

Volume 5 Section 321

Interlude VI - 1st Battalion

April - July 1918

The 1st Battalion had been badly mauled in the German Spring Offensive and was absorbing reinforcements. Continued from section 311

In Reserve

1st April 1918

The Battalion was in reserve at Engelbelmer when April opened. They were relieved by units of 6th Brigade on April 1st and moved to billets at Hedauville. Although the weather had effectively ended the German advance, the British Army was still very wary and the 1st Battalion remained on one hours notice to move.

2nd April 1918

At 04:00 on the 2nd they were off again to the Amplier area marching via Forceville, Acheux, Louvencourt, Vauchelles, Les Autrie and Marieux. Here they were diverted to Beauval as the accomodation at Amplier was full. They reached Beauval at 17:00 after passing through Beauquesne.

3rd April 1918

The morning was spent resting and cleaning up and following an inspection they decided to retain the two company structure with no 1 Coy under Capt M P Pugh and No 2 Coy under Capt E D D'O Astley. However they kept the four-company administrative arrangements in place. An order to move to Frevent arrived in the morning and the men eat at noon. The transport moved off at 13:00 but it was not until 16:00 that buses turned up to transport the men to Frevent via Doulens. They arrived at 18:00 and then had to march to Houvin-Houvineul where they arrived at quite good billets at 19:30

Houvineul

4th-5th April 1918

Two very easy days spent in light training, especially for Lewis gunners although the continuing rain made training difficult. Each day passes were granted to 10% of the men from 14:00 to tatoo.

6th April 1918

The first major reinforcements since the Somersets arrived on the 6th. 282 other ranks, mainly from the Hertfordshire Yeomany. They were numbered in the region of 43725 to 43874.

Brig General Ironsides arrived and was entertained to dinner in the officers mess.

7th April 1918

Another batch of reinforcements arrived and were posted to companies

Ivergny

8th - 11th April 1918

Shooting practice had to be abandoned owing to the rain on the 8th.

On the 9th two sergeant instructors arrived from 3rd Army School to help train the new recruits in the use of the Lewis gun. 57 more other ranks arrived after the battalion had moved to new billets at Ivergny.

More instructors arrived on the 10th including the Brigade Armourer, Sergt Maj G A Pollock who was a former Royal Berkshireman The commanding officer inspected the new company organisation. The numerous reinforcements from other units raised the battalion to a ration strength of twenty-eight officers and seven hundred and forty-nine other ranks at the end of the month, but the reinforcements, which arrived whilst the battalion was in the throes of changing sectors, were all young and inexperienced soldiers, and there was great difficulty in getting them sorted out into the companies before the battalion was again in the line on the 14th April.

Sombrin

11th-12th April 1918

On the 11th they moved to Sombrin arriving 17:30 and on the 12th the CO and his Company Commanders were sent by lorry to reconnoitre the front line north of Adinfer Wood.

La Herliere

12th to 14th April 1918

While they were away the order for the move to La

Herliere was received. A few more ORs arrived but 104 of the first contingent (Somersets?) were sent back to 2nd Division depot. By the time they all got to La Herliere they found the billets originally assigned had been occupied by men from the Labour Corps and the Royal Berkshires had to settle for poor scattered billets.

The commanders went out on recce again on the 13th and later in the day the confirmation came that they were to go back into the line next day.

On Sunday the 14th the Brigade gas officer came to inspect respirators and there was a church service at 09:00.

Boiry St Martin

14th to 18th April 1918

The battalion moved into the line relieving the 3rd Grenadier Guards in the evening of the 14th.

The section of the line to which the battalion had been transferred, when it took over from the Grenadier Guards on the 14th April, was about Boiry St. Martin, some six miles south of Arras.

The 15th was very quiet with a German surrendering to one of the patrols. They were on a forward slope and had no communication trench so during daylight hours they were unable to move from the front line trench.

The Companies swapped roles on the 16th

On the 17th the reserve company (D) amused themselves by collecting salvage

They were relieved by 1/KRRC on the 18th.

Blairville

18th to 20th April 1918

A batch of new officers arrived on the 18th Capt R Talbot took over command of C Coy, Lt J G L Dawson and Lt Banner went to A Coy, 2Lts Ayres and White to B Coy, 2Lt Brown to C Coy and Lt F Lawson to D Coy.

