



## Reflections on 1917

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Perhaps the best indicator of the British achievements and advances along the Western Front at the end of the 1916 Somme offensive campaign, can be presented through the attacks on the German held villages of Beaumont Hamel by the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF (86<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 29<sup>th</sup> Division) on 1 July 1916 and on Hamel on 13 November 1916 by the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers (190<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 63<sup>rd</sup> Royal Naval Division, XIII Corps). Both villages lie near each other and were objectives on 1 July 1916. They didn't fall into British hands until 13 November 1918. Between those dates, in fact up to 30 November 1916, the British suffered 419,654 casualties; the French suffered 194,451, a total of 614,105. The Germans suffered some 445,322 casualties.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite these terrible losses and negligible gains of the German lines, one objective of the Somme campaign, to permanently weaken the German armies on the Western Front, was achieved. When their fighting ended in 1916, Ludendorff concluded that, 'the German army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out'. On 9 January 1917, at the conference which decided upon unrestricted U-Boat warfare, Hindenburg stated, 'we must save the men from a second Somme battle.'<sup>2</sup> Similar sentiments could be attributed to the British too. The construction of the Hindenburg line beginning in September 1916 was a further indication that the weakened German army along the Somme front could no longer defend their lines. With the Somme petering out, with standstills and breakthroughs on the Western Front not much better than at the end of 1915, it was back to Chantilly to discuss Allied plans for 1917. The Chantilly Conference took place between 15 and 16 November 1916. During the conference, Haig's breakout from the Ypres Salient was discussed.<sup>3</sup> For strategic reasons, Haig had always favoured a breakout from the Ypres salient over a Somme campaign.<sup>4</sup> The year of 1917 eventually presented Haig the opportunity to implement his ambitions. The project was titled The Third Battle of Ypres, commonly known as Passchendaele. It began with great hope with the successful attack on the Wijtschate – Messines Ridge in June but deteriorated in the mud and misery at Frezenberg Ridge in August; concluding in ultimate failure at Passchendaele in November. At some stage during those telling months, every RDF battalion serving on the Western Front in 1917 played its part in that project. In Salonika, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions carried on working with their picks and shovels building the defences around Salonika. They left the Greek town in early September 1917 with the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division bound for Alexandria in Egypt where later they became part of XX Corps in General Sir Edmund Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF). In December 1917, they took part in the attack and capture of Jerusalem.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General). *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 1, 1916*, vol. 1 (London: Imperial War Museum, 1948).Pp.496-497. For further estimates of British, French and German casualties see Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General), *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 2, 1916* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1948).p.553.

<sup>2</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General).p.555.

<sup>3</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General) *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 1, 1917* (London Imperial War Museum 1948).Pp.9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General), *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 2, 1917* (London: Imperial War Museum, 1948).p.2.

## RDF Battalions on the Western and Eastern Fronts

### The 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers

On 1 January 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF were in billets in the French village of Saisseval which is about fifteen kilometres west of Amiens. The battalion diary noted. 'New Year's Day - Brigade Cross Country run held in the afternoon. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Matthews joined 31/12/16 and posted to 'X'. Coy. 1.O.R joined and 5 transferred to M.G.C.' The battalion strength was 38 Officers and 727 Other Ranks. <sup>1</sup> The first attack the battalion took part in 1917 was the attack on Potsdam Trench and Palz Trench east of Sailly-Saillisel which is about fifty-three kilometres east of Amiens. The attack, which was successful but costly, took place between 28 February and 1 March 1917. <sup>2</sup> Between those dates, some forty-nine members of the battalion were killed. Many were killed by their own artillery barrage. One of the four officers killed was eighteen year-old 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. George Francis Gradwell from Paradise Place, Drogheda, Co. Louth. He was killed on 28 February 1917. <sup>3</sup> Regimental No. 20432 Sergeant Thomas Brennock, aged twenty-eight, was also killed on the same day. His two brothers were also killed in WW1. They were Patrick and Willie. Patrick served in the Royal Navy on board *HMS Europa* that was engaged in the landing of troops in Gallipoli. Patrick contracted dysentery and died at sea on 26 August 1915. Willie served in The Irish Guards. He was killed at Zillebeke on 6 November 1914 and is remembered on the Menin Gate. <sup>4</sup> If ever a man deserved a Victoria Cross and didn't get one it was 21801 Pte. Robert Macintosh, a battalion stretcher bearer who was killed on 1 March 1917 trying to save one of his wounded comrades who also died. An account of Pte. Macintosh's bravery is written in *Neill's Blue Caps* by Capt. Kelly, R.A.M.C, the battalion medical officer. <sup>5</sup>

The second offensive the battalion took part in was during The Battle of Arras which took place between 9 and 23 April 1917. For much of this battle the 29<sup>th</sup> Division, 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, were kept in reserve and were mainly used in supplying working parties in consolidating positions and digging communication and other trenches particularly around Monchy. <sup>6</sup> This front line work had the usual hazards from German shelling. Consequently by 23 April, the battalion had suffered a loss of twenty men killed. <sup>7</sup> One of the main reasons why large-scale offensive operations failed in WW1 and losses resulted was the breakdown of communications at vital times. On night of 23 April, orders were issued for a general attack in front of Monchy to take place the following evening. At 1:00 p.m. on 24 April the attack was cancelled by 86<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The attack was due to begin at 4:00 p.m. The war diary noted: 'However owing to a Brigade runner losing his way orders regarding change in time of barrage did not arrive until after the action.' <sup>8</sup> The consequences of this Brigade runner losing his way was that 'W' and 'X' Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF attacked and ran straight into their own barrage. The attack failed and the men had to withdraw to their jump-off positions.

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, September 1916 to October 1917.* WO95/2301/2. (London: The National Archives). 1 January 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. For full report on this attack, see War Diary 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. Appendix A. Report on Operations 28<sup>th</sup> February / 1<sup>st</sup> March 1917. See also Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*, vol. III (Cork: Schull Books, 2000). Pp.77-82.

<sup>3</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) The Commonwealth War Graves Commission. and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers* (Suffolk: J.B.Hayward and Son, 1989). For further details on casualties suffered in the capture of Potsdam and Palz Trenches, see Wyllly, H.C.p.81.

<sup>4</sup> Byrne, Des, *Westland Row the Revolutionary Years 1914-1922* (The Westland Row Past Pupils Union, 2016). Pp.4-8.

<sup>5</sup> Wyllly, H.C.p.81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.93.

<sup>7</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. And Wyllly, H.C. p. 83. Notes that by 23 April 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF suffered a loss of 16 O.R killed; 4 Officers and 60 O.R wounded; 2 men missing.

<sup>8</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, September 1916 to October 1917.* 24 April 1917.

As a result of this breakdown in communications, thirty-four men lost their lives.<sup>9</sup> Most of them were never found and are named on the Arras Memorial, Bay 9. Among those names is 6425 C.S.M. William Leeman Kent. His brother Comdt. Eamon Kent (Ceannt) of the Irish Volunteers was executed on 8 May 1916 for his part in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin.

The Third Battle of Ypres did not officially begin until 31 July 1917. One could argue that it began on 7 June 1917 at the Battle of Wijtschate – Messines Ridge. The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF did not participate at Wijtschate. Their entry to the tragedy of Passchendaele and participation in their third major operation of 1917 did not take place until 16 August in the Battle of Langemarck when they were kept in reserve in the successful dawn attack on Passerelle Farm and Martin's Hill by the 29<sup>th</sup> Division. They spent the next four days consolidating a very wet and dangerous front line. Some twenty ORs were killed and fifty-eight wounded during those four days: thirteen were killed on 18 August when German shelling was very heavy and accurate with two direct hits on the battalion HQ.<sup>10</sup>

Passchendaele raged on into the summer and autumn of 1917. The fourth and final major operation the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF took part in 1917 was an attack on German strong points at Goed Ter Vestern Farm and Chinese House located about one kilometre north west of Langemarck on a drizzly 4 October in the Battle of Broodseinde. Although the attack was successful, the after-battle report again referred to the breakdown of telephone communications which 'remained useless for long periods', between brigade and battalion headquarters and forward signal stations during the battle. Capt. Tarleton noted in his report that, 'communication is the greatest problem.' Even the pigeons proved useless.<sup>11</sup>

Before the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF took part in this battle, owing to difficulties regarding recruiting in Ireland, they had been ordered to leave the 29<sup>th</sup> Division and join the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. Knowing this, they had volunteered to lead the 29<sup>th</sup> Division in their attack on 4 October. Morale seemed to be high in the battalion. The historian of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division Captain Stair Gillon wrote of the Dubs that day.<sup>12</sup>

They were in extraordinary fine form. It boded ill for those Germans who confronted the brilliant fighters and far from gentle foes, that Irish troops can show themselves on their day. Undeterred by the usual, inevitable, dripping downpour, under the command of Major A. Moore, D.S.O., they marched up to the front line by companies singing Irish Republican songs, the band in the camp speeding off to the strains of 'When Ireland is a Nation.

It is quite possible that Captain Gillon, being an officer in the K.O.S.B's may have confused this 'Irish Republican song' with another tune namely, 'A Nation Once Again.' It was during this attack that the Regiment won their second Victoria Cross and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion won their only Victoria Cross of the Great War. It was won by an Englishman from Portsmouth by the name of Sergeant James Ockenden. On the day he was an acting Company Sergeant-Major, Captain Gillon wrote.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. And Wyllly, H.C.p.84. Notes that 1 Officer and 18 O.R killed.; 5 Officers and 98 O.R. wounded ; 14 O.R missing.

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, September 1916 to October 1917*. 16-20 August 1917. See also Wyllly, H.C.p.87. See also [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, September 1916 to October 1917*. After battle report of action on 3 / 4 October 1917 written by Capt. G.W.B. Tarleton on 7 October 1917.

