

War Diary of 20th Battalion London Regiment
 Period May 1915

Ref WO/95/2738

Date	Place	Time	Summary of Events & Information	Comments
03 May			<p>Orders received at 07.00am to move back to Les Pilsnoy as the Brigade is to form part of the Army Corps Reserve for the next few days.</p> <p>At 2.40pm less second in command with A and B coys left Gorre at 3.40pm. C and D coys, with the transport left Essars under the second in command and meeting in Bethune. The whole marched for Lapugnoy arriving there at 4.30pm having had three halts on route. The Bttn occupied practically the same billets as when last here so that the men were all comfortably settled within a very short time after arrival. According to local information the house occupied by our HQ was occupied by British troops after the Battle of Waterloo. Funny they should be here again exactly 100 years afterwards.</p> <p>Capt Marchant was found this morning accidentally shot in his room. He was buried in the cover of the chateau grounds at Gorre with other British Officers killed in that locality.</p>	
04 May	Lapugnoy		<p>The men kept occupied by cleaning kit and equipment, drill in early morning and Company & Bttn training later in the day. Waterproof cloaks issued to NCOs and men.</p>	
05 May			<p>Same as Tuesday</p>	
06 May			<p>Same as Tuesday. In afternoon a soccer match. Officers v ??? Ended in a draw; 2 goals to 2. A very good game</p>	
07 May		<p>8.30pm 9.30pm</p>	<p>At 10.30am orders having the following effect were issued: The Bgde is now attached to the 2nd Division (Commanded by Gen Home), 1st Army, 1st Army Corps. All greatcoats are called in and sent to Bethune to be stored. All blankets are to be packed on wagons and everything ready to move at moment's notice to Essars and billet in allotted area. Bivouac if necessary. Men to carry only groundsheet, mackintosh cloak, cardigan, 1 pair of socks, canteen of rations as issued in addition to arms and ammunition.</p> <p>Orders received to move to Essars These orders cancelled</p>	
08 May			<p>Usual company training etc during the morning. At 12.30pm orders as to final advance received. 20th London to move out of Lapugnoy at 12.30am (9th inst) to its allotted place at Essars where it would form part of the Corps Reserve.</p>	

09 May			Bttn paraded and marched at appointed time and arrived Essars at 03.30am. Dark night, tiring march owing to constant halts. Order of march being 17 th , 18 th , 20 th 19 th .	
10 May		8.10pm	At 7.15pm received orders to be ready to move at shortest notice 'Be ready to move 8.50pm'. At 8.50 paraded and marched to Les Facons. Bttn settled down on close billets in a farm and partly in bivouac.	
11 May		01.20am 2.15pm	The Bgde has now been transferred to II Divn temporarily and forms part of the I Army reserve. Orders received for coy cooks to rejoin Bttn at once. Cooks and cooks' drivers felt they had had a disturbed night and men got a late hot meal and hurried over as at 10.00am as orders were received that cooks to be again brigaded by 1.00pm and the Bttn ready to move at 2.00pm. At 12.30pm cooks had just started when orders were received that they were to remain with Bttn, so that men's dinners need not have been so hurried over. Orders received to march in time to reach new area at Sacouture by 4.00pm. Marched at 3.30pm and arrived by time stated. All men except 3 platoons of A coy in bivouac.	
12 May	In bivouac at La Couture		Gloriously fine days, but cold nights. Bivouac more comfortable than crowded billets in bases.	
13 May			Orders received shortly before 1.00pm to be on road ready to move at 1.30pm. Destination to be communicated en route. Arrived Bethune 3.30pm. Billeted in theatre near thereto.	
14 May			A wet day. At 5.30pm orders received to be ready to be ready to move at 7.30pm. The 5 th London Infantry Brigade having now become the 141 st Infantry Brigade was now transferred from the II Divn to the 2 nd London Divn which had now become officially the 47 th London Divn. The 47 th London Divn was ordered to relieve the 1 st Guards Bgde and take over from the Givenchy trenches (Sector B). 17 th London to take over sub-sector B1 19 th London to take over sub-sector B3 18 th and 20 th playing 'Box and Cox' in sub-sector B2 and Bgde reserve. 4 days spells in each Bgde reserve at Le Preol. At 7.30pm the Bttn marched for Le Preol. A wet unpleasant march.	
15/16 May			At Le Preol. Officer spending the time reconnoitring the ground and positions to be occupied in event of attack and learning the trenches to be taken over from 18 th Bttn and the ground occupied by and in front of the whole section. Orders of the	

