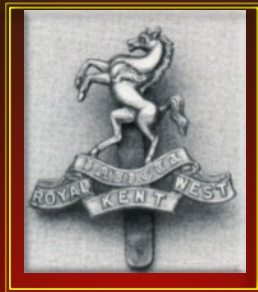


# The Queens Own Royal West Kents



## WW1

### Regimental Diary Extracts 1914



The Shrosbree Family History. A series of booklets exploring the exploits and deeds of various members of my Shrosbree family

Extracts from the Royal West Kents War Diary 1914  
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Not For Sale

Cover picture: On Parade .Milton Barracks , Gravesend,  
Kent

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Revised with additional material Nov 2019

Remember Me (The voice  
of the dead)

Remember me :

Duty called and I went to  
war.

Though I'd never fired a  
gun before

I paid the price for your  
new day.

As all my dreams were  
blown away.

Remember me :

We all stood true as whis-  
tles blew.

And faced the shell and  
stench of Hell.

Now battle's done, there is  
no sound.

Our bones decay beneath  
the ground.

We cannot see, or smell, or  
hear.

There is no death, or hope  
or fear.

Remember me :

Once we, like you, would  
laugh and talk.

And run and walk and do  
the things that you all do.

But now we lie in rows so  
neat.

Beneath the soil, beneath  
your feet.

Remember me :

In mud and gore and the  
blood of war.

We fought and fell and  
move no more.

Remember me :

I am not dead.

I'm just a voice within your  
head.

Harry Riley.

## Foreword

The Following extracts are taken from the official war diaries of the Royal West Kent Regiment

The diary entries give the background and the details of the events that led to the battle at Neuve Chapelle. 1914 Very little of this particular event was ever published.

The Germans had practically fought us to a standstill. After a terrific onslaught in the opening days and weeks of the first world war the British expeditionary forces were all but spent. The outstanding achievements of what the Kaiser called the 'Contemptible little Army' was manifest in the fact that they not only halted the German advance against superior odds, but brought them almost to the point of surrender. However whilst some of the Germans came to the point of surrender they found they were yielding to a retreating army! Ironically the British, unaware of the demoralised and weakened state of their opponents had decided that they would have to withdraw. When one looks at the severity of the losses in British ranks it is easy to see why.

Thus the armies were in a fluid state. Regrouping, repositioning and reinforcing. It was from this stalemate position that the trench warfare evolved.

It against this background that the diary extracts are set.

Neuve Chapelle was one of the principle places where the Germans were halted in their advance and it was from this position that the great offensive was eventually launched and it is often mentioned in official histories of other later actions. But because of the need for secrecy and security the full details of this last desperate act of 22-29 Oct 1914 was never made known to the public.

Pte Walter Thomas Shrosbree was one of the men who served in B coy during those fateful days of 1914. His recollections as related to his grandchildren bear a very close similarity to the Regimental diary

./.

Dedicated to memory of Pte Walter Thomas Shrosbree his comrades and the forces of the British Expeditionary forces

Lest we Forget

**Pte Walter Thomas Shrosbree**  
**British Expeditionary forces**

Walter attested to the Northumberland Fusiliers at Gravesend, Kent on the 30 May 1905, aged 18 yrs. for the 2nd Batt, Royal West Kent's. Enlisted No L- 8061 private .. for an 8 years limited Service engagement, he completed 7 yrs 274 days service of which he was abroad 6 yrs 154 days with the colours, in Peshwar. India. Serving withwith ' Exemplary conduct' ( 2 yrs officers Mess). Upon his arrival home, he disembarked at Gosport Hants 27 February 1913 . He was transferred to the reserves ' Section " A" on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1913'

Section A Reserve

For men who had completed their service in the regular army and who undertook to rejoin, if required, in an emergency that did not require general mobilisation. A man could serve no more than two years in Section A. Pay was 7 shillings a week in addition to the reservists earnings as a civilian. He had to attend twelve training days per year.

A year later he was ' Recalled' and returned to the 1st Battalion who were in Dublin. The order to "Mobilise" came on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914. and they embarked for France Aug 1914 Landing at Havre 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and were ' Engaged on the 23 rd August'

Walter served on the western front at the Somme and Ypres.

Walter was An "Old Contemptible"

Walter was transferred back to the U.K in 1915 for a medical operation.[Appendicitis]



Restored from a fragment  
The R.W.K c 1905  
Milton Barracks  
Gravesend





### THE OLD CONTEMPTIBLES: The British Expeditionary Force, 1914

In August 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II of Imperial Germany said, 'It is my Royal and Imperial Command that you concentrate your energy and the valour of my soldiers to exterminate the treacherous English and walk over General French's 'contemptible little army' In the event, walking over the 'Old Contemptibles', those implacable riflemen of the British Expeditionary Force, proved beyond the capability of the German army. At Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, on the Aisne and at the First Battle of Ypres, they shot the Kaiser's legions to pieces. Thus these men, regular soldiers from every walk of life, plunged into this new and terrible war, held their muddy trenches against impossible odds and gave the Empire time to muster. Why were they sent to France was largely due to General Henry Wilson, whose years of secret intrigue with the French High Command first committed the British Army to this global war.

It is of interest to note that 40% of the B.E.F was made up from the Army Reserve list. These were men who had completed their terms of enlistment, and were due for recall in the case of emergency. Many had been 'out of service' for several months or even years. They were recalled and sent to France with very little retraining and could be termed 'rusty', many were unfit and unused to long marches

It is also of interest to note that of the casualties and losses sustained in the opening months of the war 60% were from the Reserves.

## THE MONS STAR

The first campaign medal of the Great War. The 1914 Star was struck in 1917 . It was awarded to those who had served in France and Belgium on the strength of a unit or had service in either of those two countries between 5th August and 30 November. 1914

It is not to be confused with 1914-1915 Star awarded for subsequent service until the end of 1915, and which is identical in appearance except for the dates on the scrolls of the medal itself. [Aug. Nov]



No man could hold both medals

The award of the of the 1914 Star was restricted to to the Army and the Air Squadrons of the RFC who served in France and Flanders during the Qualifying Period.

In October the King commanded , a bar was to be awarded to all holders of the medal who had been under fire in France and Belgium during the qualifying dates .

The words under fire being further defined as

‘Within range of enemy mobile artillery.’