<sup>12</sup> Gillon, Stair Capt, *The Story of the 29th Division* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1925).Pp. 135-136.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.p.137.

He (Ockenden) saw a platoon officer near him knocked out, and, having identified the machine gun which was holding up the advance, he rushed it. He managed to kill all the crew but one man, and him he chased and slew in the open amid the cheers of his comrades - he and they, be it noted, being under fire all the time. Later in the day the same warrior attacked a farm, killed four Germans and took sixteen prisoners.

Losses to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF amounted to two Officers and thirty ORs killed; six officers and 127 ORs wounded and seventeen missing, a total casualty list of 152.<sup>14</sup> On 19 October 1917, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF arrived at Armagh Camp in the Croisilles area some fifteen kilometres southeast of Arras where they joined their brother RDF battalions in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division.<sup>15</sup> The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was now a Dublin Fusiliers brigade with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions.<sup>16</sup> However, with the amalgamation of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF and some of their officers and men going to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, their strength on 31 October 1917 was fifty-two officers and 823 ORs.<sup>17</sup> Their first duty as part of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to relieve the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment in the line at a 'sunken road about Croisilles.'<sup>18</sup> It wasn't until 20 November that the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF participated in any major offensive action. They were in support of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade's attack on Tunnel Trench facing the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's new sector between Fontaine les Croisilles and Bullecourt. Tunnel Trench ran along this sector to the west of these villages.<sup>19</sup> Their task was to wire and consolidate.<sup>20</sup> Tunnel Trench was, 'a masterpiece of German military engineering and part of the formidable Hindenburg Line.'<sup>21</sup> The attack on Tunnel Trench 'extending for 1,800 yards' or 1,646 meters between Fontaine les Croisilles (Sensee River) and Bullecourt by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was a success. Essentially it was used as one of a series of diversionary attacks and demonstrations to the great Tank offensive against Cambrai on the same day.<sup>22</sup> The wiring of the captured line at Tunnel Trench, consisting of double concertina barbed wire, erected by the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was complete by 7:30 a.m.<sup>23</sup> Casualties incurred by 1<sup>st</sup> RDF on 20 November were 'unusually light', consisting of nineteen year old 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Bernard Ward from Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo and 24478 Cpl. Christopher Wall from Dunboyne, Co. Meath being killed along with three Officers and four ORs wounded.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Wylly, H.C.p.91. The War Diary accounts for Killed- 0 Officers and 21 ORs; Wounded - 2 Officers and 103 ORs ; Missing – 2 Officers and 25 ORs. A total of 158. *War Diary 1st Royal Dublin Fusiliers, September 1916 to October 1917*. After battle report of action on 3 / 4 October 1917 written by Capt. G.W.B. Tarleton on 7 October 1917.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. WO95/1957/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 31 December 1917). 19 October 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Wylly, H.C.p.92.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.p.93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.p.94. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. WO95/1973/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 November to 29 December 1917). 1 November 1917.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974/6. (London: The National Archives, 1 July 1917 to 28 February 1918). See also *Trench Map-Sheet No: Croisilles 51b S W 3 and 4 Edition 3a*. W0 297 1258. (London: The National Archives, 8 August 1916).

<sup>20</sup> Wylly, H.C. p.95.

<sup>21</sup> Denman, Terence, *Ireland's Unknown Soldiers. The 16th (Irish) Division in the Great War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992).p.125.

<sup>22</sup> Miles, Captain Wilfred, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917. The Battle of Cambrai*. , vol. 3 (London: The Imperial War Museum, 1948). p.23. For details on 7<sup>th</sup> Leinster's raid and attack by 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on Tunnel Trench on 20 November 1917 see Denman, Terence.Pp.125-126.

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Report on capture of Tunnel Trench from U.14.a.71 to U.14.a32.59 by 10<sup>th</sup> (S) Batt. The Royal Dublin Fusiliers. p.1.

<sup>24</sup> Wylly, H.C.p.96. See also [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.



Image of Pte. Ernest Jarvis, 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in Arras.

In early December the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division moved again from the Croisilles area to Epehy, a distance of about thirty-five kilometres south of Croisilles. However, before the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF left Armagh Camp, the only incident of note was on 2 December just before they moved to the neighbourhood of Epehy and Lempire when one N.C.O. and four ORs of the battalion went 'missing' more than likely captured in a German raid that took place at 2:00 a.m.<sup>25</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF spent their Christmas Day in Brigade Support at Lempire with companies in Malassise Farm, Old Copse, Lempire village, Enfer Wood and May Copse. The weather was reported as being, 'very cold, ground covered with snow, some cases of frostbite.'<sup>26</sup> On Christmas Eve, the Germans 'rather heavily shelled' the village of Epehy with 5.9 inch shells.<sup>27</sup> The shelling eased up on Christmas Day 1917 and the 'back areas' were reported as being 'quiet.' However, there was some 'artillery activity' against the Irish troops occupying front line trenches named St. Patrick's Avenue Trench and near Priel Farm.<sup>28</sup> Before they

returned to their Nissen huts at Villers Faucon on 29 December, the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF were hit by a high explosive shell killing two men on 26 December, St. Stephen's Day.<sup>29</sup> They were 40964 Lance Cpl. Albert Carnell from Walsall and 41384 Pte. Alfred Herman, age nineteen, from Wantage, Berkshire.<sup>30</sup>

### Centenary of the Battle of Arras Christopher Weeks, RDFA

Display panel for Private Ernest Jarvis, 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers, as part of the 120 FACES OF THE BATTLE OF ARRAS exhibition. He was among the thirty-seven missing from the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF after the failed attack at Monchy le Preux on 24 April 1917. He has no known grave and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial to the Missing which includes 35,000 names of men who died during April/May 1917 and March 1918 but have no known resting place. He was the great uncle of RDFA member Chris Weekes who took the photo.

<sup>25</sup>Wylly, H.C. p.96.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.p.97.

<sup>27</sup> War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 24 December 1917.

<sup>28</sup> War Diary 48th Brigade.25 December 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Wylly, H.C.p.97.

<sup>30</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://Www.Cwgc.Org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF began 1917 billeted in the Flemish village of Kemmel. On a bitterly cold mid-night on 31 December 1916, German artillery fired off ‘numerous salvos’ to welcome in the New Year.<sup>31</sup> Back on 14 November 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF had received orders to move from the 4<sup>th</sup> Division to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. The reason was similar to that behind the move of the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF from the 29<sup>th</sup> Division to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division; the fall in recruitment in Ireland.

For the first five months of 1917, apart from training and maintaining trench lines, there ‘were no major operations of any kind.’<sup>32</sup> As an indication of the relative inactivity of the front facing Wijtschate, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF lost only twenty-five men killed between January and May 1917. One of whom was sixteen year old 5701 Pte. Myles Mahoney from No. 10 Lower Bridge Street, Dublin. He was killed on 10 May 1917 when the battalion had supplied working parties to the Royal Engineers. The lad’s name is on the Menin Gate.<sup>33</sup> The real enemy was the bitter winter of 1917. It was the coldest for nearly thirty years.<sup>34</sup>

The only offensive operations carried out by any of the RDF battalions facing Wijtschate between January and May 1917 were raids. According to Nigel Dorrington, ‘Raiding was an activity that arose almost entirely from the particular conditions created by the stalemate on the Western Front.’<sup>35</sup> The objective of raiding was to improve the morale of the troops, lower the morale of the Germans, secure identification of German units in their front line, and mislead the Germans as to the location of impending offensives.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, raids offered, ‘a dress rehearsal in miniature for large-scale attacks’.<sup>37</sup> Consequently they offered an opportunity to learn about battle planning, tactics, infantry–artillery co-operation, communications and combat skills.<sup>38</sup> The Germans too carried out their raids on the Irish lines. On 8 March, they raided the Irish lines facing Wijtschate. Their target was the entrance to one of the mine shafts. At the time of the raid, work was being carried out in the mine, mainly by a party of 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. The line was held by the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. Major Smithwick of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took command of two companies and went out from Rossignol Wood. With the help of some of the miners, Smithwick and his men fought off the raiding party from the mouth of the mine.<sup>39</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles took the main brunt of the assault and suffered seventy-one casualties.<sup>40</sup> As the target date for the attack on Wijtschate came closer, raids by Irish units intensified in frequency and with large parties. On the night of 27 May, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF raided the German line at Nancy trench with a party of twelve officers and 300 men. The raid was a success and much valuable intelligence was gained. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary noted:<sup>41</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1916 to 30 April 1919). 1 January 1917.

<sup>32</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*, vol. 2 (Cork: Schull Books, 2000).p.77.

<sup>33</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>34</sup> Passingham, Ian, *Pillars of Fire. The Battle of Messines Ridge June 1917* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998).p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Dorrington, Nigel, *Live and Let Die. The British Army’s Experience of Trench Raiding 1915-1918*, *Journal of the Centre of First World War Studies* Vol.3 no. 1, September (2007). p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General). Appendix 6 ‘Organisation and Execution of a Raid’, p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Griffith, Paddy, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front- the British Army’s Art of Attack 1916-1918* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994). p. 62.

<sup>38</sup> Haynes, Alex D, *The Development of Infantry Doctrine in the Canadian Expeditionary Force: 1914-1918*, *Canadian Military Journal* 8, no. 3 (2007). p. 66. For further reading on infantry–artillery co-operation see Farndale, Martin, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery Western Front 1914-1918* (Dorchester: Dorset Press, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 March 1917.

<sup>40</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division* WO95/1955 (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 30 April 1917). Report by General Hickie of German raid on 8 March 1917.

<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 27 May 1917. Report on raid.

Enemy's trenches were found to be very badly knocked about. Dug-outs poor and barely splinter proof; 30 prisoners including one officer were taken and much valuable information gained from maps, aero photos, and papers brought back. At least 50 of the enemy were killed. At 11:24 p.m., raiders returned.

