

Volume 8 Section 334

The Final Advance

2/4th Battalion August - November 1918

Now in the northern part of the western front the 2nd/4th were to participate in the final advance. Continued from 324.

Crossing the Patte-Becque 11th to 13th August 1918

The final British offensive had commenced on the 8th August on the Somme, and the 11th was fixed for an attack by the 184th Brigade, with the object of crossing the Platte Becque stream and establishing a bridgehead beyond it. One battalion from the 182nd was to co-operate on the right

The 184th Brigade was disposed for attack with the 2/4th Royal Berkshire on the right and the Gloucestershire on the left in front line. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry were in support. It will be remembered that British Brigades had been reduced early in 1918, from four to three battalions. The 2/1st Bucks had disappeared from the 184th Brigade.

Zero hour was fixed for 04:15 and at that hour D Company of the Royal Berkshire advanced, supported by C. By 14:00 part of two platoons of D had passed over the Platte Becque at a broken foot-bridge whilst the other two had crossed farther up on the left, where bridges had been placed in position during the previous night. The crossing here was attended with great difficulty, as the plank bridges had been destroyed by shell fire, and their position was exposed to enemy machine-gun fire.

These platoons lost their leader, and only a very few of them succeeded in rushing the passage.

The two platoons on the right were more successful in getting across. Beyond the stream they had a stubborn fight in which the Germans lost heavily. The German position beyond was very strong, being on a slight rise, and consisting of concrete buildings held with machine guns.

Casualties being numerous in the D Platoons, a platoon of C was sent up to reinforce them. On the flanks of the Royal Berkshire the other battalions had failed to get across the stream, and consequently by 09.30 on the 12th August the remains of the three platoons found themselves isolated, and also very short of ammunition.

A farm on a slight elevation to the left had not been taken by the adjoining battalion, and the enemy machine guns had not been silenced by the barrage. There was

nothing left, in the circumstances, but to retire again across the brook.

In this unsuccessful attack Captain Bowles and Lieutenants Moilliet and Schroder, all of D Company, were wounded, and there were forty-one casualties (details not given) in the ranks.

The battalion was relieved on the 13th August, and the casualties during this period of front-line service are stated in the diary to have been:-

Officers (not named): 2 killed and 3 wounded. *Other ranks:* 11 killed, 3 wounded and missing, 66 wounded (32 of these gassed), and 2 missing. From the Brigade Diary it appears that the officers were

Lieut. Thorne (5th Suffolk, attached 2/4th R. Berks), killed 7th August. Capt. Goater, killed 10th August. Capt. R. H. D. Bowles, wounded 11th August. 2nd-Lieuts. Moilliet and Schroder, wounded 11th August.

The same diary gives the August casualties in other ranks thus:

On the 11th, Wounded 18.

On the 12th, Killed 11, Wounded 6, Wounded and Missing 3, Missing 2.

On the 14th Gassed 21.

Apparently the casualties of the 11th are entered partly on the 11th and partly on the 12th. The Battalion Diary makes no mention of fighting on the 12th; nor does it mention the gassing of 21 men on the 14th.

14th to 31st August 1918

From the 14th to the 22nd the Royal Berkshire were in billets at Steenbecque. They were sent up on that date into the support line, and on the 25th into the right of the brigade front line. The battalion diary is extremely meagre, and that of the brigade is not much more illuminating.

The former states that by the 31st August the battalion had moved slowly forwards as far as Chapelle Duvelle, and adds "progress still rather sticky, owing to bitter resistance." However, the battalion does not seem to have had any fighting worth mention; for no casualties in other ranks are given in the Brigade Diary later than the 14th August, and the only officer casualty mentioned is Second-Lieutenant T. J. Hooper gassed on the 28th.

1st to 30th September 1918

On the 1st September it was ascertained at Chapelle Duvelle that the enemy had evacuated Estaires, on the north bank of the Lys Canal. At 18:00 that evening C Company, followed by D, moved forward to a position with its right at the canal drawbridge, and its left at the Bretigne Farm. No resistance, beyond a little sniping, was met with. A and B had farther to go, and did not reach the position till 02:00.

On the 2nd, attempts to push patrols across the canal failed, and the battalion was relieved and fell back to a line about Robermetz.

On the 11th the 2/4th Royal Berkshire were in Brigade reserve, and on the 17th moved to a mile N.N.W. of Trou Bayard, just N.E. of Estaires.