This bar bears the inscription "5th Aug-22 Nov. 1914" The medal ribbon is marked by a small rosette when worn without the medals

Fewer than 230,000 of these bars were awarded

It was the proudest possession of that incomparable little army, The last of a very special band of brothers "The Old Contemptible's" and it became known as

## THE MONS STAR.

### Examples of losses

1st Brigade (Guards ) of 1st Division  
went to France 4500 strong but 12 Nov 1914.

it had been reduced to :

1st Scots Guards : 1 officer 69 men :

1st Black watch : 1 officer 109 men :

1st Camerons : 3 officers 140 men :

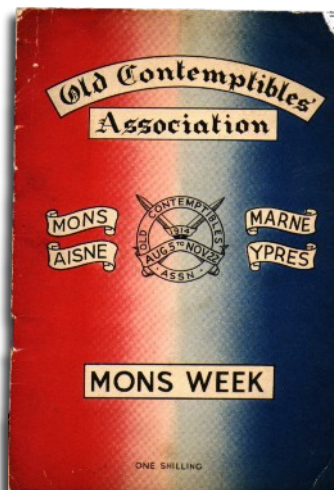
1st Coldstream Guards : No officers 150 men

Total remaining 473 men

**Lost 4027**



## The Queens Own Royal West Kents



Pte Walter Thomas Shrosbree



## Introduction

Smith-Dorrien (and, for that matter, Pulteney) had never wanted to embark on L'offensive outrance -not, at least, without proper preparation and a clear picture of the prospect before him. Lille was an inviting prize, and tantalizingly close. But might it not be possible that the same idea had also occurred to Falkenhayn? Not so, said GHQ.

Thus Smith-Dorrien, no stranger to retreat, decided to pull back; but this time there was no question of the 'stopping-blow' of Le Cateau. It was to be a matter of a fighting withdrawal and a series of desperate defensive actions, too numerous to record. Once more the BEF succeeded in slipping away, for in the words of the official History, 'the retirement of II Corps on the night of 22/23 October to the new line was carried out without the slightest interference, though next day at least one German regiment stormed the villages that had been abandoned

On 24 October, II Corps lay thus, right to left: Givenchy, thence east of Festubert, Richebourg l'Avoue, east of Neuve Chapelle, Fauquissart, Rouges Bancs. This line was to be held until the end of the battle of La Bassée, with one exception. On 26 October the Germans launched a major assault on Neuve Chapelle, which lay roughly at the junction between 5th Division and 3rd Division

The battle lasted for four days. Why the Germans should have expended so much costly effort (six infantry regiments and two Jaeger battalions, with twice the normal artillery support) to gain an objective of little tactical importance is difficult to understand; and more difficult still when, after an unsuccessful counter-attack on the 28th, a British patrol entered the ruined village at 3 a. m the following morning, only to find that it had been evacuated by the enemy.

The German military mind is not always easy to understand. The fighting had cost them well over 5,000 casualties. The official records do not even mention Neuve Chapelle, neither its capture nor its evacuation, which suggests that the Germans considered the action to have been a failure. A more probable answer is that on 29 October the battle of Gheluvelt — the battle to end all battles — began. We know, for example, that all the heavy artillery of Sixth Army was withdrawn from the front of II and III Corps on the 29th to support Fabeck's Army Group; and on 30 October 26th Division, which had taken a major part in the battle for Neuve Chapelle, was north of the Lys and about to join in the attack on the Messines-Wytschaete ridge. Not even the Germans could sustain a major offensive along the entire front.

On the British side, the order of battle at Neuve Chapelle reads very much like that on the canal at Mons: 7th, 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades of 3rd Division, and 14th Infantry Brigade of 5th Division, to which were added such additional units as Smith-Dorrien could beg or borrow from Allenby and from the Lahore Division. Distinctions are invidious, but in the forefront of the fighting were our old friends from Obourg and Nimy, 1/Lincolns; 1/Wiltshires; and above all, 1/Royal West Kents, which by the 29th had been reduced to 328 men commanded by two newly joined subalterns and two sergeant-majors. 'Once more', says the official History, 'The British troops had shown a superiority over the enemy in fortitude and endurance and once more fire discipline had, in his eyes, multiplied the force opposing him into immense superiority of numbers.'

While Smith-Dorrien was thus engaged Pulteney was fighting the battle of Armentières. As II Corps fell back on the hinge of Givenchy, so 19th Infantry Brigade and 6th Division were obliged to conform. By the 22nd it had been necessary to evacuate what had suddenly become a dangerous salient formed by the line of the previous advance: Fromelles—Radinghem—Ennetières—Prerriesques.

On the 23rd, III Corps was holding a front of twelve miles from Rouges Bancs to Epinette and thence to Houplines, le Gheer and St Yves, where 4th Division was in touch with Allenby's Cavalry Corps, itself under increasing pressure between Messines and Hollebeke. Facing Pulteney were the greater part of XIII Corps, 48th Reserve Division,

THE MONS STAR . David Ascoli

How, date & place	Summary of events and information.	Remarks & references to Appendices.
4.8.14. DUBLIN 5.30 PM	<p>The order to "mobilise" was received by telephone from the Garrison Adjutant, Dublin.</p> <p>A European "crisis" had been impending for some days, thus the order was not unexpected. The "precautionary period" had been in operation since the end of July; Officers &amp; men had been recalled from leave, troops had returned to their permanent stations from training camps, etc., &amp; the various posts provided for in the DUBLIN defence scheme to give protection to railway tunnels, bridges, power stations, etc., had been manned. Those found by the Battalion were all in the south western area of DUBLIN, &amp; were, for the most part, N.C.O.'s guards of 6 to 9 men.</p> <p>The finding of these guards</p>	

### R.W.K.W Diaries Extracts

04/08/14 5.30.p.m

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Those found by the battalion were all in the south western area of Dublin &

## THE MOVE TO FLANDERS.

### **Sept 1914**

From the moment when the German stand on the heights North of the Aisne had checked the advance of their French and British pursuers the main interest of the campaign had shifted away from the stalemate along ~ the Chemin des Dames to the open Western flank of both armies. It was there only that a decision could be reached and the last half of September had seen a Succession of efforts at outflanking, as first the French and then the Germans hurried corps after corps to the one quarter where the fighting had not yet stabilized itself into trench warfare. It was probably partly because the units holding the stabilized front were being called on to extend to their flanks and to take over more of the line, so as to make the troops relieved available at other points, that there had been no German counterattack on the none too strong British left and that the R.W.K. had not had to resist any serious attack in the Missy position.

### **1st Batt. Oct 2nd**

The first of the many "reliefs" the battalion was to carry out was completed without incident in the small hours of October 2nd, and, thanks to a fog, the battalion was well out of range of shell-fire before daylight. After so many days cramped up in trenches with little chance of exercise marching was painful; many men found their feet and legs so swollen that they had difficulty in keeping up. Reaching Couvrelies by '8.30 a.m. the battalion had hardly had time for more than a wash and a change of clothes before the prospects of the week's rest with which it had been indulging itself were dispelled by orders to be off again. That evening it started on the move which was to take it to even heavier fighting than it had yet experienced

### **Oct 1914**

They were now to be denied the relief they had so well earned because the British were to quit the Aisne and be transferred back to their original position on the French left. Administrative reasons alone made this expedient, as the supply services of the British were necessarily much complicated and impeded when their line of communications ran across those of the French armies. Moreover, the very special interest which the British had in saving from the Germans what was left of Belgium and in keeping them back from the Channel ports rendered their transfer to Flanders particularly appropriate.