Casualties suffered by the battalion on that raid were; two other ranks killed; four officers and forty-one other ranks wounded; two officers and six other ranks missing.<sup>42</sup> One of the missing was in fact killed.

The diarist of the 14<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles was a man who enjoyed the gift of being able to describe the beauty he saw in beautiful English. Occasionally his diary entries were very literary and driven by emotion, something very rarely seen, or indeed allowed, in a battalion war diary which essentially was an intelligence report of the day's events. His words eloquently described the morning that met him on 1 May 1917 and his inner thoughts about a terrible war.<sup>43</sup> (1)

Another beautiful day with a smiling country stretching out as far as one could see with the birds keeping up perpetual song, the woods and the hedges springing into life. It saddens one to think that the sun beams down upon a world at war. Death and destruction wrestling with building up and life!

The countryside around Kemmel had come to life at last. Despite all the shelling, there were still trees and 'hedges springing into life', and, as Michael Wall told his aunt, 'the swallows have arrived.'<sup>44</sup> The activities of every combatant and non-combatant unit attached to both the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division for the month of May can be summarised in three simple words, preparation for battle. As part of that preparation, all Irish infantry battalions sent their officers and many of their men to view the model of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's battlefield that was built of about 700 meters northwest of Scherpenberg Hill.<sup>45</sup> The model was approximately the size of two 'croquet lawns.'<sup>46</sup> When viewing the model there were specific orders for the men looking at the model to 'stick to the trench boards' in order to prevent men from walking in on the model and so foul it up with their hob-nailed boots.<sup>47</sup>

In the early days of May, German aerial activity was regularly noted in the war diaries of the RDF battalions facing Wijtschate. One particular German aviator flew over the Dublins on the evening of 3 May and instead of dropping bombs he dropped 'a roll of German Socialistic Propaganda' near SP.13.<sup>48</sup> Along with the increase in aerial and artillery activity came the quest for intelligence gathering through the use of night patrols and raids from battalions who occupied the front line. On the night of 2/3 May, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers sent out a small raiding party to try and grab a prisoner for identification purposes. There were three parties in the raid consisting of about thirty men in total.

<sup>42</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. Pp.80-81.

<sup>43</sup> *War Diary 14th Royal Irish Rifles* WO95/251. (London: The National Archives). 1 May 1917.

<sup>44</sup> Wall, 2nd Lieut Michael 6th Royal Irish Regiment. (Dublin: RDFA Archive). Letter to his aunt 27 April 1917.

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 6th Connaught Rangers*. WO95/1970. (London: The National Archives). 21 April 1917. See also Passingham, Ian.p.30. Note. The War Diary of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF on 29 April 1917 notes that the model of the Wijtschate Ridge battlefield was at N.18.B.9.9, co-ordinates on Map Reference 28.S.W.2. Wijtschate. Edition 5.A. This is a mistake, perhaps a typing error simply because this co-ordinate locates the model near Byron Farm on the front line. The correct co-ordinate is M.18.B.9.9 on Map Reference 28.S.W.1 Kemmel.

<sup>46</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General), *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 2, 1917*. p.34.

<sup>47</sup> *War Diary 177th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery* WO95/1962/4. (London: The National Archives, 1 February 1916-31 May 1919).

<sup>48</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. WO95/1973. (London: The National Archives, 1 January 1917 to 30 April 1919). 1-3- May 1917.



There were three officers with the rank of Second Lieutenant; they were named Beaumont, Alexander and Donovan. Apparently there was a lot of moonlight about that night. The raiders went in at 2:45 a.m. on Thursday morning 3 May. They were seen by a German sentry who sent up lights that resulted in the raiders being fired on. The result was a total failure, the Dubs retired with no prisoner, two men were missing and eight men wounded. Like many of the raids, it was a loss and a waste of time.<sup>49</sup> Three men from the battalion died that day as a consequence of that raid. They were Pte. John Mc Glynn MM, a married man aged thirty-six from Clara, Co. Offaly. L./Cpl. Michael Donoghue from Clonakilty, Co. Cork. He once served in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. Both John and Michael's bodies were never found and their names are on the Menin Gate. The third man that died that early morning was L./Cpl. John Feeney, aged twenty-six, from Collooney in Co. Sligo He was buried in Kemmel Chateau Cemetery, grave reference N 75.<sup>50</sup>

On Saturday 5 May, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were relieved in the line by the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the former went into Divisional Reserve at Loker and the Curragh Camp nearby. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF went to Birr Barracks in Loker having relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers. On 18 May, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went back into the line. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF went into Brigade Reserve at Butterfly Farm from where they supplied working parties to the Royal Engineers doing the preparatory infrastructural work required for the attack on Wijtschate.<sup>51</sup> However more importantly, they spent seven days, from 19 to 25 May, carrying out 'Special Training.'<sup>52</sup> This essentially was the new assault tactics they had practiced at St. Omer in April.

Sunday 27 May was known as 'Zero minus Eleven.' It was indeed a very busy day because it was on this day that the systematic destruction of the German lines of communication by British artillery began. The Germans heavily shelled the Irish back areas during the late evening and because of the insatiable appetite for intelligence, the raids continued. As night fell on that Sunday 27 May, during the pre-arranged lull in the artillery barrage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers raided the Nancy Support trench behind Petit Bois. This was well into the Germans lines and any information gathered here would be very useful. The raiding party was quite large. It consisted of twelve officers and 300 men of other ranks and ten sappers taken along for their demolition skills. The routine was the same. Before zero hour, which was in fact 10:00 p.m., Nancy Support Trench was softened-up with a salvo from forty heavy guns along with a field artillery barrage. Lying in their jump off positions behind this barrage must have been a nerve wrecking experience. There was always the danger that some of the shells would drop short. The raiders went in with the usual objective, which was to take prisoners, kill a few Germans, destroy any dugouts they could get in to and gain any intelligence they could get their hands on. By 11:30 p.m., the raid was over and the raiding Dublins returned to their trenches. The initial assault was met with practically no opposition and in fact the Dubs reached their objective twenty minutes into the raid, i.e. at 10:20 p.m. The only bit of opposition they encountered was in a German Switch Trench located in the wood.

However, despite the fact that the initial assault was met with 'practically no opposition' the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins suffered a total casualty count of fifty-five of which two were killed, forty-five were wounded and eight were reported missing. These casualties occurred mainly from a counter artillery barrage set down by the German gunners on their front line trying to repel the raiding Dublins. As usual, when things went well, letters of congratulations came down from the top. Referring to the raid, Lieut. -Col. Jeffreys noted in a couple of letters to his wife.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 May 1917.

<sup>50</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 Burke, Tom, *Whence Came the Royal Dublin Fusiliers?*, *The Irish Sword* XXIV, no. 98 Winter (2005). Pp.445-458.

<sup>51</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18 May 1917.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*. 19-25 May 1917.

<sup>53</sup> *Jeffreys, Lieut.-Col. R.G.B., 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers* (Dublin: RDFA Archive).



Wyttschaete salient

Trenches. May 28<sup>th</sup> 1917.

I have had a most exciting time since I last wrote to you. We carried out a most successful raid last night taking many prisoners and killing a large number. Everyone is very pleased indeed. General H (Hickie) sent me a telegram of congratulations this morning and also spoke to me on the telephone. The Brigadier also came up and was most awfully pleased.

Trenches May 29<sup>th</sup> 1917.

Since I wrote yesterday, I got congratulations by wire from the Army and Corps Commanders on our raid which was a great success and very valuable information obtained.

Trenches 30<sup>th</sup> May 1917.

Still more and more value is being gained from the result of the raid. The Army Commander says it is the most successful and biggest success we have had in this army front and consequently the men are so pleased as they can be and have all got their tails up. If you look in the Morning Post of 29<sup>th</sup> you would have seen our report, the German one, the latter, was really very amusing and absolutely false, we simply wandered round their lines at liberty, killing all that would not surrender and taking those that did back to our lines and there was no such thing as been driven back, we came back when there was nothing more to do, and remained in their trenches the time that was allotted for the purpose. It certainly is a good example on how the Hun reports on our enterprises and how little one can believe them. Their prisoners however tell quite a different story. I wish I could write you some of the things they told us. It certainly was encouraging seeing and having reports of prisoners going back. They were coming in so fast that I had not time to see them all and only saw and questioned the first batch who were a mixed mob, some glad to be in, others not so certain.

Just a couple of points on Jeffrey's letter; one must wonder what the men from other regiments in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army might have thought of him claiming that his battalion carried out the 'most successful and biggest' raid in the army front. This seems a bit presumptuous of Col. Jeffreys. Moreover, the image of Dublin Fusiliers simply wandering around Nancy Support Trench 'at liberty' as he said and killing Germans that did not surrender is hard to believe. German shelling must have prevented them from doing just that. Despite Jeffrey's claim that his men were 'pleased' and with their 'tails up', it would be interesting to know how the men themselves actually felt after the raid. Most probably they were happy to be back alive.

There were three men from the battalion who died that day and one man died a couple of days later from his wounds. The men who died were, Pte. Patrick Dunne aged twenty from Warrenstown, Dunboyne, Co. Meath. Sergeant Michael Finnerty aged twenty-six from Moore, Co. Roscommon. Both these men are buried at Kemmel Chateau Military Cemetery. The third man that died was Lance Cpl. Edward Fox from Roscommon. His name is on the Menin Gate at Ypres.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

One of the Dublins officers wounded during the raid was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. George Victor Poulton who had enlisted as a private into the famous 'D' Company, 'The Pals' of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers that had fought so gallantly in Gallipoli in August 1915. He was educated at St. Andrew's College Dublin and was a Commercial Traveller before the war broke out. On 30 August 1916 he was evacuated from Salonika suffering from enteric fever.<sup>55</sup> Upon his recovery he was commissioned into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins and met up with the battalion on 7 March 1917 at Butterfly Farm near Loker.

