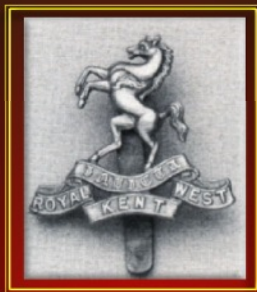
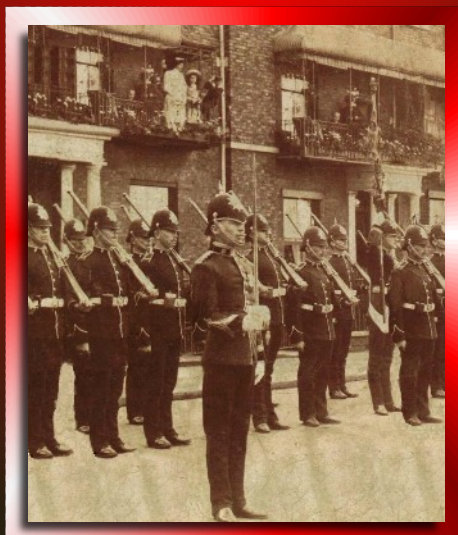


The Queens Own Royal West Kents



WW1 Regimental Diary Extracts 1914



LEST WE FORGET

They have no grave but the cruel sea
No flowers lay at their head
A rusting hulk is their tombstone
Afast on the ocean bed.

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.

Erwin Hodikin

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. with ' Exemplary conduct' (2 yrs officers Mess). Upon his arrival home, disembarking at Gosport Hants 27/2/1913 . He was transferred to the reserves ' A list '

Two months later he was ' Recalled for Section " A" ' on the 10/4/1913. and returned to the 1st Battalion who were in Dublin on the 4/8/1914. they embarked for France Aug 1914 Landed at Havre 15/8/1914 and were ' Engaged on the 23/8/1914.'

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

Walter was An "Old Contemptible"

Walter was transferred back to the U.K for General military duties, upon the expiry of his one years tour of overseas duty as a reservist ,



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



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 11 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, 11 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 *Jäger* 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-Wyschaete 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 lighting 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 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. *

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 Nampteuil, 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 and, 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.

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

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, 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 Lincolnshires 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

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

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 on the night of October 22nd/23rd. Strong parties were left in the trenches to be evacuated until the new line was taken up, and under their cover the withdrawal was not

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 Germans who were attempting to establish themselves in

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

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 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.

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

On the 26 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 liny 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 battalin also lost Cpt Keenlyside who was mortally wounded , 2nd Lt Powel was wounded and 2nd Lt Whitehouse went sick.

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.

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 tile 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 sup ports 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. 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 .#

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

* 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 Ltn s 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

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. 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 seeming was indefensible.

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

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.

1st Royal West Kent's,
by the 20,th had been reduced to 329 men,
commanded by two new Subaltern's and two sergeant majors
Pte L-10861 Walter Shrobbree was one of those 329 men

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 .





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