



## Reflections on 1918

Tom Burke

On 11 November 1917, at a meeting between Ludendorff and a select group of his advisers in Mons where the British and Germans had clashed back in August 1914, it was decided to knock Britain out of the war before any American entry into the war with decisive numbers of boots on the ground.<sup>1</sup> As 1918 opened, the Western, Italian, Salonica and Turkish fronts were each the scene of no large-scale offensives but of sporadic fighting characterised by repeated raids and counter-raids.<sup>2</sup> In terms of the eastern front, the German defeat of Russia and her consequential withdrawal from the war, presented Ludendorff and his commanders with a window of opportunity to end the war in the west. One result of Russia's defeat was the accumulation of munition stocks and the release of large numbers of German troops for an offensive in the west.<sup>3</sup> One estimate of the number of German troops available for transfer from east to west was put at 900,000 men.<sup>4</sup> According to Gary Sheffield, 'in the spring of 1918 the Germans could deploy 192 divisions, while the French and British could only muster 156.'<sup>5</sup> However, according to John Keegan, the Allies had superior stocks of war material. For example, 4,500 Allied aircraft against 3,670 German; 18,500 Allied artillery weapons against 14,000 Germans and 800 Allied tanks against ten German.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite this imbalance in material, the combination of a feeling of military superiority, and, acting before the Allies could grow in strength through an American entry along with rising economic and domestic challenges in Germany, all combined to prompt Ludendorff to use the opportunity of that open window and attack the British as they had planned to do back in Mons on 11 November 1917 at a suitable date in the spring of 1918.

Heading into 1918, the British Army on the western front was, as John Terraine noted, 'at one of its lowest ebbs of the war.'<sup>7</sup> Between January and November 1917, the BEF had suffered nearly 790,000 casualties, the majority associated with Passchendaele. Moreover, the British economy could spare no more men.<sup>8</sup> The manpower crisis in Britain and the paucity of reinforcements being sent to the BEF forced a reduction in the strength of the divisions from twelve battalions to nine and the wholesale disbandment of some 141 battalions.<sup>9</sup> This occurred mainly in February 1918.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, Richard, *The Western Front* (London: BBC Worldwide Ltd, 1999).p.191.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert, Martin, *The First World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994).p.393.

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson, David, *1914 -1918. The History of the First World War* (London Penguin Books, 2004).p.374.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert, Martin.p.387. 'On 6 December 1917, while the Bolshevik and German negotiators at Brest-Litovsk were still negotiating the final terms of a ceasefire, The British Minister of National Service, Sir Auckland Geddes, warned the War Cabinet in London that as soon as the ceasefire was agreed, the Germans would be able to transfer 900,000 men to the Western Front.'

<sup>5</sup> Sheffield, Gary, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001).p.223.

<sup>6</sup> Keegan, John, *The First World War* (USA: First Vintage Books, 2000).p.393.

<sup>7</sup> Terraine, John, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London: Cassell Military Publisher, 1963). p.390.

<sup>8</sup> Stevenson, David.p.405.

<sup>9</sup> Sheffield, Gary and Bourne, John, *Douglas Haig War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918* (London: Phoenix (Orion Books) UK, 2005). p.368.

<sup>10</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*, vol. III (Cork: Schull Books, 2000).p.99. Note. According to Wylly, 'the number of battalions in a division was reduced from 13 to 10 and the number of battalions in each brigade from 4 to 3.'

To add to their woes, in January 1918, through an agreement between Haig and Petain, the British front line was extended forty kilometres of previous French line southwards roughly between a point north of St. Quentin and a point south-west of Barisis (Barisis-aux-Bois) which lies south of the river Oise.<sup>11</sup> The British line was 153 kilometres long in early January 1918, but as a result of this decision, by 4 February it had extended to almost 200 kilometres.<sup>12</sup> The French handed over their line in a mediocre condition that required a lot of defensive work. Moreover, the BEF received no compensating increase in its fighting strength.<sup>13</sup> In essence the BEF had to do more work and cover a longer line with the men they had available at the time in France. Haig's Chief Intelligence Officer, Brigadier-General John Charteris summed up the situation on 26 January 1918; 'So ...we are confronted with a longer front line, reduced establishment to hold it, no hope of reinforcements and a German attack in greater strength than anything we have yet experienced. Not a cheerful prospect.'<sup>14</sup> Charteris presentation of the BEF in late January 1918 was an exact description of the challenges that faced the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers serving on the western front going into 1918. They had more to do with fewer men and less reinforcement. Facing them was a growingly active enemy, determined and willing to fight. On 21 March 1918, the German attack in greater strength than anything they had experienced that General Charteris feared became a reality. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division were almost destroyed as a result. As a fighting unit, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division never recovered. Between 21 March and 31 March 1918, the Dublins along with the other battalions in the Irish Division bravely fought a rear-guard action between the villages of Epehy and Le Hamel, about fifty kilometres. However, the few survivors of the two RDF battalions were the seed from which both battalions grew back. Having re-grouped, trained and brought back up to strength over the summer months of 1918 south of St. Omer, in separate new divisions, they took part in the great offensive operations throughout the autumn that eventually pushed the Germans out of France and Flanders. In a sad irony of history, in the later days of the war, particularly in mid to late October 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF fought over ground at Le Cateau where a very few of the Old Toughs had fought back in August 1914. They ended up back where they started.

In Palestine, 1918 began in the cold and wet hills north of Jerusalem for the men in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF in the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. After his successful operations in Jerusalem and Jaffa, Sir Edmund Allenby, on 29 December, issued to his corps commanders, an outline of his intentions regarding future dispositions.<sup>15</sup> His intention was to move on from Jerusalem and push the Turks across the River Jordan eastwards and eventually on Amman in what was then referred to as Trans-Jordan. However, he believed that that no further progress northward was possible for the time being until his lines of communication via rail and road had improved to permit the accumulation of supplies and stores in the forward area.<sup>16</sup> The winter rains had hindered this work.

Throughout January and February 1918, progress was made in roadmaking in the hills north of Jerusalem. A great lateral line of communication north of the Jaffa- Jerusalem road had begun by the complete reconstruction of the track running north from Amwas through Beit Sira; the latter being a Palestinian village located twenty-two kilometres west of Ramallah. This work had been done under the orders of the Chief Engineer of XX Corps, Brigadier - General R. L. Waller, mainly by Egyptian labour and that of other units put at his disposal by GHQ. From there it turned off eastward into a metalled road up the Wadi Sad to Ain Arik, another Palestinian village about eight kilometres west of Ramallah. The metalled road was made by the 10th (Irish) Division and was named Irish Road.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, David.p.404. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium, 1918. The German March Offensive and Its Preliminaries.*, vol. 1 (London: The Imperial War Museum, 1934). p.21 and Sketch 1.

<sup>12</sup> Sheffield, Gary and Bourne, John.p.371. Footnote 3.

<sup>13</sup> Stevenson, David.Pp.404-405.

<sup>14</sup> Terraine, John.p.390.

<sup>15</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War.* (London: The Imperial War Museum, July 1930). Vol. II. Part 1. p.301.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Vol. II. Part 1. p.303.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Vol. II. Part 1. p.303.

Both the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions supplied working parties in the construction of Irish Road throughout January and February.<sup>18</sup> With an improvement in the roads, operations began in the Jordan Valley in late February 1918. The British 60<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Divisions advanced eastward, capturing Jericho between 19 and 21 February and also driving the Turks across the river Jordan.<sup>19</sup> By the end of February 1918, the British line in Palestine essentially ran from near Ramallah to Jericho.<sup>20</sup>

It was also in February that the British War Office decided to despatch large numbers of Indian troops to Palestine. The object of this move of Indian troops at that time was, however, not the relief of British troops for transfer to the western front, but the reinforcement of Sir Edmund Allenby's Army.<sup>21</sup> A number of Indian battalions were to be sent from India during the spring of 1918 to replace six British battalions of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, this included the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF along with six battalions of the 60<sup>th</sup> Division, five of the 75<sup>th</sup> Division and two of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Division. The British units broken up were to be retained in Palestine as reinforcements to form a new Corps; there being yet no intention of transferring any troops to France.<sup>22</sup>

The initial success of the German offensive in France in March 1918 made the changes imperative and forced the abandonment of the idea of forming a third Corps in Allenby's army by transferring these units and others from Palestine to France to re-enforce the BEF. Their place in the line in Palestine was taken up by Indian battalions. The first British division to move was the 52<sup>nd</sup>; they were replaced by the 7<sup>th</sup> Indian Division on 1 April 1918.<sup>23</sup> In total, some six divisions from Allenby's EEF (Egyptian Expeditionary Force) lost nine of their twelve battalions who were replaced by Indian troops, many of whom had little or no training.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the Indian troops sent to the EEF needed training. While they were being trained, General Allenby authorised two large operations across the Jordan into Trans-Jordan in March-April and May-June 1918. Of particular concern to Irish troops and specifically the two RDF battalions was the offensive operation known as the Battle of Tel Asur, 9-12 March 1918 in which the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division took part.<sup>25</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were in reserve for this operation which was fought over craggy treacherous mountain terrain. One of the hills the Irish troops fought over and captured was later named Clonmel Hill.<sup>26</sup> According to David Stevenson these operations were an 'ignominious failures.'<sup>27</sup> Yet according to the Official History (OH) the operation at Tel Asur was, 'successful, everywhere except at one or two points of small importance. The depth of the advance in the centre was five miles, the frontage over fourteen miles...'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/4583/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1918 to 30 June 1918). 11 February 1918.

<sup>19</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 1. Pp.306-309.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson, David.p.436.

<sup>21</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 2. p.411. This action was based on a recommendation issued to the War Office in London on 15 February by Lieut.-General J.C. Smuts and Sir. Edmund Allenby and other senior officers of the EEF in Egypt following a meeting to discuss future strategy.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II. Part. 2. Pp.411-412.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II. Part 1. p.350.

<sup>24</sup> Stevenson, David.p.436. See also Johnstone, T, *Orange Green and Khaki* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992). p.401 for the order of battle of the 10<sup>th</sup>(Irish) Division following the arrival of Indian Army regiments.

<sup>25</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 1. Pp. 317-318 and Pp 320-321.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. II. Part 1. p.320.

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, David.p.436

<sup>28</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 1. p.322.

The Battle of Tel Asur was the last action in which the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7 RDF took part in Palestine. On 23 May 1918, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF left Alexandria on board the P & O ship *Kaiser-I-Hind* bound for Marseilles in France and reconstitution.<sup>29</sup> Many of the men transferred from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions in France carried the malaria bug with them. The 6<sup>th</sup> RDF did not leave Alexandria until 3 July 1918 on board the *S.S. Malwa*.<sup>30</sup> They were the only Service battalion of the RDF to serve intact until the end of the war.

For much of the summer of 1918, the EEF was occupied in reorganization, and except for one action in the Jordan Valley in July the front was quiet until the final offensive.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the summer, the Turkish army facing General Allenby melted away; over 500,000 Ottoman soldiers may have deserted since the start of the war. The final British offensive began on 19 September with a strength of 57,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry against Turkish forces of 32,000 and 2,000 respectively. Allenby advanced on Damascus which fell on 1 October 1918. Next day Beirut fell. The autumn campaign lasted until the 30 October 1918, the date of the Armistice in Palestine.<sup>32</sup>

At 11:00 a.m. on 11 November 1918, the guns fell silent on the western front. For many of the Dublin Fusiliers in France and Flanders the moment was met with indifference. The battles they had taken part in over the past four years were bloody and tragic; their enemy was identified and known to them. They were easy to see and face. However, the battles that lay ahead of the thousands of men who served in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers following demobilisation, the war they faced was also tragic and their enemies being rejection, unemployment, destitution were this time often hidden. That story however is for another day.

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<sup>29</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/4583. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1918 to 31 May 1918). 23 May 1918.

<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/3140/2/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 July 1918 to 16 October 1918). 3 July 1918.

<sup>31</sup> Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 1. Preface p.v.

<sup>32</sup> Stevenson, David. p.437. See also Becke, A F and Falls, C. Vol. II. Part 1. Preface p.v.

Note  
on  
Volume 23 December 2018  
of  
*The Blue Cap*

This edition of *The Blue Cap* is the last edition I will compile. I have compiled all the editions of *The Blue Cap* beginning with our first edition, Vol. 4 in February 1997. The previous three editions, the first being issued in February 1922 under the editorship of Capt. A.L. Elsworth MBE, were issued monthly to members of the original Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association formed in 1910. The order for disbandment of the regiment in June 1922 resulted in the cancellation of any further issues of *The Blue Cap*. (See footnote) With the formation of the new RDFA in 1996, our committee decided to bring back *The Blue Cap* and issue it to our members on a yearly basis.

In Volumes 19 to 23, issued for the years 2014 to 2018 inclusive, I have written an account of the salient activities of ALL the battalions of the RDF during the years of WW1 from 1914 to 1918 inclusive. Volume 19 covers 1914 and so on up to Volume 23 which covers 1918.

Unfortunately, due to COVID 19, Dublin City Library and Archive, where we hold our archive and copies of the battalion war diaries, was closed from March 2020 to the present, December 2020. Consequently, I was unable to access the war diaries of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions. Dublin City Archivist Dr Mary Clarke, who retired in December 2020, graciously arranged for me to have a private view of the said diaries at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. The 6<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary for 1918 was freely available to download from the National Archives, London. However, for several reasons, I was unable to include the activities of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions for 1918 in Volume 23.

Therefore Volume 23 of *The Blue Cap* only includes the activities of the RDF battalions serving on the Western Front between January and the end of August 1918; and from the end of August 1918 to end of December 1918 concentrating only on the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. The story of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF between August and December 1918 will be presented in a book I hope to publish that covers the activities of ALL the RDF battalions in WW1 between the years 1914 to 1918 inclusive. I hope to have this work published by June 2022, the centenary of the regiment's disbandment. I would like to thank all who contributed to the journal over the past twenty-three years. I look forward to the continuation of *The Blue Cap* under our new editorial committee. I hope you enjoy the story I lay before you.

Tom Burke  
12 December 2020

Footnote: Wylly, Col. H.C. *Neill's Blue Caps*. 1914-1922, Vol. III. Schull Books, Cork. 2000. p.231.

## RDF Battalions on the Western Front The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade <sup>1</sup>

On 1 January 1918, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Back on 24 October 1917, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions were amalgamated to be named the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers commanded by Lieut.- Col. A.C. Thompson.<sup>2</sup> On that day, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was in the reserve in the 16th (Irish) Division's reserve area around Tincourt-Boucly, a village about twelve kilometres southwest of Epehy. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was at Villers-Faucon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at Tincourt-Boucly, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions were at Hamel, a hamlet with a railway siding on the north-eastern edge of Tincourt-Boucly.<sup>3</sup> The billets at Hamel were noted as being 'comfortable.'<sup>4</sup> Those at Villers-Faucon were Nissen-type huts for the officers and Adrian huts for other ranks. 1<sup>st</sup> RDF battalion HQ at Villers-Faucon was in 'one of the few houses left standing in the village.'<sup>5</sup>

On average, battalions spent five or six days in reserve in Tincourt-Boucly, Hamel or Villers-Faucon. German rotations were reported as being on average seven days.<sup>6</sup> When troops were in reserve at this time, the main activity around these billet villages was tactical training, sport events such as boxing, football and rugby matches, tug-of-war and inter-company and inter-battalion shooting and bayonet competitions. Other activities took place such as battalion administration / disciplinary matters, and when required, which was more often than not, supplying working parties to the Royal Engineers. Cleaning of kit and equipment too took up some time in reserve.

Familiarisation and practice in the new infantry assault tactic formations was an important training activity when out of the front line for officers, NCOs, and other ranks alike.<sup>7</sup> To this end, a training ground was set aside near Villers-Faucon where companies trained in this tactical formation of attack. They were also allocated one hour on the firing range to improve their musketry skills.<sup>8</sup> Physical exercise, gas training with Box Respirators which would prove to be lifesaving and bayonet fighting also took place.

Following the periods of training, inter-battalion and brigade football matches took place. These sporting competitions were all set up to keep men mentally and physically active and add a bit of battalion pride and rivalry.

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<sup>1</sup> On 1 January 1918, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the RDF. Their activities were much the same up to the German offensive of March 1918. Thus, rather than record the activities of each individual battalion between January and May 1918, this section of *The Blue Cap* Vol. 23 records the history of the RDF battalions at brigade level between 1 January 1918 and 31 May 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974/3. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 31 October 1917). And *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* WO95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915-31 October 1917).. 22-24 October 1917. See also. *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974/6. (London: The National Archives, 1 July 1917 to 28 February 1918). 14 July 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *Trench Map-Sheet No. 62. C.N.E.3 Edition 1 a - Buire*. WO 297/1580. (The Western Front Association, 9 January 1917). The trench map location for Hamel is J.18.d.9.0.1.0. See *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 November 1917 to 19 February 1918). Battalion Order No. 139. 28 December 1917.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* WO95/1974/1 (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1917 to 30 April 1918, with note 27 April 1918)..22 January 1918.

<sup>5</sup> Wylly, H.C.pp.97-98. Nissen huts were distinguished with a circular roof. Adrian type huts were a French design barrack hut with a distinguished triangular roof and widening towards the ground to provide extra floor space.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. WO95/1956/2/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 January to 31 March 1918). Intelligence Report – Preliminary Examination of 2 Prisoners captured on the morning of 7/3/18 in connection with enemy's raid on our trenches at F.4.b.10.55.

<sup>7</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 January 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*. 29 January 1918. The location of the training ground was given as J.17.d.5.0.8.0.

On the afternoon of 28 January, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF beat the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF by one try to nil in a tightly contested rugby match at Hamel.<sup>9</sup> Next day, on the same muddy patch of ground, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF beat the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF by 3-1. Being a fine footballer who played for Shelbourne AFC in Dublin, Pte. Ned Brierley from Ballsbridge and of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF would have been a major asset to the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF team.<sup>10</sup> In the '15 Rounds' shooting contest, Pte. Ronan of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF beat Pte. Gibbs of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF on 2 February again in Hamel before the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went back into the line.<sup>11</sup>

The pleasure of a warm bath at Tincourt-Boucly was always welcome after a day's activity.<sup>12</sup> Occasionally during training there were inspections by senior officers. For example, to watch the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF go through their routine, none other than Lieut.-General Sir W.N. Congreve, VII Corps Commander accompanied by Maj.-General Hickie and 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Commander, Brig.-General Ramsay.<sup>13</sup> No doubt Major M.M. Hartigan D.S.O. temporarily in charge of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF since Lieut.-Col. Robertson was on leave, looked on anxiously.

One activity that always gave a boost to men's morale in the cold January weather was the issuing of gallantry awards normally in the form of medal ribbons. On 1 January 1918, a selection of officers and other ranks from the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were notified by General Sir William Hickie, 'that their names have been entered on the records of the Division for gallantry and devotion to duty on the 20 November 1917.'<sup>14</sup> The 20 November 1917 was the date of the attack on Tunnel Trench. Some seven officers and eleven other ranks of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were presented with certificates by General Hickie signed by him. At the same ceremony, General Hickie presented NCOs from the Battalion with the Military Medal. They were; 24245 L/Cpl. (acting Sgt.) Michael McLoughlin, 19412 L/Sgt. (Acting Sgt.) Christopher Doyle and 26447 L/Sgt. (Acting Sgt.) George McCullagh. In the same ceremony 26761 L/Sgt. Edward Albert Spratt was awarded a Bar to his Military Medal.<sup>15</sup> The CO of the 8<sup>th</sup> /9<sup>th</sup> RDF, Lieut.-Col. A.C. Thompson, was awarded the DSO.<sup>16</sup> On the same day as the 10<sup>th</sup> Dublins received their medals from General Hickie, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF celebrated their Christmas Day in Villers-Faucon. They had a concert in the evening at about 5:30 p.m. and 'everything went off very well.'<sup>17</sup> The day was 'sharp and fine' but cold. Next day the men of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF had their Christmas Dinner in the cinema in Hamel, while men from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF played a drawn football match of two goals each against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Welsh Fusiliers.<sup>18</sup>

Disciplinary matters were also taken care of in reserve. At 2:00 p.m. on 31 January, a 'Court of Inquiry' was held in 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF commanding officer's billet at Hamel. The court was to inquire into the 'Illegal Absence' of six men of other ranks namely, 10046 Sgt. P. Geeves, (ex 1<sup>st</sup> RDF) 21302 Pte. J. Duffy, 40891 Pte. O. Roberts, 23501 Pte. P. Tiernan, 7908 Pte. T. Sweeney, 11536 Pte. F. Gill. The six men were 'struck off strength as deserters having been declared by Court as illegal absentees.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 28 January 1918.

<sup>10</sup> *Brierley, Edward. Pte. M M 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* (Dublin: RDFA Archive Dublin City Library and Archive).

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 2 February 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 11,12,13 January 1918.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 17 January 1918.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 1 January 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 1 January 1918. The full list of names and regimental numbers of the 11 men from the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF who were awarded the Hickie Parchment for their action on 20 November 1917 is listed in the Battalion's War Diary.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 1 January 1918. Sadly, George McCullagh was killed in action on 28 March 1918. He was twenty-two years of age and came from Sliveroe, Strandoon, Co. Monaghan. He had previously served in The Queen's Own West Kent Regiment. His name is on the Pozieres Memorial, Panel 79-80. See Connolly, Sean, *A Forlorn Hope-the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the Kaiser's Battle March 1918* (Dublin: The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association, 2008).p.78.

<sup>17</sup>Wylly, H.C.p.98. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 1 January 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* See also . *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .2 January 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 31 January 1918. 40891 Pte. O. Roberts was awarded his medals which would suggest he resumed duty.

Throughout the month of January 1918, battalions of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade and indeed the Brigade itself, rotated with days in reserve, support, and front-line duties. For example, on 4 January, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade relieved the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the line. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF went into the front line. From the centre of Lempire, the front line lay about 500 metres east of the village. The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF went into brigade support at Lempire Defences. They took a train from Hamel Sidings to St. Emile, about nine kilometres which took forty minutes on the narrow-gauge rail line. They then marched from St. Emile to Lempire via Ronssoy, about five kilometres where they relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> (South Irish Horse) Royal Irish Regiment.<sup>20</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF went into brigade reserve at St. Emile where they relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment.<sup>21</sup>

As early as mid-December 1917, rumours of ‘extensive attacks’ by the Germans circulating throughout the Irish battalions proved false.<sup>22</sup> However what *was* certain was there would be a large-scale attack, where and when was not certain. As well as British infantry assault tactics changing and improving with time, defence tactics changed too. The changes were all part of the learning curve the British Army experienced throughout the war. By mid-1917, the British had introduced a new concept of defence-in-depth, modelled on the German pattern.<sup>23</sup> Recalling the German defensive system facing the Irish troops at Wijtschate in June 1917; in place of linear trenches, defensive positions consisted of Forward, Battle and Rear Zones, utilising machine gun posts and redoubts.<sup>24</sup> This defensive system was copied by the British.<sup>25</sup> The use of the defence-in-depth concept of zones by the British was a consequence of the lack of manpower in France; mainly because there were not enough troops to man continuous lines of trenches. In keeping with this zoned concept of defence in zones set up in the Irish lines just east of Lempire and Epehy, a series of posts named Yak and Zebra were set up in the Forward Zone that were occupied by platoon size patrols of the RDF battalions when in the front line.<sup>26</sup> Both Yak and Zebra Posts were located on the eastern edge of Lempire Road in St. Patrick’s Valley.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of rumour, it was crucial that the defences around Yak and Zebra Posts and indeed the villages of Lempire and Ronssoy in the Battle Zone were structurally strengthened and reinforced throughout January 1918. Despite the short daylight hours, the work carried out was extensive. Work parties of up to 200 men from all the RDF battalions worked under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. In total there were eighteen defensive posts around these villages that were strengthened throughout January 1918 with ‘a very considerable quantity of wire erected around each post.’ Companies were assigned different tasks.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 4 January 1918. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 22 January 1918.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. WO95/1973. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1917 to 30 April 1919). 4 January 1918.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1916 to 30 April 1919). 5-11 December 1917.

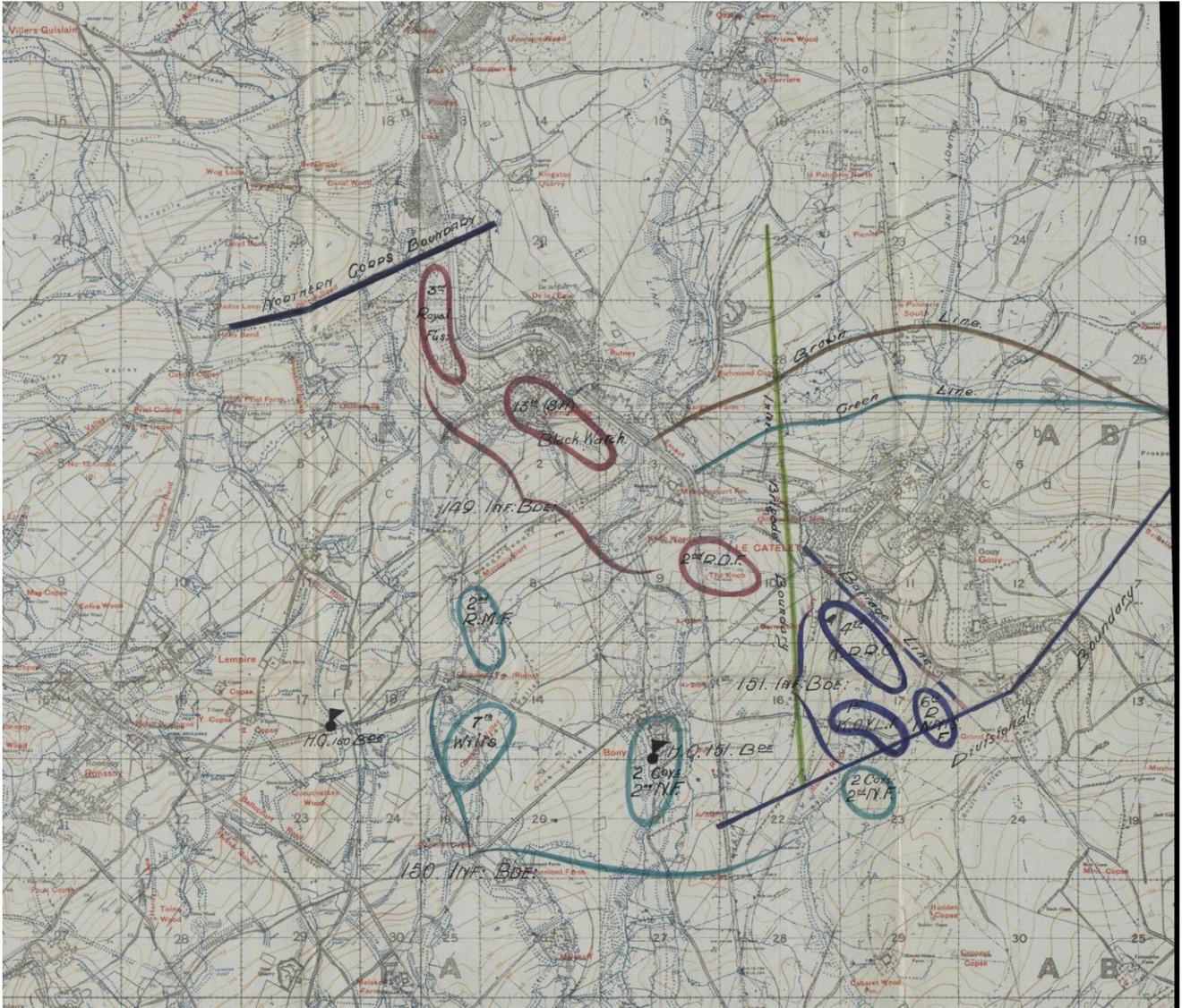
<sup>23</sup> Burke, Tom, *The Learning Experiences of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in Trench Warfare in the First World War, August 1914 to December 1916* (University College Dublin, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Sheffield, Gary.p.225 Note. Although the Forward Zone was intended to be lightly held, to do little more than delay the attacker and force him to channel his attack where it could be more easily broken up in the Battle Zone by artillery, machine gun fire and local counterattacks, as many as one third of British infantry were pushed into the Forward Zone.

<sup>25</sup> Travers, Tim, *How the War Was Won Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front 1917-1918* (London: Routledge, 1992).p.50.

<sup>26</sup> Burke, Tom, *Reflections on 1917. R D F Battalions on the Western and Eastern Fronts. The 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, The Blue Cap 22*, (2017). p.16 For further discussion on defence in depth concept facing the Irish at Lempire, see: Denman, Terence, *Ireland’s Unknown Soldiers. The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992).Pp. 156-157.

<sup>27</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918).



Zebra and Yak Posts in Square 10 on right hand side of Lempire Road.

For example, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF worked on erecting shelters for ammunition and men, trench drainage systems, erecting number boards at each post and direction boards to each post. New paths laid and old ones cleared to these posts and a new post created named Post 13A near the cemetery in Ronssoy.<sup>28</sup> At times during this hazardous front-line duty in January, entire battalions of the Dublins were called up to work on repairing, wiring and clearing these front-line trenches. Under the cover of fog in mid-February, all available men from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF worked on Ridge Reserve Trench ‘to deepen and widen it.’<sup>29</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> war diary noted that their sector of trenches around Tombois Farm, were, understandably for the time of year, ‘in a mess, muddy and wet...’<sup>30</sup> Regularly there was heavy snow falls with hard frost reported in mid-January.<sup>31</sup> Slush and ice added to the awful state of the front line trenches. They were regularly ‘falling in and waste deep in mud.’<sup>32</sup> In consequence men had to move about over the top. Food was brought up to men in the front line, and because of the dreadful state of some of the communications trenches due to the flooding; it was difficult for the men carrying the food to get to the front-line posts. Consequently, ‘Tommy Cookers’ were issued to companies in the front line, ‘to save men’s orderlies going over the opening with meals to the men, who will thus be able to do their own cooking.’<sup>33</sup>

Discipline may not have been at its best during these trying times. On 12 February, four men from differing Irish regiments attended a Field General Courts Marshal (FGCM) at 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division HQ at Tincourt-Boucly. One of the men was 9210 Sgt. John Whelan.<sup>34</sup> Whatever his crime was, the punishment was a demotion in the ranks to corporal.<sup>35</sup>

The cold weather took its toll on the men. In January alone, some 152 men from the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF were sent to hospital suffering from cold related illness, compared to just five men sent to hospital suffering from wounds following German shelling.<sup>36</sup> Out of a battalion strength of forty-seven officers and 823 men on 1 February 1918, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF sent sixty-three men to hospital, three were wounded and two reported as missing for January.<sup>37</sup> The only death casualty the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered in January and February 1918 was 26537 Pte. Thomas Evelyn Boyd from Bray, Co. Wicklow who died in a German POW camp on 25 February 1918; he was twenty years of age and was buried in Cologne Southern Cemetery, Grave VID24.<sup>38</sup> For January and February, twelve men from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF died, all of them died from wounds except two.<sup>39</sup> The loss of their medical officer added a bit of gloom to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in mid-January. ‘Capt. D. Kelly, MC, who had been with the Battalion since July 1916 (Somme) leaves for service in Mesopotamia. Very much to the regret of all ranks.’<sup>40</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-5 January 1918.

<sup>29</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 12 February 1918.

<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 10 January 1918.

<sup>31</sup> McCance, S, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers. 1861 to 1922*, vol. II (Cork: Schull Books, 1995), p.149. Heavy snow fell on 8 January 1918.

<sup>32</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 15 January 1918.

<sup>33</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .19 January 1918.

<sup>34</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch*. WO95/1957/2. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1918 to 30 November 1918). 12 February 1918.

<sup>35</sup> *Medal Rolls British War and Victory Medal of Royal Dublin Fusiliers Officers* WO95 329/ 2259. (London: The National Archives). 9210 Cpl. John Whelan, 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. p. B.141. It seems very possible that Cpl. Whelan survived the war as he is not listed among the RDF dead.

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-31 January 1918.

<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 February 1918.

<sup>38</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) The Commonwealth War Graves Commission. See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers* (Suffolk: J.B.Hayward and Son, 1989).

<sup>39</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>40</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 12 January 1918.

Aggression from both sides of the wire was slight in January. Few men were killed from action or died from wounds. The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF diary noted there was, 'very little to report' during their time in the front line in January. They sent out patrols every night and encountered very few Germans doing the same thing. German activity at night comprised of 'sending Very Lights and very slight MG fire on our parapet.'<sup>41</sup> Indeed, some German troops in their front line didn't want to fight at all. On 18 January 1918, German soldiers in their front line tried 'to patronise' with men from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on a patrol, 'beckoning men to come over.'<sup>42</sup> German artillery too was relatively quiet for the first few weeks of the new year. However, towards the end of January and heading into February it intensified with the shelling of St. Emile on 22 January; apparently to search out British batteries located on the southeast side of the village which they hoped would retaliate thus revealing their location.<sup>43</sup> British artillery did indeed retaliate, particularly on Bony, 'a village in which much enemy movement has been observed.'<sup>44</sup>

Occasionally German aircraft flew over the RDF front and reserve lines. Dotted around the reserve villages of St. Emile and Villers-Faucon were mounted anti-aircraft Lewis Guns to defend and deter German aircraft from hitting men and supply dumps in reserve.<sup>45</sup> On a couple of occasions the Lewis The German flyers too got lucky at times with the downing of a British balloon on the same day, 13 January 1918. The balloon was also brought down in flames.<sup>46</sup> Later that day, the pilot of the triplane that brought down the observation balloon was shot down and captured near Malassise Farm.<sup>47</sup> Apart from the intermittent shelling and occasional air raids, in general, things were relatively quiet throughout January with very little to report.<sup>48</sup>

The naming of both their own and German trench features was by now a common feature of Irish troops serving on the western front. One particular group of German front line posts facing the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division that received regular British artillery hits was named by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division as Kildare Avenue trench and Kildare Post at the end of it. This post was a very active post throughout January and February 1918 as regular reports of machine gun fire and Very Lights sent up from it were noted in both 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade and RDF war diaries. It was also the focus of much British machine gun fire and night patrols too.<sup>49</sup> To the left of Kildare Avenue there was Limerick Lane and at the end of this was Limerick Post.<sup>50</sup> Both these trenches and posts lay at the northern end of the divisional boundary line and could only have been named by Irish troops when they arrived in the area.<sup>51</sup> On the Irish Division's side of the wire, there were specific trenches and places named after places in Ireland too, such as for example as previously mentioned St. Patrick's Valley which ran between Old Copse and Enfer Wood. About 850 metres on the road heading towards the front line out of Malassise Farm known as Malassise Road was Ockenden Trench; named after Sgt. Jim Ockenden, 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, who won the Victoria Cross on 4 October 1917.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11-15 January 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18 January 1918.

<sup>43</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22 January 1919.

<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11-15 January 1918.

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 23 January 1918. 16 Mounted Lewis Guns were placed around Villers Faucon in late January 1918.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 13 January 1918.

<sup>47</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 13 January 1918.

<sup>48</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11-13 January 1918.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade* WO95/1973/5/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1918 to 1 March 1918). For example see Intelligence Report 3-4 February 1918.

<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 February 1918

<sup>51</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. WO95/1973/5. (London: The National Archives, 28 February 1918 to 30 September 1918). Trench Map titled Lempire revised 15 December 1917. Located today about 1.5 km out the Rue Louis Georges from Epehy on the way to Pigeon Ravine Cemetery.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

February 1918 began with the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade back in reserve around Tincourt-Boucly. They had been relieved in the line by the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the night of 22/23 January.<sup>53</sup> On the afternoon of the changeover, as if they knew it was taking place, German artillery was reported to be in a 'more aggressive mood' and heavily shelled St. Emilie between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.; luckily 'very few casualties resulted.'<sup>54</sup> Following the usual few days rest and clean-up, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went back into the front line on 2 February relieving the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Before they left for the line, 22825 Cpl. (L/Sgt) J. Gorry of 'B' Coy. 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF was awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre and 15155 Pte. F. Boylan of 'C' Coy. and 21450 Pte. P. Healy of 'D' Coy. were awarded the Decoration Militaire (Belgian).<sup>55</sup> The Dublins remained on front line duties for the next eight days up to 10 February. At times, the duty was 'exceptionally quiet and almost without incident on the front.'<sup>56</sup> However, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF reported, 'the enemy maintains the usual artillery activity around Bn HQ, but no direct hits have been obtained.' The village of Epehy seemed to attract most of the German shelling. German aircraft activity over the Dublins' front lines was light and patrols the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF sent out reported, 'no enemy in No Man's Land.'<sup>57</sup>

The 10 February 1918 was a historic day for the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and in particular the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF because it was on this day that, due to illness, Major-General Sir William Hickie K.C.B, the man who commanded the Irish Division through some of its toughest battles, was temporarily replaced, by Brigadier-General Ramsay, CMG, DSO, the commanding officer of 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>58</sup> General Ramsay held the appointment until 23 February 1918 when Major-General C.P.A. Hull KCB was given command of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division.<sup>59</sup> General Hickie had gone to hospital at Etaples but never returned to his Irish Division. As for the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on 10 February, they came out of the front line and were relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers.<sup>60</sup> It was the 10<sup>th</sup> Dublins last tour of trench duty together as a Dublin Fusiliers Brigade. Little did most of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF officers and other ranks know that it was the last time they would be together as a battalion of the 48<sup>th</sup> (Dublin Fusiliers) Brigade in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division; because a few days previous, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary had noted on 2 February 1918.<sup>61</sup>

Received orders to the effect that all brigades are to be re-arranged forthwith on a three-battalion basis. The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Bn RDF and the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn RDF to be disbanded. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn Royal Munster Fusiliers to join the brigade. Personnel of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF to be used to bring the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Bns RDF up to strength. Issued Order No 195 attached.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, who had served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division since the beginning of the war, had been informed of their transfer to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on 29 January 1918. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters were also informed of their move from the 24<sup>th</sup> Division to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division.<sup>62</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters arrived at Longavesnes from Pesezhoek in Flanders on 3 February with a battalion strength of forty-four officers and 823 men of other ranks. Their chaplain Rev. Fr. F. Gleeson, who had been with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters since August 1914, remained with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, a move that was 'very much against his will and to the regret of all ranks'<sup>63</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Operation Order 38. 21 January 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 22 January 1918. See also Whitton, F E, *The History of the Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment. (Royal Canadians)1914-1922* vol. II (Cork: Schull Books, 1998).p.516.

<sup>55</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 February 1918. Note 1: The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary notes Gorry's regimental number as 22825. However, *Neill's Blue Caps* on p.197 notes his regimental number as 24825. He was Gazetted on 12 July 1918. Note 2: Some 67 members of the regiment received Foreign Awards; of which three received the Belgian Decoration Militaire and twelve received the Belgian Croix de Guerre. See Wylly, H.C.Pp.196-198.

<sup>56</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 February 1918.

<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 February 1918.

<sup>58</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.10 February 1918.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*.23 February 1918. General Ramsay resumed command of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

<sup>60</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 10 February 1918

<sup>61</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 2 February 1918.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.31 January 1918.

<sup>63</sup> McCance, S. p.149.

The disbandment of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions and others originated from a decision made by the Army Council on 10 January 1918 when they ordered Sir Douglas Haig to reduce all British divisions by three battalions to economise on manpower.<sup>64</sup> Following the terrible losses at Passchendaele in 1917, Lloyd George had lost confidence in Haig's leadership and was reluctant to send him more troops. Haig believed the government had starved him of troops.<sup>65</sup> On 20 January 1918, Haig wrote to General Gough, Commanding Fifth Army stating: 'The situation with regard to manpower has rendered it impossible to maintain all the units now in the field, and in consequence the Army Council have issued orders that a large number of battalions must be broken up.'<sup>66</sup> Hence the disbandment of the RDF battalions; in fact some 141 battalions were disbanded.<sup>67</sup> The process was carried out quickly and without warning. The number of battalions in each division was reduced from thirteen to ten and the number of battalions in each brigade reduced from four to three.<sup>68</sup>

The infantry battalions of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade now consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF. However, before they left the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, both the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions continued with their routine duties of supplying large working parties in building the defences around Ronsoy. They also worked with the 16<sup>th</sup> Division Signals to dig a cable trench at St. Emile and assist in the construction of a new aerodrome at Templeaux-a-Fosse.<sup>69</sup>

The actual breakup of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade began with the departure of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF at 12:30 p.m. on 13 February when the Battalion left their billets at Longavesnes and marched eighteen kilometres in full marching order dress to camps at Barleux, arriving at 4:30 p.m. Barleux is some six kilometres southwest of Peronne. Before they left their billets at Longavesnes, Major M.M. Hartigan inspected the billets to ensure they were left clean and sanitised. With officers on horseback or 'chargers' as they were referred to in the war diary, their march took them through Bussu, Peronne, across the river Somme and on out to Barleux. On arrival Capt. V.D. O'Malley MC, arranged for guides to bring the men to their respective quarters.<sup>70</sup> Three days later, at 10:30 a.m. on 16 February, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF left their billets at Villiers Faucon and marched to Sorel, a village of about ten kilometres northwest of Villiers Faucon. They arrived in Sorel at 12:20 p.m. and occupied huts on the outskirts of the village. When they arrived at Barleux and Sorel, both battalions came under the administration of the Officer Commanding the VII Corps Reinforcements Depot whose headquarters were in Haut Allaines, some four kilometres north of Peronne. Supplying working parties of up to 250 men, they were immediately assigned to work with Canadian Railway Troops who were building light gauge railway lines.<sup>71</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF worked on the Brie Estrees Railway Line.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Sheffield, Gary and Bourne, John. p.371.

<sup>65</sup> Stevenson, David.p.405.

<sup>66</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Copy of letter written by Sir Douglas Haig to Sir H. de la P. Gough 20 January 1918.

<sup>67</sup> Sheffield, Gary and Bourne, John.p.368.

<sup>68</sup> Wylly, H.C. Pp.98-99. See also Stevenson, David.p.406. Stevenson notes that the number of battalions in each division went from twelve to nine.

<sup>69</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 12 February 1918.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*. Operation Order No. 44 12 February 1918 and 13 February 1918. Note the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division noted on 12 January that the transport of 10<sup>th</sup> RDF 'proceeded to Hervilly to join the 24<sup>th</sup> Division.' Hervilly is nine kilometres south of Longavesnes. *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.12 January 1918.

<sup>71</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 – 18 February 1918.

<sup>72</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 February 1918.

The disbandment of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions came as a surprise and shock to the men in both battalions and indeed many other long-serving battalions in the BEF. Excepting the Dominion Divisions, between January and March 1918, forty-seven divisions lost three battalions each.<sup>73</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division lost the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF and the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment. Others would follow later.

The choice of who was to go and who was to stay was based on 'territorial reasons.' The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted: 'The Battalions actually to be broken up have been selected by GHQ for certain territorial reasons, and to prevent the disbandment of Regular Battalions or Yeomanry Regiments.'<sup>74</sup> Although disbanded, and in terms of the continuity of soldiering, the 8<sup>th</sup> /9<sup>th</sup> RDF did not come out of the rearrangement as badly as the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF. Two companies of 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF numbering twenty officers and 477 other ranks were transferred to form No.1 Coy. and No.2 Coy. of what was titled the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion. Some of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF was also distributed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions.<sup>75</sup> Some ten officers and 220 other ranks were transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF; and eleven officers and 206 other ranks went into the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF.<sup>76</sup> The other two companies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching were made up of men from a range of infantry battalions such as for example four officers and sixty-six other ranks that came from the 3<sup>rd</sup> South African Infantry. On 20 February 1918, 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching had a battalion strength of thirty-three officers and 992 other ranks under the command of Acting Captain N. Jackson of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>77</sup> In mid-February 1918, Lieut.-Col. A.C. Thompson DSO from the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade became the commanding officer.<sup>78</sup> These Entrenching Battalions were set up to accommodate the surplus of men following reorganisation. They were used for work on defences until required to replace casualties.<sup>79</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF in its entirety was disbanded and the majority of officers and other ranks were transferred to the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion on 15 February 1918. The strength of the Battalion that day was forty-three officers and 759 other ranks.<sup>80</sup> Their war diary somewhat sombrely noted.<sup>81</sup>

On this date the Battalion ceased to exist as a Service Battalion and together with some details from the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment was re-constituted under the authority of VII Corps C/1570. The Battalion will henceforth be known as the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion temporarily under the command of Captain. F.W. Synnott.

Essentially two companies from the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF and the entire 10<sup>th</sup> RDF, who had enticed the young white-collar clerical and banking men of Dublin to enlist in the 10<sup>th</sup> (Commercial) Battalion of the RDF, who had recreation rooms in the fashionable Grafton Street of Dublin, went from being soldiers to navvies.

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<sup>73</sup> Stevenson, David. p.406.

<sup>74</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 13 February 1918.

<sup>75</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 19 February 1918. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade* 3 February 1918.

<sup>76</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 10, 17, and 20 February 1918. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .10- 11 February 1918.

<sup>77</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. WO95-905. (London: The National Archives, 20 February 1918 to 28 February 1918). 20 February 1918.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 24 February 1918.

<sup>79</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E. p.54.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 February 1918. Capt. Bailey, Adj. Report on strength of battalion.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 15 February 1918. VII Corps C/1570 was an order.

They may well have worked like navvies in the months previous; but now it was official.<sup>82</sup> But yet navvies were urgently needed to build fortifications particularly at the southern end of the British line occupied by General Gough's 5<sup>th</sup> Army. Regardless of the need for navvies, the idea of serving in an entrenching battalion didn't go down well with many of the officers and other ranks who had to transfer. When the 'details from the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment' were transferred to the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion, Capt. J.H.M Staniforth refused the role of senior captain and eventually went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters. He felt like 'the sole survivor of a wreck.'<sup>83</sup>

Several letters expressing sympathy on the breaking up of 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were sent to the Battalion. They came from Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, General Sir H. de la P. Gough and Brig.-General F. Ramsay, Commanding 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Writing to Gough on 20 January 1918, Haig noted: 'I wish, through you, to convey to the commanders and all ranks of their battalions about to be disbanded my great regret that this step should have been found necessary.'<sup>84</sup> Gough passed on Haig's regrets in a letter to Lieut.-Col. Robertson, CO 10<sup>th</sup> RDF dated 25 January 1918. Brig.-General F. Ramsay's note just simply thanked the Battalion, 'for the excellent work they had done.' He would always 'remember with pride their gallant conduct at the Battle of Croisilles...'<sup>85</sup>

Around the middle of February, with increasing rumours of a German offensive, things began to heat up on both sides of the wire between Ronssoy and Epehy. To get some idea of what was afoot, large raiding parties from both sides went out from their forward observation posts to gain any intelligence about the other side right throughout late February and into the middle of March indeed up to 20 March 1918. From mid-February, the frequency, and intensity of German raids increased. Moreover, German artillery and aerial activity using 'Albatross machines' also stepped up in their activity. They were observing British trench layouts, defences, strong points and seeking the locations of British artillery; they were, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary noted, 'apparently registering.'<sup>86</sup> Their artillery increasingly targeted the villages of Lempire, Ronssoy and Epehy.<sup>87</sup> British artillery hit back, firing on 'possible assembly positions.'<sup>88</sup>

On the day after the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF left their billets at Villiers Faucon and marched to Sorel, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were up in the front line. A party of about thirty-four Germans raided the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin's front on 17 February. They hit 'B' Coy. which was in Relief Copse located due north of Malassise Farm. Four of the raiders were seen attempting to cut the wire and were fired on. 'Cries were heard and the whole party of them retired.'

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<sup>82</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion*. WO95/905. (London: The National Archives, 4 March 1918 to 14 April 1918). See letter from Capt. W.M. Calwell MC to The Director Historical Section (Military Branch) dated 27 January 1928. Note. On 27 January 1928, a former officer of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF and 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion, Capt. W.M. Calwell who lived on Orwell Road, Rathgar, Dublin, responding to a letter sent to him from The Director Historical Section (Military Branch) regarding the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion, noted in a letter that the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion was composed of 'about 450 men of the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers and about 200 men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster Regiment.' Since the strength of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on disbandment was 759 other ranks, not all men from the Battalion became navvies. According to Whitton, the number of other ranks who were transferred from the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters to the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion is estimated as being 219, in agreement with Capt. Calwell who claimed, 'about 200 men'. The balance, some 285 went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters. See Whitton, F E.p.517.

<sup>83</sup> Grayson, Richard, *At War with the 16th(Irish) Division 1914-1918. The Staniforth Letters* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword, 2012).p.180.

<sup>84</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Copy of letter written by Sir Douglas Haig to Sir H. de la P. Gough 20 January 1918.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.1 March 1918. See also *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 1 January 1918.

<sup>87</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*.14 March 1918.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*.18 March 1918.

A follow-up patrol from 'B' Coy. could not find any wounded Germans. A loaded rifle and a few bombs were all that they found.<sup>89</sup> Four days later on 21 February, German artillery hit Sandbag Alley and killed 29938 L./Cpl. Charles Watson. Age twenty-seven, he came from Islington in Middlesex. He worked as an Excise Officer in Ireland before he enlisted.<sup>90</sup>

On the morning of 7 March, following a severe German bombardment, another German raiding party entered Heythrop Lane Trench in the afternoon. They went out to cut the wire in front of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF 'Z' Coy. under command of Lieut. G.W. Bolster who was in the vicinity. One of the Dublins' sentries saw what was happening and sent up an SOS signal. He then opened fire on the raiders. A Lewis gun was also fired but it broke down and before it was fixed, a German shell fell close by, wounding three of the Lewis gunners and knocking the gun into the bottom of the trench. As soon as the raiders got into the Dublins trench, they threw their bombs. One of them fired off two green lights signalling to their artillery to stop. Flanking fire from the Dublins' garrison at Mule Trench brought confusion to the German raiders who withdrew leaving a bag of bombs behind. Seeing one of them struggling out of the trench, L./Cpls. 17577 Geddes and 18624 McGeeney, heedless of the British barrage that was called in to repel the raiders, ran out into No-Man's Land and captured the straggler. Both men were later awarded the M.M.<sup>91</sup>

Heythrop Lane trench was the focus of several German raids. Back on 23 February, they raided Heythrop Post. In the close-quarter struggle that ensued, 26223 Pte. William Langan of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF from Dublin was killed. In the same encounter, 54236 Cpl. Hilary. C. Gilbert from Bridport, Dorset was killed. He was a Dispatch Rider from 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Signal Coy. RE. attached to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF for instruction. He was due to be commissioned and was twenty-one years of age.<sup>92</sup> One must wonder then following these raids did the Germans assume the British front line at this point was fully occupied. Either way, they never broke into the Irish lines too far with any of their raids thus far.

Counterraids from battalions in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were also carried out with the object of obtaining any possible identification of new German divisions believed to be moving up.<sup>93</sup> At mid-night on 13/14 March, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters raiding party of four officers and seventy-three other ranks raided Kildare Post. It was a bloody affair. 'The Post was rushed and many of the enemy bayoneted. Three prisoners were brought back.' The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters suffered four casualties, and one missing.<sup>94</sup> The prisoners were from the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in the 183<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>95</sup>

As well as raids, listening posts in the Irish Division's section close to the German front line often brought back some interesting intelligence. In early March for example, 'singing was frequently heard during the night in enemy front line opposite right section.'<sup>96</sup> It would seem morale was in good spirits for some men on the German side of the wire. Identification of Germans units facing the Irish around Ronssoy up to 20 March essentially came from two sources; dead or captured German soldiers. Dead German soldiers often found in No Man's Land revealed the unit they were from.

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<sup>89</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 February 1918.

<sup>90</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .21 February. See also [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>91</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on German raid on Heythrop Trench 7 March 1918.

<sup>92</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .23 February 1918. See also [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>93</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*, vol. II (Cork: Schull Books, 2000). p.97.

<sup>94</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 13 March 1918.

<sup>95</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 7, 14 March 1918. See also Intelligence Report – Preliminary Examination of two prisoners captured on the morning of 7/3/18 in connection with enemy's raid on our trenches at F.4.b.10.55.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*. Intelligence Report 1, 2, 3 March 1918.

For example, a night patrol on 26/27 January went out from the Irish lines and found the unburied bodies of two German soldiers in Little Priel Farm. They were identified as coming from the 418<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and 201<sup>st</sup> 'K' Pioneer Regiment of 183<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>97</sup> Captured Germans, mainly taken in small groups of two or three men during raids came from a variety of regiments during that period. For example, there were men taken by 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters in their raid on 19 February from the 11<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment (RIR) of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Reserve Division.<sup>98</sup> Later on 7 March, two Germans were captured from the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment again in the 183<sup>rd</sup> Division, one of whom was wounded. Two Germans were captured during a night raid on their front line at Chaffinch Lane on 18 March. Both prisoners were from the '6<sup>th</sup> Coy. II Bn, 111<sup>th</sup> Bav. RIR'; one of the prisoners died on the way back to the Irish lines.<sup>99</sup>

The information obtained from captured Germans was a mixed bag. Following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters raid on Kildare Post on 14 March, Capt. D.P. Hall and his patrol who brought in five German prisoners from the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 183<sup>rd</sup> Division noted that, 'many details of the utmost value, as regards the impending attack, were obtained' from his prisoners.<sup>100</sup>

Referring to the raid, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division war diary noted: 'Prisoners captured both stated that an attack would be made by the enemy in this section very soon.'<sup>101</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF diary noted that the same Germans captured by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters stated that 'their division was to be relieved next morning (15 March) by a fresh division who were to open in conjunction with the rest of the German Army the big enemy offensive so long expected.'<sup>102</sup>

This may be true. However, no specific dates were revealed in any interrogation of captured Germans. This is because for their own security reasons, the ordinary German in the lower ranks and indeed some of the lower ranking officers, were deliberately kept unaware of the exact date and timing of their offensive.<sup>103</sup> And yet, there may be some truth in what captured Germans said to their interrogators regarding the timing of their offensive. A week previous at about 2:30 a.m. on 7 March, following the usual pre-raid heavy German bombardment, a 'strong party of the enemy, afterwards estimated to have been 1 officer and 48 other ranks', raided Mule Trench and yet again Heythrop Lane 'Z' Coy. from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF took the brunt of the German raiders. The raiders were 'driven off by our fire and the prompt action of our artillery in response to our SOS signal.'<sup>104</sup> Two men from the same German regiment, i.e., the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, were captured; one of them was found entangled on the Dublin's wire. Both men were interrogated separately and asked the same questions for reliability. One of the men, referred to as 'A', gave his interrogators some useful information. The intelligence report noted he was, 'willing to talk' and he knew the 'sector well and seems observant and trustworthy.' The other man referred to as 'B', who was picked up lost in No Man's Land at 5:00 a.m. near Crellin Avenue, had only been in the field eight days but his statements confirmed what 'A' had said 'as far as they could.' Prisoner 'A' informed his interrogators that the raid actually consisted of fifty-one men. Volunteers were asked for but only sixteen volunteered out of the entire battalion.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.27 January 1918.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.19 February 1918.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.18 March 1918.

<sup>100</sup> McCance, S.p.150. Capt. Hall was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for this action, and several men received the MM. Note 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division war diary noted that the raid took place on 14 March 1918 and not on 15 March according to McCance. The diary of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF noted the raid took place on night of 15/16 March 1918.

<sup>101</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.14 March 1918.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 16 March 1918.

<sup>103</sup> Laudan, Sebastian, *'Tag X - Durchbruch !' The German Advance from St. Quentin Canal 21 March 1918, Stand To !* Journal of The Western Front Association No 111.p.16.

<sup>104</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 7 March 1918. The German raiding party consisted of fifty-one men.

The objective as usual was 'to secure prisoners.' The intelligence report on information obtained from 'A' was written under several headings such as, Divisional Reliefs; Method of Holding the Line; Reliefs and Boundaries; Machine Guns and Trench Mortars; Training. Under the heading Hostile Intentions, there was no talk from either man about a time and date for an offensive. There were rumours in the German ranks of an attack. But there were also rumours of no great attack.<sup>105</sup> In reality, what was revealed was that both 'A' or 'B' knew nothing of the offensive, and if they did, they were not telling their captors.

British G.H.Q knew there would be a major offensive. Indeed, in mid-February 1918, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, and one must assume other battalions, knew there would be an attack, noting in their diary; 'Enemy attack in the future expected.' Later in the month they noted; 'Enemy attack on Corps front expected.'<sup>106</sup> Even on the eve of the attack, on 20 March, the war diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF noted. 'Enemy attack is expected any day now. It is stated now to be certain, although on many previous occasions it was given out that it was about to take place.'<sup>107</sup> GHQ also knew where most likely the attack would hit, hence all the work on building fortifications in Gough's sector. What they didn't know for sure was when the attack would occur.

In a defensive precautionary tactical move designed 'to make the enemy believe the (British) front line was held as usual', brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division withdrew from the Forward Zone on 15 March to the Battle Zone with 'only a few observation posts being left in the front system to report on enemy movement.' This precautionary move was, according to 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade intelligence, 'adopted owing to the expected German offensive, which according to all indications was expected to commence soon and would include the front occupied by this Division.'<sup>108</sup> A further precautionary defensive measure was taken by VII Corps on 14 March regarding Stand To arrangements at dawn. The order noted to its divisions that, 'Divisions in the line will thin out the front from one hour before dawn on 15<sup>th</sup> inst, the order MAN BATTLE STATIONS, was, at 8:40 p.m. issued to units of the Division.'<sup>109</sup>

The uncertainty of the imminent German attack made divisions occupying the VII Corp front lines jittery in the days of middle March 1918. Recall back in mid-February, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF diary referred to an expected attack. Germans captured by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters stated that a fresh division had come into the German line on 15 March who with the rest of the German army was going to launch the 'offensive so long expected.'<sup>110</sup> Interesting to note that to verify that bit of intelligence, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. W.F. Thompson and sixty men from 'X' Coy. 1<sup>st</sup> RDF under Capt. W. Kee MC. sent out a raiding party on Kildare Post to see if there was a new German division facing them. The raid was a waste of time; no Germans were found and due to short falling of the pre-raid British artillery, one member of the Dublins' raiding party was killed and five were wounded, one of whom later died from his wounds. The raid took place on St. Patrick's Day.<sup>111</sup> No Irish celebrations took place; things were getting too tense to drown the Shamrock in March 1918.

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<sup>105</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. See also Intelligence Report – Preliminary Examination of 2 Prisoners captured on the morning of 7/3/18 in connection with enemy's raid on our trenches at F.4.b.10.55.

<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 and 19 February 1918.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 20 March 1918.

<sup>108</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 15 March 1918.

<sup>109</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 14 March 1918.

