entrance to any Dug-out passed on the way.

III. 2/Lt. Watson. Turn to Right and go through Sally Port to Points D. (M.30.a.5.5) and E (M.30.a.5 ½.4). 5 men (2 Bombers and 3 Bayonet men) to each point.

IV. 2/Lt. Hinchliffe, 6 Bombers, 6 Pillagers. Thoroughly search and destroy the area between Points A. and C. Pass back all Prisoners to Point A. and put all documents and identifications into sandbags. On completion of this work, go to Point C. and reinforce party at that Point. 2/Lt Hinchliffe will take all possible steps to obtain identifications.

V. 2/Lt. Worlock (O.C. Attack), 2 Tape men, 2 Signallers, 2 Runners, 4 Bayonet men, 2 Ladder men, 8 Bearers with 4 stretchers. Remain at A. (point of entry), further enlarge gap in wire, fix ladders from enemy parapet to trench. Keep communication with Advanced Battalion Headquarters at M.30.a.4.8 ½, cut all telephone wires in trench below them, and open fire on any enemy showing above ground.

8. PRELIMINARY RECONNAISSANCE.

A Party, composed of Sgt. Taylor, 1 signaller and 2 Snipers, will go to M.30.a.5.5 ½ with a telephone at 7 p.m. on the night of the attack, and will establish itself in a Crater there, and report to Advanced Battalion Headquarters any enemy movement, patrol, M.G. fire, etc, as it occurs.

This party will be relieved at 11 p.m. by a similar party. The relief will remain in position until the Attackers have returned to our lines.

9. DUCKBOARD PARTY.

One N.C.O. and 8 men of "B" Coy. will place 4 Duckboards across the ditch at F at 11 p.m. Two of these men will lie up and watch these Duckboards until the attackers have crossed them.

10. BANGALORE PARTY.

Will leave our lines at 11 p.m. and lay a Bangalore at point of entry. At 1 a.m. Sgt. Gilhooley will return to 2/Lt Worlock at Bay 106 and inform him whether or not the Bangalore is ready to be fired. If the Bangalore is not ready, the operations will proceed without it.

11. ATTACK MOVES OUT TO POINT OF ASSEMBLY. X.

At 1.20 a.m. Parties I, II, III, IV and V will move out from Bay 106 and take up their positions at point of assembly. X.

12. ZERO TIME.

BETWEEN THE HOURS OF 1.40 AND 2 a.m. O.C. ATTACK WILL ORDER THE BANGALORE TO BE FIRED. THE FIRING OF THE BANGALORE WILL BE ZERO TIME. IF THE BANGALORE FAILS TO EXPLODE, ZERO TIME WILL BE AT 2 a.m.

13. TIME TABLE OF ATTACK & ARTILLERY FIRE.

No/	Time /	Guns /	Targets /	Rate of fire/	Remarks
1	0	0	0	0	1 0 /
Attackers lie at Point X.					
Attackers move up to Point of Entry.					
Attackers move forward under 18 pounder					
Barrage and enter enemy trenches.					
2.	0.00-0.10		M & Ltm		Wire & parapet rapid
point of entry					
3.	0.00-0.15		do		Wire & parapet at rapid
M24.d.6.3					
4.	0.00-0.15		do		Wire & parapet at steady
M.30.c.5.0½					
5.	0.15-10		do		As 3 and 4 mins after withdrawal
6.	0.10-0.13		18 pounders		parapet 50 yds on rapid
either side of point					
of entry					
7.	0.13-0.18		do		creep back to box steady
barrage in lifts of					
50 yards					
8.	0.18-10		do		Box barrage and steady
strong points mins after withdrawal					
9.	0.0 - 10		howitzers		Box barrage & steady
strong points mins after withdrawal					
10.	0.00-0.10		184 MG Coy		Parapet from bursts of A gun will fire
M30.b.1½.7					
to	fire				bursts from 11.45
M24.d.9.5,					
CTs					pm to 1.30 am to

roads and back
drown noise of laying of Bangalore

14. SUPPORT PARTIES.

At 12.50 a.m. the following parties will be in the positions mentioned:-

(a) Left flank party, 1 Lewis gun team and 6 men of "C" Coy. at M.30.a.7.7, to protect Left flank from counter-attack.

(b) Right flank party, 1 Lewis Gun team and 6 men of "D" Coy. at M.30.a.3.2, to protect Right flank for counter-attack.

© Centre party, 1 N.C.O. and 3 men of "D" Coy. on our parapet at M.24.d.3.3, to confuse the enemy and draw his barrage by firing similar Rockets to his own.

NOTES: On no account will Green Rockets be fired by this party.