Still in the front line on 1 June, no mention was made of the fact that three 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF men were killed and three were wounded. One of those killed by German artillery fire that fell near a part of the Chinese Wall named Hong Kong Trench was Pte. Richard Lester from Bermondsey in Surrey. He had previously served with the 6<sup>th</sup> London Rifles and was either conscripted or returned to the colours on the outbreak of war. When he died, he left a wife and three little daughters behind. They were Catherine aged seven, Hannah aged three and Norah aged two. His wife Catherine never re-married and reared the three girls the best she could. She lost her brother also in the war. Catherine and Norah are now dead, but in November 2000, for the first time in her life, Richard's daughter Hannah, laid a wreath at the grave of her father whom she never got to know.<sup>56</sup> The other men killed that day were C.S.M. James Gilbert age twenty-nine from Dublin and Pte. Martin Walsh M.M. from Kilrush, Co. Clare. All three men were buried in Kemmel Chateau Military Cemetery in Kemmel.<sup>57</sup>

At 3:15 p.m. on the afternoon of 2 June, just before they were relieved in the front line by the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, German artillery opened up with another heavy bombardment on the Irish front and reserve positions. Siege Farm, S.P.11, S.P.12 and Rossignol Wood were all hit and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins suffered serious casualties. Four men from the Old Toughs were killed in the front line and two officers were wounded, along with seventeen other ranks. The officers wounded were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. A.J. Clancy and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. T. Gaffney. (Both men survived the war.) The men that died from the German shelling that afternoon were Pte. Michael Fearon age twenty-two from Newry. Pte. John Craven age twenty-five from Birmingham. Pte. Ernest Cooper, age thirty-one, from Clerkenwell in Middlesex and Sgt. James Coleman age twenty-seven from Landport in Portsmouth. Pte Fearon's body was never found and he is remembered on the Menin Gate. The other three men were brought back with their comrades and buried in La Laiterie Cemetery.<sup>58</sup> When he got back to Loker, Lieut. - Col. Jeffreys wrote home to his wife to tell what he and his men had come through that day and previous night.<sup>59</sup>

Trenches 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1917.

We have had a most awful thirty hours of it and it is still going on. We were quiet prepared for a raid last night and I think by being on the alert and our own artillery watching we just stopped them coming across. One was up the whole night and again today they have been giving us a terrible time of it. We have had several casualties; the only consolation one has is that we give him a worse time of it. The bombardment this afternoon was terrific and my old dugout was rocking about like anything – having earth, bits of iron etc blown right into it. Things are beginning to hum now I can tell you!

I had two Coy Sergt. Majors marched out yesterday, one killed, the other wounded.

<sup>55</sup> Hanna, Henry, *The Pals at Suvla* (Dublin: E. Ponsonby Ltd, 1916).p.226.

<sup>56</sup> *Correspondence between Tom Burke and Mrs. H.E. Cowley (Lester), Surrey, England.* . (November 2000).

<sup>57</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>58</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* Intelligence Report. 2 June 1917.

<sup>59</sup> *Jeffreys, Lieut.-Col. R.G.B., 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*

All three battalions of the Dublin Fusiliers along with the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were camped at Clare Camp between 2 and 7 June prior to the attack on Wijtschate. The final objective assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in their attack on the Wijtschate Ridge was the German Oil Trench south of Oosttaverne Wood on the eastern side of Wijtschate Village, which ran from the south-eastern corner of Oosttaverne Wood to the Wijtschate - Oosttaverne Road north of Torreken Farm. The plan for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles was to come into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of the attack on Wijtschate in the afternoon; relieve the assault battalions of the 47<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigades, supply working parties, consolidate and hold the gained positions at Oil Trench south of Oosttaverne Wood.<sup>60</sup> Accompanying the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins was two sections of the 155<sup>th</sup> Field Company, Royal Engineers under the command of Major Packenham Walsh. Their objective was to wire the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's captured line and link it in with the wire from the Ulster Divisions' sector of their new line on the right and the 19<sup>th</sup> (Western) Division on their left thus wiring the entire 9<sup>th</sup> Corps front. Moreover they also had to quickly construct two strong points at pre-selected sites further out beyond Wijtschate to hit any German counter-offensive.<sup>61</sup>

At 9:20 p.m. on 6 June, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF left Clare Camp and by 2:00 a.m. on the morning of 7 June, they and the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles had initially assembled at Vierstraat Switch trench north of Desinet Farm on the eastern side of the York Road. After the main attack on Wijtschate had gone in by the 47<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup>(Irish) Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved up to take their battle positions along the Chinese Wall in a section from Watling Street to Usnagh Trench, with battalion H.Q. at Shantong. There they remained for the rest of the day. At about 6:40 p.m. in the evening Lieut. -Col Jeffreys of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins wrote a quick note home to his wife. About that time, showers of rain fell very heavily on and off for about an hour. Along with the rain came thunder and lightning. The battlefield turned into mud.<sup>62</sup> Jeffreys got his letter away early because his transport officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Henry was going back to Loker. Jeffreys was in a good mood.<sup>63</sup>

Battle of Wytschaete - Messines attack June 7<sup>th</sup> 1917. 3:10 a.m.

Written 6:40 p.m.

We have been fairly at it since about 10 p.m. last night, as you will see by the enclosed report. I thought it was the best way to tell you what we did. The whole attack was a most successful show and as far as the fighting went faultless. The enemy were absolutely beaten and showed no fight and all that could, bolted. Anyway we have gained a lot of ground and taken many prisoners. More Germans went down through us, than our own. I think the whole attack was a complete surprise. The fighting is practically over now, but I fancy there will be a counter-attack sometime. It is most encouraging to have such a successful show and it bucks the men up tremendously. I was with the Brigadier during the early part of the show. At present I am lying on the ground without anything except what I am able to carry. The guns have tuned up again – it may mean a counter-attack going on. We will have many more hard days before we finish. I have just got an opportunity of sending this off to you by Lt. Henry, our transport officer, who is going back.

<sup>60</sup> Burke, Tom, *Messines to Carrick Hill - Writing Home from the Great War* (Cork: mercier Press Ltd, 2017). See Ch.17 Pp.239-259. See also *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. End of 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade Order; 'The 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was in Reserve and took no active in the fighting but were used to consolidate and hold positions taken.'

<sup>61</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Irish Rifles*. WO 95/1975/2. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 30 November 1917). 7 June 1917.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Irish Fusiliers* WO95/2505/2. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1915 to 31 March 1919). 7 June 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffreys, Lieut.-Col. R.G.B, *2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*

By the time Jeffreys wrote his letter, many of his men had worked all day as carry parties and apart from a cancelled order issued at 4:00 p.m. for him to move up and relieve some of the fighting battalions, he had not received any further orders to move. At 8:50 p.m., a telephone message was sent from 16<sup>th</sup> Division headquarters to 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters ordering the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles to get prepared to move forward from their positions along the Chinese Wall and relieve the battalions from the 49<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade respectively. These battalions were the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment and 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers from the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers from the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>64</sup> As night fell over the ruins of Wijtschate, at 10:00 p.m., the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF moved up to relieve the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. They set up their H.Q. in Unnamed (Inniskilling) Wood. The relief went off without any incident and the remainder of the night and early morning passed off quietly.<sup>65</sup>

On 9 June, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade came out of the line at Wijtschate and the battalions moved back to various stations at Merris, Westoutre and St. Sylvestre Cappel where on 21 June, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was transferred from IXth Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army to XIXth Corps, 5<sup>th</sup> Army under the command of Sir Hubert Gough. This transfer resulted in the Dublins moving to the Rubrouck area on 22 June where they remained in training for the remaining days of June. Before they left St. Sylvestre Cappel, they paraded past their 2<sup>nd</sup> Army commander General Sir Hebert Plumer.<sup>66</sup>

During July, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF did very little except training at Tatinghem near St. Omer. The war diary noted on 15 July, 'Special Mass at St. Omer Cathedral for R.C.s. Capt. L.C. Byrne marched party.'<sup>67</sup> This was the Mass at which Fr. Willie Doyle S.J. made his last sermon to his men. Fr. Frank Brown S.J. offered the Mass. O'Rahilly claimed there were about 2,500 men at the Mass.<sup>68</sup> Towards the end of July, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade moved to a camp near Poperinghe in preparation for the coming offensive. At 3:50 a.m. on 31 July 1917 the British bombardment of the German lines along the Frezenberg Ridge began. The bombardment marked the beginning of the Third Battle of Ypres or simply known as Passchendaele. The roll the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF played in this battle is covered in the section dealing with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF.

Despite the fact that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF played a supporting role in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade's attack on Frezenberg Ridge, the battalion lost 50% of its officers and almost 40% of its men of other ranks. See Table 7. They spent the following couple of days back in camps at Vlamertinghe and Watou recovering from the shock of Frezenberg. On 19 August, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division received orders to transfer to VI Corps in the Third Army. This order resulted in a move of some 110 kilometres south by route march and train from the Ypres salient to the Bapaume - Miraumont sector south of Arras in France. This sector had seen some fierce fighting around Arras in the spring of 1917.<sup>69</sup> The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went into camp at Wormhoudt on 20 August. Next day, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division relieved the 21<sup>st</sup> Division in the centre section of VI Corps.<sup>70</sup> 'Quite Days' noted the war diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division for the remaining days of August 1917.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Narrative of Operation 6/9 June 1917.

<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 June 1917.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 21 and 22 June 1917.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 15 July 1917.