<sup>110</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 March 1918.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 17 March 1918. The two 1<sup>st</sup> RDF men who died from that raid were: 41430 L./Cpl. William Edward Robbins, age nineteen from Bristol, formerly 5936 The Training Reserve. And 30462 L//Cpl. Robert George Spratt from Derry, formerly a member of The Black Watch.

The last raids carried out by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions were on the night of 19/20 March 1918; in fact, they both took place in darkness at 3:00 a.m. on 20 March. It was a desperate effort to find out was there a different German division from the 183<sup>rd</sup> Division on the other side and if so who were they. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF carried out a follow-up silent raid on the same Kildare Post by Lieut. J.F. Williamson and ten other ranks from 'Y Coy. 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. Again, rather eerily, Kildare Post was found empty. The raiders waited till dawn, but nobody showed up.<sup>112</sup> They found the trench 'unoccupied...no sign of enemy having been seen.'<sup>113</sup> At the same time, Lieut. T.H.L. Addis and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Christopher Quigley along with thirty other ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF raided the German trenches north of Lark Post which was about 500 metres directly east of Little Priel Farm, a very dangerous spot to be. They left their jump-off point at Grafton Post and proceeded down Bird Lane towards Lark Post. They entered the German trenches north of Lark Post where they encountered a German patrol, six of whom were reported killed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in what must have been a terrifying encounter. The raiders who returned to their lines via Mule Trench and Heythrop brought 'one wounded prisoner' back with them. Two of the raiders were 'slightly wounded' in what must have been another bloody affair.<sup>114</sup>

In accordance with their defensive strategy, the Germans did not occupy their front line in any great numbers; hence the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF finding Kildare Post empty.<sup>115</sup> But that was not the case further down their line as discovered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. This was unusual. What were so many Germans doing in their front line on 20 March 1918 and who were they ?

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had been in the line since the beginning of March 1918. In fact, they had been in and out of the trenches for forty days prior to 21 March and were well overdue for relief.<sup>116</sup> Casualties for both battalions were comparatively light for that period; between them both, they lost eleven men in total between 1 and 20 March 1918 mainly from German shelling.<sup>117</sup> Apart from the raids and cold weather, they had suffered far worse trench life in other parts of the western front in their history than suffered to date. In so far as what was about to happen to them, they were unlucky because on 28 February, orders were received from VII Corp HQ cancelling the relief of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division with the 21<sup>st</sup> Division to take place between 28 and February and 3 March.<sup>118</sup>

The tiredness of being in and out of the line for forty-days, along with the stress and anxiety felt by all ranks in waiting for a possible attack they suspected was about to happen, eventually got to some men. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. D. W. Wallis from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was sent to England for six months rest. He was struck off the strength of the Battalion.<sup>119</sup> Presumably his nerves broke. He wasn't the only one who suffered the same fate. On two occasions over 14 and 15 March, the order to MAN BATTLE STATIONS was issued by 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. SOS signals were sent up by the 21<sup>st</sup> Division on their left.<sup>120</sup> Nothing happened, and divisions were stood down.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.19 March 1928.

<sup>113</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.19 March 1918. Note, the war diary of 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted the raid was against Holts Bank which is the trench on the east side of Kildare Post. *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 19 March 1919.

<sup>114</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 March 1918. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.Pp.97 and 101. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*.19 March 1918.

<sup>115</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . Note. For example, between 6 and 11February 1918, when in the front line, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF sent out night patrols into the German lines to capture a German soldier. On the three consecutive nights they raided, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF found the German front line entry point of the rad void of German soldiers.

<sup>116</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.p.100.

<sup>117</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died d Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>118</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 28 February 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .28 February 1918.

<sup>120</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.14-15 March 1918.

<sup>121</sup> Kingston, Grahame P, *History of the 4th (British) Infantry Division 1914-1919* (London: The London Press, 2006). p.369.

To add to their stress, the Germans often played mind games on the jittery British. In what could best be compared to modern day warfare as psychological operations, occasionally, the Germans sent balloons over the British lines with German propaganda notes attached. Ominously, these balloons began to fall on the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division area in early March.<sup>122</sup> To ease the stress level that was felt in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, who, on 20 March were holding the centre sub-section of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade line between Malassise Farm and May Copse inclusive, the men were paid, and a small canteen was opened which was 'greatly appreciated by the men who were short of cigarettes and tobacco.'<sup>123</sup>

Still not knowing the exact date and time of the German attack, in an effort to disrupt any potential 'enemy movement', during the early morning and throughout the day of 20 March, British artillery was 'very active', targeting 'possible assembly positions...defended positions and back areas.'<sup>124</sup> During the late evening of the same day, reports circulated in the Irish Division's sector of 'considerable enemy movement on the front of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division on our left.'<sup>125</sup> With the simple comforts of a fag and maybe a drop from the small canteen, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins settled down to a routine but tense night of trench duties east of Malassise Farm, May Copse and Enfer Wood. Little did they know what awaited them at dawn.

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<sup>122</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. Intelligence Report 7 March 1918.

<sup>123</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 19 March 1918.

<sup>124</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 20 March 1918.

<sup>125</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 20 March 1918.

## The Downpour of Death: 21 March 1918

Sean Connolly

At 4.40 a.m. on 21 March 1918, over 6,000 pieces of German artillery began a five-hour bombardment of the British Third and Fifth Armies along an eighty-kilometre front. Over 1,160,000 shells were fired, including gas and high explosives in accordance with a precise timetable. The main initial targets were the British positions in the Battle Zone (The Red Line), the communication systems and the artillery in St. Emilie and Villers-Faucon. Towards the end of the bombardment, the target was switched to the front-line positions containing the forward troops. These were drenched with poison gas shells which made the soldiers incapable of dealing with the attackers. The layout of the British defences was precisely known to the German planners as German planes had made many reconnaissance flights over the British lines in the preceding weeks. The telephone lines were cut, and communication was impossible.

As the dawn broke, the countryside was shrouded in a thick mist that reduced visibility to about twenty-five metres. The Dublins unlucky to be in the front line at this time could not see if and when the Germans were advancing. The machine gunners, so carefully positioned to cut down any German soldiers breaking through the front line, could not see through the mist. In contrast, the lack of visible targets did not prevent the German gunners directing their shells at predetermined British positions where the soldiers were sheltering.

The anxious soldiers had to endure the shelling in poorly protected positions while wearing their gas masks. Few of the survivors ever spoke about the experience but some idea of the horror can be glimpsed in the German veteran Ernst Junger's description of how it felt to be on the receiving end of such a bombardment in his classic book titled *Storm of Steel*.<sup>1</sup>

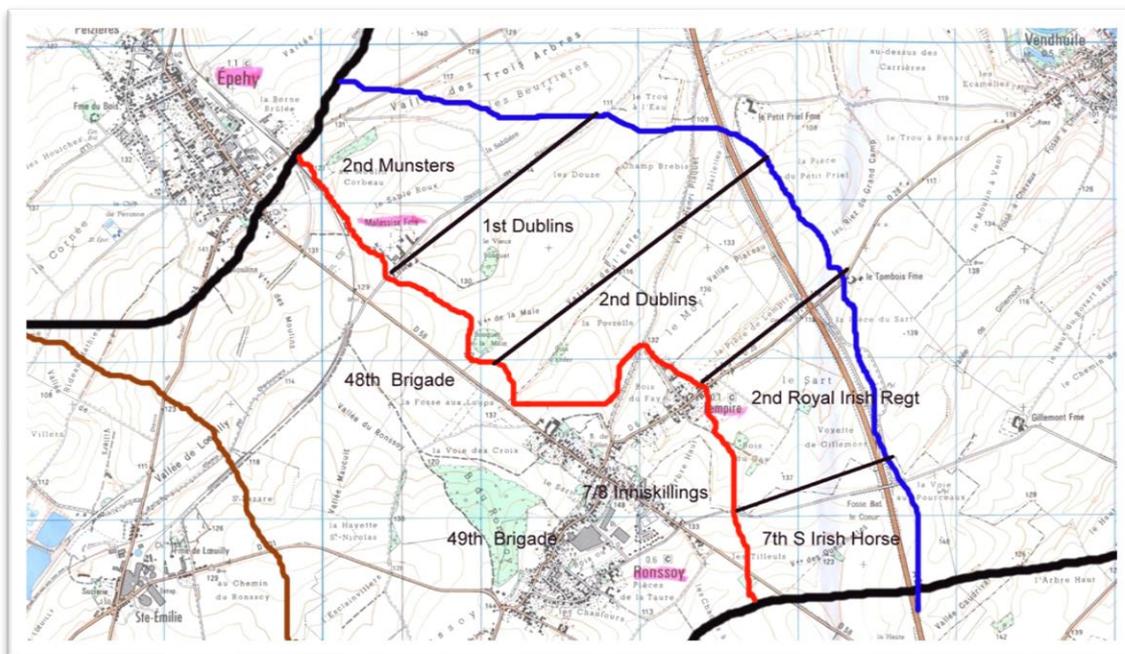
You must imagine you are securely tied to a post, being menaced by a man swinging a heavy hammer. Now the hammer has been taken back over his head, ready to be swung, now it's cleaving the air towards you, on the point of touching your skull, then it's struck the post, and the splinters are flying – that's what it's like to experience heavy shelling in an exposed position.

At 9.30 a.m. a further 3,500 mortars shelled the forward British defences in a final crescendo. Five minutes later, sixty divisions containing 500,000 German soldiers began to advance through the mist. Forty divisions attacked the sixty-seven kilometres of the front held by Gough's Army.

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<sup>1</sup> Junger, Ernst, *Storm of Steel* (London: Penguin Books, 1920). p.81.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed, ‘never in the history of the world had a more formidable force been concentrated upon a fixed and limited objective.’<sup>2</sup> The relative shortness of the bombardment would also have contributed to the surprise. Previous large British attacks on the German lines had been preceded by days of shelling to ensure that all defences were destroyed. Germans now appeared out of the mist before the British soldiers expected them.



Approximate positions of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division at 4.40 a.m. on 21 March 1918.<sup>3</sup>

The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade containing the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters were on the left of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's position. During the day, they managed to withstand the direct attack on their positions, but the Germans made an early break-through at the junction with the 66<sup>th</sup> Division at the side of the salient. They surrounded the Ronssoy / Lempire defences, attacked the Dublins from their right along the main trenches and threatened to come behind them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment held out until 1.30 p.m. but their Commanding Officer, Lieut.-Col. Scott, was killed. Just three officers and fifteen other ranks got away to St. Emile, 499 men were missing.<sup>4</sup> Only one Officer and about forty other ranks of the 7<sup>th</sup> (South Irish Horse) Royal Irish Regiment managed to withdraw. They reached St. Emile at about 7:00 p.m.

By midnight, the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade was holding the Brown Line while the remnants of the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigades withdrew further back to Villers-Faucon. In the confusion, the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers had been ordered to move up to Ronssoy Wood with two tanks to make a counterattack in accordance with the defence plan. The attack was launched in the afternoon without any artillery support and was repelled with heavy losses. The CO of the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade had cancelled the operation but was unable to contact the Rangers in time.

<sup>2</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders, January to July 1918*. (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1919). p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Connolly, Sean.p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Geoghegan, S, *The Campaigns and History of the Royal Irish Regiment 1900 to 1922* vol. II (Cork: Schull Books, 1997). p.58.

**21 March 1918, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers**

The War Diary for the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF for the period 21 –31 March was not written on the standard intelligence form and it appears to have been completed at the end of the retreat. The detailed entries for the first day of the attack describe how the inadequate defences were overwhelmed by the German advance from the front and flank: <sup>5</sup>

*4.45 a.m. An intense barrage with gas shells was opened by enemy all along front and battery positions. Visibility was rendered impossible by a very thick mist. Our batteries at once replied but were speedily neutralised, presumably by the effects of gas. Few casualties from gas occurred among the troops holding the line owing to the prompt adjustment of Box Respirators.*

*8.45 a.m. As far as can be judged, the gas barrage gave way to HE (High Explosive) at about 8.45 a.m.*

*10.45 a.m. The HE barrage continued 'til 10.45 a.m. and by this time the gas had sufficiently cleared to allow the removal of Box Respirators.*

*10.45 a.m. 'Z' Coy. on the left reported the enemy attacking the Red Line.*

*10.55 a.m. At 10.55 a.m., 'W' Coy. in centre reported that enemy had entered the Red Line in the vicinity of May Copse but had been ejected.*

*11.10 am At about 11.10 am., 'Y' Coy. on right reported that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers had withdrawn and that the right flank was exposed. 'X' Coy. in support sent two platoons to reinforce right flank: remaining two platoons reinforced 'Y' Coy. which had up to now suffered severely from casualties.*

*11.50 a.m. The Centre was again heavily attacked at 11.50 a.m. and compelled to fall back on support line, in consequence the enemy effected a footing on the Lempire-Epéhy Road.*

*11.55 a.m. At about 11.50 a.m., the mist cleared slightly, and it was possible to form some idea of the situation – on the left the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion R. Munster Fusiliers still held the Red Line. On the right, touch had been lost with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt R. Dublin Fusiliers who had been withdrawn and further to the right, the Right Brigade could be seen withdrawing through Ronssoy.*

*12 Noon About 12 Noon, Brigade HQ was informed of the situation by telephone as far as it was known and it was agreed that the Battalion should hold its ground and, if forced, to withdraw to make a defensive flank for the 2<sup>nd</sup> R. Munster Fusiliers.*

*12.20 p.m. At About 12.20 p.m., the enemy were seen to be advancing through Ronssoy and our artillery were seen being withdrawn.*

*12.40 p.m. At 12.40 p.m., one of our tanks was observed proceeding to counterattack up the St. Emilie - Ronssoy Road.*

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<sup>5</sup> War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers . Report of events on 21 March 1918.

12.50 p.m. At 12.50 p.m., reports from wounded showed that the troops in the Red Line were very hard pressed and about this time a message was received from O.C. 'Y' Coy. on the right reporting his position surrounded and that he would hold out to the end. (O.C. 'Y' Coy. A/Capt. H.M. Letchworth) The personnel of battalion HQ now manned the Sunken Road at battalion HQ, ready to defend the right flank.

1.50 p.m. The remnants of the Red Line held out until overwhelmed about 1.50 p.m. when the enemy were observed all along the camouflage along the Epéhy-Lempire Road.

The position of battalion HQ was being swept by MG fire at close range and enemy were seen to be working around the right flank from Ronssoy Wood.

2.05 p.m. At about 2.05 p.m., telephone communication with Bde. HQ which had been cut, was restored and the situation discussed. It was agreed that the remnants of the Battalion should withdraw to the Railway Embankment just South East of St. Emilie-Malassise Road and protect the right flank of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munster Fusiliers.

2.30 p.m. This withdrawal was effected by the Battalion, now 70 strong in pairs by 2.30 p.m. and a position established to command the Lempire-Epéhy Road.

2.45 p.m. About 2.45 p.m. about 30 men had been collected in the Brown Line immediately East of the Quarry. These were mostly stragglers collected by NCOs.

3.15 p.m. The party on the Railway Embankment effected touch with a battalion of the Leicester Regiment (39<sup>th</sup> Division) who had moved up in support of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers.

4.15 p.m. At 4.15 p.m. Enemy opened intense barrage on Brown Line attacking S.E. of St. Emilie.

5.30 p.m. At about 5.30 p.m., the party on the Railway had their right flank turned and, finding it impossible to further hold their position, fell back in good order through the Leicestershire Regiment to the Brown Line which was reached at 6 p.m. and joined up with the details of the Battalion holding it. It is estimated that the enemy lost heavily in his assault on the Red Line and particularly heavy in front of our position on the Railway – about 80 or 90 were killed in the old battery position which had been battalion HQ.

8.45 p.m. The 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade having taken over the Brown Line, the Battalion was withdrawn and reinforced with details from Transport lines, took up a position from the Quarry to the Sugar Factory at St. Emilie effecting touch with the 11<sup>th</sup> Hants on the right.

Midnight At 12 midnight, the Battalion withdrew to Divisional HQ (Tincourt) to reorganise, arriving there about 4:00 a.m.

When the Battalion withdrew at 2.30 p.m., it was missing over 600 soldiers. When the official records were compiled after the war, the deaths of forty-five of them were officially recorded for 21 March. This was the lowest number for the Division. Others who were killed on this day may have been assigned to a later date due to the lack of precise information. Almost 75% have no known grave and their names are on engraved on the Pozieres Memorial.

## 21 March 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins and the other battalions to the right bore the brunt of the German breakthrough into the salient. The War Diary for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF is also written on plain paper but is less detailed. It states that the Germans attacked along the whole front at 11.15 a.m. The mist prevented any observation. All companies were in their battle positions when the Germans reached Sandbag Alley where they were held up by the companies in the Red Line. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary notes: <sup>6</sup>

*2/Lieut. G. Quigley and a Party of 20 Other Ranks pushed forward in front of the Red Line to deal with an enemy Machine Gun which had worked close up to our line. The gun and team were destroyed. When the party were returning 2/Lieut. Quigley was killed*

(Note: This was the same 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Quigley who on the night of 19 / 20 March, he, Lieut. Addis and thirty men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF raided a German trench just north of Lark Post. He was killed in action when he and his men, in a rear-guard offensive action, attacked a German machine gun post at Ridge Reserve, north of Sandbag Alley. Christopher Quigley was twenty-one years of age when he died. His parents were Patrick and Mary from No. 73 St. John's Gardens, Islandbridge, Dublin 8. His name is on the Pozieres Memorial in France, Panel 79-80.)

*At about 12.30 p.m. the troops on our right flank which were holding Lempire East Defences were seen to be withdrawing. This exposed our right flank. Shortly afterwards the enemy appeared in the villages of Lempire and Ronssoy and brought enfilade fire on our position. 'A' and 'C' Companies were isolated. Our position then became untenable and withdrawal to the Brown Line was commenced from the left. This was carried out in good order, supported by Rifle and Lewis Gun fire.*

*The Battalion occupied the Brown Line about 3:00 p.m. where it remained in position until relieved by the 47<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade at about 4:00 a.m. on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1918.*

These formal accounts could never portray the horror and madness that took place over these hours on 21 March 1918. The withdrawal was covered by two Lewis machine-gunners who took up one position after the other to delay the German pursuit. The initial group that reached the Brown Line consisted of seven officers and 200 other ranks.<sup>7</sup> They were joined by some stragglers from their own and other battalions. These were organised into platoons to help repel further German attack. Shortly after 3:00 p.m., the German artillery opened fire on the Brown Line with heavy artillery. The shelling continued until after dusk. The Germans launched an infantry attack around 6:00 p.m. that was driven back. The 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, and it spent the few hours before dawn in the Railway Cutting to the west of the village of St. Emile. This was about three and a half kilometres from the front line.

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<sup>6</sup> War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 21 March 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.* p.102.

## Malassise Farm

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters were responsible for the Ridge Reserve North Trench (the Red Line) between Tetard Wood and Malassise Farm. 'D' Company and some of 'B' and 'C' Companies of the Battalion were here. About 200 metres in front, two platoons were located in two strong points in Room Trench which was otherwise unmanned. When the mist began to clear about 11:00 a.m., Lieut.-Col. Ireland went forward to assess the situation and was mortally wounded. The Munsters inflicted severe casualties on the troops assembled opposite in Le Catelet Valley. They prevented the German moving artillery up the Malassise Road until after 4:00 p.m. by shooting the drivers and horses. When the Germans succeeded in taking the positions of the Dublins on their right flank, the garrison in Malassise Farm was open to an attack from three sides. An attack was launched from Old Copse which was successful despite the tough defence led by Lieut. P. L. Cahill who had moved up from the reserve position. The enemy now continued the attack along Ridge Reserve North Trench using trench mortars. The fight lasted until 5:00 p.m. when some of the Munsters managed to withdraw under the cover of darkness.<sup>8</sup> A group under Lieut. Whelan and Lieut. Denahy managed to hold out in Epehy until noon the next day when they had 'fired their last round and thrown their last bomb before surrendering.'<sup>9</sup> Lieut. H.H. Whelan, MC, who was from Natal in South Africa, died of his wounds in Germany on 11 April 1918. In all about fifty Munsters were killed in action. Among the dead was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Daniel Joseph Mehegan of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF who was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters. The Signals Officer, Lieut. Andrew Strachan, who was reported as missing, was also attached from the Dublins.

## The End of the First Day, 21 March 1918

The elaborate defence strategy had not worked. By 10.30 a.m., most of the Forward Zone had been overrun. The Germans had broken through the Battle Zone in four places, equidistant along the Fifth Army front. There were now gaps at Ronssoy (16<sup>th</sup> Irish) and 66<sup>th</sup> (Divisions), Massiemy (24<sup>th</sup> Division), Essigny (36<sup>th</sup> Ulster, 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Divisions) and opposite La Fere (58<sup>th</sup> Division). The Germans had advanced over six kilometres into the Fifth Army's southern area.

The soldiers in the forward positions did not have the numbers nor the strong defences to resist the swathes sent against them. There were not enough troops positioned in the Battle Zone to repel the enemy who had bypassed the machine gun strong points in the mist. There was little point in using the reserves to regain the Battle Zone now that the size of the German force was known. General Gough ordered a limited withdrawal at 10:00 p.m. to a defensive position titled the Green Line which lay about five kilometres west of Villers Faucon and running through Tincourt. He decided that the most effective tactic was to delay the Germans by a rear-guard action while maintaining an unbroken line. He ordered that the old French Somme trenches south of the Somme be prepared as a last line of defence.<sup>10</sup>

Several historians have suggested reason for the collapse of the Fifth and Third Armies of the BEF. Martin Middlebrook attributes the British failure to four factors: the nature of the defensive system used, the weather conditions on the day and the morale and the lack of fighting spirit of the British soldiers and the skill of the German infantry.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers*. WO95/1975/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 February 1918 to 31 May 1918).21 March 1918.

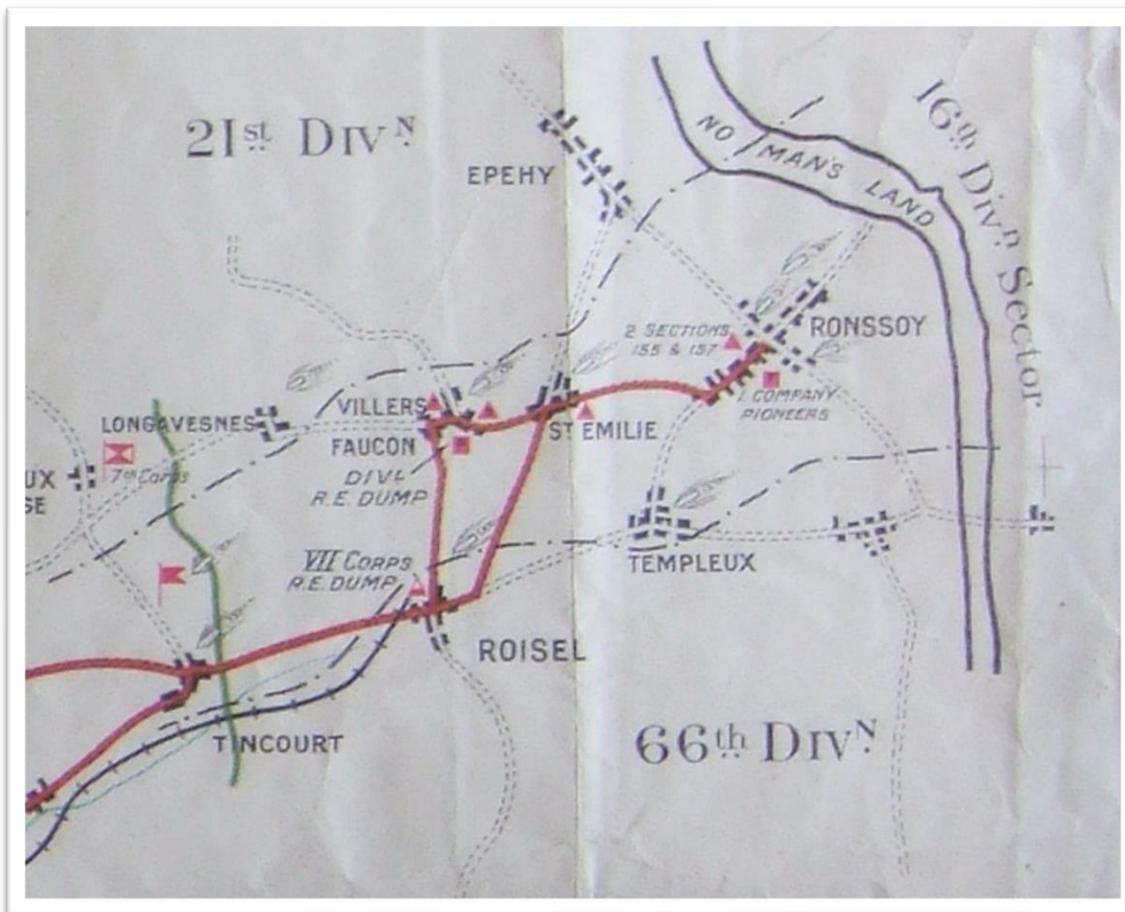
<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Confidential report by Major M.M. Hartigan 13 April 1918.

<sup>10</sup> Doyle, Arthur Conan. p.114.

<sup>11</sup> Middlebrook, Martin, *The Kaiser's Battle* (London: Penguin Books, 1983).p.322.

In his book *How The War Was Won*, Tim Travers suggest that, ‘the underlying reason for the rapid retreat of the BEF’s Fifth and Third Armies was the failure to understand and properly apply the new three-zone, defence-in-depth system, copied from the German army.’<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, there is no doubt that command and control broke down and it almost became every man for himself along the way. Orders were issued and countermanded during on 21 March. According to Travers, ‘in a matter of hours the command structures of the BEF began to break down and continued to do so for the next six or seven days.’<sup>13</sup> Officers, NCOs had to use their own initiative to stand, fight and get away. In line with General Gough’s new plan, the surviving Dublins would now prepare to resist the enemy in defensive positions north of Tincourt in rear-guard actions in positions that had not yet been properly prepared.



Retreat of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division to the Green Line on 21-22 March 1918 <sup>14</sup>

Records show that 106 men from both battalions of the RDF were killed in action on this day.<sup>15</sup> Almost 80% have no known grave, their names being engraved on the Pozieres Memorial. 28071 Pte. Michael Moore from No. 20 Lombard Street East, Dublin; 30327 Pte. John Drain from 2 Ballymacool Terrace, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal were both nineteen years of age when they died on 21 March 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Travers, Tim. p.58.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.p.50.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division.*

<sup>15</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.Cwgc.Org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 21 March 1918 There may have been more, up to 117. See Connolly, Sean. p.55.

The higher number of deaths in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF may have been caused by the fact that German assault came from their flank and not from the front as anticipated. Their resistance gave more time to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF to withdraw before they were surrounded.

The Commander-in-Chief sent the following message to the Fifth Army at the end of the first day of the battle: <sup>16</sup>

The C-in-C sends his congratulations to the troops of your Army on their splendid defence today. He relies on their continued steadfastness and valour to crush this new attack and with it the enemy's last hopes of success.

There was a lull in the fighting which occurred on 24 March which presented an opportunity for units who had been scattered by the confusion of the retreat, to re-group into some form of cohesive operational units. The lull gave some time for losses of men to be accounted for as best could be given the confusion and panic created by the retreat. The lull gave Major-General Hull at Cappy time to assess his losses and report on the situation thus far. He noted in his report of events between 21 and 24 March inclusive, that 'approximate estimates' could only be made of the losses suffered by the brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. 'The majority' he noted 'were incurred on 21 March and early morning of 22 March.' <sup>17</sup>

Table 1<sup>18</sup>

Estimate of casualties' 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division between 21 and 24 March 1918 inclusive.

Brigade	Officers	Other Ranks
47 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	59	1300
48 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	76	1790
49 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	53	1600
11 <sup>th</sup> Hants (Pioneers)	3	150
16 <sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Bn	12	500
Total	203	5340

Note: The highest loss suffered by any unit between 21 and 24 March was the 7<sup>th</sup> (South Irish Horse) Royal Irish Regiment of the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade. They suffered a loss of seventeen officers and 650 other ranks, a total of 667 all ranks. Table 2 presents a breakdown of an estimate of the losses incurred by the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. Appendix 1/15. Report on the Operations carried out by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division 21 – 25 March 1918.

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division Report on Operations Carried out by 16th Division 4:30 A.M. 21 March 1918 to 4:00 A.M. 25 March 1918*. WO95/1956/2/2. (London: The National Archives, 21-25 March 1918). See also *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch*. 25 April 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division Report on Operations Carried out by 16th Division 4:30 A.M. 21 March 1918 to 4:00 A.M. 25 March 1918*.

Table 2 <sup>19</sup>

Estimate of casualties 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade between 21 and 24 March 1918 inclusive.

Battalion	Officers	Other Ranks
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	24	600
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	25	640
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	27	550
Total	76	1790

## The Retreat

The retreat of the two RDF battalions and the remnants of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division ended at le Hamel on 31 March 1918. Each day of the retreat from Epehy to le Hamel, about fifty kilometres, between 21 and 31 March 1918, men from both battalions of the RDF were either killed, wounded, taken prisoner or got lost in the rear-guard fighting that was forced upon them. Walking night and day back westwards through the village of Doingt and across the river Somme at Peronne eventually stopping at le Hamel, the rear-guard action fought by many units of the retreating British divisions no doubt slowed down the German advance; it was the essence of rear-guard fighting. The OH referred to the rear guard fighting by men of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF with the use of six machine guns at Doingt on 23 March in order to cover the retreating 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was: <sup>20</sup>

Sent across the river Cologne at Doingt in order to hold the high ground south-west of the village, protect the flank of the Division and gain touch with 50<sup>th</sup> Division...Thanks to the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, whose position covered the Cologne defile, and to a particularly fine rear-guard action fought by the 157<sup>th</sup> Field Company R.E. and 11<sup>th</sup> Hampshire (Pioneers), holding the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade sector in and around Doingt, the enemy's advance was for a time checked so effectively that the 16<sup>th</sup> Division...was able to carry out its withdrawal through the southern part of Peronne. Crossing the Somme by the Bristol Bridge between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m....

Pte. Edward Parker of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF didn't cross the Somme at Peronne by the Bristol Bridge. He noted in his diary on 23 March that; 'Again had to retreat quickly to Peronne. Just managed got away in time. Escaped, had to swim across the river. Lost all kit all I had got.' <sup>21</sup> The loss of Peronne was a serious blow. The failure to stop the Germans at the river Somme gave the advancing troops access to an area containing hospitals and large quantities of abandoned stores. The sick and wounded were evacuated in very difficult conditions.

One key feature of that rear guard fighting in slowing down the German advance was the blowing of some of the bridges across the Somme and canal. There were strategic places where the RDF assisted the Royal Engineers in these operations. The three Field Companies of the Royal Engineers attached to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, namely the 155<sup>th</sup>, 156<sup>th</sup>, and 157<sup>th</sup> had orders to blow up ten bridges in their retreat.<sup>22</sup> Some of the bridges blown were successful in slowing down the Germans; others were not and had consequences for the RDF.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E. p.359. The order was issued on 24 March but took effect on 25 March 1918.

<sup>21</sup> Parker, Ernest. *40826 Pte. Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Diary. (Dublin: RDFA Archive Dublin City Library and Archive). In possession of Sean Connolly, RDFA.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report*. WO95/1956/3/2. (London: The National Archives, 29 March to 30 June 1918). Map showing line of retreat 21-27 March 1918.

For logistical reasons, on 25 March, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and 39<sup>th</sup> Division were transferred from VIIth Corps to XIXth Corps.<sup>23</sup> The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was assigned the task of guarding a 'line of the Somme River...from a possible attack from the north.' They were now beyond Peronne. The line along the river and canal that the Division was given responsibility for was from south west of Frise to Cerisy, about twenty kilometres along the Somme and canal. Each brigade of the Division, or what was left of them, was assigned a section within that overall line. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was assigned a line roughly from Frise to Eclusier-Vaux, about four kilometres along the riverbank west of Frise.

During the afternoon of 25 March, remnants of the RDF arrived at Eclusier-Vaux; a battalion HQ was set up at Cappy, three kilometres across the fields along the riverbank. Their objective was to guard the bridge at Eclusier-Vaux. However, during the night, in fact at 12:30 a.m. on 26 March 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade received orders to blow the bridge at Eclusier-Vaux. The bridge was blown at 1:00 a.m., more than likely by sappers from the 155<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. Royal Engineers attached to the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>24</sup> The same brigade order issued instructions for the battalions to carry on the withdrawal and assume a new defensive line on the eastern edge of Proyart. This position was taken up at 2:30 p.m. on 26 March at which another stand was made throughout the afternoon. However, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF and others again had to fall back in the dark from the eastern edge of Proyart to a position on the heights just east of Mericourt-Sur-Somme.<sup>25</sup>

Early on morning of 27 March, the German 1<sup>st</sup> Grenadier Regiment and 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had tried to cross the river at Sailly Lorette and Sailly le Sac respectively but were repelled by men from the British 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division.<sup>26</sup> Having failed to cross the river at either at Sailly Lorette and Sailly le Sac, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment crossed the Somme further back the river a couple of kilometres at Chippily opposite Cerisy in mid-morning.

Although the bridge at Chippily had partially been blown up by Royal Engineers – only one end of the girders had dropped into the river – men of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment managed to cross the river with the help of planks under cover of artillery fire. Despite determined resistance by some eighty men of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment was in possession of Cerisy by 2:00 p.m. on 27 March.<sup>27</sup> The consequence for the RDF heights just east of Mericourt-Sur-Somme was that the Germans had flanked the Dublins and were in a position to fire on or capture them if possible.<sup>28</sup>

It was during this German attack on the morning of 27 March, that about forty-five men of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on the heights above Mericourt-Sur-Somme got left behind when the remnants of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade retreated further westward along the Somme. The German 4<sup>th</sup> Guards Division had attacked the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade positions by artillery and machine-gun firing from the direction of Proyart which they had taken at about 10:00 a.m. The two Irish brigades held their position until about 2:30 p.m.<sup>29</sup> The attack was resumed at about 4:00 p.m. and lasted about half an hour.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E. p.418.

<sup>24</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division Report on Operations Carried out by 16th Division 4:30 A.M. 21 March 1918 to 4:00 A.M. 25 March 1918.* See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 26 March 1918.

<sup>25</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.106.

<sup>26</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive*, vol. 2 (London: Imperial War Museum, September 1936). Pp.23-24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Footnote 3. Pp.23-24.

<sup>28</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.*p.106

<sup>29</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.20. See also Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.106.

<sup>30</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.*p.106. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 27 March 1918.

After consultation, General Ramsay (48<sup>th</sup> Brigade) and General Leveson-Gower (49<sup>th</sup> Brigade), ordered a retirement of three kilometres to a spur west of Morcourt. Cerisy was abandoned and by this time in German hands. In yet another communications failure resulting in casualties, the order to retire issued by both Generals failed to reach some of the Dublins on the heights east of Mericourt.

They remained on fighting in their position until about 8:00 p.m. on 27 March and partially held up the German advance which, for the second time, gave other units of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division time to get away.<sup>31</sup> Like a scene from a classic war film, the men that got left behind, escaped through the German lines around Cerisy by moving very quietly along the tow path on the southern bank of the Somme canal at night. An officer having learned the German password, the men were able 'to close with and dispose of the sentries and piquet whom they encountered'.<sup>32</sup> They eventually got to the safety of Villers Bretonneux, twenty kilometres southwest of Mericourt, reaching there at 11:30 p.m. on 27 March.<sup>33</sup> The CWGC records note that thirteen members of the RDF died that day.<sup>34</sup>

The broken 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division typified the state of many retreating British divisions when on 28 March the Division was described as, 'rather a crowd of warlike particles than an organised unit.'<sup>35</sup> The collapse of command and control in some retreating divisions like the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) did not however dampen the men's willingness to stand and fight. In fact, a form of control was restored during the retreat with the creations of large and small bands of men scrambled together from retreating British divisions who also contributed to holding up the German advance.

One of these large scrambled units was known as Carey's Force. On 23 March, General Gough began to assemble a force of some 3,000 soldiers on the Amiens Defence Line located east of Villers-Bretonneux. Under the Command of Major-General George Carey, the assembled force, known as Carey's Force, were mainly from engineering tunnelling and signal companies and included 500 U.S. Railway Troops who had no military training; 400 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Railway Troops and a ten-gun battery from the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade. Ex-Dublin Fusilier Capt. W.H Callwell MC who was Adjutant of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion, became attached from the Battalion between 29 and 31 March inclusive noted that he, 'was in command of a section of Carey's force in front of Villers Bretonneux. He claimed to have 'the nominal rolls of the company showing that it was composed of troops belonging to some fifty or sixty different units.'<sup>36</sup> That 'crowd of warlike particles', i.e., the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, also joined Carey's Force and helped to repel a very strong German attack on Hamel on 28 March.<sup>37</sup>

As stated, there were small bands of men who stood and fought too. A force of some 350 men with six Lewis guns and a Canadian machine-gun battery gathered in the Bois de Vaire, about two kilometres southwest of le Hamel, under the command of Lieut.-Col. Horn, known as Horn's Force, who assisted the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on 27 March.

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<sup>31</sup>Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.24.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.24.

<sup>33</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.*p.106.

<sup>34</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>35</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.107

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion.* Letter from Capt. W.M. Calwell MC 29 June 1927 to The Director, Historical Section, Military Branch. In 1927, Calwell worked at the famous book shop Eason and Sons on O'Connell Street, Dublin.

<sup>37</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.107

Horn's mission was to go to Saily Laurette, about five kilometres north of le Hamel and cross the Somme where he was to take up a position 'to secure the crossings from Saily Laurette to Saily le Sec (both inclusive) and so to protect the left of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Division).' <sup>38</sup> The crossing Horn's Force was assigned to hold was at Saily Laurette which is about two kilometres east of Saily le Sec along the bank of the Somme. They too managed to beat off an attack on the morning of 27 March.

More relevantly to the RDF there was 'The Aubigny Details', another one of these hastily assembled rear-guard small units that consisted of some forty-five remaining soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF along with 'other details' who met up at the village Aubigny, ten kilometres east of le Hamel, on 28 March. 'Stragglers and tired men' from the fighting gathered at Aubigny 'where a soup kitchen' was installed at the school for these men. Under the guidance of Lieut. R.S. Redmond, a staff officer at 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division HQ; the men were given a clean pair of socks and any that required medical attention were looked after.<sup>39</sup> Having recovered a bit, The Aubigny Details helped to beat off an attack by the Germans on 30 March in front of the Bois de Vaire, two kilometres southwest of Le Hamel. <sup>40</sup>

The German attack at Bois de Vaire is of some significance in the context of the RDF and the German offensive of March 1918. The attack began at 11:30 a.m. on 30 March with an artillery barrage followed by an infantry attack at 12:00 noon. The barrage drove 'elements of Carey's Force' out of the front line they were holding east of le Hamel. <sup>41</sup> Twenty minutes after the barrage began, The Aubigny Details, along with the gathering of men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF, Pioneers and Engineers and men from the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade, all under the command of Brig.-General Ramsay, counter-attacked and reoccupied the line east of le Hamel. They even took German prisoners from shell holes near the front line from the 228<sup>th</sup> Division who had relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Division earlier on at 1:00 a.m. German prisoners told Ramsay's officers that 228<sup>th</sup> Division's first objective was to carry on their offensive and take le Hamel. German dead 'could be seen lying on our wire,' noted the report of the day's events. Out of General Ramsay's assembled force of some 700 men, he suffered a casualty count of six officers and 342 other ranks. <sup>42</sup> It is amazing to think that a band of some 700 men drawn from a scattering of infantry battalions, pioneers, engineers, and anyone else they could muster, having come through the past nine or ten days of fighting a rear-guard action, could hold out under an artillery barrage, counterattack and beat back an entire German division retaking a line of trenches. The CWGC records eleven RDF men that died on 30 March. <sup>43</sup> They came from Dublin, Wexford, Longford, Tyrone, Sligo, Devon, Cambridgeshire and Stirling in Scotland.

The significance of this counterattack in terms of the RDF was that it was the last stand the remnants of RDF and the band of brave men gathered by General Ramsay made to stop the German advance.

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<sup>38</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division German Offensive Report*. WO95/1956/3/1. (London: The National Archives, 21 March 1918 to 3 April 1918). Report on operations carried out by 16<sup>th</sup> Division 4:00 a.m. March 25<sup>th</sup> to 8:00 p.m. April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1918. Appendix B. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium, 1918. The German March Offensive and Its Preliminaries*. Pp.506-507.

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch*. 28 March 1918.

<sup>40</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.107

<sup>41</sup> Carey's Force suffered a casualty count of approximately 250 men. See Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive*. p.490.

<sup>42</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division German Offensive Report*.

<sup>43</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Note, not all eleven men died in the attack, such as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Frank Howden.

That night, Pte. Ernest Parker made a note in his diary. 'Had the narrowest escape of my life during the retreat, I'm about worn out now fifty-five days in the line but still smiling.'<sup>44</sup> Next day, 31 March, the men of the 'Aubigny Details' were reassigned to their own units and battalions and were, as far as possible, reformed. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF received twenty-three soldiers who had been fighting with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF along with the men from Villers Bretonneux. Lieut. R.S. Redmond still had his soup kitchens going in the school at Aubigny where men were given new socks and had their feet attended to.<sup>45</sup>

At 11:00 p.m. on 31 March, the much-depleted 1<sup>st</sup> RDF relieved 'C' Squadron from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards, Queens Bays, (1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) in front of le Hamel.<sup>46</sup> Both scratch battalions of the RDF remained in this position just east of le Hamel until they too were relieved by units of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division on the evening of 3 April. There was a lull in the fighting between 1 and 3 April but the Germans continued their advance until 5 April when on the day Ludendorff ordered the abandonment of his offensive between Barisis and Arras; an operation he called Michael.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Parker, Ernest. 40826 Pte. Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

<sup>45</sup> War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch. 1 April 1918.

<sup>46</sup> Wylly, H.C, Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922. Pp.107-108. See also War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers 31 March 1918. See also War Diary 16th (Irish) Division German Offensive Report. Note. At 5:00 a.m. on 31 March, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division took over the part of the defence line occupied by Carey's Force. The Cavalry Division became responsible for a line beginning in the Bois de Hamel just south of le Hamel, northwards through le Hamel up to the Somme, a distance of about three kilometres. Orders were received by 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division to supply support to 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, hence the use of much depleted 1<sup>st</sup> RDF.

<sup>47</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.109. and Pp. 135-136.

## Footnote - The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalions

The OH referred to many Entrenching Battalions. However, there was only one reference to the 20<sup>th</sup> in their action on 26 March and none to the 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is only fair to their memory and the RDF men who served in them to write an account of their brief history from the limited number of sources available and their role in the German offensive of March 1918.<sup>2</sup>

As noted previously in this text, the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion was formed back in mid-February 1918 and came under the command of Col. Mather of the Leinsters, who, lucky for him, was on leave at the time of the German offensive. Lieut. James B. Tober of the Leinsters noted that Capt. V.D. O'Malley MC of the RDF, who was later transferred to the Munsters, was in command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion during the offensive. In contrast, Capt. W.M. Callwell, ex-10<sup>th</sup> RDF, claimed that Capt. O'Malley MC was also on leave and did not return to the Battalion 'until activities were over.' Callwell noted that, 'the command devolved therefore on Capt. F.W. Synnott.' Callwell was second-in-command and Adjutant.

Up to 21 March 1918, both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalions were employed as navvies working on light railways supervised by Canadian Engineers and working with a Tunnelling Company, 'behind the Somme sector.' Both were working in the Peronne area. Up to the beginning of the German offensive, the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching were under canvas at St. Christ, (St. Christ-Briost) approximately ten kilometres south of Peronne on the eastern banks of the Somme.<sup>3</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching were also under canvas not too far away at Doingt which lies about four kilometres south-east of Peronne. It was from Doingt that the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching supplied working parties of up to 550 men to work with 'B' Coy. 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. Canadian Railway Transport at Quinconce. Taking 'haversack rations' with them, they worked eight hours a day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Other men from the Battalion worked on building cook houses and latrines for a new camp being built.<sup>4</sup> According to Lieut. Frank Laird, ex-8<sup>th</sup> RDF who served with the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching, the work was 'cushy'.<sup>5</sup>

According to Capt. Callwell, the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching 'was thrown into the line which was very disorganised on the night of 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918. On the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, it came under orders of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division...' holding a line east of Vermand, about twenty kilometres east of St. Christ.<sup>6</sup> Thrown into line they were indeed. They had no Lewis guns to defend themselves; no stretchers to help carry any wounded. Any signal apparatus they had was taken from them along with any personnel trained to use them.<sup>7</sup> Essentially all they had to defend themselves were their rifles and no doubt a selection of shovels.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium, 1918. The German March Offensive and Its Preliminaries.* p.503.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion.* The account of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion's roll in Operation Michael was written by the Adjutant of the Battalion Capt. W.M. Calwell late 10<sup>th</sup> RDF who in 1929 lived at Rathgar House, Orwell Road, Rathgar Dublin 'S.2'. His account was written from memory over nine years after the German offensive of March 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Memorandum written by Lieut. James B. Toher ex-Leinster Regiment on 21 June 1927 from his home at New Street, Killaloe, Co. Clare. He referred to the German offensive as 'the row.' The activities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion between 21 and 27 March 1918 is covered on one page in the Battalion War Diary.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion.* 21-28 February 1918. I could not find a location named Quinconce but only a Rue du Quinconce on the north-western edge of Peronne.

<sup>5</sup> Laird, Frank, *Personal Experiences of the Great War (an Unfinished Manuscript)* (Dublin: Easons, 1925). p.155.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion.* Memorandum written by Capt. Calwell on 27 January 1929.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Co. Clare. He referred to the German offensive as 'the row.'

<sup>7</sup> ibid. Account written by Capt. Calwell of the activities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion between 4 March 1918 and 14 April 1918.

Unlike most units on 21 March who headed westwards away from the advancing Germans, in the afternoon, the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching were ordered by an officer from XIX Corps HQ, 'to be in readiness to move that evening in battle order by motor lorries which would be provided at 6:00 p.m.' They were ordered to move eastwards to help the retreating 24 Division coming from Vermand. As was expected, there was utter confusion and congestion on the roads.

On arrival at Vermand, which was early on the morning of 22 March, they were split into two sections, one section to dig a defence line 'in the neighbourhood which had been previously wired', while the other section was ordered 'to take up a defensive line in front of the village... on a small cliff on the east side of the village....' With little more than rifles to defend themselves and no support on either side of them to try to slow down the German advance, the men were flanked but managed to get away along the Vermand-Brie Road (D 1029), the road they had come up the previous night on lorries which was shelled. Their journey was an absolute waste of time. They held up for the night some eleven kilometres off that road at Monchy-Legache where field kitchens had been set up.<sup>8</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching remained at their work on the light railways north-west of Peronne on 21 and 22 March. When the attack was launched, Frank Laird heard artillery in the east and thought it was British. It never occurred to him that the Germans could break through. So, they carried on with the cushy work and watched the 'continual procession of motor lorries and cars hurrying west... Train loads of American railway troops, too, came down our light railway... firing off their rifles cow-boy fashion...'<sup>9</sup> With the fall of Peronne, it was not until 23 March that they moved out southwards towards Harbonnieres, a village on the Peronne-Amiens Road, crossing the Somme southwest of Peronne. Their Canadian Railway Engineering employers had 'flitted westward ho!' without informing the Battalion.<sup>10</sup> They left most of their kit behind in the rush and got away as quick as possible; 'the bridges over the Somme were being blown up' as they left.<sup>11</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching continued with the same routine of falling back, digging in and helping out the retreating units of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division with the rear guard fighting over the following few days and nights. They fell back through Devise and St. Christ where they had previously been camped. To prevent the Germans getting any supplies, a party under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J. Owens set fire the stores at St. Christ.<sup>12</sup>

German infantry advance tactics were based on the small tactical lightly armed quick-moving units with machine gun support. Calwell recorded seeing the Germans advance 'over open country preceded by small detachments of machine gunners.' They also had control in the skies over their advancing troops in this region. In places such as near Warvillers, mid-way between Amiens and St. Quentin, Calwell recorded on 26 March, 'Enemy observation balloons had been moved forward during the night and their aeroplanes were active. No British aeroplanes were to be seen nor was there any British artillery.' German aircraft were free to bomb retreating troops and no doubt report locations. In places their advancing infantry were even free to move over open country on their bicycles.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Memorandum written by Capt. Calwell on 27 January 1929. Note for 22 March 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Laird, Frank. p.156.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.157.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. Record of activities between 21 and 27 March 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion*. Memorandum written by Capt. Calwell on 27 January 1929. Note for 23 March 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Memorandum written by Capt. Calwell on 27 January 1929. Note for 23 March 1918.

In their retreat, the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching passed through Chaulnes, Hallu, Fonches-Fonchette and reached Hattencourt about forty kilometres south-west of Vermand on 25 March; all the while being pursued by the Germans. Also, on the same day, having trekked across the devastated landscape of former Somme battles, the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching reached Harbonnieres from Peronne, about thirty kilometres. They slept in the open fields, which without sleeping bags in late March, was cold and wet. <sup>14</sup> They were a bit of a nomad unit that at this stage in the sense that they operated without any orders and were not attached to any unit. Next Day on 26 March, the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching received orders to break up and reinforce the remnants of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. <sup>15</sup> The order marked the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion. Frank Laird reckoned that about nine officers and three hundred other ranks from the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching went back to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and were distributed between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. <sup>16</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion suffered badly at Hattencourt when the Germans attacked on 26 March. Capt. Robert Boyd of the RDF, aged twenty-eight, was in command of 'C' Coy. of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion. He was in fact put in charge of four companies that had been ordered to dig a trench about fifty metres east of the town on the road from Hattencourt to Fonches-Fonchette. At 1:00 a.m. on 26 March, a Brigade Staff Officer had indicated that the line had to be defended until the men were forced to retire and fall back on Rouvroy-en-Santerre, six kilometres westwards. The work had been completed when the Germans attacked at about 8:00 a.m. using their usual tactics with 'intensive machine gun fire.' Snipers were also very active from the woods on their left. <sup>17</sup> Second Lieut. S.W. Palmer was killed, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Barrett was fatally wounded. After some time, French Cavalry troops who were sent the previous day to assist the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion, were forced to retire thus allowing the Germans to get round the open flank. Capt. Boyd was ordered to hold the line at all costs. To add to their woes, as happened many times before, during the night they were hit by their own artillery, which were 'under the impression that it (Rouvroy-en-Santerre) was occupied by the enemy.' <sup>18</sup>

Capt. Boyd's action allowed two of the four companies get away under covering fire when he was hit on the side of the head by a piece of mortar shrapnel that pierced his helmet. When he recovered consciousness, a German was applying a field dressing to his wounded head. The Good Samaritan German had already taken his revolver, field glasses and wristwatch. Boyd survived and was repatriated in December 1918. <sup>19</sup> The confusion of the retreat led to a report in *The Irish Times* of 27 April 1918 that Capt. Boyd had been killed in action. The same paper published the notice of his actual death almost fifty-eight years later. <sup>20</sup>

Having received orders to join the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, on 26 March, Frank Laird and his fellow Dublin Fusiliers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion set off north from Harbonnieres towards Cappy where the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were reported to be. <sup>21</sup> Very early in the 'small hours' they headed first to Lamotte-Warfusee (Laird referred to it as La Motte) where they spent a few hours fitting out with gas masks and ammunition before setting out for Bray-sur-Somme and Cappy, essentially over the same ground they had come across the previous days. <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Laird, Frank. p.157.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. Record of activities between 21 and 27 March 1918.

<sup>16</sup> Laird, Frank. p.158.

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 19th and 20th Entrenching Battalions*. WO95/905. (London: The National Archives, 20 to 28 February 1918 and 21 to 27 March 1918).26 March 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion*. Note for 27 March 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *Boyd, Robert. Capt. Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO 339/44950. (London: The National Archives, 1915-1919).

<sup>20</sup> Connolly, Sean. Pp.65-66.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. Record of activities between 21 and 27 March 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Laird, Frank. p.158.

Laird described seeing artillery weapons being destroyed by British gunners and dumps of stores being set on fire to prevent the Germans getting them.<sup>23</sup> Calwell reported similar burning carried out by a party under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J. Owens at St. Christ. From Lamotte-Warfusee to Bray-sur-Somme is about fifteen kilometres. They got as far as Etinehem on the northern side of the Somme which was abandoned. There they met a General who was directing operations in the area and told them to get back across the Somme as quick as they could as the area was being evacuated. The whole walkabout in circles is a fine example as to how much command and control had broken down. They rested up for a few hours and headed back as ordered.

Early next morning of 27 March they headed for Mericourt-sur-Somme where the Dublins were then reported to be. They pushed on a couple of kilometres along the southern bank of the Somme to Morcourt.<sup>24</sup> Here they met a Major of the 16<sup>th</sup>(Irish) Division who was described as being 'a very self-possessed and cheerful person' who Laird noted, 'was organising things in that locality as calmly as if the whole business was a peace-time manoeuvre instead of serious warfare.'<sup>25</sup> On arrival at Morcourt, his column was broken up into several parties and immediately put into defensive position on a bluff 'just outside the village of Morcourt with orders to see the last of our men through before leaving.'<sup>26</sup>

As previously noted, the two brigades in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division held their position at nearby Mericourt until about 2:30 p.m. The Germans resumed their attack at about 4:00 p.m.<sup>27</sup> However, during the afternoon, perhaps during the lull between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., Laird claimed that a counterattack on the Germans in the direction of Mericourt took place and was organised by a Major of the Hampshire Regiment and a captain of the Dublins, named Cowley.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly Laird introduced his men to Capt. Cowley as being 'Dublins', not entrenchers. Many of the men who took part in this brave act were 'mere boys.'<sup>29</sup> Laird and some of these mere boys were not as lucky as the Dublins left behind on the heights above Mericourt-Sur-Somme who got away in the late evening. He was wounded in the legs and taken prisoner; so too was Capt. George Cowley who subsequently died of his wounds on 18 June 1918 and was buried in Le Cateau Military Cemetery.<sup>30</sup>

In a response to a request for information, Lieut. Frank Laird wrote on 3 March 1919 that he had taken part in a counterattack with Capt. Cowley at Morcourt, on 27 March 1918 that was halted by machine gun fire. Virtually everyone was hit. He did not see Capt. Cowley again, being hit himself and captured by the Germans.<sup>31</sup> 25666 Pte. T. Walsh saw Capt. Cowley wounded and left behind on the 27 March 1918.<sup>32</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. George Perry Crawford from No. 5 Cambridge Villas, Rathmines, Dublin was also wounded and taken prisoner.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.158.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.159.

<sup>25</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. Record of activities between 21 and 27 March 1918 See also Laird, Frank.p.159.

<sup>26</sup> Laird, Frank.p.162 and p.159.

<sup>27</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.106.

<sup>28</sup> *War Diary 20th Entrenching Battalion*. Description of counterattack made on 27 March 1918 by part of 8<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers. Written by 'Capt.' Laird, 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.

<sup>29</sup> Laird, Frank. p.161.

<sup>30</sup> Connolly, Sean. p.72.

<sup>31</sup> *Laird, Frank . Lieut. 1st (Attached) 3rd Royal Dublin Fusiliers, Weelsby Camp, Grimsby, Lincolnshire. . Letter.* (Nottingham: Nottingham University Library, 3 March 1919); Connolly, Sean. For details on events at Mericourt on 27 March 1918, see Laird, Frank. Pp.162-164. Laird was captured and spent the rest of the war in Karlsruhe and Rastatt POW Camps. He was released in mid-December 1918 and ended up in Scotland. See also Connolly, Sean. p.72.

<sup>32</sup> Connolly, Sean. p.72.

His father was officially notified that this occurred while he was engaged in a counterattack on 27 March. Major Squire Duff-Taylor, the acting 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Major was taken prisoner. He had been commissioned into the 4<sup>th</sup> RDF in 1914, transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF as Adjutant in 1916. Like Frank Laird, Squire Duff-Taylor was repatriated in December 1918.<sup>33</sup>

Capt. W.M. Calwell's account of the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion's retreat ended at Boves, some fourteen kilometres southwest of Amiens, where at 4:00 am on 29 March he left his billet in Boves and was placed in charge of a detachment of Carey's Force at Villers Bretonneux for a couple of days until 31 March; he re-joined the 19<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalion at Cottenchy five kilometres south of Boves on 1 April 1918. On 3 April, while at Thezy-Gilmont, eight kilometres east of Cottenchy, the Battalion received orders for their disbandment and to be absorbed by units of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division. Calwell noted that 'representations were made to Major-General Daly, Divisional Commander (24<sup>th</sup> Division) that the troops being Irish would prefer to be drafted to Irish regiments.' Their wish was granted and next day, 4 April, they marched the twenty kilometres westward to Saleux where they met Lieut.-Col. Mather, who had difficulty finding them. Eventually they caught up with the remnants of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and during the middle weeks of April they were absorbed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Pp.72-73.

<sup>34</sup> *War Diary 19th Entrenching Battalion*. Memorandum written by Capt. Calwell on 27 January 1929.

**The Losses**

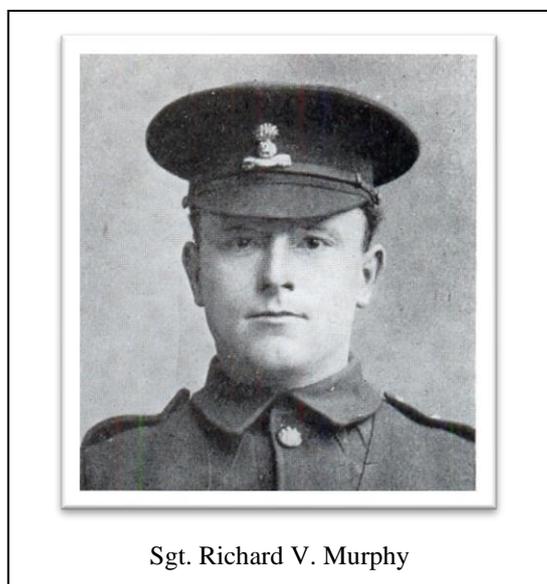
Of the 331 RDF men who died between 21 March and 4 April 1918, 167 or 50.4% are listed as having died on 21 March 1918. The next date on which the highest number of deaths is assigned to is 29 March. Some sixty-two or 18.7% are listed as having died on that date. The breakdown is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 <sup>1</sup>

The number of RDF men killed in action or died of wounds between 21 March and 4 April 1918

RDF Bn	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> /9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>
Casualties	157	130	1	1	2	4	10	24	2

Table 3 presents the statistics of death. The following are some of the human faces belonging to those statistics. Pte. Ernest Parker was ‘still smiling’ and alive on 30 March 1918.<sup>2</sup> It would not be until the night of 3 / 4 April before what was left of his battalion was relieved at le Hamel. He was one of the lucky ones.