15. LEWIS GUNS.

2/Lt. Coggin will be in charge of all Lewis Guns and will be responsible that all guns arrive at their proper places at the times named.

16. TAPE.

Two men will carry out broad white Tapes on either flanks of the Attackers. When all the Attackers are in, these Tapes will be carried in and fixed on the enemy parapet.

17. ENEMY RUSE.

If the word "RETIRE" is heard, it will be a signal for bombs to be thrown at, and rifle fire opened in, the direction from which it is heard.

18. SIGNAL FOR WITHDRAWAL.

The signal for the withdrawal from the enemy lines will be given by Battalion Forward Headquarters, and will consist of three Red Rockets fired from Bay 98 at intervals of ¼ minute. If possible, Battalion Headquarters will inform the F.O.O. 10 minutes before this signal is to be given.

Parties will withdraw into NO MAN'S LAND in the order IV, II, III, I, V.

Each O.C. Party will report "ALL CLEAR" to O.C. Attack as he passes him. If there is a barrage on NO MAN'S LAND, parties will lie up in shell holes until it is lifted, and will then make their way back to Advanced Battalion Headquarters at M.300.a.4.8 ½, where they will be checked in by Lt. Heywood.

No withdrawal from the assembly position will be carried out without orders from O.C. Attack.

19. SIGNALS.

Lieut. Bingemann will establish communication between O.C. Attack, Battalion Forward Headquarters and Brigade Headquarters.

20. ARMS.

The Bomb will be used as little as possible, and Bayonet as often. Each man will carry 50 rounds S.A.A. in a bandolier.

21. EQUIPMENT.

No badges, identity discs. Letters or papers will be carried. Faces will be blackened.

22. R.A.P.

The M.O. will establish a R.A.P. at the Junction of Trolley Line and Front Line. He will make arrangements for

additional Stretcher Bears and Trolleys.

23. WOUNDED.

It will be impressed on all ranks that no man is to fall out to help wounded.

24. TRAFFIC.

After 10 p.m. on night 14/15th, all traffic will proceed as under:-

UP to trenches WINCHESTER C.T.

DOWN from trenches ERITH and MIN STREET.

Normal traffic will not be resumed until 5 a.m. on 15th October.

25. WATCHES.

Will be synchronised before parties leave billets.

Battn. HdQrs.

Lieut. & Adjutant,

12/10/16. 2/4th Bn. Royal Berks Regt. [TX00650]

The official report on the raid read:-

2/4th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment

Appendix "A" to War Diary. Vol 6

Report on Attack. Night 14/16 Oct 1916.

1. PRELIMINARIES.

On Oct 1st. 1916 orders were received to carry out an attack on the German Lines. From this date forward a Company was specially trained for the duty.

2. ATTEMPTED ATTACK ON NIGHT 8/9TH OCT.

An attempt was made to carry out the Attack this night, but owing to Bangalore torpedo failing to explode orders were issued postponing it till a later date.

3. CANCELLATION OF ORDERS FOR NIGHT 11/12TH OCT.

Orders had been issued to the effect that the attack should take place this night, but they were cancelled by 184 Brigade at 7 p.m.

3. ATTACK ON NIGHT 14/15TH OCT.

The attack took place this night. Report as under:-

1. DIARY.

9 p.m. Patrol as ordered in Para 8 of order 28 went out with telephone to Crater.

11.30. Bangalore Party (B) went out.

11.45. Enemy wiring party reported in Crater to right of Patrol.

12.43. Bangalore Party report that 2 Bangalores are in position under enemy wire.

1.23. Attackers move out from our line.

1.56. 2 Bangalores exploded. Zero starts.

2.120.C. Attack reports party into enemy trench.

2.35.O.C. Attack reports he is withdrawing party to place of assembly.

3.4. All men reported "IN".

2. NARRATIVE.

Questioning of all concerned brings out the following:-

(1). Everything worked smoothly up to Zero.

(2). At 0.10 party moved from point of assembly and worked up close under barrage of 18 pounders.

(3) Wire was found beautifully cut and no bridges were need.

(4) Party 1 moved to left as ordered but found trench entirely wrecked, and had great difficulty in finding the way. The men had to climb out of the trench and this caused some confusion.

(5) Party 2 found the trench they were meant to go up and pushed on to within a few yards of objective. 2nd/Lt Daniels himself shot an Officer and three men with his revolver. He then looked into dug-out shewn in enlarged map and saw 5 men. He threw several bombs into this dug-out. These bombs exploded. He was then wounded by a bomb as were 2 other men with him.

(6) Party 3 met with no opposition whatever but found the trench very badly damaged. A dug-out was found but it had nothing whatever in it except a table.

