

This War Diary for 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps was handwritten by Captain P.J.R. Currie, Adjutant. It details the daily actions of the unit in the days surrounding the Battle of Loos. 2/KRRC was part of 2nd Brigade, 1st Division. This was the first time the British used gas, instead of being on the receiving end. 4673 Pvt William Smith was likely wounded in a night assault during this period, possibly on Sept 25th.

Sept 9th

Another glorious day. Priaulx and Haseltine to be Majors (London Gazette 6th)
The Coys cleaned up billets and got issues of clean clothes and equipment.
Preparations started to get ready for the coming attack.

Sept 10th

Glorious day. The morning spent in bathing all the men either in the Billets or in the showerbaths at Raimbart Mines.
M32 New Pattern smoke helmets issued. They have goggles and a tube mouth piece for exhaling. They are not allowed to be used for practice.

Sept 11th 1915

Fine day. Preparations for the coming attack are being pushed on fast. The Col. is promoted to temp Brigadier and went this afternoon to command the 70th Bde., 23rd Division. Farewell parade this morning. Major Priaulx takes command of the battalion today.

Sept 12th 1915

Fine day. Usual work.

Sept 13th 1915

Fine. Bombing in the morning. It is a pity more bombs cannot be given for practice. Signallers and orderlies were out practicing. Sing-Song at 7:30 pm, the Divisional Band played.

Sept 14th 1915

Fine day. Usual work and preparation. Company inspection of Billets

Sept 15th 1915

Fine day. Companies were route marching, practicing the attack and running parade.

Sept 16th 1915

Fine day. Dress rehearsal with grounds measured out to represent our front. Difficulties gone into and discussed.

Trench Strength - Officers 18, O.R. 859, Ration Strength 995.

Sept 17th 1915

Fine day. Drilled and practices skirmishing. Coy commanders visited the trenches. Conference at Bde HQ for Coy commanders and adjutants. A draft of 3 corporals and 27

Riflemen joined the Battn.

Sept 18th 1915

Usual work

Sept 19th 1915

Fine day. Church Parade etc.

Sept 20th 1915

The Battn moved at 6:30 pm and arrived in Billets at MARLE at 8:15 pm. Rather crowded.

Sept 21st 1915

Fine day. Conference at Bde Office at LAPOUGNOIR. Major Priaux to be Temp Lt.Col. while in command.

Exhibition of smoke bombs. This is the first day of the bombardment.

Sept 22nd 1915

Fine day. The smoke bombs shown yesterday were certainly good, especially the tin of white smoke. The sulphur candles were not so good, the smoke not being thick enough. We move to Bivouac F near MINX leaving here 8:30 pm tonight.

This is the 2nd day of the Bombardment.

Sept 23rd 1915

Arrived 11:15 last night 2 Comps + HQ in Billets, 2 in Bivouac.

3rd day bombardment.

Leaving here at 9:15 pm tonight.

Sept 23rd 1915

Trench strength 20 officers, 870 other ranks

Ration strength 1002

Sept 24th 1915

Rained all night and relief took till 5:30 am. We took over from the S.W.B.'s The trenches were full of mud. The Battn moved up to its battle stations by 11 pm.

On our right are the 36 Bde on left 2/N.Lancs; right rear 1/N.N. left rear 2/Sussex.

This evening we cut our own wire. The report on the hostile were made out by the 3rd Bgde is very promising and it is apparently all cut.

Sept 25th 1915

Everything ready for the assault.

The gas expert reports wind favourable.

4:40 am

Gas turned on and fired smoke shell from Stokes gun (Those guns got done in. In one the copper collar burst and charge burst in the other. We got off about 30 rounds between the 2).

6 am

The wind changed all the gas blew back especially on to B Coy. All ranks had smoke helmets on (old pattern ordered to be used) Consequently part of B Coy were gassed. not all very bad but it put them out of action. Reported to Bde. Ordered to attack 6:34 am, Wind got better at 6:20 am and gas turned on again.

6:34 am

Battn got out and moved forward to the assault. Battn HQ with the Battn. Could see nothing for smoke and gas between the hills. Very difficult to find direction. Most people choking. On reaching the wire it was discovered that it was not cut, being low and wide. On the left of the Battn troops started to go back. This left the Battn as there was a gap of 500' to our right unattacked. The Battn had to fall back. A rally was made on the left and we went forward again. Gas from the 15th Divn drifted up to us and it was necessary to go back to our 1st line. On the right the 15th Divn got through and could be seen streaming through LOOS to Hill 70 on the left in the 7th Divn area. The German line was taken. There was then only the unbroken gap in front of 2 Bde.