Sgt. Richard V. Murphy

There were hundreds of his comrades in the Dublins not so lucky. The casualties suffered of dead, wounded and missing by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF Battalions between 21 March and 4 April 1918 as noted in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary are shown in Table 4.

According to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Soldiers Died Part 73, a total of 331 Dublin Fusiliers men were either killed in action or died of wounds in France during the same period.<sup>3</sup> This number of 331 is comprised of men who had been registered at their time of death as having served in either one of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions.

The men who died with the 8<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions more than likely died while serving with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching Battalions. The two men who died with the 11<sup>th</sup> RDF were both officers, one of whom was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Christopher Quigley. He is registered in the CWGC data as having died while serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Moreover, Lieut. William F. MacHutchison is registered as having been a member of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF when he died while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF.

Two former members of ‘D’ Coy. The Pals, 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were killed 26 March. Sgt. Richard Victor Murphy was a Civil Servant in the Land Registry Office in Dublin. He joined The Pals company in September 1914 and served with them in Gallipoli and Serbia before being invalided home in July 1916. He recovered and went to France in July 1917. He was invalided home again with pneumonia. He returned to the front in January 1918.

<sup>1</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>2</sup> *Parker, Ernest. 40826 Pte. Royal Duiblin Fusiliers.*

<sup>3</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.Cwgc.Org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*



Lieut. William F. MacHutchison

Sgt. Richard Victor Murphy had been a member of Wanderers Rugby Football Club. His name is on the brass memorial in the Land Registry Office along with that of Francis H. Browning, the President of the Irish Rugby Football Union who was killed in Dublin in 1916 on the first day of the Easter Rising.<sup>4</sup>

Lieut. William F. MacHutchison had been employed by the Hong-Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. He too joined the Pals and served in Gallipoli. In October 1916, he was almost killed in an action in the Struma Valley, Salonica, when a rifle bullet went through his chest just above his heart. Though seriously wounded, he recovered and was sent home to Dublin to recuperate in December.<sup>5</sup>

He was declared fit for service abroad in May 1917. His parents, who were living at No. 6 Mount Temple Terrace, Dartry Road, Dublin, were notified of his death in April 1918. The recorded date is 26 March, but this may be incorrect. A fellow officer wrote that William was wounded in the head by a machine gun bullet on the afternoon of 27 March. Two soldiers were directed to take him to the nearest Field Ambulance which was in the village of Lamotte-Warfusee. At the time it was not known that the village had been captured by the Germans and wounded men were sent there all that evening and night.

The German Medical Officer, who had taken over the station, sent a report that William had died there after two days but apparently that report and all the other papers were captured by the Germans and was lost.<sup>6</sup> He was named on the Pozieres Memorial to the missing. After almost a century, the historian and researcher Tom Tulloch-Marshall convinced the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that Lieut. MacHutchison was the unidentified Royal Dublin Fusilier officer buried in Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery. He was given a proper gravestone and there was a rededication service at on 12 April 2017.

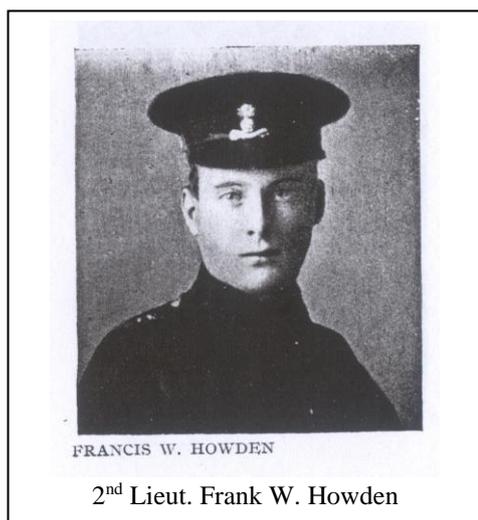
It was during the fighting on 27 March either with the men who counter-attacked or on the heights just east of Mericourt that another member of The Pals was lost. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Frank Howden who was wounded in that action but died on 30 March 1918. Francis, or Frank as he was known to family and friends, William Howden was born in Longford on 2 March 1894. He was one of seven children, two boys and five girls born to John and Elizabeth Howden who lived at Woodview, Carriglass, Co. Longford. The house was about five kilometres on the north eastern side Longford town in the townland of Cloncoose and parish of Templemichael. John and Elizabeth had married in 1888. The family were Church of Ireland. John worked in Longford as a draper's assistant. Their other son, Walter, was two years older than Frank, worked as a clerk in a shipping office in Dublin and lived as a lodger in the home of the Evans family at No. 31 Addison Road, Fairview, Dublin. As a young boy, Frank went to school at Ranelagh School, Athlone and Mountjoy College, Dublin. After his schooling years he obtained a job as a clerk in the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. See also Hanna, Henry, *The Pals at Suvla* (Dublin: E. Ponsonby Ltd, 1916), p.218.

<sup>5</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. See also Hanna, Henry, p.212

<sup>6</sup> Sean Connolly RDFA correspondence with a relative.

<sup>7</sup> *Howden, Frank. 2nd Lieut. 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO 339/109149. (London: The National Archives). See also [Http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie) *Census of Ireland* The National Archives of Ireland.



On 24 October 1914, at twenty years of age, Frank enlisted into The Pals 'D' Coy. of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. As 15846 Pte. Frank Howden, served with The Pals at Suvla Bay in Gallipoli where towards the end of August 1915 he picked up enteritis.<sup>8</sup> Following a short term of treatment in hospital, six days in fact, he returned to his unit. In December 1916, Frank returned to England for a while but went back to his battalion who were in Salonika. He was not long back in Salonika when he applied for a cadetship on 19 January 1917.

His application for a cadetship was signed 'In the Field' by the CO, 7<sup>th</sup> RDF at the time, Lieut.-Col. Ashton on 20 January 1917 and his Brigade Commander 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, Brig. – Gen. MacPhearson on 22 January 1917. The Bishop of Kilmore signed his application as a referee. On 10 March 1917, Frank left

The Pals in 'D' Coy. 7<sup>th</sup> RDF and returned to England to join the No. 5 Officer Cadet Battalion in Cambridge on 7 June 1917. He spent a little over three months training in Cambridge and on 25 September 1917 he was commissioned into the 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers but sent to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in France.<sup>9</sup>

He arrived at the Battalion on 18 December 1918; a quiet but cold day when the Battalion was at Epehy. He arrived with 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. W.N. Gourlay who was reported missing following the German offensive.<sup>10</sup> Frank served with the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF just 105 days. He was shot in the chest again either in the counterattack or on the heights just east of Mericourt-Sur-Somme on 27 March.

Two days later on 29 March, a telegram from The War Office to Frank's father stated that Frank was wounded in action and admitted to the Stationary Military Hospital at Abbeville with gunshot wound to chest and was 'dangerously ill - visit not possible.'<sup>11</sup> Abbeville is about eighty kilometres west of Proyart. He was subsequently moved to No. 5 British Red Cross Hospital, Wimereux; about eighty-seven kilometres north. He may well have rallied a bit at Wimereux. A telegram from The War Office in London dated 30 March was issued to Frank's father giving him permission to visit his son. Sadly however, another telegram from The War Office dated 31 March 1918 to Mr John Howden noted: 'Deeply regret 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. F.W. Howden, Dublin Fusiliers, died of wounds 9:10 a.m. March 30<sup>th</sup>. The Army Council express their sympathy. Permit to visit is now cancelled.'<sup>12</sup>

Frank's father had been informed that he could visit his dying son and his travel expenses would be paid. Walter went instead and got as far as London but was informed that Frank had died, and his travel permit was therefore cancelled. Walter claimed for travel expenses of ten pounds from The War Office but was refused payment. On 24 April 1918, a letter from The War Office to Frank's father informed him that Frank was buried in Wimereux Communal Cemetery, grave reference IVF2. Frank had just turned twenty-four years of age when he died. Walter wrote to The War Office on 4 April 1918 from his family home at Woodview, Carriglass, Co. Longford. He asked them to send on any of Frank's personal effects that might be available. The letter presented a terrible sense of grief, loss and perhaps loyal patriotism in the Howden home.

<sup>8</sup> Hanna, Henry.p.199.

<sup>9</sup> Howden, Frank. 2nd Lieut. 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.18 December 1918. See also *The London Gazette*.30 October 1917.

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*

<sup>11</sup> Howden, Frank. 2nd Lieut. 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



Sgt. Tommy Cunningham with some of his RDF comrades. Tommy is the man seated in front row on the right-hand side with the moustache.

*Dear Sir,*

*I shall be glad if you will kindly arrange to have all personal property of my brother 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Frank Howden 1<sup>st</sup> Batt. Royal Dublin Fusiliers who died at the Anglo-American Hospital, Wimereux on Saturday last (30<sup>th</sup> March) addressed to me at 59 Lower Mount Street, Dublin. You will understand that I wish to spare my parents further grief- and I can take them home when the wound is not so open and when they will feel proud that he gave his life for God, his King, and his country. Will you see that this is done - it is the wish of my father. Any correspondence relevant to money effects may be addressed to my father - who was a dependency. Yours faithfully. Walter Howden*

9500 Sergeant Thomas Cunningham, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was taken prisoner on 21 March near Malassise Farm. He spent the rest of the war in a German POW camp. Not long after he was released, he became a victim of the Spanish flu pandemic. On 21 August 1920, Tommy was discharged from the army with a note saying he was of 'Good character.' In 1939 Tommy went to Belfast to have another go at the Germans in World War II. The recruiting sergeant sent Tommy back to Dublin. Soon after he travelled to England and over the next ten years Tommy worked on the Derwent Dam outside Sheffield. In 1964, when Tommy was seventy-nine years of age, he suffered a collapsed lung and was taken to the Adelaide Hospital in Dublin where he died three weeks after admission. He is buried in Mount Jerome Cemetery, Dublin.<sup>13</sup>

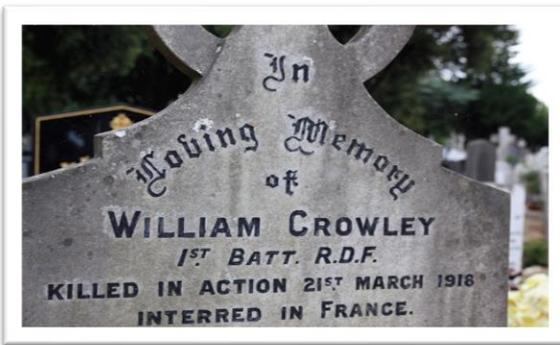
<sup>13</sup> Cunningham, Kevin, *Something to Get Off My Chest !*, The Blue Cap - Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association 11, (December 2004).Pp.21-23. See also Cunningham, Kevin and Connolly, Sean, *A New Headstone for a Dublin Fusilier* The Blue Cap-Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association 18, (December 2013).Pp.21-22. See also Cunningham, Kevin, *An Unmarked Grave*, The Blue Cap-Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association 21, (December 2016). Pp.24-25.



Andrew Kinsella with his wife Mary and family  
c.1910

Of the sixty-two RDF who are listed as having been killed in action or died of wounds on 29 March 1918, forty-five of them have no known grave and are commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial. Among them is Sgt. Andrew Kinsella of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, the grandfather of Sean Connolly, one of the founders of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association (The RDFA).

Also among the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF names on the Pozieres Memorial as missing on 29 March 1918 is 23295 Pte. Timothy Kiely, age seventeen from Cork Hill, Youghal, Co. Cork. Fourteen are buried in Epehy Wood Cemetery which is close to where the German attack began. This makes the date doubtful. (Following representations, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has adopted the practice of assigning '21-29 March' in doubtful cases.)



The headstone of L./Sgt. William Crowley,  
1<sup>st</sup> RDF in Glasnevin Cemetery,  
Dublin

Lance-Sergeant William Crowley aged thirty and husband of Mary Crowley, No. 57 Lower Dominick Street, Dublin is commemorated on a gravestone (HK79) in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, as discovered by historian and member of The RDFA, Conor Dodd.

The story of the two battalions of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers during the fifteen days of the Kaiser's Battle deals with one event in the terrible four years of the WW1. The personal stories and the background details give some idea of the human cost and the impact on the families involved. The pain did not finish with the war. Right up to the late-1960s, WW1 veterans were still suffering the mental trauma of war being diagnosed with what was termed 'Neurasthenia'.<sup>14</sup>

Marshall Foch paid tribute to the heroism of the Irish soldiers in a statement for Armistice Day, November 1928, ten years after the battle; he noted.<sup>15</sup>

I had occasion to put to the test the valour of the Irishmen serving in France. And whether they were Irishmen from the North or the South, or from one party or the other, they did not fail me... Those Irish heroes gave their lives freely, and in honouring them on Sunday, I hope we shall not allow our grief to let us forget our pride in the glorious heroism of these men...

<sup>14</sup> On-going research by Tom Burke on the ex-service personnel charities in post -WW1 Ireland. See also Kelly, Brendan, *He Lost Himself Completely* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, July 2015). See also Burke, Tom, 'All His Failings Are a Result of War Services.' *The Post-War Tragic Life of Pte. John Dunphy, 4th and 1st Rdf*, The Blue Cap - Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association 18, (December 2013). Pp.1-7. See also Robinson, Michael, *Shell-Shocked British Army Veterans in Ireland, 1918-1939 - a Difficult Homecoming* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Editor, *The Irish Times*. The Irish Times, 10 November 1928.

**Not Forgotten**  
Sean Connolly

The only local reminders of the Irish regiments who spent the winter months of 1917/1918 in the front line between Ronssoy and Epehy in the Somme department of northern France and who fought and died in the March Offensive are the gravestones in military cemeteries such as Unicorn (Vendhuile), St. Emilie Valley, Villers-Faucon Communal Cemetery Extension, Templeux-Le-Guerard and Epehy Wood Farm Cemetery.

The Unicorn Military Cemetery can be found beside the quiet rural road that links the village of Vendhuile and Lempire, about twenty kilometres north of St. Quentin. In March 1918, that location was in No Man's Land. It holds the remains of thirteen Royal Dublin Fusiliers who were killed on the 21 March, the opening day of the great German offensive.

Exactly 100 years later, I visited the cemetery to commemorate those men and their comrades. When I signed the visitors' book, I discovered that I was not the only one to go there on that day. Michael and Pat Greene had already laid a floral wreath on the grave of their grandfather, Michael Greene from Tullow, Co. Carlow, who was killed while serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and is one of the few with a known grave. He was forty-three years old and left a wife, two daughters and a son. In 1924, she paid eight shillings and two pence for the inscription:



The CWGC headstone at Unicorn Cemetery of 18877 Pte. Michael Greene.

*From his loving wife and children at a cost of three and a half pence per letter.*

Before Michael and Pat arrived, a group from the Hodson and Meleady families had been there to commemorate their grandfather who was captured on that day and who survived his captivity. They were there to honour him and his fallen comrades. I was there to remember my grandfather, Sgt. Andrew Kinsella, his comrades, the Germans who were also doing their duty and all who were victims of forces beyond their control. I was reminded of the question in Pete Seeger's song.

*Where have all the flowers gone?  
When will we ever learn?*

## The question of casualties

Tom Burke

Because of the mixing up of officers and men from within and without units of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in the confusion of the retreat, it is difficult to establish exactly the number of casualties both battalions of the RDF and indeed other units suffered because of the German offensive in March 1918. This difficulty was referred to in General Ramsay's report to VIIth Corps HQ of 8 May 1918 when he noted that it was 'extremely difficult to form any accurate estimate of the casualties actually incurred between 25 March and 3<sup>rd</sup> April.'<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the OH gave note of the discrepancies contained in the data collected.<sup>2</sup>

Only the gross, uncorrected casualties, reported soon after events, can be given; and the various sets available do not always agree, do not cover quite the same periods, and do not sometimes include all arms of the service.

The sources that record the casualty data for the RDF fail to match up and agree with each other. For example, in terms of fighting strength; according to Crown and Company, on morning of 21 March 1918, the 'effective strength' of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was twenty officers and 643 other ranks, a total of 663 all ranks.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the total casualty count which includes killed in action, wounded, missing and gassed from the same source i.e. Crown and Company, is thirty-nine officers and 916 other ranks, a total of 955 all ranks.<sup>4</sup>

The sources for the casualty count on both battalions of the RDF are:

1. The War Diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Report by General Ramsay dated 8 May 1918.
2. The War Diary of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Report by General Ramsay 8 April 1918.
3. The War Diary 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers.
4. Crown and Company – History of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in WW1.

Table 4<sup>5</sup>  
Casualties of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division between  
21 March and 4 April 1918.

Recorded on 8 April 1918

Battalion	Officers	Other Ranks
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	28	731
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	45	827
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	36	796
Total	109	2,354

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report*. Report by General Ramsay to VIIth Corps Dated 8 May 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive*. p.488.

<sup>3</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.100.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*. p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918 Inclusive. Dated 8 April 1918.

Table 5 <sup>6</sup>  
Casualties of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division between  
21 March and 4 April 1918.

Recorded on 8 May 1918

Battalion	Officers	Other Ranks
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	33	800
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	28	872
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	30	612
Total	91	2,284

As can be seen from Tables 4 and 5, the casualty counts for all the regiments of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were revised downwards between 8 April and 8 May 1918. This is because more than likely men who were classified as missing on 8 April had by 8 May returned to their battalion in the Brigade. In both reports however, General Ramsay did not give a breakdown in terms of killed in action, wounded, missing etc. of the individual battalions.<sup>7</sup> For that data we must refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF War Diary for the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF data and Crown and Company for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF data.

Table 6 <sup>8</sup>  
Casualties of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF because of German March Offensive 21 March to 4 April 1918

Casualty	Officers	Other Ranks
Killed in action	5	40
Died of wounds	3	6
Wounded	9	253
Missing, believed killed		5
Wounded and missing	7	6
Missing	4	290
Total	28	600

Table 7 <sup>9</sup>  
Casualties of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF because of German March Offensive 21 March to 4 April 1918

Casualty	Officers	Other Ranks
Killed in action	8	10
Wounded	7	162
Gassed	7	31
Missing	17	713
Total	39	916

<sup>6</sup> War Diary 16th (Irish) Division German Offensive Report. Dated 8 May 1918.

<sup>7</sup> War Diary 48th Brigade. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.

<sup>8</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.108. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . Casualties 21 March – 4 April 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.108. Casualty data not listed in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF War Diary.

In terms of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, Wylly who copied the casualty data from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF war diary offers a total casualty count of twenty-eight officers and 600 other ranks, a total of 628 all ranks. In his 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade report of 8 April 1918, General Ramsay noted twenty-eight officers and 731 other ranks, a total of 759 all ranks.<sup>10</sup> In his 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division report of 8 May, General Ramsay noted thirty-three officers and 800 other ranks, a total of 833 all ranks. The final estimate of RDF casualty data resulting from the German offensive of March 1918 can be taken from the ‘before and after’ data.

Table 8 <sup>11</sup>  
Strength of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF before and after German offensive of March 1918

Date	Source of data	Officers	Other Ranks
26 February 1918	1 <sup>st</sup> RDF War Diary (Before)	52	1,081
4 April 1918 (Ramsay).	48 <sup>th</sup> Brigade Report 8 April 1918 (After)	7	217
Losses		45 (86%)	864 (80%)

Table 9 <sup>12</sup>  
Strength of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF before and after German offensive of March 1918

Date	Source of data	Officers	Other Ranks
21 March 1918	(Morning) Crown and Co. (Before)	23	643
4 April 1918	48 <sup>th</sup> Brigade Report 8 April 1918 (After)	5	204
Losses		18 (78%)	439 (68%)

There are even more anomalies in terms of the number of men that survived the period 21 March to 4 April 1918. These anomalies however are small. The figures in Table 10 in black print are those presented in General Ramsay’s report of 8 April 1918. The figures in Red are in Appendix B/58/1 in 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division war diary, probably collected by General Ramsay.

Table 10 <sup>13</sup>  
Strength of Units on coming out of action on 4 April 1918.

Battalion	Officers	Other Ranks
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	7 (6)	217 (204)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	5 (5)	204 (146)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	3 (3)	142 (118)
Total	15 (14)	563 (468)

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 26 February 1918. This figure may be high as it records the total number of men on battalion listing which would have included men not with the Battalion on morning of 21 March 1918. Some men for example were in hospitals or on leave etc. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.p.108. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.

It seems therefore that one can take one's pick as to the number of casualties the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions suffered as a result German offensive. Suffice to say, regardless of the anomalies, they were catastrophic. According to General Ramsay's figures, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF suffered the most. Perhaps with all these statistics, the final and most relevant statistic of all is the number of RDF men from all the battalions who died fighting the Germans in their incredible advance between 21 March and 4 April 1918. This is, as shown in Table 3 to be 331.

The total British losses for the 21 March alone amounted to about 38,500. Of these, 7,512 had been killed, 10,000 wounded and 21,000 had been taken prisoner. The Germans had 40,000 casualties, of whom 10,851 were killed and 28,778 wounded.<sup>14</sup> The OH concluded that the gross British casualties between 21 March and 5 April 1918 were 178,000. This figure included some 18,000 who returned to their units thus giving a net figure of 160,000. This 160,000 they estimated to be made up from, '22,000 probably killed, 96,000 wounded or gassed, 42,000 unwounded prisoners.' For the period 21 March to 30 April 1918, the OH recorded the casualty count of 9,704 officers and 230,089 other ranks, a total of 239,793 all ranks. French casualties of all ranks for the same period i.e., between 21 March and 30 April 1918, was 92,004. The total Allied casualties were therefore 331,797. German casualties for period 21 March to 30 April were again estimated as 12,300 officers and 336,000 other ranks, a total of 348,300 all ranks. Not too far off the Allied casualties.<sup>15</sup> The Germans found it difficult to replace the experienced soldiers who had been carefully selected and trained to use the new storm-trooper tactics in their offensive.

Much like the anomalies in the RDF casualty statistics for the German offensive, there are anomalies for the casualties suffered by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. The OH noted that the Division suffered a casualty count of 7,149. See Table 11 below for breakdown. In contrast, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division 'A and Q Branch' War Diary noted that on 16 February 1918, the 'Feeding Strength' of the Division was 18,989 all ranks.<sup>16</sup> Feeding Strength would include non-combat personnel of the Division. On the night of 31 March / 1 April 1918, the same 'A and Q Branch' diary noted the total 'Fighting Strength' of the Division including infantry, engineers, pioneers, and machine gunners was seventy-eight officers and 1,977 other ranks, a total of 2,055 all ranks.<sup>17</sup> This would imply the gross loss to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division for the period 16 February to 1 April 1918 was 16,934. This figure no doubt reduced when men returned to their units within the Division. Interestingly the OH was of the opinion that casualty figures in the 'A and Q Branch' diaries gave, 'the most reliable figures for the period 21 March – 5 April.'<sup>18</sup> The 'A and Q Branch' diaries were the diaries kept by The Adjutant and Quarter-Master General Branch of the Division.

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<sup>14</sup> Middlebrook, Martin. p.328.

<sup>15</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.490.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch.* 16 February 1918. The 16 February 1918 was the nearest date to 21 March 1918 that the diary gave a number for 'Feeding Strength.'

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report.* Appendix B/58/1.

<sup>18</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.489.

Table 11<sup>19</sup>  
Casualties for 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division 21 March to 5 April 1918.

Rank	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers	29	104	144
Other Ranks	369	1,327	5,176
Total	398	1,431	5,320

Grand total: 7,149

The OH figure of 7,149 compares reasonably well with General Ramsay's figures in his report dated 8 May 1918, which was 277 officers and 6,672 other ranks, a total of 6,949 for the same period. Both agree on officer casualty numbers. As previously noted, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF suffered the highest number of casualties in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division being twenty-eight officers and 872 other ranks, a total of 900 all ranks. The second highest loss was with their comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF who lost thirty-three officers and 800 other ranks, a total loss of 833 all ranks.<sup>20</sup> Most of the casualties suffered by 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division occurred between the 21 and 24 March; losing 203 officers and 5,340 other ranks, at total loss of 5,543 all ranks which included men missing who subsequently returned.<sup>21</sup>

The German offensive left its mark on the island of Ireland. The highest number of casualties suffered by any division in any of the ten Corps of the BEF's Third and Fifth Armies who took the brunt of the German offensive between 21 March and 5 April, was suffered by the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division being 7,310. The second highest was the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division being 7,149.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.491.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division German Offensive Report*. 8 May 1918.

<sup>21</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive*. p.20.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Pp.491- 492.

### The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, 3 April to 31 December 1918. <sup>1</sup>

On the night of 3 / 4 April 1918, what was left of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division following its almost destruction, was relieved by the 14<sup>th</sup> Division at le Hamel.<sup>2</sup> J.H.M. Staniforth noted in a letter home dated 31 March; ‘The Division (16<sup>th</sup> Irish) has ceased to exist. Wiped off the map.’<sup>3</sup> The loss of men to the Division was as shown, catastrophic. In his report on the German Offensive, Brig.-Gen. Ramsay noted.<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion...The courage and determination displayed by all ranks in the successful repulse of the enemy’s attack east of Hamel on 30 March 1918, after continuous fighting for nine days and immediately following a period of forty-six days continuously in the trenches, would maintain the highest traditions of the Irish race and the fighting quality of the Irish soldier.

The next day, i.e., 5 April, after fruitless attempts to capture Amiens, Ludendorff called off his Operation Michael.<sup>5</sup> Over the previous fifteen days, the Irish division had fought bravely against the German offensive retreating from Epehy to le Hamel losing some fifty-five kilometres of ground. The village of le Hamel eventually fell into German hands and would not return to Allied hands until 4 July 1918 when it was recaptured by the 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Division and four companies from the US 33<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>6</sup>

What was left of two great battalions of Royal Dublin Fusiliers, marched from le Hamel to the neighbourhood of Blangy Thronville / Trouville on 4 April 1918, a distance westward of about fourteen kilometres, where they were given hot soup at the crossroads one and a half kilometres south of the village. However, before they left le Hamel, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF received a reinforcement of 200 men, many of whom were English.<sup>7</sup> They also received men from the two entrenching battalions.<sup>8</sup>

Table 12 <sup>9</sup>

Strength of battalions in 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade following reinforcements on 5 April 1918 at Ramburelles.

Battalion	Officers	Other Ranks
1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	8	361
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	7	307
2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	6	244
Total	21	912

<sup>1</sup> The activities of the 1<sup>st</sup> and RDF Battalions is written on a monthly basis from this point on. Beginning with the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF followed by the activities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. This methodology in presenting the history of both battalions will be used for 1<sup>st</sup> RDF between 3 April 1918 and 5 September 1918, and, for 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF between 3 April 1918 and 31 December 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918 Inclusive. p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Grayson, Richard.p.183.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Report on Operations from 21 March 1918 to 4 April 1918. Dated 8 April 1918.p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Stevenson, David.p.411.

<sup>6</sup> Sheffield, Gary.p.235.

<sup>7</sup> p.109.

<sup>8</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.108. See also *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch*. 4-5 April 1918.

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 5 April 1918.

From Blangy Trouville they were taken by omnibus to Saleux, about twenty kilometres south-west of Amiens. Here they found other small units of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division re-assembling. By 4 April 1918, the 'approximate strength of the Division (less artillery) was 3,241.'<sup>10</sup> At 3:00 p.m. on 4 April, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions boarded a train at Saleux that took them to Blangy (Blangy-sur-Bresle), distance eastwards of about sixty kilometres, arriving at Blangy about 11:00 p.m. Billets and a quite night's rest were provided following a bit of a night march on to Ramburelles and Rambures, about nine kilometres to the northeast of Blangy.<sup>11</sup>

Following their few days of badly needed rest, cleaning and recuperation, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF battalions along with the rest of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were on the move again. Much had changed in both battalions; some fifty percent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was now English.<sup>12</sup> On 9 April what was left of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was moved from 5<sup>th</sup> Army to 1<sup>st</sup> Army up in the Flanders section of the line.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the activities of both RDF battalions for much of April 1918 were mainly recorded in terms of their movement north, re-organisation and training. There were no combat operations as the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was incapable of doing so. All they were fit for now was offering help in trench work.

Leaving the area of Ramburelles and Rambures on 9 April and traveling north some 100 kilometres by route march and rail, the two RDF battalions arrived at the village Clety on 14 April. They were back in the familiar training area south of St. Omer, which was in essence a recovery ground for many of the battered units of the BEF following the German offensive. The previous day when they were a few kilometres southwest of Clety at a village called Campagne-les-Bouloonnais, 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ received an order to the effect that, 'each infantry brigade would form a composite battalion, so as to be capable of employment as an Infantry Brigade in case of an emergency.'<sup>14</sup> A 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Composite Infantry Brigade under Brig.-Gen. Ramsay was therefore formed from composite battalions of the Irish Division essentially to be deployed in trench work on what was termed the GHQ Defensive Line.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, on 13 April, one company from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF along with two companies from 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF under Lieut.-Col. K. Weldon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF formed the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> RDF Composite Battalion.<sup>16</sup> The strength of the Munsters composite battalion was twenty-eight officers and 896 other ranks.<sup>17</sup> Two days later, the RDF composite battalion was sent off to Boeseghem some twenty-five kilometres east of Clety, 'employed in digging and wiring a defensive line in front of Thiennes.'<sup>18</sup> Interesting to note that the 1<sup>st</sup> Portuguese Infantry Brigade was attached to this composite Irish brigade for a while in doing work on the GHQ Defensive Line.

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<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. A and Q Branch. The Adjutant and Quartermaster General Branch.* 3 April 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 4 April 1918. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade notes Blangy. This may well be Blangy-sur-Bresle.

<sup>12</sup> Burke, Tom, *Whence Came the Royal Dublin Fusiliers?*, The Irish Sword XXIV, no. 98 Winter (2005), p.449. Table 2. Between 1 April and 11 November 1918, based on death numbers, the percent of English men in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was 50.3% compared to 39.2% Irish. 10.5% were neither Irish nor English.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 9 April 1918.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 13 April 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 12 April 1918. Note war diary of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division noted that the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Composite Brigade was commanded by Brig.-Gen. P. Leveson-Gower, CMG. See *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report.* 17 April 1918.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 13 April 1918. See also Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.109. See also McCance, S.p.156.

<sup>17</sup> McCance, S.p.83. Col. Weldon was later given temporary command of 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Training Units. See *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 4 May 1918.

<sup>18</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.109. Note. The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division war diary noted that work was carried out on, 'GHQ Defensive Line in the Isberques Area.' *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report.* 16 April 1918. Thiennes is about six kilometres directly north of Isberques.

The officers and men from the battalions of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division who did not make up this composite brigade were formed into cadres of training staff units consisting of ten officers and fifty-five other ranks, 'to provide instructors for the American Army, which was beginning to arrive in France.'<sup>19</sup> On 30 March 1918 there were 284,000 American troops in France; by 2 November that figure had risen to 1,872,000.<sup>20</sup> The experience these men from the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division had gained, often along a bitter learning curve, was now put to use in training these combat-raw American troops.

Further rearranging of the RDF battalions took place on 18 April when a cadre of men from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, not involved with the composite battalion, along with men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, reinforcements and other units were ordered to reform the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF with an establishment of 940 non-commissioned officers and men with 1<sup>st</sup> RDF headquarters' staff under the command of Lieut.-Col. A. Moore DSO. The headquarters staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was reorganised as a Battalion Training Staff unit with ten officers and forty-three non-commissioned officers and men.<sup>21</sup>

The end game in all this re-arranging essentially was the breakup of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division when the regular Irish battalions were transferred to other divisions. Some went back to the divisions from whence they came. For example on 20 April, the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Muster Fusiliers went to 57<sup>th</sup> Division; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment went to the 63<sup>rd</sup> Division on 23 April; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinster Regiment went to the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, so too did the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers on 26 April.<sup>22</sup> They received orders on 21 April to 'proceed at short notice to re-join the 29<sup>th</sup> Division' in XV Corps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army located from south-west of Hazebrouck to four kilometres north of Ypres.<sup>23</sup> They marched from Boeseghem to Hurdegem where they were marched in by the divisional band of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. They went back into the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade which was much the same order of battle as when they left being; 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers and 86<sup>th</sup> Trench Mortar Battery under the command of Brig.-Gen. G.R.H. Cheape MC.<sup>24</sup>

### 1<sup>st</sup> RDF May 1918

During the months of January, February, and March and into April 1918, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was holding a line in the Passchendaele sector of the defences north of Ypres. Despite the desolation that had occurred there back in the autumn of 1917, much of the sector was quiet.<sup>25</sup> The Division had missed much of the hammer blow of operation Michael; however, fighting returned to Flanders on 9 April. In Operation Georgette, the German Sixth Army struck out for the key British-held rail junction of Hazebrouck. The River Lys formed the barrier between the opposing armies. On the morning of the attack, much like the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on 21 March, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Portuguese Division was directly in the path of the German offensive on the Armentieres front.

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<sup>19</sup> McCance, S.p.156. See also *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report*.16 April 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson, David.p.420.

<sup>21</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.109. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.110.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report*.23-26 April 1918. See also McCance, S.p.83.

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*.26 April 1918. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive.*, vol. 3 (London: Imperial War Museum, September 1936).p.193.

<sup>24</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.110.

<sup>25</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt, *The Story of the 29th Division* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1925). Pp.185-186.

The Portuguese were simply pushed aside holding the line at Neuve Chapelle and the German advanced some six kilometres.<sup>26</sup> Estimates of up to 6,000 Portuguese soldiers were taken prisoner on 9 April.<sup>27</sup> As has been mentioned, it seems some of the Portuguese soldiers made it back to Boeseghem a few days after their ordeal and worked with the Dublin Fusiliers on the GHQ Defensive Line. The situation was so bad on 9 April that Haig made his famous 'backs to the wall' statement contained in his Special Order of the Day on 11 April 1918. Having made their advances, the Battle of the Lys (9-29 April 1918) reverted to the familiar pattern of furious German attacks confronted by stubborn British and eventual American resistance. The hard-won village of Wijtschate captured from the Germans by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Divisions on 7 June 1917, fell back into German hands when Plumer was forced to abandon Messines on 25 April 1918 and fall back to the Ieper Canal line.<sup>28</sup> Kemmel Hill was taken from 28<sup>th</sup> French Division.<sup>29</sup>

It was towards the end of the Battle of the Lys that the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF and 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters arrived to the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, who had participated in the battle since 10 April. Owing to their heavy losses and to the impossibility of replacing them quickly, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry were withdrawn from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. The places of these two battalions were taken by the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, who replaced the Royal Guernsey Light Infantry, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinster Regiment who replaced the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>30</sup> After a short period for reorganisation and absorbing the reinforcements, on 27 April, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division took over the line from the 31<sup>st</sup> Division from the Foret de Nieppe to the Hazebrouck-Bailleul Railway. They remained in that line until 22 June 1918 in strengthening their defences against a threatened German renewal of their offensive.<sup>31</sup>

The front line the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF occupied in the Foret de Nieppe and Bois d'Aval east of Thiennes was essentially 'a series of outposts' on the eastern edge of the woods. Battalion HQ was in La Motte-au-Bois, a ruined village right in the heart of Foret de Nieppe.<sup>32</sup> Lieut. O'Donnell noted.<sup>33</sup>

We had been given instructions to make as little movement as possible. This warning was, to my mind, unnecessary, as the trench we occupied was only about three feet deep, and we were told not to deepen or widen it, as new soil would give our positions away to the enemy.

The landscape around Foret de Nieppe was so different to much of the landscape in the Ieper salient where in places it was like the surface of the moon. The OH described the landscape:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sheffield, Gary.p.228. See also Gillon, Stair Capt.p.186. Richard Holmes suggests the advance was ten kilometres. Holmes, Richard.p.201.

<sup>27</sup> [https://Encyclopedia.1914-1918-Online.Net/Article/Lys\\_Battle\\_of\\_the\\_De\\_Meneses,\\_Filipe\\_Ribeiro.The\\_Battle\\_of\\_Lys](https://Encyclopedia.1914-1918-Online.Net/Article/Lys_Battle_of_the_De_Meneses,_Filipe_Ribeiro.The_Battle_of_Lys), Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin.The Commonwealth War Graves Commission at Neuve Chapelle contains the graves of the Portuguese soldiers who died on 9 April 1918.

<sup>28</sup> Sheffield, Gary and Bourne, John.p.407. Diary of Sir Douglas Haig, Friday 26 April 1918.

<sup>29</sup> Holmes, Richard.p.202. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive.* p.487.

<sup>30</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.196. See also Whitton, F E.p.458.

<sup>31</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.197.

<sup>32</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* WO95/2301/2/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 May 1918 to 5 September 1918).1 May 1918.

<sup>33</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* Pp.110-111.

<sup>34</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. March to April 1918: Continuation of the German Offensive..*1918 Vol. 2. Pp.157-158.

The Forest of Nieppe in 1918 was dense and impassable except by the numerous rides; a line of defences through it, facing south-east, had been constructed in 1915. The surface soil is everywhere clay... Near the rivers and canals there are large grass fields...the higher parts offering slight command for machine-gun positions... Everywhere the ground is under cultivation. In April 1918, the spring wheat was well up. In this area ...the fighting was carried out not at ground level from trenches, as on most of the front, but above ground from behind breastworks and hedges.

It is amazing to think that amidst the madness and destruction in this war zone, French farmers could still sow and cut fields of wheat. The Germans held the village of Vieux Berquin and some farmhouses a little over 180 metres in front of the Dubs outposts.<sup>35</sup> The routine of trench duties the Battalion followed throughout the month of May 1918 was very little different to what they were doing twelve months previous. When up front, the obsession of knowing what German unit opposed the Battalion carried on as usual. 'Fighting Patrols' went out at night to capture a wandering German for identification purposes. Running through the woods was a small river known as the La Bourre. A further front line duty carried out when up front was guarding the small but very strategic bridges that ran across the La Bourre. Guarding parties of one NCO and between six and nine men performed this duty day and night.<sup>36</sup> Throughout May, drafts of officers, mainly young in-experienced Second Lieutenants and other ranks arrived. On 3 May, some eleven officers and 138 other ranks joined the Battalion.<sup>37</sup> One of the officers was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Paul Guret or Gueret, a past pupil of Trinity College Dublin Officer Training Corps who survived the war.<sup>38</sup>

Out of the line in either reserve or support, the men were billeted around the area of Papote, located just west of La Motte-au-Bois. Right throughout the month of May, mainly at dawn and dusk, German artillery was very active; perhaps even revengeful in the light of their failure to break through the lines around this forest. On 4 May, when up in the front line, Lieut. G.P.N. Thomson, his servant and four other ranks were hits by German shelling. Two days later, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. R.S. Boles died of wounds in a local Casualty Clearing Station, again as a result of this dawn and dusk shelling.<sup>39</sup> The Foret de Nieppe was regularly drenched by German gas bombardment, often with devastating results.<sup>40</sup> During the night of 11 May, the German gunners got lucky. They fired off some 4,000 gas shells into the billet areas around Papote where the Battalion happened to be in reserve and asleep in their bunks. Some of the gas shells were direct hits on the RDF billets. The casualties suffered by the Battalion on that night were six killed, eleven wounded along with 231 men gassed; some of whom died soon after the attack. The terror and panic in those billets in darkness and the resulting carnage from thousands of gas shells falling on them must have been horrific. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF war diary noted.<sup>41</sup>

All usual precautions were taken but owing to the nature of the gas shells employed (Yellow Cross Mustard) many men were severely blistered and burnt about the body – of course owing to the direct hits on billets where men were crowded together and asleep, a certain amount of unavoidable confusion in the dark of the billets was responsible for a number of the casualties.

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<sup>35</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.111. Vieux Berquin is about six kilometres east of Le Motte-au-Bois.

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Operation Order No 20 dated 4 May 1918.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 3 May 1918.

<sup>38</sup> *Gueret, Paul. 2nd Lieut. Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. RDFA/036. (Dublin: Dublin City Library and Archive).

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4-6 May 1918.

<sup>40</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*. 1918. Vol.3. Pp.195-196. On the night of 25/26 June, another German gas shelling on the forest resulted in casualties of the entire staff of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 May 1918.

Next day orders were issued for men to evacuate the area on account of the lingering gas and go into bivouacs southwest of Papote. The gas shelling continued intermittently over the next two days. During the early hours of 15 May, gas shells fell on the nearby Marquette (Morbecque) area resulting in the Battalion suffering a further thirty-nine gas casualties.<sup>42</sup>

Although the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF war diary recorded six killed, the CWGC data records that between 11 and 19 May when they came out of the line, twenty-three had died. And, between 20 and 31 May, a further nine more died from wounds making a total of thirty-two. For the month of May, the total number of 1<sup>st</sup> RDF killed in action or died of wounds was forty-seven. For those whose ages were recorded, the youngest was 25826 L./Cpl. James Frewen, age eighteen from Dublin. He had originally served with the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. Lieut. Gerald Pittis Newman Thompson from the Isle of Wight was nineteen; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Robert Stephen Boles from Main Street, Killenaule, Co. Tipperary was twenty-two; 29870 Pte. Bartholomew Ratcliffe from Baldoyle, Co. Dublin was nineteen; 25892 Pte. Thomas Henry Dixon was twenty and from No. 45 De Courcy Square, Glasnevin, Dublin. The oldest man was forty-six-year-old 40570 Pte. Frederick Charles Whitear, a Dubliner who enlisted in Portsmouth and had formerly served in the Hampshire Regiment. Of the forty-seven who died in May 1918, twenty-seven, or 57% were Irish, fourteen or 30% were English.<sup>43</sup>

On 19 May, the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved by the 87<sup>th</sup> Brigade; the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters; one Irish battalion relieved another. The Blue Caps went into hutments at Le Grand Hasard, about ten kilometres northwest of La Motte-au-Bois. Many of the men were still suffering from the effects of gas and forty-three of them were evacuated to hospital.<sup>44</sup> The Battalion remained out of the front line for the remaining days of May. They did however spend a relatively quiet few days in support at the end of the month. It was time for resting and cleaning up. There were lots of men coming and going into and out of the Battalion either going to or returning from hospital or going on training courses; also new drafts arriving from England arrived.

At 5:30 p.m. on 20 May, the band of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division gave a concert for the troops. But even in the reserve lines at Le Grand Hasard, it wasn't safe at times. On 21 May, the billets were hit by what was termed in the war diary as a 'long range high velocity gun', killing a couple of men. Consequently, the camps were 'condemned unsafe for troops - battalion therefore accommodated in bivouacs placed under hedgerows in neighbouring fields.'<sup>45</sup> Thankfully for small mercies though, the weather was fine.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF May 1918

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, with its grand total of eight officers and forty-one other ranks, remained on in the area of Boeseghem until 22 April when they, along with the training staff of 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF were moved to Wavrans, or Wavrans-sur-l'Aa, a distance westward of about twenty-nine kilometres. The training staffs of the 7<sup>th</sup> (South Irish Horse) Royal Irish Regiment and 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were moved to Elnes nearby.<sup>46</sup> As stated, American troops were arriving from Boulogne into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army training area south of St. Omer; consequently, these Irish training units were needed to meet and train the Americans in the surrounding area.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.15 May 1918.

<sup>43</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*19 May 1918.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.21 May 1918.

<sup>46</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 22 April 1918.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF training unit, and indeed the training units of the much-depleted 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, were moved around the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army training area quite a bit during late April and most of May, mainly to facilitate the arriving American troops. They moved closer to the coast. On 22 April, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF training staff along with the training staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF were moved from Wavrans to Vaudringhem, about twelve kilometres west. The sounds of war could still be heard off to the east as the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted at Vaudringhem; ‘Heavy firing heard all day from E direction.’

During their time on the training grounds around Vaudringhem, in the fine weather of early and mid-May, the training units brushed up on their own skills and developed new training schemes in tactical exercises and firing skills at Blequin Range nearby. Firing exercises were carried out firing, ‘at 300 yards one slow 5-round and one rapid 15-round practice.’ Lectures were given in the evening on topics such as gas by ‘Divisional Gas Officers.’<sup>47</sup> ‘Divine Service’ was given on Sundays in the village school in Vaudringham. The Old Toughs training unit remained on at Vaudringhem doing their work with the Americans until 13 May before being ordered to ‘clear off’ the training grounds around Vaudringham by noon of the following day. The training grounds were needed by the IX Corps Training School for their exercises.<sup>48</sup> They were ordered to move to training grounds at Desvres which is some twenty kilometres west of Vaudringhem.

Having overnighted in La Calique, a village on the way to Desvres, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF training unit arrived in Desvres at 3:00 p.m. on 15 May and went into billets. The small 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division HQ was set up in Samer, ten kilometres south west of Desvres.<sup>49</sup> Their orders were again ‘to train an American Division arriving there.’<sup>50</sup> The American troops the training units from the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division trained were from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions, 59<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> American Division, stationed at Le Brunquet, eight kilometres south west of Desvres.<sup>51</sup> Between 15 and 31 May, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF Training Staff passed on all they had learned in trench warfare to the American 4<sup>th</sup> Division. There were no better men for this job, particularly in the tactics of offensive warfare.

The days of static war and defending trenches were drawing to a close. However, just as they were settling into their role as military instructors, on 29 May 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade received orders from 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division HQ to the effect that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF training units were to be transferred to the 31<sup>st</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on 31 May.<sup>52</sup> It resulted in a further breakup of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division. They were replaced in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade by Training Staff units from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Liverpool Regiment and 20<sup>th</sup> Middlesex Regiment.<sup>53</sup> The small group of men were moved by lorry from Desvres to Racquinghem at 2:30 p.m. on 31 May, a journey of about fifty kilometres east, back near the danger zone. The last RDF battalion of the 48<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers Brigade was gone. Brig.-Gen Ramsay wished The Old Toughs ‘the best of luck.’<sup>54</sup> Written in bold print in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division’s war diary on the 31 May 1918 were the words: ‘Casualties 1<sup>st</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May **NIL.**’<sup>55</sup>

Note: By 18 June 1918, the only Irish regiment left in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was a training cadre of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers who were in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade. All other eight infantry battalions in the Division were from Scottish, English, and Welsh regiments.<sup>56</sup> The division essentially became a training unit to train American troops.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.8-10 May 1918.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.12 May 1918.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.15 May 1918.

<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report.*14 May 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.19 May 1918. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade.*19 May 1918.

<sup>52</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.*29 May 1918.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.31 May 1918.

<sup>54</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922..* p.110.

<sup>55</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division March 1918 Report.*31 May 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.18 June 1918.

**1<sup>st</sup> RDF June 1918**

Going into the month of June, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was in a sector that was not in the line of any major German offensive operation. General Ludendorff had called off Operation Georgette in the Hazebrouck region on 29 April. Consequently, the sector was relatively quiet despite the regular German gas shelling of the Foret de Nieppe. The final German offensive of 1918 had taken place down south with an attack along the Chemin des Dames in what became known as The Third Battle of the Aisne (27 May-6 June).

However, suffice to say, that going into June the days of running from the Germans were coming to an end. Confidence began to improve with the arrival of reinforcements from the UK and the USA. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was back to full strength with a battalion of forty-three officers and 953 other ranks.<sup>57</sup> Ammunition was plentiful, almost unlimited. An offensive and aggressive spirit emerged with the carrying out of small /minor operations and raids. Indeed, by the end of June 1918, Haig felt that his forces were strong enough to attempt operations on a larger scale.<sup>58</sup> All throughout June, frequent small operations and raids took place along the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army front in places familiar to some of Dubs such as Loker. Most if not all were successful in their objective of grabbing new lines and German prisoners.<sup>59</sup>

One such minor operation was carried out by the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on the night of 2 / 3 June. Along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers of the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the operation was carried out in conjunction with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Australian Brigade. It was a well-planned attack using all arms such as infantry assault platoons, Lewis gunners, artillery, and air support. The days of men charging machine gun positions were over. As an indication of how progressed the art of attack had become by June 1918 even for such a 'minor operation' as it was referred to, detailed pre-attack, attack, and post- attack procedures were prepared by the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade staff and issued to battalion commanders on 2 June.

The plan was set out in a list of twenty-two instructions covering topics such as; Objectives, Methods of Attack, Gaps in wire to be cut previous night, Actions of artillery, Trench mortars and machine guns, Consolidation, Carrying parties, Prisoners, Medical arrangements, the wounded would be looked after at Advanced Regimental Aid Posts and finally Communications. Although 'Power Buzzers' would be set up at Advanced Battalion Headquarters, pigeons, dogs and human runners were still used to get signals back from the captured zone to battalion HQ. Pigeons went forward with the attacking troops.<sup>60</sup>

The overall objective for the Australians was to capture Mont de Merris, a small hill west of Merris which lay about five kilometres east of Sec Bois where the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was located.<sup>61</sup> The specific object of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in the operation was for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers 'to attack and capture Lug Farm, while the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was to advance the front to the line of Becque (river) on the western bank between certain points which were specified.' Their target was essentially Ankle Farm and when captured, posts were to be established along the line of the Becque occupied by the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade. See Sketch 8 La Becque 28 June 1918.

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<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 June 1918.

<sup>58</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*. 1918. Vol.3. p.195

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*. Pp.193-194.

<sup>60</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. WO95/2298. (London: The National Archives, 1 July 1918 to December 1919 ).Report on Operation 2/3 June 1918.

<sup>61</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*.p.193.

In terms of the infantry attack, two companies from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, namely 'Y' Coy. on right and 'Z' Coy. on left of attack would lead the assault. 'W' Coy. would occupy the jump off point of the assault companies fifteen minutes after Zero Hour. The attack would be supported by artillery, trench-mortar, and machine-gun barrages, also by aeroplanes if necessary. They would be called in by the use of red flares. Zero hour would be 1:00 a.m. on 3 June. <sup>62</sup>.

On 1 June, as stated, the Battalion was in Sec Bois, a hamlet on the northern edge of Foret de Nieppe. Their battalion strength was forty-three officers and 953 other ranks. The German occupied village of Vieux-Berquin lay four kilometres south-east. At short notice, the Battalion was ordered to relieve the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers in the front line on the night of 31 May / 1 June. All three companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF were to go into the front line 'to reconnoitre the ground and study the area in front of them' in preparation for this operation. The relief was completed by 3:00 a.m. on the morning of 1 June. The day passed quietly with the platoons in the front line doing their work of gathering information of the land in front of them and quietly bringing up ammunition to supply dumps. They were given help in their assessment of the terrain by photographs taken by aircraft that had previously flown over their line. <sup>63</sup> A report on the terrain noted. <sup>64</sup>

The ground over which the attack had to be made was quite flat, with corn in places waist high, intersected by hedges and ditches; but the surface was hard and the ditches dry owing to the long continued rainless weather. The Plate Becque stream beyond the German positions was only eighteen inches deep at the time.

The instructions for the operation were issued to the Battalion on 2 June which turned out to be another quiet day with some usual German shelling at dusk. In the hours before the attack, hot meals were brought up to the men specifically involved and water bottles were filled. Gaps in their own wire had been cut and watches were synchronised at 10:30 p.m. At midnight on 2 June, 'companies reported everything ready.' <sup>65</sup>

At 12:45 a.m., the two companies who took part in the initial assault, quietly slipped through the gaps in their wire and began to form up outside their wire. Instructions were given that 'sufficient gaps' were to be cut in the wire to allow the exit of the assaulting platoons. However, this proved to be an awkward operation as some of the men found it difficult negotiating the gaps owing to the wire dimensions. Long grass and fallen trees in No Man's Land added to the confusion in forming up. <sup>66</sup> At 1:00 a.m., the artillery barrage came down and the companies moved off. The artillery had made good gaps in the hedges in front of 'Y' Coy. on the left. However, the hedges in front of 'Z' Coy. and small streams provided a bit of a hold up to their advance.

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<sup>62</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.112. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Operation Order No. 33. 2 June 1918.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-2 June 1918.

<sup>64</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*.1918 Vol.3. Pp.195-196. This description of the terrain was written from a report of a similar attack by the 13<sup>th</sup> York/Lancaster Regiment on night of 26/27 June 1918.

<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.2 June 1918.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*. Gaps – Operation Order No.33 2 June 1918.



The Battalion War Diary noted: 'The attack progressed excellently from the start and despite the difficulties of the ground; the barrage was never lost, though touch was not always maintained owing to the darkness.'<sup>68</sup> Co-ordination between artillery and infantry was getting better. Despite some opposition, which wasn't much, the operation was over in less than thirty minutes. The war diary noted.<sup>69</sup>

Companies should have reached their objective at Zero Hour plus seven minutes but owing to the resistance met with from machine-guns in consolidated and camouflaged shell holes and the considerable 'mopping up' necessary, the signal showing objectives had been reached was not sent up by Right Coy. until 1:25 a.m. and Left Coy. by 1:40 a.m. Companies immediately commenced consolidation of posts and distributed themselves as far as possible in depth. Lewis guns being pushed out to cover consolidation – touch being made by means of flank patrols. The original front line being used a line of support to afford more depth to the defence. A reconnaissance was immediately carried out and established the fact that Companies were firmly on their objectives.

This was a textbook assault using the platoon size tactical unit. Officers, NCOs, and other ranks were trained in its execution. The only resistance they encountered was a machine gun firing from in front of Lug Farm which, according to the post-attack report noted was 'silenced by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. McGowan who, taking out a party of men to the flank, bombed a dugout killing two German officers (one apparently a colonel) and some men causing the machine gun which he could not reach to withdraw.' The German artillery response to the operation was recorded as being 'heavy' but died down. Some of the shells were gas.<sup>70</sup> They believed the operation was only a small raid and attempted to cross back from the east side of the Becque to return to their old position, but they were met with heavy Lewis gun fire from the Dublins' companies on the Becque. The remainder of the day was quiet, and the men worked on consolidating their new positions.

Around midnight on 3 June, a heavy German artillery and machine-gun barrage came down on the battalion's positions in the new front line. The artillery barrage, again using gas, lasted for about forty-five minutes. The shells fell on the old line and consequently there were a few Dubs casualties reported. The Dublins thought it was the prelude to a counterattack by the Germans. The assumption was correct because at about 12:30 a.m., under their barrage, two German raiding parties of about thirty men each attacked 'Z' Company's position at Ankle Farm.<sup>71</sup> A fire fight followed and the Germans were driven back with Lewis guns and rifle fire. The diary noted, 'at least ten German bodies were afterwards seen in front of this post.'

At 1:45 a.m. on 4 June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Dubs were relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers. Casualties recorded for this operation were: 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J.J. Gyves killed; Lieut. M.F. Montgomery MC wounded; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. C.K. Kirwan, missing; seven other ranks killed; forty-four other ranks wounded. A burial party of ten men buried their dead during the 4 June. Of the fourteen men killed in action or died from wounds with the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in June 1918, only six, or 43% were Irish. The youngest Dublin Fusilier who died in June 1918 was 14523 L/Cpl. John Sullivan of 'Y' Coy. from Dublin. His parents lived in Borris, Co. Carlow.<sup>72</sup>

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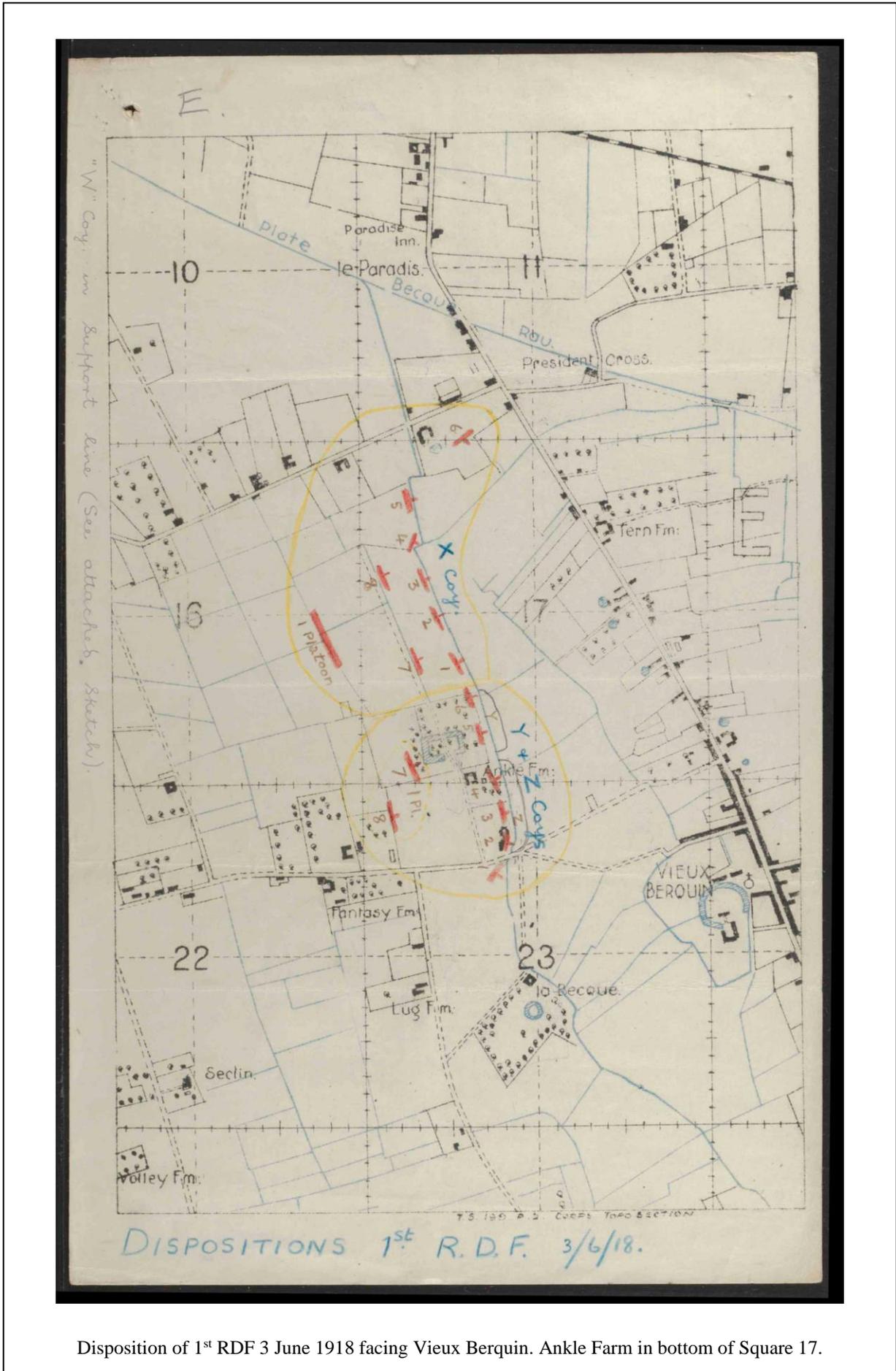
<sup>68</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 June 1918.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 3 June 1918.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* Report on 'Minor Enterprise carried out by 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on the morning of June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918.'