(7) Party 4 made endeavours to obtain identifications but missed the dug-out and trench up which 2nd/Lt Daniels had gone and where all the German dead were. They were delayed in getting into the trench by the confusion of one of the parties in front and could not recognise the trench owing to the damage done by T.M.s

(8) Party 5 remained on the parapet and carried out the duties assigned to it.

3. CONDITION OF ENEMY TRENCHES.

In nearly all the parts entered, the trench was literally blown to pieces by our T.M. fire.

Where it could be seen it was revetted well with boards similar to our own. The trench was however a good deal narrower. 2 Funk Holes were seen cut in under the parapet.

4. FACTS ABOUT ENEMY.

One man put up his hands as the leading bayonet man ran at him and was killed. Enemy all wore Steel helmets except the officer who wore a helmet.

A good many enemy appeared overland and fired at our men on the parapet at a range of about 60-70 yards.

The enemy as a whole appeared dazed.

The officer who was shot cried "Kamerad".

Enemy artillery retaliation was practically nil.

No machine gun fire at all was opened on the party.

No rockets or Very lights were fired for 300 yards on either side of point of entry.

A few rifle grenades or L.T.Ms were fired on our left Coy.

5. OUR BOMBARDMENT.

(1) M.T.Ms and L.T.Ms fired extremely well on point of entry and wrecked all the area behind it.

(2) The first M.T.M. opened fire within 1 second of firing of 1st Bangalore.

(3) Shooting of 18 pounders was accurate.

6. BANGALORE.

2 Torpedoes were well laid in spite of bright moon and exploded within 3 seconds of one another. Laid and fired by 2 men of 3/1 Coy R.E. assisted by party B.

7.COMMUNICATIONS.

Communications were exceedingly good all through and constant reports were received at Left Bn.H.Q., transmitted from Bay 106. A wire was broken in No man' Land and mended in a few minutes.

8.GENERAL NOTES.

A telephone wire was laid from 5 yards from Bangalore and given into the hand of leading attacker and served as a good guide to the gap.

9.ENEMY CASUALTIES.

Known enemy killed 11. Estimated at least 20 killed.

This does not include those killed by bombardment.

OUR CASUALTIES.

1 Officer and 3 O.R. wounded.

1 O.R. missing.

15/10/16.(Sd)

R.E. Salkeld

Lt Col 2/4th Bn. Royal Berks Regt.

A rather curious incident was reported by the the Berks Chronicle on 9/11/17:-

MILITARY MEDAL PINNED ON DYING MAN

Pte Alfred Woods Royal Berks of 19 South Place Windsor had the Military medal pinned on his breast before he died. He went out with a raiding party and was wounded. His comrades searched for him all night but they could not find him. When it was light however one of the sergeants bravely brought him in. A General who was present awarded the deceased the Military Medal before he died. "It was a brave raid, well carried out and very successful" said the chaplain. His company commander wrote "By your son's death the battalion has lost one of the bravest men it ever possessed. He died most nobly doing his duty to the last. He had a stretcher party suitable only for a brave man namely the Corps Commander and the Brigadier. Although I have only been with the company for a short time I knew him as being plucky, willing and loved by the company." [TX00583]

The Chronicle of 26/10/17 gave a much simpler version:-

ROYAL BERKS IN A SUCCESSFUL RAID

One of the Territorial battalions of the Royal Berks recently took part in a very successful raid. An officer [2Lt G L Worlock] and fourteen men went over and they reached the enemy's lines, bayoneting a good many of the enemy. They were returning with a prisoner when the latter was killed by the Boche machine guns which opened fire. The Berks had one man hit, but they were unable to get him in that night. The next afternoon a sergeant went out in broad daylight and brought him in. It happened that the Corps Commander and the Brigadier General were in the Berkshire trench at the time and they witnessed the brave deed. The officer has been awarded the Military Cross and the sergeant has been recommended for a distinction. The Berks have been highly commended on the success of the raid. [TX00736]

They were relieved by the 2/1st Bucks on the 16th

Gaverelle Switch

16th to 22nd October 1917

After relief they proceeded to the left support trenches in the Gaverelle Switch.

Lt Worlock's raid was acknowledged with congratulations from the Brigadier, Brig Gen the Hon R White CMG on the 18th.

Working parties continued with one man wounded on the 21st.

Greenland Hill

22nd to 28th October 1917

It was back to the front line on the 22nd, relieving the 2/1st Bucks. B Coy under 2Lt Worlock were on the left, A Coy under Lt Coggin in the centre, C Coy under Capt Knott on the right and D Coy under Capt Reeves in support.

D Coy carried out a raid on the 24th and suffered 4 men wounded. They exchanged duties with C Coy on the 25th.