This transfer was accordingly begun by extending the line of the Fourth Division to the right as far as Missy and by relieving the Third by units of the Sixth. \*

\* This had reached the Aisne on Sept 17th, just too late for the battle, and had been placed in Army reserve

By the morning of October 3rd the Second Corps was able to report itself as concentrated in the appointed area. This for the Fifth Division meant the country round Nampsteuil, Maast, Droizy, Launoy and Long Pont, the 13th Brigade having the first two assigned to it. The battalion, which had left Couvelles at 7 p.m., on October 2nd, reached Maast at 9.15 p.m., and billeted in an enormous cave, crowded and none too comfortable quarters, though the rest after the trenches was most welcome.

From Maast it started off again next evening for Hartennes, and eventually on October 7th found itself at the railway station of Pont St. Maxence.

The marches had been made at night in order to conceal the move from the inquisitive eyes in the German aero planes, and for the same reason the men had had to keep well under cover by day. Night marches, however, proved fruitful in checks and stoppages and were an exhausting experience, men often falling asleep as they marched, and dropping down the moment they halted.

At Pont St. Maxence the battalion entrained late on October 7th in two trains, the first of which reached Abbeville early next morning, the second not till the afternoon. Directly the second trainload had detrained the battalion started off on a cold and tiring march to Gueschart, whence it proceeded next night, partly by marching and partly in motor-omnibuses, to Vaulbon. Its first experience of this method of transporting troops was not too favourable. The motors did not turn up till many hours late, then missed their way and went miles too far, and eventually landed their passengers at Vaulbon later and more fatigued than if they had marched all the way.

At Vaulbon the battalion found itself in the concentration area of the Second Corps, which had now assembled in readiness to advance N.E. to the Aire—La Bassée canal just West of Bethune, from which it might strike most effectively at the flank of the Germans, who were closely engaged near Vermelles, N. W. of Lens, with the left corps of the French line, the 21<sup>st</sup> me. The British cavalry were pushing N. and N.E. ahead of the Second Corps towards the Forest of Nieppe, in touch with French cavalry on their right, who were falling back over the Lys before superior forces of Germans advancing from the N.E. Meanwhile the Third Corps, having in its turn left the Aisne, was detraining round St. Omer.

**On October 11th** the forward move began. The 13th Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier-General W. B. Hickie, who had replaced General Cuthbert (invalided) on October 10th, was for the first day's march in Corps reserve and followed uneventfully in the wake of the Fifth Division to Vaudricourt, where it billeted. The orders for October 12th

were for an advance N.E. of Bethune to the line Festubert—Fosse, with the Third Division on the left, the Fifth on the right, and the 13th Brigade again in Corps reserve. But the day was not far advanced when news came in that the Germans had driven the French out of Vermelles and that General Maudhui (G.O.C. 21 me Corps) wanted British assistance for the counter—attack he proposed to make. The 13th Brigade, which had reached Beuvry about 10 a.m., was therefore diverted to the right and given as its objective a line from N.W. of Vermelles through Burbure to Pont Fixe on the canal, the battalion being on the right and therefore next the French. By 3 p.m. the Brigade had reached the position of deployment and the attack began. Directly the British moved forward, however, they came under a very heavy enfilade fire from the direction of Vermelles: they pushed on for some distance, but the fire was too hot and soon brought the attack to a standstill. The right flank was completely "in the air," for the expected French counterattack had never been launched, and without more support on the right the British could not get on; indeed, as the ridge which the leading line had reached was nicely ranged by the German machine-guns, the battalion withdrew a little and dug in along a road running N.E. from Noyelles lez Vermelles, with some advanced trenches 200 yards further East, and this line was maintained, though after dark the Germans attempted a counter-attack, which was successfully repulsed.\* The Duke's, on the battalion's left, and the K.O.S.B.'s, who were beyond them reaching to the canal, had been unable to get any further forward and had also to dig in as best they could. North of the canal also the Fifth Division had become engaged all along its line, which reached from Pont Fixe to Rue des Chavattes, whence the Third Division continued it Northward.

For the next day the 13th Brigade's orders were to co-operate as before with the French counter-attack on Vermelles. This was to be preceded by an artillery bombardment, and while that was going on the infantry were to retain their positions. Actually this proved to be all that the R.W.K. were called on to do all day; it was another unsatisfactory day. On the right, the French made no progress against Vermelles, and until they got up level with its right the 13th Brigade could not move. On the left a German counter-attack drove the right battalion of the 15th Brigade back to Pont Fixe, and in consequence the K.O.S.B.'s, who had advanced a little, were checked. By 3 p.m. the 13th Brigade reported that it was heavily engaged along its whole front in a fire fight, and not until after dark did the Germans abandon their efforts to push back the British line. After dark indeed A Company and the machine-guns, now under Lieut. Palmer, made a small advance to a rather better position. During the day General Hickie had been compelled to go sick,

\* The battalions casualties on this day came to just under 50

so Colonel Martyn became acting Brigadier and Major Buckle took his place in command of the battalion.

**October 14th** proved equally uneventful for the battalion. Not until the late afternoon was the expected French attack launched, and though the battalion did what it could to help it with covering fire, it soon had to stop shooting when the French advance masked its fire. At 7 p.m., however, French troops relieved the battalion, which withdrew into billets near Beuvry.

Three days of comparative quiet followed for the battalion, which was at first held in reserve to the 14th Brigade, and then lent to the Third Division, along with the K.O.Y.L.I., to act as its Divisional reserve. Not until the **18th** was it called upon to return to the firing line. By that time the Third Division had made substantial progress, had pushed the Germans back well East of the La Bassée-Estaires road, and had established itself on the Aubers Ridge. On the previous evening the Lincolnshire of the 9th Brigade had stormed Herlies and the 7th Brigade on their right had got within half-a-mile of Illies. Some of its battalions, however, were in need of relief, and early on the 18th the R.W.K. left some very indifferent billets in Neuve Chapelle to relieve the 3rd Worcesters opposite Illies.

In this position the battalion was E. of La Hue and had the 2nd South Lancashires on its right and the 1st Wiltshires on the left. But the German position was very strong, and in the last day or two their resistance had appreciably stiffened, as reinforcements had arrived from less active parts of the front: indeed the Intelligence had located the whole German VII. Corps, in addition to cavalry and jagers, in front of General Smith-Dorrien's troops. Moreover, the Third Division was now so far ahead of the French cavalry on its left that that flank was liable to be enfiladed, and though the Fifth Division had gained ground East of Givenchy, and its left had advanced down the Estaires-La Bassée road level with the right of the Third, there could be no converging movement on La Bassée till the French, South of the canal, could get well beyond the line reached by the 13th Brigade. The line which the British had reached on October 17th was indeed to be the high-water mark of their advance. Four years were to pass before they got beyond it, and throughout the 18th and 19th of October the battalion could do no more than maintain and improve its position as the troops on its flank were completely held up.

