

Volume 11 Section 307

Interlude V

The 7th Battalion November 1917 - March 1918

The 7th Battalion had spent a long summer with little action. The winter was to prove a test of their resolve. (continued from section 287)

Changes in Command

Early in November the battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion 1^{re} Regiment de Marche d'Afrique and the latter part of the month was passed at Sarakli three miles from railhead. In that neighbourhood, during December 1917, the 7th Royal Berkshire were employed on railway construction, and on the 27th of that month Colonel Dene, on recovery from his wound of the 9th May, resumed command of the battalion.

When he had been wounded Lieut.-Colonel J. F. B. Morrell had taken over command. He went on leave at the end of September and Captain Pike took command. When he had to go to hospital, the command was assumed for more than a month, before Colonel Dene rejoined by Major Witts of the 9th Gloucestershire Regiment.

During January 1918 the battalion was still in the Sarakli neighbourhood till the 25th, when it moved to Kalinova north of Lake Ardzan and on the 31st went into front line in the F sector of the British line till the 8th February. After five days at Tertre Vert, north of Kalinova, in Corps reserve, the battalion went for the second half of February to work in H sector, and was back in front line in F on the 1st March.

Raid On the Vardar 2nd March 1918

On the 2nd, Captain E. W. Ravenshear and three other officers took out A Company for a raid which was supported by twenty men of D under Second-Lieutenant G. Berry, who were left at Dautli Track Post. The plan was for the main raiding party to attack the enemy's support position N.W. of Selimli, whilst the enemy's attention and fire were diverted from them by a demonstration by Berry's party against White Scar Hill to the right.

The main party had no success; for they lost their way in the darkness, and were unable to reach their objective. The country was difficult, and they presently found themselves facing a deep ravine over which no crossing could be found. Second-Lieutenant Berry, meanwhile,

had succeeded in drawing the attention of the enemy, who fired heavily on his party, put down a barrage on Ham Ravine, and shelled Goldies Hill on his right. All the raiders eventually withdrew to their lines without any loss.

The diary mentions that the battalion was at this time busy with "anti-malarial" work, an occupation in which much of the time of the troops was spent on the Salonika Front, with more or less satisfactory results. This was not the malaria season, but it was that of blizzards which blew with great fury down the valley of the Vardar, making life anything but a picnic, and adding frostbite to the many troubles the unfortunate troops on this front had to bear.

The Salonika Front has been treated too often as a "side show" of little importance and little suffering. Yet it was with the final advance on this side that the collapse of the allies of Germany began, and the sufferings of the Allied troops from malaria and heat in the summer and autumn, and cold and insufficient shelter in the winter, were very great.

Sources

Petre pp 305-306

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