7:56 am

Received orders that Northants and 2/Sussex would go through us, also 2 N.Lancs. Nothing came of this attack.

12 Noon

The Gloucestershires (3 Bde reserve) ordered to Advance by Southern Gap and bomb north up German trench in conjunction we opened frontal fire and the Germans surrendered.

3:30 pm Bde Advance ordered & Gloucesters were advancing on BOIS HUGO "Green's Force" (9/King's Liverpool & London Scottish), in support 2/Bde in reserve

The Bde objective reached by 4:30 pm. Line taken up and dug as follows (see map)

All our casualties in officers took place in the morning.

Rained all night. Men dug in awfully well.

Casualties during the 25th

8 officers wounded, including Lt. Col Priaulx

4 officers killed

1 officer sick from gas

Other ranks approximate numbers:

Killed 100

Wounded 250

Missing 234 (suffering from gas probably)

Sept 26th 1915

Relieved by the 21 Divn at 4 am.

The Bde returned to Dalys Keep etc.

12 Noon New received that French have captured SOUCHEZ.

3:50 pm The Bde moved up into our front line trenches.

(Notes on German Trenches)

They seemed to be bluff and not nearly so strong as shown by air photo.

The wire in front of us was about 10x wide very low and thick barbed wire. The saps to

which we paid great attention were nearly a foot deep!

The front trench was in perfect condition and partly touched communication trenches deep and narrow. Trenches very well kept and clean.

Lockers for everything including "Gas Shute" Rifle Racks etc M-Gun positions excellent and well concealed. Telephone wires found but no 'phone. Equipment new, rifles marked 1915. The Corps has 157 on shoulder. Dugouts good. Bottom of trench latticed with drain underneath.

The wire along communications trenches was bluff, thistles being planted in rows which at short distance looks like strong wire.

The men were a fair specimen if German. They were provided with goggles and nose had pattern Respirator. No dead Germans in the trench.

The actual numbers of Casualties including officers up till 28/9/15 are

Killed 81

Wounded 193 *** This probably includes Bill*

Missing 149

Gassed 75

Sept 26th 1915 (continued)

During the afternoon the Germans counterattacked weakly, Hill 70 changed hands and the PUIS 14 BIS changed hands twice with the 21st Divn. On the left the Germans met the attack on HULLOCH by gas. Gas shells were thrown over LE RUTOIRE about 5 pm the head of the Guards Divn drove up. One Battn relieved the Cavalry holding the front line trenches (in support). The rest of the Guards Divn took over the new line in front of LOOS.

Sept 27th 1915

The Battn did practically nothing the Bde being in reserve in our own First Line trenches.

Sept 28th 1915

The Battn arrived in MAZINGARRE at 10:30 am and rested till 8:30 pm. 2 officers and 14 o/r joined the Battn. Major Bircham joined and took command of the Battn. The Battn moved out at 8:40 pm with the rest of the Bde to go into support on the east side of LOOS.

Sept 31st

Trench Strength 873

Ration Strength 1018

Oct 1st 1915

Fine day. Ground drying up. The Battn was relieved by the 114th French Regt. and marched into NOEUX-LES-MINES Arriving in billets 3 am the 2nd.

Oct 2nd 1915

Day spent getting clean and refitting. The Coys are commanded as follows:

A Co. - 2/Lt. Bullen

B Co. - Capt. Brady
C Co. - Capt. Wenham
D Co. - 2/Lt. Dowden D.S.O.
2/Lts. Nash and Fowlers died of wounds.

Oct 3rd 1915

Fine day. Voluntary church parade. Cos. inspection of billets.

Oct 4th 1915

Draft of 2 Sgt 3 Cpl and 95 o. ranks joined the Battalion.
2 pm. The Battalion moved into DROUVIN the remainder of the Bde remained in NOEUX.
Rained at times.
It is probable we will move up again tomorrow and the Divn take over a bit of the line.

Oct 5th 1915

During the night a considerable amount of gunning. 2/Lt Holme and 2/Lt Stokes joined.

Oct 6th 1915

The Battn marched off 8:30 am via NOEUX-LE-MINES - MAZINGARTSE to PHILOSPHE to billets. The place was stuff with troops and the Battn only able to move into billets at 6 pm.

7 pm Whole Battn paraded for digging.

The situation as present: The French hold part of Hill 70 and LOOS. On their left are the 1st and 3rd Bde with 2nd Bde in Divn Reserve.