The battalion's patrols were active but found the enemy in strength and on the alert, and 2nd-Lieut Kerr was wounded while engaged in this work. Snipers, too, were busy on both sides, and it was clear that if the Germans were to be pushed further back reinforcements must be put



in. Thus, though more than one German counter-attack was beaten off, the most determined being one delivered early on the **19th**, the line

*E Hue. 19/10/14 -P79*

*Men killed & wounded in addition to the earlier wounded.*

*At 3.15 A.M on the 20<sup>th</sup> the battalion was relieved by the WORCESTRSHIRE.REGT and went into billets near the Bois Dubiez, arriving there about 5.30 A.M . During these two days in the trenches, the weather had been mild, but the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> was very wet. The men had been entirely confined to the trenches as all the ground was under fire from the village of Illies.*

*The batt'n was in telephone communication with the 7<sup>th</sup> Bge: Hd: Qts at HALPENGARDE. We were not to subjected to much artillery fire ,but the enemy appeared to be getting up more men and guns in the second day. Rations and the cookers were bought up under cover of darkness the transport remaining near NEUVE CHAPELLE. Except S.A.A carts & tool wagons which were*

had not been advanced when, early on the 20th, the Worcester's arrived to take over, and the battalion withdrew to the Bois de Biez for a promised two days' rest.

Promises of rest, however, were beginning to be regarded as certain indications of a hard time coming. Shortly after mid-day an urgent message arrived for the battalion to support the South Lancashires, who were being heavily attacked. By 3 o'clock, therefore, the battalion was moving back to the trenches, but on reaching a farm half-a-mile North of Lorgies, it was halted and placed in reserve as the attack had already been checked, mainly by very effective fire from our artillery. Here, therefore, it spent the night, but early next morning the South Lancashires were again attacked in force, and this time the Germans succeeded in breaking through them near Le Transloy, and thrust them back, inflicting heavy casualties on them. The Worcester's flank was thus exposed, and their right company was forced back, though those further to the left held on some time longer before being compelled to retire on La Hue Farm. On the right the D.C.L.I., though themselves heavily attacked in front, threw back their line to cover their left, and maintained their position very stubbornly. But there was a dangerous gap in the line and the battalion had to fill it if the Germans were to be stopped. Two companies were at once put in, one on the right, to gain touch with the D.C.L.I., the other on the left, toward La Bouchaine, to help the Worcesters to counter-attack. Thanks largely to the fire which the 41st Battery, R.F.A., maintained on the gap, the counter-attack was most successful. The Germans had advanced nearly a quarter-of-a-mile, but for the most part did not stand their ground, retiring rapidly as C Company advanced, and though all the advanced trenches of the 7th Brigade were not re-

occupied, a line was taken up connecting the 14th Brigade with the Wiltshires, who had held on unshaken on the left of the 7th Brigade.

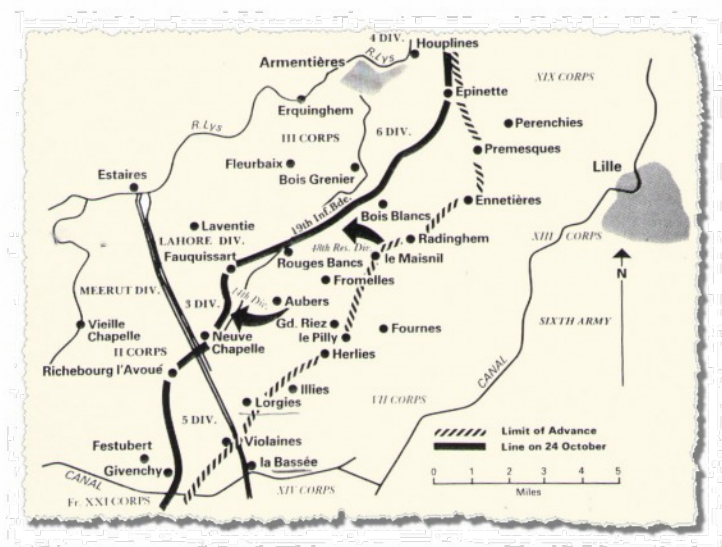
Thus the immediate danger was averted and a renewed German advance early that evening was beaten off. But the loss of Le Transloy made it necessary to draw back the line held by the 7th Brigade.

In the course of the night, therefore, a new line was taken up, the battalion being behind the Lorgies-La Hue \* road.' Just before moving back it had beaten off another German attack, but during the 22nd it was not seriously troubled either by infantry or artillery. The German snipers were busy, but they gave some targets for our snipers and more than one German patrol came in for heavy punishment.

Still, October 2nd proved a bad day for the Second Corps. The village of Violaines, S.W. of the position held by the battalion, had been rushed by the Germans early in the morning, counter-attacks had failed to re-cover it, and this left the centre of the British line in a most unsatisfactory position. On the left of the Third Division also the expulsion of the French cavalry from Fromelles had accentuated the already very pronounced salient about Herlics. General Smith-Dorrien had no option, therefore, but to withdraw to a new line, already reconnoitered and to some extent prepared, running North from the canal in front of Givenchy, bending round N.E. along the Rue du Bois and passing East of Neuve Chapelle. To this line a retreat was accordingly accomplished

In the new line the battalion was assigned a position which was to become famous in the annals of the Regiment. Just South of Neuve Chapelle the Rue du Bois running W.S.W. to E.N.E. joins the main road from La Bassée, which runs about S.S.E. to N.N.W. towards Estaires. From the road junction (afterwards known as "Port Arthur ") a road goes off about N.E., practically continuing the Rue du Bois to Neuve Chapelle. The main road marked the right of the battalion's line, which extended about 400 yards to the left, the front line being 250 yards East of the Port Arthur Neuve Chapelle road, West of which Battalion Headquarters and the reserve company's trenches were placed. To the front, turnip fields and ploughed land stretched for about 400 yards to the hamlet of Lingy Le Petit, while to the left front and more opposite Neuve Chapelle itself was the Bois de Biez, in those day affording plenty of cover attacking forces, so that its nearness to the British line was a serious disadvantage. Trenches of sorts had been begun, but they needed all available labour to improve them. Fortunately the delay of the Germans in advancing gave time for the work. It was 2.30 p.m. before their leading scouts reached the houses in front, and soon after that the troops in the front trenches were pretty briskly engaged, finding targets in the Ger-

\* The two other companies had come up after dark and rejoined those which had been employed in restoring the line



mans who were attempting to establish themselves in the houses, and being heavily fired on in return, though as yet there was little shelling. Of that plenty was to come.\*\*\*

During the night of the 23rd /24th B Company heard what sounded like digging going on close to their front, a heavy fire was therefore opened, and the noise soon ceased.