<sup>68</sup> O'Rahilly, Alfred, *Father William Doyle S.J.* (London: Longman's Green and Company, 1920). Pp.302-307. Note. O'Rahilly stated the Mass in St. Omer Cathedral took place on the Sunday, 21 July 1917. The 21 July 1917 was in fact a Saturday and 22 July 1917 was a Sunday. On Sunday 22 July 1917, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, according to their war diary, was on the move from Eringhem to Winnezele Area No.3 for training. O'Rahilly got his dates mixed up.

<sup>69</sup> Denman, Terence. p.124.

<sup>70</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. WO95/1956/1. (London: The National Archives, 1 May 1917 to 31 December 1917). 19-21 August 1917.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 31 August 1917.

It was during these quite days that the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF received new drafts to replace those that were lost at Frezenberg. Between 19 and 31 August, the battalion received a total draft of seventy-three other ranks. During September, eight officers and a further 164 other ranks joined the battalion.<sup>72</sup> Many of the drafts were non-Irish. In July 1916, some 70.8% of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was Irish born, 19.4% was English. At the end of August 1917, some 46.6% were Irish and 47.9% were English.<sup>73</sup> Some Irish battalions could not muster enough men to form separate battalions and were consequently amalgamated.

In mid-September, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, along with the rest of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were in billets at Ervillers. There were lots of inspections carried out here by senior officers; for example General Hickie inspected them on 9 September, the 'anniversary of Ginchy' as noted the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary.<sup>74</sup> General Haldane G.O.C.VI Corps called by next day. Trench duties didn't begin for the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF until 16 September when they went into the line until 22 September. During this time, on 18 September, German artillery hit a section of front line trench occupied by 'D' Coy. Using 5.9 inch shells, trench mortars nick named 'Pine Apples, some 182 meters of trench 'was completely obliterated.'<sup>75</sup> Two men died during that tour, they were; 22107 Pte. Peter Lawlor from Tallaght in Co. Dublin and 26377 Pte. James Doherty also from Dublin.<sup>76</sup> There was nothing of very particular note during the early part of October. However, at mid-day on 21 October following a preliminary British gas shell and Stokes Mortar attack which prevented a German counter-attack, 'a very dashing and successful raid was carried out by a party of the regiment against the enemy's works at the apex of Prince and Tunnel Trenches with the object of obtaining identification, etc.'<sup>77</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters of the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade had raided the same target of Tunnel Trench in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's sector a few days previous on 16 October.<sup>78</sup> The Dubs raid consisted of three parties led by Lieut. Beaumont M.C., 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Lloyd and an N.C.O with fifteen other ranks who acted as a covering party to Beaumont and Lloyd. Six Germans, who were not wearing gas masks, were found 'crouching into the parapet' and armed; held their hands up to Beaumont who took the nearest to him as a prisoner. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Lloyd also bagged one prisoner. Both prisoners came from the 266<sup>th</sup> Reserve Infantry Regiment.<sup>79</sup> The whole affair lasted less than ten minutes. Good intelligence was gained about the condition of the German trench around Tunnel Trench which was 'well revetted and deep.' The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF suffered only one man wounded.<sup>80</sup> Their war diary contained lots of congratulatory messages from VIth Corps, 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, 16<sup>th</sup> Division and Brigade commanders.

The raids and small patrols carried out on German lines at Tunnel Trench by units of 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division were intelligence gathering in preparation for a larger operation the Irish Division carried out on Tunnel Trench on 20 November 1917. Daily intelligence reports were prepared by 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade on topics such as the condition of wire and physical state of German trenches and distributed to the other brigades in 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. On 14 and 15 November, a practice assault on Tunnel Trench was carried out by the Dubs at Hamelincourt about four kilometres northwest of Ervillers.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendix to War Diary for August and September 1917.

<sup>73</sup> Burke, Tom, *Whence Came the Royal Dublin Fusiliers?* p.449.

<sup>74</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/1974/3. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 31 October 1917). 9 September 1917.

<sup>75</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18 September 1917. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.93. Note. Pine Apple was the nick name British soldiers gave to a particular type of German trench mortar shell.

<sup>76</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>77</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.93.

<sup>78</sup> Denman, Terence. Pp.124-125.

<sup>79</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 21 October 1917.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Report on raid carried out by 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF on 21 October 1917.

<sup>81</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 14-15 November 1917.

The Order of Battle for the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's attack on Tunnel Trench was: 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Right; 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Centre and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade on Left. In terms of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Order of Battle for the attack: the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF (Lieut.-Col. G. Mc M. Robertson) on Right and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF (Lieut.-Col. R.G.B. Jeffreys) on Left; 1<sup>st</sup> RDF (Lieut. Col. A. Moore) in support and 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> (Lieut.-Col. A.G. Thompson) in Reserve at Ervillers.<sup>82</sup> On the right was the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade and on left was 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>83</sup> On the 18 November they moved into their assembly trenches which were in front of Tunnel Trench which was in turn on the western edge of Croisilles.<sup>84</sup> During the night at 10:00 p.m., men went out and cut the German wire facing their sector of the attack.<sup>85</sup> Zero hour was set at 6:20 a.m. The attack was a complete success and all done in under an hour. By 7:10 a.m., 'information was received that all objectives had been taken, and that the work of consolidation was well in hand.' Moreover, communication systems worked using buried cable from 'Brigade to Battalion headquarters, thence by Runner to the forward troops.'<sup>86</sup> Parts of Tunnel Trench below ground were mined and thanks to intelligence about these mines gathered from the raids, the wires connecting the charges were located and cut.<sup>87</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF war diary noted, 'Tunnel Trench was found to be mined. All wires connecting the mines were cut by Capt. W. Pedlow and Capt. L.C. Byrne M.C. who captured the German officer responsible for the laying of the mines, compelling him to point out where the mines were placed.'<sup>88</sup> The Official History noted that the 174<sup>th</sup> Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers 'removed the charges after several underground encounters with the enemy.'<sup>89</sup> The infantry attack was carried out 'behind a special smoke screen.' No.3 Special Company of the Royal Engineers put down a special smoke bombardment along the whole VI Corps front at Zero Hour. 'Q' Special Company R.E. discharged some 300 gas drums into the Riencourt area east of Bullecourt and seventy-five at the German trenches south-west of Fontaine-les-Croisilles north of Bullecourt facing in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Divisions sector of the attack.<sup>90</sup> The smoke shells devised by the Royal Engineers, fired from four inch mortars, tactically used to panic the Germans into putting their gas masks on, were fired on targets at Tunnel Trench previously on the night of 12 and 13 October 1917 by No.3 Special Company R.E. Over those two nights, some 1,500 smoke and gas shells were fired. German retaliation was reported as being 'extremely slight.'<sup>91</sup> Gas gongs and other alarms were heard going off all along the German line. Red Very Lights were sent up. As the cloud gradually passed over the line and dispersed, Green Very Lights went up as a signal that all was clear.<sup>92</sup> Gas and smoke shelling continued on into November. It seemed the tactic of forcing the Germans to wear their gas masks worked. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade post-battle report noted: 'A great number of the enemy, fearing a gas attack, had put on their gas masks, and large numbers ran out into No Man's Land to surrender.'<sup>93</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.95. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Report on the assault on Tunnel Trench, carried out on 20 November 1917. Preliminary Dispositions. p.1.

<sup>83</sup> Miles, Captain Wilfred.p.98.

<sup>84</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Section of trench map. *Trench Map-Sheet No:Croisilles 51b S W 3 and 4 Edition 3a*.

<sup>85</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 18-19 November 1917.

<sup>86</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. p.95. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Report on the assault on Tunnel Trench, carried out on 20 November 1917. The Assault. p.1.

<sup>87</sup> Denman, Terence.p.126.

<sup>88</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 November 1917.

<sup>89</sup> Miles, Captain Wilfred.p.98.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*. p.97.

<sup>91</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 12 and 13 October 1917.

<sup>92</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 November 1917.

<sup>93</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Report on the assault on Tunnel Trench, carried out on 20 November 1917. The Assault. p.2.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF casualties were; '2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J. A. Harvey killed along with five other ranks; twenty-seven other ranks wounded. German casualties were; killed estimated fifty; prisoners estimated 180.'<sup>94</sup> According to Wyllly, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division 'secured 670 unwounded prisoners, and caused very considerable loss to the enemy.'<sup>95</sup> The war diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division recorded the total German prisoners captured for the month of November 1917 was seven German officers and 668 other ranks, a total of 675.<sup>96</sup> The Official History noted that; 'Prisoners amounted to 718, representing all three regiments of the 240<sup>th</sup> Division; and it was reckoned that nearly 500 Germans had been killed. The losses to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Divisions ~~was~~ were 805.'<sup>97</sup> According to 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division war diary, signed by General Hickie, their losses were: forty-four officers, killed, wounded, and missing; plus 890 other ranks killed, wounded or and missing, a total of 934.<sup>98</sup> The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted on casualties:<sup>99</sup>

Table 1  
Casualties of 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade incurred by attack on Tunnel Trench 20 November 1917.

Battalion / Unit	Officers killed	Other Ranks killed	Other Ranks wounded
10 <sup>th</sup> RDF (Right)	1	3	20
2 <sup>nd</sup> RDF (Left)	1	5	27
1 <sup>st</sup> RDF (Support)	1	3	2
48 <sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Coy.	1 Plus 1 wounded		
48 <sup>th</sup> Trench Mortar Battery	1 Plus 1 wounded		

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. John Harvey came from Charleville, Co. Cork. He was twenty years of age.<sup>101</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF saw out the remaining days of November with a spell of front line duty after which, on 30 November, they were relieved by the South Irish Horse.<sup>102</sup>

On 1 December, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division received orders to be relieved 'at once by the 40<sup>th</sup> Division.'<sup>103</sup> The reason it was 'at once' was due to an urgent defensive re-arranging of infantry divisions following the successful German counter-attack on 30 November on positions gained at the Battle of Cambrai.<sup>104</sup> They moved south from Ervillers to St. Emile and specifically to the neighbourhood of Epehy where companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF took up their new position at Lempire Defences on 5 December 1917.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 November 1917. According to Wyllly the battalion suffered a loss of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Harvey and nine men killed along with 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Perry and fifty-four other ranks wounded; three were missing. See Wyllly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.94.