			<p>day contained letter from Gen Home to the Brigadier complementing him on the state of efficiency and work done by the Bgde while attached to his (the II Divn) Division.</p> <p>On Friday evening orders received for the Bttn to be ready to move at any moment as the Divn on our left was going to attack. Attack subsequently postponed for 24 hours. Saturday night Bttn was kept ready to move, but was called upon. All today we hear of good progress being made by the Hackney force and German trenches on our left being captured. Our duty is now to hold the Givanchy section at all costs as it was the pivot on which whole advance was being made. Owing to success of attack on our left we expect counter attack from Germans tonight.</p>	
17/18 May			<p>The Bttn at 1.30pm received orders to go up one coy at a time to Sidbury Trench. The D coy left at 2.00pm and was followed by C, B, and A. it had been raining all morning and Sidbury Trench which was only a ploughed ditch which was in a very wet and muddy condition. The Bttn remained there all night as support for an attack contemplated by the Bttn occupying the left of sector Bin the event of the Bgde on our left capturing the German trenches in front of it. At 8.00pm it began to rain and a very wet and uncomfortable time was spent till 3.00pm on Tuesday when the Bttn was put into shelter - close billeting in the houses along Harley Street in rear of the trench. The Bgde on our left not having advanced far enough to enable the contemplated attack to be delivered.</p>	
19 May			<p>The Bttn took over section B of the trenches from the London Irish, ie the section in front of Givanchy; C and took over the firing line, B the Keep, Mary Redoubt and Gunnery Siding and A in reserve in the dugouts in rear of Harley Street. The Bttn was subjected to moderate shellfire all day.</p>	
20 May			<p>Bttn's dispositions remained as above. Moderate shell fire all day till evening when our guns commenced an heavy bombardment replied to vigorously by enemy's guns</p>	
21 May			<p>Heavy bombardment continued. Our front and communication trenches being blown in in several places. All breaches repaired by our own men -. During the day B and D coys changed places and A and C coys ditto. Shortly after relief a section of B coy had a narrow escape. A six-inch shell landing right in the trench close to a NCO and six men, but did not explode.</p>	
22 May			<p>Trenches broken down on three places and repaired. Bombardment moderated about midday. Comparatively quiet afternoon and evening. Heavy thunderstorm and received bombardment early hours of Sunday morning.</p>	

23 May		<p>A glorious day. Quiet morning. Heavy firing in front to Festubert. Moderate bombardment commenced at 10.00am. The Bttn was relieved at 4.00pm by the London Irish and returned to billets at Le Preol. Total casualties since leaving Le Preol; 2 killed and 17 wounded. A reinforcement of 3 officers; Lt Goodwin and 2Lts Hamilton and Adams with 26 men arrived from base. One of the men got wounded on the way up without and got sent back wounded without having reached the firing trenches.</p>	
24 May		<p>Another glorious day. Men bathed in canal and spent a quiet day resting.</p>	
25 May		<p>Same as Monday till 6pm when Bttn was ordered to be in Divisional Reserve. About 10pm 2 coys (C & D), under Major WH Matthews, were sent up to Windy Corner to reinforce the Reserve Bttn of the 142 Inf Bgde, which was attacking the German trench at point B3. On arrival were ordered to Sidbury Trench almost immediately afterwards. C coy was sent to carry ammunition to the firing line and shortly after the 2 platoons of D coy were sent to carry up tools and sandbags and to act as working party</p>	
26 May		<p>About 12.15am Major Matthew was ordered to take up the remaining 2 platoons of D Coy (with which there were then Capt Dolphin, Lt Dyer and 2Lt Young) as a reinforcement to the 24th London Rgmt and to report to Col Simpson for instructions.</p> <p>On arrival they manned the front line trench at the point where the same had been opened to reinforce the troops there in the captured German trench. This trench had been captured up to the foot of a slope leading to some higher ground along which the continuation of the German trench ran and which rise had checked the advance of the attacking troops. About 12.45am Lt Dyer's platoon was ordered down to reinforce the 24th London at the point where the advance had been checked. The 24th had lost very heavily and were getting exhausted and but for the arrival of these fresh men there was grave risk that the Germans would have recaptured the extreme right of the position the 24th had taken. In this point was situated the head of a German mine and they fought strenuously to recover it. Lt Dyer was wounded here and Sgt Lomas to command of the remains of the platoon and held on to the position until relieved at nightfall, doing most excellent work in a very valiant manner.</p> <p>Shortly after midnight the remaining two companies of he Bttn had been sent to Windy Corner to further reinforce the Reserve Bttn on the 142nd Inf Bgde and at 02.30am, it having been decided to stop the attack and consolidate the position</p>	