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.



Disposition of 1st RDF 3 June 1918 facing Vieux Berquin. Ankle Farm in bottom of Square 17.

Second Lieut. John James Gyves was in command of 'Y' Coy. and was killed near Ankle Farm. He was the son of Nicholas and Elizabeth Gyves of No 14 Albert Place, Grand Canal Street, Dublin. John was thirty-two when he died. He is buried in Cinq Rues British Cemetery, grave ref F2. <sup>73</sup>

In terms of booty, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF took twenty-two German prisoners, four of whom were killed by what the diary noted as 'hostile artillery' on the way back from the attack. They also captured nine machine-guns.<sup>74</sup> The war diary of the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted that, 'Ten other prisoners were killed by enemy shellfire while being brought to the rear.'<sup>75</sup> In Neill's Blue Caps, Wylly never made any reference to these German prisoners being killed by 'hostile artillery.' One must wonder did they meet their end at the hand of their captors, hopefully not.

For the remaining days of a warm June 1918, there was not much to report out of the ordinary. The Battalion returned to the normal routine of trench duty. Tactical training and getting better in offensive operations were the order of the day most of the time the Battalion was in reserve either in La Trocodero, seven kilometres from Sec Bois where the tents were reported as not being up to standard or on west a further ten kilometres at Blaringhem. When in the line facing Vieux Berquin, there were the occasional nightly raids into the German line on the eastern side of the Becque; constantly probing and trying to push them back further. The Battalion was assigned no major offensive operations for the rest of the month. However, they were put on alert at short notice as to possible German attacks which did not occur.

Towards the middle of June, 'a large number of gas cylinders' were installed along the 29<sup>th</sup> Division's line with the intention for use on the first favourable opportunity. The deployment of this dreadful weapon was not successful and proved to be more of an inconvenience than anything else because each time a gas attack was prepared; front line troops had to evacuate their lines the night before for safety reasons with no certainty that there were no Germans in them next morning. On the night of 11 / 12 June when the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF were back in the Petit Sec Bois sector, companies were removed from the front line as the engineers prepared to launch one of these gas attacks from cylinders located in the ditches along the road with map references E.16.a and c near Mere Farm which in 2020 is along the Rue de Sec Bois D.53 at the bend in the road. 'Daisy', 'Mary' and 'Kate' were the code words used to say yes, no, or possibly to launch the gas attack or not. <sup>76</sup> Before they evacuated the front line, troops had to cover all metallic objects with earth such as 'ammunition, grenades, or any other metal stores which could be corroded by gas.' <sup>77</sup> This was a time consuming and pointless operation. According to Capt. Gillon, 'this procedure went on for more than a week and was most wearing and harassing to the troops.' <sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. See also Wylly, H.C., *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.113.

<sup>74</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.3-5 June 1918.

<sup>75</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Report on Operation 2/3 June 1918.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade Order No. 232. 10 June 1918. Rue de Sec Bois see Antoine Havetz animal feed store.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade Infantry Order Number 232. 10 June 1918.

<sup>78</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.198.

The attack on the night of 11 /12 June was called off as the wind was noted as being ‘unfavourable.’ For the wind to be favourable, wind speeds had to be, ‘not less than four miles per hour between N.W and W’.<sup>79</sup> Next day they tried again, but wind conditions were again unfavourable.<sup>80</sup>

It was during the middle of June too that some men began to return to the Battalion who were wounded during the German offensive back in March. Men like Capt. R Maguire MC who was wounded in action on 28 March returned to the Battalion on 12 June and took over the duties of Adjutant. Although not mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF war diary, Capt. Gillon referred to an outbreak of flu within the 29<sup>th</sup> Division in June 1918; he noted. ‘We suffered at this time from a very bad epidemic of influenza, and many officers and men were affected, the principal symptom appearing to be acute depression, which temporarily led to a lack of enterprise.’<sup>81</sup>

The last 1<sup>st</sup> RDF casualty recorded in June was 43204 Pte. James Edward Rogers. He was the man noted in the war diary as being shot by a sniper on 17 June as the Battalion relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> King’s Own Scottish Borderers for a short spell of front-line duty. Pte Rogers came from Limehouse in Middlesex. He lived in Canning Town and had previously served as 6675 The London Regiment.<sup>82</sup>

Before the month of June was over, the Battalion along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers were put on notice to assist, if required, the 31<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions in an operation they carried out on the morning of 28 June known as ‘Operation Borderland’.<sup>83</sup> The objective of Operation Borderland was to further push back the German line east of the Foret de Nieppe by about one and a half kilometres on a frontage of about five and a half kilometres to create what was termed an ‘outpost zone’ clear of the forest in preparation for future offensive operations.<sup>84</sup> The objective given to both fusilier regiments was to, ‘counterattack in the event of the enemy forcing our advanced troops to retire beyond our original front line.’<sup>85</sup> At this time, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was in Papote having marched back a journey of about fifteen kilometres in hot weather from Blaringhem where they had a ten-day spell in divisional reserve. They reached Papote at 11:30 p.m. on 27 June.

The planning, preparation and operation carried by the 31<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions was again a textbook process that resulted in success with objectives achieved and consolidated as scheduled. Signs of cracks began to appear in the Germans’ will to fight. The OH noted: ‘The success of the attack established that the enemy entertained no offensive intentions near the junction of the First and Second Army.’<sup>86</sup> On account of ‘Operation Borderland’ being so successful, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was not called upon and on 29 June they marched back to Blaringhem area getting there about 8:30 p.m. where they stayed overnight. Next day, with their drums at the head of the column, they moved on further back seven kilometres westwards to Campagne. (Campagne-les-Wardrecques) and settled into ‘good accommodation’ on a fine summer’s evening. The month of June 1918 had been relatively kind to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. They ended the month with a battalion strength of forty-two officers and 939 other ranks.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. 86<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Order Number 232. 10 June 1918.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 June 1918.

<sup>81</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.197.

<sup>82</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>83</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>84</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*. 1918. Vol.3.p.195.

<sup>85</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.28 June 1918.

<sup>86</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive*.p.197

<sup>87</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.Pp.28-29 June 1918. See Operation Order No. 42.

**2<sup>nd</sup> RDF June 1918**

On 1 June 1918, the Training Staff of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF consisting of eight officers and forty-one other ranks became part of the 94<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade in the 31<sup>st</sup> Division. Based at Racquinghem, the task that now faced the nucleus of this new battalion was to re-build.<sup>88</sup> That re-building process began on 6 June when the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF marched into camp. What a proud moment and welcome sight their arrival must have been. The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF noted on 6 June.<sup>89</sup>

The 7<sup>th</sup> Bn detrained at Arcques (St. Omer) and marched into camp at 11:00 p.m. The Battalion left England on 15 July 1915 and served in Gallipoli, Serbia, Macedonia, and Palestine. It embarked at Alexandria, Egypt on 23 May 1918 and disembarked at Marseilles on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918. Strength on arrival 33 officers 814 other ranks - of these – Battalion Headquarters consisting of 7 officers and 26 other ranks formed the Training Staff of the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn; the remainder were this day absorbed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Practically all the officers and men were subject to attacks of malaria contracted on the Struma.

On the same days as the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was reinforced with men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF were reinforced by men from the 6<sup>th</sup> RMF who also arrived from Egypt. Colonel Jervis wrote: 'Six was a lucky number for the Battalion (2<sup>nd</sup> RMF) in 1918. On sixth day of sixth month the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers arrived from Palestine...a fighting battalion once more.'<sup>90</sup> The Munsters too had their fair share of men suffering from malaria. As many as ten battalions who had returned from Salonika were incapacitated for a time in France and Flanders with the effects of malaria.<sup>91</sup>

The next day, 7 June, was spent re-organising the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. On 8 June, leaving the Training Staff behind, the Battalion marched from camp in Racquinghem to another camp at Le Val de Lumbres twenty kilometres westwards. Dinners were served from cooks along the way at Wizernes. In the heat of the day, weakened by malaria, some 112 NCOs and men, 'fell on the line of march; of these twenty were picked up and carried to hospital.'<sup>92</sup>

Most if not all of the men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF had not served on the western front; their experience to date was in desert warfare. Acclimatising, training, lectures, with one from Major-General Campbell, GOC 31<sup>st</sup> Division, welcoming the Battalion to his division and informing them of the importance of 'Discipline and Esprit de Corps' in his Division, was the daily routine when at Le Val de Lumbres. On 14 June the commanding officer, adjutant and company commanders were taken by omnibus to 'Wallon Cappel and reconnoitred the Army Line of trenches near Hazebrouck with a view to possible occupation.'<sup>93</sup> In fact the three battalions of the 94<sup>th</sup> Brigade received orders to get prepared for a move to the trenches on 15 June.

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<sup>88</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.*p.110

<sup>89</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* WO95/2831/1. (London: The National Archives, June 1918 to April 1919).1-6 June 1918.

<sup>90</sup> McCance, S. p.157.

<sup>91</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive.* 1918. Vol.3. p.189.

<sup>92</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 8 June 1918.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 14 June 1918.

The first battalion of the brigade to move off by train from camp at Le Val de Lumbres was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Loyal North Lancashire Regiment; they moved out at 9:00 a.m. on 15 June. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF were due to move out at 3:00 p.m. However, at 2:00 p.m. the order to move was cancelled. A staff officer in brigade HQ had realised that some men were not fit for trench duty. Colonel Jervis assertion that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters and indeed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dubs would soon be 'a fighting battalion' would have to wait. Consequently, both battalions were moved to what was termed the 'back area', to a new camp in the village of Martin Eglise some 186 kilometres southwards near the French coast at Dieppe.<sup>94</sup> No doubt there was great relief among all ranks, particularly those men suffering from the effects of malaria, in not having to face the front line so soon after their time in Palestine.

They began their journey to Martin Eglise on 16 June by catching a train that left Lumbres at 10:00 p.m. Earlier in the day, the Battalion attended church parades in the morning and some 'recreational games' in the afternoon. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF arrived at Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles at 2:00 p.m. the following day. They stayed at Rouxmesnil until 27 June and essentially began a period of well-earned rest; almost a holiday. Of course, there were tactical training exercises at camp but every day companies went swimming in the sea at Dieppe which was about five kilometres away. They took cookers with them and had lunch, picnics on the beach; games were played before returning to camp in the evening. Quinine parades began. Those who suffered from the disease were spoken to by Sir Ronald Ross, a leading expert on the disease.<sup>95</sup> As a further measure in treating the more serious cases of malaria, 'a special leave allotment of four per day was granted to the Battalion.'<sup>96</sup> The men granted the leave went to England, leaving from Boulogne. A new camp was being built at a site about six kilometres eastwards from Rouxmesnil between the forest of Arques and the village Martin Eglise and it was into this new camp that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF moved on 27 June. With the men helping to build the new camp, much the same relaxed routine took place at Martin Eglise over the remaining days of June.

### 1<sup>st</sup> RDF July 1918

While their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were having a relatively enjoyable period of rest and rebuilding at Martin Eglise, a little over 145 kilometres away to the north at Campagne-les-Wardrecques, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF began July in a similar relaxed mode. The 4 July was a day of ceremony for the Battalion when the GOC 2<sup>nd</sup> Army General Sir Herbert Plumer, well known by many in the ranks of the Battalion from their days in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division at Wijtschate, presented 'decorations' to men in the Battalion for gallantry and good work during recent operations in June. It was a brigade-size ceremony which demanded the brigade to go through a practice run the previous day. A second 'decorations' parade was held on 13 July when 'Army and Divisional Parchments for gallantry' were issued to some men in the Battalion.<sup>97</sup> The following men of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF received decorations from General Plumer on 4 July 1918.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 16 June 1918.

<sup>95</sup> McCance, S. p.157. Sir Ronald Ross spoke to the men while on parade on 1 July 1918 at Martin Eglise.

<sup>96</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17-30 June 1918.

<sup>97</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 13 July 1918. No names were noted in the Battalion War Diary as to who was awarded either Army or Divisional parchments for gallantry.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 1-4 July 1918. See also Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.114. All of these men survived the war.

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut./Acting Capt. E.J. Alexander DCM and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. P. J. McGowan received the MC.  
12123. RQMS F.O. Cops received the Meritorious Service Medal.  
16223. Pte. R. Foster MM received a bar his MM.  
20080. Cpl. J. Hammil, 27757. Pte. P. Hanlon, 17812. Pte. P. Lenathen, 22172. Pte. L./Cpl. S. Batchelor, 10099. Cpl. A. Finlay, 27907 Pte. G. Brunton, all received the Military Medal (MM).

It may seem somewhat repetitive to state, that for most of the month of July, the Battalion devoted much of its time to training, specifically, 'in open warfare'. Such training was deemed 'vitaly necessary' which went on 'continuously and strenuously.'<sup>99</sup> Brigade and battalion-size tactical exercises were carried out mainly in the mornings. One such brigade exercise was carried out on 20 July when the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF and 1 Lancashire Fusiliers carried out a practice attack using machine-guns as covering fire in the advance. Great detail was paid to the design and execution of these exercises all taken from the revised series of S.S. Training Pamphlets produced by GHQ such as SS 109, *Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* issued in May 1916 and SS 143 (*Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action*) issued by GHQ in February 1917 and based on hard lessons learned from the beginning of the war.<sup>100</sup> Pages of instructions covering all aspects of a battalion or brigade attacking a fixed objective were issued to battalion commanders outlining for example the roll of Contact Aeroplanes or the use of pack mules for transporting ammunition during an advance.<sup>101</sup> Capt. Alexander mentioned above was an expert on night operations and regularly gave lectures to the battalion's officers.<sup>102</sup> There was an objective to the training schemes that were devised. A Wyllly noted, it was 'for the general advance or war of movement which it was expected would shortly commence.'<sup>103</sup>

Divisional, brigade and battalion sports events were also arranged all throughout the month, mostly in the afternoon after morning tactical training. At divisional sports, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF seemed to do well at the football and specifically the divisional boxing competitions. Pte. Ronan won the middle and welter weight competition, while Pte. Robson was runner's up in the lightweight competition. The CO of the Battalion, Lieut.-Col. A. Moore DSO went three rounds with a chap from the Army Gymnastic Staff in what was termed 'an exhibition.'<sup>104</sup> At the Brigade Sports that followed, the Battalion had a mixed fortune. They were beaten 3-0 in the football final by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers but won the boxing competition 'easily', winning the feather, bantam, welter and middle weight completions. Capt. S.G. Darling seemed to be a fit man, he competed in the '100 yards flat race', the high jump and long jump competitions. There was a 'veteran's race' too. Runners had to be thirty-five years of age or over and as evidence of age, before the race began, competitors had to produce of their army pay book.<sup>105</sup> Cups were presented to the winners by GOC 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier-General G.R.H. Cheape. The odd football match between the battalion's officers and sergeants added to the fun and team building process.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.198.

<sup>100</sup> Beach, J, *Issued by the General Staff: Doctrine Writing at British G H Q, 1917-1918*, War In History 19, no. 4 (2012).p.469. For further details of these SS type training manuals see. Burke, Tom, *The Learning Experiences of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in Trench Warfare in the First World War, August 1914 to December 1916*.

<sup>101</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade Order No. 239. 15 July 1918.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 August 1918.

<sup>103</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.114.

<sup>104</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.8 July 1918.

<sup>105</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*.

<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.16-21 July 1918.

A 29<sup>th</sup> Divisional Horse Show was put on too while at Campagne on the 9 July and with it came ‘a holiday for all ranks.’<sup>107</sup> Nearly the entire division turned out for a show that was put together by Col. Wright of the Army Service Corps. General Plumer and two former divisional commanders, Generals Hunter-Weston and de Lisle, were invited guests who turned up. Princess Philippa of Caraman-Chimay (Belgium) offered prizes such as a cup for sports competitions such as football matches and cross-country running from teams drawn from the Belgian Army and British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.<sup>108</sup> The Dubs won ‘the best turned out Company Commander’s Charger’ competition. It was won by ‘X’ Coy.’s horse named ‘Billy’ ridden by Lieut. C. Neill. They also won the ‘Drums competition open to all the battalions of the Division – Great credit being due to Sgt. Drummer Hallett for the fine performance given by the battalion’s Drums.’<sup>109</sup> The winner was chosen by General de Lisle who gave the award to Sgt. Hallett.<sup>110</sup>

All throughout July, the band and divisional troupe, named ‘The Diamond’ of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division performed concerts either at Campagne or at St. Omer.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps as a means of boosting the men’s morale, occasionally the divisional band played in the afternoon following a morning’s tactical training exercises. For example, on 18 July following a morning brigade-size tactical exercise, the divisional band played a concert at 4:00 p.m. for the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade in a hanger given to the men as a venue by the balloon section of the RAF. Later at 6:30 p.m., the ‘The Diamond’ concert troupe put on a concert and ‘gave a most excellent entertainment.’<sup>112</sup> On one occasion ‘all women workers in the neighbourhood, from principal matrons to ambulance drivers, were invited and came in their hundreds’ to the show.<sup>113</sup>

There were no periods during most of July that the Battalion went into the line. However on 21 July, after an evening football match between the battalion’s officers and sergeants, orders were received at about 10:00 p.m. to get ready for a route march in the morning, ‘at 8:00 a.m. in a northerly direction’, i.e. back towards the line. In fact, the entire 29<sup>th</sup> Division moved; their destination was Noordpeene, which is about eight kilometres east of Cassel and fourteen kilometres away from Campagne-les-Wardrecques. In the heat of the high summer sun, the Battalion left Campagne at 9:05 a.m. After having lunch along the way at mid-day, the Battalion marched on to Noordpeene reaching there at about 2:00 p.m. and into billets. The holidays were not yet quite over as the Battalion carried on with much of the same activities as they did in Campagne. But they were coming to an end because a couple of days after they had settled in at Noordpeene, some of the battalion’s officers took off on a day trip to reconnoitre the ‘forward zone.’<sup>114</sup>

There is no doubt that a month away from the front line did nothing but good to strengthen up the men in mind and body. The rest and tactical training in battalion and brigade tactical exercises played a crucial role in re-energising and freshening up the Battalion for what they would face in the weeks and months ahead. It improved the esprit de corps’ of the Battalion which had almost been annihilated in March. Many of the reinforcements were English and those training and competitive sports days helped to bond the men as a unit.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.9 July 1918.

<sup>108</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. See. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clara\\_Ward,\\_Princesse\\_de\\_Caraman-Chimay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clara_Ward,_Princesse_de_Caraman-Chimay).

<sup>109</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.9 July 1918.

<sup>110</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.199.

<sup>111</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 15 August 1918.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.18 July 1918.

<sup>113</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.199.

<sup>114</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.24 July 1918. The 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved into the Noordpeene – Wemaers-Cappel area with billets at Zuytpeene.

**2<sup>nd</sup> RDF 1 July to 14 September 1918**

In early June 1918, divisions that had suffered heavy losses in the German offensives were reconstituted from battalions that had served in Palestine and Salonika. For example, the 30<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> Divisions were reconstituted with men from battalions which had served in Palestine.<sup>115</sup> In late June, the 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian) Division was also one of those reconstituted divisions that took place in the Dieppe area from battalions which had served in Salonika; one battalion of which was the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who, as previously stated, was reconstituted with men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF who had served in Salonika. This process was finalised by 14 July 1918.<sup>116</sup>

Consequently, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved to Martin Eglise on 27 June, they were transferred from the 94<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 31<sup>st</sup> Division to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. They would remain in this division for the remainder of the war.<sup>117</sup> The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Brig.-Gen. P.M. Robinson, CMG was made up from four battalions namely, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers.<sup>118</sup>

Over the 13 and 14 July, the Battalion along with battalions from the other brigades in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, participated in ceremonial parades to mark 'France Day.' At 11:00 a.m. on 13 July the Battalion paraded for an inspection by Brigadier-General P.M. Robinson, CMG and Major – General H.C. Jackson DSO commanding the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. Following the inspection, Lieut.-Col. Weldon and his adjutant discussed the arrangements for the military parade on the Plage at Dieppe for 'France Day.' The 14 July is the National Day of France which is often referred to as Bastille Day in memory of the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789. Despite the war, the France Day military parade along the Plage was a grand affair. It was an early morning start for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. The war diary noted:<sup>119</sup>

The Battalion paraded at 7:10 a.m.: 15 officers and 416 other ranks – and marched off to Dieppe. The troops in the Garrison were drawn up in line with backs to the sea. A squadron of Cavalry on the right – the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. Royal Fusiliers, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. KOYLI, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Royal Munster Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The massed bands of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division and Belgian Buglers supplied the music. Major-General H.C. Jackson DSO, commanding 50<sup>th</sup> Division took the 'General Salute' in the line. The troops then marched past in column and returned in quarter column. Column of route was formed, and troops marched through the street on their way back to camp. Nearing the camp, General Sir H.S. Rawlinson complimented Lieut.-Col. Weldon on the smart appearances of the Battalion.

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<sup>115</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium. May - July: German Diversion Offensive and the First Allied Counter Offensive.* Vol.3 1918.p.169.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Vol.3 1918.p.169.

<sup>117</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* WO95/2827/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 May 1918 to 30 September 1918). On 15 July the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF came under the command of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>118</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.* p.111 Note. McCance notes on p.157 that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF was in the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. So too does the War Diary of the 150<sup>th</sup> Division. See *War Diary 150th Brigade.* WO95/2833/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 July 1918 to 30 June 1919). Moreover, the War Diary of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade places the battalions of the Brigade as being 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, 13<sup>th</sup> Black Watch, 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers under Lieut.-Col. K.C. Weldon, D.S.O. See 50<sup>th</sup> Division No. G.262. 15 July 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 14 July 1918.

It would seem on the day after the parade at Dieppe, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RMF were transferred to the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General G. Rollo DSO in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division and their place in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade was taken by the 13<sup>th</sup> (Scottish Horse) Battalion Black Watch. They also lost 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. The Brigade reverted to a three-battalion brigade now being made up from 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, the 13<sup>th</sup> (Scottish Horse) Battalion Black Watch and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. <sup>120</sup>

Although the rebuilding of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division was completed by 14 July, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was still understrength in early July 1918. The total effective strength of the Battalion on 12 July 1918 was forty-two officers and 682 other ranks. However, for a variety of reasons such as men on leave or absentees which as a matter of note was very low, only two in fact, the fighting strength of the Battalion was thirty-one officers and 588 other ranks. Not all the Battalion officers and other ranks took part in the parade, twenty-seven officers and 266 other ranks did not parade.<sup>121</sup> The reason they did not parade was more than likely they were suffering from the effects of malaria. Since the arrival of men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF into the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 6 June 1918, some 360 men of other ranks had been admitted to hospital, evacuated, and struck off the Effective Strength of the Battalion suffering from malaria. Moreover, eight officers were admitted since the arrival of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF, two of whom were invalided to England. <sup>122</sup>

The loss of men was topped up by small drafts of officers, mainly junior in-experienced officers, and untrained other ranks throughout July and August. For example, thirty men arrived to the Battalion at Martin Eglise from Calais on the day of the parade, 14 July. Lieut. O'Neill, Sgt. McGee, L/Sgt. Elston along with ten men came from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. Incredibly, a further sixty men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF from Egypt arrived on 19 July more than likely suffering from malaria. <sup>123</sup>

Between 1 July and 14 September 1918, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade remained at No.5 Camp in Martin Eglise. Their one and only activity of any significance was training, training and more training. Wylly noted that during this period, the Battalion went 'through all kinds of training and attending lectures on every possible military subject.' <sup>124</sup> It is important to understand the importance of all this training in July 1918 in the context of explaining the success of future offensive operations undertaken by both RDF battalions in their respective infantry divisions. The gospels of SS 109 and SS 143 in particular were preached to all battalions prior to their final push to beat the German armies along the Western Front in 1918. The message was the same, all that differed between units were the preachers.

Much like the training their comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF underwent during July, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF training scheme was carried out according to a similar structured syllabus. Almost every morning during that period, training began at 9:30 a.m. and ended around 12:30 p.m. Training exercises began at company level, then to battalion, then on to brigade and finally divisional exercises were carried out in the early weeks of September 1918. There was assault tactical training on topics such as bayonet assault by platoons; gas training at the Divisional Gas Hut with the testing out of new gas box respirators; bombing and musketry assault courses. Night operations were carried out. 'Break through attacks' were carried out; Engineers practiced methods of rapid consolidation. Companies gave demonstrations of a 'Company Attack'.

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<sup>120</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 14 July 1918. See 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Order No. 25 of 17 July 1918.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* Strength Return 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 12 July 1918.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* Strength Return 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 12 July 1918.

<sup>123</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.112. *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 August 1918.

<sup>124</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.112.

For example, on 5 and 6 August, the Scottish Horse gave the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF such a demonstration. Rains interrupted play on the second day.<sup>125</sup> Occasionally, Lieut.-Col. Levey from the Training Inspectorate called by to observe the training and discuss with officers any issues around training.<sup>126</sup> A crucial aspect of all this training was the concept of feed-back learning. After each exercise, particularly at brigade level, meetings were held between infantry, transport, artillery, and medical officers at which the training exercise carried out was discussed and analysed for mistakes and improvements. For example, on 6 September, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division held a Divisional Exercise in the Foret D'Arques after which a report was written titled, 'Summary of Lessons Learned During Recent Operations.' This report went through the exercise and made some recommendations for improvement under a variety of headings. For example, the report outlined the importance of the maintenance of close touch between the Machine Gun Commander and Infantry Commanders on the spot, 'so that close co-operation between the two arms may be continually maintained...the old method and rules for advancing machine guns, i.e., by bounds, are absolutely sound.'<sup>127</sup>

Feedback learning was as quick as possible. Some officers were brought to Amiens and on out to Villers Bretonneau to visit a battlefield where an attack by the Allies took place on 8 August. They returned to Amiens for a conference. Trench Mortar officers discussed the attack made by the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Brigade (17<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> New South Wales Battalions) where lessons were discussed.<sup>128</sup>

Lectures were given on a range of subjects such as use of Contact Aeroplanes and communications. One Royal Artillery officer again gave a lecture on a recent attack. The following day he set up a demonstration of a smoke barrage.<sup>129</sup> There were also lectures on topics not so much on military tactics but on morale boosting topics. For example, the County Antrim preacher Dr Alexander Irvine (1863-1941) presented a lecture at Martin Eglise on the subject of 'War Aims'.<sup>130</sup> A Naval officer gave a lecture on the anti-submarine campaign.

By the end of their training period in mid-September, the men's physical health had improved. Cross country runs took place in which up to 140 from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took part. Long distance route marches took place and perhaps as an indicator as to the state of the men's physical health, unlike back in July when dozens of men fell out of marches, only one or two fell out on these August and September marches. On one such battalion march from Martin Eglise to Berneval (twenty kilometres there and back) on 23 August which began at 6:00 a.m., only one man fell out. On 4 September on a march of twenty-three kilometres in full marching order, no men fell out.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5-6 August 1918.

<sup>126</sup> *War Diary 150th Briagde*. 6 August 1918.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Report titled Summary of Lessons Learned During Recent Operations. 18 September 1918.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 24 August 1918.

<sup>129</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 September 1918.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* 9 September 1918. See Dictionary of Ulster Biography – Ulster Historical Circle. Website <http://www.newulsterbiography.co.uk/index.php/home/viewPerson/735>.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 1 July 1918 to 31 August 1918. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade*. See also *War Diary 150th Briagde*.

As all this training was going on, the war had reached a couple of crucial turning points in favour of the Allies. The Australians had taken le Hamel on 4 July and on 8 August the Canadians, Australians and British III Corps reduced the Amiens salient by advancing twelve kilometres.<sup>132</sup> Fourth Army casualties were comparatively light; they were ‘computed to be under 9,000.’<sup>133</sup> They inflicted on General von der Marwitz’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Army casualties of about 700 officers and 27,000 men.<sup>134</sup> German prisoners through 4<sup>th</sup> Army Corps cages amounted to 281 officers and 12,314 other ranks. The French captured 150 officers and 3,200 other ranks.<sup>135</sup>

The German official history called this, ‘the greatest defeat which the German army suffered since the beginning of the war...The divisions between Avre and the Somme which had been struck by the enemy attack were nearly completely annihilated.’ Ludendorff himself was horrified. He wrote in his memoirs, ‘August 8<sup>th</sup> was the black day of the German army in the war.’<sup>136</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers turn to join that campaign would come soon enough. On 14 September, the training stopped at Martin Eglise and the Battalion began their move back towards the front line. Their destination was the village of Nurlu, roughly 150 kilometres east of Martin Eglise. The fun and games were over.

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<sup>132</sup> Holmes, Richard.p.209.

<sup>133</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 8 August - 26 September.The Franco - British Offensive.*, vol. 4 (London: Imperial War Museum, December 1940),p.84.

<sup>134</sup> McWilliams, J and and Steel, J, *Amien Dawn of Victory* (Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2001). p.197.

<sup>135</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 8 August - 26 September.The Franco - British Offensive.* p.85.

<sup>136</sup> McWilliams, J and and Steel, J. p.197.

**1<sup>st</sup> RDF 3 August to 5 September 1918**

In order to consolidate their line, the Germans began to make small strategic withdrawals in early August 1918 from the head of the salient they had won back in the April 1918 Lys offensive between La Bassee and Kemmel. To do this, they shortened their line to a depth of nearly one and a half kilometres.<sup>137</sup> The background to this move was that a German offensive scheduled for the beginning of August had been cancelled and therefore Crown Prince Rupprecht, who was in command of the German Group of Armies in Flanders, evacuated unimportant salients.<sup>138</sup>

The British Fifth Army, located on the right flank of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army and facing the salient, had an idea of the withdrawal but were not sure of it. On 31 July they issued an instruction which 'gave warning of the possibility of a withdrawal by the enemy to shorten his line.'<sup>139</sup> They gave great importance in getting early information of the withdrawal so that Rupprecht's retirement could be hindered. Plans were devised to determine if Rupprecht's strategic moves were real and occurring or not. The OH noted: 'Constant patrolling and raids were to be undertaken and plans of action to be considered should either information of the enemy's intended withdrawal be received or should he succeed in affecting his withdrawal.' The plans of action were set out in instructions issued by the two corps that made up the 5<sup>th</sup> Army, i.e. XIIIth and XI Corps. In essence they instructed that if the Germans had left an area, it was to be immediately occupied and consolidated.<sup>140</sup>

Advanced patrols were to be pushed forward from one tactical locality to another, supported by other troops whose duty it would be to consolidate the ground won. Should the advance be a long one, brigades and divisional reserves, covered by advance guards might be pushed through the patrols to accelerate the movement.

Although the plan was issued by 5<sup>th</sup> Army, it also applied to 2<sup>nd</sup> Army on its left flank in Flanders within which was the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF (86<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 29<sup>th</sup> Division, XV Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army). General Plumer, the Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, added his objectives to those set out by 5<sup>th</sup> Army. As clever as ever, his plans were to exert continuous pressure on the retiring Germans, 'acting vigorously against his rear guards and thus hampering his choice of defensive lines, whilst making his retirement as costly as possible.'<sup>141</sup>

Consequently, in accordance with General Plumer's plan of harassment, its implementation dictated much of the activity of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF and other battalions of the brigades in the 29<sup>th</sup> Division for all August and early September 1918. These activities could best be categorised in terms of holding and prodding with support when required. Since during this period, the main thrust of the Allies operations was going on down south at Amiens, holding the line was carried out with the usual battalion rotational tours of the front line. The Germans did not launch any offensives in this sector during this period; consequently, the main hazards were from the usual sources, German artillery and snipers which did inflict casualties on the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. Through raids and patrols, prodding the Germans was carried out almost day and night in order to ascertain the units facing them; determine if the German line was moving back and if so how far. And if it did, occupy and consolidate it.

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<sup>137</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 8 August - 26 September. The Franco - British Offensive.* p.27 and p.427.

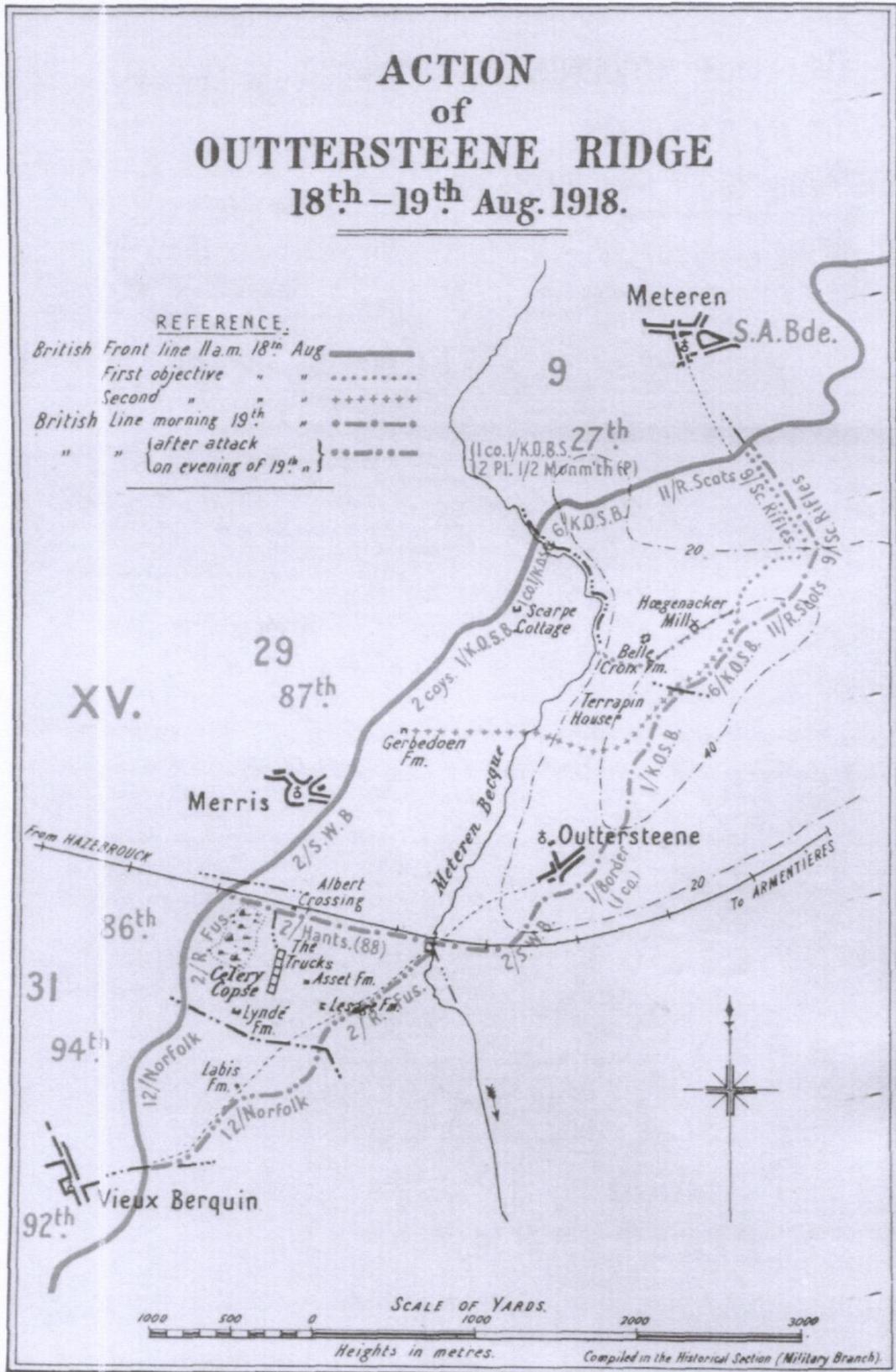
<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p.427.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p.428.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. Pp.428-429.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p.430.

Sketch 22.



Sketch 22 Action of Outtersteene Ridge 18-19 August 1918. <sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. Vol.4 p.678.

Support work was essentially the Battalion supplying working parties of up to 300 men to the Royal Engineers in consolidation work of any abandoned ground and carrying ammunition for neighbouring units who carried out offensive operations.

On 3 August 1918, the 29<sup>th</sup> Division took over the Strazeele / Merris sector from the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division.<sup>143</sup> Essentially the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF went back along the front north of the Foret de Nieppe they had left some weeks previous. The Australians were needed in the up-coming 4<sup>th</sup> Army's attack on the Amiens salient which, as stated, began on 10 August and with great success. As a consequence of this move, and to carry out Plumer's plans, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF left Noordpeene at dusk on 1 August and marched through the night to La Kruele on the northern outskirts of Hazebrouck, about sixteen kilometres.<sup>144</sup> They were now certainly back in the war zone because along the way, bombs were dropped from German aircraft very close to the Battalion and two men from 'X' Coy. were slightly wounded. On arrival in Hazebrouck the Battalion was temporarily accommodated in tents and shelters which must have been uncomfortable as it rained heavily during the day.<sup>145</sup> Next day, some of the officers reconnoitred the front line they were now responsible for and on the late evening of 4 August, the Battalion, with a strength of forty-three officers and 911 other ranks, took over a very wet and muddy front line near Strazeele and replaced the 23<sup>rd</sup> Cheshire Regiment of the 40<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>146</sup> The distance between the front line at Strazeele and the billets was a little over three kilometres.<sup>147</sup>

In terms of prodding the Germans, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF didn't waste much time in doing so when they got to the line near Strazeele. On the night of 5/6 August, a patrolling party of four men led by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Reilly from 'Z' Coy. rushed a German post roughly located on the eastern side of Lynde Farm. Reilly's men killed the garrison which consisted of three men of the 98<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 207<sup>th</sup> Division and captured a light machine-gun.<sup>148</sup>

It would seem that the German withdrawal was either left to the local German rear-guard commander to decide when to do so, or the order to move back from higher up the command had not reached the German garrison at Lynde Farm. The OH noted that the first German withdrawal took place on the night before 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Reilly's patrol i.e., on the night of 4/5 August. Some must have remained behind at Lynde Farm to stand and fight. Patrols discovered that on the morning of 5 August, the Germans had in fact evacuated about 550 metres of their outpost line in Pacaut Wood near the La Basse canal, about the centre of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army sector.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt.p.199. See also *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Warning Order. 1 August 1918.

<sup>144</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. WO95/2299/3. (London: The National Archives, 1 August 1918 to 30 September 1918).1 August 1918.See 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade Order No. G.2. 30 July 1918.

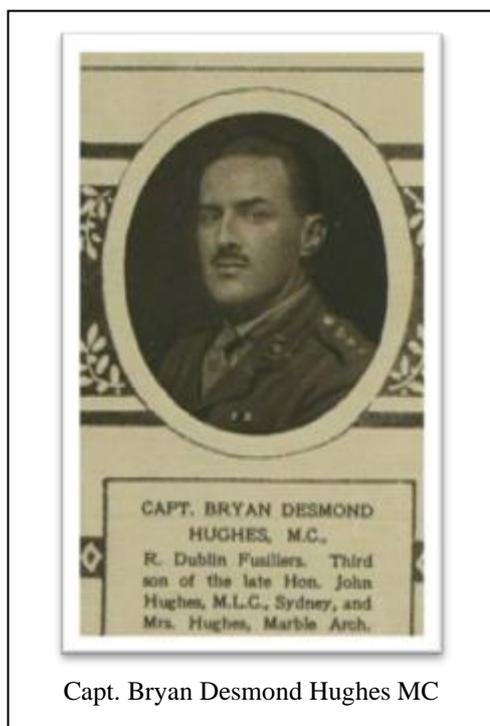
<sup>145</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.1 August 1918.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*.7 August 1918

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*. 10 August 1918.

<sup>148</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Note the place noted in the raid was E.18.a.8.5,7.5 which is on the eastern edge of Lynde Farm (F.13.a.5.5) difficult to read print) on trench map in 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade War Diary.

<sup>149</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 8 August - 26 September*.The Franco - British Offensive. p.430.



Capt. Bryan Desmond Hughes MC

However, the Battalion didn't have everything their own way on 6 August. Later in the afternoon, another patrol under Captain Bryan Desmond Hughes MC from 'Y' Coy. went on out to Celery Copse. Hughes took a Lewis gun in the attack but was killed. He seemed to be a popular officer in the Battalion. The war diary noted; 'In Captain Hughes's death the Battalion lose a very gallant officer universally popular.'<sup>150</sup> Company Sergeant Major Patrick Joseph Kavanagh later died of wounds. Moreover, two men were wounded and two reported missing.<sup>151</sup>

It was a costly event for the Battalion. Perhaps the main lessons learned was that the men of the German 207<sup>th</sup> Division hadn't gone away just yet, were still up for a fight and possibly sought revenge for the loss of their comrades to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Reilly's patrol. Company Sergeant Major 16723 Patrick Joseph Kavanagh gave his address as Dublin but enlisted in Manchester. He was thirty-eight years of age when he died and is buried at Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, grave reference VD35. On his headstone is the inscription, 'Jesus have mercy on him in loving memory from brother and sisters.'<sup>152</sup>

Captain Bryan Desmond Hughes was born in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. He was thirty years of age when he was killed in Celery Copse on the afternoon of 6 August 1918. As a younger man, he won two caps playing rugby for Australia. He was commissioned in 1915 into the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF, was wounded in action several times and as a Temp 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut., he won the Military Cross in April 1916 at Hulluch. On 29 April, he was listed as one of the officers wounded following the German gas attack.<sup>153</sup> He served with the Dublins right throughout the war and died a couple of months short of its ending. He is buried in Borre British Cemetery, grave reference IIG2.<sup>154</sup> Borre is a small village just east of Hazebrouck and it was where the Battalion was billeted in farmhouses and barns soon after they arrived in Hazebrouck.

The other two men who died on 6 August were 43198 Pte. James Samuel Dabbs and 12826 Pte. John Johnstone. Pte Dabbs came from Shoreditch in Middlesex. His parents lived at No 41 Scrutton Street, Finsbury S.E. London He previously served as 6564 The London Regiment. He was thirty-three years of age and was buried in Outtersteene Communal Cemetery Extension, Bailleul, grave ref. IIE22. Pte. Johnstone came from Ballyphilip, Co. Antrim. He enlisted in Scotland and he too is buried in Outtersteene Communal Cemetery Extension, Bailleul and grave ref. IE30.

<sup>150</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 6 August 1918.

<sup>151</sup> Wylly, H.C., *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.114.

<sup>152</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>153</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.29 April 1916. See also 5 June 1916.

<sup>154</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also Wylly, H.C., *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.171.

Interestingly, the CWGC records that five 1<sup>st</sup> RDF men died on 8 August 1918: one DOW and four KIA. The loss of these men is not noted in either Wyllly or the Battalion War Diary which noted there was 'heavy hostile artillery fire in forward areas causing casualties...Enemy attitude very alert but inclined to be nervous.'<sup>155</sup> Their nationality shows how less Irish the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF had become towards the end of the war. Four of them are buried along with Capt. Hughes at Borre British Cemetery; they are. 40379 Cpl. William Frederick Mayer age thirty-two from 49 Dalmeny Road, Tufnell Park, London; 26791 L/Cpl. Arthur George Wyatt, age twenty-three from Highgate in Middlesex; 25880 Pte. Robert Savage, age thirty-one from Templemore, Co. Tipperary; 43572 Pte. Frederick Charles Parker age twenty-three from 43 Tadmor Street, Sheppard's Bush, London; 16836 Pte. Albert Edward Newman age twenty-seven was from Upton Park, Essex. He was buried in Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, grave ref VD38.<sup>156</sup>

In scenes similar to those of L/Cpl Will Schofield running through the German lines in Sam Mendes film *1917*, Wyllly recorded a similar incident that took place during Capt. Desmond's attack in Celery Copse on 6 August 1918. Wyllly wrote:<sup>157</sup>

This attack had taken place early in the afternoon, and about midnight a youngster of 'Y' Company reported at battalion headquarters, bringing with him a note from a captain of the Middlesex Regiment, which was holding the line about a mile to the south, and explaining that the lad had entered the line in his area. This young soldier had been cut off during the attack, and in an attempt to get back had lost his direction and got into and behind the enemy lines. He was repeatedly challenged and pursued by the German, but escaped, holding on to his rifle throughout, and was able to give accurate and valuable information as to various enemy dispositions and strong points. This boy- for he was only 17 – was complimented by Brigadier-General Cheape, particularly for having stuck to his rifle throughout, and was recommended for and received the Military Medal.

Unfortunately, the boy's name was not recorded in either Wyllly or the Battalion War Diary. Further research needs to be done to establish who he was. All the recipients of the Military Medal listed in Wyllly whose name was in *The London Gazette* after 6 August 1918 and of the rank of Private, of which there are forty-seven, survived the war.<sup>158</sup>

With the objective of pursuing this ever-growing German withdrawal, any advance of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and indeed any other divisions in XV Corps would be hampered by the German possession of the Outtersteene Ridge, which, though a little more than thirty-seven metres above sea level, gave good observation over the low-lying country around; See Sketch 22. It was the last piece of high ground in the region occupied by the Germans who mainly came from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Divisions.<sup>159</sup> The importance of its capture was a bit like the capture of the Wijtschate – Messines Ridge as a first objective prior to the presumed capture of Passchendaele in the autumn of 1917.

The 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division was assigned the task of taking the Outtersteene Ridge, with the assistance of a small party (87<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> Brigades) from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. The objectives of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division were Belle Croix Farm and Hoegenacker Mill near the top of the ridge.

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<sup>155</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 7-9 August 1918.*

<sup>156</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>157</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922.* p.115.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* Honours and Rewards, Military Medal. Pp177-184.

<sup>159</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 8 August - 26 September.* *The Franco - British Offensive.* p.430. and p.436.

The objective of the follow-up units from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was the village of Outtersteene. In an innovative tactic, cocoa matting, 'with a black band painted on to represent the shadow' was laid over the assembling Scots in their jump off trenches so as to hide them from German aircraft observers, more learning from the past. Zero hour was 11:00 a.m. on 18 August in the hope of catching the Germans off their guard, which occurred. From an Irish perspective, a brigade from the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division artillery put down a smoke barrage to hide the advancing infantry. By late evening on 19 August, all objectives were taken with 'many prisoners' and a few extras thrown in for good measure such as Lynde Farm.<sup>160</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers in 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade took 100 prisoners and eight machine guns.<sup>161</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF had a very limited role; 'W' Coy. was used to carry up Stokes Mortar shells to forward captured positions.<sup>162</sup>

With the gradual German withdrawals along the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Army fronts, the prodding continued day and night. With the Germans now on the back foot, there was no let up. However, in the Strazeele / Merris sector at least, the Germans had not retired entirely just yet. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF had mixed success in carrying out General Plumer's wishes during August. A week or so after the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division's success in taking the Outtersteene Ridge, 1<sup>st</sup> RDF carried out two raids on Despot Farm to 'reconnoitre and if possible secure an identification.'

The first raid was carried out during the day on 24 August and the second during the night of 26 August. Second Lieut. G. G. Holmes of 'W' Coy. led the raid on 24 August. He was to 'Scupper an enemy post by daylight.' He was unable to bring back a prisoner but his party managed to kill 'many enemy.' The night of 24/25 was reported quiet. Two more patrols went out during the night of 25/26 August but 'were unable to establish touch with the enemy.'<sup>163</sup> Despite this patrol not encountering any Germans, the reality was they were still about the place. During the early morning of 26 August, just to remind the Dublins and other battalions in the front line they hadn't gone away, German artillery set down a heavy bombardment. That night, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. G. G. Holmes led his second raid, again taking men from his 'W' Coy. out to Despot Farm to reconnoitre it and again possibly secure an identification. Referring to the raid, the Battalion Diary noted; 'When about to rush the post they (Holmes men) were observed by the enemy a party of whom doubled round in an attempt to cut them off. Our patrol engaged with the enemy and withdrew to our lines.' There were no casualties reported.<sup>164</sup> Holmes was lucky to get back to his own lines.

At the end of August, Despot Farm was targeted again. Reports had come in that the farm was still occupied 'in strength'.<sup>165</sup> This time Lieut. J Cassidy MC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. M.F. O'Donnell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. P.H. Lennon and fifty other ranks from 'Y' Coy. carried out a dawn raid on Despot Farm. Zero Hour was 4:45 a.m. 30 August. For ease of manoeuvrability, the men attacked carrying as little excess weight as possible. '50 rounds in bandolier and one bomb per man...only to be used for clearing cellars or buildings...' and as usual, '...no papers or identification to be carried.'<sup>166</sup> To his great surprise, Lieut. Cassidy and his men found, Despot Farm and surrounding buildings unoccupied. The only casualties they had was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Lennon and one other rank who got too close to their own covering barrage. Contrary to reports, the Germans had indeed gone and were now being chased.

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. Pp.431-434.

<sup>161</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18-19 August 1918.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 18 August 1918.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 24 and 25 August 1918.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 24-26 August 1918.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. Minor Operation Order R1 29 August 1918. Map Ref 36 A NE.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. Report - Minor Operation Order R1. 29 August 1918.



The Strazeele Railway Station circa 1900.

The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF war diary noted; ‘Body of German officer (dead for about 24 hours) found, identification normal. Enemy withdrawing apparently on this front. Many fires at night in his lines. Whole Divisional Line is now advanced daily – Patrols bring actively engaged in keeping touch ...’<sup>167</sup>

Lieut. Cassidy and his men went back to camp in the support line, which now was well behind the front line on account of the German withdrawal. They had a bath and a change of underwear at the Battalion Transport Lines near the Battalion Headquarters which at the time was 270 metres west

of Strazeele railway station, Gare de Strazeele. Later in the day, a ‘battalion canteen’ opened for all the men and the Divisional Drums put on a concert. The Germans were on the run, there was a change of gear, baths, beer and song. What more could a Dub at the front want.

With the Germans on the back foot in this sector, morale high among the Battalion and the bit between their teeth going into September 1918, crack on was the general feeling with a battalion strength of forty-four officers and 972 other ranks.<sup>168</sup> However, the cracking on in places was slow. This was a new warfare to many of the officers and long-serving men in the Battalion who had been used to static trench warfare for a long time. Moreover, according to Capt. Gillon, ‘the whole countryside was strewn with booby traps, and house after house and cross-road after cross-road went up to heaven as a result of delay action mines.’<sup>169</sup>

With the Germans gone from the Outtersteene Ridge, on 2 September, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF left the Outtersteene area and again as part of the strategy outlined by General Plumer, moved up through the lines the Germans had abandoned and on into La Crèche, a distance of about ten kilometres east and just south east of Bailleul; yet another familiar place to some of the older Dubs. There they came under orders to be prepared to move at three hours’ notice.<sup>170</sup>

The next target on the advance was the village of Ploegsteert just over the border in Flanders. Taking Ploegsteert was part of a 29<sup>th</sup> Division advance in which the divisional objective was the line Hill 63 to Ploegsteert by the 88<sup>th</sup> and 86<sup>th</sup> Brigades, respectively. Hill 63, with barbed wire entanglements over forty metres in depth had to be overcome.<sup>171</sup> It was again the dominating position, so, to cover the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade (2<sup>nd</sup> Leinster and 2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshire Regiment) in their attack, a strong barrage was arranged. As less resistance was expected on the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade front (1<sup>st</sup> RDF on right and 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers on left) the barrage there was much weaker.<sup>172</sup> The specific objective for the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade was the line Hyde Park Corner to Ploegsteert inclusive; the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was assigned the village of Ploegsteert.<sup>173</sup> In the brigade and battalion war diaries, the attack was noted as being ‘a Minor Operation.’

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 30 August 1918.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. 1 September 1918. For details on photo of Strazeele Railway station see : <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gare-Strazeele-1900.Jpg#Filehistory> Wikimedia Commons.

<sup>169</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.202.

<sup>170</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. 2 September 1918.

<sup>171</sup> Whitton, F E. p.463.

<sup>172</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.202.

<sup>173</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.1.

On 3 September, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was ordered to move into position at Romarin Camp east of Le Crèche at 6:30 p.m. in preparation for the attack the next day. At 6:00 p.m., in a bit of a rush, the Battalion commander, Lieut.-Col. Athelstan Moore and his four company commanders, went up to reconnoitre as thoroughly as possible the assembly position for their attack in the forward area.<sup>174</sup> To allow this inspection to take place, the marching off time was delayed a bit. Their attack formation would be with two companies, 'Y' and 'W', leading the attack and one company 'Z' Coy. in reserve. Lieut. McNulty was in command of the leading platoon of 'Y' Coy. 'W' Coy. was under the command of Capt. S.G. Darling and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. O'Donnell was in command of a defensive flank platoon. Experienced non-commissioned officers led other platoon formations in the attack.<sup>175</sup>

The Battalion was at Romarin Camp by 11:15 p.m. It was on this march up from La Crèche to Romarin Camp that the Battalion suffered its first casualties of the attack, yet again from German artillery fire.<sup>176</sup> The Battalion War Diary noted that the reserve company 'Z' Coy. suffered casualties from heavy gas shelling of the roads and approaches at Le Crèche hours before they took off.<sup>177</sup> All along the line of attack of both brigades, German machine gun fire inflicted havoc before the men ever got to their jump off positions. For example, during the night of 3 September and early morning of the following day, assault companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Leinsters and Hampshires were pinned down in their positions by sweeping German machine gun fire. Very Lights helped them see some of their targets. Had the Germans discovered that so many men were packed into a small area lying flat on the road around a crater and in ditches on the western slope of Hill 63 awaiting the signal to attack, there would have been no attack on Hill 63. It would have been a massacre.<sup>178</sup>

At 3:00 a.m., on 4 September the two assault companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, 'W' and 'X' Companies, moved forward, followed closely by 'Y' Coy. towards their jump off point beyond Romarin Camp. It was on this movement up to their jump off position over what was termed 'Peaceful Penetration ground' that the Battalion suffered most of its casualties in this 'Minor Operation' from the same machine gun fire that hit the Leinsters and Hampshires. The Battalion Diary recorded. 'Severe casualties suffered from machine gun fire when endeavouring to reach by Peaceful Penetration ground laid down as jumping off position.'<sup>179</sup>

They were hammered from all directions and from as much weaponry the Germans could muster. Machine gun fire came from directly in front of them initially and later from their flanks when flank troops were unable to advance. They were also hit by all calibre of artillery, air-bursting trench mortars and gas shells which was noted as being very heavy; some of which fired from Ploegsteert village. To add to their misery, they were also bombed from three low-flying German aircraft.<sup>180</sup>

The casualties suffered by the Battalion in this attempt to get forward by 6:00 a.m., as 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade had ordered, were so severe that they temporarily abandoned the move until they got support from artillery. Lieut.-Col. Moore reported the desperate situation to 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ asking for a barrage to knock out the machine guns.

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<sup>174</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

<sup>175</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.116.

<sup>176</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* 4 September 1918.

<sup>178</sup> Whitton, F E. p.465/

<sup>179</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 September 1918. Note the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade report noted the Advance to Assembly Area commenced at 2:00 a.m.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2.

His request was denied and cruelly, 'the Battalion was ordered to proceed on its original instruction.'<sup>181</sup> The Dubs tried again. 'With great difficulty and a great number of casualties', they pushed on a few metres further towards Ploegsteert along what is now the Rue du Romarin and stopped again near a dyke (Ploegsteertbeek) due to the heavy German machine gun fire.

Zero Hour was scheduled to be at 8:00 a.m.<sup>182</sup> To cover the advance at Zero Hour, a thirty-minute barrage had fallen on Ploegsteert village between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. but had little or no effect in dampening the German machine gun fire. One man who was with the Battalion wrote that the Germans 'had very thick wire erected in front of their position; machine guns seemed to spring up from everywhere, chiefly on our right flank.'<sup>183</sup>

By 9:00 a.m. on 4 September, the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire Fusiliers were reported to be at their starting point and 'to be advancing under a barrage.'<sup>184</sup> They were able to do so because they were assisted by the artillery assigned to the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>185</sup> Only one company of the Lancashires eventually got to their objective. However, the rest of the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 1<sup>st</sup> RDF were still pinned down.<sup>186</sup>

At this point Lieut.-Col. Moore took matters into his own hands, and in fear of his battalion being wiped out, he ordered his men to halt where they were and not move until a covering barrage was set down. As it was, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF had only one battery, 'D' Battery from the 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Royal Field Artillery assigned to cover its advance.<sup>187</sup> By 10:00 a.m., he had lost so many of his two attacking 'W' and 'Y' Companies, that they amalgamated them and called on a company from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers to make up the numbers required for the attack.

Col. Moore eventually got his way. Following a 'conference' between him and Brigadier-General G.R.H. Cheape, it was agreed that the Battalion would attack, 'under a creeping barrage, at 3:00 p.m., with the barrage to come down and rest for five minutes on Big Farm in T 30 c (presumably this was where some of the machine gun fire was coming from), then lift 100 yards (90 metres) every three minutes to Ploegsteert, to remain in Ploegsteert for fifteen minutes then lift.'<sup>188</sup> In fact, the decision to divert artillery from 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack to 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade was made at 29<sup>th</sup> Division HQ.<sup>189</sup>

At 3:00 p.m., the new Zero Hour, the attack commenced 'and was carried out with complete success... All objectives were taken by 4:10 p.m.' The Battalion War Diary noted: 'Assault by the Battalion of Ploegsteert village carried through with the greatest dash and gallantry.'<sup>190</sup> They had taken a line about 180 metres beyond their Ploegsteert objective.<sup>191</sup> When the Battalion got through the wire and in amongst the Germans, according to Wylly, the Germans 'surrendered far too easily.'<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.1.

<sup>182</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

<sup>183</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.118.

<sup>184</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.1.

<sup>185</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2.

<sup>189</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

p.2.

<sup>190</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5 September 1918.

<sup>191</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

p.2.

<sup>192</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.118.

In the fighting to get into Ploegsteert, Lieut. McNulty was killed. His death was reported by an unnamed eyewitness, 'who took part with the Battalion' in the attack on Ploegsteert.<sup>193</sup> Second Lieut. O'Donnell went forward and discovered McNulty out in front. McNulty had already captured two machine gun posts and was in a 'good size house on the main road to Ploegsteert'. McNulty had been sending back messages asking for reinforcements. Second Lieut. O'Donnell sent the witness forward to assist McNulty. The witness wrote:<sup>194</sup>

As soon as he saw me McNulty shouted, 'are there any stretcher-bearers there?' and on running towards him with my runner McNulty had fallen, wounded in the throat by a machine-gun bullet, and when kneeling over him to ask if he had any request to make, my runner, Pte. Coffee was wounded in the wrist beside me. Poor McNulty never spoke. He had only five men left in his platoon; the rest were casualties.