They went back into the line on the 20th relieving the 23rd Royal Fusiliers.

Boiry St Martin

21st to 26th April 1918

They found that for a change they had a complete line to defend with all the posts and wire in place, albeit a bit shallow and with a gap to their left. They remedied this during their tour of duty. Battalion HQ was established in an old burnt out German dug out but although offering good shelter and accomodation it was all a bit precarious as all the supporting timbers had been removed

Three Other Ranks were wounded on the 21st by a shell at the sugar factory, one of whom, 43818 Pte Ben

Moore of Sheffield died on the 23rd. - He was one of the recent reinforcements.

Major Anderson from the 11th Middlesex, who had been attached to the 5th Royal Berks, joined on the 22nd as temporary second in command to Lt Col Brett.

On the 23rd the companies swapped positions.

On the 24th a gas attack was launched from midnight to 02:00 on the Cojeul valley but some of it blew back into the Berks' lines and they had to don masks for a short time.

On the 25th enemy shelling was heavy and one shell fell into a trench where men were sleeping. Luckily it failed to explode but one man reported sick the next day with shell shock

They were relieved by the 1st KRRC at 22:30 On the 26th and they moved back to Brigade reserve.

Blairville

26th to 29th April 1918

The men of A Coy and some from B were able to get a bath at Berles au Bois on the 27th with the rest of the men getting their bath on the 28th.

On the 29th one officer and one platoon from each company was sent to join the transport section to get a rest. Major Anderson was sent back as well to command them, they included men from all the regiments in the Brigade.

The battalion finished the month with a strength of 30 officers and 1186 men but a ration strength of 28 officers and 749 men.

Casualties for the month had been very light with one offpicer, Lt Shipton and 10 men wounded. The large number of reinforcements had been very much welcomed but they were mainly young with very little experience and it was very difficult to get them organised into platoons and companies mixed with old hands as no sooner had the process started than the battalion had to move.

Boiry St Martin

29th April to 5th May 1918

The battalion relieved the 23rd Royal Fusiliers in the front line at 23:00 on the 29th and settled down to a miserable few days in the wet with the Germans firing trench mortars and grenades all day on the 29th and machine guns on the 1st.

Sgt Rumble DCM MM who was in charge of the stretcher bearers was himself wounded on the 2nd..

Two American officers arrived on the 4th to learn something about trench warfare. A sheel hit the forward transport killing four horses and wounding three others..

The shelling continued during the whole of their tour but

it was only when they were being relieved on the 5th that another man was killed: 43843 Pte G H Green, another of the recent reinforcements.

1st Bn War Diary

Continued in section 331

Brigade Reserve

6th to 8th May 1918

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May 1918

This employment continued without any special feature till the 13th May when the battalion, then in reserve at Lanerlière, began to have platoons of American Infantry attached to it for training.

Much progress in training the young drafts was made in May, and the brigade was inspected by the Corps-Commander on the 23rd.

June 1918

On the 1st June there was a heavy bombardment, by which Captain E. D. D'O. Astley and one man were killed, and eight men wounded.

On the 28th a patrol of "B" Company, under Second-Lieutenant Murray, returning from a reconnaissance, encountered a patrol of about twenty-five Germans near the British line, who fled when bombed but left behind nothing to identify them. Apparently there were no casualties the British party.

July 1918

There was a bad epidemic of influenza when the battalion was in brigade reserve near Monchy in the early days of July.

On the 16th practice began for an important raid in the near future. This came off on the 23rd, and was directed against the German trenches above Ablainzeville.

The raiders consisted of two hundred and three other ranks with six officers, and was commanded by Captain Stokes, M.C. The Battalion Diary gives no details, but says it was very successful, bringing in five prisoners, and having killed about fifty Germans, in addition to those killed by the barrage.

The casualties on the British side were: Second-Lieutenant F. Boshell killed, and Second-Lieutenant Bysh wounded; of other ranks thirty-one wounded, most of them slightly.

The raid started at 12.30 a.m. and all was over by 2 a.m.

Sources

Petre pp 52-53