

Volume 11 Section 327

Interlude VI

The 7th Battalion in Salonika (March - June 1918)

Well away from the Western front the 7th Battalion continued playing their part in the defence of Salonika and eventually the invasion of Bulgaria. (continued from section 307)

Raid at Piton des Quatres Arbres 29th April

By the end of April the Battalion was in M Section the extreme left towards Vardar. From the 26th the British artillery were pounding the enemy wire on the hill known as Piton des Mitrailluses which was in fact some 1200 yards to the east of the real target which was a hill called Piton des Quatre Arbres to the north of some orchards. A raid was fixed for the night of 29th-30th April using B and D Coys under the command of Major J M Eldridge. The objective was to destroy enemy outposts believed to be on the hill.

The raiders left the trenches at 21:30 on the 29th and formed up at 21:45 outside the British wire. From there they advanced in artillery formation until they were in position opposite a line of slits in the German wire. They then sent up a white flare to signal the commencement of an artillery barrage.

At 22:42 D Coy moved forward again and entered the orchard at 22:50. Simultaneously a flank party of a Lewis gun section and a rifle grenade section worked their way round the western slopes of Piton des Quatres Arbres, while scouts moved over the top of the hill.

As it turned out there were no dugouts in the orchards and a hut close to the river bank was also found to be unoccupied. The expected defensive wire consisted only of a few strands strung between the trees. After D Coy had gone as far as the second track past the orchard Capt Donkins who commanded D Coy gave the order to withdraw at 23:15 and the Company was back in its trenches by 24:00 having encountered no opposition other than a few 77 mm shells.

Meanwhile two platoons of B Coy under the command of Capt H C Ellis had moved off in the direction of Piton de l'Eglise and were deployed west of the Smol-Macukovo track to the SW of the Macukovo Ravine. Their left reached about 60 yards north of the junction of Cardiff and Macukovo Ravines and their flanks were covered by Lewis guns. The SW Bank of the Macukovo Ravine, being higher than the NW bank gave good shelter against shell fire.

The other two platoons of B Coy remained in reserve near Piton de l'Eglise. Where the enemy wire had been cut earlier as a diversion a party of the 11th Worcesters were sent to engage the enemy's attention by firing and cheering about 150 yards from the enemy trenches. The noise was amplified by megaphones and the ruse was completely successful. Instead of firing on the real raiders, the Bulgar artillery set down a barrage on Cardiff, Bangor and Macukovo Ravines and on Macukovo village. Just a few shells landed in the orchards but not on Piton de l'Eglise. The enemy evacuated his own trenches and then shelled them, expecting them to be occupied by the British.

Two of the Bulgars had been caught by the British barrage and had remained in Macukovo village. One was captured and the other killed. The raid had gone according to plan and the 7th Battalion suffered only five men wounded, two of whom remained on duty. The Worcesters actually suffered more casualties with six men wounded.

Patrols and Skirmishes 8th May

On the 8th May a patrol of Battalion scouts lead by 2Lt Shillcock were intent on clearing out an enemy post on the Piton des Quatre Arbres. They encountered three parties of about 20 Bulgars each and engaged them with rifles and bombs. The Bulgars were beaten off suffering about 25 casualties with one being taken prisoner. The Royal Berks had seven men slightly wounded.

12/13th May

Another similar but stronger raid was made in the night of the 12th-13th May when Captain A. K. Barrett, with eighty-five men of "C" Company, met a small party of the enemy on the hill. After an exchange of rifle fire and bombs, Barrett's men charged with the bayonet. The enemy fled to the mulberry orchard north of the hill, where they were lost among the trees. The casualties on the British side are described as "very slight."

The rest of the mon~ was spent in the Brigade reserve at Smol Hill. The battalion returned to the front in "M" sector for the first eighteen days of June. During this period there were many small patrols of no particular note, generally lying up to try and catch enemy patrols, leaving propaganda in match-boxes for

the enemy, etc. Lieutenant Shillcock took a full share in these minor operations.

Sources

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