

Section 335

The Final Advance

The 5th Battalion

*After the attack at Hamel on May 24th, the 5th had spent most of the rest of June either resting or working in the rear trenches.
Continued from section 325*

Albert

July/August 1918

On the 30th June the Battalion moved to Vignacourt where its trench strength was seven hundred and nineteen.

On the 1st August the 12th Division relieved the 58th in the Dernancourt Sector, south of Albert.

Col Goodland wins the DSO

8th August 1918

Sir H. Rawlinson's new offensive in conjunction with the Third Army was timed to commence on the 8th August. On his extreme left the 18th Division was to operate along the ridge on the north bank of the Somme by the Corbie-Bray Road. But a German attack on the 6th had hit the 54th Brigade of the 18th Division so heavily, that it had to be replaced on the 8th by the 36th Brigade, lent for the purpose by the 12th to the 18th Division. On the 7th, the 36th Brigade was placed under the orders of the 53rd for the operations commencing next day. The function of the 36th Brigade on that day was the defence of the left flank of the 53rd as it advanced. The attack had been six hours in progress when, at 10:30 the brigade was called to form a defensive flank for the 53rd.

Two companies (C and D) of the 5th Royal Berkshire moved off under Captain A. G. Revill in artillery formation at 11:15. The fighting on this day appears to have fallen to the lot of the other two battalions of the Brigade, and the Royal Berkshire diary mentions no casualties.

It consolidated the road constituting the second objective with two companies in front. It was relieved at 19:00 by the 7th Royal Sussex.

Col Goodland won the DSO for his actions on the 8th. His citation read:-

For conspicuous gallantry, coolness and devotion to duty. On the 8th August 1918 south of Morlancourt he led his Battalion, which had been in reserve, through a heavy barrage in order to re-inforce the firing line; at the time

the situation was somewhat obscure and as the enemy counter attack was in progress he rapidly summed up the situation and filled up a dangerous gap which had occurred, and stopped the advance of the enemy. He then personally supervised the consolidation of a vital position under direct fire from MGs and field guns firing with open sights. He was conspicuous by his coolness and gallantry during the whole operation.

9th August 1918

On the 9th again it seems to have been confined to forming a defensive flank facing south for the 175th Brigade of the 54th Division, to which it was attached, in case the troops on the right should fail.

10th August 1918

On the 10th again there is no record of fighting, and the battalion only took over the trenches taken by the 9th Essex on the right.

12th August 1918

On the 12th the battalion went into Brigade reserve, returning to the front from the 14th to the 16th, a quiet period.

Execution

14th August 1918

Private John Swain had been under two suspended sentences and sent to the trenches from which he promptly absconded. He was found the next day, several miles away hiding in a cornfield. He had removed his regimental badges and gave a false name when caught.

He was shot on 14th August and buried in the cemetery in the village of Montigny where his grave was set well away from his comrades. [75-PUTKOWSKY]

17th to 21st August 1918

After three days in rear from the 17th to the 20th, the 5th Royal Berkshire again went into line north of Morlancourt on the 21st in preparation for an attack in conjunction with the 6th Northamptonshire Regiment (18th Division) on the left. That night forming up was much hampered by a gas-shell bombardment, and Lieutenant Engelbach was wounded.

Attack on Meaulte

22nd August 1918

At 04.55 on the 22nd the British barrage opened and the battalion advanced to the attack with A, B and C Companies, D being in reserve. With it and the 9th Royal Fusiliers went three Mark V tanks, and the advance was covered by a creeping barrage. The objective of the 5th Royal Berkshire was the village of Meaulte. Here they were assisted by the tanks, one of them moving up and down the main street, and the other two on either side of the village. The village was successfully cleared and a position was consolidated. The casualties were:

Officers. Wounded: Capt. J. N. Gregory, M.C. Lieut E. A. Engelbach; 2nd-Lieuts. L. Chapman S. M. Eccles, C. A. Farebrother, L. C. Oakes

Other Ranks: Killed 3; Wounded 72

Attack on the 24th August

At 16:45 on the 24th August the battalion again attacked, with the object of gaining touch with the 18th Division beyond Becordel. Two attacks earlier had failed. The 5th Royal Berkshire, advancing under a good barrage to the left of the village, outflanked the German position, which was evacuated and occupied by the 37th Brigade.