At daybreak a good many German corpses along the line Of an intended advance trench testified to the effectiveness of B's shooting, and during the morning the enemy attempted no advance. But early in the afternoon his guns opened fire, not only field guns, hut large howitzers, 6 inches in calibre and more, whose shells, descending at a steep angle, wrecked completely anything they struck. Luckily the soil was soft, which diminished considerably the effect of the bursts, but fire trenches and dug-outs such as the battalion had been able to make proof against shrapnel could not compete with these "Black Maria's," and when these guns got the range of the British line, as they did on the 26th, the trenches were blown to pieces and many casualties sustained. Luckily more than one alternative position was available and, by shifting men about, casualties were to some extent kept down.

But the ordeal to which the men were subjected was a severe one, alike for those in the firing-line and for those, equally exposed, in

\*\*\* Up to this time the battalion had not suffered many casualties since leaving the Aisne . Except for the 50 incurred on Oct 15 it had got off lightly. The only officer casualties had been 2nd Ltn Kerr. Wounded on patrol and Cpt Grant hit in the leg by a sniper 22nd ,whilst Lnt's Fuber & McClelland had been invalided as was Lnt Newton 25 Oct

support or reserve. It was now that Major Buckle's wonderful example of calm and courage had a most remarkable effect in steadying and encouraging the men. As Major Molony has written (*Invicta*, p. 287) "*the great personal influence of this officer over the whole battalion was one of the greatest factors which helped to bring it through these days of trial and crisis.*" But the worst of it was that the damage done to the trenches by these heavy shells very much diminished the protection they afforded against shrapnel, and gave opportunities to the German snipers and machine-gunners.

To repair trenches or to dig out men buried under the debris meant exposure to a stream of bullets. But volunteers for these perilous tasks were never wanting, and their gallantry was rewarded more than once by men being dug out alive.

For the first two days in this new position the Germans made no determined effort against the battalion, though they shelled it steadily and managed, during the nights, to dig new trenches within about 150 yards of its front line. Their main efforts were directed further North, against Neuve Chapelle itself, though one or two weak attacks on the battalion were beaten off on both days, while under cover of darkness renewed efforts were made to push up close and dig in. It was before the days of Very lights, and if sounds of digging were heard all that could be done was to open fire in the direction of the noise; this, however, was done with good effect. On the morning of **October 25th**, for example, a length of newly-turned earth was seen some way in front of B.'s trench. No movement could be detected, and L/Cpl. Wright\* therefore volunteered to go out over the top to see what actually was there. Rapid fire was opened to cover him and enabled him to get out and back and report that there was no one in the trench save some dead Germans. That evening Sergt. Bishop took out a party after dark and filled in the trench. On the 26th shelling opened about 7 o'clock and continued with increased vehemence all day, reaching an intensity not yet experienced #

Both to the right and left of the Battalion the German infantry attacked, but not until late in the day did it get the satisfaction of having good targets to shoot at. When the attack came it was directed mainly against D Company on the right, who had been getting the worst of the bombardment and had lost Captain Tulloch, badly concussed by a shell bursting close to him. But D, unshaken by the shelling, shot

\* For which he was awarded the D.C.M

# On the 26 th the battalion had D.B. & A Companies in the firing -line. In that order right to left . A having 1 platoon to the left of the lane to Lingy le Petit . Each company had two platoons in support and C was in reserve

### these officers seem to have been killed by a direct hit on their way back to to the front line from Batt H.q as they were never seen alive again after leaving . On this day the battalion also lost Cpt Keenlyside who was mortally wounded , 2nd Lt Powel was wounded and 2nd Lt Whitehouse went sick.

steadily and straight at the advancing enemy, met with the bayonet the few Germans who reached the parapet, and maintained its line triumphantly. That night D Company, which had had over 50 casualties, including captain Beernan and 2nd-Lieut. Harding, # # was relieved by C and went back to a new reserve position rather further in rear.

*27<sup>th</sup> cont:*

*Capt Tullock went sick with concussion owing to shell fire the day before. On the evening of the*

The front-line companies were not the only ones to be busy that day. Early in the afternoon a renewed attack broke through the left of the 7th Brigade, North of Neuve Chapelle. The Germans poured into the village seeking to roll up the Wiltshires from the left. That battalion put up a splendid fight; its reserves checked the German advance beyond the village and counter-attacking cleared the Southern half of the village before two platoons of C Company could arrive from the reserve trenches of the R.W.K.

Returning to their trenches these platoons were promptly summoned to the right flank, which was reported to have been left uncovered by the retirement of the next battalion. No. 9 Platoon was sent off, but arrived just in time to join the reserves of the K.O.Y.L.I. in a counterattack, which regained the small section of that regiment's trenches which the Germans had managed to rush, all those of the enemy who had penetrated into the gap being satisfactorily disposed of and a dozen prisoners taken from the 158th Regiment of the VII th Corps.

*Neuve Chappelle*

*Oct 27<sup>th</sup> 1914*

*At 9 A.M the Germans made a counter attack on the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs and the 9<sup>th</sup> B inf : and drove them back . A & D coy's owing to a misunderstanding retired with the Sikhs. Capt Battersby & Lieut Gore were killed during this retirement . Some 300 Germans then broke through, thus putting themselves in rear and on the flank of B and C Coy's who at the time were being heavily attacked from the front in the firing line . During the day Lieuts Palmer & Moulton-Barrat were wounded leaving Lieut White & 2nd Lieut Russell the sole surviving officers in the firing line .*

*Redacted lines .....*

With daylight on **October 27th** the men in the front line trenches of the R.W.K. were not a little encouraged by the number of German dead and wounded to be seen lying out in front of the line. Several efforts were made, notably by Corpl. Verrall, to take out water to the wounded, but as the Germans fired on the men engaged in this task it had to be abandoned. About the same time a German patrol, trying to work down a dry ditch leading into the battalion's line, was met and repulsed by Major Buckle and Corpl. Verrall,

The Major himself accounting for six Germans with his revolver. However, the day was to bring the hard-pressed 7th Brigade and its neighbours of the 14th along the Rue du Bois no relief, but an accentuation of trouble. All efforts to recover the Northern part of Neuve Chapelle proved fruitless, while in the course of the morning the Wiltshires were once more outflanked through a retirement beyond their left. This time the German effort to roll them up was more successful, and early in the afternoon the left of the R.W.K.'s front trenches came under fire from their flank and rear, while some of the Wiltshires were pressed back upon Battalion Headquarters and the reserve trenches.



Mai Buckle

Major Buckle at once ordered D Company (now in reserve) to turn out to their assistance. All turned now on the possibility of stopping the Germans by holding the lane from Ligny le Petit, on which the left of the front trenches rested. As D pushed up to the lane the supports of A lined it nearer to the front trenches and, seeing help coming, many of the Wiltshires turned and joined the line. But in organizing the stand Major Buckle was killed and about the same time Captain Legard also fell mortally wounded, the battalion thus losing two of its finest officers at a most critical moment.