<sup>95</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.96.

<sup>96</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 30 November 1917.

<sup>97</sup> Miles, Captain Wilfred.p.98.

<sup>98</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 30 November 1917.

<sup>99</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Report on the assault on Tunnel Trench, carried out on 20 November 1917. Casualties. p.3.

<sup>101</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) See also; *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. In fact seven 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF men died on 20 November 1917.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 30 November 1917.

<sup>103</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*.1 December 1917.

<sup>104</sup> Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*. Pp.96-97. See Also Miles, Captain Wilfred. Chapter XI;XII;XIII. Pp. 176-229.

<sup>105</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 1-5 December 1917.



Some companies occupied what were referred to as 'a series of Posts' named YAK and ZEBRA which were defensive positions or strong points set out at various positions along the front line designed to slow down any potential large scale German infantry assaults. Rumours of 'extensive attacks' by the German proved false throughout their time in the line.<sup>106</sup> However, following a 'heavy barrage' on 23 December, the Germans raided a front line Bombing Post at 3:15 a.m. where a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were manning. About thirty Germans took part in the raid.<sup>107</sup> One man was killed, two wounded and five were reported missing.<sup>108</sup> The man killed was 43521 Pte. Robert Keegan from Dublin.<sup>109</sup> Next day, Christmas Eve, while out of the line and back in their billets at Railway Cuttings near St. Emilie, at 3:25 p.m. German artillery hit the billet area using 5.9 inch shells. Three men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF were killed outright and six were wounded.<sup>110</sup> The three men killed were: 28203 Pte. Edward Smalley from Northamptonshire; 43513 Pte. Charles Dever from Boston, USA, he enlisted in Ireland; 27297 Pte. James Joseph De Venny from Downpatrick, Co. Down. It seems two of the men wounded died on Christmas Day 1917. They were; 19365 Pte. Patrick Grogan from Mullingar, Co. Westmeath; 25282 Pte. William Dempsey from Monageer, Co. Wexford.<sup>111</sup> Needless to say, the families and loved ones of these unfortunate men, and indeed of many of their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who had died over the past twelve months, had a miserable and sad Christmas 1917.

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<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5-11 December 1917.

<sup>107</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 23 December 1917.

<sup>108</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 23 December 1917.

<sup>109</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>110</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 23-24 December 1917. Note. St. Emilie is a little over four kilometers west of Lempire and is between Villers Faucon and Ronsoy.

<sup>111</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

## The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were still in Salonika on 1 January 1917. They were part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 10<sup>th</sup>(Irish) Division. Other battalions in the brigade were; the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers and 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. On 1 January 1917, the strength of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was eighty officers and 774 other ranks.<sup>1</sup> Based in poor billets and tents near the village of Orlyak, which lay about twenty-one kilometres southwest of Seres in the River Struma valley. Both Dublin battalions began 1917 as they had ended 1916; supplying working parties needed for the construction of roads and training trenches in bitterly cold winter weather. Cold and snow turned roads into mud and men could not work. Consequently men were confined to billets enduring hours of cold boredom. To relieve such boredom, they were given lectures.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally rum was issued to keep out the cold.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the freezing weather, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF diary noted there was ‘amazingly little sickness.’<sup>4</sup> Throughout January, companies rotated between working parties and training. They worked at Sakavca, about five kilometres southeast of Orlyak and Jenikoj where they had created a cemetery within which some RDF men were buried. Groups of men, both officers and other ranks were sent to Divisional Schools to learn the skills of bombing, signalling, bayonet fighting etc. Training in new attack tactics was carried out using infantry, scouts, signallers, bombers, ‘according to scheme issued.’<sup>5</sup> Inspections by divisional officers were carried out without warning. If a man failed his gas mask inspection, he was fined.<sup>6</sup> Officers were trained in the use of the Barr and Stroud Range Finder for artillery range finding.<sup>7</sup> Some men of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were sent to cadet units in UK. Candidates had to be interviewed by an officer of General rank first.<sup>8</sup> Up to mid-January 1917, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF supplied some eighty men of other ranks to cadet units, a fact they were proud of.<sup>9</sup>

In early February, 7<sup>th</sup> RDF moved into the front line across the Struma at Cuculuk which was about eight kilometres north of Orlyak and again they resumed their work in maintaining some of the outposts dotted around the hills. They named some of their trenches and front line outposts after places in Ireland, such as ‘Munster Crossing’, ‘Irish Post’ and ‘Irish Crossing’ at Topalova which was about three and a half kilometres east of Cuculuk.<sup>10</sup> Apart from the occasional bit of Bulgarian shelling, there was very little aggressive action and indeed fighting offered from either side in the early days of February. The only real bit of excitement was early on the morning of 17 February when a large white barn where a portion of the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF were billeted went on fire. Large explosions took place due to boxes of bombs kept in the barn exploding. No casualties were reported and a Court of Inquiry was held to determine the causes of the fire.<sup>11</sup> On 24 February, the relative peace of the front line was broken when the Bulgarians shelling hit a front line post at Topolova killing two men and wounding three. The men killed were 24159 Sgt. Edward Blundell, killed instantly and L/Cpl. Hyland. Sgt. Blundell was twenty-one years of age and came from Bordesley in Warwickshire. L/Cpl. Hugh Hyland was twenty-seven, a married man and came from Miltown in Cumberland. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF War Diary noted that another man who was injured ‘lived a very short time after being hit’ and died from his wounds. In fact two men died on 27 February.

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<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/4836. (London: The National Archives, 1 October 1915 to 31 August 1917). 1 January 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 25 January 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 12 January 1917.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 2 January 1917.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 17 January 1917.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 31 January 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 15 January 1917.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 12 May 1917.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 13 January 1917.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 4 May 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 17 February 1917.

They were 24304 Pte. Charles Nash, age thirty-four, from Stepney, Middlesex, and 24307 Pte. Denis O'Connor age thirty-five from Cathairdean Cottage, Ballyhan, Farranfore, Co. Kerry.<sup>12</sup> The men were buried in the cemetery that the Dublins had made at Jenikoj.<sup>13</sup> At the end of February, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was relieved in the line by the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. They went back to billets at Dragos which was about five kilometres southwest of Cuculuk on the west bank of the Struma and were apparently 'excellent billets'.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout March, working parties of up to 140 men from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were used by the Royal Engineers in various projects such as the construction of lite railway lines at Cuculuk or deepening communication trenches where necessary 'to screen from enemy view.'<sup>15</sup> The progress of work on trenches etc. was noted in a log book written up by each battalion and handed over to the incoming battalion on rotation thus keeping an eye on how work was progressing.<sup>16</sup> Much of the trench work on defences facing Prosenik, which lay on the Salonika to Istanbul railway, was done at night; during the day the men that worked rested.<sup>17</sup> Consequently these particular trenches were the target of much of the Bulgarian intermittent shelling.<sup>18</sup> Back on 16 November 1916, 'a dismal day with sheets of rain from dawn till dusk', the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF had captured Prosenik with little or no fighting. 'The garrison, only about forty strong, promptly ran.'<sup>19</sup> However they later had to withdraw on 18 November owing to strong Bulgarian counter-attacks.<sup>20</sup> One simple consequence of all this manual labouring was the wear and tear on men's uniforms, so much so that they ran short of uniforms.<sup>21</sup>

Training continued to pass away much of the time for men who were not on work parties. New drafts arrived. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF War Diary noted that some of these new drafts seemed, 'to have very little training before coming out.'<sup>22</sup> There was no encounter with the Bulgarians noted. The only casualty was one of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF mules which broke his leg and was put down.<sup>23</sup> St Patrick's Day was a bit of a holiday for the Dubs. Mass was in the morning for the Roman Catholics. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF War Diary noted: 'Division allows us half-holiday...Boxing contests in the afternoon and a free issue of beer.' Bare back mule racing for men of the Transport 'was a great success.'<sup>24</sup> And 14166 L./Sgt. Frederick Falkiner of 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was awarded The Bronze Medal of the Kingdom of Italy.<sup>25</sup> March ended on a sad note. Pte. Vincent Arnold was reported missing. He had committed suicide. A Court of Enquiry found that he had been shot.<sup>26</sup> Vincent Arnold was twenty-seven years of age. He came from Clonmult, Middleton, Co. Cork. He is buried in the Struma Military Cemetery, Kalocastron in Central Macedonia, Greece.

<sup>12</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 24-15 February 1917. Both these men are buried in Salonika (Lembet Road) Military Cemetery. According to CWGC, 'After the Armistice, some graves were brought in from other cemeteries.' It is likely that the men buried in the cemetery created by the RDF in Jenikoj fell into that category and were reinterred at Lembet Road.

See [https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/68901/Salonika%20\(Lembet%20Road\)%20Military%20Cemetery](https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/68901/Salonika%20(Lembet%20Road)%20Military%20Cemetery)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 28 February 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 5 April 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 4 May 1917.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 24 March 1917.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 4 May 1917.

<sup>19</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917*, vol. 1 (London: Imperial War Museum, October 1932).p.242.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.p.245.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22 May 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 15 March 1917.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 16 March 1917.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 17 March 1917.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 12 January 1917. L./Sgt. Frederick Falkiner was later promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. and transferred to the Royal Irish Rifles. The award as titled; 'The Italian Bronze Medal for Military Valour.' His citation was noted in the London Gazette on 31 August 1917. See Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.197.

<sup>26</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22 March 1917.