		<p>captured, the whole Bttn less Lt Dyer's platoon was reassembled at Windy Corner.</p> <p>About 5.00pm the Bttn had orders to relieve the 24th London and other troops of the 142nd Bgde in sub section B3 of the captured trench. At 5.00pm HQ staff went up and made the necessary arrangements. The relief commenced at 7.00pm and was completed by 9.30pm and the work of clearing the dead from the trenches (of which there were very many, especially in the captured trench) and repair the trenches, which in several places had been broken down by shell fire and constructing parapets to the communication trench to the captured position was t once commenced and continued all night.</p> <p>During the afternoon the Battalion Medical Officer (Capt S Clark, RAMC attached) and stretcher-bearers were occupied getting out wounded from the front line under heavy fire.</p>	
27 May		<p>Work of repairing and cleaning up trenches, consolidating and construction of new communication trenches continued practically night and day without stop. All ranks duly allowed the minimum of rest to enable them to carry on. Sentries reduced to a minimum compatible with safety and to check enemy's sniping, so as to have every possible man working.</p> <p>Moderate shellfire and considerable sniping all day.</p>	
28 May		<p>Same as Thursday until 3.45pm when the enemy attempted the end of the captured trench which was situated their mine and which our Engineers are now working back on to their trench.</p> <p>Attack developed into a battle of bomb throwers covered by rifle fire. In about an hour the attack was repulsed and the enemy forced to construct a fresh barricade further back than the one they held before their attack commenced. The success of this little scrape was largely contributed to the fact that Capt Escombe, Lt Thorne and Pte Carrington succeeded at great personal risk in establishing themselves on the crest of the hill which was situate the trench held by the Germans and from which they were delivering their attack and from there, under heavy fire, directing our bomb throwers, who were on lower ground than the enemy and consequently at a disadvantage where to throw. During the attack the 18th London (London Irish), who were holding sub sector B2, sent some of their bomb throwers to assist, especially Pte Shipley.</p>	

		<p>Unfortunately and to everyone's great regret, just when the defence was assured, Pte Carrington and Pte Shipley were killed</p> <p>The defence was also greatly helped by the 47th Battery RFA who placed 3 shots right on the enemy close to the spot where the fight was taking place. Everyone was delighted when these came and we all greatly admired the skill and measure of the gunner officer directing the fire. (Major Newcombe, we believe) as to be of any use it had to be very close and the first shot fell on the enemy's trench about 60 yards from where our men were fighting. The third fell within about 20 yards and the second was in between the two and all were beautifully placed on the trench.</p> <p>Directly the scrap was over the work of cleaning up, consolidating and repairing was continued harder than ever and during the night we succeeded in erecting 3 sangars along the crest where Capt Escombe, Lt Thorne and Pte Carrington had first succeeded during the fight and getting a footing. These give an enormous advantage for defence of the captured trench and for attacking that still held by the Germans. It is worth recording, although not an incident of this Btn, that in the mine, to recapture which the Germans had no doubt delivered their attack. Lt Mooreland RETF had on the night of Tuesday 25th captured 18 German sappers who were working in it up the line and for which purpose, he without a moments hesitation, when the entrance to the mine was captured entered it single handed.</p>	
29 May		<p>Work of repairing, cleaning, consolidating and constructing new trenches continued until 7.00pm when Btn was relieved by 19th London and returned to billets at Le Preol.</p> <p>Total casualties from Tuesday to Saturday; killed 16, missing, believed killed; 7. Wounded; 1 officer and 44 NCOs and men.</p> <p>Total casualties to date; Killed 1 officer and 19 NCOs and men. Missing, believed killed; 7 Wounded; 1 officer and 76 NCOs and men</p>	
30/31 May		<p>In billets at Le Preol. Slight shelling after 9.30pm. Tuesday 2 men slightly wounded by Frankfurt Line.</p>	