Their inspiration and example were not lost. D, though only 80 strong, pushed forward to the lane, and, together with the supports of A,\* opened such a heavy fire that the Germans, instead of pressing on straight, either worked off to their right or halted and opened fire in reply, bunching into masses which, at 250 yards range, presented excellent targets.

\* Apparently the left platoon of A had also to be brought back to cover the flank .

# On this day 27Oct 1914 the battalion had 2nd Ltns Holloway & William wounded as well as losing Maj Buckle and Cpt Legard. As Cpt Tullochs injuries involved his being sent to hospital , the command devolved to Cpt Battersby , who had arrived that very evening.

The day was notable for the gallantry of Pte G H Johnson who left his trench in full daylight , made his way to a field gun which had been left in no mans land , and removed the sights and then the breach-block . Although within 200 yds of the enemy . He received the D.C.M



First Battalion, The Queens Own, Royal West Kent Regiment, at Neuve Chapelle Oct. 28th. 1914.

Frank Hyde

C.S.M. Penny did splendid work, behaving with the utmost coolness, walking along smoking a cigarette and directing the fire of his men calmly and collectedly, and the determination with which this improvised line was held kept the Germans at bay, despite their superiority in numbers, till about 5 p.m. the 9th Bhopals, of the lately arrived Lahore Division, came up from Pont Logy. This battalion, pushing forward till it joined up with the left of the flung-back R.W.K. line, swept the Germans back across the Port Arthur-Neuve Chapelle road. On its left other Indian units continued the line to and beyond Pont Logy, a continuous front being thus formed in a rough semi-circle West of Neuve Chapelle. Meanwhile the front line companies had stuck to their position quite unshaken by the bombardment or the danger to their flank and taking every chance of inflicting punishment on the enemy. #

Oct 27 :14

*These orders were written by Lieut H.B.H.White and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut J.R.Russell the two surviving officers of the battalion, from memory, four days after the events occurred, owing to that the war diary being temporarily unobtainable.*

*Neuve Chappelle Oct 27<sup>th</sup>*

*On this day the Battalion was holding a line west of Neuve Chappelle. The K.O.Y.L., I were on our left right and the Wiltshire regiment on our left. B and C coy's were in the firing line, A and D in support. During the day we were subjected to a heavy shell fire, during which the regiment on our left fell back leaving a large gap in the line. Major Buckle in attempting to rally this regiment was killed. The Adjutant Capt :Legard was wounded and died during the night. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieuts : Hol-*

\* According to one account there was some confusion over orders. It is said the Bophals had been ordered to retire, as the Germans, by recovering the village, were in position to outflank them. But at The Batt H.Q. of the Queens own nothing was known about this, and there was no idea whatever of retiring



But the position was far from satisfactory, and the Third Division accordingly determined to counter- attack Neuve Chapelle with all the troops available. In this attack, timed for 11.15 on **October 28th**, the battalion was to open covering fire to assist the 9th Bhopals, who were to attack to the South of the village, while the 47th Sikhs and two companies of the Sappers and Miners attacked the village itself. The assault was preceded by a bombardment, to which the German guns replied in great volume, the trenches of the battalion coming in for an extremely heavy shelling. However, the attack was at first successful, and the 47th Sikhs and the Sappers and Miners who made a magnificent charge, got well, into Neuve Chapelle. But the Bhopals, coming under a heavy shrapnel fire, were soon brought to a stop without reaching the trenches they were attacking or getting into touch with the 47th. The Sikhs, therefore, finding themselves unsupported were unable to withstand the vigorous German counter-attacks, and about 1 o'clock they were driven out of the village and fell back fighting on Pont Logy. Before this a strong attack had developed against the 14th Brigade and against B and C Companies, R.W.K. in the front trenches. Supported by heavy shelling and machine-gun fire the Germans advanced by rushes, only to be brought to a standstill about 100 yards away; beyond that point they failed to advance, having apparently suffered too heavily, though they continued to send up more lines from the rear. Some effective combined shooting by a small party of C Company put one troublesome machine-gun out of action, and despite casualties B and C maintained their line intact. But while they were fully occupied in keeping this attack at bay the Germans advanced in force against the Bhopals, just as that regiment was beginning to retire to the trenches from which its attack had started. The Bhopals had fought well while they had their own British officers to lead them, but with almost all these out of action they gave way and recoiled in disorder across the La Bassée-Estaires road and behind the front trenches of The Queen's Own. On this A and D Companies were hastily pushed forward to stem the German advance, but there was great confusion, and A and D were not strong enough to stem the rush.\* Much reduced by the fighting of the previous days they had no time to take up a position before the Bhopals with the Germans at their heels were right upon them. Lieut. Gore was killed making a stand on the La Bassée road, as was C.S.M. Penny also, and in the end most of A and 1) were carried away in the Bhopals' retreat. They had lost all their officers, Captain Battersby had been

# # The total casualties at Neuve Chappelle have never been accurately ascertained ., under the circumstances it could hardly be expected that they should have been , but of the 15 officers , seven were killed and six wounded and the losses in ' other ranks ' were estimated at about 450

killed, Lieut. Palmer had been wounded and disabled in fetching D from the reserve trenches, and there was no one to take command.

About 300 or 400 Germans pressed on after the Bhopals, reaching the trench where Battalion Headquarters had been established; the situation was most critical, it looked as if the companies in the firing-line could not possibly retain their position and as if there was nothing to stop the Germans. However, nothing could have surpassed the steadiness with which B and C stuck to their fire-trenches even with the enemy right in their rear and with shots coming into them from behind. They were heavily attacked in front but they never wavered, and kept the Germans back. C.S.M. Crossley was conspicuous by his coolness and the skill with which he handled his men, and the steadiness and tenacity of the defense was a wonderful proof of their discipline and of the spirit with which The Queen's Own were inspired.

This determined stand was of vital importance; had these companies gone back they would have uncovered the flank of the 14th Brigade and the whole line along the Rue du Bois might have been rolled right up with far-reaching consequences. However, the Germans do not seem to have pushed their advance beyond the La Bassée road. This may have been because they were under fire from the dismounted men of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, who had been hurried down from Messines and had just taken over the trenches near Pont Logy; it is possible also that they were deterred by the tenacity of B and C and feared to be caught in a trap if they pressed on. This can only be surmised, but it may well have seemed as if B and C must have known that ample reserves were at hand or they would never have held on in so precarious a position. Anyhow the Germans did not press on and meanwhile all available reserves had been ordered up when the failure of the attempt to recover Neuve Chapelle became known. These reserves consisted of fragments of several battalions, more than one reduced to the strength of a company, all exhausted with a fortnight's almost continuous fighting, but their arrival sufficed. A line was hastily patched up connecting the right of the cavalry with the still intact front trenches of The Queen's Own, and thus at last the danger was averted.