Carnoy

26th August

On the 26th the battalion had orders to attack between 04:00 and 04:30 to the east of Carnoy. It marched at 03:30, by compass, but only reached its forming-up position at 04:45 when the barrage had ceased. The attack was made on both sides of Carnoy, with B followed by D on the right and A followed by C on the left. As the advance passed Carnoy, it was met by heavy artillery and machine-gun fire which caused many casualties.

Only a few men reached the German trenches on the forward slope. Touch was gained with the 10th London Regiment on the right, but not with the 7th Royal Sussex who had been held up on the left. There was heavy fighting on the left of the battalion and after two attempts the Germans counter-attacking succeeded in rushing that flank and capturing a number of men. In trying to get away, Second-Lieutenant Stapleton was killed and Second-Lieutenant Tutton was mortally wounded

The casualties of this day were:

Officers. Killed or Died of Wounds: 2nd-Lieuts. W. H. Stapleton, F. J. Tutton, *Wounded:* 2nd-Lieut. G. W. W. Page.

Other Ranks: Killed 43; Wounded 97; Missing 31

The Medical Officer, Captain W. M. Lansdale, had been killed by a shell on the previous evening.

In the morning of the 27th the 9th Royal Fusiliers passed through and captured Maltz Horn Farm, and the 5th Royal Berkshire followed.

On the 28th the battalion moved back to Carnoy to allow the 19th London Regiment to pass. At Carnoy the battalion stayed till the end of August.

Nurlu

September 1918

On the 1st September the 5th Royal Berkshire were at Maricourt. At 08:00 on the 2nd they were occupying dugouts and a bank to the north of Le Forest, the assembly position for the next advance. Here they suffered a considerable long-range shelling.

At 19.30 on the 3rd they moved forward to trenches round St. Pierre Vaast Wood, which they reached at midnight, to find there was no accommodation or shelter, whilst much gas shelling was going on.

The 4th was a very wet day. At 16:00 orders were received to move into trenches just north of Moislains, which entailed passing through a gas-shelled area. At midnight the battalion was sharing Head-quarters with the 7th Royal Sussex, with whom they were to attack Nurlu next morning.

The attack started at 06.45 on the 5th under a creeping barrage. The Canal du Nord was passed at Moislains, with C Company leading on the left and D on the right A and B in support.

During the forming up some casualties had occurred from shells. The battalion was acting as reserve to the 7th Royal Sussex and 9th Royal Fusiliers, who led the attack. These battalions captured Nurlu, and the 5th Royal Berkshire dug in three hundred yards east of it. Here they were in touch on the right with the supporting companies of the 10th London (58th Division) and the Cambridgeshire (35th Brigade) on the left.

At 10 a.m. the companies were rearranged and the line was extended to the right.

At 11 a.m. the 10th London had advanced towards Lieramont and the 5th Royal Berkshire moved forward on their left and dug in on a line extending from Sorel Wood on the left to the northern edge of Lieramont on the right.

The casualties of this day were:

Officers. Killed: Capt. B. W. Hougham (commanding if C " Company). *Wounded:* 2nd-Lieut. Ralph.

Other Ranks: Wounded 12.

Epehy

17th September

This line was held till the 7th, when the battallion was withdrawn to Nurlu, where it suffered from shelling at intervals. Here it was refitting till noon on the 17th, when it was attached to the 37th Brigade, and at 8 p.m. moved to assembly positions for the attack on Epehy next day. The 18th was on the right of the 12th Division and the 58th on the left toward Peizieres.