The weather began to improve in April and the men were issued with sun helmets worn by all ranks between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, battalion orders noted that the Dublins remove their distinctive blue triangle sown onto left shoulder of their tunic and place it on the left side of the helmet as a distinguishing mark when the battalion was in shirt sleeves order.<sup>28</sup> Despite the fact that most of the battalions were actually used as manual labourers, it was important they kept up their skills as fighting soldiers. After all, many of the drafts sent out had poor soldiering skills anyway. Consequently training camps were set up where men trained in the skills of musketry, Lewis guns, bombing, gas helmet drill using box respirators, etc. They used 18-Pounder cartridge cases as gas alarms.<sup>29</sup> Sgt. Crossman of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF gave a fine demonstration in the, 'new style of bayonet fighting' to G.O.C. 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>30</sup>

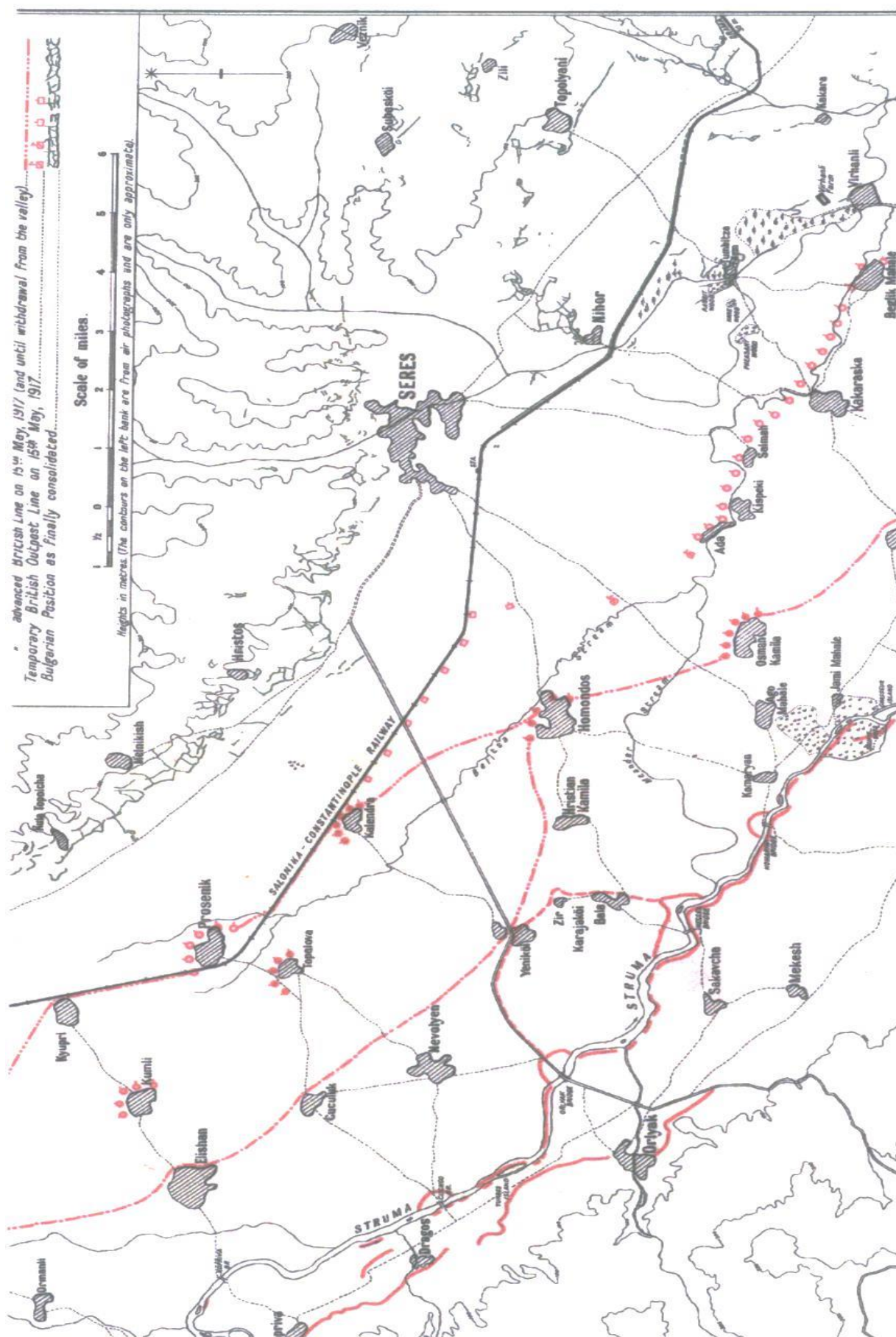
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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 14 April 1917.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 9 May 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 19 May 1917.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 29 June 1917.



Operations Struma Valley, May 1917. GSGS 2097. War Office, October 1908.

Officers conducting this training had to produce a training programme for each week showing numbers under training.<sup>31</sup> The Dubs endeavoured to have at least fifty men from each battalion at musketry and Lewis gun training on rotation.<sup>32</sup> Special attention was brought to 'arms drill, saluting, smartness in turn-out.'<sup>33</sup> They were after all soldiers not navies. Interesting to note that battalion size training in assault tactics, which was rare because of the commitment to work parties, was per the training manual titled; 'Instructions for Training of Divisions for Offensive.'<sup>34</sup> The lessons of the Somme and later battles had been codified and sent to units as far away as Salonika. One of these brigade size exercises was carried out on 1 May. The objective was to 'attack and hold five lines, opening trenches and consolidate final objectives.' The exercise was observed by G.O.C. 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>35</sup>

A second attempt to push the Bulgarians back beyond the Prosenik-Kyupri line, a distance of about three and a half kilometres, was carried out by the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on evening of 15 May 1917. All three brigades of took part in the operation and despite heavy counter attacks by the Bulgarians, some of whom 'tied sheaves of corn round their bodies and stuck small tufts of it into their caps' as camouflage advancing through the high crops, British artillery decimated them in the open. There were Irish casualties.<sup>36</sup> However, compared to the Western Front in May 1917 and in particular in the Irish lines facing Wijtschate in Flanders, because it was so quiet, Salonika was the front to be at if you were a soldier. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF War Diary noted; 'Health of men is very good with remarkably little sickness.'<sup>37</sup> On Sunday evenings when the heat of the sun had faded, the officers played cricket and hockey matches against the battalion sergeants.<sup>38</sup> In early June 1917, a 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division Band was formed. They visited camps around the divisional sector. On 19 June, they visited Hill 439 Camp, a reserve camp in the hills near Turica. It was about two and a half kilometres west of Dragos, There the band played for the Dubs for one and a half hours. 'Their services were much appreciated by the men.' They hoped to have the band in the brigade sector 'once every three weeks.'<sup>39</sup> Battalion Committees were set up to keep a good atmosphere and high spirits in the Dubs battalions. For example, there was a Canteen Committee set up to ensure, 'best possible distribution for the men be obtained.' A Sports Committee was responsible for 'running the battalion sports in connection with the Brigade Sports Programme.' They were also responsible for 'recreation training.'<sup>40</sup> They built battalion bathing facilities in safe places to bathe '1 Coy per day...Showers and a plunge bath' were also built.<sup>41</sup> The river Struma offered a bathing place too. However it did present a danger for some men. L/Cpl. Daniel Quinn of 'B' Coy. 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was drowned on 17 July. 'He was seen to throw up his arms and sink having swum across and being on his way back. He was not seen again.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 18 June 1917.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 2 April 1917.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 19 June 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 24 April 1917. Further examples of the Learning Curve concept and how military training had been transferred around various armies on both western and eastern fronts.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 1 May 1917.

<sup>36</sup> Falls, Cyril.pp.336-337.

<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 May 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 20 May 1917. See also 26 July 1917.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 19 June 1917.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 20 June 1917.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 22 June 1917/

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 17 July 1917.

His body was found two days later, 'on left bank about half a mile downstream.' L/Cpl. Quinn was twenty-two years of age and he came from Convoy in Co. Donegal. He was initially buried in Kopriva Cemetery and later in Struma Military Cemetery, Kalocastron.<sup>43</sup> Following this tragedy, safety measures were installed in the river and rules for swimming in it were established.<sup>44</sup> The only grouse reported was the fact that mail often didn't get through from home. 'Two more lots of mail notified as lost at sea' noted the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary.<sup>45</sup>

Towards the end of June, the heat really intensified. Men were reported as having dysentery from eating tinned fish. Consequently, a brigade order was issued, 'that all tinned fish must be cooked in future.'<sup>46</sup> Also with the heat came the mosquitos and malaria. Initially, the numbers admitted to hospital were reported 'low'. The War Diary of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF noted that the numbers did 'not go above two or three per day.'<sup>47</sup> Men who had recurring doses of malaria were issued with, '20 grams of quinine per day.'<sup>48</sup> Twice weekly quinine parades were started in July but the men were not inoculated. The Bulgarians were inoculated twice a week which apparently caused some of them to desert.<sup>49</sup> Further precaution against the mosquitos was using mosquito nets and huts.<sup>50</sup> In General Milne's words, the mosquito net was looked upon as being 'as important as the rifle.'<sup>51</sup> The huts were found to be defective.<sup>52</sup> However, by end of July, the numbers coming down sick with malaria had increased. 'The cases of Malaria in the two Coys on the plain are beginning to multiply. Sick parade remains about 100 per diem (day).' Between fifty and seventy-five men from the two companies working were excused duty due to illness.<sup>53</sup> As a result of a visit by the A.D.M.S in early August, he ordered that all men who had persistent ill-health or 'over age' were 'considered to be unfit for service in the front line.'<sup>54</sup> The number of sick rose steadily as the summer advanced. By the end of June there were about 11,000, chiefly malarial cases in the hospitals, by the end of July about 12,500, by the end of August about 18,000. The peak of the casualty chart, 21,434, was not reached until 16 October 1917, after the beginning of cooler weather when the graph dipped sharply.<sup>55</sup> Several measures were taken to avoid malaria. 'Streams were canalised and stagnant water drained off. Long grass near camps or bivouacs was cut or burnt.' Mosquito proof huts were built. Sentries were provided with gloves and masks.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly as a preventative measure against malaria, men were forbidden to shave their upper lip and thus grow moustaches. An order was issued stating, 'G.R.O. again impresses on officers that all or no part of the upper lip is to be shaved. Disciplinary action will probably have to be taken in many battalions.'<sup>57</sup> The cool mountain air on Hill 439 Camp offered some relief from the mosquitoes.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 19 July 1917. See also [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://Www.Cwgc.Org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>44</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 26 July 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 10 July 1917.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 10 July 1917.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 27 June 1917.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 3 July 1917.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 12 July 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 17 August 1917.

