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## War Diary of the 13<sup>th</sup> Bn. Royal Sussex Regiment for WW1 5<sup>th</sup> March 1916 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 1916 (extract)

5 March 1916: left **Witley Camp** in 3 trains, and embarked at **Southampton** on the SS "Viper" (860 men) and SS "Australind" (120).

6 March: marched to rest camp No 5 at **Le Havre**, in snow.

7 March: entrained at 8am, arrived 3.30am on 8 March, and moved to rest camp at **Morbecque**.

11 March: Brigade marched to **Neuf Berquin**. HQ at G.24.d.9.8. Into billets.

12 March: Marched to **Rue du Quesnoy**, via Estaires and Saily. HQ G.24.d.9.8. A and C Companies moved into trenches attached to 2nd Royal Irish Rifles and 2nd Royal Berkshires respectively [for tuition]. B and D Companies provided working parties.

Over the next few days the Companies were rotated. A Company came out on 14 March, relieved by B, but went into the line again two days later, to be relieved themselves on the 18 March. The front line units suffered no casualties, but there were small numbers wounded while on working parties.

19 March: moved to **Saily sur la Lys**, in billets.

20 March: moved to **Fleurbaix**, in reserve to 11th Sussex. A Company moved into **Croix Marechal** Post, and C to **Cain** Post.

23 March: relieved by 16th Royal Scots, and marched to billets in **Estaires**. HQ L.17.d.4.8.

25 March: moved to billets on the Neuf Berquin – Merville road at **Robermetz**. K.24.d.3.6.

31 March: To billets in **Verte Ru** [?] E.28.d.4.3. Training began.

While at this place, the battalion was inspected by the General Commanding XI Corps (Haking), and the commander of their Division, Major-General Barnardiston.

14 April 1916: Marched to **Locon**, via **Merville**, and into billets.

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**15 April:** Took over the Right Subsector front line at **Givenchy**, relieving the 13th Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Moved via Gorre and the canal, in sections 50 yards apart after leaving Gorre. A Company (Captain S. Hughes) was Left Company, in the Duck's Bill. B (M. Makalua) in the centre and C (C. Humble-Crofts) on the right, on the canal bank. D Company was in support in Pont Fixe Keep. Trenches reported in very poor condition, and wire defences practically non-existent. Work to remedy this was commenced. 1 man wounded. Patrols went out at night, to reconnoitre enemy positions.

**16 April:** Enemy shelled Gunner Siding and the Village Line. No damage done. At 12.30pm, there was a direct hit on the parapet of B Company, killing and wounding 10 men. A great number of rifle grenades were fired on both sides.

**17 April:** Quiet by day, much machine gun and rifle grenade fire by night. 3 men in an A Company working party were wounded and fell on the wire. Second Lieutenant N. MacRoberts went out and fetched two of them in. Privates Parvin and Hayter gave assistance.

**19 April:** Relieved by 11th Sussex, and moved to **Gorre** Chateau.

**23 April:** Relieved 11th Sussex in positions as before. D Company was in Duck's Bill, A in Pont Fixe Keep. [This was a relatively quiet tour].

**27 April:** Relieved by 11th Sussex, taking over **Village Line**. A and C Companies in billets in the village, B in le Plantin Keep and Windy Corner, D in Givenchy Keep, Herd Redoubt, Moat Farm and Hilder's Redoubt. Found working parties. [On 28 April, battalion stood to for a gas alarm, but none reached the battalion sector].

**30 April:** Relieved by 4th Black watch, and moved to billets at **La Pannerie**. HQ in Pont L'Hinges, W.4.c.3.7. In Divisional reserve.

**9 May 1916:** Relieved 17th King's Royal Rifle Corps in **Festubert** Left Subsector. A Company on right, D on left. C and B in the old British front line. Work began on wire and on Shetland Communication Trench. [On 11 May, Lance Sergeant Harriott, Battalion Sniping Sergeant, was killed by machine gun fire.]

**13 May:** Relieved by 11th Sussex, marched to billets at **Le Touret**. Working parties found.

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**17 May:** Relieved 11th Sussex, in positions as before. [On 20 May, Second Lieutenant G. Elliott, Battalion Signalling Officer, was killed. However, a relatively quiet tour, punctuated by firing of whizzbangs].

**21 May:** Relieved by 11th Sussex, moved to **Festubert** Village Line.

**25 May:** Relieved by 4/5th Black Watch, marched to billets at **La Pannerie**.

**28 May:** Marched via Locon and Gorre, relieved 2nd Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders in **Cuinchy** trenches. B Company on right, C centre, A left near canal. D in support and HQ in Kingsclere.