The attack commenced at 5.20 a.m. on the 18th, the role of the Berkshire Battalion (less " B " Company) being to move south of Epehy and mop up between the first objective, marked on the map by a red line, and the second marked by a green line, as soon as the former should be taken by the 6th Queen's, in support of whom three companies were acting.

B Coy was attached to the 6th Royal West Kent, moving north of Peizieres, which itself lay north of Epehy.

At 06:45 the three other companies moved from assembly position in artillery formation, but, the attack on Epehy having failed, the 6th Queen's were unable to advance with their left flank exposed to the village. It was decided, therefore, about 08:15, to withdraw to a ridge where further orders were awaited. At 13:00 the battalion was attached to the 35th Brigade which had now taken Epehy. Two companies (C and D) were ordered to mop up the village, and, after clearing it, to take position in Princes Reserve to the east of it. C and D reached this position by 14:30, A Coy being in reserve.

The attack was continued at 15:00 by the 36th and 37th Brigades on the right and left respectively, but they failed to reach the second objective, and at 19:00. A, C and D Companies of the 5th Royal Berkshire, with two companies of the Northants, were ordered to hold Princes Reserve, capture some trenches beyond it, and gain touch with the 9th Essex at Chestnut Avenue on their left. This was done by 14:00 on the 19th, and the line was established in advance of Tetard Wood east of Princes Reserve. The trenches between Tetard Wood on the right and Chestnut Avenue on the left had been taken by the 5th Royal Berkshire at 18:15.

Tetard Wood

19th-23rd September

On the 19th, orders issued for an attack on Room and Ockenden Trenches east of Tetard Wood. The advance was commenced at 11:00, but was at first held up by strong opposition, and it was not till 22:00 that all objectives were captured. These trenches appear to have been taken by the 1st Cambridgeshire and 5th Northamptonshire without the aid of the 5th Royal Berkshire.

At 22:00 on the 20th the battalion was relieved by the 7th Norfolk and returned to the 36th Brigade, with

which it took position at Vaughan Bank.

At dawn on the 21st the 35th and 37th Brigades continued the attack with partial success towards the east. The fighting continued all day, but the Royal Berkshire do not appear to have been engaged before 7 p.m. when they received orders to form up in Mule and Bird Trenches and attack the line in front, which ran south to north from Heythrop Post on the right, through Little Priel Farm, to Cruciform Post on the left.

The battalion formed up at 11p.m. and attacked at midnight. " D " Company on the right was immediately successful, but " B " on the left was for a time held up by machine guns on its left flank. However, by 2 a.m. all objectives had been taken and consolidated, with " B " and " D " in front, " A " in support and " C " in reserve in Mule Trench. Here they were heavily shelled all day on the 22nd, and were enfiladed by machine-gun fire from Kildare Post on the left, until that position was carried by the 58th Division. During the 23rd the divisional front was reorganized on a line from Kildare Post on the left to Fleece All Post on the right. The Berkshire Battalion was relieved and went into reserve of the 36th Brigade, with one company in Kildare Avenue on the left, and three in Poplar and Room Trenches.

Attack on 12th Division

24th September

On the 24th at 11a.m. the enemy made a strong attack on the front of the 12th Division. It was repulsed on the right, but the enemy on the front of the 36th Brigade succeeded in getting into Dados Lane and the Loop in front of Kildare Post. A counter-attack by the 9th Royal Fusiliers, with A Company of the Royal Berkshire attached, failed to eject the Germans from the captured trenches. A second attempt by the Berkshire Battalion at 22:00 also failed.

At 22:00 on the 25th the 5th Royal Berkshire relieved the 9th Royal Fusiliers at Kildare Post, and at 3 a.m. on the 26th another attempt was made to recover Dados Trench and the Loop by attacking with two platoons on each flank. The right platoons were successful at first, but, as no progress could be made by those on the left, all were eventually forced to retire. Bomb fighting went on all day.