On the 28th it was again in front line, on the left of the right sector of the brigade.

The casualties in the battalion during September are given only in the Brigade Diary, without specification of dates. They were

Officers: Lieut. A. J. Fox, killed; *Other ranks:* Killed 10, wounded 21, and gassed 1.

2nd October 1918

On the 2nd October, an attack was made on Bartlette's Farm by two platoons of A, one from the south and the other from the north. An artillery and trench-mortar barrage played on the farm for forty minutes, and then swept back behind it. Very slight resistance was encountered and the farm was taken with four prisoners.

On information of this being sent back, B came up on the left of A and the advance continued with A and B, in front line and C and D in support.

3rd October 1918

It was again continued at 06:30 on the 3rd with B and C leading, followed by A and D

By 11.45 the first objective had been gained on the old British line running N.E. At 21:00 the position was front of the distillery, where the battalion was relieved and withdrew to Rouge de Bout, which lies almost midway between Neuve Chapelle and Armentieres.

4th to October 1918

The battalion now moved, with the brigade, farther south partly by omnibus, partly by rail and partly by march. On the 9th October it marched into Doullens, having been attached on the previous day to the XVI Ith Corps of the 3rd Army.

From Doullens it went by train to Hermie on the road from Bapaume to Cambrai, arriving there on the 10th,

and halted till the 19th, when it marched by Noyelles and the southern part of Cambrai to Cugnonles, whence it marched, on the 23rd, to St. Aubert.

24th October 1918

That place was left at 07:00 on the 24th, and at 14:00 the battalion was resting on the railway embankment at Montrecourt. It then moved up into support of the 183rd Brigade, D taking post a mile north of Bernerain, A in the quarry near the River Harpies, S.W. of St. Martin, B and C in the quarry a quarter of a mile south of Les Furrieres.

25th October 1918

On the 25th A and C captured, without resistance, the high ground north of La Justice, and took one prisoner. Moving forward to the line of the Valenciennes-Avesnes railway, the battalion consolidated, with A and C in front, and B and D in support line.

At 16:00 a smoke barrage was put down, under cover of which the battalion advanced with the object of ascertaining whether it was possible to cross the Rhonelle stream and effect a lodgment on the high ground beyond it.

The enemy was found to be holding the heights so strongly with machine guns that advance was out of the question, and the companies were compelled to fall back to the position from which they had started.

Crossing the Rhonelle

26th October 1918

On the 26th A Company on the left occupied a chateau near Artres and at 10:00 the 4th Division on the left attacked and occupied Artres where a bridgehead was established on the right bank of the Rhonelle. The slope of the hill beyond was also gained.

A and D Companies then attempted the passage of the stream. D succeeded in crossing, and gained touch with the 4th Division on the slope on its left. A was less fortunate, being caught in a gas-shell barrage and suffering some casualties. It could not get beyond its original front line, in which it was presently relieved by B.

Later, the battalion was relieved in front line, and withdrawn to billets in reserve at Bernerain, where it remained training till the end of October.

The casualties in these actions are not given in the Battalion Diary, but that of the brigade states them for the 2/4th Royal Berkshire during October as follows:

Officers : No casualties.

Other Ranks: From 1st to 23rd, Killed 1, Wounded 8. 24th-31st, Killed 6, Wounded 39. Missing 1,

Gassed 27.

It seems safe to assume that practically all the casualties in the latter period occurred on the 25th and 26th, and that most of the gas cases were in A when it was in the gas barrage on the latter date.

1st to 11th November 1918

On the 1st November the battalion relieved the Gloucestershire in the main line of resistance on the high ground on the left (south) bank of the Rhonelle. The line here had remained stationary since the 26th October. At 14:00 the 2/4th Royal Berkshire moved up into front line as the 183rd Brigade attacked. They appear to have had no fighting on this day, and there is no casualty list from which to judge either in the Battalion or the Brigade Diary.

The fighting career of the 2/4th Royal Berkshire had ended; for on the 2nd November they returned to their billets at Bernerain.

They went still farther back, via Montrecourt and St. Aubert, to Avesnes-lez-St. Aubert on the 3rd, returning to Bernerain on the 4th.

On the 8th they were at Sepmeries, where they remained till the Armistice at 11:00 on the 11th November 1918.

Sources

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