

Royal Sussex Regiment: Newspaper Articles and Documents

2nd Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment
(original held at West Sussex Record Office
RSR MS 2/57)

War Diary covering the Battle of Aubers
Ridge (9th May 1915)

The whole war diary for the 2nd Battalion is
available on this website on the 'Battalion
War Diaries' page.



2ND BATTALION, ROYAL SUSSEX REGIMENT.

1915.

Appendix.

May

PONT AVELETTE

1st 5 am. Aroused early in the morning by a heavy bombardment. We received orders from the Brigade to be ready to move at the shortest notice. The Battalion got up dressed and had breakfast. No move however was made. It transpired that the enemy were expecting us to deliver an attack and so bombarded our fire & support trenches in the RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE Sector. They also bombarded LACOUTURE where the Cameron Highlanders were billeted, causing some casualties. We remained at PONT AVELETTE. Company training was carried out.

PONT AVELETTE - ALLOUAGNE

2nd Marched to ALLOUAGNE at 1.30 pm. Capt V.E.C. Dashwood evacuated with measles.

ALLOUAGNE

3rd) Company Training etc.
4th)
5th)

ALLOUAGNE - LES FACONS

6th Received orders to move up to LES FACONS; marched off 2 p.m and reached LES FACONS at 6.30 pm, & went into billets for the night.

LES FACONS

7th Received orders for an assault on the German line opposite RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE to take place on the morning of the 8th. Remained in LES FACONS making necessary arrangements for the next day. 7 pm just as we had were moving off to RICHEBOURG received orders that the attack had been postponed 24 hours and we were to remain where we were for that night.

LES FACONS - RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE

8th Remained at LES FACONS all day and moved up to RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE in the evening. On arrival took over breastworks from BLACK WATCH.

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(Ctd).

During the night bombs, wooden bridges were drawn for crossing the stream in front of our line. 5 Spappers (Mining Experts) joined our two Companies which were going to lead the attack in order to cut the wires of any mines in German lines, when we had captured them.

Capt Villiers & St Croix were wounded in the RUE DU BOIS on the way up.

RICHENBOURG L'AVOUE

9th

The day started with an issue of tea and ran at 3.30 am.

Battalion limits with regard to enemy first line trenches, R.2 to V.1. Frontage of Bn about 400 yards. Bn left on Cinder track. Bombardment commenced at 6 am. At this hour the Battalion was distributed as follows:-

1st Line of Breastworks - 'C' Company right, 'D' Company left.
2nd Line of Breastworks - 'A' " right; 'B' Company, left.
(less 1 platoon No 8)

No 8 Platoon under 2nd Lt F.T. Goring attached to Lowland Coy R.E. in breastworks immediately behind the RUE DU BOIS.

Machine Guns were distributed as follows - 2 on extreme left of Bn line. One of these guns remained in this position throughout. 2 guns about 100 yards to the left of Bn right.

Battn Head quarters at telephone near right flank of Battalion, in front Breastwork.

At 5.30 am an intense bombardment commenced and two platoons of 'C' & 'D' Coys respectively advanced over the parapet.

First line from right to left being formed by No 9 Platoon (2nd Lt Fentrell) 11 Platoon (Sgt Reeves) 12 Platoon (2nd Lt Roberts) 13 Platoon (Sgt Dray), and were closely followed by the second line formed by 10 platoon (Sgt Startup) 14 platoon (2nd Lt Taylor) 15 platoon (2nd Lt Child) 16 platoon (Sgt Lower).

The advance over the parapet was made in line except by 12 and 13 platoons which crossed the parapet at a particular spot which afforded some cover.

At the same time, 'A' Coy advanced from second line of breastworks on the top of the ground, the two platoons in front being No 3 (2nd Lt Shaw) right, and No 2 Platoon (Sgt Catchpole) left, followed respectively by No 4 Platoon

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(Lt Dicker) and No 1 Platoon (2nd Lt Talbot) at a distance of about 30 yards.

A Coy's advance was in column of sections to a flank at deploying interval. When B and E Platoons left the rear breastwork, the outer platoons filed inwards behind the breastwork, thus getting into position behind the leading platoons before they advanced. Meanwhile, B Coy's three platoons, advancing from the End line breastworks to the first line by the left communication trench having started two minutes before the advertised time (5.28 am) in order to allow of their reaching the first line at the same time as 'A' Company.

Of these Companies, the whole of 'A' followed 'C' over the breastworks, and two platoons of 'B' Coy followed 'D' Coy. These were No 6 Platoon (2nd Lt Miller) right and No 5 Platoon (2nd Lt Jukes) left.

No 7 Platoon (2nd Lt Wallington) being ordered to remain behind the front breastworks by C O B Coy (Capt C E Bond) D S O The Machine Gun Officer had given orders for two Machine Guns to go forward with the leading Coys line, one from each flank, and the other two guns were to advance in a similar manner with the supporting Coys End Line.

Both guns were only to move if substantial progress was being made. The two right guns actually went forward, but the two left guns remained in their original position except that one of these was moved about 15 yards to the left front, to a listening post. This gun was withdrawn to its original position after firing for about a quarter of an hour.

No 8 Platoon advancing with a section of Lowland Coy R. E. on the top of the ground reached the left portion of the first line breastworks just after No 7 Platoon. It appears that through some misunderstanding that an order was passed that the sappers should advance over the breastworks. Many did so, being shortly afterwards recalled, but not before they had suffered several casualties. No 8 Platoon carried sand bags, barbed wire so for making good the enemy's position if taken.