**29 May:** Heavy enemy bombardment and raid. 6 casualties. Enemy captured an NCO and several rifles.

**30 May:** Enemy blew a small mine in front of C Company. The near lip of the crater was 20 yards from Sussex front line. There was much damage to the parapet. Several men were buried, but only 1 killed. Bombing parties were sent to the near lip, but there was no sign of the enemy. They recovered the body of our captured NCO and a German, of a Saxon regiment.

**1 June 1916:** Relieved by 11th Sussex. A Company moved to Cambrin Point, B to Braddell Castle, C to Cuinchy Keep, Caters Post and Tourbieres.

**5 June:** Relieved 11th Sussex in same **Cuinchy** sector. A to right, D in centre, B on left. C in support in Esperanto Terrace. Patrols sent out, but fairly quiet.

**8 June:** Relieved by 11th Sussex, moved to billets in **Annequin North**.

**10 June:** Moved to Divisional Reserve at **La Pannerie**. Much attack practice undertaken.

**16 June:** Relieved 17th Lancashire Fusiliers in **Ferme du Bois** trenches. A Company on right, C in centre, D on left and B in support at Bute Street.

**17 June:** With the exception of dropping a few "minnies" on the head of Plum Street at 6.30pm, the enemy was very quiet. Usual machine gun and rifle fire at night. Our trench mortars registered in the afternoon. Usual patrols reconnoitred at night. Captain Gillespie and Lieutenant Ripley wounded during patrol, the former seriously.

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**18 June:** Enemy very quiet except for machine gun and rifle fire at night. Our rifle grenades were active both during the day and night. Captain Gillespie reported died of wounds. This was a great blow to the Battalion and one very much felt by all ranks. This officer was a model of energy and cheerfulness in the performance of his duty, and was always ready to help anyone who was in trouble. His funeral took place at Merville and was attended by Second Lieutenants Jones and M. Sparks. Second Lieutenant Dickens reported to this Battalion for duty and was posted to D Company. Captain R. D'A. Whittaker temporarily took on command of D Company and Lieutenant Coxhead was appointed acting Adjutant.

**19 June:** the enemy dropped a few whizz bangs near Cadbury's and Cockspur Street, slightly damaging the trench but causing no casualties. Slight interchange of bombs at Boar's Head Sap. During the night our Lewis guns dispersed a hostile wiring party. Weather rather cold, wind southwest, about three miles an hour.

**20 June:** enemy bombarded our line at intervals during the day only doing slight damage and wounding one man slightly. Machine guns were active during the night and there was a certain amount of bombing activity in the Boar's Head Sap, during which Lieutenant Clarke was wounded in the leg and thigh, but not seriously. Patrols under Captain Whittaker, Second Lieutenants Whitley and Prior went out during the day and night into no man's land. Direction of wind west about 5 mph. Weather much warmer.

**21 June:** the enemy artillery was active during the day, shelling our trenches and also Windy Corner. A few casualties amongst a loading party of B Company were sustained. Our rifle grenades were again active with visibly good results. The battalion was relieved in the trenches by the 14th Battalion Hampshires, taking over the following posts and billets evacuated by the relieving Battalion. A Company Cats Post S.15.a.6.5½, Orchard Post S.14.a.b.5.8, Albert Post S.8.d.5.4, Dogs Post S.9.c.2.2½, Scott S.8.a.2.0, Hunter S.8.a.2.3, billets S.8.a.7.9 and S.8.b.1.4, Company headquarters S.8.b.3½.3. B Company Edward's Post S.9.a.8.9, Hen's S.3.d.1.3, Rags S.2.c.9.9, Bones S.2.1.0, Company headquarters S.8.a.7.9. C Company billets S.2.a.2.7, D Company (grotto and angle) S.2.a.8.8, St Vaast R.32.d.7.2, Richebourg S.2.c.3.1. Companies reported relief complete 3:15am.

**22 June:** the battalion was relieved by the 1/1st Hertfordshire Regiment, moving to billets at **Vielle Chapelle** evacuated by the relieving Battalion. Companies reported all in billets at 11:45pm. The battalion remained under the GOC 116

Infantry Brigade for administration, discipline and training, but otherwise temporarily formed part of Brigade in Divisional Reserve.

**23 June:** the officers of the battalion were informed of a future operation to be carried out by the Brigade and the plans of action were discussed. The Corps Commander presented the medal ribbons to Privates Parvin, Ford and Balcombe. Weather very warm, sharp thunderstorm about 4:30pm.

**24 June:** the morning was devoted to interior economy, and 50 men from each company had a bath. In the afternoon the battalion marched to the divisional training ground to practice (R.19.c) carrying out the attack. Companies marched off independently at 2pm.