Apart from the raid it was all pretty quiet. Patrols were sent out and trenches improved.

They were relieved by the 2/6th Warwicks on the 28th.

Arras

28th October to 9th November 1917

The relief was carried out without casualties and the companies marched independently back to Levis Barracks in Arras via Pont du Jour where they assembled to form up as a battalion to complete the march via St Laurent Blagny and St Nicholas.

The Brigade was now in Divisional reserve and had the time for more training and a thorough cleaning of men and equipment. They went to the baths on the 30th, after which they were inspected by the medical officer. Later that day the CO and quartermaster carried out a detailed inspection of kit.

On the 2nd they formed a guard of honour for a Divisional ceremony at which parchment certificates for gallantry were presented.

Chemical Works

10th to 28th November 1917

On the 9th the battalion returned to support when they relieved the 2/4th Glosters in the Chemical Works sector.

Mostly they were engaged on working and carrying parties until they moved up to the front line on the 15th relieving the 2/1st Bucks. That evening at 19:30 the 2/8th Worcesters mounted a raid through the Berkshire lines and triggered a furious reaction from the German artillery.

The Germans seemed to have it in for the Berks as there were sporadic incidents of heavy bombardment for the next

few days aimed at their trenches. There was a good deal of this sort of thing during this tour of front-line service, and there were several raids by troops on either side of the 2/4th Royal Berkshire. This worried the enemy and caused him to expend much ammunition, but was somewhat costly to the battalion, which lost seven dead and fourteen wounded between the 18th and the 21st, when it returned to support trenches.

It must be remembered that on the 19th the battle of Cambrai was being launched and the raids and diversions along the Arras front were a carefully orchestrated plan to deceive the Germans into thinking the main attack was to come through Arras.

15th Division (on the Berks right) launched a raid on the 17th and again on the 18th and 20th. 182 Bde (on the left) raided on the 19th and on the 18th a smoke discharge in front of 61st Division led the enemy to expect an attack, and to put down a heavy barrage all over the British trenches.

This smoke discharge was a screen for a bombing raid by the Battalion which saw Sgt Wellesley Browne 201099 win the DCM. Writing home soon after, his letter was reported in the Berkshire Chronicle of 14/12/1917:-

Sergeant Browne, Royal Berkshire Regiment, of 50 Norton Road Reading describes very picturesquely in a letter to his wife how he won the DCM. He says:-

"D Company was to have a bombing raid. About fifty men were picked and formed into three parties as there were three trenches in the German lines which we had to attack. I was with the left party and volunteered to take first bayonet man which in no case is an easy job as you are the first man in the German lines. Well we got out in No-mans-land ready for the barrage, and what a row! Something like a thousand tons of shells in three minutes, besides fifty six thousand machine gun bullets. Well in we went. I came to a dugout which I jumped over so they couldn't shoot up the stairs at me and of course I left the bombers to deal with that while I went on in front. There were nine Jerries (Germans) waiting for us round the corner so I got my rifle loaded and bayonet fixed. The first man to rush at me - well he nearly got to me, but I opened fire on him and down he went. I took the gun from him and sent it back to the Colonel. On the way back one of my party got wounded so I told the others to get back before Jerry opened fire and I was left with my mate. Well I got him on my back and crawled about a hundred yards then found a stretcher and dragged him in to our lines; but I am sorry to say he died of wounds."

Private Osborne of Didcot has received the Military Medal for his work on the same occasion.

Sergeant Browne is now in hospital in Leeds with contusion of the back. The Germans opened a barrage and knocked in the Royal Berks bay causing several casualties. The victims belonged to A and D sections. Those who lost their lives were Corporal Hill [200414 Ernest Hill], Private Mason [220027 Thomas Edwin Mason], Private Tanner (of Reading) 201180 Pte Walter Tanner] and Private V Woodley (of Reading) [201712 Arthur William Woodley]. Corporal Walters is [200369 Alfred Edward Walters] suffering from shell shock as the result of being buried by the same shell.

It is interesting to note that Sergeant Kew [203021 Daniel

Kew] who was awarded the DCM for bringing in a wounded under heavy shell fire and attending to his wounds whilst exposed to the same danger, has already won the Delhi Durbar Medal and the Military Medal

Relief came on the 21st via the 2/1st Bucks and the Berks moved back into the support positions. Here they remained on working and carrying duties until the 26th when they were ordered back to the front line. This order was cancelled next day, the 27th when the battalion was warned to be ready to go to the Cambrai area. Next day it entrained at Arras for Bapaume, whence it marched south-east, by le Transloy and Rocquigny, to Lechelle.

Sources

Petre pp-189-191

War Diary and attached operational orders

Berkshire Chronicle