The Germans had been removed from Ploegsteert for the last time. On 5 September, they were reported to be between ninety and 180 metres beyond the eastern side of the village and on the move. 'Guns and transport were clearly heard retiring during the night; light railway also working.'<sup>195</sup>

However, it must be acknowledged, many German machine gunners bravely fought to the bitter end without surrendering. The post-attack report by the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted. 'Throughout the whole operation, the enemy put up a very stubborn fight, particularly the machine gunners who, in the majority of cases, fought their guns to the last.'<sup>196</sup> On this point the late Professor Richard Holmes noted: 'Although the Germans never broke – day after day, machine gun rear guards sacrificed themselves to buy time.'<sup>197</sup> In desperation to hold their ground, some of their men who manned the machine guns that were captured wore Red Cross brassards; suggesting they were members of German Field Ambulances.

It seems the artillery eventually did what they were asked to do. The post-attack report noted it was 'exceptionally good.'<sup>198</sup> The artillery used to help the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in their attack came about only through the availability of weapons after the 88<sup>th</sup> Brigade's capture of Hill 63.<sup>199</sup> Although the artillery support, when it did come, was 'exceptionally good', in assessing the artillery requirements for each brigade's objective, an error of judgement was made in assigning artillery for the task in hand that resulted in the delay of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF attack on Ploegsteert and the loss of men, more costly learning. Indeed, as was now common practice for most fighting units, post operation reports were written in which recommendations were made for future operations based on lessons learned from operations recently carried out. For the operation carried out by 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 4 September, the post-operation report noted that immobile trench mortar batteries were useless; in future they should be mobile and keep up with the attack. Mules were recommended to carry the trench mortars forward. The report acknowledged attack by the Dublins should have been better supported by artillery.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. Pp.116-117.

<sup>195</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2.

<sup>196</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out By 86<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade on 4 / 5 September 1918.

<sup>197</sup> Holmes, Richard. p.210.

<sup>198</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2.

<sup>199</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.203.

In mobile fighting such as what the brigade had gone through, in future more maps should be issued to senior NCOs and more map reading training should be given.<sup>200</sup> These were basic lessons that should have been learned by fighting units by September 1918 which would suggest that learning to fight and win was slow.

The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF estimated they killed 100 German troops during the advance. They also claimed to have captured about 170 prisoners of whom about twenty of these prisoners were killed. The catch also included six officers. Some captured German machine gunners wore Red Cross brassards.<sup>201</sup> No account is made in either the Battalion or Brigade War Diaries as to how and why twenty German prisoners were killed, which was presumably after they had surrendered. Capt. Gillon grimly wrote that the Dublins, seeking revenge for their losses in the morning, 'got well into the Boche with their bayonet at Ploegsteert and slew many of them, so felt their day had not been wasted.'<sup>202</sup> If they were killed by men from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF after their surrender, this was indeed a dark day for the RDF.

The casualties suffered by the Battalion in that hour of combat on 4 September 1918 were just seventeen. The bulk of the casualties were suffered before 3:00 p.m. during the process of assembling for the attack.<sup>203</sup> According to the Battalion war diary, the casualties recorded were: 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. M.J. McNulty KIA; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. S. Owens missing (survived and was with battalion in September 1919); 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. T. N. Darby (Royal Irish Regiment attached) wounded; also 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. T.A. Cooney wounded; twenty-three other ranks killed; eighty-nine other ranks wounded; fourteen missing.<sup>204</sup>

According to CWGC data, between 4 and 7 September 1918, thirty-three men from the Battalion died; twenty-seven were KIA and six DOW. It would seem that ten of the other ranks reported in the war diary casualty list as being wounded later died from their wounds. Of the thirty-three who died between 4 and 7 September, twenty-eight died on the day of the attack, the 4 September. The place of rest or remembrance for the majority of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF men that died are evenly split between the Ploegsteert Memorial of which there are thirteen named on Panel 10 and the Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck in which there are twelve men buried.

In terms of the nationalities of those 1<sup>st</sup> RDF men who died, 62.5% were Irish; 34.5% were English and 3% were Scottish.<sup>205</sup> Some of the men who were killed on 4 September had been previously awarded medals for bravery. For example, 4998 L/Sgt. Philip Doyle from Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow; 11481 Sgt. Richard Gleeson from Paulstown, Co. Kilkenny and 5008 Sgt. John Brooks also from Carlow were previously awarded The Military Medal.<sup>206</sup> Their loss deprived the Battalion of brave experienced soldiers.

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<sup>200</sup> *War Diary 86th Brigade*. Notes on Minor Operation 4 / 5 September 1918.

<sup>201</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2. Note the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade post-attack reported noted that the Brigade had killed at 'a very moderate estimate' about 100 Germans and took about 150 prisoners. This would imply that the RDF did all the 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade killing and captured most of the prisoners also implying the 1<sup>st</sup> Lancashire killed none and captured about twenty Germans. The casualties inflicted and prisoners taken by the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF needs clarification. Moreover, there are no details as to how the twenty prisoners were killed.

<sup>202</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt. p.203.

<sup>203</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix A. Report on Minor Operation Carried Out on 4 / 5 September 1918. p.2.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. See also Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.118.

<sup>205</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>206</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. Pp.177-184.

The youngest recorded Dublin Fusilier who died in the taking of Ploegsteert on 4 September 1918 was 26984 Pte. James Arthur Clarke, a member of 'Y' Coy. from Rathcormac, Co. Cork. He enlisted in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary and was killed in action, age nineteen. He was buried at Trois Arbres Cemetery, Steenwerck, Belgium, grave reference IIM14. The inscription on his headstone is 'God is Love.' Lieut. Michael John McNulty was in command of the leading platoon in 'Y' Coy. A native of Swinford, Co. Mayo, he had previously served in the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF. His mother, Sabina came from No. 10 Hannah Street off Ordsall Lane, Salford in Lancashire. He was thirty-one years of age when killed in action on 4 September and is remembered on Ploegsteert Memorial, Panel 10.

On night of 4 / 5 September, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and went back to tents and bivouacs hurriedly pitched near the old Swindon Camp in Bailleul.<sup>207</sup> Having lost some good men over the previous days, they were given a brief break from pushing the retreating Germans out of France and Flanders.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.p.118.

## Breaking through The Hindenburg Line 3-11 October 1918

During the time the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF spent at Martin Eglise, the German retreat, and the Allied harassment of that retreat in set piece battles such as the Battles of the Lys (9 -29 April 1918); Battles of the Aisne, Marne and Amiens (May-August 1918) and Second Battle of the Somme (8 August- 3 September 1918) all took place with positive outcomes for the Allies. In Flanders, their comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF had contributed to the removal of the Germans from Ploegsteert. Between late September and mid-October, all hands were thus required to continue the final push to break through the Hindenburg Line in a further series of set piece battles which would lead to the Germans signing an armistice in November 1918 and ending the war. Consequently, with this demand for fighting units and to continue the harassment of the Germans, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was transferred from the 94<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 31<sup>st</sup> Division to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division in the XIIIth Corps which also contained the 25<sup>th</sup> Division and the 66<sup>th</sup> Division of General Sir Henry Rawlinson's 4<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>1</sup>

The Battalion's journey from Martin Eglise back to the front line near Nurlu north of Peronne began on Sunday 15 September. The journey began with a route march from Martin Eglise to Arques-la-Bataille where at 10:00 p.m. they entrained for the village of Bouquemaison. Travelling through the night, they arrived at Bouquemaison next morning at 7:15 a.m. and were given breakfast after which they marched to billets at Ivergny about six kilometres northeast of Bouquemaison. They remained at Ivergny for a few days training in tactical exercises and carried out a brigade field day; they also picked up a draft of twenty-four other ranks.

The teaching and learning continued. After Church Parade on Sunday 22 September, the Battalion officers and platoon sergeants were given a lecture on the co-operation of Tanks with infantry by Lieut.-Col. Micklean DSO.<sup>2</sup> According to Tim Travers, 'from July 1918 onwards, the BEF essentially applied two different offensive methods, both of which could potentially save manpower yet at the same time prove effective. The first was the traditional infantry-artillery offensive but utilising very much greater amounts of artillery, machine guns and mortars than ever before. The second was the combined tank-infantry-artillery type offensive.'<sup>3</sup> The combined tank-infantry-artillery offensive tactics proved successful at Amiens in August and so the lessons learned there were passed on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF by Lieut.-Col. Micklean.

At 10:00 a.m. on 26 September, the Battalion was brought by busses to Behancourt, approximately thirty-six kilometres south of Ivergny, where they re-organised on 27 September into Fighting and Administrative Portions with a total strength of thirty-five officers and 884 other ranks. Behancourt is about eighteen kilometres north of le Hamel. In essence they were back in the Somme region in full strength and very near to where they had almost met their demise during the previous March. Next morning on 28 September, the Buses took them on a further forty-five kilometres eastwards closer to the danger zone to the village of Nurlu where they arrived at 9:30 p.m. and bivouacked overnight; moving into more comfortable huts next morning on 29 September.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wylly, H.C. *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.* p.113.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 22 September 1918.

<sup>3</sup> Travers, Tim. p.110.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 15-28 September 1918.

At 9:30 a.m. on 29 September, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ received verbal orders to be battle ready at two hours' notice from midday to move forward. The battalions remained in a state of readiness throughout the afternoon and into the evening in the rain but were not called on.<sup>5</sup> Next morning, 30 September, General Rawlinson ordered the XIIIth Corps to relieve the III Corps in his 4<sup>th</sup> Army; the relief would be carried out at noon on 1 October.<sup>6</sup> All throughout that day, 1 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF stood by at Nurlu awaiting orders. In accordance with General Rawlinson order of Corps rotation, on the night of 1 and 2 October, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division (less artillery) relieved the 18<sup>th</sup> Division holding a line opposite Vendhuile.<sup>7</sup>

On the morning of 2 October, in accordance with the strategy of keeping the pressure on the Germans, Rawlinson ordered the opening attack on the reserve line of the Hindenburg Line known as Bearevoir Line.<sup>8</sup> The Germans had been forced back to the neighbourhood of this Bearevoir Line as a result of the successful operations of August and September. The village of Epehy and surrounding area had been taken from the Germans on 18 September by the 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division and 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisions of Rawlinson's 4<sup>th</sup> Army. To recall, the *Siegfried Stellung* or Hindenburg Line known to the Allies, was not a line, but a series of defensive positions between Arras in the north to just east of Soissons in the south.<sup>9</sup> Its purpose, as Ludendorff declared on 11 December 1916 to General von Kuhl, Chief of the General Staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies, was, 'to be regarded as a factor of safety (against a mishap) and a (voluntary) retirement to it was not intended.'<sup>10</sup> For strategic reasons, the German retirement to the Hindenburg Line took place between 14 March and 15 April 1917.<sup>11</sup> Behind the main defensive positions of the Hindenburg Line were the Hindenburg Support and Reserve Line, respectively. The later was also known as Bearevoir Line. Both were only single lines of trenches with uncompleted wiring.<sup>12</sup>

Much had been known about the Bearevoir Line gained from aerial photographs and reports from repatriated refugees. On 8 August, a defensive scheme, complete in every detail of the lines between the river Oise and Bellicourt, located about fifteen kilometres north of St. Quentin, had been captured at a German headquarters. It was an incredible catch. It contained the location of every dugout, machine-gun emplacement, battle station and headquarters, sound-ranging, flash-spotting, and observation posts, even barrage lines. It also revealed signal communications, electric power installations and ammunition and supply depots, railheads, billets, balloon sheds and landing grounds.<sup>13</sup> The British 4<sup>th</sup> Army was close up to the Bearevoir Line in the south, but near the village of Le Catelet, it was still some distance away. To clear the way for the attack on the Line itself, several preliminary operations had to be undertaken which consisted of a series of attacks between 3 and 8 October 1918.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 29 September 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.*, vol. 5 (London: Imperial War Museum, December 1945). p.138.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.158.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.96.

<sup>10</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1917.*, vol. 1 (London Imperial War Museum 1948). Preface. p.vii.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Preface. p.v.

<sup>12</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.96.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.96.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2-3 October 1918. See also McCance, S. p.158.

At 1:00 p.m. on 2 October, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division headquarters at Lieramont received orders for the Division, in conjunction with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisions, to attack, in a northerly direction and capture a section of line identified on the operational trench map as the Green Line beyond the village of Le Catelet and the high ground on the northern edge of the village. The Green Line objective roughly ran from Macquincourt Farm to Prospect Hill. Later in the afternoon at 3:00 p.m. on 2 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF began their contribution to the BEF's final effort to push the Germans back whence they came with a move up to Tetard Wood relieving the 8<sup>th</sup> East Surrey Regiment in Knoll Trench on the eastern edge of Epehy. Malassise Farm was nearby to the south; a familiar place to a handful of men from the Battalion who were there back in March.

The attack was scheduled to begin at dawn on 3 October.<sup>15</sup> The battle formation of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division for the attack was 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade under Brig.- Gen. R.E. Sugden on the right of the attack, 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Brig.- Gen P. N. Robinson on left using two battalions, one of which was 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF under the command of Major L.C. Byrne MC as a defensive flank along the St. Quentin Canal, the other battalion, the Scottish Horse, in support. The 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade would remain in reserve. The main attack would be carried out by the battalions of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade. Both the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and Scottish Horse in 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade would co-operate in the attack. The objective of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade on 3 October was as stated; the villages of Le Catelet and Guoy nearby with high ground north of these and Prospect Hill which lay just east of Guoy.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the night of 2/ 3 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF stood to arms along Knoll Trench. The attack by the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade began on time at 6:05 a.m. with a creeping barrage supplied by 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery. From an Irish perspective, the leading attack companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling, Fusiliers who had served in the 31<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in Gallipoli and Salonica, now in the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade, were late in forming up and consequently had to rush to catch up with creeping barrage.<sup>17</sup> There were tragic consequences because during the attack they 'suffered severe casualties; two (companies) of them being reduced to thirty rifles apiece'. Alongside the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifle Corps, the Inniskillings 'fought their way into Guoy and Le Catelet, some of the defenders running away, whilst others held out in the cellars and dugouts.'<sup>18</sup> The 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade reported that as early as 9:35 a.m. on 3 October both Le Catelet and Guoy were 'clear of enemy', and, that that troops from the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings were on Prospect Hill. The Green Line was reported taken by 11:00 a.m.<sup>19</sup>

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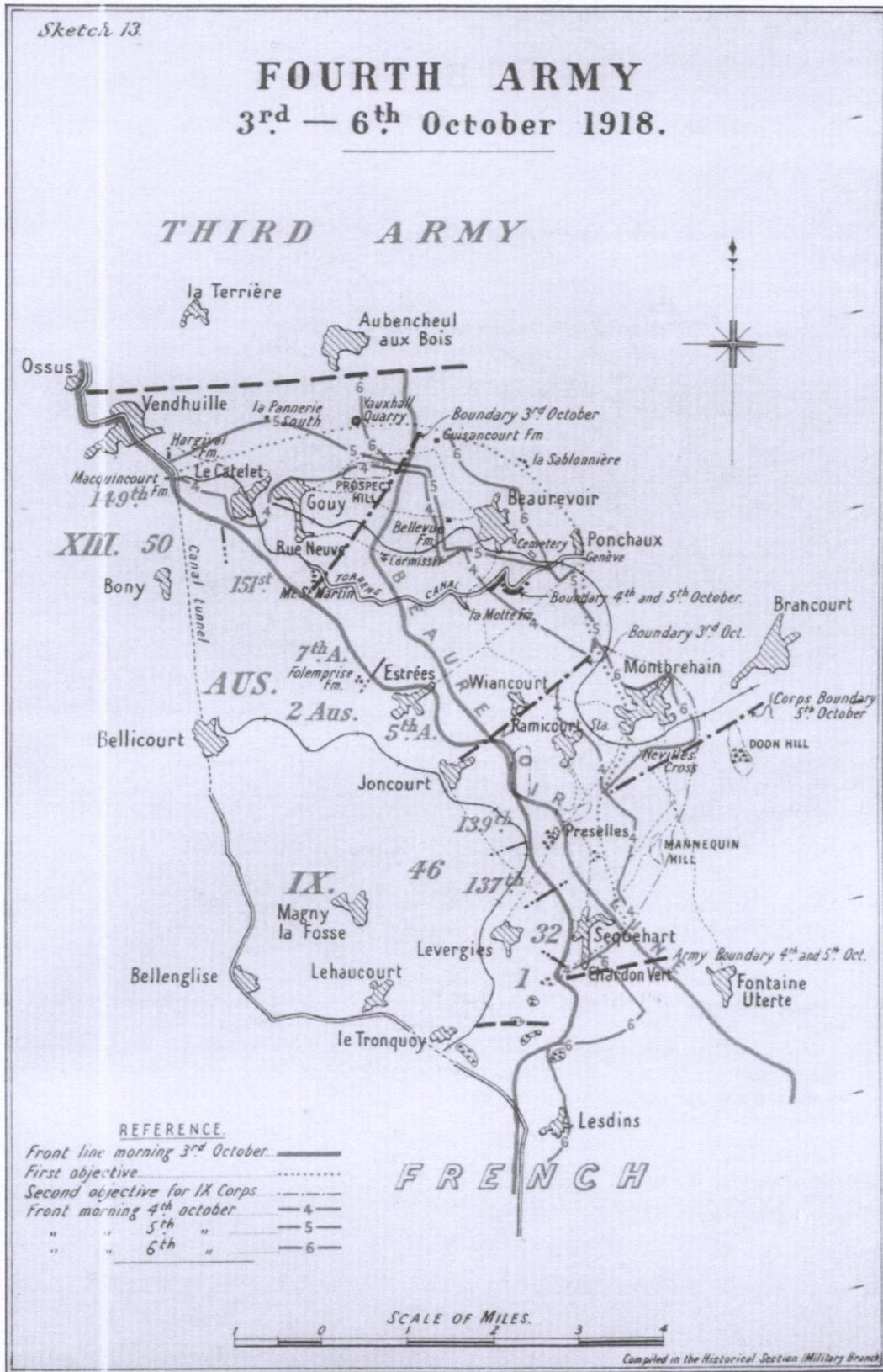
<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918). Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. Section 4.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. WO95/2827/5. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 June 1919). Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918. 13 October 1918.

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>18</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*.p.166.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.



Sketch 13 Fourth Army 3-6 October 1918. See Beaurevoir Line to the east of XIIIth Corps and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Macquincourt Farm.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* Vol.5. p723.

However, it was not all plain sailing. Earlier in the morning at about 8:45 a.m., in support of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in their advance from Knoll Trench came under heavy machine gun fire and was pinned down unable to move. Much of the machine gun fire and sniping came from Putney.<sup>21</sup> Le Catelet and Gouy were reported being clear of Germans in the morning. However, both were counter-attacked and penetrated by Germans at around 2:15 p.m. resulting in the late afternoon in a loss of some ground on the western outskirts of Gouy and north of Le Catelet.<sup>22</sup> The reports of Le Catelet and Gouy being clear of Germans were erroneous. The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade reported at 9:25 p.m. that the northern slope of Prospect Hill was held but that Le Catelet and Gouy were not.<sup>23</sup>

There seemed to be a question about the total occupancy of Le Catelet and Gouy on the night of 3 / 4 October. However, the taking of these positions north of Le Catelet and Gouy by the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade allowed both the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and Scottish Horse to move up to a new position along north bank of the Escaut (Escaut or Schelde in Flemish) River at Vendhuile and The Knob trench respectively in preparation for a continuance of the attack. Here they remained throughout the rest of 3 October, occasionally being hit by gas shells and machine gun fire from nearby woods running northeast of Macquincourt (Maclincourt) Farm and from Hargival Farm on the eastern side of the Escaut northwest of La Catelet.<sup>24</sup> The Battalion Headquarters followed up and moved from Tetard Wood to Lone Tree Trench which was an extension of Knoll Trench running south.

The 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade had a successful but costly morning on 3 October. Despite the setback with the German counterattack during the afternoon, when things had settled down, by 7:00 p.m., troops of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade were 'firmly established north of Gouy and Le Catelet.'<sup>25</sup> The attempt to push through to the Beaurevoir Line at this location was held up on 3 October. At 6:15 p.m. that evening, orders were received at 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ to resume the attack next morning.<sup>26</sup> During the late evening of 3 October, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade was relieved by the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade brought up from reserve who would continue with the attack.<sup>27</sup>

Although not referred to in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary, according to CWGC, eight members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were killed in action on 3 October 1918 more than likely from the gas shelling or machine gun fire coming from Hargival Farm.<sup>28</sup> The youngest member of the Battalion recorded killed was 40236 L/Cpl. Morgan Arthur Wheatley from Sherwood Rise, Nottinghamshire. He had previously served in the Sherwood Foresters. He was twenty years of age when he died and because either he was blown to bits or his body got lost in the subsequent fighting, he along with three of his comrades are remembered on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial, Panel 10.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Trench Map titled Montbrehain. Scale 1:20,000.

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. See *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Hand written report titled 'Story of Battle 3/10/18 Appendix A'.

<sup>24</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.166.

<sup>25</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.114.

<sup>26</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>27</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.167.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*. p.166. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. Intelligence Report for 2 October 1918.

<sup>29</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

The resumption of the attack on 4 October opened with the usual creeping barrage that began in darkness at 6:10 a.m. in a thick fog and haze which made observation difficult for the Germans but assisted the attacking troops.<sup>30</sup> To add to the firepower of the attack, the OC of the 50<sup>th</sup> Bn Machine Gun Corps (Lieut.-Col. H.H. Hoare DSO) arranged for as many guns as he could muster to co-operate in the advance. The infantry attack this time was led by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers of 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade assisted by two battalions of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF again on left flank making ground towards Hargival Farm.<sup>31</sup> According to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade post-battle report, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had occupied Quincampoix Mill during the night of 3 / 4 October.<sup>32</sup>

The OH noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, who like their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, had passed through the familiar ground of Epehy back in March, had taken the village of La Pannerie South, a small village about one kilometre north of Le Catelet and with costly bitter street fighting, had cleared the greater portion of the village by 9:45 a.m. on 4 October.<sup>33</sup> There they remained for the remaining of the day. However, on the left of the attack in their effort to gain the slopes north of the village and Hargival Farm, things didn't go too well for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Both battalions were again held up by machine gun fire coming from Hargival Farm and Richmond Copse.<sup>34</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers suffered severe casualties losing nine officers one of which was their commanding officer Lieut.-Col. E.H. Nicholson, DSO and thirty-two other ranks.<sup>35</sup> Pinned down, the situation remained stagnant for much of the morning. There was some success however when 2<sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, working around the north of Le Catelet captured a strong post 'which had materially assisted in holding up the advance in the morning' taking 250 prisoners, five machine guns and several trench mortars.

All throughout the afternoon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had been pushing out patrols from The Knob to see if there was room for movement.<sup>36</sup> At 4:00 p.m., 'D' Coy. of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF attacked Macquincourt (Maclincourt) Farm nearby but were driven back to almost where they started and suffered a loss of four men missing.<sup>37</sup> One of those missing was 21956 Pte. James Sheridan age twenty-six from Mullyconnor, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. He had previously served in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and died of wounds; he is buried at Doingt Communal Cemetery, grave reference IIIIE24.<sup>38</sup> Determined to push on, a two-hour heavy bombardment was carried out between 5:30 p.m. and 7: 30 p.m. on Richmond Copse, Richmond Quarry and Hargival Farm. The bombardment did its job because late in the evening Major L.C. Byrne led his men in the dark and successfully took what was left of Hargival Farm.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>31</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>32</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>33</sup> McCance, S. Pp. 158-159. See also. Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.170.

<sup>34</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.114.

<sup>35</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.170.

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. See Map 'B' *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2.

<sup>37</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.170. See also Wyllly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.114.

<sup>38</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.Cwgc.Org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918). Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

Note. No mention of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF taking Hargival Farm is made in the Battalion War Diary for 4 October. With this late evening success, other battalions which had made some progress throughout the day such as the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires of the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade on top of Prospect Hill; the 4<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifle Corps and 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry capturing Hill 28, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters, assisted by the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires, captured La Pannerie South, made contact with each other and established a new line, the Brown Line objective.<sup>40</sup>

Early next morning at 5:45 a.m. on 5 October, using men from 'C' and 'D' Companies, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF attacked and captured Macquincourt (Maclincourt) Farm. Lieut. Poulter was reported to have done 'very good work' but his brother officer Lieut. Sheppard fell wounded.<sup>41</sup> During the night of 4 / 5 October, the Germans had evacuated the Hindenburg Line north of Le Catelet.<sup>42</sup> Patrols from other battalions in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade reported that as far north as La Terriere had been evacuated by the Germans.<sup>43</sup> Later in the morning, verbal instructions were received at 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ 'to concentrate ALL units of the Brigade' in preparation for the next move; which was to relieve troops of the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Thus, throughout the afternoon up to about 4:30 p.m., the battalions of the Brigade assembled in the following places. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers assembled at May Copse; Scottish Horse south west of Vendhuile and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF along with Trench Mortar Battery assembled at Macquincourt (Maclincourt) Farm.<sup>44</sup> The remainder of the evening was quiet.<sup>45</sup>

There seems to be some confusion in dates in the taking of Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill between the war diaries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 50<sup>th</sup> Division. The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF states that the attack on Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill began in darkness at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of 6 October.<sup>46</sup> The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade report on the events of 3 and 4 October noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF occupied Quincampoix Mill on the northern edge of Le Catelet on the night of 3 / 4 October and that Hargival Farm 'was in our possession by 15 hours' on 4 October.<sup>47</sup> The 50<sup>th</sup> Division war diary account notes that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took Hargival Farm on 4 October 1918.<sup>48</sup>

The following is an account of the taking of Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill on 6 October according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary. Owing to some unexplained delay, the attack resumed at 5:30 a.m. However, the artillery barrage covering the attack began at 6:00 a.m. and consequently as usual caught some of the attacking Dubs in No Man's Land thus holding the attack up. This should never have happened at this stage in the war. As a prevention of this occurring, 'in order that every possible step is taken to secure accuracy of fire on the day of attack,' a set of five standing orders was presented by XIIIth Corps Artillery for the safety of infantry in attack. A point on the Royal Artillery's learning curve. Such standing orders were for example that all gun sights must be tested before attack and at intervals during the attack 'by means of Clinometers'; also climatic changes had to be noted.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. See also *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. WO95/2836/2. (London: The National Archive, 1 July 1918 to 31 May 1919). 4 October 1918.

<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5 October 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>43</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5 October 1918. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. Section 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 6 October 1918.

<sup>47</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>48</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Section 1. Operation Order No. 255. – Artillery Standing Order for an attack.

With the assistance of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the objectives, i.e. Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill, were taken along with some 200 prisoners. They then pushed out to La Terriere without encountering any resistance. That night, i.e., 6 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was relieved by a battalion from the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division. Upon their relief, the Dubs went back to the vicinity of Lone Tree Trench. Cookers were brought up for the men to have a late-night feed.<sup>50</sup>

According to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade report, the operation carried out by 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 6 October was not in taking Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill but as follows. At 3:50 p.m. on 6 October, orders were received from divisional headquarters for 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade to relieve the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade along the western side of Masniere-Beaurevoir Line. The line taken over was roughly between Guisancourt Farm and Villers Farm, both farms were on the eastern side of the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line and occupied by the Germans. Vauxhall Quarry lay roughly in the middle on the western now British occupied side. The orders specifically issued to Scottish Horse and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were to:<sup>51</sup>

Push out patrols, seize trench on east side of the wire of the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line, to occupy this as our main battle position and to establish an observation line in the support trench. 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers were also ordered to attempt to capture of Villers Farm, rushing it with one company if possible. The thickness of the wire and lack of gaps prevented those tasks being carried out.

The 'battle position' was essentially their starting point from which the next attack would begin on the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line beyond which lay Villers Farm. None of this was mentioned in the war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF for 6 October. Again, according to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary, the Battalion was busy taking Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill on 6 October after which they were withdrawn to the vicinity of Lone Tree Trench.

Regardless of which account is true, the reality was that by early on the morning of 6 October, Hargival Farm and Quincampoix Mill were taken and the well-defended Hindenburg Line was crossed too, west of Le Catelet. On the eastern slope of Prospect Hill lay the wire of Masniere-Beaurevoir Line beyond which was the next objective, Villers Farm. But the good news was that a 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade report issued at 8:45 a.m. on 6 October noted that 'the enemy has been driven out of Beaurevoir and the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line is unoccupied south of Guisancourt Farm.'<sup>52</sup>

During the night of 6 / 7 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF marched in darkness from the vicinity of Lone Tree Trench to La Pannerie and went into support of 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade. Note. Lone Tree Trench and Macquincourt (Maclincourt) Farm are near each other. Patrols of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade pushed out through the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line to reconnoitre Villers Farm and attempted to take it.<sup>53</sup> One of these patrols was from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. At dawn, 'C' Coy. supported by 'A' Coy. attempted to enter Villers Farm, 'by peaceful penetration by gaps reported in wire.'<sup>54</sup> There were no gaps in the wire. 14938 Corporal Frank Noakes from Salisbury, Wiltshire who had previously served with the Wiltshire Regiment, although twice being wounded, bravely attempted to cut a gap in the wire but was killed. For his bravery he was recommended to receive the Victoria Cross, which he never got.<sup>55</sup> His body was never found, and he is remembered on the Vis-En-Artois Memorial, Panel 10.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 6 October 1918.

<sup>51</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 149 Brigade Order No. 34. 6 October 1918 at 8:45 a.m.

<sup>53</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 October 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 7 October 1918.

<sup>56</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.Cwgc.Org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

A second attempt to take Villers Farm was made at 9:00 a.m. supported by artillery which also failed. The Brigade Diary noted: 'Our front was kept under artillery and machine gun fire throughout the day; all movement in the open became impossible. Attacking troops dug in.'<sup>57</sup> The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack on Villers Farm and Villers Outreaux had failed, consequently the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF remained at La Pannerie for the remainder of the day until about 5:00 p.m. when, as support for the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade attack, arranged for next day, 8 October, they 'moved forward under heavy shell fire and dug in on the high ground to the left of Vauxhall Quarry.'<sup>58</sup> At 10:00 p.m. the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade relieved the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the later going into divisional support behind Vauxhall Quarry.<sup>59</sup> Lieut. Elvey and Lieut. Sutherland were wounded during the day. Lieut. Sutherland subsequently died of his wounds; he had previously served with the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF. Age thirty, he came from Broughty Ferry in Dundee, Scotland. He is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery, grave reference IID3.<sup>60</sup>

From an Irish perspective, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers also took part in the attack on Masniere-Beaurevoir Line on 7 October. They attacked Guisancourt Farm and they too had no success. They discovered the wire in front of them wasn't cut either and several men tried to get through it but failed. Captain J O'Brien MC who had served with the Munsters in 1896 and throughout the whole war, was killed trying to breach the wire facing Guisancourt Farm. They too remained pinned down all throughout the day by German artillery. Interestingly, according to McCance, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters received orders that they would be relieved by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at 5:30 p.m. No mention of this is made in either the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF or 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade diaries and the relief did not in fact take place.<sup>61</sup>

Early next morning, on 8 October, under an artillery barrage, the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry under Capt. A.E. Starling, MC of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade attacked and captured Villers Farm. At the same time the 115<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked Villers Outreaux.<sup>62</sup> The wire that held up the Dubs and Munsters on 7 October was still there on 8 October and held up the attack on Villers Outreaux. To provide a reserve cover for the 115<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and Scottish Horse were sent to a sugar factory (Trench Map ref T.14.b.0.6) on the eastern edge of the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line on the southwestern road entering Villers Outreaux and a place called the Crucifix located at cross-roads on the southern edge of Villers Outreaux (T.15.c.7.0) respectively. However, they were not needed as the 115<sup>th</sup> Brigade had completed their task and by 8:15 a.m. Villers Outreaux was reported to be clear of Germans. Later in the morning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dubs along with all other battalions in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division were again ordered to concentrate at various locations in Le Catelet and Gouy for relief and go into Corps Reserve. For the present, they had done their bit in pushing back the German lines eastwards. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF assembled by Guisancourt Farm directly south of Villers Farm where they re-organised and bivouacked for the night.<sup>63</sup>

The Pioneers and Field Companies from the Royal Engineers followed up behind the infantry clearing roads and collecting material that would be needed for bridging the canal in the next operation. They also cut lanes through the wire in places along the Masniere-Beaurevoir Line to allow faster movement of men and traffic. From an Irish perspective, the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment (Pioneers) under the command of Acting Lieut.- Col. G.W. Hawkes, MC participated in this work.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918

<sup>58</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 October 1918.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*. 7 October 1918.

<sup>60</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org)

<sup>61</sup> McCance, S. p.160.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 October 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. Narrative of Operations from 3 to 11 October 1918. Note. Capt. Starling had taken command of the KOYLI after Major G. De Hoghtan was wounded.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>64</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918. Royal Engineers and Pioneers. Note the Filed Companies of Royal Engineers attached to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division for these operation between 1 and 11 October 1918 were the, 41<sup>th</sup> and 447<sup>th</sup> Field Companies along with the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment (Pioneers).

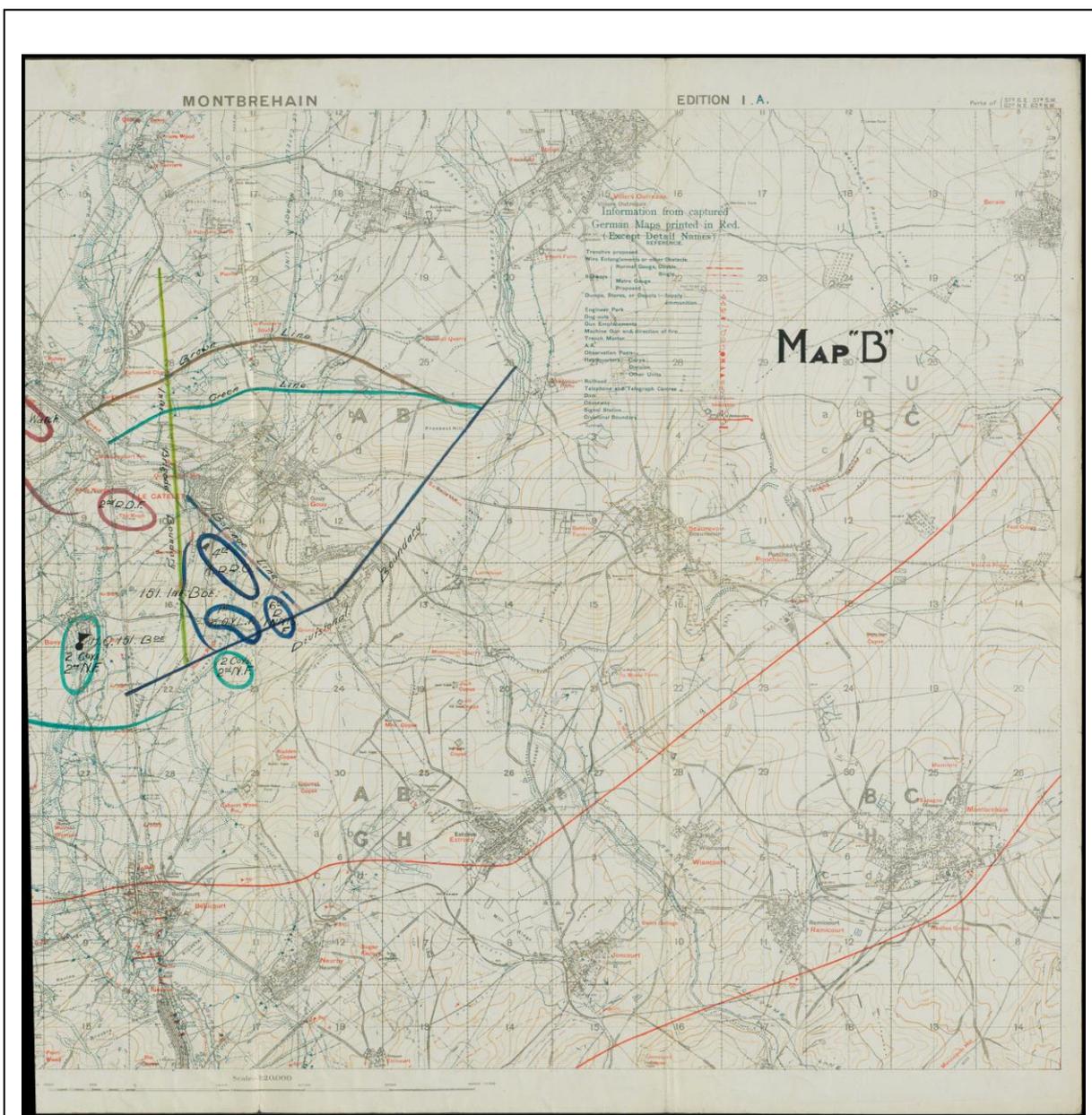
Perhaps a hint as to why Villers Farm and Villers Outreaux fell relatively easily on the morning of 8 October may lie in a couple of words written in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade report that despite their bravery, the Germans the King's Own faced and fought were in a state of 'low morale.'<sup>65</sup> They had had enough.<sup>66</sup> The distance between Lone Tree Trench (picking Unicorn Cemetery) and the Villers Farm (near Villers Outreaux on the road D76A south of Petit Villers) is about ten kilometres. Within that space laid the Hindenburg and Beaurevoir Lines. The Germans knew well, that if these lines fell, the Allies would face very little resistance beyond them; hence their determination to defend them to the last man; and bravely they did. Open country now faced the 4<sup>th</sup> Army that 'consisted of open undulating country devoid of hedges and free from wire.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade from 3 to 11 October 1918.

<sup>66</sup> For discussion of German perspective on events at Le Catelet between 2 and 11 October 1918 see Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. Pp.181-182.

<sup>67</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.115.



Disposition of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 4 October 1918 at The Knob at Square 10 in section A on southwestern side of Le Catelet.

Between 3 and 11 October 1918, the casualty count, either killed in action or died of wounds for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was one officer, Lieut. William Sutherland and thirty-nine other ranks.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, there is no Other Ranks casualty data in the relevant war diaries for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade; there is casualty data for the officers between 1 and 14 October 1918 for the 150<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigades. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers had the highest officer casualties in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 1 and 14 October 1918. See Table 13.<sup>69</sup> Considering the physical challenges, they faced along the Hindenburg Line and others, the losses were remarkably low. The majority, some twenty-two or 56% of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF killed or died between 2 and 11 October 1918 occurred on 7 October in the attack on Villers Farm. Moreover, the majority, twenty-five of the thirty-nine, 64%, were English who had previously served in English regiments such as The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, The Royal West Kent Regiment, The East Yorkshire Regiment and The Wiltshire Regiment.<sup>70</sup>

The Main Dressing Station run by the 1/3<sup>rd</sup> Northumberland Field Ambulance that tended to the dying and wounded of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 3 and 11 October 1918 was initially at Villers Faucon and as the attack progressed, moved to St. Emile. The Walking Wounded had to find their way to the Walking Wounded Post on the road to Nurlu. As the advance progressed, these dressing stations moved up with the advance. Ambulance cars ferried the more seriously wounded from specified posts to the Main Dressing Station at St. Emile. Between the 3 and 9 October, the field ambulances attached to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division during their operations on the Bearevoir Line treated approximately 1,505 wounded men. They also treated 160 wounded German prisoners. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division captured thirty-two German officers and 1,408 other ranks. 'Great use was made' of some of these German prisoners, 'who carried large numbers of our wounded from forward posts to rear posts.'<sup>71</sup>

As mentioned, many times before in this text, most if not all arms of the BEF improved their operating procedures throughout the war by learning from their mistakes. The medics learned too, particularly the lesson in getting wounded men treated as quickly as possible away from the danger zone to a treatment centre thus not allowing delays in time to worsen a wound or blocking the line of treatment from Advance Dressing Stations to Main Dressing Stations. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division post-battle medical report stated that 'the general scheme of things was based on the rapid evacuation from the forward area.'<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>69</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Section 2. Casualties (Officers) 1<sup>st</sup> Phase 1-14 October 1918. p.12.

<sup>70</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>71</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. Medical Arrangements.

<sup>72</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 3 October to 11 October 1918. Medical Arrangements.

Table 13  
50<sup>th</sup> Division Officer Casualties 1-14 October 1918.

Brigade	Battalion	Officers killed in action	Officers wounded in action
149 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers	1	1
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers	No data	No data
	13 <sup>th</sup> (Scottish Horse) Black Watch	3	10
150 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers	4	9
	7 <sup>th</sup> Wiltshire Regiment	3	2
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers	5	13
151 <sup>st</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers	4	8
	1 <sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	3	8
	4 <sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifle Corps	4	10
Total		27	61

### Back to Le Cateau, October 1918



2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Jack Boulter  
2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

During the night of 8 / 9 October, the Germans began a further retirement along a wide front, part of which faced the 4<sup>th</sup> Army. The overall front from which they withdrew was roughly between St. Quentin in the south to Valenciennes in the north, about eighty kilometres. The OH noted that the withdrawal was from the river Oise, about ten kilometres south of St. Quentin in the south to the Sensee Canal in the north.

Along the way they abandoned Cambrai and fell back to another defensive line termed The Hermann Position which for most part existed mostly on paper only. It had two parts. Part 1 of The Hermann Position ran from Le Cateau to St. Souplet; Part 2 ran about six kilometres behind it along the Sambre – Oise Canal south of Landrecies and between the villages of Bousies and Fontaine au Bois. <sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, from the XIIIth Corps perspective and in particular the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, a segment of the Hermann Position ran east of the River Selle from Le Cateau north to St. Souplet in south, about seven kilometres. Along their retreat eastwards, the Germans left rear guards in places the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were once briefly familiar with on the way into Le Cateau from the west, such as Montigny-en-Cambresis and Ligny-en-Cambresis which from recent experience presented more challenges and resistance to the Divisions in XIIIth Corps. <sup>2</sup>

As the Germans withdrew on 9 October, late in the afternoon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF also withdrew back to billets in Gouy. McCance noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters spent the morning of 9 October burying their dead at Gouy with their chaplain Fr. Morrissey officiating. <sup>3</sup> On 10 October the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF formed up with the rest of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the Gouy to Beaurevoir Road (D28) and were taken by a convoy of buses to Marez which is about eighteen kilometres northeast of Gouy. They marched on a further five kilometres or so to billets in Maurois near Honnechy in bright sunshine. <sup>4</sup> The early part of the morning was reported as being ‘cold and raw.’ A light drizzle fell but it cleared towards noon and brightened by late afternoon. <sup>5</sup>

Next morning on 11 October, while at Maurois, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF War Diary noted that the Battalion was, ‘Presented with a tricolour (French) by Cure of Maurois. Spent night in billets.’ <sup>6</sup> For the remaining days of the war, which was one month to the day away, ‘the flag with R.D.F. emblazoned on it, was always carried as the Battalion Headquarters flag.’ <sup>7</sup> Before they left Maurois for Honnechy on 12 October, their billets were cleaned; the men were ordered to leave their billets ‘clean and sanitary.’ In a somewhat morbid tone, perhaps reflecting the dreadful place they were in, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade order which covered the move from Maurois to Honnechy noted. ‘Any dead horses or soldiers that are found in the vicinity of Units’ areas will be buried as soon as possible.’ <sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. See Sketch 29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.Pp.212,228-229,

<sup>3</sup> McCance, S. p.160.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Section 5. Operation Order No. 255. 9 October 1918.

<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 10 October 1918.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11October 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.116.

<sup>8</sup> No. 44. Dated 12 October 1918.



The WW1 war memorial in the grounds of St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Donnybrook, Dublin.

Their move was due to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division relieving the 25<sup>th</sup> Division on the night of 11 / 12 October. On arrival at Honnechy, each man was allocated a place in a house cellar in the village. The 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade went into the front line; the 149<sup>th</sup> in support and 151<sup>st</sup> in reserve.<sup>9</sup> Essentially the Brigade and Division were keeping on the heels of the German rear guard in their retreat eastwards.

It was on this brief march from Maurois to Honnechy on the afternoon of 12 October 1918 that Capt. William Pedlow was killed and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter was fatally wounded. The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF noted; '12 October 1918. Maurois. 3:00 p.m. moved to Honnechy. Captain Pedlow killed and Lieutenants Boulter and Poulter wounded, the former died of wounds at Roisel.'<sup>10</sup> Lieut. E. Poulter survived his wounds. There is no mention in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary of any German shelling during the short march from Maurois to Honnechy. It is noted in 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter's file at the National Archives, London, that he died from gunshot wounds received in action on 15 October 1918.<sup>11</sup> The chances are that it was German rifle or machine gun fire that killed Capt. Pedlow outright and inflicted fatal wounds on 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter. Where that fire came from is not noted.

William Pedlow came from No 59 Anglesea Road in Ballsbridge, Dublin. He was twenty-four years of age when he died on 12 October 1918. His parents were William and Marianne. Their house in Ballsbridge is opposite of St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Donnybrook, Dublin. His name is on the WW1 war memorial in the church grounds. Capt. Pedlow is buried in Honnechy British Cemetery, grave reference IB66.

Jack Edward Hewitt Boulter was born in India in 1895. His father was in the army and he may have been stationed in India when Jack was born. In 1913, Jack lived at No 21 Stamer Street off the South Circular Road, Dublin.<sup>12</sup> On 23 May 1913, Jack joined the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at the age of eighteen years and two months. Before he enlisted, he worked as a Clerk, more than likely in Dublin and was a member of the Church of England. He signed up at the Recruitment Offices in No 24 Great Brunswick Street, (Pearse Street) Dublin. When the UK entered the war on 4 August 1914, Jack had been promoted to the rank of full Corporal and was with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF when they left Gravesend and arrived at Boulogne in France with the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, BEF.<sup>13</sup> Jack served all through the war and came through some of the fiercest fighting the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had been involved in; such as Le Cateau / Honnechy in late August 1914; the German gas attack on Mouse Trap Farm in April and May 1915; The Somme in 1916; Messines and Passchendaele in June and August 1917. As a Company Quarter Master Sergeant (CQMS) he was posted back to the RDF Depot in Naas on 12 October 1917. One month later, on 10 November 1917, he was sent to No 18 Officer's Cadet Battalion at Prior Park, Bath.

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. 25<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery Order No. 291. 11 October 1918.

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. See page. WO 95 2831-1-25.jpg. Note. Edwin Poulter's brother, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Wilfred Forman Poulter, RFC 24<sup>th</sup> Squadron, is buried in Honnechy Cemetery, grave reference 11.D.14. He died on 6 March 1918, age nineteen.

<sup>11</sup> *Boulter, Jack Edward. 2nd Lieut. 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO 374/7871. (London: The National Archives, 21 October 1918). The National Archives, London file on 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Jack Edward Hewitt Boulter MC of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers contains some 81 pages. The contents are made up mainly of documents relating to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter's outstanding credits and debits accounts; his Will; his attestation papers; army record sheets, a couple of letters from his father etc.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

He was commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the RDF on 30 January 1918 and sent to the Regimental Depot at Naas, Co. Kildare where he was temporarily attached the 3<sup>rd</sup> RDF. The officer that recommended Jack for a commission in the field was the then 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF Commanding Officer, Major Standish Smithwick, dated 1 September 1917.<sup>14</sup> The first mention of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary is on 12 October 1918.<sup>15</sup>

To treat his wounds, Jack was taken back to No 53 Casualty Clearing Station at Roisel which is about thirty-five kilometres south west of Maurois.<sup>16</sup> Jack Boulter died at the 53<sup>rd</sup> CCS on 15 October 1918, 'from gunshot wounds compound fracture of the left thigh'<sup>17</sup> He was buried in Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension nearby. His grave reference number is I B 12. He was twenty-three years of age when he died. It seems 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Boulter, as he was designated a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary, was awarded his Military Cross during the month of October 1918; possibly in the battalion's action at Hargival Farm or Villers Farm. The war diary noted: 'Awards for gallantry in the Field during operations of October and November were awarded to the undermentioned of the Battalion... MC to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J.E.H. Boulter.'<sup>18</sup> The citation of his Military Cross medal is in the London Gazette dated 15 February 1919. Unfortunately, the citation makes no reference as to how he was awarded the Military Cross.<sup>19</sup>

By the time Jack Boulter died on 15 October, his comrades were on the western edges of the River Selle along a line from Le Cateau southwards through St. Benin to St. Souplet. The next major offensive operation undertaken by the 4<sup>th</sup> Army would be, 'to maintain the pressure on the enemy' in pushing them eastwards beyond the River Selle and Le Cateau, and 'to increase the difficulties of his (the Germans) withdrawal.'<sup>20</sup> Le Cateau and its surrounding countryside would have been familiar to Jack and some of his comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. The offensive was another one of the set-piece offensives that made up the so called Hundred Days Offensive. It became known as The Battle of the Selle which began on 17 October and ended on 25 October 1918. The shoe was now on the other foot and the hunter in August 1914 became the hunted in October 1918.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 12 October 1918.

<sup>16</sup> *Boulter, Jack Edward. 2nd Lieut. 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*..Appendix to War diary November 1918. See page.

<sup>19</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.172. See also *The London Gazette*. 15 February 1919. p.2372. Supplement 31183 14 February 1919. On Saturday 15 September 2018, I had the privilege and honour of laying a wreath at the grave of Jack Boulter with his family.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Preliminary Instructions No.1 14 October 1918.

## The Battle of the Selle

### The Objectives

The main objectives of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army were ambitious founded on the feeling in British GHQ that, 'such was the demoralisation of the German troops that their resistance might collapse at any time.'<sup>1</sup> As imaginary lines on a trench map, the objectives were the Hermann Positions Part 1 and 2. In terms of the XIIIth Corps and specifically the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, their objectives were essentially:<sup>2</sup>

To cross the River Selle, attack the enemy's position on the east bank of, and on the high ground beyond that river, to work northwards up the east bank and railway line as far as the southern outskirts of Le Cateau, clearing the Railway Station and Factory Buildings in that vicinity...the final objective was... Basual.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Division were assigned three sub-objectives with their attack which would take place in three waves of advancing infantry as usual under artillery barrages. The first objective (referred to as an Intermediate Objective) was assigned to 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade. This objective line ran along the railway south of Le Cateau parallel with the river Selle through the small village of St. Benin on to St. Souplet. It ran just below the top of the slope up from the river.<sup>3</sup>

The second objective (the Red Line referred to on Operation Map 'B' as First Objective) ran roughly from east of Le Cateau southwards to the west of Mazinghien. This was assigned to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade (2<sup>nd</sup> RDF) after the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade had taken their objective.

The third objective (the dotted Red Line referred to on Operation Map 'B' as Second Objective) ran roughly from east of Basual southwards to the east side of Mazinghien. This final objective was assigned to the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>4</sup> There would be a pause of three hours on the second objective before the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade would move off to take their objective. This was to ensure a coordinated advance with the Americans on their right.<sup>5</sup>

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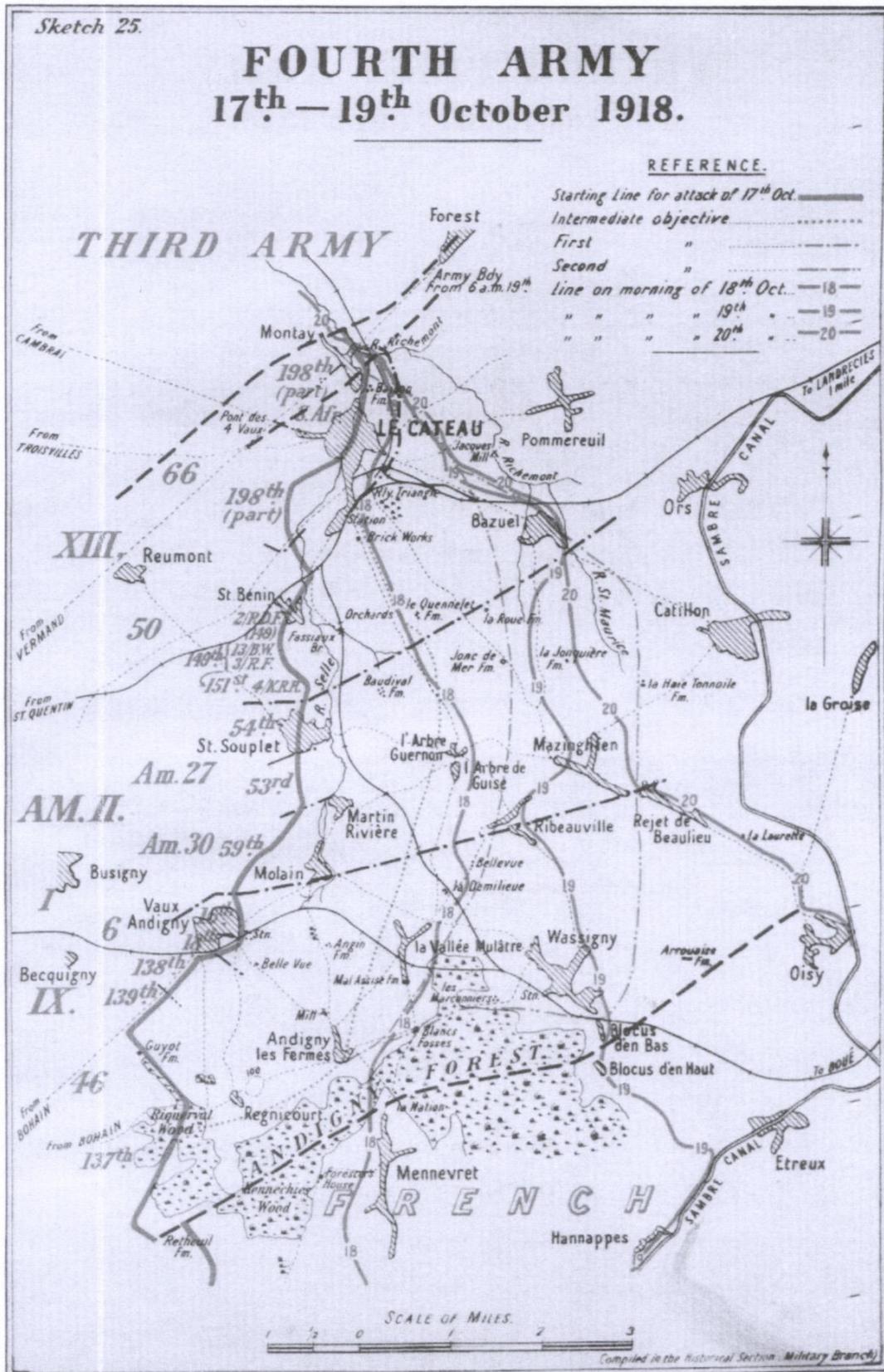
<sup>1</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.298.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* Brigade Operation Order No.45. 16 October 1918. Other spelling of Basual is Bazuel.

<sup>3</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.297.

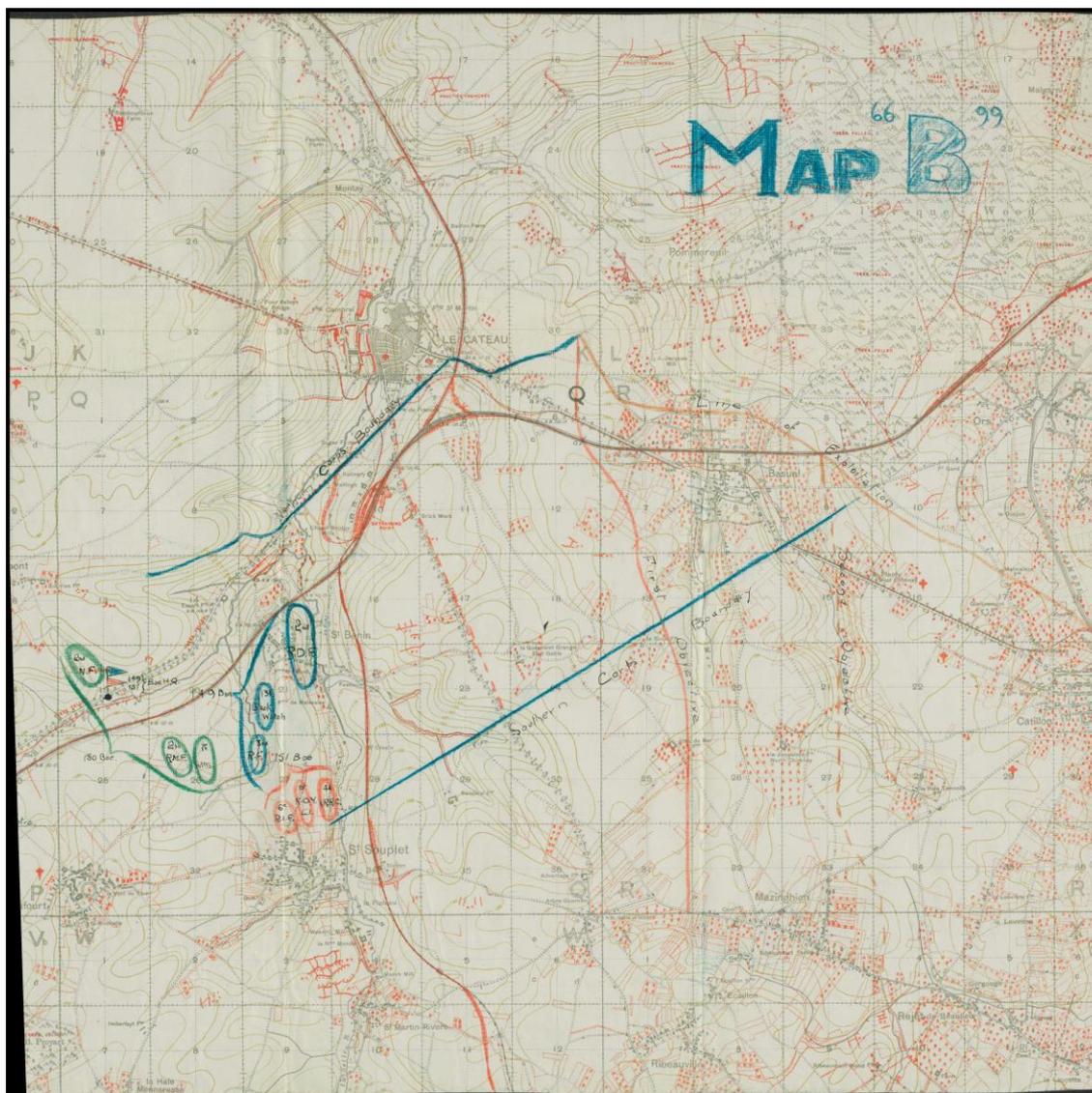
<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* Operation Map 'B'. Note.