*During the day Lieuts Palmer & Moulton-Barrat were wounded leaving Lieut White & 2nd Lieut Russell the sole surviving officers in the firing line .*

By dusk, too, the attack on B and C had died down and Lieut. Moulton-Barrett, the senior officer in the firing-line, was able to send out patrols to find out what had happened in the rear of the trenches.

Shortly afterwards he, too, was wounded and had to hand over the command to Lieut. H. B. H. White, who, with 2nd-Lieut. Russell, alone

remained effective. Lieut. White promptly got in touch with Brigade Headquarters, and with its concurrence he decided to throw back his left flank, evacuating the trenches which B had held so tenaciously all day and placing that Company almost at right angles to the old line. B, therefore, despite its arduous day, had to turn to and dig for the greater part of the night. During the night the remnants of A and D, under 100 strong, who had been rallied by C.S.M.'s Mockford and Duffield, were brought up and were set on to assist in the entrenching.

By morning the new trenches had been dug to such purpose that the battalion was warmly complimented by the Brigade Staff, and the position had been made fairly secure. C Company was still in the old firing-line, with B flung back to the left along the new line, A and D being in support behind B. The total strength of the battalion in trenches was now between 300 and 400, but with only two company officers. Its losses had been crippling, # # but what it had achieved is difficult to appraise without exaggeration. There was hardly a moment in all that terrible month when the Germans were nearer to breaking through the British line than at the Neuve Chapelle cross roads on **October 28th**. That they failed to improve their opportunity may be in large measure put down to the tenacity with which The Queen's Own had clung to a position which to all was seeming indefensible.

After the heavy fighting of October 27th-28th a day of mere intermittent shelling and machine-gun fire, such as the 29th proved, was one almost of repose, and with evening came the welcome news that the battalion would be relieved by the Meerut Division. It was no mere rumour. Shortly after midnight the 1st Seaforths appeared and the weary remnants of the R.W.K. marched off by Le Touret, where they found the transport awaiting them, to billets at Merville, and thence next day the Caestre area, where the Fifth Division was collecting for badly needed rest and re-organization.

But the battalion's hopes were once more to be disappointed. Heavy fighting as the Second Corps had had round La Bassée the last days of October had seen even more desperate struggles in the Ypres salient and on the Messines Ridge, and the loss of Messines and Wytschaete and the straits to which the First Corps was reduced denied to the exhausted units of the Fifth Division their hardly-earned repose. The afternoon of November 1st found the battalion on the march North to support the cavalry, who were forming a new line west of the Messines Ridge to link up the left of the Third Corps with the French. Colonel Martyn had rejoined that day, and the total numbers present with the battalion were 560 other ranks, but still there were only two company officers. However, before the battalion actually went into trenches again, seven officers' had arrived with 76 other ranks, so that there were enough officers to

go round the companies. Captain Buchanan-Dunlop who had recovered from wounds received at Mons, rejoined on November 2nd and took over command next day from Colonel Martyn, who had now been definitely appointed to command the 13th Brigade. The battalion had owed much in peace and in war to Colonel Martyn and the reputation it had earned was due in no small measure to his outstanding ability as a trainer of troops and to his coolness and resourcefulness as a commander in the field.

For the first ten days of November the battalion remained facing the Messines Ridge, being either in billets at Neuve Eglise or in support trenches. Though not actually employed in the front line it came in for much shelling and had several casualties, while at the same time the Brigade lost General Martyn, who was wounded on November 7th. Two days later Lieut. White went sick and was invalided. Lieut. Rogers, the Quarter-Master, who had accomplished wonders in the way of getting the rations up to the men despite all kinds of difficulties and dangers, was still at his post, but of the combatant officers who had come out with the battalion and served continuously with it Lieut. White was the last survivor. The chief incident of these days was a special visit paid by Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien to the battalion on the 8th for the special purpose of congratulating and thanking it for what it had done. He explained the necessity for keeping out of the papers particulars of the gallant deeds and achievements of individual regiments, showed why our men had to go on performing great things without those at home ever learning what their own regiment was doing, and added that when the time came for these things to be known "in no records will be published better deeds than those of this battalion."

*I am perfectly certain," he said, "that there is not another battalion that has made such a name for itself as the Royal West Kent."* He spoke with special appreciation of the way in which Lieuts. White and Russell had handled the battalion after all the other others had fallen, and said that he had brought their names before the notice of the Commander-in-Chief.'

Between La Bassée and the Messines Ridge the struggle had by this time quieted down into what was soon to be classed as "normal trench warfare," no major operation being attempted by either side; in front of Ypres, however, there had been no relaxation of the severe pressure on the First Corps. The Germans had not yet abandoned hopes of a break through, and after the defeat, on **November 11th**, of the Prussian Guard's special effort against the thinly-held British line, it became necessary to draw on the Second Corps for another couple of battalions. Thus on **November 13th** the R.W.K. found themselves on the road to Ypres along with the K.O.Y.L.I.

It was growing dark when they first sighted the town whose name will always be associated with the great stand of the “ Old Army.”

It was as usual being heavily shelled, but the battalion, moving in companies at ten minutes' intervals, negotiated the passage without casualties, and, turning off to the right. reached Lord Cavan's headquarters, a mile-and-a-half East of Zillebeke.

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It is to the remarkable credit of the The Royal West Kent Regiment that it had earned the reputation that during the whole of the conflict of the first world war they never lost a position

#### ROYAL WEST' KENT REGIMENT

WW1 Record August -December 1914

3 Victoria Cross . 6900 Casualties\* Approx . 69 Battle honours.

1st Battalion Royal West Kent's,  
by the 20th Nov 1914 had been reduced to 329 men,  
commanded by two new Subaltern's and two sergeant majors

Pte L-10861 Walter Shrosbree was one of those 329 men



Over leaf can be found pages from the the temporary Regimental Diary

*With transcription* in the very poignant words of the men who served there.

These page were written in the trenches

These are from the very dramatic days of the fighting at Neuve Chappelle by the Royal West Kent Regiment which is portrayed in this Picture and which Walter Shrosbree played his part



Image composed from an Original 40x30 Framed Print signed by  
Frank Hyde Neuve Chappelle 28<sup>th</sup> Oct 1914

A legacy from our grandfather

Walter T Shrosbree



E HUE men killed & wounded in addition to the earlier wounded. LILLE map.