St Quentin Canal

27th-30th September

On the 27th the battalion was in line on the left of the brigade, and at 5-20 a.m. on the 28th yet another attack, by the 6th Queen's, failed to recover the lost trenches.

On the 29th the troops on the right attacked over the tunnel through which the St. Quentin Canal passes. For this attack the 37th Brigade passed through the 36th,

which was not engaged. The attack on the right succeeded, but the 33rd Division on the left and the 37th Brigade failed. Next day (30th) the enemy had left the canal, and the 37th Bngade pushed on, whilst the 36th was sent back at night to the Guyencourt concentration camp

The battalion's casualties in this period of fighting, from the 18th to the 30th September, were:

Officers. Killed: 2nd-Lieut. E. F. Bond.

Wounded 2nd-Lieuts. F. S. Hawkins, W. A. Buckingham, T. C. Enever, A. V. Saunders.

Other Ranks: 250 (details not specified).

Arras

October 1918

On the 1st October the battalion left the Epehy front by bus for the Proyart area, whence they were conveyed by rail to Acq in the Arras area, arriving there on the 4th and going to Niagara Camp.

On the 5th they proceeded by 'bus to the Vimy Ridge area, where they relieved the 12th Rifle Brigade of the 26th Division, and were in reserve behind the 9th Royal Fusiliers and 7th Royal Sussex. The line held by the Division was extended from Oppy on the right and Lelen dit Leauville on the left, a distance of eleven thousand yards. All three brigades were in line, the 36th being in the centre, with the 35th on its right and 37th on the left. The 5th Royal Berkshire were in reserve to the 9th Royal Fusiliers and 7th Royal Sussex in front line.

Immediately after the relief the 36th Brigade, finding that the enemy was falling back, advanced to Mericourt, and on the 7th a further advance was made to the line Fresnoy-Rouvroy. On the 9th October, the enemy was found to be retreating, but he succeeded in holding up the British advance on the 10th. On the 11th the advance was resumed unopposed, and at 17:00 the Drocourt-Queant line was occupied.

On the 12th A and C Companies of the 5th Royal Berkshire were employed to clear Henin Lietard and pass beyond it. This operation neared considerable resistance, as did the clearing of Dourges next day.

On the 14th the enemy was still on the east bank of the canal, the bridge over which he had blown up. D and B now relieved A and C in front line and were heavily shelled at night. On the 15th no advance across the Haute Deule Canal was possible; but on the 16th the east bank was reported clear of Germans and B Company forced a passage at Pont Sault on the left.

The advance continued on the 17th, and at 15:00 A and C again passed through B and D to clear the village of Le Forest. By 17:00 Cordela had been occupied, and C had outposts beyond it. During these last operations the

36th Brigade had been on the left of the division On the 18th the 37th Brigade passed through the 36th, which moved on the 19th to Baches, on the 20th to Orchies, and from the 23rd to the 26th was at Ramegies. On the 27th it relieved the 7th Royal Sussex in the front line of the whole division.

On the 28th an attempt was made to pass the Canal de l'Escau which encountered some resistance and was not at first successful. In the evening the retreat of the enemy enabled a bridge to be thrown. In this action the 5th Royal Berkshire had some fighting but apparently nothing very serious, as their casualties were only five men wounded.

Fighting for the 5th Royal Berkshire was now at an end. On the 30th October the battalion was in billets at Flines where next day it furnished a guard-of-honour for General Horne, the Army Commander. and was inspected by H.R.H the Prince of Wales.

There are no separate statements of casualties for October, but it appears they they were as follows:

Officers Died on 29th of Wounds received on 28th: Captain and Adjutant C A Mallam

Wounded: (on 14th) 2nd-Lieut. Humphries.

Other Ranks: Killed 11; Wounded 55; Missing 3.

Sources

Petre pp 238-245

Shot at Dawn by Julian Putakowsky

Personal papers of Col Goodland

Continued in section 345