<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/5. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918). Division Preliminary Instructions No. 1. 15 October 1918.

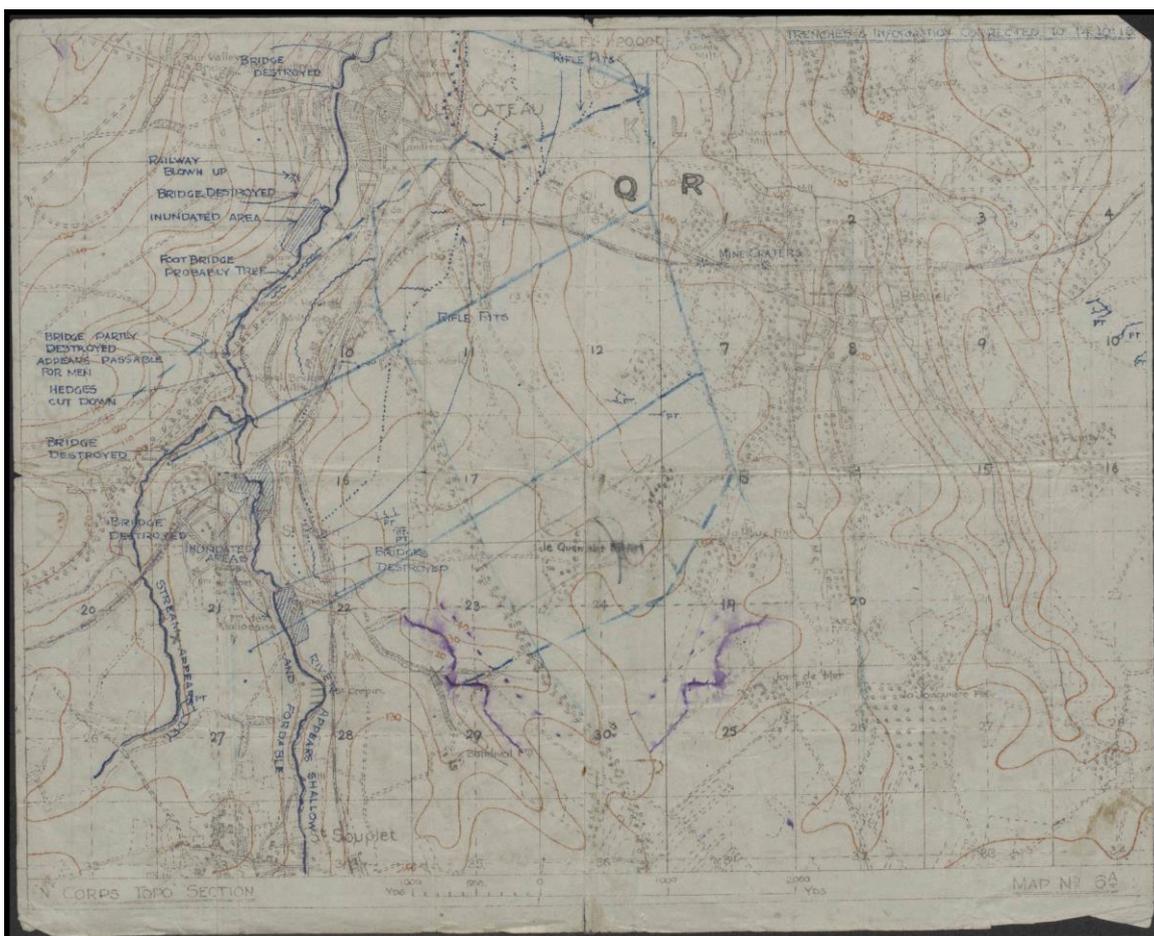


Sketch 25 Fourth Army 17-19 October 1918. See 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at St. Benin south of Le Cateau.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* Vol.5. p.735



Location of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade between St. Benin and St Souplet at dawn on 17 October 1918.



Location of bridges across the River Selle 17 October 1918.  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed Selle just below St. Benin at Square 22 Section Q.

## The Teams

The order of battle for the 4<sup>th</sup> Army attack would be XIIIth Corps in centre, the 27<sup>th</sup> American Division (American II Corps) on the right and V Corps, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army on left.<sup>7</sup> The XIIIth Corps order of attack on 17 October would be with the 66<sup>th</sup> Division on left of attack and 50<sup>th</sup> Division on right of attack. The 25<sup>th</sup> Division would be kept in reserve.<sup>8</sup>

As stated, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division would attack with three infantry brigades. Both the Intermediate or dotted Red Line and Red Line would be taken by the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade on right of attack followed by 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade on left. The 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade would follow up and take the final objective, Basual, after the previous objectives were taken. According to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade Operation Order No 45 dated 16 October 1918, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade order of attack would be 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers on right; 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in centre and Scottish Horse on left.<sup>9</sup> However, according to 50<sup>th</sup> Division Operational Map 'B', the order of attack was actually 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on left, Scottish Horse in centre and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers on right.<sup>10</sup>

Plans to achieve these objectives.

The attack on the Hermann Position Part 1 between Le Cateau in the north to St. Souplet in the south would begin on Zero Day, 17 October 1918 and Zero hour would be 5:20 a.m.<sup>11</sup> The plan of attack was set out in the usual Preliminary Instructions document prepared by the staff of XIIIth Corps and issued to 50<sup>th</sup> Division on 14 and 15 October. The Preliminary Instructions set down how these objectives were going to be taken in terms of the use of artillery, infantry, air support, communications, and treatment of wounded and prisoners. It gave instruction on brigade and battalion assembly positions prior to Zero hour. For example, the assembly position for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and Scottish Horse in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade would be on the western side of the Selle between St. Benin and St. Crepin. (Q.21.c. and Q.27.a.)<sup>12</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF would assemble facing St Benin at Q.21.c. By a strange co-incidence, this assembly location for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was just north of a farm named Fm.de Mallassise.<sup>13</sup>

The Instructions gave details on the artillery weapons and ammunition to be used before, during and after the attack. Using 18-Pounders and 4.5 Inch Howitzers, five brigades from the Royal Field Artillery would provide the artillery barrage for the attack.<sup>14</sup> For two days prior to the attack, a 'strong harassing fire' would be carried out using 'Long Range Guns' or Heavy Howitzers, on specific targets such as the roads east of Le Cateau. This was designed to prevent reinforcement of the German garrisons in Le Cateau. The Brickworks, the Sugar Factory and Le Cateau railway station would all receive specific bombardment.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations. 16 to 18 October 1918. Note. The OH noted the order of battle for the 4<sup>th</sup> Army attack was the 27<sup>th</sup> American Division (American II Corps) in centre, XIIIth Corps on left and IXth Corps on right. See Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. Pp.295-296. See Sketch 35.

<sup>8</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations. 16 to 18 October 1918. See also 50<sup>th</sup> Division Order No. 258. 16 October 1918.

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Brigade Operation Order No. 45, 16 October 1918. See also See Map 'B'.

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Operational Map 'B'.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. XIIIth Corps Order No. 1686/61 (G.A.) 16 October 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.1.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Brigade Operations Order No. 45. 16 October 1918.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.1. 15 October 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. XIIIth Corps Instruction – Artillery 13 October 1918.

From lessons learned in similar previous operations, to ensure some level of accuracy and not hit their own men again, Corps Artillery Instructions No 119 dated 7 October 1918 'Standing Orders for Attack' would hold good for this operation.<sup>16</sup> Again from lessons learned, in an effort not to warn the Germans of an infantry advance immediately following such standing barrages being the usual tactic in the past, this time there would be no 'hurricane bombardment' immediately before the infantry assault, i.e. just before Zero hour.<sup>17</sup> The infantry advance would be covered by a creeping barrage at Zero hour set down, 'immediately east of the river. It would stand for three minutes and then advance in two lifts to the line of the railway where it would begin to swing to conform with the barrage of the Americans.' Smoke bombs, with phosphorus provided by the 18<sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery, would provide visual cover for the advancing troops.<sup>18</sup> Machine guns from the 50<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Corps battalions would assist the advancing troops by again firing on specific targets such as The Triangle, a railway interchange on the southern outskirts of Le Cateau in area Q.5.a.<sup>19</sup>

Weather and visibility permitting, the infantry advance would also be covered by the 35<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the RFC in sending out Contact Patrols at various set times throughout the day and supplying counterattack patrols. Should a counterattack occur, these aircraft would drop weighted white parachute lights over the counterattacking German troops in the area from where the counterattack was coming. This was to assist British artillery to identify and hit these positions. Moreover, in an effort to blind German artillery and machine guns, the RFC were to drop phosphorous smoke bombs on these pre-selected locations that also provided the Germans with good observation of the battlefield. An example of one of these observation sites was, 'the high ground in squares L.19.c. and L.25.a. and L.26.b.' on Operational Map 'B'.<sup>20</sup> These locations were just north of Pommereuil. The map reference L.25.a. was Evillers Wood Farm.

Twelve Tanks from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. (Heavy) Tank Corps would also be placed at the disposal of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, 'with a view to co-operating the breaking down of the resistance in the area about the Railway in Squares Q.5. and Q.10.' Railway sheds or 'Detraining Points' on the railway line on the southern edge of Le Cateau presented well-protected positions from which German fire could come, hence the need for Tanks.<sup>21</sup> The only place the Tanks could get across the Selle was south of St. Souplet.<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting the growing importance of communications in attack, five means of communications would be used. They were Telegraph, Wireless, Visual, Despatch Rider and Contact Patrols. Pigeons would not be used.<sup>23</sup> To treat the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's wounded, the Main Dressing Station would be established at Busigny and the Advanced Dressing Stations east of Honnechy near the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ<sup>24</sup> Battalion Medical Officers would establish the location of their own Regimental Aid Posts and consult with Lieut.-Col. Thompson the commanding officer of the 1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> Northumberland Field Ambulance HQ at Maurois.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. XIIIth Corps Instruction – Artillery 13 October 1918.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Preliminary Instructions No. 3. 14 October 1918.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. XIIIth Corps Instruction – Artillery 13 October 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.1. 15 October 1918.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.1. 15 October 1918.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.3. 14 October 1918.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.1. 15 October 1918.

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instructions. No.3. 16 October 1918.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 50<sup>th</sup> Administrative Instruction No.9. 15 October 1918.

<sup>25</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Administrative Instruction. 16 October 1918.

Even at this stage in the war, a Cavalry Regiment attached to XIIIth Corps would be 'held in readiness to exploit the situation should circumstances permit.' The 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers at the northern end of Butry Wood were put in a state of readiness to move at one hour's notice.<sup>26</sup> The Cavalry from the Northumberland Hussars would also be used to escort German prisoners to a POW Collecting Station near the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ southwest of Essart Farm.<sup>27</sup> They would also be used as couriers to collect and deliver messages to and from brigade and divisional headquarters.<sup>28</sup>

### The geographical challenges

The river Selle formed the main obstacle for the advance. On the western side, the slopes of the river valley were gentle and devoid of cover and obstructions; however, the slopes on the eastern side were steep with the country beyond enclosed.<sup>29</sup> On the XIIIth Corps front and in particular the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's sector of the attack, the Germans had dammed the Selle in places thus increasing its depth within the banks to about one meter. This flooding expanded the river in places; consequently, to cross the river, bridges would have to be constructed prior to the attack and crossed under German machine gun fire during the attack coming from the high ground above the river on the eastern side.<sup>30</sup> This proved too dangerous a project.

However, further south near St. Souplet in the initial American II Corps sector of the attack, the river was narrower and offered a less severe challenge in crossing. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division boundary with the American II Corps was therefore extended southwards by about 1,830 metres so that the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had approximately 460 metres of river frontage between St. Benin and St. Souplet where crossing would not be too difficult.<sup>31</sup> However, once across the river and up the steep bank on the eastern side, the front to be attacked would open out from 460 metres to be 2,194 metres.<sup>32</sup> As a less challenging option, this sector of the line that 50<sup>th</sup> Division would attack was taken over from the Americans on the night of 14 / 15 October.<sup>33</sup>

The river ran through No-Man's Land and it was thus only possible to reconnoitre it at night.<sup>34</sup> During the four nights preceding the attack, reconnaissance and patrols of the river took place by Lieut.-Col. P. de H. Hall and officers from the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's Field Companies of Royal Engineers such as Major J. McLellan MC, Officer Commanding 446<sup>th</sup> Field Company, 'who rendered invaluable services in the reports and reconnaissance' he and his men carried out.<sup>35</sup> Major J. McLellan determined the depth and width of the river at points along the river north of St. Souplet.

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<sup>26</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.3. 14 October 1918.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Administrative Instructions No.1. 15 October 1918. See Map 'B'.

<sup>28</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5.

<sup>29</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.296.

<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Inundations of River Selle - October 1918.

<sup>31</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. Pp.297-298 and p.308.

<sup>32</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16 – 18 October 1918.

<sup>33</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*.p.308.

<sup>34</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16 – 18 October 1918.

<sup>35</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Major J. McLellan, Royal Engineers and Officer Commanding. 446<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. R.E. 14 October 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16 – 18 October 1918.

He noted the trees that lined the riverbank could be of use. The width of the river near St. Souplet varied from three and a half to six and a half metres and in depth a little bit over one meter. Near St. Benin, the width was between seven and eight metres and a depth of less than one meter.<sup>36</sup>

In the nights before the attack, officers from some battalions went out to see the crossing points for themselves and see where their men would cross the river. They also got some idea of the German defences they would face when across the river. On the night of 14 October, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Horrell and three scouts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF reconnoitred the river facing St. Benin where they were assigned to cross for fording places. The Operational Map showing the river had notes inscribed at potential bridging and river crossing sites. Where 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed, the map noted; 'River appears shallow and forgeable.'<sup>37</sup> However, officers from the King's Royal Rifle Corps in the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade discovered that further down the river between St. Crepin and St. Souplet, the river 'was unfordable in many places.'<sup>38</sup>

Reconnaissance of the river also revealed that owing to the floods and inundations created by the Germans, 'it would be impossible to bridge the river quickly in the face of the enemy except just north of St. Souplet and a small front near St. Benin.'<sup>39</sup> Also identified were numerous mills on the river with temporary dams and sluices, one of which was at St. Crepin. On the night of 14/15 October, men from 446<sup>th</sup> Field Company of the Royal Engineers blew a temporary dam the Germans had made where the railways crossed the river, thus releasing the water in that flooded section of the river.<sup>40</sup>

Following this reconnaissance work, the Commander of Royal Engineers, 50<sup>th</sup> Division, Lieut.-Col. P. de H. Hall, set out places where the river would be crossed. He noted, 'The crossing of the river presented great difficulties, and owing to the inundations, had to be carried out at two points only, i.e., Q.21.b.8.5. and between Q.28.d.3.9 and Q.34.a.3.6.'<sup>41</sup> These map references given by Lieut.-Col de H. Hall were in fact between St. Benin and St. Souplet. At 1:30 p.m. on 16 October, the eve of the attack, he gave exact locations to his sappers as to where these bridges would be assembled. They would place footbridges along this line of the River Selle, as mentioned about 460 metres in length, at the following locations:<sup>42</sup>

At Zero hour, (Sketch A) twelve duckboard-type bridges would be set in positions along the river between St. Crepin and St. Souplet (Q.28.c.3.2. and Q.28.a.4.4.) At Zero plus seventy-five minutes, (Sketch D) four floating-type bridges would be set on southern edge of St. Benin (Q.21.b.7.5.) This would be where the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF would cross the River Selle at their appointed time.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Report titled Bridging the River Selle in connection with the Operations on 17 October 1918. By Lieut.-Col. P. de H. Hall dated 26 October 1918.

<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Map titled. 'N' Corps Topo Section.

<sup>38</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions. No.2. 15 October 1918.

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/2. Inundations of River Selle - October 1918.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/2. Inundations of River Selle - October 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Order No. 258. Issued at 1:30 p.m., 16 October 1918.

<sup>43</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. See Sketch A and D. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Order No. 258. 16 October 1918.

A crossing point for the Tanks too was reconnoitred. On the same night as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Horrell went out, i.e., 14 October, so too did Major Maurice Miskin MC of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Tank Corps. He discovered a place for his tanks to cross 'with the help of cribs' at St. Souplet where the river was only two and a half metres wide, and a little over one meter deep. The river was noted on the Operational Map at this point as appearing to be shallow. To help his tank crews find the crossing point, Major Miskin set out tapes on the night before the attack. <sup>44</sup>

Because there were two main sites chosen for crossing the river between St. Crepin and St. Souplet that presented different bridging challenges, in the days before the attack, the Royal Engineers built two types of temporary portable bridges to get the infantry across the river; they were duckboard (Sketch A ladder) portable bridges which could be very quickly thrown across the river, and, floating bridges (Sketch D) used in the wider parts which took about fifteen minutes to assemble. All infantry battalion commanders were issued with a copy of the bridge designs they would use in getting their men across the Selle.

The material used to construct some of the duckboard bridges was made from scrap timber found in a captured German dump near Honnechy. They were load-tested, 'by crowding as many men on them as possible. The weight of the 18 ft (5.4.meter) bridge was 230 lbs. (104 kilograms)' <sup>45</sup> Because the river width at St. Souplet (3.5 to 6.0 metres) was less than the width at St. Benin (7.0 to 8.0 metres), it was therefore decided to use the duckboard-type bridge that would be capable of getting five battalions of infantry across the river near St. Souplet on a front of about 450 metres and one battalion across the floating-type bridge at St. Benin on a front of about ten metres. <sup>46</sup> In total there were twenty-four duckboard type bridges built. According to Major McLelland, all twenty-four bridges were used in one way or another such as for example spare parts and standby. <sup>47</sup>

In terms of infantry tactics crossing the river, 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions noted that: <sup>48</sup>

As soon as the barrage opens, the leading waves of the three attacking battalions will advance accompanied by the bridging party. Wherever possible the leading waves will advance by fording the stream, the remainder will cross by the bridges directly they are thrown and will re-form on the eastern bank keeping right up the barrage...Closely following the rear waves of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade, the leading battalion of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade will cross by the bridges and move north along the eastern side of the railway...The second battalion of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade will closely follow the first battalion of this brigade...The Battalion at St. Benin will cross by a bridge which will be thrown and by the ford as soon as the barrage has passed their front line and form up at 16.d.3.3. (High ground above River Selle east of St. Benin)

The two battalions from the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade assigned to cross the Selle with the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade north of St. Souplet would be the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and Scottish Horse. As noted, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF would assemble facing St. Benin (Q.21.c.).

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<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918. See also Map No. 6A.

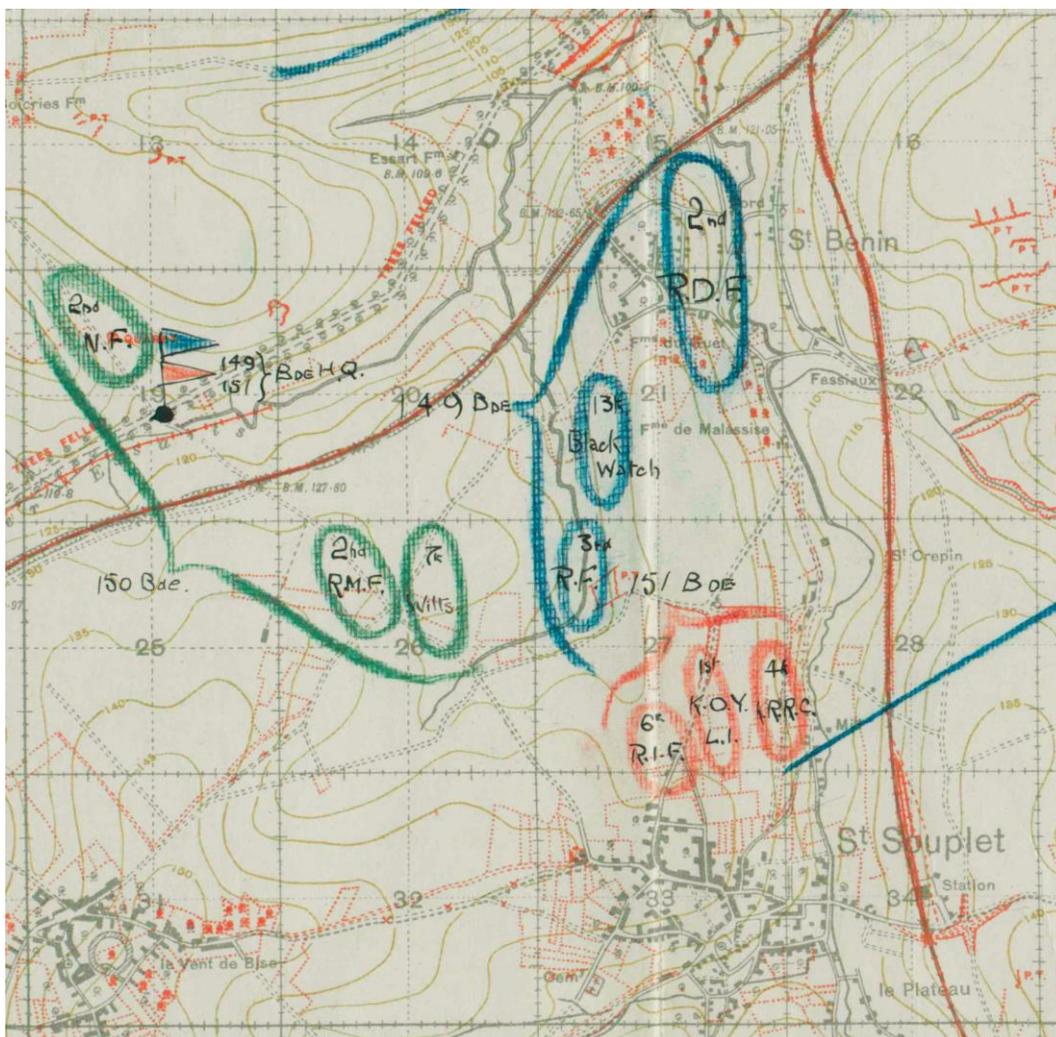
<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/2. Do.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/2. Hand written report by Major McLelland dated 23 October 1918.

<sup>48</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Preliminary Instructions No. 2. 15 October 1918.

As soon as the barrage enables them after Zero hour, they were assigned to cross the Selle just below St. Benin at Q.22.a. and when across, form up at 16.d.3.3., a point on the high ground above the river just east of St. Benin for the continuation of the attack.<sup>49</sup> They would leave ‘B’ Company behind as a reserve until the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade had cleared the north of St. Benin and follow up later.<sup>50</sup>



Location of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF facing St. Benin at dawn on 17 October 1918.  
Between Squares 15 and 19 in Section Q.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918. Map ‘B’. Note: Referring to the actual site of crossing the river Selle on 17 October 1918 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, a typed note written on 1 July 1937 in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division war diary stated. ‘Think it was 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at St. Benin and not 13/Black Watch.’ Unfortunately, the writer of the note signed the note with their initials and are difficult to read. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Map titled Trenches Information Corrected to 14 October 1918. Scale 1: 20,000.

<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Operations Order No. 45. 16 October 1918. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918.





The second major geographical obstacle the infantry would face was of course the town of Le Cateau which was in German hands since late August 1914. The OH noted: <sup>51</sup>

The town of Le Cateau, with a population of between ten and eleven thousand, also provided a useful bastion; its houses and factories solidly built, and their cellars furnished admirable protection during the bombardment. East of the town, the railway, either on embankment or cutting, commanded the exits from it... had an edging of goods sheds, factories, and other strongly constructed buildings suitable for defences... The station was indeed a little fortress.

The German units that faced the men of the 149<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Brigades on the other side of the river between St. Benin and Le Cateau came from two divisions: the 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division and the 204<sup>th</sup> Division. On the night of 15/16 October, a fresh division from German GHQ Reserve, the 243<sup>rd</sup> Division, was brought into the line immediately south of the 17<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division partly relieving the 204<sup>th</sup> Division. At Zero hour, both British brigades would face eight battalions of four regiments on an average strength of about 300 men per battalion. Most of these troops were fresh. <sup>52</sup> As mentioned, aerial reconnaissance revealed that the Germans were holding the line of the railway, about 275 metres from it in considerable strength with a large number of machine gun posts between the river and the railway. The high ground north of Pommereuil was well defended.

### The Action

On the night of 16 / 17 October, in order to take their places for the coming attack, the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved in the line by the 149<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Brigades. <sup>53</sup> During the day, the men prepared themselves and their weapons. At about 11:15 p.m., the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ moved into their Advanced Headquarters which was a farmhouse (Q.19. central) about three kilometres east of Honnechy along a side stream of the River Selle. <sup>54</sup> At 12:30 a.m. on 17 October, packed and ready, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF left Honnechy. They marched out during the night. At 3:00 a.m. they arrived at their assembly point between St. Benin and St. Souplet. There they were issued with hot soup, a tot of rum and drinking water. <sup>55</sup> The attacking strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF that morning was twenty officers and 458 men of other ranks. <sup>56</sup> They relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers in the line in front of St. Benin.

Dawn broke and the attack began on time at Zero hour, 5:20 a.m. in a thick fog.<sup>57</sup> The sappers and pioneers rushed forward and the bridges were quickly thrown across the river at the selected points by the sappers bravely working under their own barrage and in the face of the Germans whose advanced positions were within a few metres on the opposite bank.<sup>58</sup> As soon as the bridges were in position, the sappers and pioneers withdrew leaving a skeleton crew to maintain the bridges throughout the attack.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.297.

<sup>52</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment.* Note on German troops opposite the divisional front October 17-19 October 1918. For the perusal of all ranks. 20 October 1918.

<sup>53</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/2. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Order No. 257. 16 October 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* Narrative of Operations 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade Operation Order No.45. 16 October 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.*p.116.

<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* Narrative of Operations 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*Do.

<sup>59</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/2. . Report by Commander of Royal Engineers 50<sup>th</sup> Division 24 October 1918.

Under the creeping barrage with lifts of thirty metres at three-minute intervals, the first wave of infantry from the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade advanced.<sup>60</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> King's Royal Rifles Corps who had assembled on the northern edge of St. Souplet was the first battalion to cross the river; closely followed by the 1<sup>st</sup> King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.<sup>61</sup>

The attack was supported by eight tanks mainly used as moppers / support and not in the vanguard of the attack.<sup>62</sup> They crossed the river at St. Souplet as scheduled. However, two failed to get across. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division noted that, 'all tanks' got across the river 'without difficulty.' Sadly, Major Miskin MC 'was killed by a shell whilst leading his Section to the river crossing.'<sup>63</sup>

At about 6:30 a.m. as scheduled, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed the Selle at their designated spot facing St. Benin. The battalion's crossing was not without some mishaps. The war diary noted: 'Crossed river without difficulty...floating tree ... men fell in.'<sup>64</sup> Interesting to note that in the 27<sup>th</sup> American Division's sector of the Selle crossing nearby, to avoid their men falling into deep holes in the river, the Americans, under the command of Major-General John F O'Ryan's instructions, issued to his brigade commanders on 16 October 1918, provided ropes across the river tied to trees for men to hold on to as they crossed.<sup>65</sup>

Just after 7:00 a.m., a report was received at 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ from a wounded corporal of the Scottish Horse who claimed that all battalions of the 151<sup>st</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigades had crossed the river and got up the steep banks without much opposition. Thirty minutes later, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade reported corroborated the corporal's report and noted, 'our troops seen on the ridge east of the railway in Q.23.c'. The latter being a map reference for the eastern slopes of the ridge above St. Crepin.<sup>66</sup>

However, when the attacking companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF got across the river, things turned for the worse on the banks of the other side. Owing to the fog and smoke, the Battalion made no contact with any other battalion in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>67</sup> They were hit with heavy machine gun fire coming from the direction of St. Benin. 'A' Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF suffered badly. Two of their officers were killed. They were Lieut. Charles Kidson age twenty-four from the Holy Trinity Vicarage, Sittingbourne in Kent, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Francis Walkey age twenty-three from 'Trevose', Palmerstown Gardens, Rathmines in Dublin. Lieut. Walkey joined The Irish Rugby Volunteer Corps on 12 August 1914. He enlisted in 'D' Coy. (The Pals) of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF and served in Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine and Salonika. He was a member of 'A' Coy. when killed on 17 October 1918.<sup>68</sup> Both men were buried in Highland Cemetery, Le Cateau.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 17 October 1918. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. Appendix 'D'. p.1.

<sup>61</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Do.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>64</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Note. There is a typed account of an unstated battalion's action on 17 and 18 October 1918 at the Selle. The account is contained in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary. It is NOT the account of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF activity on 17 and 18 October 1918. The typed account is very likely to be the account of activities of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers as the account records the assembly point as being Q.27.a.5.6. which was the assembly point of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers. See Operational Map 'B'.

<sup>65</sup> O'Ryan, Major General John F, *The Story of the 27th Division* (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford and Co, 1921). p.353.

<sup>66</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>67</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>68</sup> *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. See also [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also Hanna, Henry.p.236.

<sup>69</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918. See also [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

Their comrades in the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers crossed by footbridges and floating tree trunks at the northern side of St. Souplet, in rear of units of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade; both these battalions suffered about forty casualties.<sup>70</sup> The fog, accurate German machine guns and artillery created hold ups in the advance.

The presumption by GHQ of the Germans falling away was wrong. By 7:20 a.m., the battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade 'ceased to operate as one united Brigade...heavy casualties sustained.'<sup>71</sup> In fact the attack of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division was in trouble and held up partly due to the fog which still lingered, partly due to brave German resistance and artillery counterattacks using gas shells and partly due to the age-old problem with such confused operations so often like this in the past, poor communications. Nothing new.

The weather before the battle was unfavourable for RFC activity, consequently it was almost impossible to perform aerial reconnaissance. On the two days before the attack began, mist and rain interfered, and little useful flying was done.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, up-to-the minute locations of some German machine gun emplacements proved difficult and were left in operation despite the British artillery barrage.

Inaccurate communications did not help the progress of the attack. A wounded officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI reported that his battalion and 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC 'were on the dotted Red Line' which was a line on the ridge above St. Benin and St. Crepin. The report was later found to be wrong. However, they weren't too far off it; they were at least on the lower slopes of the ridge south of St. Crepin. Their positions were noted as being at Q.28.b. and Q.28.d. which was along the railway line south of St. Crepin. Further north of the attack, the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskilling had reached the 'Station Buildings round the Detraining Point', a location on the railway line into Le Cateau north of St. Benin (Q.10.a. and c.) but they were facing 'strong opposition.'<sup>73</sup>

By about 8:45 a.m., the attack of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade began to falter and get stuck in places.<sup>74</sup> Around the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF sent out a patrol of a corporal and two men from 'D' Coy. to reconnoitre ahead of their position. The patrol never returned.<sup>75</sup> Things began to get worse. By 9:15a.m., the follow-up battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade got bogged down and 'embroiled in the fight.'<sup>76</sup> It seems that units from both 149<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Brigades were simply attacking any opposition in front of them they encountered unilaterally; and still in fog. Command and control had collapsed.

Yet, despite the confusion and 'irrespective of the barrage', the battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade were ordered to press forward to the dotted Red Line up on the ridge.<sup>77</sup> Bravely enough, and in compliance with orders from 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ at around 9:00 a.m., the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, in diamond tactical formation, advanced to try and get to their dotted Red line objective. They did well; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Rogers and about thirty men from No 4 Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers with the assistance of Tank No 43 attacked Quennelet Farm and occupied a small trench within fifteen metres of the farm. They managed to take thirty-three German prisoners in the advance. One of them had a map 'giving enemy dispositions.' He was sent back to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ for interrogation.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade October 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>72</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.296.

<sup>73</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>75</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918.

<sup>76</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>77</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>78</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918. Account of 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers.

It is interesting to note that Quennelet Farm was referred to in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diaries as 'Dublin Farm.' (Q.17.c.8.6)<sup>79</sup> In their effort to push on, at 10:25 a.m., 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were ordered to 'make dotted line their objective', i.e., to continue on with the attack on Dublin Farm.<sup>80</sup>

Counterattacks by the Germans and continued confusion on the battlefield resulted in the cancellation of the order to bring up the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade to attack the Red Line as planned. The cancellation took place at about 10:00 a.m. Their time to attack the Red Line from their assembly point on the dotted Red Line as scheduled was to begin at 12:00 mid-day.<sup>81</sup> Not only was there confusion on the battlefield but the time schedules in the plan were falling apart.

The situation therefore became unclear and static for the next hour or so up to about 11:00 a.m. Despite all the systems set out in the Preliminary Instructions, there was a 'difficulty in getting any information back from the front-line troops.'<sup>82</sup> It seems there was no difficulty in getting messages / signals between Brigade and Division. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division after-battle report noted: 'The Signal Arrangements were very satisfactory and at no time was any Brigade Headquarters cut off from the Division.'<sup>83</sup> However, in the overall command and control loop that relied on total communications from battalions in action in the front line to brigade headquarters, there was a break in that crucial part of the communications loops.

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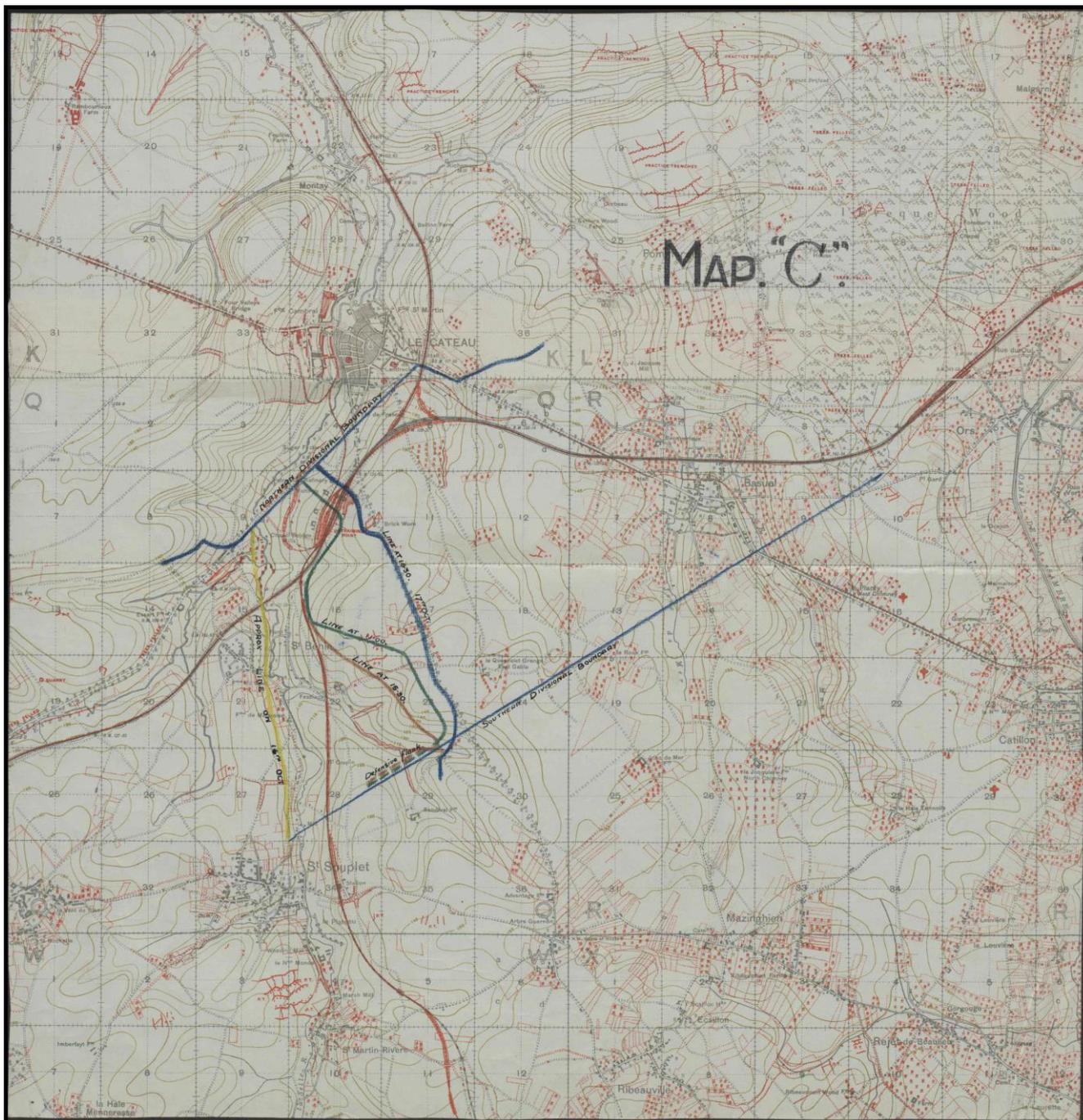
<sup>79</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918 for Dublin Farm Operation Map location reference Q.17.d.9.9.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.



Map 'C' - Position of 50<sup>th</sup> Division south of Le Cateau at 4:30 p.m. on 17 October 1918.

When the fog lifted soon after 11:00 a.m., with the attack at a standstill, the battalions were still pretty much where they were an hour earlier. For the record, the 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC were just west of dotted Red Line at Q.23.a. and d.; 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers were providing a defensive flank at Q.28.d., the Americans hadn't moved; The 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF 'were about' Q.17.c. which was near Dublin Farm, 'with the enemy holding the orchard and high ground in Q.17.c.' The 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings and Scottish Horse fighting around the buildings in Q.10.a and c and 'were meeting strong opposition' from the surrounding buildings and slag heap in Q.10. b.<sup>84</sup>

Not only were units stuck, but some also even began to fall back. At 11:30 a.m. 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF reported that the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI and 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC, 'had withdrawn to railway.'<sup>85</sup> Lieut. Rogers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and his men were ordered to fall back from their position near Dublin Farm.<sup>86</sup> This must have been annoying for Rogers having got so far. They were coming under too much artillery fire. A platoon commander in No 2 Coy. of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers sighted a German field battery coming into action about 550 metres in front of them. The gun was located south of Dublin Farm. The CO of No 1 Coy. went through the long process of calling in an RFC scout flight and locating the target being the German field battery in the process of setting up. With the clearing of the fog six more RFC scout aircraft joined in the action of machine gunning not only the German battery but Dublin Farm and counter-attacking points for about forty minutes.<sup>87</sup> With creeping barrages, tanks, diamond formation infantry advances, small tactical Lewis gun units like Lieut. Rogers, aircraft assisting advancing infantry – the all arms nature of an infantry attack on a machine gun post in October 1918 was light years away from the infantry tactics of August 1914. Yet the Germans in Dublin Farm proved stubborn to remove.

In view of having no flank cover because of the withdrawal of some battalions to the embankment, confirmation was sought by 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF as to whether an advance as ordered was the smart thing to do. At 11:30 a.m., 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ ordered them to advance. It took a while to begin the advance. It wasn't until 2:00 p.m. with no cover on their right and Scottish Horse on their left, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF pushed for the dotted Red Line and another go at Dublin Farm.<sup>88</sup> They only got to between 182 and 274 metres of it and dug in at about 6:00 p.m.<sup>89</sup> During the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF attempts on Dublin Farm, the Germans launched two counterattacks at 3:00 p.m., one against the position held by the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI and the other against the 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC. The 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI held their ground but the 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC., 'who had suffered heavy casualties and were very weak, were driven back from and off the top of the hill.'<sup>90</sup>

By 4:00 p.m., the situation had become so bad that the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade who were in reserve astride the railway line south east of Reumont waiting to move, were urgently called up to help 'restore the situation and capture the dotted Red Line without delay.' The 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshire Regiment was assigned this task, and, using whatever men they could muster from the 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers, managed to restore the lost positions on the dotted Red Line. The Americans, who had got moving by this time, got in touch at the farm at point Q.29.b.2.8 which was Beaudival Farm.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>85</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 17 October 1918. 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers account.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 17 October 1918. 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers account.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 17 October 1918. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>89</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918. Note: The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF only got to within 548 meters west of the dotted red line at 5:55 p.m. See *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>90</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

Moreover, the 66<sup>th</sup> Division on the left of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division seemed to have done better in their attack and by 4:30 p.m. had reached the line of the railway near the centre of Le Cateau, reported as being 'K.35. central' and were 'still mopping up Le Cateau but were unable to advance their position until the Railway Triangle in Q.5.a. was in our possession.'<sup>91</sup> In other words, when the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had done its job.

As evening set in and darkness fell over the battlefield, all nine battalions of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division 'were mixed up and it was quite impossible to extricate the units of any one Brigade.'<sup>92</sup> Their positions were laid out on Map 'C' at 4:30 p.m.<sup>93</sup> In an effort to restore some form of command, control and organisation on his battlefield, General H.C. Jackson, GOC 50<sup>th</sup> Division, made a tactical decision to divide the sector of his divisional front they had gained into three sections and assign three battalions into Groups to attack a sector under the command of a Brigadier-General from the original brigades of the Division.<sup>94</sup>

The implication for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was that they, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers, formed the Centre Group in the next attack all under the command of Brigadier-General Sugden. Another group, the Right Group was the combination of the KRRC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshire Regiment all under the command of Brigadier-General Rollo.<sup>95</sup> Each Group commander had to dig in and consolidate what they had costly gained throughout the day and prepare for the advance on a new objective to take in a specific sector. The overall operation of digging in by the nine battalions of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division was completed by 8:00 p.m. Despite some sporadic fighting, the rest of the night was quiet.<sup>96</sup> At the end of the fighting on 17 October, all nine battalions of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF included, were back almost where they had started after they had crossed the Selle over its eastern bank with little ground gained. However, they were on the high ground above the east bank of the Selle and in a good position to resume the attack.

Just after midnight on 17 October, under the cover of darkness and in total silence, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF pushed up nearer to Dublin Farm which was still in German hands.<sup>97</sup> The Dubs and Munsters were alongside each other again. 'V' Beach in Gallipoli was a long time ago when they were last side by side. The Munsters had crossed the Selle 'north of St. Souplet at 9:30 a.m. and by 11:00 a.m. were dug in on the western side of the railway embankment.' They too couldn't move and remained there all day until about 9:30 p.m. when in pitch darkness over unknown ground they moved off to take up a new position on the flanks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in preparation for the continuation of the attack at dawn next morning, 18 October, along with 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI.<sup>98</sup>

During the very early hours of 18 October, at 2:50 a.m. to be precise, in an effort to reconnoitre the German positions around Dublin Farm, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF sent out patrols in the dark up close to the farm. They were brought back owing to the impending opening barrage for the next attempt to take yesterday's objectives, which were still Le Cateau and a line beyond to another imaginary line titled The Brown Line or Line of Exploitation on the Operations Map.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/4. Map 'C'.

<sup>94</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.p.118. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. Appendix 'D'. p.2.

<sup>95</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. The Right Group attacked the right side of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's attack on 18 October. Next to them on their right was the Americans.

<sup>96</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>97</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918.

<sup>98</sup> McCance, S. p.161.

<sup>99</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18 October 1918.

This Line of Exploitation for the 50<sup>th</sup> Division ran from a point directly east of Le Cateau south-eastwards around the northern edge of Becqueriaux and Basual.<sup>100</sup> During the night, the 75<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division who had been in Corps Reserve were called up to help out in this push after the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had taken the Red Line in their second attempt. In preparation, the 75<sup>th</sup> Brigade assembled along the line of the railway in the valley just north of St. Crepin.<sup>101</sup>

As dawn broke on 18 October, the fog and thick mist had returned; it was impossible to see ahead or around more than fifteen metres or so. Consequently, it was again difficult to locate units in the advance. Regardless of the same challenges the infantry and gunners had faced yesterday morning, the attack began again with a creeping barrage on time at 5:30 a.m. Guided mostly by compass bearings, the Dublin and Munster Fusiliers moved off side-by-side in the fog with the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI in support to this imaginary line on the Operation Map, the Red Line. Their advance pushed northwards towards Le Cateau and the railway station.

As soon as the Dubs and Munsters advanced, German artillery counter-attacked and the three battalions yet again got mixed up together leaving no dividing lines between them. However, by 6:30 a.m., the dreaded mist had somewhat cleared, and the battalions battled on over a rolling plain. Command and control of the advance was somewhat restored. According to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade report, along the way 'Dublin Farm was over-run and had to be mopped up subsequently.' It proved a difficult nut to crack even on the second attempt on 18 October. The mopping up was carried out by No 2 Company from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers. A battery of German trench mortars at a point referred to as Q.17.d.9.9 which was on the northern edge of Quennelet Grange / Dublin Farm, 'which had given much trouble' during the fighting the previous day was captured near the farm. It is not clear who took Dublin Farm – the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF or 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires. Since Dublin Farm was in the Right Group sector of attack, and although they never recorded taking it in their war diary, it is more than likely that the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires in their advance took Dublin Farm with No 2 Coy. of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers mopping up behind them.<sup>102</sup> At 7:00 p.m. on 17 October they took up a position on the road at (Q.23.b and d.) directly in front and western side of Quennelet Grange / Dublin Farm. At Zero hour, 5:30 a.m. on 18 October, they 'attacked, captured and consolidated enemy line Q.18. a. and Q.18.d. Prisoners captured 123 and many machine guns.'<sup>103</sup> These points were on the eastern side of Quennelet Grange / Dublin Farm.

The Munsters took their objectives too and a bit more by 7:30 a.m.; they had even got into the southern outskirts of Basual and began to consolidate their position.<sup>104</sup> At 8:30 a.m., again through the failure of communications, a British barrage put down to help the oncoming 75<sup>th</sup> Brigade, came down on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters without warning inflicting casualties and they had to retire to about one kilometre to the west of Basual.<sup>105</sup> In their attack, the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires and Americans were reported to have run into their own barrage. At about 2:00 p.m., La Roux Farm on the southern edge of the divisional and corps boundary was taken by the Americans.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Operation Map 'B'.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers account.

<sup>103</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. 17-18 October 1918.

<sup>104</sup> McCance, S.p.161.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p.162.

<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 October 1918. 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers account.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Division war diary noted that the Red Line objectives, which proved so difficult on 17 October, were taken within hours of the opening barrage, 'without much opposition'.<sup>107</sup> The success of the operation on the morning / afternoon of the 18 October may well be attributed to several factors; the fighting skills and bravery of the attacking troops, the element of surprise, or, more than likely the main reason being that many of the German garrisons simply had had enough and surrendered. According to McCance, the Germans were taken by surprise. He noted: 'Everything pointed to the attack having come on the enemy as a complete surprise...Officer's dugouts were found equipped for a fortnights siege...A steaming hot breakfast had been abandoned only a few minutes previously.'<sup>108</sup>

It seems after all, the will to keep on fighting had, for some of the Germans, gradually fallen away. They began to surrender in large numbers throughout the day. During their advance towards Le Cateau, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF encountered hundreds of Germans surrendering. Referring to the events around Dublin Farm, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted; 'About 300 prisoners including seven officers were taken in this operation with very little loss.'<sup>109</sup> The Munsters claimed they took 'over 100 prisoners' whom they 'sent back.'<sup>110</sup> The 50<sup>th</sup> Division recorded that twenty-nine German officers were taken prisoner along with 1,136 other ranks. Some five of these German officers and eighty-eight other ranks were treated at 50<sup>th</sup> Division Casualty Clearing Stations.<sup>111</sup>

In an effort to boost the morale of the fighting troops, the following revealing 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional intelligence report dated 20 October 1918 was distributed 'down to platoons for the perusal of all ranks.' It seems that by mid-October, the ordinary German soldier was informed the war was coming to an end soon with an armistice:<sup>112</sup>

On the whole, the 243<sup>rd</sup> (German) Division may be said to have suffered so severely at the hands of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division that it is no longer of much use as a fighting unit. Its morale, which was not as good as its long rest warranted at the beginning of the attack, is now very low. The fact that a routine order had been read out to all ranks before coming into the line, promising that an armistice before October 18<sup>th</sup>, did not tend to improve their spirits when our barrage came down on the morning of 17<sup>th</sup>. On the other hand, Machine Gun prisoners and Gunners captured in Basuel (sic), were of much better quality and the machine gunners particularly put up a good fight. All ranks were firmly convinced that Germany has lost the war, and the hopelessness of the situation and the depressing prospect of a disastrous winter in the field have had a lowering effect on the general morale of the enemy's troops, from which they will scarcely be able to recover.

Regardless of hundreds of Germans surrendering to the RDF and other battalions on their way into Le Cateau, nevertheless there were still many of them, mainly the machine gun crews, still prepared to fight on inside the town. At about 2:00 p.m., on 18 October, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF received orders, 'to clear enemy machine guns out of houses in Q.6. a. and to fill gap on right.'<sup>113</sup> Note. Q.6.a. was map reference for the area on the south-eastern edge of Le Cateau where the railway line bends and runs alongside road D643 heading to Basual. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division diary noted:<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>108</sup> McCance, S. p.161.

<sup>109</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Do.

<sup>110</sup> McCance, S. p.161.

<sup>111</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>112</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. Notes on German troops opposite the divisional front October 17-19, 1918.

<sup>113</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18 October 1918.

<sup>114</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

During the afternoon, the troops on the left (not named but more than likely 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers (150<sup>th</sup> Brigade) worked gradually up and fought their way forward and although held up for a time by machine gun fire from the houses along the main Le Cateau - Basual Road in Q.6.a. and b., drove the enemy out and established touch with the 66<sup>th</sup> Division...

It was during this house clearing operation along the Le Cateau - Basual Road that 14017 Sgt. Horace Curtis, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, was awarded the Victoria Cross for his brave action. There is no mention of Sgt. Curtis being awarded the VC in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary for the month of October 1918. The OH noted: 'Sergeant H.A. Curtis 2.R. Dublin Fusiliers (Centre Group) was awarded the VC for great gallantry on this day.'<sup>115</sup> According to Crown and Company:<sup>116</sup>

A party of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, over-running their objective, even penetrated into Bazuel (Basual) and captured a few prisoners. Here, a daring individual exploit by Sergeant Curtis of this battalion put out of action the teams of two hostile machine guns and resulted in the capture of four other machine guns with their crews.

Throughout that afternoon, orders were received at 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ that the 66<sup>th</sup> Division would take over the final section of line the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had won on 18 October, between K.36. central and Q.6.b., a line of about one kilometre and east of Le Cateau. The transfer began at dusk. At 9:00 p.m. the battalions of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division were ordered back to their original assembly positions on the western side of the Selle between St. Benin and St. Crepin and from there to proceed to Honnechy and to be there by 10:00 a.m. next morning, 19 October.<sup>117</sup>

At 11:00 p.m., the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was relieved from their position along the Le Cateau - Basual Road by a battalion from 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade.<sup>118</sup> Travelling back over the ground they had won during the night and morning of 19 October, they arrived in Honnechy and were given a welcome hot meal from the company cooks. During the day, their casualties were counted.<sup>119</sup>

It was anticipated that the Germans would retire further east and consequently orders were received at 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ 'that should he do so, touch be maintained.' There was a feeling in VIIIth Corps HQ that the Germans were finally on the back foot; so keep going after him. However, because the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had come through a difficult previous forty-eight hours, they were not in a fit state to continue the immediate pursuit.

That task was assigned to the 25<sup>th</sup> Division to push on beyond the Line of Exploitation towards the Forest of Mormal. The 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers attached to XIIIth Corps were brought up early on the morning of 19 October to a position east of the Selle at Fassieux to get ready if needed to keep in contact with the retreating Germans, if in fact they had retreated. Amazingly, they hadn't retreated too far at all. On 19 October, German troops were reported as holding a series of defensive position along a small river named the Richemont that ran on the northern edge of Le Cateau through Jacques Mill on the western side of Pommereuil. There were groups of practice trenches which they made use of.<sup>120</sup> Sooner rather than later, they too would be removed from that position by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Divisions.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.320.

<sup>116</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.*p.118.

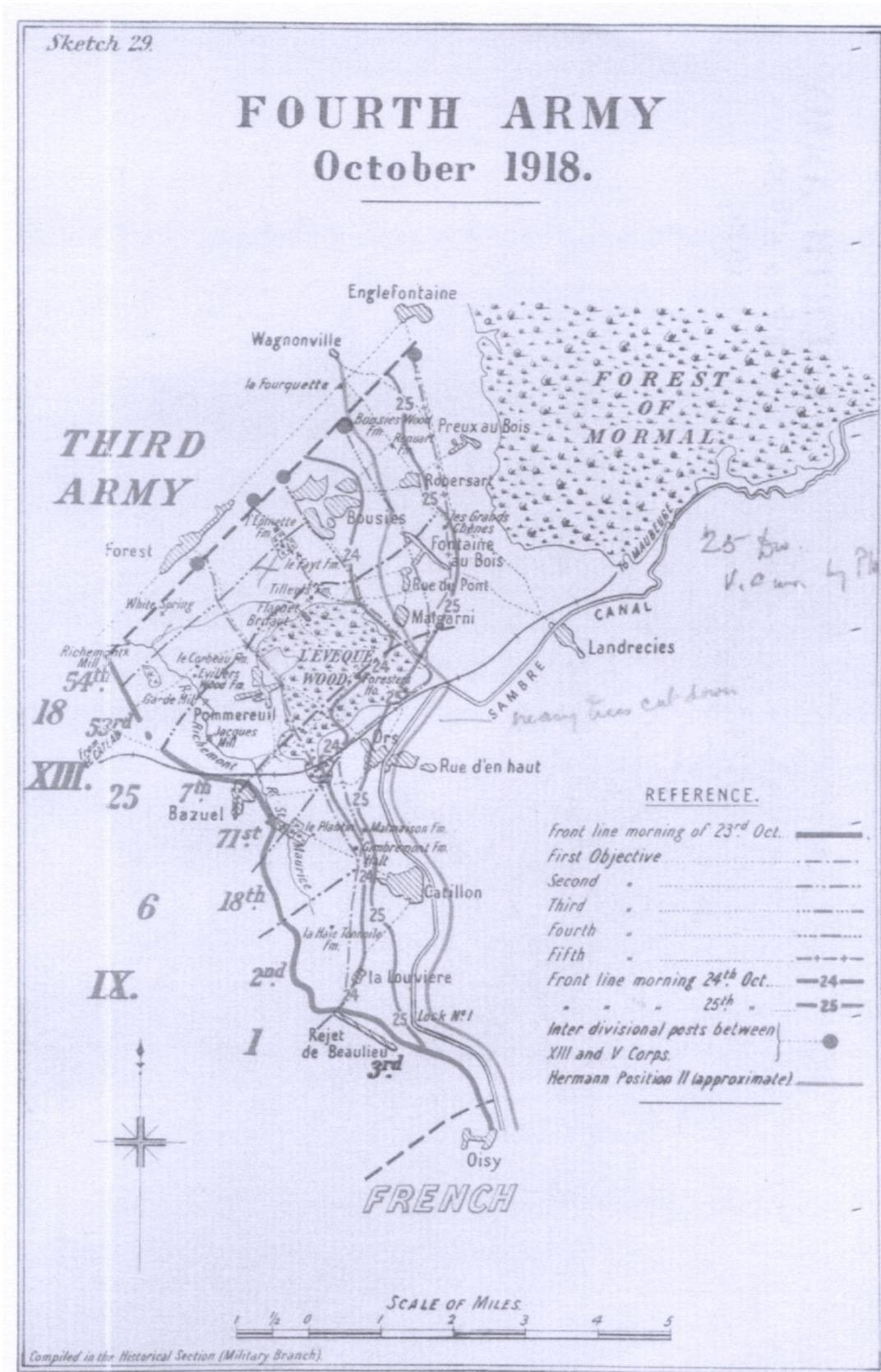
<sup>117</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 18 October 1918.

<sup>118</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 19 October 1918.

<sup>120</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p. 353. and Sketch 15. Fourth Army 17-19 October 1918.





Sketch 29 Fourth Army October 1918. Advance of 18 and 25 Divisions of XIIIth Corps 24-25 October 1918.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* Vol.5. p.739.

The challenges faced by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division in crossing the river Selle and how they overcame them is worthy of reflection. The construction and bridge laying operations across the river were successfully carried out by the 447<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers, and 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment (Pioneers) minutes before Zero hour on the morning of 17 October. The 447<sup>th</sup> Field Company had developed some experience in bridge-building over the previous weeks.<sup>123</sup> The bridges they constructed managed to get two brigades of infantry across the river under a barrage. Five battalions went across at St. Souplet and one (the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF) at St. Benin.<sup>124</sup>

Using Field Company Transport, all the bridges were brought up to assigned crossing places near the Selle between St. Souplet and St. Benin at about 4:00 p.m. on 16 October, the day before the attack. By 8:30 p.m. in the evening, they were carried forward and placed about 457 metres away from the river.<sup>125</sup> In terms of the bridges used at St. Benin where the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed, these left Honnechy at 10:20 p.m. on 16 October and according to Major F. Horsport 447<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE were:<sup>126</sup>

Transported via Escaufourt to the site at St. Benin where 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed the river (Q.21.a.6.4.) where they were unloaded. From that point they were manhandled and carefully, with due regard to cover from view, placed approximately forty-five metres from the sites of erection, this being accomplished by 00:30 hrs on 17 October.

In total darkness at about 1:00 a.m., the construction teams from the Royal Engineers and 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish (Pioneers) formed up to do their work of bridging the Selle. Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall also noted on the bridges used at St. Benin, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF crossed:

Four bridges (Sketch D Floating type) were issued from Army Park and were carted on Field Company Transport to within about 500 yds. (457 metres) of the site, and from there were quietly carried forward and carefully concealed about 50 yds. (45 metres) from the sites of the bridges; this was completed by 00:30 hrs...As soon as the barrage passed the bridging parties got to work. The time taken to carry the 50 yds, construct and place in position was ten minutes. The infantry actually commenced crossing after seven minutes, as the sappers were then merely employed in picketing and lashing down.

Regarding the bridges at the St. Souplet section of the river, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall reported that his sappers and pioneers:<sup>127</sup>

Gradually worked forward cutting gaps in the hedges as they went, being always kept in front of and closely followed by the infantry. Five bridges were actually placed across the river five minutes before Zero hour. The barrage came down about 100 yds (ninety-one metres) east of the river, dwelt for three minutes and then lifted on to the railway. Immediately it lifted on the railway the bridging parties dashed forward and threw their bridges over the river; all bridges being in position within one minute of arrival at the riverbank.

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<sup>123</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Operations 3-11 October 1918 Field Companies of Royal Engineers. Reports of dally duties.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/2. Do.

<sup>126</sup> WO95/2812/1/2. Handwritten report. Major F. Horsport 447<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE, 24 October 1918.

<sup>127</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918.