19.10.14  
20.10.14

At 3.15 A.M. on the 20<sup>th</sup> the battalion was relieved by the WORCESTERSHIRE REGT & went into billets near the Bois Dubiez, arriving there about 5.30 A.M. During these two days in the trenches, the weather had been mild, but the night of the 19<sup>th</sup> was very wet. The men had been entirely confined to the trenches as all the ground was under fire from the village of Illies. The batt<sup>n</sup> was in telephone communication with the 7<sup>th</sup> Bde: Hd: Qrs at HALPENGARDE. We were not subjected to much artillery fire, but the enemy appeared to be getting up more guns on the second day. Rations & the cookhouse were brought up under cover of darkness. The transport remaining near NEUVE CHAPELLE, except S.A.A. carts & tool wagons which were near HALPENGARDE.

involved in the battle

67

195 of 902

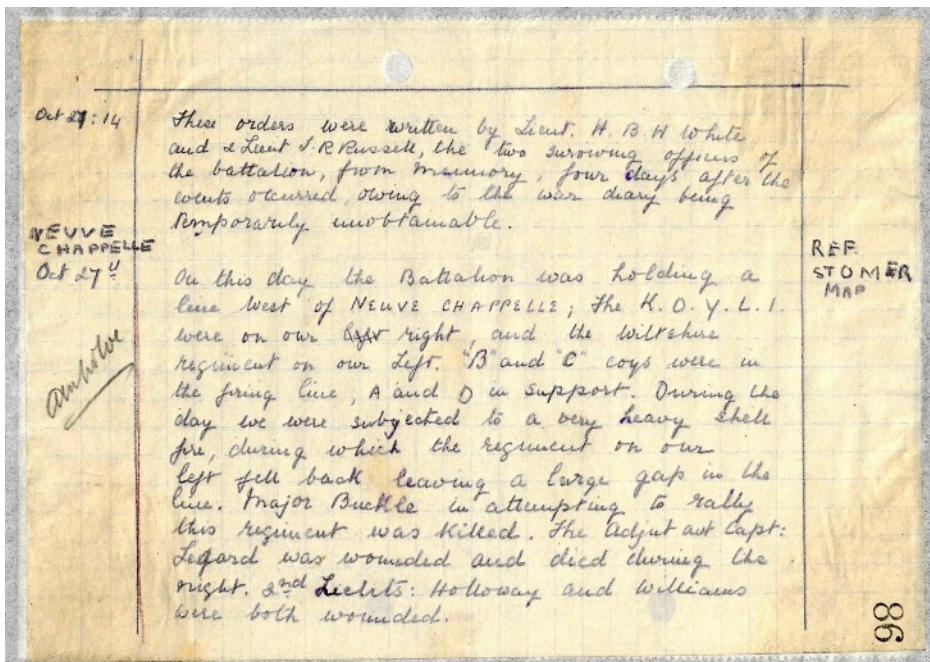
E Hue. 19/10/14 -P79

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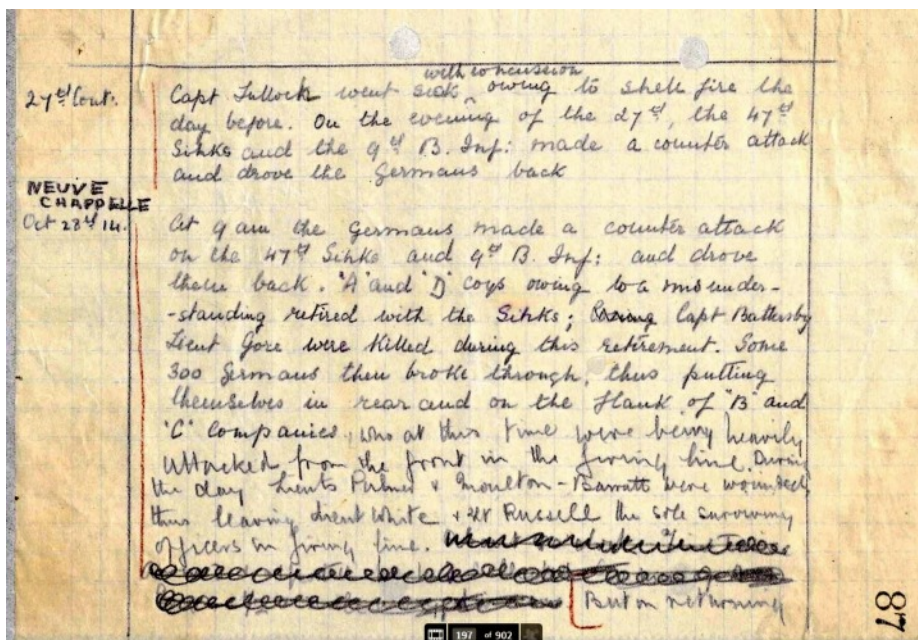


Oct 27 :14 P86

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27<sup>th</sup> cont: P87

Capt Tullock went sick with concussion owing to shell fire the day before. On the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> the 47<sup>th</sup> Sikhs and the 9<sup>th</sup> B inf , made a counter attack and drove the Germans back.

Neuve Chappelle

Oct 27<sup>th</sup> 1914

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28<sup>th</sup> (Cont) returning, warming them up, he slipped & put his knee out, thus reducing the officers with the Battalion to two. About 11 o'clock B took up a position facing west, & entrenched themselves. On their were two corps of the Bedfords, & the remainder of A & D Corps came up in support.

NEUVE CHAPPELLE 27.10.14

MERVILLE 31.10.14

On this day nothing of importance happened beyond being shelled at irregular intervals. At 2 o'clock A.M. we were relieved by the Seyforth Highlanders who formed part of the 10<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade. At 5.0 A.M. the Battalion marched to LE TOURET where it met the transport & rested there till 3 P.M. The Battalion marched with transport to billets at MERVILLE.

COUTRE CROIX 31.10.14

COUTRE CROIX 1.11.14

At 1.00 P.M. the Battalion left MERVILLE & marched to billets at MERVILLE. At 1.30 P.M. Maj Coe Martin again resumed Command of the Battalion, the 13<sup>th</sup> Brig. having been broken up.

28<sup>th</sup> cont page 88

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Neuve Chappelle

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The Battalion marched with transport to billets at Merville

Coutre Croix 31/10/14

At 1.00 p.m the Battalion left Merville and marched to billets in Coutre Croix at 1.30.p.m

Maj Coe Martin resumed command of the battalion , the 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade having

In 1917 the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion RWK were posted to Italy returning to France in 1918

Walter was 'lucky' in some respects because he came back from India on completion of his service contract.

When he was recalled he joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion who were stationed in Ireland having been posted there to help quell Troubles.

He served through some of the toughest earlier campaigns of the war but an attack of appendicitis rendered him unfit for duty and he was sent back to 'blighty' for an operation. Once home and recovered he managed to remain in the U.K and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps where he served the rest of the war.

Had he stayed with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in India he would have been posted to Mesopotamia and fought against the Turks . In 1915 Two companies were attached to the 30th Brigade of the 6th Indian Division which was besieged at Kut al Amara and then captured in 29.04.1915

## LEST WE FORGET

They shall grow not old  
as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them  
nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun  
and in the morning  
We will remember them.

Laurence Binyon.  
September 1914





Peter Masters  
Armchair History  
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