

## Section 294

# The Battle of Cambrai

## 2/4th Battalion November - December 1917

*The 2nd/4th had been carrying out diversionary operations while Cambrai had begun. Continued from section 284.*

### 27th-30th November 1917

On the 27th November 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.

### 1st December 1917

On the 1st December the 2/4th Royal Berkshire started, at 03:45, to march through mud and water to Fins, where were Brigade Head-quarters. The cold was so great that sleep was impossible, before or after the march.

### 2nd December 1917

At 02:00. on the 2nd December a Staff Officer of the Guards Division arrived to explain the situation as it now stood since the commencement of the German general counter-attack on the newly acquired Cambrai Salient. The Guards had retaken Gouzeaucourt, which had been lost to the Germans at the commencement of the counter-attack. It had been learned from prisoners that a big attack in this neighbourhood was about to be made. 2/4th Royal Berkshire and 2/5th Gloucestershire were sent to support the Guards at Gouzeaucourt, moving off at 13:25.

The rest of the 184th Brigade went to Metz-en-Couture. Colonel Dimmer went back with the G.S.O. to the Guards Head-quarters whilst the battalion marched to Gouzeau-court, where it was ordered to take up a position on the railway east of the village. Here it dug in and made all preparations and reconnaissances for the expected attack.

Later, however, orders were received for the battalion to rejoin its own brigade, which was under orders to support the Secundera-bad Cavalry Brigade. It rejoined the Brigade at 20:00. with the Gloucestershires. The two battalions were ordered to Villers Plouich to take up support positions north of the village.

### 3rd December 1917

At 08:30 on the 3rd December the enemy attacked La

Vacquerie and the line north and south of it after a heavy bombardment.

About 10:00. the 2/5th Gloucestershire were placed at the disposal of the 183rd Brigade with a view to counter-attack, while the 2/4th Royal Berkshire, also under the 183rd Brigade, were ordered to occupy the old British line in front of Villers Plouich, that is the line held before the battle of the 20th November.

At 13:00 C Company was sent to Welsh Trench, facing the enemy towards the east, whilst D was placed in support of the left of C, and the rest of the battalion was posted in Corner Work. Heavy attacks continued all day, and the enemy succeeded in taking La Vacquerie and the line north and south of it, but were held up there.

During the day Sgt T A Maccabee of Newbury was injured when a shell exploded. Both legs were shattered and he lay on the battlefield for three days and nights before he could be rescued. When he got to the Dressing Station he was found to be suffering from frostbite and seven fingers and two legs were amputated at the 3rd General Australian Hospital at Abbeville. He never recovered from his wounds and died after many operations at the Pavilion Hospital Brighton on 3rd March 1920.

### 4th December 1917

During the night of the 3rd-4th December the Royal Berkshire took over Corner Support and the trenches west of it. Corner Work was a short way north-west of La Vacquerie, with Corner Support just west of it again. At 04:00. on the 4th December, after a fairly quiet night, the enemy bom-barded for an hour.

Orders were received for the 184th Brigade to relieve the 183rd in the night of the 5th-6th. Eight tanks also came up in order to help in a counter-attack, in the event of Welsh Ridge (between La Vacquerie and Villers Plouich) being taken by the Germans. The day, however, passed uneventfully.

### 5th December 1917

During the night of the 4th-5th the 2/4th Royal Berkshire bombed the enemy out of the trenches leading to La Vacquerie, but were counter-attacked and forced back to their starting point.

About 16:00 on the 5th, after an intense bombardment

lasting half an hour, the enemy made three assaults in succession on Corner Support Trench, which were 'all repulsed'. It appears from the Battalion Diary that, previous to this, C and D Companies had been driven from Corner Work. Orders to retake it were received, but it is not clear whether any serious attempt to do so was made. In any case, it was not successful; for the three attacks at 16:00 started from the west side of Corner Work against the trenches to the west, that is Corner Support.

The casualties of C Company are shown in the diary as Second-Lieutenant Janaway very seriously wounded, three other ranks killed, and six wounded. Those of D were not yet known at the time of making the diary entry, and were not subsequently recorded.

### 6th December 1917

During the night of the 5th-6th the 184th Brigade relieved the 183rd as ordered. The Royal Berkshire were then still attached to the 183rd Brigade, but appear to have been returned to the 184th at the time of the relief, so remained in front line. The disposition of the 184th Brigade after the relief was thus - 2/4th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry on the right, 2/1st Buckinghamshire in the centre, and 2/4th Royal Berkshire in the old position on the left. The 2/5th Gloucestershire were in support in the Villers Plouich quarry.

In the morning of the 6th December the Royal Berkshire were ordered to extend their holding to the left, and, in order to enable them to garrison this extra piece of trench, two hundred and thirty-five other ranks of the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire (182nd Brigade) were placed under the orders of the O.C. 2/4th Royal Berkshire. There was no infantry action during the 6th in this part.

### 7th December 1917

During the night of the 6th-7th the battalion, and, the detachment of the 2/8th Royal Warwickshire, were relieved, and sent back into support in Villers Plouich quarry.

## Casualties

The casualties of the battalion during the period from the 1st to the 7th December are shown by companies thus:

*Officers. Wounded:* 2nd-Lieut. H. R. Leggett, A. E. Janaway.

*Other Ranks: Killed. Wounded*

A Company	4	15
B Company	2	12
C Company	6	16

D Company	9	24
Total . .	21	67

On the whole, looking to these losses, it seems clear the battalion was not very seriously engaged in the second part of the Battle of Cambrai.

### Sources

Petre pp 190-193

*continued in section 304*