In general, Col. de H. Hall was pleased with the work of his sappers and pioneers. He noted: 'The whole of the bridging operation went off without a hitch.'<sup>128</sup>

When the dust had settled so to speak and when time permitted, again with a view of learning from failures and mistakes during the operation, some units of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade wrote after-battle reports which gave reasons why their unit initially failed to achieve their objectives. For example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers noted why things didn't go too well for them on 17 and 18 October.<sup>129</sup>

- Barrage too quick to allow mopping up of farms.
- Units must be definitely earmarked to mop up strong localities.
- Fog was so dense on both days during the first three hours that it was difficult to control troops or spot German machine gun fire.
- Inter-communications must be maintained by means of officer's patrols by units.
- In view of the strength of the battalions, the frontage given them was much too great.

It is interesting to note, that even at this late stage in the war, the horse and rider proved valuable. During the previous day's operations in crossing the Selle, squadrons of cavalry from 1/1<sup>st</sup> Northumberland Hussars were employed as Forward Observation Posts, Special Patrols, and Mounted Orderlies to escort German prisoners back down the line. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division post-operation report noted; 'Very good reports, which were of great value in clearing up the situation, were frequently received from O.P. and Special Patrols.'<sup>130</sup> The cavalry were used again days later when the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Divisions pushed on towards the Forest of Mormal. In this operation, the 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers who assembled in the valley north of Reumont, south of Le Cateau, were brought up and held in readiness 'to exploit the situation should circumstances permit, or to follow up and regain touch with the enemy, should his screen be broken by the infantry attack.'<sup>131</sup>

Most of the casualties suffered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 17 October occurred during their attempts to capture Dublin Farm. According to the CWGC, two officers, Lieutenants Kidson and Walkey, and twenty-two other ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were killed. All of them were buried in Highland Cemetery, Le Cateau.<sup>132</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF suffered highest casualties of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the Battle of the Selle. The casualties suffered by the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade between 17 and 18 October 1918 are shown in Table 14 below. The figures quoted from 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary are both killed in action and wounded combined. See Table 15. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF casualty count for officers is nine, which are two officers killed and seven officers wounded.<sup>133</sup> Table 14 presents a breakdown of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF casualties from the Battalion War Diary.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/2. Report by Commander of Royal Engineers, Lieut.- Col. P. de H. Hall titled Bridging of River Selle in connection with Operations on 17 October 1918. Dated 26 October 1918.

<sup>129</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. Appendix 'D'. p.4.

<sup>130</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/4. Narrative of Operations 16-18 October 1918.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/4. XIIIth Corps Instructions No. 6.. 21 October 1918.

<sup>132</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>133</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of Operations of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 16-19 October 1918. Appendix 'D'

<sup>134</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 19 October 1918.

Note there is a difference of three other ranks casualties between 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF account of casualties. The attacking strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was twenty officers and 458 men of other ranks. They lost 45% of their officers and 43% of their other ranks. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters lost 107 other ranks out of a total strength of 322, or 33%.<sup>135</sup>

Table 14  
Losses to 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF between 17 and 18 October 1918

Officers killed	Officers wounded	Other Ranks killed	Other Ranks wounded	Other Ranks gassed	Other Ranks missing	Cases of shell shock	Total
2	7	35	132	20	5	3	<b>204</b>

Table 15  
Losses to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade between 17 and 18 October 1918

Unit	Officers	Other Ranks	Total
3 <sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers	8	97	105
Scottish Horse	6	157	163
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>207</b>
149 <sup>th</sup> Trench Mortar Battery	0	4	4
Totals	23	456	479

Some of the other ranks who were listed as wounded died from their wounds. The final death count of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was two officers and forty other ranks. Twenty-four were killed on 17 October and eighteen of 18 October.<sup>136</sup> The majority of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at that time were English. Out of forty-two who died, twenty-six or 62% were English.

There were two twenty-year-old young men killed on 17 October. They were 24547 Pte. Joseph Patrick Scully, ‘A’ Coy. from No 3 Great Strand Street, Dublin and 28370 Pte. James Arthur Hitch from Ely, Soham, Cambridgeshire who had formerly served in The Suffolk Yeomanry Regiment. They were both buried in Highland Cemetery, Le Cateau.<sup>137</sup> Little did these two young lads know when fighting towards Le Cateau, the town would be their final resting place. Also, among the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF dead was 19787 Pte. John Messitt; he was killed in action on 18 October 1918. He was twenty-three years of age and came from Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. He enlisted in Bray and he too is buried along with his comrades in Highland Cemetery, Le Cateau. His cousin, Thomas Messitt also joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF but survived the war. His regimental number was 19788. They may have joined together.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>135</sup> McCance, S. p.162.

<sup>136</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>137</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) . See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>138</sup> Burke, Tom, *Privates Thomas and John Messitt, 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers*, The Blue Cap-Journal of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association 8, (June 2001). Pp.21-23.

## A final bow, 1 to 11 November

On the day the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had their hot meal in Honnechy, 19 October, little did they know that in twenty-three days' time, the misery and sadness they had experienced, a very few for four years, would come to an end. But before that day came, there was one more job to be done; a couple more pages for the adjutant to write in the Battalion's War Diary.

Sunday 20 October was a dark, dull, and wet day.<sup>1</sup> The Battalion held a church parade and gathered their dead to be buried. They spent the afternoon quietly cleaning up their kit and weapons. It must have been a silent and somewhat sombre billet.<sup>2</sup> Next day was fine during which Lieut.-Col. Weldon attended a meeting of all the Battalion Commanders of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Marez to 'discuss recent operations.' No doubt more lessons were learned and documented. It seems at the meeting that Col. Weldon was informed of a promotion. Experienced men were a valuable asset to the BEF. He was sent to take temporary command of the 54<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 18<sup>th</sup> Division. His place at the head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was taken over temporarily by Major Trasenster MC from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers.<sup>3</sup> One must wonder why the job was not given to an officer from within the Battalion. However, before he left on 25 October, Col. Weldon was at the head of the Battalion when they were inspected by GOC 50<sup>th</sup> Division, Major-General H. Jackson, DSO in a warehouse in a hollow square in Marez at 11:00 a.m. on Tuesday 22 October. Fifty-three officers and 912 other ranks formed the parade that was inspected.<sup>4</sup> During the inspection, General H. Jackson presented that long-serving man in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters, Regimental Sergeant-Major John Ring with a bar to the DCM he had already been awarded.<sup>5</sup>

There wasn't much time for these men sit on their laurels. On the day Col. Weldon left to take up his new temporary post, 25 October, the GOC 4<sup>th</sup> Army, General Rawlinson, 'warned his two corps commanders (IX Corps Lieut.-General Sir Walter Braithwaite and XIII Corps Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland) that operations would be continued shortly with a view to forcing a passage of the Sambre and Oise Canal and securing a footing in the Forest of Mormal.'<sup>6</sup> Next day on Saturday 26 October, at meetings in Marez between battalion and brigade commanders of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, General Rawlinson's ambitions were discussed, and plans were made for the next operation to be carried out on the retreating Germans. None of these men knew that it would be the final push that would bring the war to an end.

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<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 20 October 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 October 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 25 October 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 22 October 1918

<sup>5</sup> McCance, S. p.162.

<sup>6</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.464. See also p.618.

While the meetings to set out the plans and objectives went on, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had moved to billets in Maretz for some re-organising and training, which, ominously enough, was in the tactics of ‘woods fighting.’<sup>7</sup> There was a fear in 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ that fighting in a forest and enclosed spaces specifically presented by a forest, ‘required consideration’, particularly in the light of so many of the reinforcements being inexperienced recruits.<sup>8</sup>

Next day on 27 October, ‘with a view to continuing the pressure on the enemy further’, 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ issued a series of Preliminary Instructions received from GHQ which outlined the next objectives which were.<sup>9</sup>

1. Secure a foothold in the Forest of Mormal, especially the high ground running north from La Haute Cornee (on the northern side of the Sambre just north of Landrecies) towards Locquignol and also the high ground north of Landrecies...
2. Forcing a passage over the Sambre and Oise Canal between Oisy and Landrecies.

Since the XIIIth Corps of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army had been, ‘keeping a constant pressure on the enemy’s rear guard’ in this region, they were assigned the objective of securing a foothold in the Forest of Mormal, which covered an area of about forty square miles (103 square kilometres) and the high ground running north towards Locquignol and the high ground north of Landrecies.<sup>10</sup> To complete the paperwork of formal orders, on 29 October, GHQ issued an order that would cover the next combined offensive by the 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Armies; an offensive that came to be known as the Battle of the Sambre. The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF referred to the coming offensive as being ‘a major operation to be carried out on a fifty-mile (eighty kilometres) front.’<sup>11</sup> The frontage of the 4<sup>th</sup> Army would be ‘about 15 miles (twenty-four kilometres) due east.’<sup>12</sup> The offensive would begin on 4 November to drive the Germans further eastwards, ‘advancing in the general direction Avesnes-Maubeuge-Mons.’<sup>13</sup> Essentially, the objective was to drive the Germans back to where the two opposing armies met in August 1914.

Consequently, in accordance with cracking on with this next objective, after their period of rest and reorganisation, on the night of 30/31 October 50<sup>th</sup> Division moved back up to a front line that had moved on a bit where they relieved units of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Divisions.<sup>14</sup> Between 19 and 25 October, these two divisions had pushed on the offensive and had taken the ground between Le Cateau and the western edge of the Forest of Mormal and established a new line between Englefontaine in the north and Fontaine au Bois in the south.<sup>15</sup> Included in that gain were Bousies and the Herman Position 2 .<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 26-27 October 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary 27 October 1918.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary. 27 October 1918.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary. 27 October 1918. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.120.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.120.

<sup>13</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.463.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Relief Order No. 259. 28 October 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/5. See Sheet 57B. Edition 1. Scale 1:40,000.

<sup>16</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. See Sketch 29. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Divisions had captured these positions by 25 October 1918.

When this fighting had died down, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved up from Maretz to billets in Le Cateau via Reumont on 29 October.<sup>17</sup> The weather was typical for late October, fine, cold but mostly overcast with poor visibility and drizzle.<sup>18</sup> Before they left for the relief, the men that were lost to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were made up by reinforcements. The Battalion received six officers and 159 other ranks, many of whom were raw recruits and totally inexperienced, hence the training in forest tactics.<sup>19</sup> One of these reinforcements was William Watts, from Newmarket Street in Dublin who had enlisted into the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF at the outbreak of the war in 1914. Admitted to hospital in January 1918, he missed the German offensive but was sent back to the front to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF for their final push.<sup>20</sup>

There was concern in 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ that they would not have enough time to absorb and train these new recruits in time for this next offensive.<sup>21</sup> At this stage in the war, battalion sizes were much smaller than they were in 1914. To recall, in August 1914, the Battalion strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was twenty-two officers and 1,023 other ranks.<sup>22</sup> The attacking strength of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 18 October 1918 was twenty officers but only 458 men of other ranks. Following the two days' fighting at the Selle, they lost 204 men which was 45% of their officers and 43% of their other ranks. With a replacement of 165 men, this would suggest that the new battalion strength was 419 which included 165 replacements making the inexperienced number in the Battalion to be roughly 40%. This was a substantial number of inexperienced men to take into battle. Moreover, this was just one battalion out of nine in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters lost 33% of their men who were also replaced with new recruits bringing their battalion strength up to 400.<sup>23</sup> Is it therefore any wonder why Major-General H.C. Jackson was worried?

Knowing the predicament, he was in, General Jackson gave a map, Sheet 57.b. showing the objectives, along with aerial photographs to his brigade commanders for them, 'to consider in detail, and discuss with' their battalion commanders, how they 'would carry out the attack with objectives as shown on attached map.' He told them that the order of attack would be, 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade on right of attack, 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade on left with 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade in reserve.<sup>24</sup> He further told his brigadiers that, 'attention should be paid to the five ravines which the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade will have to cross and the four knolls at map reference points G.10.d., G.10.b., and G.5.b. and c. which the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade will have to capture.'<sup>25</sup> These map references refer to a location just northeast of Faubourg Soyers and La Haute Cornee. Faubourg Soyers is less than two kilometres on the north western edge of Landrecies on the D934. In early November 1918 it was a wooded area. Hence the 'woods fighting' training requirement.

The pause in XIIIth Corps operations between 25 October and 3 November gave time for careful preparations particularly as regards bridging the Sambre Canal and the age-old problems of communications.<sup>26</sup> The plan of attack that General Jackson's brigade commanders came up with during this interval was, not surprisingly, not very different to the plan they used to attack across the Selle on 17 and 18 October. Zero day was originally set for 3 November. It was put forward by one day in order to allow 50<sup>th</sup> Division brigades to get 'to know their front from which they will attack.'

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<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 29 October 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 31 October 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*. Casualties and Reinforcements during October 1918.

<sup>20</sup> *Watts, William. Pte. 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. (Dublin: RDFA Archive Dublin City Library and Archive). I would like to thank Sean Connolly, ex-Secretary of the RDFA for the information on Pte. William Watts.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary 27 October 1918.

<sup>22</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. Vol. II. p.14.

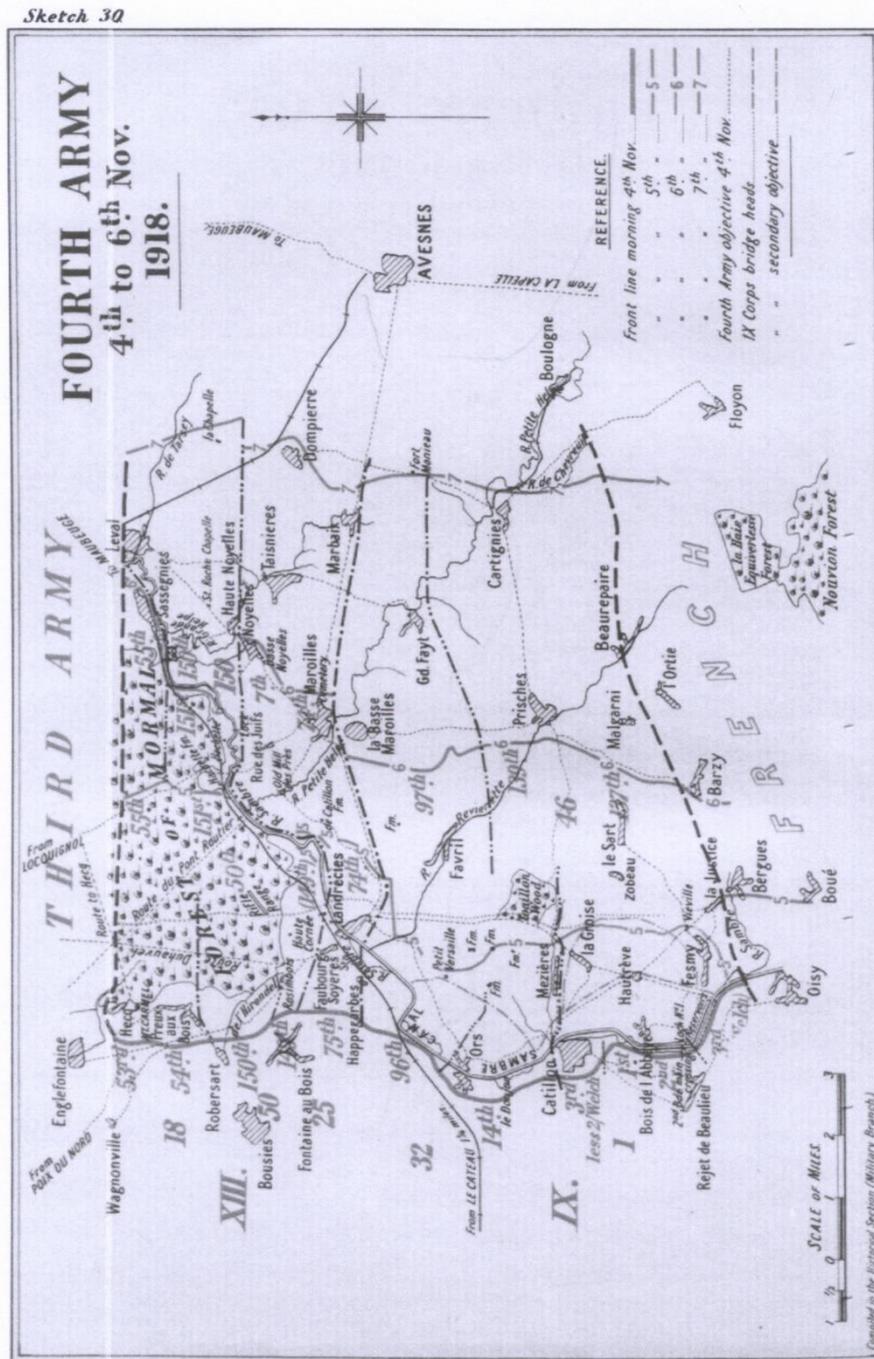
<sup>23</sup> McCance, S. p.162.

<sup>24</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary 27 October 1918.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary 27 October 1918.

<sup>26</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. Pp.465-466.

Moreover, at a meeting of 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional brigadiers on 30 October, it was agreed that their troops needed a further day's rest.<sup>27</sup> So, it seems that General Jackson's worry about his reinforcements not being ready was addressed, albeit with one extra day of preparation and rest. Zero day would be 4 November 1918. Zero hour would be 6:15 a.m.<sup>28</sup>

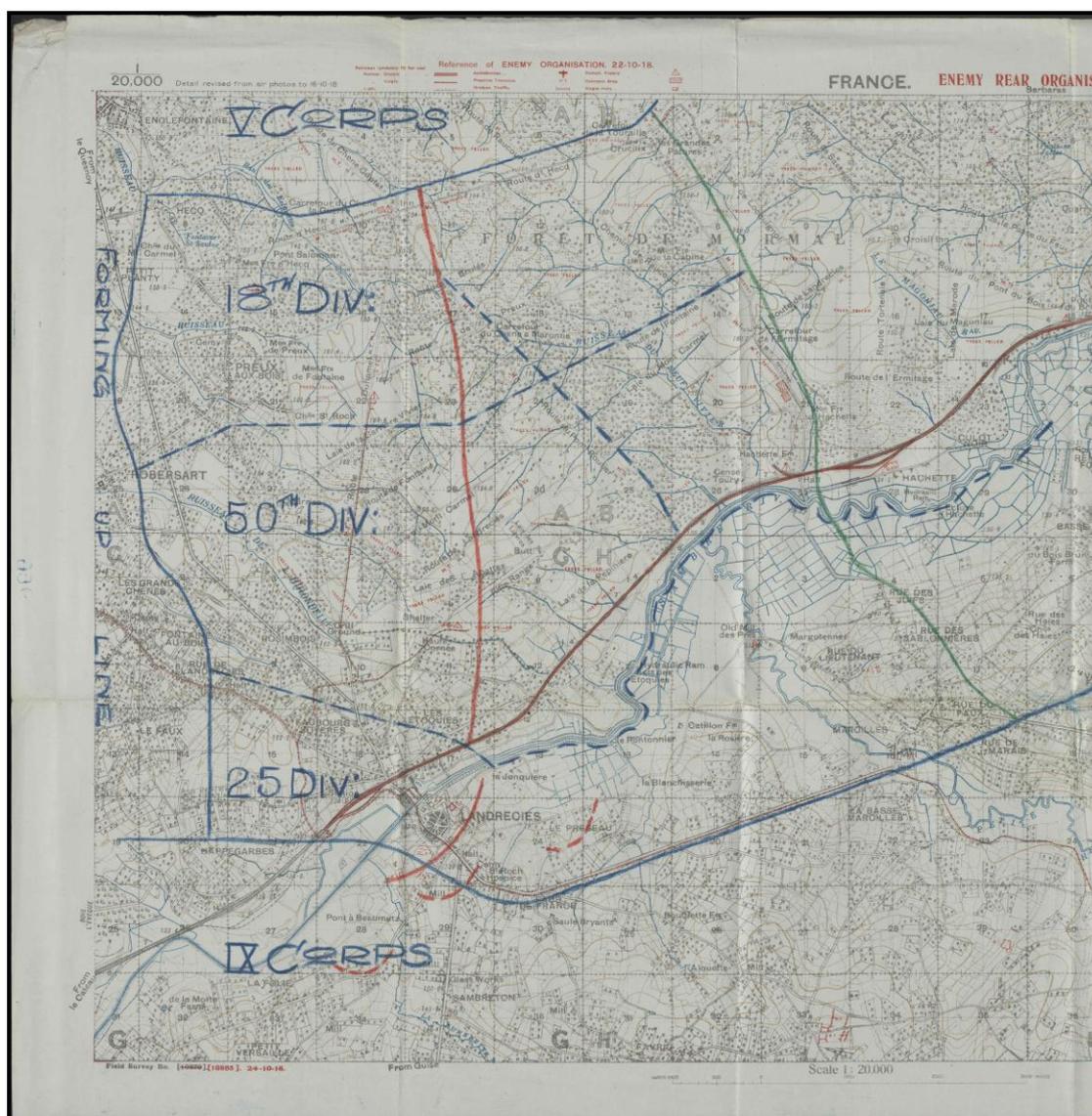


Sketch 30 Fourth Army 4-6 November 1918. XIIIth Corp and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade west of Forest of Mormal at Fontaine au Bois.<sup>29</sup>

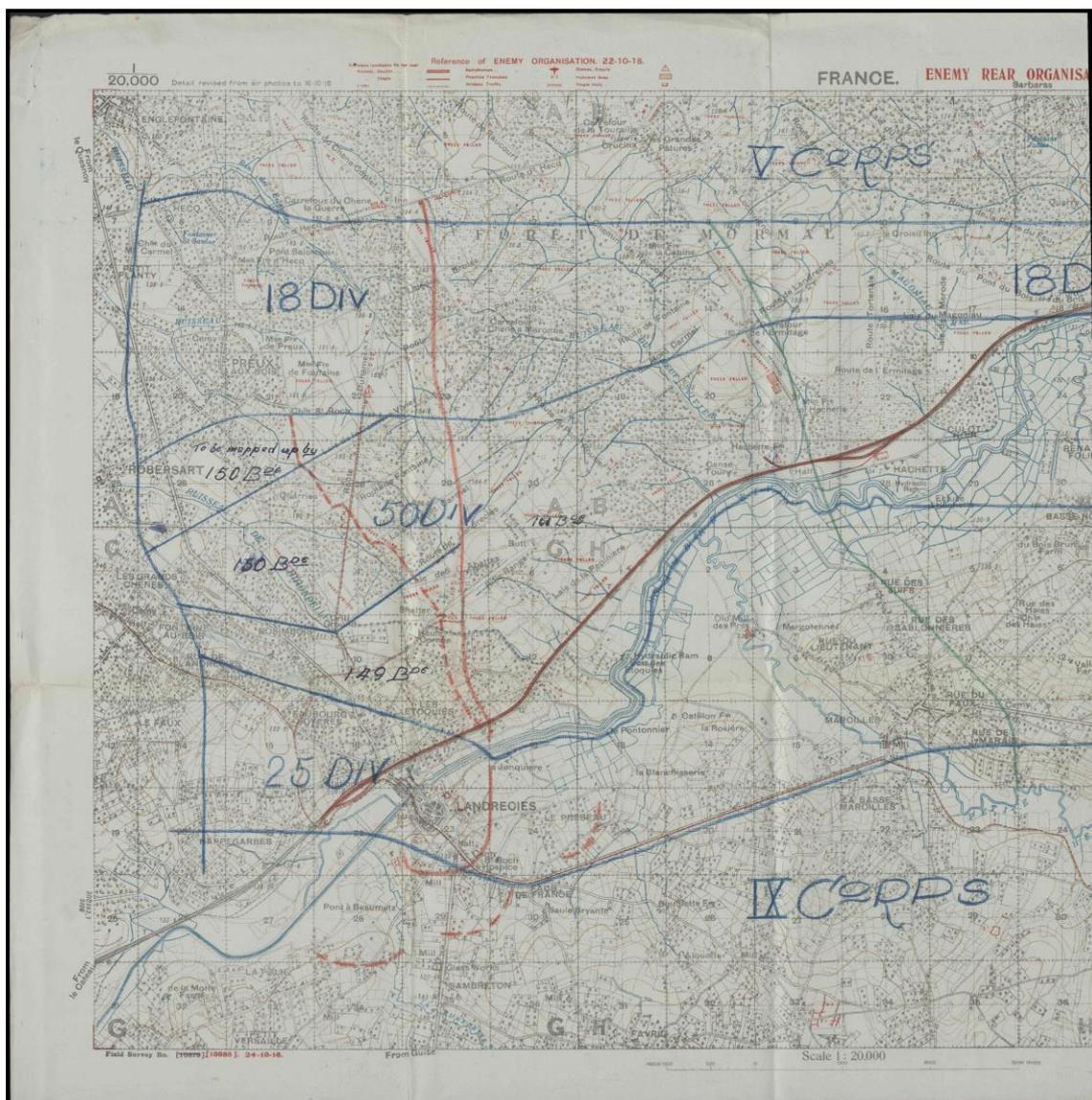
<sup>27</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Memo of minutes of meeting 50<sup>th</sup> Division General Staff titled: 'Very Secret', G.X.793. 30 October 1918. See Map for divisional objectives of VIIIth Corps on 4 November 1918 and 50<sup>th</sup> Division line of attack showing brigade boundaries.

<sup>28</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.464.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* Vol.5. p.740.



Divisional objectives of VIIIth Corps on 4 November 1918. Note 50<sup>th</sup> Division attack in a north-eastern direction.



50<sup>th</sup> Division line of attack showing brigade boundaries and objectives on 4 November 1918.

## The Objectives

As stated, the overall VIIIth Corps objective of this operation was to secure a foothold in the Forest of Mormal, especially the high ground running north from La Haute Cornee towards Locquignol and also the high ground running northeast of Landrecies through the Forest of Mormal. As usual, the objective lines were set out as coloured lines on an operational map of the region. In terms of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, the first objective, the Red Line, going from north to south, ran from the western edge of the Forest of Mormal at the Route 'Hecq and Route du Chene Cuplet crossroads on southern side of Englefontaine directly southwards to the Sambre and around Landrecies; about nine kilometres. The second objective, the Green Line, again going from north to south, began on the eastern edge of the Forest of Mormal at a location on the southern side of les Grandes Patures southwards to Hachette on the northern side of the Sambre; about four kilometres.<sup>30</sup> The initial advance from the forming up lines to the Red Line would be about 914 metres. This terrain was intersected by hedgerows and the infantry would have to get 'through very close and difficult country as far as the western edge of the Forest de Mormal, and from thence on (to the Green Line) an advance through the forest, which in many stretches was almost impassable owing to the dense nature of the undergrowth.'<sup>31</sup>

## The Teams

The teams, their equipment, operational tactics and methods used in carrying out this attack would be similar to that used at the Selle on 17 and 18 October. In view of the depleted strengths of the divisions in XIIIth Corps, and the depth to which the advance was to be carried, Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland, GOC VIIIth Corps, decided to employ three divisions for the initial attack, each being on a comparatively narrow front, with one division in support.<sup>32</sup> Going from north to south along the 4<sup>th</sup> Army's XIIIth Corps line of attack, the order of battle would be 18<sup>th</sup> Division on left, 50<sup>th</sup> Division in centre and 25<sup>th</sup> Division on the right with 66<sup>th</sup> Division in reserve.<sup>33</sup> The front assigned to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division was 2,500 yards (2,286 metres) in length.<sup>34</sup>

In terms of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, the attack would be carried out in a series of bounds on a two-brigade front. The division's first objective (Red Line) was assigned to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade on right of attack, 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade on left. Between the assembly position and the Red Line there would be a halting line noted on the operational maps as the Red Dotted Line.<sup>35</sup> At Zero hour plus 120 minutes, two companies from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers (150<sup>th</sup> Brigade) under Major C.R. Williams, MC would attack and mop up in a northern direction and meet with the 18<sup>th</sup> Division at Preux-aux-Bois just north east of Robersart.<sup>36</sup> After the capture of the first objectives, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade in reserve would pass through the 149<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> Brigades to capture the final objective (Green Line) on the 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional front.<sup>37</sup> On obtaining the final objective, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade were to consolidate what they had gained.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Map. Sheet 57.N.W. Edition 3.a. 'France'. Updated 22 October 1918. Scale 1:20,000.

<sup>31</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>32</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.120.

<sup>33</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.465.

<sup>34</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.120.

<sup>35</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. Instructions No. 1. 3 November 1918.

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918). Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Instruction No. 3 Plan of Attcak. 30 October 1918. See also map showing divisional and brigade objectives and order of battle.

<sup>38</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1. Operation Order No. 261. 3 November 1918.

The attack formation of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade would be 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers on the right and Scottish Horse on the left to be formed up in their assembly positions at Zero hour minus thirty minutes. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF would be in reserve for the attack. They and 149<sup>th</sup> Trench Mortar Battery would leave their bivouacs at Zero minus three hours and move to assembly position at L.12.a. (on western edge of Fontaine au Bois with Bousies off to the north west.) and L.11.a. respectively. Attacking troops had to be in their assembly positions two hours prior to Zero hour. Battalion commanders were to notify 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ by the code word 'NOVEMBER' immediately they were in position. <sup>39</sup> Brigade commanders were to notify the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's Advanced Divisional Headquarters by the word 'CAT' immediately they were in position.

There were no major changes made to the allotment of artillery. The attack of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade would be carried out as usual under a creeping barrage at a rate of ninety-one metres in six minutes to a point referred to as the dotted Red Line on the western side of the Red Line which the Brigade was assigned to reach at Zero plus 170 mins. <sup>41</sup> A protective smoke barrage in front of the two companies of 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters would cover their advance northwards.

During the five days before the infantry attack, in an attempt to remove some of the reported German machine gun posts identified in the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade's sector of attack, divisional artillery 'kept up harassing fire on enemy positions and communications, the front edge of Forest of Mormal just east of Robersart (Quarries A.27.c.) and (just south of Quarries G.3.b.) receiving special attention.' German artillery response was quiet during the day but at intervals throughout the night became active using '4.2 Blue Cross' shells.' <sup>42</sup> In an effort to locate some of the German artillery positions, sound-ranging was carried out from time to time. To assist in this operation, British artillery went completely silent for periods of half an hour. <sup>43</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Machine Gun Corps was assigned to support the attack of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. One Machine Gun Company would co-operate with each attacking brigade. <sup>44</sup> 'B' Coy. would be allotted to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade. <sup>45</sup> There would be a pause on this dotted Red Line for one hour i.e., between Zero plus 170 mins and Zero plus 230 minutes after which the infantry attack would continue. The pauses between objectives and barrages would allow the attacking infantry to re-organise and prepare for the attack on the Red Line objective. During this pause, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade would, 'by rifle and Machine Gun fire assist the 25<sup>th</sup> Division to cross the Sambre Canal by a bridge at G.17.d.9.7.' <sup>46</sup> The nearest bridge to this map reference was the bridge over the Sambre on the northern edge of Landrecies.

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<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Order No. 57. 3 November 1918. For map references L.12. a. and L.11 see also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Sheet 57B. Edition 1. Scale 1:40,000. For assembly point of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade see *ibid*. WO95/2812/1/5. Sheet 57.N.W. Edition 3.a. 'France'. Updated 22 October 1918. Scale 1:20,000.

<sup>40</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1. Operation Order No. 261. 3 November 1918.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/1. Operation Instruction No. 2. Plan of Attack. 29 October 1918.

<sup>42</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.1. 30 October to 31 October 1918.

<sup>43</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.466.

<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Instruction No. 1. Preliminary. 27 October 1918

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Instruction No. 1. 2 November 1918.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instructions No. 5 Plan of Attack. 31 October 1918.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instructions No. 5. Plan of Attack. 31 October 1918.

Tanks from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> (Mark V) Tank Battalions of II Tank Brigade would assist the XIIIth Corps.<sup>48</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> (Mark V) Tank Battalion was assigned to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. Initially six tanks were allotted to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade; six to the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade and four to the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade.<sup>49</sup> However on 2 November, the Tank allocation changed. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division was allocated ten tanks in total ; six to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade and four to the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The Tanks allocated to the brigades would advance, ‘with the object of overcoming Machine Gun resistance and making tracks through the hedges for the Infantry.’<sup>50</sup> One of the lessons noted by Lieut.-Col. N. O. Clarke, DSO of the the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers in his post-Selle report was that, ‘units must be definitely earmarked to mop up strong localities.’<sup>51</sup> Perhaps by way of acting on that lesson and his recommendation, during the pause of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack, the slow-moving tanks were specifically assigned mopping duties.<sup>52</sup>

The duties of the Royal Engineers and Pioneers would be to assist in the making of roads and tracks through the woods and in ‘bridging the Sambre.’ The 447<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE prepared ‘four light floating bridges, each a 60-foot span, for crossing the Sambre Canal.’ The 7<sup>th</sup> and 446<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE had a specific objective in making a track from where the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade assembled at Fontaine au Bois to a location called Drill Ground Corner beyond which was open ground through to La Haute Cornee and the Red Line objective.<sup>53</sup>

Communication systems would be the same as those used at the Selle. However, should supplies of pigeons become available for the second and any subsequent days of the operation, ‘arrangements would be made’ to acquire the pigeons.<sup>54</sup> The feedback of information from the front line to advanced battalion headquarters was essential and noted in preliminary instructions as a requirement. ‘It is most essential that information be sent back as early as possible.’ Moreover, casualty counts or even estimates were to be sent to advanced battalion headquarters as soon as possible.<sup>55</sup>

The RFC would supply the contact planes and counter-attack patrol planes in the sky over the battlefield from Zero hour to dusk. Again, if a German infantry counterattack was spotted, white parachute lights would be dropped, ‘over the centre of the hostile troops.’ The positions if spotted would come under artillery attack.<sup>56</sup> The 15<sup>th</sup> Wing of the RAF would supply a ‘smoke screen’ at agreed times throughout the attack on the spur above the bend in the Sambre on the northern side opposite le Pontonnier just east of Landrecies and in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade’s line of attack (G.12. d. to H.7.c.)<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.466.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Operation Instruction No. 2. Plan of Attack. 29 October 1918. The OH noted that ten tanks in total were allocated to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* p.471.

<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instruction No. 1. Tanks. 2 November 1918.

<sup>51</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 17 October 1918. 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers account. See also *War Diary 50th Division.* Order of Battle. 50<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>52</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Instructions No. 5. 31 October 1918.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instruction No. 1. R.E. and Pioneers.. 2 November 1918. See Sheet 57.N.W. Edition 3.a. ‘France’. Updated 22 October 1918. Scale 1:20,000 for location of Drill Ground Corner. See also *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/6. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1918 to 30 November 1918). Narrative of Operations. Beginning 4 November 1918. Report Royal Engineers 12 November 1918.

<sup>54</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instruction No. 1. Pigeons. 2 November 1918.

<sup>55</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment.* Instructions No. 1. 3 November 1918. Reports.

<sup>56</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Division Instruction No. 1. Contact Planes. 2 November 1918.

<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* Amendment No. 2 Division Instructions No. 1 Smoke. 3 November 1918.

The wounded men from the 50<sup>th</sup> Division would be looked after by 1/1<sup>st</sup> Northumberland Field Ambulance under the command of Lieut.-Col. J.W.Craven MC. At their disposal would be eight officers, 230 other ranks, eleven motor ambulances and nine horsed ambulances wagons. Capt. H. Shields MC and forty-eight stretcher bearers would be assigned to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>58</sup> Advanced Dressing Stations (ADS) would be set up with the advancing infantry attacks. The first ADS was set in open ground on the southeast edge of Bousies (L.11.c.3.2.) To collect the badly wounded, Ambulance Cars would push forward towards Regimental Aid Posts, 'as far as circumstance permit.'<sup>59</sup> Six hours after Zero hour, a Divisional Burial Party accompanied by four Chaplains would follow the infantry's attack.<sup>60</sup>

### The challenges

The main geographic challenges both 150<sup>th</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigades would face would be the Forest of Mormal and what was termed the 'enclosed country', i.e., the woods.<sup>61</sup> Along both Red and Green line objectives there were places in the forest where the Germans had cleared the growth particularly in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade's line of attack on the northern edge of La Haute Cornee. However, there were untouched portions of the forest with dense undergrowth and this would hamper movement. To assist the men hacking their way through this dense undergrowth, each division was given 500 billhooks 'for cutting hedges.'<sup>62</sup>

Up to date information was gathered on the obstacles the advancing battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade might face. A German soldier from the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment picked up on the night of 1 November informed his captors that where he was in the Forest of Mormal there were no-dugouts or shelters of any kind and that 'the wood was not difficult to walk through by day.'<sup>63</sup> However there were many streams that had their sources in the forest and ran throughout it in narrow channels with steep banks.<sup>64</sup> The landscape near the streams was swampy and consequently underfoot conditions would be soft and marshy. Local civilians informed 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional intelligence officers about the depth and width of some of the small streams and the condition of the bridges over these streams that ran through the forest. For example, in the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade's line of attack, the bridge over a river / stream named the Ruisseau De L'Hirondelle that ran through the wooded area just north of Les Grands Chenes, was 'a brick arch level with the road, about twelve metres wide.' The river/ stream itself was also reported by local civilians to be between and three and three and a half metres wide and about one and a half metres deep. However, oddly enough for early November there was 'very little water in it.'<sup>65</sup> Civilians also informed that the bridge over the canal at Landrecies was mined.<sup>66</sup> The location of all these machine gun positions, clear pathways through the forest, river depths and widths, bridges and possible location of mines and traps was fed back from divisional intelligence reports to brigade and battalion intelligence officers to distribute to the company commanders who would lead their men in attack.

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<sup>58</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Medical Arrangements. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/2. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1919 - 19 March 1919). 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional Headquarters.

<sup>59</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Addendum No. 2 to 50<sup>th</sup> Division. Medical Arrangements No.27 2 November 1918.

<sup>60</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Burials.

<sup>61</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.473.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*. p.466.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

<sup>64</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.463.

<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.1. 30 October to 31 October 1918. Note. On trench map Sheet 57.N.W. Edition 3.a. 'France'. Updated 22 October 1918. Scale 1:20,000, this river is referred to as Ruisseau De L'Hirondelle. However it may also be referred to as Ruisseau a Grenouilles.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

Much of the information on the forest and the clearances had been obtained from aerial photography of the forest carried out by the RFC. Some German positions were spotted as recent as 22 October 1918.<sup>67</sup> When the weather permitted, the RFC flew over the German lines and photographed the location of points of interest. They put together a 'mosaic' of the divisional front from a selection of photographs taken that was issued to all units. Unfortunately, however, due to distortion in some of the photographs, the mosaic proved inaccurate.<sup>68</sup>

The RFC also identified a number of German machine gun posts located on the south eastern edge of Fontaine au Bois (G.9.c.1.9.) and in line with the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade's sector of attack.<sup>69</sup> Other machine gun posts were identified on the western edge of the Forest of Mormal. The RFC also located a German Observation Tower previously reported as being in the Forest of Mormal but was in fact located much further south in the line just west of the village of Le Nouvion located about twenty-five kilometres southeast of Le Cateau. Built 'on the Eifel Tower pattern', it was on a 165 map contour and stated as being 'four times the height of the trees.'<sup>70</sup>

As per usual, further information of the forest and potential obstacles was gathered from patrols and the occasional wandering German soldier picked up in No Man's Land. For example like the man from the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment picked up on the night of 1 November as previously mentioned.<sup>71</sup>

In terms of the German opposition, intelligence gathered had shown that the main opponents the 50<sup>th</sup> Division would face this time would come from the Jager Division containing the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Jager Regiments, and a Cyclists Brigade which had been holding the south-western corner of the Forest of Mormal from some time. Other units such as the 27<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment from the 54<sup>th</sup> Division might also be faced. Contrary to the men of the 243<sup>rd</sup> Division the 50<sup>th</sup> Division faced at the Selle, the morale of the Jager Division was noted as being 'as good as that of any troops possessed by Germany.'<sup>72</sup> British patrols went out at night along the divisional front to gather any snippets of information they could about the Germans in the forest and beyond through listening, watching and if lucky, capturing any straying Germans.

The Germans too sent out night patrols that occasionally came up as far as Fontaine au Bois before being confronted by British patrols and often captured. A wounded German soldier left behind by one of their night patrols on 31 October who later died, was identified by his disc and documents as being from The Guard Reserve, Jager Battalion, Jager Division. This German division was last identified at Le Quesnoy.<sup>73</sup> Another German soldier from the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was picked up on the night of 1 November also near Fontaine au Bois.<sup>74</sup> Fourth Army intelligence knew that this Jager Division, 'had been engaged three times against the Third Army and is known to be exhausted, having lost over 1,380 prisoners since September 12<sup>th</sup>.'<sup>75</sup> Yet, their moral was noted as being good.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Sheet 57.N.W. Edition 3.a. 'France'. Updated 22 October 1918. Scale 1:20,000.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.2. 31 October to 1 November 1918.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.1. 30 October to 31 October 1918.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.1. 30 October to 31 October 1918.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

<sup>72</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Notes on German prisoners captured by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 4 and 10 November 1918.

<sup>73</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.2. 31 October to 1 November 1918.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

However, despite the intelligence on the German troops facing the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade were not exactly sure what German units they would specifically face when the attack would begin. A brigade order issued on 3 November noted; 'It is not definitely known what enemy troops are opposite our front. It is probable that the Jager Division, 8<sup>th</sup> Division and elements of the 30<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Divisions may be met with.'<sup>76</sup>

In the days leading up to the attack, battalions rotated in the line daily 'in order that as many units as possible became acquainted with the ground over which they had to attack.'<sup>77</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF did not rotate with any battalions but spent these last few days of October training in Reumont and in billets at Le Cateau. On 1 November they moved into billets at Pommereuil. They were a bit unlucky here; on the eve of the attack, they were hit by German 'high bursting shrapnel shells' which resulted in the wounding of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. T.E. Flewitt, the death of one other rank and wounding of another.<sup>78</sup>

At 8:45 p.m. on 3 November, the day before the attack, officers of the battalions in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade met to synchronise their watches at brigade headquarters near Les Grand Chenes (G.1.d.2.3.)<sup>79</sup> The mood among them might have been good and perhaps optimistic as to the outcome of the coming operation. A line in one of the last of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's intelligence reports noted under the title 'News'; 'We have taken Valenciennes.' 'The News' also noted that Turkey had capitulated.<sup>80</sup>

However, regardless of the good news, nothing would be taken for granted and they were reminded that, regardless of what German unit they would face, possibly for the last time, there would be a fight. The reminder came in the form of a captured German order, 'signed by the Crown Prince' which read; 'The defence of the Canal position is of great strategical importance...I reckon absolutely on the Army holding its new position at all costs.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Brigade Order No. 57. 3 November 1918.

<sup>77</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>78</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 28 October – 3 November 1918. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Flewitt as in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary and Flewitt as in Crown and Co. survived the war. He remained in India when the regiment was disbanded. According to the C.W.G.C., two other ranks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF DOW on 3 November 1918. They were 17993 Pte. Daniel Monaghan, age 22 from Clontarf, Dublin and 23414 Pte. Harry Tasker, age 25 from Manchester. Both were buried some 240 kilometres away from the front in Rouen. It is unlikely either of these two men was the other rank KIA on 3 November 1918. See [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org)

<sup>79</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1. Operation Order No. 261. 3 November 1918.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.3. 1 to 2 November 1918.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/5. Division Intelligence Summary. No.2. 31 October to 1 November 1918.

## The Action

In pitch darkness, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved off from their bivouacs in Le Pommereuil at 3:00 a.m. on 4 November to take up their assembly position for the attack in Fontaine au Bois.<sup>82</sup> They marched about five kilometres through Mal Garni and waited for the barrage to begin. At 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ, the code word 'November' had come back from battalions and all troops were in their assembly positions by 5:45 a.m. The attack started at Zero hour, 6:15 a.m. on time with the creeping barrage. However, the 4<sup>th</sup> Army barrage had actually begun a half an hour earlier at 5:45 a.m. by the neighbouring IXth Corps on the right of XIIIth Corps. The reason for the earlier start by IXth Corps was based on a tactical move requested by Lieut.-General Braithwaite, CO. IXth Corps. They too had to cross the Sambre and Braithwaite believed his IXth Corps could get a surprise jump on the German to get across the canal rather than waiting on the XIIIth Corps.<sup>83</sup> The move however had tragic consequences.

Using high explosive shells and gas, the German artillery responded immediately to the early barrage. The German barrage 'was very heavy on our forming up line and casualties were sustained especially by the reserve battalion.'<sup>84</sup> The reserve battalion for the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade was the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF forming up near the village of Fontaine au Bois and Robersart. According to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary, the Battalion assembled some '800 yards (731 metres) behind the attacking battalions', namely Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, who were awaiting orders to move as per the attack schedule were sitting ducks and 'almost immediately, (at Zero hour.) came under a heavy barrage and suffered heavy casualties.'<sup>85</sup>

For totally sensible reasons of avoiding any further casualties, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF didn't wait where they were and moved up closer to the fighting and 'got involved.'<sup>86</sup> The advance of the leading battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, namely the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers got held up from hostile machine gun fire which was 'extremely heavy' and owing to the terrain being 'so liberally intersected by hedgerows,' the machine gun positions 'were very difficult to locate.' Moreover, a heavy ground mist / fog had set in which hindered observation and 'greatly added to the difficulties of the attack.'<sup>87</sup> The result was that 'severe casualties were inflicted on the extreme right battalions (3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers behind them) in reserve where the opposition appeared to be strongest.'<sup>88</sup>

Another factor that added to the delay of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade was that during the advance, the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers drifted off course and swung too far northeast instead of attacking directly eastwards. Remember, there was a thick mist and the battlefield in the woods was still in very low winter morning light if any at all.<sup>89</sup> Except on the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade's side of the attack, i.e., the left of the attack, this machine gun fire along with the thickening mist, held up the advance according to the timetable schedule.

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<sup>82</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>83</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.464.

<sup>84</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.474.

<sup>85</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>86</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.474.

<sup>87</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>88</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade holdup also prevented them from keeping up with the barrage. However, following, 'a short severe struggle, the resistance was over-come and at 7:45 a.m. the line was reported to be again advancing.'<sup>90</sup> By 9:45 a.m., some form of cohesion had returned when the left company of the Scottish Horse had reached Drill Ground Corner (G.10.b.5.0.) and got in touch with 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers.<sup>91</sup> Credit must go to the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Pioneers attached to the Brigade who moved off with the leading battalions and helped to clear a track from Fontaine-au-Bois to Drill Ground Corner as scheduled to do and 'in spite of heavy shelling and severe casualties this (track) was successfully completed by two hours after Zero.'<sup>92</sup>

Things went a bit better in the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade's attack. Under a creeping barrage, two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munster Fusiliers who moved off on time from their start position on the eastern edge of Robersart (A.27.a and b). Supported by three tanks, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters were detailed for the mopping up operation behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, 18<sup>th</sup> Division. They were met with some machine gun nests and snipers left behind by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers. According to McCance, these were 'successfully dealt with.'<sup>93</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters had completely cleared the area assigned to them and by 9:00 a.m. had made contact with the 54<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 18<sup>th</sup> Division on the southern outskirts of Preux. Apparently during this operation, 'great confusion was caused in the enemy ranks that broke and fled in a north-westerly direction; at least 120 prisoners were taken in the vicinity of Preux.'<sup>94</sup> German prisoners captured confirmed that 'everything was in confusion behind their lines and that units were very much mixed up.'<sup>95</sup> By mid-day, the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade had taken their Red Line objective and were re-organising and consolidating their gains. At about 12:30 p.m., the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade passed through and continued the attack on to the Green Line.<sup>96</sup>

At about 10:00 a.m. reports had reached Major-General Jackson GOC 50<sup>th</sup> Division, 'that the resistance, although still fairly strong on the right flank (149<sup>th</sup> Brigade) of the Division, was considerably weakened on the left flank (150<sup>th</sup> Brigade).' Consequently, he decided to exploit this weakness and bring up the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade who were assembled on the Route de Fontaine and the Laie du Mont Carmel and have them prepared 'to strike where the opposition was least...to push on to the Red Line with all possible speed preparatory to continuing the advance to the final objective.'<sup>97</sup> This was a clever move by Jackson. Therefore, in accordance with Major-General Jackson's orders, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade, which from an Irish perspective, contained the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, moved up along the rides in the Forest of Mormal in three columns on the left of 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade. By 1:15 p.m. the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade had carried out his orders and was in position to carry on with the next phase of the attack, i.e., the capture of the Green Line objective.<sup>98</sup> According to the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires, the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade passed through their captured sector at about 12:30 p.m.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>91</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>92</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Narrative of Operations. Beginning 4 November 1918. Report Royal Engineers 12 November 1918.

<sup>93</sup> McCance, S. p.163.

<sup>94</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/3. Notes on German prisoners captured by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 4 and 10 November 1918.

<sup>96</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. Narrative of Operations 4 – 10 November 1918.

<sup>97</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.475.

<sup>98</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.475.

As noted, the place where the toughest resistance was going on throughout the late morning was on the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade's side of the advance. After fighting doggedly for most of the early morning, the Scottish Horse and Royal Fusiliers eventually wore down the German resistance and by 11:15 a.m. 'a considerable improvement in the line was reported' with the Scottish Horse at Haute Cornee (in G.11.a near the Red Line) and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers in touch with the Warrwicks of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division on the right.<sup>99</sup> The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted:

Very strong opposition had been encountered along our front up to this point. At about this time (9:45 a.m.) however it slackened, and progress became easier as the fog lifted, and both leading battalions reported that they reached their objective at about 11:00 a.m. Tanks gave great assistance throughout the operation as far as the Red Line.

Speaking of the role of tanks thus far in the attack, with the exception of two, one of which was 'ditched' and the crew of another being gassed, the remaining tanks assigned to the Brigade went forward with the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers as planned and as noted 'gave great assistance.' The OH noted that the crew of the Tank that got gassed was replaced by 'a scratch crew from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who caught up with the infantry at 8:50 a.m. and did good service.'<sup>100</sup>

However, there was a section of the southern end of the Red Line between Haute Cornee and the Sambre that was not taken by mid-day. As mentioned, during their advance earlier on in the morning, the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers had drifted off course. GOC 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier-General Robinson, became aware of this error and in order to rectify it and take this remaining section of the Red Line, he ordered these battalions to take a southeast direction 'and to make good the railway embankment in G.12.c. and G.17. b. and make good the spur in G.12.d. and B.7.c. (H.7.c) with all possible speed in order to assist the Division on his right to effect the crossing of the canal.'<sup>101</sup> These map references were at the southern end of the divisional front. The spur mentioned in G.12. d and H.7.c. was above the bend in the Sambre on the northern side of the canal opposite le Pontonnier just east of Landrecies. When taken, this marked the completion of the Red Line objective.

During the late morning, both battalions pushed down as Robinson had ordered. It was for this operation, particularly the securing of the spur that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was called up. Their objective was 'to take and hold the important spur in H.13.a. and H.7.c. This spur overlooks Landrecies and enfilades the Canal Sambre both north and south.'<sup>102</sup> The objective behind the taking of this spur by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was part of the initial overall plan of attack to help the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in their assault on Landrecies and secure the bridges across the canal.

As stated, the 25<sup>th</sup> Division took the attack on the right of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. The 75<sup>th</sup> Brigade (Brigadier-General C.W. Frizell) of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division led the attack. The town of Landrecies and the bridges over the canal to the east of the town were part of their Red Line objective. Retaining the bridges intact was crucial for the passage of artillery and troops. Preparations for crossing the canal in the form of rafts made from petrol tins were made by their engineers (108<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE) and pioneers.

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<sup>99</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>100</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.474.

<sup>101</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive. Note the map reference B.7.c was a printing error. It should have been H.7.c. See 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Map Location of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF mid-day 4 November 1918 opposite le Pontonnier.

The main bridge into Landrecies was blown by a mounted German officer who was seen galloping down to the bridge to blow it. However crucially for the advance, one of the bridges was saved from destruction by the Germans when an engineer sergeant, under his own barrage, bravely jumped into the canal and cut the leads leading to the charges. The trestle bridge was saved and fit for field artillery to cross. Moreover, two footbridges were also saved from German detonation when charges were removed by sappers from the 446<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE.<sup>103</sup> Machine gun fire from Landrecies held up the crossing but as the artillery barrage advanced this was eventually knocked out and bridge was rushed by troops from the 1/8<sup>th</sup> Worcestershire Regiment. Later the 8<sup>th</sup> Warwickshires crossed a wooden bridge left intact north of the main bridge into Landrecies.<sup>104</sup> The OH noted that the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, 'enjoyed a wholly successful day.'<sup>105</sup>

However, all this work by the 25<sup>th</sup> Division was done prior to the call up of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and in essence the Dublins work in providing cover on the spur for battalions of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division was not needed after all. For the record, the task of taking the spur was assigned to 'D' Coy. under Capt. J.N. Barry and about ten men of 'C' Coy. under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. S.A. Morris. There were no reports of much German resistance in this operation and Capt. Barry and his men occupied the spur by about 12:30 p.m. Their move through the southern end of the forest was made easier due to the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE who 'fixed a number of direction boards on main roads and tracks through the forest.'<sup>106</sup> The only action and opposition reported occupying the spur was in the capturing of 'a battery of enemy field guns attempting to come into action near the canal bank.' The horses and drivers were 'shot down and the battery commander captured.'<sup>107</sup> Up to mid-day on 4 November, the two leading brigades of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division had captured some three officers and about 200 other ranks from three different German Divisions<sup>108</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF claimed to have captured one officer and twenty other ranks. In addition, they captured one field gun, two 4.2" Howitzers and 'many' trench mortars and machine guns.<sup>109</sup>

There seems to be some disagreement between battalion and brigade accounts as to what time the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took the spur. According to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade; 'at 3:00 p.m. they (the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF) were sent forward to establish a line on the spur (H.7.c) and accomplished this without opposition.'<sup>110</sup> It is interesting to note that in writing his account of the Battalion's action on 4 November, Capt. T. Brady of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF noted; 'The spur was attacked by 'D' Company under Capt. J.N. Barry...' The use of the word 'attacked' by Capt. Brady might be a bit self-indulgent. No matter – they had come through enough hard times and a bit of self-praise was of no harm.

For the remainder of the day, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF re-organised and consolidated the spur. During the night of 4 / 5 November, they crossed the canal under the spur at L'Echuse-des-Etguise and established bridgehead posts at that point and at le Pontonnier.<sup>111</sup> The final line achieved on 4 November ended up near the Green Line between Hachette Farm and the canal.

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<sup>103</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Narrative of Operations. Beginning 4 November 1918. Report Royal Engineers 12 November 1918.

<sup>104</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. Pp.472-473.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*. p.473.

<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Narrative of Operations. Beginning 4 November 1918. Report Royal Engineers 12 November 1918.

<sup>107</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>108</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.475.

<sup>109</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918.

<sup>110</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

The 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade finished the day just short of the the Green Line and it was decided, ‘that no further advance would take place that night, owing to darkness and the difficulties of supplying ammunition etc. to the troops on account of the numerous road craters on the supply line of advance.’ With the exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who were left guarding the bridgeheads around the spur, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade was withdrawn to the area around Haute Cornee. Next morning, the second phase of the operation, i.e. the taking of the Green Line and beyond continued. <sup>112</sup>

In terms of the day’s losses, the first casualties began to arrive back at the 50<sup>th</sup> Division’s Advance Dressing Station at about 7:00 a.m. An hour later the more serious cases were picked up by ambulance cars and horse wagons and brought to the Main Dressing Station at Noyelles. Unfortunately however, a full complement of stretcher bearers were not available because of the number of men from each Field Ambulance assigned to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division who were suffering from influenza. To add to their misfortune, one of the Walking Wounded Posts was hit by a German shell at about 9:30 a.m. causing ten casualties which included some of the Field Ambulance personnel. Overall, though, the wounded were evacuated from the battlefield ‘satisfactorily.’ <sup>113</sup>

Table 16  
Losses to 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 4 November 1918

Officers killed	Officers wounded	Other Ranks killed	Other Ranks wounded	Other Ranks missing	Total
1	5	10	103	3	<b>121</b>

Table 16 presents the casualties suffered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 4 November 1918; they were minor compared to similar operations in years gone by. Yet they seemed to have suffered a high number of wounded casualties (103) in an operation that met with very little opposition. Therefore, it would be reasonable to conclude that the majority of the Battalion casualties were suffered as a result of the early morning German shelling that hit their place of assembly. <sup>114</sup>

The officer killed was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Hubert John McBrien. He was nineteen years of age and came from St. Pancras in London. His father came from Gortmore in Co. Cavan and mother came from Mountshannon, Co. Galway. As an eighteen-year-old student at Wimbledon College he enlisted and was commissioned on 28 June 1917. He was the youngest recorded member of the Battalion that died on 4 November 1918 and was buried in Cross Roads Cemetery, Fontaine au Bois, grave reference IA35. <sup>115</sup> Not too far behind him in age was twenty-one-year-old 31094 Pte. Ivor Llewellyn Price from Swansea. He was buried in Fontaine au Bois Communal Cemetery, grave reference A8. As ever, the listings of the CWGC and battalion war diary differ. The CWGC record eleven RDF other ranks KIA on 4 November 1918. Over the following days, some more men died from their wounds.