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(Ctd).

Before our supporting Companies were clear of the first line breastworks, the 5th Bn RI Sussex Regt arrived, many of them going straight over the breastworks and becoming mingled with our men.

The following arrangements had been made with regard to Bombers by 2nd Lt Austin, Command 'D' Company - Bombers of 14 & 15 Platoons were to collect at V1 when enemy's first line was reached with the intention to bomb the enemy out of the communication trench in rear. 'C' Coy's bombers were distributed, one with each of sections. Sergt Startup having orders to supervise the work of these bombers as occasion offered on arriving at enemy's first line.

'B' Coy's bombers were with their platoons except that those of No 8, (attached to R E) who were attached to No 6 Platoon (2nd Lt Miller).

'A' Coy's Bombers were grouped near their respective Platoon Commanders. The leading Coys, 'C' & 'D' barred bridges and ladders. 'C' Coy 5 bridges and 2 ladders. 'D' Coy 6 bridges and 2 ladders.

From information collected it appears that on the right Capt R F Pinke 'C' Coy was hit early in the action but continued to lead his men. The same is also reported of 2nd Lt Taylor 'C' Coy who was leading 'C' Coy's 2nd line. 2nd Lt Fentrell, leading 'C' Coy's first line advanced to within about 40 yards of the enemy's wire.

Capt Finch, Command A Coy also reached this line.

2nd Lt Shaw was wounded whilst leading his platoon and was subsequently killed whilst endeavours were being made to bring him back.

Lieut Dicker and 2nd Lt Talbot were both wounded.

The right of our line was subjected to enfilade fire from Machine Guns.

On the left 2nd Lt Austin 'D' Coy appears to have been hit early in the engagement leaving 2nd Lt Roberts in command of 'D' Coy's first line - 2nd Lt Roberts was wounded and 2nd Lt Child in command of 'D' Coy's 2nd line was killed. Coy Sgt Major Butcher assumed command and ordered the first line to dig themselves in.

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(Ctd).

of 'B' Coy, 2nd Lt Miller & 2 Lt Jucks were both hit. The left suffered very severely from enfilade fire from an angle in the German trench opposite the Munster Fusiliers, the early retirement of this Bn leaving our left flank in the air. In general the centre of gravity of the assaulting troops did not get much more than 150 yards, or about half way to the German Breastworks, though a portion succeeded in getting within about 40 yards of it, and one man appears to have reached the parapet itself.

Flags were carried to denote the position of Companies. The German fired from loopholes low down in the parapet.

At 6.30 a.m. orders were given to withdraw behind our first breastworks, under cover of reopened bombardment. D Coy's first line seems to have received this order, but not 'C' Coy's. Several men managed to get back during the day but some remained till dark, a few joining in the assault by the 1st Division Brigade delivered in the afternoon.

The two machine guns on the right were got back and three out of the four machine guns and what remained of the Battalion were returned to a line of breastworks behind the AWE DU BOLS, the fourth Machine Gun by request remained up in the first line till late in the afternoon.

Our casualties were

Killed

Officers 2 (2 Lt A T Shaw
(" S S Child

Wounded

9 (Capt E F Villiers.
" de St Croix.
2 Lt Fawtrell
" Lt Dicker
2 Lt Miller
" Roberts
" Falbot
" Taylor
" Green

Missing

3 (Capt R F Pinke
2 Lt T. R. Jucks.
" C. Austin

Other Banks 101. 329 (includes 118.
8 at duty
Total. 14 officers 548 Rank & file.

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(Std).

Our casualties were due to Machine Gun Fire Shrapnel and High Explosive Shells when advancing over the first breastwork and between our line.

At 4 pm a fresh assault was delivered by the Black Watch and Cameron Highlanders (1st Guards Bde) after another bombardment. This attack reached the enemy's first line but was driven out soon afterwards. In the evening about 7.30 pm the Battalion marched back to billets at LES CROQUAUX.

LES CROQUAUX

10th Resting. At 4 pm the Battalion marched to billets at OBLINGHEM.

OBLINGHEM.

11th Draft of 120 N C O's and men joined ~~Maximilian Battalion~~

OBLINGHEM - BETHUNE

12th Batta was inspected and addressed by the Brigadier in the morning. In the afternoon the Battalion moved to Billets in BETHUNE (squares E 10.d. 11.c. 16 b. & 17 a.)

BETHUNE

13th -) Battalion in same billets BETHUNE;
14th) training carried out under Company arrangements and bathing parades held at Swimming Baths.

BETHUNE - LABOURSE

15th The Battalion marched to billets at LABOURSE

LABOURSE

16th) S Lieuts West, Owen and Cook joined
17th) on 16th. 2 Lieut A. S. E. Dicker
18th) rejoined on 18th. Battalion held a
19th) concert in the courtyard of the
CHATAU LABOURSE (Batta H. Q.) On 16th
Men were given baths during this
period under Coy arrangements.

SOUTH OF LA BASSEE - BETHUNE ROAD.

20th The Battalion marched from LABOURSE at 2 pm and relieved the Welch Regt. 3rd Brigade in sub-section "E 2", South of the LA BASSEE- BETHUNE Road.