The line runs roughly from Hill 70 - Just east of LOOS - CHALK PITT - Just West of Hulloch (Hohenzollern & Foss 8 are held by the Germans)

The following wire received:

The French Attach on the CHAMPAGNE is progressing well and that TAHURE has been captured"

Oct 7th 1915

The Battn moved up at 7 pm and arrived in Y1 trenches at 9:30 pm, Y1 being just north of LE RUTOIRE. Battn HQ in old 1st Bde Battle HQ.

Oct 8th 1915

Quiet day till 11-am. The rest of the day was lively with a German counter-attack against the 3rd Bde. 3rd Bde Right was on LOOS touching the French. The 9/Liverpools (2 Bde) was attached to 3rd. The attack was strong from H25 A96 to H19 C86 (ref 1/10000 trench map). Enemy opened fire on front and support trenches with HE and shrapnel. At 12:30 pm the bombardment became intense. At 3:30 pm the Enemy opened with rifle and machine-gun. At 3:50 pm he advanced in 4 ranks shoulder to shoulder. They were seen to fall in great numbers and the advance was checked. The 2/NLancs relieved the 9/Kings same night. Our casualties in the battle were 4 wounded.

10 pm We formed 300 for digging fatigue.

Oct 9th 1915

Misty day and pretty quiet. Spent the day cleaning up the trenches and collecting war material left in them by some other Corps after the fight on the 25th. The waste is disgraceful. Wounded will not take their rifles, equipment etc. down with them. In the German wire there are still some 10 or more British soldiers still unburied. The clearing arrangement seem very bad. We formed the following fatigue party: 12 officers 35 NCO's 475 OR in 5 detachments to carry gas cylinders to a dumping place. Two men carry cylinders with one man relief walking in rear.

Oct 10th 1915

Quiet day. Casualties 3 wounded.
Trench Strength officers 19, O/R 486 Ration Strength 612.
Formed another carrying party same as last night

Oct 11th 1915

Fine day and quiet. Casualties Wounded 2. Formed another carrying fatigue to take the gas from dump to front line. They were out at 9:30 pm and did not return until after 4 am.
No. 2 Squadron R.F.C. brought down 2 German planes.

Oct 12th 1915

Casualties Wounded 3
At 12 Midnight the Battn moved up into old German firing line and support line. On the right are the 9/Kings in front the Northamptons and Sussex in front of them the 1st Bde. 2 NLancs are attached to 3 Bde. The 1st Bde objective is German trench H13 A46 and then to drive a wedge into HULLOCH. On the right 3 Bde to make a holding attack. The 1st Bde can call on the 2/Sussex and 11 Northamptons. Kings and ourselves are in divisional reserve. The attack to be preceded by 1 hours bombardment. We are only allowed to take in 10 officers to 400 Rifles. We look forward to a Battn dump about 60 Petrol tins of drinking water. These proved invaluable as it was impossible to send back to the water supply.

Oct 13th 1915

Zero was 1 pm at which time the gas smoke etc was turned on. The assault was timed for 2-pm. At fist this was thought to be successful but the ground taken could not be held. 3-pm. Order issued for 24 of our Bombers with 8 Mills bombs and carrying parts of 20 each carrying 2 boxes to go to G18 B92 to assist the Camerons who were held up at this point.
3:30 pm Ordered to move 1 Coy to Trench G18 A76 to G17 b10-3.
4 pm Complied with.
4-7 pm Sussex gone forward into 2 front lines 1st Bde We are ordered to move up in compliance with BM116/13/.
6:20 pm Ordered to have remainfer of Bombers with 480 Mills Bombs ready to move at a minutes notice.

Oct 14th 1915

The Bde ordered to attack early and the men moved forward and lay down. Attack cancelled and returned to trenches. Misty morning.

The 42nd? Bde 47th Divn relieved us and Battn marched to MAZENGARBE thence by train to LILLERS arrived 2:50 am.

Notes

It appears that the wire in front of 1st Bde was considerably stronger than was thought nor was sufficiently cut. The wind was right for the gas and smoke but it appears to have very little effect on the enemy. So far as could be seen there was a ding-dong fight going on for Hohenzollern and the "Quarries".

Oct 15th

The Battn arrived at LILLERS station 2:50 am and went into Billets in RUE DE PERNES. The 1st and 2nd Bde are in LILLIERS, the 3rd at LOZENHAM.

Rest for Men today. Divided up the New Draft of 194 to Companies. They are from the 14th Battn. and issued with leather equipment. This brings the average strength of a Coy up to 200.

Casualties 14th - 7

Trench Strength Ofcrs 18

O.R. 683

Ration Strength 808