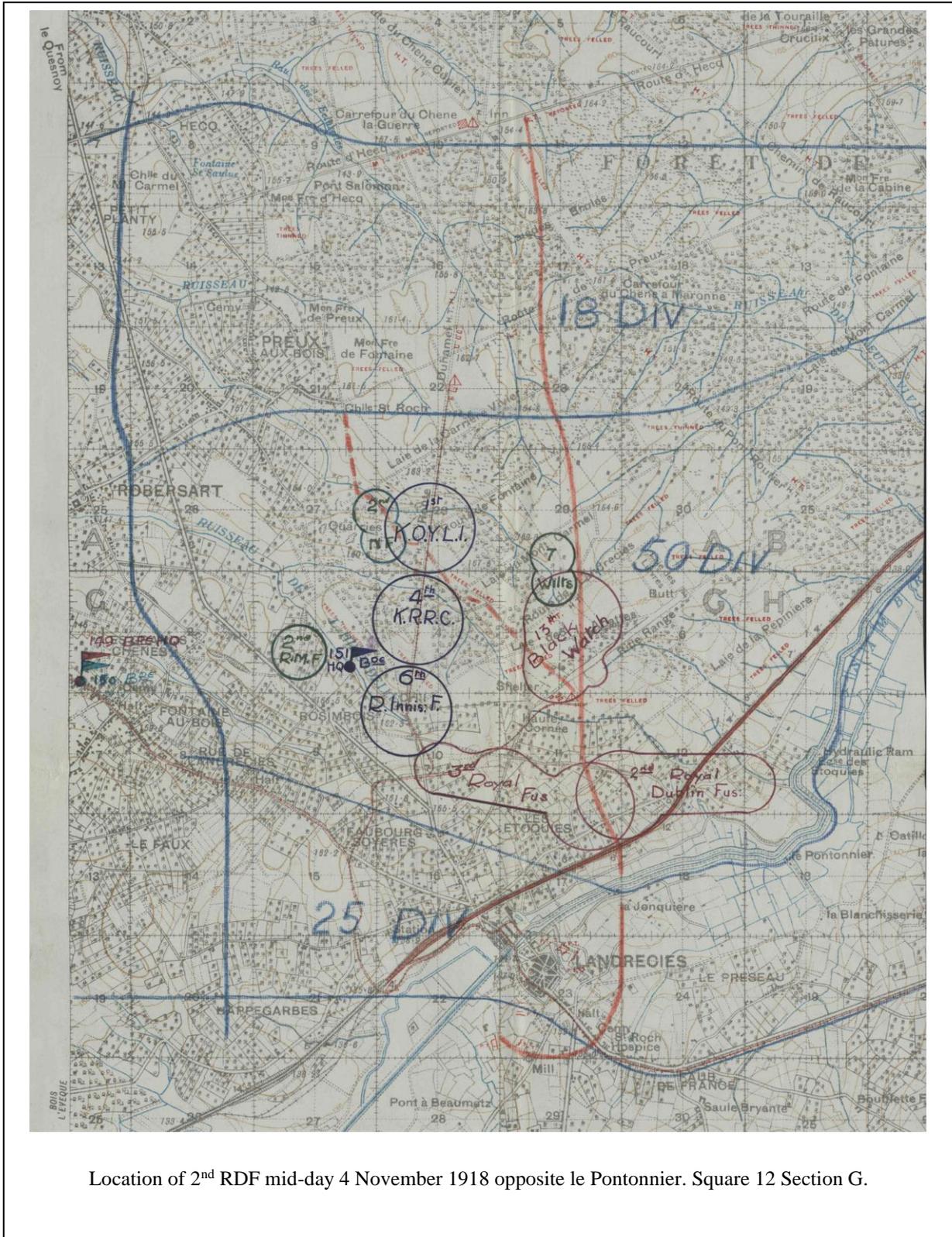
<sup>112</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>113</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1 and WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Medical Arrangements.

<sup>114</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 November 1918. Note. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary lists only four officers wounded. Crown and Co. lists five officers wounded. The officer in Crown and Co. who is not listed in 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary is 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. F.V. Barry. See Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.122. Moreover, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. F.V. Barry is listed as wounded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF casualties list of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.in the Division war diary. See *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Casualties (Officers) 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase.

<sup>115</sup> *Mc Brien, Hubert John. 2nd Lieut. 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO 374/43580. (London: The National Archives, 1917-1918). I would like to thank Ms Bernie Egan of the Kilkenny War Memorial Committee for researching and giving me this information on 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Herbert McBrien.

The total number of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF men who were either KIA or DOW between 4 and 6 November 1918 was twenty-two, of which thirteen or 60% were English. <sup>116</sup>



<sup>116</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org> See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

It rained all day on 5 November. Despite the rain, the Pioneers worked on clearing roads through the forest making them passable for horse transport; they also bridged two large craters. One lesson from previous large-scale operations such as this was the lack of drinking water for men and horses close to the action. To overcome this deficiency, sappers from the 446<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE assembled a 2,300-gallon (10,456 litres) canvas tank at the cross-roads (B.25) just above the canal bank to the north of the spur where the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF guarded.<sup>117</sup> Throughout the day, details of men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF continued with their work of guarding the bridgeheads. One of the bridges at Hachette Farm (B.27.d.0.8.) on the northern side of the river was destroyed so it was important to guard other crossings. A half-completed pontoon bridge was connected by planks near the crossing at Hachette Farm and used in the early afternoon by men from the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires to cross in a single file.<sup>118</sup>

Those who were not assigned to this duty were lucky enough to be in out of the rain and spent the day in billets more than likely resting and cleaning off the previous day's mud. The relative calmness gave the adjutant time to spend a few hours writing into the Battalion War Diary the regimental numbers and names of men who received medals and bars to their medals for their, 'gallantry in the field near Le Cateau' on 17 and 18 October 1918. Lieut. J.S. Farrell, 6<sup>th</sup> RDF, attached to 7<sup>th</sup> Suffolk Regiment joined the Battalion for duty.<sup>119</sup>

At 2:00 p.m., the other battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade who had assembled at the Haute Cornee (Sawmills), moved off out along the Route de Landrecies to Hachette Farm where they sheltered out of the rain in adjoining sheds for the night and awaited orders. Despite the efforts of the Pioneers, the roads were so bad from the rain that the transport carrying their kit became bogged down and didn't get up until late in the evening. A dry change of socks was welcome even if it was late in the evening. During the evening, those men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF guarding the crossings were ordered to withdraw from their guarding duties and to follow the rest of the Brigade and catch up with them next morning on 6 November by 7:00 a.m. and prepare for the next move.<sup>120</sup>

The pursuit of the Germans eastwards continued on 6 November, which again was a rainy dull day. There were still reports coming into 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ of machine gun positions in places still willing to fight and hold out to the bitter end. Captured German prisoners revealed that the opposition was now men from the 64<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guards Reserve Division, and the 56<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiments of the 121<sup>st</sup> Division. The Jager Division had moved north away from the front of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>121</sup> During the hours of darkness, at 4:00 a.m., crossing the river at Hatchett Farm, 'a strong Company of Scottish Horse' consisting of three officers and 100 other ranks moved off with the objective of taking the high ground south of Leval thus covering the further advance of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade later on in the day. At about 6:00 a.m., Scottish Horse had captured this high ground enabling the advance of the rest of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, less the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at 7:15 a.m., to their position on the northern edge of Noyelles-sur-Sambre which lay on the southern side of the Sambre.

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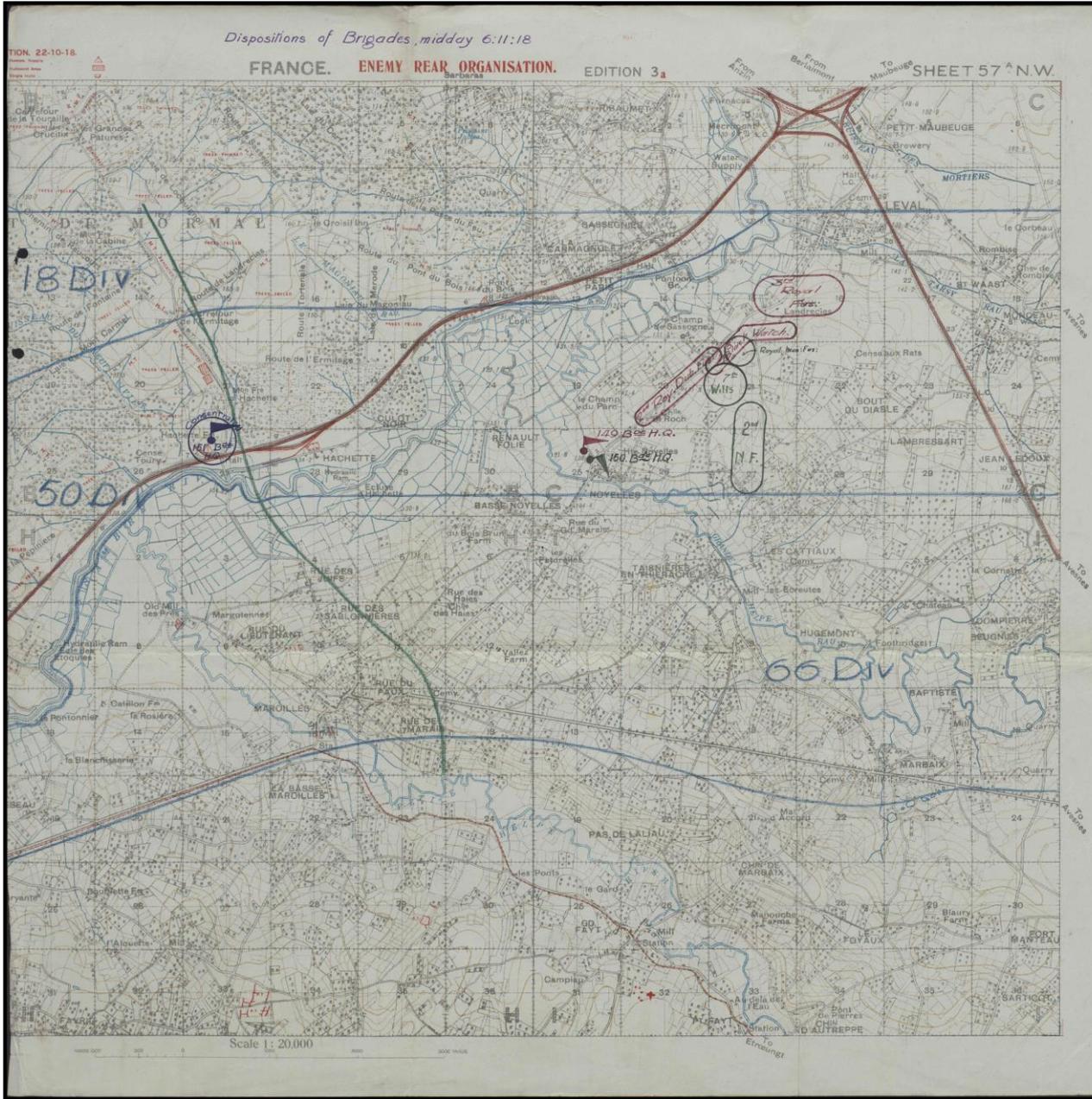
<sup>117</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Narrative of Operations Beginning 4 November 1918 – Royal Engineers.

<sup>118</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. Narrative of Operations 4 – 10 November 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5-6 November 1918. Note two men were awarded Bars to their Military Medal and eighteen men received the Military Medal. One of those who received a Bar to his Military was ex-7<sup>th</sup> RDF man 28525 Sgt. William Marchant. Having received his Military Medal, 7165 Pte. Richard Sneddon from New Monkland in Lanarkshire later died of wounds. He was buried in Fontaine-Au-Bois Communal Cemetery, grave reference D7. See [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>120</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>121</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Notes on German prisoners captured by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 4 and 10 November 1918.



Location of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at mid-day on 6 November 1918.

As the crow flies, from Hachette Farm to Noyelles-sur-Sambre is about three kilometres. Later in the morning in accordance with 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade instructions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved off from their positions holding the bridgeheads and took their place with the Brigade at north-eastern edge of Noyelles-sur-Sambre which they reached by 11:00 a.m. For much of the day, they remained in brigade reserve on the road between Noyelles and Leval.<sup>122</sup> While there, Lieut.-Col. Weldon returned and resumed command of the Battalion. He took over from Major J. Luke who was in charge for only a couple of days.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the day, the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers pushed on towards Monceau St. Waast which they captured by about 6:00 p.m. Later in the evening, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved up to support these battalions in their occupation of Monceau St. Waast.<sup>124</sup>

The 7 November was a busy day for the 50<sup>th</sup> Division. The 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade was assigned the task of pushing on with the attack. The morning was shrouded in a thick mist which lasted all day; it was dark by 4:00 p.m. Local villagers gave information that the Germans had retreated at about 3:00 a.m. Where they had halted was not known.<sup>125</sup> By this day the German units facing the 50<sup>th</sup> Division were in full retreat and scattered. From 6 November onwards, 'everything was in confusion behind the German lines, units were hopelessly mixed up and very little attempt was made to preserve regular formations.'<sup>126</sup> All that was left to protect their main retreat and the removal of stores were isolated machine gun posts with men willing to fight. To slow down the British, the Germans systematically destroyed bridges and cratered roads.<sup>127</sup> They set mines on roads and culverts through the forest. However, sappers from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 447<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE reconnoitred roads ahead of the infantry and removed any mines they discovered. One mine discovered, the fuse was burning in it ready to blow.<sup>128</sup> A new problem arose with the withdrawal of the Germans, which was feeding the French population.

The overall objective of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade was to push the Germans back further to the Maubeuge – Avesnes Road just east of Dourlers. They were first to take a line along the Ecuclin - St. Aubin – Avesnes Road (D121). Here they would halt 'in order to reorganise' before pushing on to the second and final objective being the Maubeuge – Avesnes Road. Their start point at about 8:00 a.m. was at St. Remy Chaussee. The leading battalions which included the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings advanced about six kilometres and met with no serious opposition until they got just west of the Ecuclin - St. Aubin – Avesnes Road where they met with some more brave Germans willing to fight. They held out until 11:00 a.m. The move on the final objective which began at about 1:00 p.m. was also met with fierce opposition. It seems what the locals had stated was right and that the Germans had indeed fallen back and decided to make a stand on the western edge of Dourlers. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division report noted:<sup>129</sup>

...the enemy had been considerably reinforced and intended to hold his position to the last. Every road, and there were many, contained its complement of enemy machine guns, who sturdily defended their positions. Hostile artillery fire had also increased and at least twelve batteries of all calibres were supporting his defence.

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<sup>122</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>123</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Order of Battle 50<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>124</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 6 November 1918.

<sup>125</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.507.

<sup>126</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Notes on German prisoners captured by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 4 and 10 November 1918.

<sup>127</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.513.

<sup>128</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Narrative of Operations. Beginning 4 November 1918. Report Royal Engineers 12 November 1918.

<sup>129</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

The report continued:

Slowly, but surely, however, he (the Germans) was forced out of his positions, falling back stop by stop on Doublers in which village very bitter fighting ensued, the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings principally being engaged, supported by one company of the KOYLI.

Throughout the morning, as the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade fought their way towards Doublers, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade in 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional reserve were still back along the road between Noyelles and Leval west of Monceau St. Waast. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and other units of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade 'stood by' until mid-day prepared to assist the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade. It turned out that they were not needed and luckily for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and the rest of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, they saw no action for the day but were ordered to move on and into any billets they could locate along the Rombise – St. Remy Road south of Leval.<sup>130</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took up their billets for a dark misty night in the village of St. Remy Chaussee, a little less than two kilometres east of Monceau St. Waast.<sup>131</sup>

In the late evening, the battalions of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade dug in and rested up for the night. However, before the day was out, one historic event occurred. Marshall Foch received a wireless message from German Army Headquarters, (OHL Oberste Heeresleitung or German Supreme Command) giving the names of the plenipotentiaries for the arrangement of an armistice, asking for a designation of the place of meeting, and requesting a suspension of hostilities as soon as the German delegates had reached the Allied lines.<sup>132</sup> Neither friend nor foe on their front lines in battle was aware of the major events that were afoot above their heads. As far as they were concerned, the fight to win on one side and the fight to defend on the other would go on as bitter as it had been over the previous four years. Based on statements from German prisoners, a VIIIth Corps Intelligence Report sent to 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ on 8 November informed them that their orders, i.e., the Germans, 'were to hold the Maubeuge - Avesnes Road at all costs.'<sup>133</sup>

Next morning 8 November at 7:30 a.m., the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade resumed their attack and although there was some sporadic machine gun resistance, the pressure on these gunners 'was beginning to tell and he (the German machine gunner) now showed a much greater antipathy to remaining in his positions in the Sunken Roads than hitherto.' By 9:30 a.m., the 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings, the 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI and 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC were in Doublers and to the south of it along the Maubeuge – Avesnes Road, and, pushing patrols on out as far as Floursies. The 6<sup>th</sup> Inniskillings came up against tough resistance from the houses on the eastern edge of Doublers, on the right-hand side of crossroads heading into Mont Doublers from Doublers, the houses being located at (13.b.9.2.).<sup>134</sup> And yet, at about 11:00 a.m., in a brave attempt to fight back at the southern end of the 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional front, about 500 Germans supported by artillery counterattacked. The attack was beaten back with the attackers 'retiring in great disorder having suffered heavily.'<sup>135</sup>

On went the 50<sup>th</sup> Division's push eastwards; the game of brigade leap frogging continued. Back with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and the rest of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade who were at St. Remy Chaussee and Monceau St. Waast respectively, they were still under orders to be ready to move at one hour's notice and not to delay when called upon.

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<sup>130</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>131</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 November 1918.

<sup>132</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.514.

<sup>133</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. XIIIth Corps Intelligence Summary No.39 8 November 1918.

<sup>134</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive. 8 November 1918.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

The next objective for the 50<sup>th</sup> Division was the high ground in the Bois de Beugnies. Major-General H.C. Jackson chose his 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade for this objective and at 11:00 a.m. he told Brigadier-General Robinson what he wanted. The three battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade were each assigned a village to take; all were in a line on the western edge of the Bois de Beugnies. Going from south to north along that line of about three kilometres; the Scottish Horse (13<sup>th</sup> Black Watch) were assigned Semousies; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers were assigned Mont Doublers and finally, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were assigned the village of Floursies.<sup>136</sup>

Having received their orders, and being in one hour readiness to move, the Dubliners from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, the Scots from the Scottish Horse and Londoners from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers moved off from St. Remy Chaussee at 12:30 p.m. Little did they know that this would be the last time these battalions would ever again fight shoulder to shoulder against the Germans. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF led the column on their march to Doublers. The order of march was 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers followed by Scottish Horse. As they approached Doublers, which was shelled persistently throughout the afternoon, the battalions deployed in the order of their march from left to right so as to line up against their respective objectives. On arrival at the outpost line of the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade at 2:30 p.m., the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF passed through the 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC; no doubt a cheer or two of best of luck lads was raised. The war diary of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade described the attack and gave particular praise to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF:<sup>137</sup>

The SH met with considerable opposition from MGs and made slow progress until after dark. The 3<sup>rd</sup> RF in the centre were somewhat delayed by this opposition on their right flank. Floursies was captured at about 16:00 hours by the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who rapidly organised the attack and carried out the operation with great dash and resolution.

Major J. Luke of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF led his men into attack; the Battalion War Diary noted:<sup>138</sup>

Major J. Luke commanding the firing line was soon wounded devolving under Capt. F.M. Kiernan. Considerable opposition from MG nests was dealt with and the Battalion occupied the village. Owing to delayed action of units on flanks, no captures were made. At 4:00 p.m. an outpost line was thrown out beyond the village and defensive posts formed on the flanks pending arrival of units on flanks.

And that was it. The fighting for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF in the Great War was over. Their casualties were light; Lieut. G.H. Perrier was killed; Lieut. Greaves and Major Luke were wounded. Four other ranks were killed and fourteen wounded.<sup>139</sup> Lieut. George Hargrave Lumley Perrier was nineteen years of age. He came from Dolphin Villas, Crosshaven, Co. Cork.<sup>140</sup> What must his parents have felt when they received the terrible news so near the ending of the war in three days' time. The five men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who died on 8 November in the attack on Floursies, all of them Irish, were buried side by side in the churchyard of the little Roman Catholic church in the village. On 28 May 2018, members of The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association, along with civic dignitaries and village folks from Floursies, held a remembrance ceremony at the graves of these five men. See Table 17 below for details of these men.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive. See Map Location of battalions of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 50<sup>th</sup> Division at mid-day on 10 November 1918.

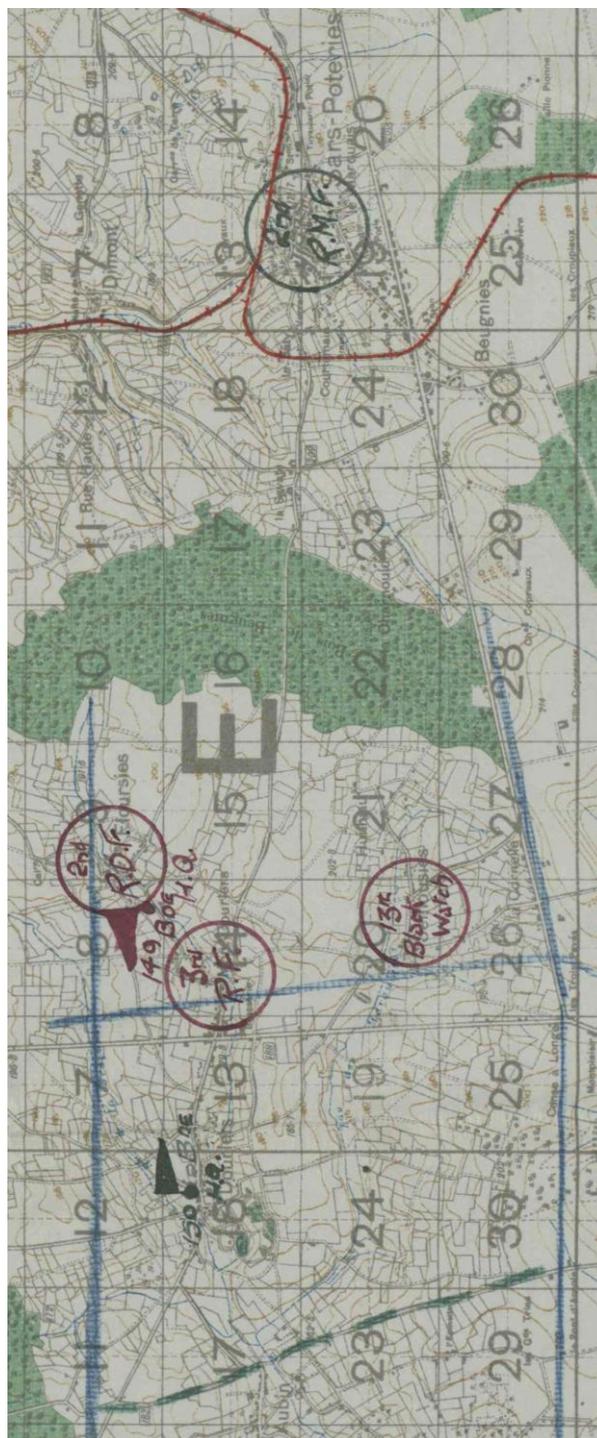
<sup>137</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A. Note 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF diary noted the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved off at 12:00 mid-day.

<sup>138</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 November 1918.

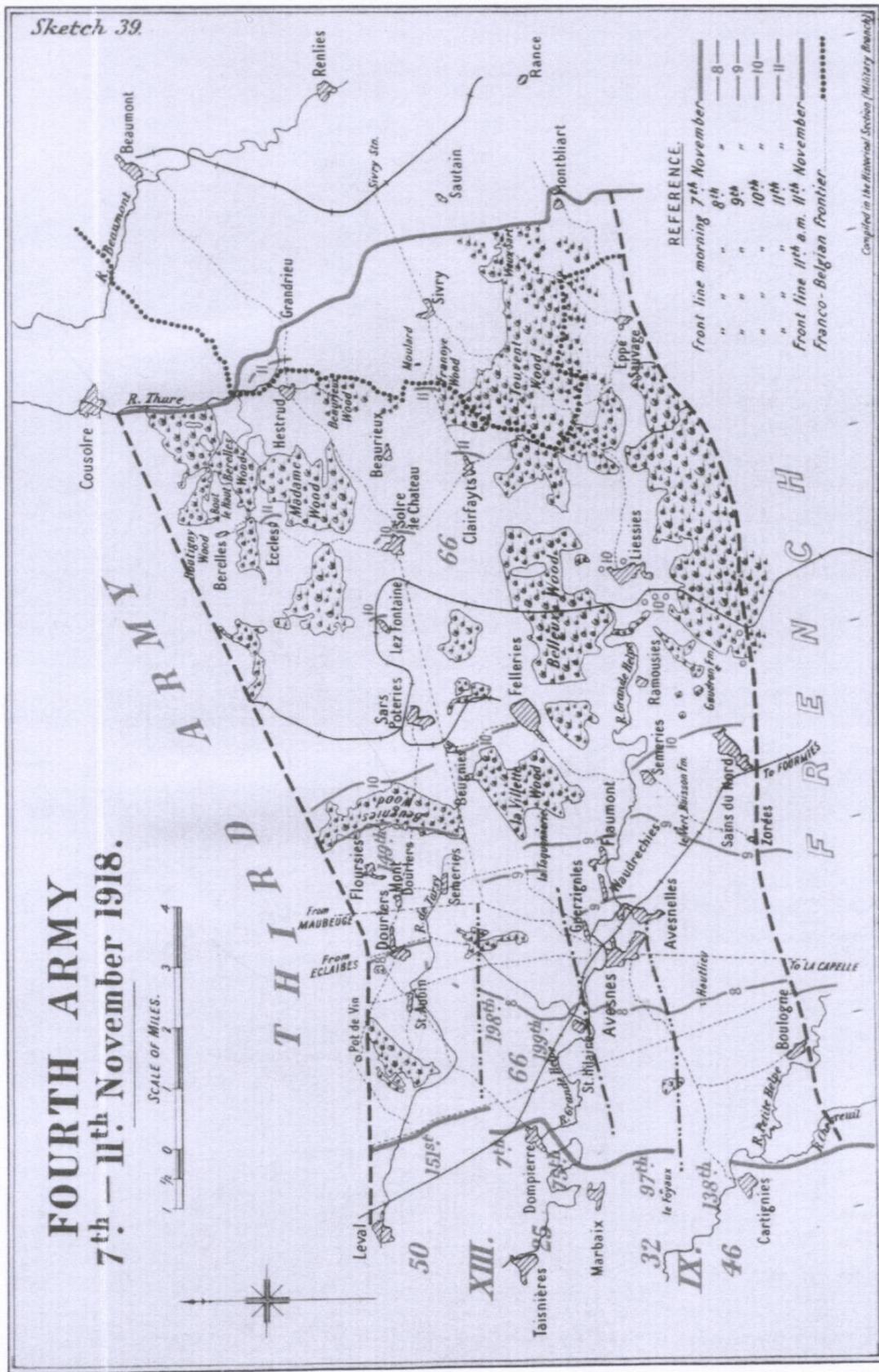
<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 8 November 1918. See also Wylly, H.C., *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.122.

<sup>140</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>141</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.



Location of battalions of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 50<sup>th</sup> Division at mid-day on 10 November 1918; Scottish Horse (13<sup>th</sup> Black Watch) at Semousies, 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers at Mont Doublers and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF at Floursies.



Sketch 39 Fourth Army 7-11 November 1918. 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Floursies and the Bois de Beugnies.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory.* Vol.5. p.749.

Table 17  
The five men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who were killed in action on  
8 November 1918 during the attack on Floursies.

Regimental Number	Name	Rank	Biographical details
	George Hargrave Lumley Perrier	Lieut.	Age 19. Came from Dolphin Villas, Crosshaven, Co. Cork.
13810	John Gregory	Sgt.	Age 23. Son of the late John Gregory and of Elizabeth Gregory, of 17, Belgrave Rd., Rathmines, Dublin.
19644	P.J. Barnes	Pte.	Age 35. Son of Bryan and Annie Barnes, of Curnasase, Kells, Co. Meath.
23555	J. Byrne	Pte.	Age 35. Son of Patrick and Anne Byrne; husband of Elizabeth Byrne, of 41, Gordon St, Ringsend, Dublin.
27967	Thomas Neill	Pte. Signaller	Age 21. Son of Michael and Kate Neill, of 26, Station Square, Stevenston, Ayrshire. Born in Bray, Co. Wicklow.

During the late evening of 8 November, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved their headquarters into Floursies. The Battalion formed a defensive line along the north western edge of the Bois de Beugnies with the two other battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade holding the villages they had captured and the southwestern edge the Bois de Beugnies. German shelling of Dourlers stopped at about 6:00 p.m. and the night was quiet.<sup>143</sup>

At about 6:30 a.m. next morning on 9 November, the game of leapfrog continued in the pursuit of the Germans with the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade pushing on the advance. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF sent out patrols through the woods and on out to Rue Haute on the eastern edge of the Bois de Beugnies without meeting any opposition. A troop of from the 12<sup>th</sup> Lancers attached to the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade and a cyclist patrol also went out through the woods and reached Sorle-le-Chateau, a distance from Floursies of about ten kilometres east, without catching up on the Germans who had simply gone.<sup>144</sup>

The French / Belgian border lay about six kilometres to the east from Sorle-le-Chateau. A VIIIth Corps Intelligence report sent to 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ on 9 November noted; 'The enemy is retiring on whole Army front. He is being followed by our troops.' In the same report under the heading, 'Late German Wireless', the report noted that the German Chancellor had resigned.<sup>145</sup> Wyllly noted, 'the enemy was in full retreat and had no longer the heart or the power to put up a strong resistance.'<sup>146</sup> More than likely on this day too the Battalion buried Lieut. Perrier and the men who died with him in Floursies. There was no more appropriate place for these men to be buried than in the churchyard of the French village they and their comrades had liberated. It would be a fitting project to undertake for The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association to have erected in the churchyard a memorial to the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

<sup>143</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 9 November 1918.

<sup>144</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Narrative of operation of 149<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade from 4 November to 9 November 1918 inclusive. Appendix A.

<sup>145</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. XIIIth Corps Intelligence Summary No.40. 9 November 1918.

<sup>146</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.122.

Between 4 and 9 November 1918 inclusive, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division pushed the Germans back thirty-five kilometres and suffered a loss of 1,274 men killed and wounded in doing so. When one compares this advance and losses to the Somme in 1916 and Passchendaele in 1917, such an advance over those six days in the winter of 1918 was impressive; considering it was made mainly through water-logged forest and, much like the terrain at the Somme, was 'over a country liberally studded with villages and a network of sunken roads ideal for machine gun defence.'<sup>147</sup>

There were many factors that contributed to the battalions of the BEF being better fighting troops using better hard learned all arms systems of attack in 1918 when compared in 1916. Yet there were mistakes, particularly in communications and infantry co-operation with artillery. The RAF had full control of the skies over the battlefield along the 4<sup>th</sup> Army front at the Sambre. Poor visibility and bad weather between 1 and 3 November were unfavourable for air work. On 2 and 3 November the mist and rain allowed attacks only from a low height. However, on 4 November the mist cleared considerably enabling the RAF take part in the attack across the entire 4<sup>th</sup> Army front. Some 241 air offensive patrols were carried out on the 4<sup>th</sup> Army front. The RAF dropped 1,020 bombs (including 112 smoke bombs), a total of between thirteen and fourteen tons (14,225 kilograms) in weight and fired 86,000 rounds of ammunition on ground targets. Eight German aircraft crashed and two were shot down compared to six British aircraft who failed to return to their base.<sup>148</sup> In fairness though to the Germans and Jager battalions in particular, they were an army on the back foot, in total disarray and in retreat where command and control had totally collapsed. For the majority of them, the will to fight was gone too.

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<sup>147</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>148</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. XIIIth Corps Intelligence Summary No.38. 7 November 1918. See also Edmonds, Brigadier-General Sir James E, *Official History of the Great War 1914-1918 Military Operations France and Belgium 1918. 26 September to 11 November 1918 - the Advance to Victory*. p.465.

**The casualties 4 - 9 November 1918**

During the offensive operations between 4 and 9 November, roughly 1,000 wounded men passed through the 50<sup>th</sup> Division’s Advanced Dressing Stations that moved with the advance. Some of these Advance Dressing Stations were set up Noyelles, St. Remy Chaussee and La Savate. <sup>1</sup> Six hours after Zero hour, a Divisional Burial Party accompanied by four Chaplains followed the attack; no doubt Fr Delaney SJ was among them. Essentially their task was to find dead soldiers, be they friend or foe. When a dead man was found, the place was marked by ‘erecting rifles to which were appended white bandages’ so that collecting parties could find the bodies. The location of these bodies was given to the Divisional Burial Officer and arrangements were made for ‘collection and internment.’ Orders were issued to all ranks stating that it was ‘the business of everyone to remove any dead which may be lying on the roads or tracks...no identification discs or personal effects of any kind are to be removed from the dead except by a duly authorised burial party.’ <sup>2</sup>

The bodies of about fifty British and forty German soldiers were located on the first day’s search. These British dead were mainly found ‘in the vicinity of the Englefontaine – Landrecies Road where the resistance met with seemed to have been fairly severe...the area within the Forest of Mormal was fortunately found to be remarkably clear of dead, only ten British and three German bodies being discovered there by the Party.’ The area between Monceau-St.-Waast and Noyelles ‘proved to be very clear’, only nine British bodies were found; six of these men were buried at Noyelles Communal Cemetery. No German dead were discovered in this area. A 50<sup>th</sup> Division cemetery had been set up at the Advanced Dressing Station southeast edge of Bousies (L.11.c.4.2.) and during the 4 November, ‘several bodies were handed over to the cemetery party there by the adjacent Dressing Station for internment.’ Most of these deaths were caused when a German shell burst in the Dressing Station. Another cemetery was set up at Fontaine Cemetery (G.1.6.3.). <sup>3</sup>

Table 18

The burial locations of British and German dead who were killed in action between 4 and 9 November 1918 inclusive and buried by the 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional Burial Party.

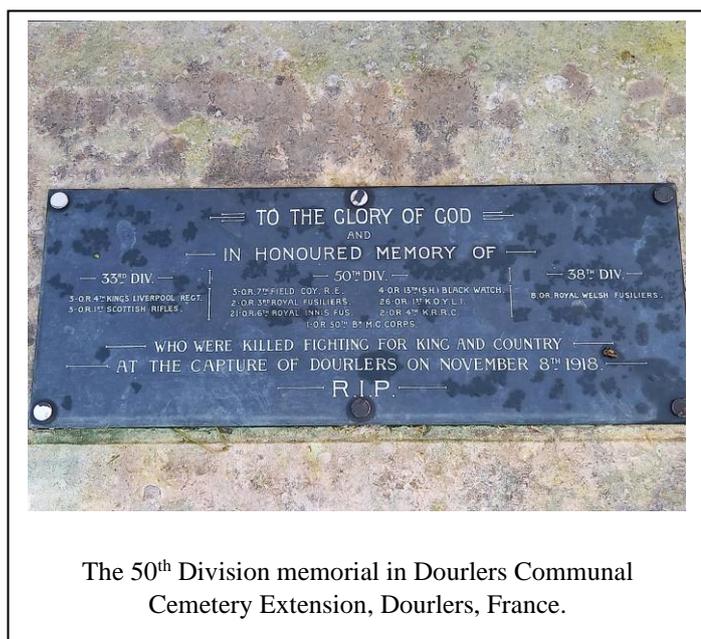
Note. In addition to these numbers, forty-three British bodies and sixteen German bodies shown in brackets below were collected at Fontaine Cemetery and handed over to 103<sup>rd</sup> Labour Coy. for burial; presumably at Fontaine Cemetery.

Cemetery location	Map Ref Sheet 57B	British	German
Southeast edge of Bousies	L.11.c.4.2.	61	10
Fontaine	G.1/.6.3	20 (43)	0 (16)
Noyelles Communal Cemetery		6	0
Dourlers Communal Cemetery		70	23
Floursies – all 2 <sup>nd</sup> RDF		5	0
Total		205	49

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1 and WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Medical Arrangements. For locations of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division Advanced Dressing Stations, see WO95/2812/1/3. Map. 57.B. They moved from Le Cateau on morning of 3 November to the farm at L.11.c.3.2.; then to G. 3.c.5.5; then to Rue des Juifs south of Sambre Canal; then Noyelles, St. Remy Chaussee and finally ending up on 9 November 1918 at La Savate.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. Instructions No. 1. 3 November 1918. Burials.

<sup>3</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/1 and WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Burials



The 50<sup>th</sup> Division memorial in Doublers Communal Cemetery Extension, Doublers, France.

The 103<sup>rd</sup> Labour Company assisted the 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional Burial Party in their gruesome work in transporting the bodies to the cemetery. This was ‘a lengthy process’ on account of the bodies being scattered, in some cases literally, around the battlefield and bad roads. The process of searching, locating, and marking, collecting, and burying the bodies by the Divisional Burial Party continued until 9 November. The village of Doublers and indeed the surrounding villages including Floursies was in German hands for almost all the war.

The sacrifice of the soldiers who liberated them was honoured by the villagers in the days after the war had ended. At the request of the Mayor of Doublers: <sup>4</sup>

A military extension of the Communal Cemetery was made, and a special ceremony arranged, which was attended by many of the inhabitants of the village and the bodies collected were interred with full military honours...The inhabitants of the village of Doublers expressed their intention of erecting a memorial in the cemetery to the fallen of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.

On 24 April 1921, the villagers of Doublers unveiled a memorial in the centre of the village of Doublers to the local French soldiers who died in the Great War. The inscription on the memorial reads; ‘Aux Enfants De Doublers Morts Pour La France.’ In English is, ‘To the children of Doublers who died for France.’ Along the stone wall that surrounds Doublers Communal Cemetery Extension outside the village there is a brass plaque set inside a stone plinth. The inscription on the brass plaque reads; ‘To the glory of God and in honoured memory of 50<sup>th</sup> Div... Who were killed fighting for King and Country at the capture of Doublers on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918. RIP.’ <sup>5</sup> Also inscribed are the battalions of the 33<sup>rd</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> Divisions. In the column on the plate that lists the battalions of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, mostly battalions from the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade who took the village on 8 November 1918, it lists the number of other ranks death casualties for the Battalion which are the following in brackets:

(3) 7<sup>th</sup> Field Coy. RE; (2) 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers; (21) 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers; (4) 13<sup>th</sup> (S.H.) Black Watch; (26) 1<sup>st</sup> KOYLI; (2) 4<sup>th</sup> KRRC; (1) 50<sup>th</sup> Bn. Machine Gun Corps.

There is no date on the brass plate memorial as to when or by whom it was placed in Doublers Communal Cemetery Extension. The memorial lists two battalions from 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade only, the Scottish Horse and 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers: no mention of the third battalion in the Brigade, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Moreover, there is no mention of the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshires, 2<sup>nd</sup> Munsters or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers from the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the memorial possibly because they had no direct involvement nor suffered any death casualties in the taking of the village.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Burials.

<sup>5</sup> <https://Monumentsmorts.Univ-Lille.Fr> *Les Monuments Aux Morts France-Belgique*, University of Lille. I would like to thank Madame Vimla Hunt, Chargee d’Affaires Export, French Embassy Dublin for her help in finding these memorials in Doublers.

There were no names recorded in the war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF for 11 November 1918. However, according to the CWGC data, 24093 Sgt. Charles Arthur Bass MM, ‘D’, Coy. 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF died of wounds on 11 November 1918 and was buried a St. Sever Cemetery Extension, Rouen, grave reference S.III.T9. A married man age twenty-eight, he lived in Thaxted, Dunmow in Essex and was formerly 9009 The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. <sup>6</sup> What a sad day it must have been for his wife to have received the news that her husband died on the day the war ended.

In terms of casualty numbers i.e., men killed in action and wounded, the total loss suffered by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 1 and 11 November 1,274. <sup>7</sup> See Table 19. The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade casualty total for the same period is shown in Table 20. <sup>8</sup>

Table 19  
Losses of 50<sup>th</sup> Division between 1 and 11 November 1918.

Rank	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	12	48	2	62
Other Ranks	172	984	56	1,212
Totals	184	1,032	58	<b>1,274</b>

Table 20  
Losses of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade between 1 and 11 November 1918.

Battalion	Officers killed	Officers wounded	Other Ranks killed	Other Ranks wounded	Other Ranks missing	Total
3 <sup>rd</sup> Royal Fusiliers	1	5	14	89	6	115
Scottish Horse	1	2	28	99		130
2 <sup>nd</sup> RDF	1	9	8	112	2	132
149 <sup>th</sup> TM Battery				2		2
Total	3	16	50	302	8	<b>378</b>

Although the Scottish Horse had the highest number of death and wounded casualties amongst the other ranks in the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade being 127; the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had the highest overall losses in the Brigade due to the high number of officers that were wounded. Losses to the other infantry brigades in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division were: 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade 284 and 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade 555. The Battalion that suffered the highest losses of officers and other ranks in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division during the period 1 to 11 November 1918 was the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in the 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade having a battalion total loss of 205 men. The Battalion with the lowest loss was the 7<sup>th</sup> Wiltshire Regiment being seventy; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers lost seventy-four; both of the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>7</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/1. Appendix B. Actual Casualties for Phases 1<sup>st</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/1. Appendix B. Actual Casualties for Phases 1<sup>st</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/2. Note. Included in the Other Ranks wounded are those listed as Injured which were only two. The figure noted in the 50<sup>th</sup> Division war diary for total Other Ranks wounded of 151<sup>st</sup> Brigade was wrongly calculated by the diarist. He quoted 403, the correct calculation is 416.

Throughout Sunday the 10 November, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF remained on at Floursies with the men in billets throughout the village; no doubt wondering when the next move would be. At 7:00 a.m. on Monday 11 November, 'a wire from XIIIth Corps (to 50th Div. HQ) was received saying that an Armistice with the Germans would come into effect at 11:00 a.m. today.'<sup>10</sup> At 8:30 a.m., Major-General Jackson passed on the news to his three brigades and issued the following cautious notice; 'Hostilities will cease at eleven hours to-day November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918. Defensive precautions will be maintained. There will be no intercourse of any description with the enemy until receipt of further instructions.'<sup>11</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary for 11 November simply noted; 'Armistice signed at 11:00 a.m.' News of the Armistice came as a somewhat 'so what' event tinged with suspicion among the ranks of the men in Floursies, Semousies and Mont Doublers. In fact, the 50<sup>th</sup> Division believed the Armistice was only temporary, their diary noted on 11 November; 'At 11:00 hours on 11<sup>th</sup> instant, an armistice lasting 30 days came into force.'<sup>12</sup> Indeed with an eye on the next operation and learning lessons from operations up to 9 November, 50<sup>th</sup> Division wrote several pages of notes on a selection of topics such as artillery, signals, manoeuvres, horses and tanks titled, 'Lessons learned during recent operations.'<sup>13</sup> The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade diary noted; 'Terms of Armistice, having been accepted by the German Government, hostilities ceased at 11:00 a.m. Battalions resting.' And, in case the Germans were bluffing 'A' Coy. of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was 'ordered out to an outpost duty at La Savate.'<sup>14</sup> From Floursies to La Savate is about four kilometres along the Rue de Doublers east into Sars Poteries. This was the furthest point in France a unit of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF reached in WW1.

General Jackson had every reason to be cautious as Wylly noted: 'The firing which had been heavy all the morning continued until three minutes to 11:00 a.m. when it ceased for a short period then broke out in a final crash at 11:00 a.m.' He continued with a somewhat dramatic description of the final shots by a German machine gunner defiant to the end:<sup>15</sup>

The final act of a German machine-gunner, always our most formidable opponent throughout the war, is worthy of record. At two minutes to 11, a machine gun, about 200 yards from our leading troops, fired off a complete belt without a pause. A single machine-gunner was then seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and turning about walk slowly to the rear. Then all was silence. Combatants from both sides emerged from cover and walked about in full view. The World War was over.

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<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. War Diary 11 November 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Order issued by 50<sup>th</sup> Division to 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade at 8:30 a.m. on 11 November 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/3. Narrative of Operations 27 October - 10 November 1918 inclusive.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/3. Report titled: Lessons Learned During Recent Operations. This is a very interesting document in terms of plotting the learning curve of fighting and support units in infantry divisions.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 11 November 1918. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 November 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.123. Wylly used this description from Montgomery, Major-General Sir Archibald, *The Story of the Fourth Army* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1920). Pp.260-261.

## Readjusting and going home - 12 November to 31 December 1918

Perhaps the reality of the ceasefire had set in because there was an unusual silence over the countryside around Floursies and neighbouring villages on 12 November. Some men turned to their God to thank him for their deliverance. At 11:00 a.m. in the grounds of Dourlers Chateau, a Special Thanksgiving Service for the entire 50<sup>th</sup> Division was held and addressed by Major-General H.C. Jackson, after which Lieut.-Col. Weldon presented medal ribbons to some of his men in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.<sup>1</sup> On the same day, Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland, GOC VIIIth Corps, wrote to units under his command thanking them for 'their splendid efforts.' He noted; 'During the period 3 October to 11 November, troops of XIIIth Corps have fought a series of successful actions, have advanced a distance of 50 miles and defeating 16 actual enemy Divisions. During this period, they have captured 8,300 prisoners (of 28 Divisions), 250 guns and enormous quantities of stores of all sorts.'<sup>2</sup>

The days immediately after the Armistice around Dourlers and Floursies etc. were occasioned with visits to battalions from senior divisional and corps commanders. It was a congratulatory period. Such visits were occasions for medals and ribbons to be distributed. On 14 November for example, the brigades of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division held another thanksgiving service after which Major-General Jackson presented ribbons to those 'who had gained distinction.'<sup>3</sup> Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland was in attendance and later paid a brief visit to Lieut.-Col. Weldon at his headquarters in Floursies.<sup>4</sup>

For the remaining dark and cold days of November and on into December 1918, the immediate challenge that faced the battalions and brigades of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division, and probably every other division of the BEF along the western front, was the physical and mental wellbeing of their men in their transition from a battle environment with all its intensity, stress and fear to a state of peace, tranquility and idleness. Crucially, men had to be kept busy. The long-term challenge was of course returning these men to civilian life through the process of demobilisation.

To address the physical wellbeing of the men and to keep them physically active during this transition period, a conference was held at 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ at Dourlers on 19 November attended by the Division's infantry brigade, artillery, and engineering commanders. The main item on the agenda was for them to come up with a plan to implement what they termed 'recreational training' schemes for their men.

Subsequently a 'Recreational Staff' committee was established, and they decided that each afternoon, men who were not employed on various duties for example on salvage work, would carry out 'recreational training'.<sup>5</sup> Salvage work, which was occasionally very hazardous, mainly involved the sorting and clearing of tons of abandoned German ammunition boxes and shells from train wagons at the Sars Poteries railhead.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 12 November 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/6. Special Order by Lieut.-General Sir Thomas Morland, HQ., XIIIth Corps. 12 November 1918.

<sup>3</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 14 November 1918.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 November 1918.

<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 14 November 1918.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/2. Administrative Services. Narrative of Operations from 1 to 11 November 1918. Salvage.

Working parties of about 150 men from each battalion of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade carried out this work normally during the hours of daylight from mid-day to 3:00 p.m.<sup>7</sup> Cross-country running was a typical example of this recreational training. If a man took part in this run, he didn't have to attend 'school' in the afternoon.<sup>8</sup> Recreational rooms were set up and used as schools for men in the villages in which they were billeted.<sup>9</sup>

To address the mental and vocational wellbeing of the men, another 50<sup>th</sup> Division conference was held on 22 November at which the commanders discussed the 'Educational Training' of the Division and again a 'plan of operation was decided upon.'<sup>10</sup> This was all part of the process of re-integrating men back to civilian life following their demobilisation. To proceed with this scheme of educational training, which included training in trade crafts, names and pre-war details of men in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were taken.

On 27 November, following a ceremonial drill practice which took place at 9:00 a.m. at Bas-Lieu, the first 'class of education and instruction' was formed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. By then the Battalion had moved from Floursies to Bas-Lieu, a townland about seven kilometres south of Floursies. No reason was given as to why this move took place on 20 November. By that date too they had been withdrawn from their outpost duties at La Savate.<sup>11</sup>

The man who helped set up the battalion's education scheme and gave some of the classes to the men was the Irish Jesuit, Rev. Fr. J. J. Delaney SJ.<sup>12</sup> Fr. John was appointed as a temporary chaplain by the War Office on 13 August 1917. He was first sent to the 50<sup>th</sup> Division artillery but later to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Lieut.-Col. Weldon wrote of Fr. Delany:<sup>13</sup>

He was with me from September 1918 until June 1919. He greatly distinguished himself by his fearless conduct under fire, especially in the great fight at Le Cateau, October 1918, when he won the Military Cross...He was indefatigable too in arranging sports and concerts to amuse them during the dreary time spent in bad billets after the armistice. I can honestly say that of all the good priests I had the honour to serve with in various battalions, Father Delaney was the best.

The education scheme set up was very much geared towards the other ranks. The post-war education of officers did not seem to be as practical. Their education scheme seemed to be along the more academic lines. On 9 December, a meeting was held among the Battalion commanders of the 150<sup>th</sup> Brigade to discuss 'details of a proposed Brigade School for officers and NCOs joining the regular army.'<sup>14</sup> Evening lectures which normally began at 6:00 p.m. were presented by officers and academics to officers on a range of topics. The topics of some of the lectures were immediately relevant; others were more entertaining and a way of passing the time. For example, a lecture was given by Lieut.-Col. Hoare, DSO Commanding Officer, 50<sup>th</sup> Bn. Machine Gun Corps, on the subject of, 'The Social and Imperial problems to be faced by the British Government in the immediate future.' Col. Dowling of the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> (Northumberland Field Ambulance) gave a lecture titled, 'Reconstruction Problems.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 15 November 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 December 1918.

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 25 November 1918.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* WO95/2812/1/5. 22 November 1918.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 and 27 November 1918.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 27- 28 November 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, Damien, *Irish Jesuit Chaplains in the First World War* (Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2014). p.37. Note: There is a chapter in this excellent book on the life of Fr. Delany SJ.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 7th Wiltshire Regiment*. 9 December 1918.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 2 December 1918.

Lieut. Coughlan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF gave a lecture titled, 'A Word on the Colonies.'<sup>16</sup> A Mr. A.L. Williams presented a lecture on the topic of 'Russia'.<sup>17</sup> Dr Alexander Irvine returned to the front following the last time he spoke to the Battalion in September on the topic of 'War Aims.' On 2 December he returned and gave another lecture to the officers of 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the topic of, 'Problems after the War.' In attendance was Brigadier-General Robinson. He later presented a lecture to the staff officers of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ on the subject of 'Religion.'<sup>18</sup> The county Antrim astronomer and expert on comets Professor Andrew Crommelin came out to the Western Front and gave the officers of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division a lecture on, 'Astronomy.'<sup>19</sup> Lieut.-Col. A. Duke lectured on the entertaining subject of, 'Things not generally known.'<sup>20</sup> Perhaps by way of introducing officers to a flying career, Lieut. Walmsley from the RAF gave a lecture on 'Flying.'<sup>21</sup>

The ceremonial drills the men practiced was for a good reason. King George V visited the 50<sup>th</sup> Division on 1 December 1918. Accompanying the King was the Prince of Wales and Prince Albert and their Staffs.<sup>22</sup> The day before he arrived, the three battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade assembled for a practice drill. It was a busy day for them because when they had finished their practice parade, it was back to the classroom as the 'educational classes proceeded as usual.'<sup>23</sup>

Before the Battalion set off to be reviewed by the King, they went to Mass at 8:00 a.m. in Avesnes; more than likely celebrated by their chaplain, Fr. John Delaney SJ. After Mass they paraded to the field where the review took place at 11:30 a.m. The field was on the western side of the Maubeuge - Avesnes Road (N2) opposite Semousies where the Scottish Horse was billeted.<sup>24</sup> With the men facing west, the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade lined up in the field for their review beginning with the 50<sup>th</sup> Division HQ staff and travelling along the ranks in ten sections down along a line to the 1/1<sup>st</sup> Northumberland Field Ambulances at the end. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF lined up at number seven in the line with its four companies in close column at six paces distance. The Battalion strength on 1 December 1918 was thirty-four officers and 625 other ranks; so it was an impressive enough parade.<sup>25</sup> Beside the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF came the Pioneers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. To keep the men warm and dry on parade, Jerkins (a leather waistcoat) were worn with a belt on the outside. Wrapped on the belt was a waterproof sheet. No rifles were carried, and officers were not allowed to carry their sticks.<sup>26</sup> Arrangements were made so that some of the men could meet the King.<sup>27</sup> When the King had departed, it was back to those 'bad billets' in Bas Lieu and free of activity for the rest of the day. Two days later the King visited the Munsters at the cross-roads east of Dompierre Station. Apparently, he took an interest in the Educational Scheme set up by the Munsters and asked the Battalion CO, Lieut.-Col. C.R. Williams MC., on the progress of the scheme.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 and 12 December 1918.

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/1/5. 26 and 30 November 1918.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 December 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/2. 4 and 8 December 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/2. 2 December 1918.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*. WO95/2812/2. 13 December 1918.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 and 12 December 1918. See also *War Diary 50th Division*. WO95/2812/2. 5 December 1918.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 December 1918.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*. 30 November 1918.

<sup>24</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Brigade Order No 61. 29 November 1918. Refer to Sheet 57A. Map Reference E.19.b.9.8.

<sup>25</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 30 November 1918.

<sup>26</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. Brigade Order No. 61. 29 November 1918.

<sup>27</sup> *War Diary 50th Division*. 1 December 1918.

<sup>28</sup> McCance, S. p.167. Note: Dompierre-sur-Helpe is ten kilometres southwest of Floursies.

At about 9:30 a.m. on 5 December, the Battalion moved from Bas Lieu back to Monceau-St.-Waast, about eleven kilometres westwards, where they arrived at 11:30 a.m. Other battalions of the Brigade went to Dompierre.<sup>29</sup> The other brigades of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division moved back too.<sup>30</sup> By that time, the names of the men for the educational schemes had been collected and categorised. Next day, based on the information obtained from the men, the Battalion was re-organised along the following lines:<sup>31</sup>

‘A’ and ‘D’ Companies were formed of those non-commissioned officers and men who were employed in trade or had settled occupations prior to enlistment, and whose re-employment on return to civil life was already assured.

‘B’ Company took all serving soldiers and men attending school.

‘C’ Company was made up of those with or without trades who had no prospect of work on return to civil life; men learning trades in the Battalion under the new schemes which had been started, and those desirous of learning trades which the Battalion did not profess to teach, such as motor work, electric lighting and engineering of all kinds.

In accordance with a 50<sup>th</sup> Division order to move further back westwards, the three battalions of the 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade marched the twenty-one or so kilometres north-westwards from Monceau St. Waast to Le Quesnoy on 18 December. Note. The 50<sup>th</sup> Division would remain in Le Quesnoy until 19 March 1919 when it was reduced to a cadre.<sup>32</sup> When they got to Le Quesnoy, the Town Major, who incidentally was Major A. Mac Dermott of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who had returned to the Battalion on 2 December having recovered from wounds, allocated an area of the town to each battalion.<sup>33</sup> He had lists of places around the town that were suitable for accommodating battalions. The civilians who lived in these billets, which were in fact their family homes, continued to live in them. Records of house ownership and which unit occupied the house were kept and each billet / house was allocated a number and recorded on Billeting Certificates kept by the Battalion adjutants.<sup>34</sup> Many of the buildings in Le Quesnoy used as billets had been damaged by war; consequently, the Battalion spent part of their days cleaning out and repairing their new billets. Some of the billets had the comfort of a coal fireplace. Schools and recreational rooms were soon set up and allocated to each battalion.<sup>35</sup> For the remaining days of December 1918, the four companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF mentioned above rotated between recreation training, education classes, drill and salvage work.

A bit of good news came to the Battalion from 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade HQ on 22 December, the news was that Sgt. Horace Curtis had been awarded the Victoria Cross and the Regimental Colours had been sent out from Gravesend. Sgt. Curtis was presented with the VC ribbon by the Major-General Jackson on Christmas Eve in Le Quesnoy. Other men too were presented with ribbons; one of whom was Capt. Fr. John Delaney SJ. He was awarded a Military Cross ribbon ‘for gallantry in the in the field during operations in November.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.* p.125. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 6 December. See also *War Diary 149th Brigade.* 5 December 1918.

<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/2. 5 December 1918.

<sup>31</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922.* Pp.125-126. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 26 November 1918. Note: Men in ‘A’ and ‘D’ Coy. were for example men who had worked in Guinness, the Banks, Jacobs, or The Civil Service.

<sup>32</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* 18 December 1918.

<sup>33</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 20 December 1918.

<sup>34</sup> *War Diary 50th Division.* WO95/2812/1/6. 50<sup>th</sup> Division Movement Order No.267. 14 December 1918.

<sup>35</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade.* Administrative Instruction issued with 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade Order No 65. 16 December 1918.

<sup>36</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 31 December 1918. Note: Lieut.-Col. Weldon referred to Fr. Delaney being awarded the Military Cross for his bravery at Le Cateau in October 1918. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary referred to him being awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in November 1918.

Christmas Day 1918 was the first Christmas the men had without the fear of going back to war. The people of Le Quesnoy must have celebrated this peaceful Christmas too. A conference was held by brigade commanders of the 50<sup>th</sup> Division on New Year's Eve to discuss, 'questions connected with the reorganisation and equipment of the Post Bellum Army.'<sup>37</sup> On 30 December 1918, the Battalion War Diary noted, 'School reopens. Two Companies on salvage.'<sup>38</sup> Routine had resumed and soon the process of demobilisation would begin.<sup>39</sup> The question of the post-Bellum army reorganisation was far from the thoughts of the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. The question on their mind now was, when can I go home.

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<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 149th Brigade*. 30 December 1918.

<sup>38</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 30 December 1918.

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 13 January 1919 and 31 March 1919. The first batch of men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF to be demobilised occurred on 13 January 1919 when 1 officer and 10 other ranks were demobilised. From a strength of 34 officers and 718 other ranks on 31 December 1918, by 31 March 1919, due to demobilisation, the Battalion was reduced to 11 officers and 85 other ranks.

Tables 21 and 22 present the number of deaths suffered by the battalions of the RDF on the Western Front and Eastern Front i.e., Salonika and Palestine in 1918.<sup>40</sup>

Table 21 all ranks.

Date From	Date To	KIA, DOW, or D
6 August 1914	31 December 1914	131
1 January 1915	31 December 1915	1,483
1 January 1916	31 December 1916	1,338
1 January 1917	31 December 1917	952
1 January 1918	11 November 1918	954
6 August 1914	11 November 1918	4,858

Table 22  
1 January – 31 December 1918.

RDF battalion	All Ranks only KIA, DOW,D	% Irish in battalion	% of Irish born in battalion coming from Dublin
1 <sup>st</sup>	398	57	45
2 <sup>nd</sup>	317	51	44
6 <sup>th</sup>	94	53	34
7 <sup>th</sup>	13	31	75
8 <sup>th</sup>	17	41	43
9 <sup>th</sup>	10	70	43
8 <sup>th</sup> /9 <sup>th</sup>	11	64	43
10 <sup>th</sup>	38	61	35
Others	56	39	63
	954	53	44

See bibliography for references and sources used in footnotes.

I would like to thank Sean Connolly, past Hon-Secretary of the RDFA for his editorial skills in editing this edition of *The Blue Cap*.

<sup>40</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org). And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.See also Burke, Tom, *Whence Came the Royal Dublin Fusiliers?* p.449. Note 1: In Table 22 ‘Others’ in the RDF battalion column include men who served in the 3<sup>rd</sup>,4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> Cadet and Depot battalions and men who died with no registered battalion number. Note 2: There is no CWGC data for men who died serving with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching battalions. Men listed in the CWGC as died serving with the 8<sup>th</sup>,9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF battalions between the duration of service of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Entrenching battalions i.e., between 15 February and 3 April 1918, more than likely died serving in the entrenching battalions.

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