**25 June:** companies marched off independently to the training ground for attack practice. Special bombing squads under Second Lieutenant Ellis marched to the 35th Divisional Bombing ground at **Le Pacaut** (Q.23.a.3.6).

**26 June:** companies paraded at 9am and marched to the to 35th Divisional training ground at Le Pacaut and practiced the attack on the new trenches, returning in the afternoon to the training ground at R.19.d.

**27 June:** weather very wet. Training abandoned owing to rain. In the afternoon companies detailed 50 men for the baths. Clean change of clothing issued out. [From *Operation Orders*: On the night the 28th, the battalion will take over the right sub-sector, as follows: from Cadbury's to Bond Street inclusive. The dividing line between 13th and 12th battalions will be bombed street inclusive to 13th Battalion, and a line drawn in prolongation of Bond Street in the northwest direction. Their disposition of the battalion will be as follows: in front immediate support line B and C Companies; in reserve trench Palma and part of right Guards D Company; in billets behind Battalion Headquarters a Company; Battalion Headquarters Bond Street, with use of house at S.9.a.8.5.]

**28 June:** battalion relieved the 14th Battalion Hampshires in the Right Sub-sector **Ferme du Bois** and moved to the following billets. B and C Companies in the front line, A in Richebourg Saint Vaast Post, and D in billets in Vielle Chapelle.

**29 June:** day spent in collecting materials, and general organisation for the attack. In the afternoon, our artillery bombarded the enemy trenches from 2pm to 5pm, cutting his wire and destroying his works.

[Extract from *Operation Order Number 23. Intention* The Battalion will assault and capture the enemy trenches as

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follows: Enemy front-line from Boar's Head to S.10.c.8.1. Enemy support line from S.16.a.5½. 6½ to S.16.a.9.9. The 12th battalion will assault on our left. The dividing line between battalions will be the ditch running from our front line parapet at S.10.c.5.3 to the enemy front-line parapet at S.10.c.8.0. *Method of attack* Main attack from our front line between cinder track and the ditch near Vine Street. Flank attack from our own Fishtail Sap against the Boar's Head. Main attack will be delivered in four lines, each line consisting of 4 Platoons. Flank attack will be delivered by five bombing parties, each party consisting of one NCO and six men. Lewis guns These will assemble in the old disused trench about 35 yards in front of trench between Bond Street and Vine Street. *Carrying party* Carrying party will assemble in the Strand. As soon as the assaulting lines have advanced over the front parapet these parties will move to the company stores situated in our present front line. Their work will be to transfer SAA, bombs, rations and water from the stores to the company's stores in a new front line. Silence must be insisted on.]

**30 June: Report on Operations.**

1. The Battalion assembled at 1:30pm on the morning of 30 June in readiness for the assault with all 4 Platoons of each Company in the front line.
2. The preliminary bombardment on the morning of the attack opened at 2:50am and at 3.05am the leading wave of the battalion scaled the parapet, the remainder following at 50 yards interval. At the same time the flank attack under Lieutenants Whitley and Ellis gained a footing in the enemy trench. The passage across no man's land was accomplished with few casualties except in the left companies, which came under very heavy machine-gun fire.

The two right companies succeeded in reaching the objective but the two left companies only succeeded in penetrating the enemy's wire in one or two places. Just at this moment a smoke cloud, which was originally designed to mask our advance, drifted right across the front and made it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. This resulted in all direction being lost and the attack devolving into small bodies of men not knowing which way to go. Some groups succeeded in entering the support line, engaging the enemy with bombs and bayonets and organising the initial stages of a defence. Other parties swung off to the right and entered the trench where the flanking party was operating, causing a great deal of congestion. On the left the smoke and darkness made the job of penetrating the enemy wire so difficult that few if any succeeded in reaching the enemy trench. Some parties of the right company succeeded in reaching the enemy support line when they were

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subjected to an intense bombardment with HE and whizzbangs. Captain Hughes, who was wounded, seeing that his company was in danger of being cut off, gave the order for the evacuation of the enemy trenches and the remainder of the attacking force returned to our trenches. The enemy who was evidently thoroughly prepared now concentrated his energies on the front line and for the space of about two and a half hours our front and support lines were subjected to an intense bombardment with a bit heavy and light shells causing a large... [The diary disappears here and does not start again until after the attack].

The Sussex' attack is not mentioned in the British Official History of the war, no doubt being more concerned with the very much greater events taking place on the Somme on 1 July 1916. The South Downs units lost 360 killed and more than 1,100 wounded in this fruitless action, the intention of which was to distract the enemy from the Somme, pin down his reserves and improve the local tactical situation.