<sup>51</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War.*, vol. II (London: Imperial War Museum, November 1934). p.7.

<sup>52</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 July 1917.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 25 July 1917.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 10 August 1917.

<sup>55</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917*.p.7. The total number of malaria cases up to the armistice with Bulgaria in September 1918 was 198,000. The total number of non-combatant casualties was 481,262. Thus malaria accounted for some 41.2% of the total non-combatant casualties. See Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War*. Front page.

<sup>56</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917*.p.7.

<sup>57</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 July 1917.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 2 August 1917.



The relative lack of engagement with the Bulgarians presented an opportunity for one Bulgarian soldier who had had enough of war and 'gave himself up at Prosenik' on 3 May. He may also have been an inoculation deserter. He was a schoolteacher and he gave the Dublins 'some useful information' such as the 'dispositions of enemy, also gun positions and two or three new posts.'<sup>59</sup> Later in the summer, more Bulgarians came across the line. On 9 July, one came over driving, 'a two pony wagon.' On 12 July, seven Bulgarians gave themselves up. 'They did not look in bad condition but complained of bad feeding and treatment.' Two more came over at Artillery Bridgehead on 25 July.<sup>60</sup>

There was little no encounters with the Bulgarians or reports of shelling. The general method of defence was to be that of holding essential points lightly, with reserves in readiness to eject the enemy if he broke into the line. Losses from artillery fire would thus be reduced to a minimum.<sup>61</sup> In the closing days of May, daily reports noted, 'situation normal and very quiet.'<sup>62</sup> However, despite this lack of fighting, the potential for sudden attacks always existed; consequently the Dubs set up an early warning system of any potential Bulgarian attack on the outposts. Every 731 meters or so right across the front they occupied were located standing patrols of one NCO and six men. Each patrol carried a Very Pistol and white lights to be used in the event of a Bulgarian attack and the patrols were forced to withdraw.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore in accordance with 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade Operation Order No 26, Situation Reports were carried out daily at regular intervals at 4:40 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.<sup>64</sup> Encounters with the Bulgarians were more skirmishes than actual full on attacks. Patrols were sent out to establish Bulgarian positions and strengths in points along the line. A typical report noted; 'Scouts returned not having got in touch with the enemy at all.'<sup>65</sup>

As a means of keeping the Dubs fighting abilities sharp and perhaps to let the Bulgarians know they were still in a war, occasional raids were carried out on the Bulgarian defences. Some raid reports noted, 'nothing of interest.'<sup>66</sup> Others were a bit livelier. Following a raid carried out in early June, 28525 Sgt. W. Marchant of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was awarded the Military Medal, 'for gallantry and devotion to duty in the field.'<sup>67</sup> And, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Edward Gerald Little was awarded the Military Cross, 'for gallantry and devotion to duty in the field.'<sup>68</sup> Both men received their decoration on 2 August at Kopriva which was three and a half kilometres northwest of Dragos from the XVI Corps Commander, Lieut.-General C.J. Briggs.<sup>69</sup> The limited defensive duties the Dublins were assigned to in August, presented an opportunity for them to train. With a battalion strength of thirty-three officers and 943 other ranks, companies were withdrawn from work duties and took part in a brigade size attack training programme in all arms, rifles, hand and rifle grenades, Lewis guns, use of bayonet etc. To ensure quality of rifle fire training, a Salonika Musketry Test was established, and every man had to pass this test. It transpired that some 50% of the RDF battalions failed the test and had to attend further training.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 3 and 6 May 1917.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 9,12 and 25 July 1917.

<sup>61</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From Outbreak of War to the Spring of 1917*.p.6.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 28-31 May 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 27 May 1917.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.27 May 1917.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.28-30 July 1917.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 31 May 1917.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 10 June 1917.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 26 June 1917. See. Wylly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.171. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Little citation is noted in The London Gazette dated 16 August 1917.

<sup>69</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 August 1917.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 1 July 1917 and 9 August 1917.

Is it any wonder so many failed, most of the time they had a shovel in their hand and not a rifle? The final day of brigade training at Hill 439 1917 on 17 August ended with what can only be described as a battalion booze up. The war diary of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF noted:<sup>71</sup>

The evening provided all ranks with a pleasant change. The Divisional Band opened the proceedings in our Battalion area followed by the finals of the Brigade Boxing Tournament. Then came the issue of beer, each man who wished purchasing 1 litre on the ticket system. A concert given by artists chosen from all units in the brigade completed the programme. There was a huge attendance including the Brigadier General and a thoroughly enjoyable evening was spent.

Contrast that end of day with the end of day their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions at had experienced at Frezenberg Ridge in Flanders.

On 20 August, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF left Hill 439 for the last time. Over the following days, they packed their kit, limbers and transport animals (horses and mules), cleaned up and headed by lorry and route march to Uchantar Camp near Salonika, the latter being out of bounds to all ranks. There was no hotel accommodation in the town due to the fire which had almost destroyed it.<sup>72</sup> The fire left 100,000 people homeless.<sup>73</sup> Lieut. Noel Drury of the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF noted in his diary on 21 August 1917:<sup>74</sup>

The fire in Salonika has been a dreadful disaster. Two-thirds of the city is wiped out including all the best part of it with the Hotels and business houses. Nobody knows how it started, but, of course, everyone says Enemy Agents. I think it was one of the old paraffin flares that are used to light the small shops and wok-rooms, as I often thought that some such disaster would follow the bursting of one of these.

Before they left Salonika, the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF lost the C.O. Lieut.-Col. Paddy Cox. He had been called back to England, 'for other employment.' He had been promoted to command a brigade.<sup>75</sup> Cox was replaced by Major W.H. Whyte. Drury believed Whyte was, 'a dam fine fellow and a white man.'<sup>76</sup> Their destination was English Quay at Salonika harbour front where on 2 September 1917 they boarded *H.M.T Hunts Green* bound for Alexandria in Egypt.<sup>77</sup> They became part of XX Corps in General Sir Edmund Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF).<sup>78</sup> Prior to their departure from Salonika, the G.O.C of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, Major-General J.R. Longley, sent a message to his departing troops.<sup>79</sup>

The C in C has directed me to inform all ranks how pleased he is with what the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division has done and with its high state of efficiency. I feel sure that I can rely on everyone doing his utmost not only to maintain but even improve the high reputation earned by the division while in this command. I desire this to be read out on parade in all units and would remind them that good discipline, smartness and sound training are just as necessary to success in the field of battle as they are at other times.

Signed J.R. Longley, Major-General, Commanding 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 17 August 1917.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 25 August 1917.

<sup>73</sup> Drury, Noel, *Drury, Lieut. Noel, 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. (Dublin: RDFA Archive). Vol.3.p.10.(p.330).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Vol.3.p.10 (p.330).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Vol.3.p.19. (p.339).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Vol.3.p.33. (p.353).

<sup>77</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 September 1917. Note; The 6<sup>th</sup> RDF did not leave Salonika until 9 September 1917. Drury, Noel. Ref Drury Diary Vol.3.p.24. (p.344)

<sup>78</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War.*, vol. II Part 1 (London: Imperial War Museum, July 1930).p.16.

<sup>79</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.26 August 1917.

Escorted by two destroyers, the voyage from Salonika to Alexandria took about four days. The only stop they made on the journey was at Scyros. The men slept on the decks to avoid the heat of down below. Their transport personnel and animals went on a captured German vessel named the *S.S. Dereflinger*, 'an intermediate boat before the war on Chinese service.'<sup>80</sup> The sea and wind were calm. Hours were passed through the odd tug-of-war pulls between the RDF and 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment.<sup>81</sup>

At 11:00 a.m. on 6 September, they reached Alexandria where trains were available to bring them to their destination camp named Moascar, about two kilometres outside the town of Ismalia which lies about 340 kilometres east of Alexandria. Their camp was alongside a big Australian Detail Camp and the Suez Canal. Within days of their arrival, they began a regular routine of training that included the usual 'bayonet fighting, musketry and arms exercises.' Lectures were given to officers on topics such as the use of gas from 'Chemical Advisors' from 'The Egyptian Gas School.' They were equipped with what was termed 'Egyptian scale'. Strong winds and sand storms were a regular occurrence. Their steel helmets were withdrawn because of the hot climate and sun goggles were issued.<sup>82</sup> The dust and sand of the desert were washed off with a 'bathing parade.'<sup>83</sup> However, the men were warned not to bath in the canal nearby as they could pick up Bilharzias or as the men called it 'Bill Harris.'<sup>84</sup> Moascar camp had an officer's club shared with French officers where the Dubs 'pipe and fife band' occasionally played. Apparently at the end of the evening's entertainment they marched off playing 'A Nation Once Again,' or as Drury called it 'A Nation Once a Week.'<sup>85</sup> In the evening, the men attended a cinema and visited the town of Ismalia on a limited basis with an N.C.O.<sup>86</sup> The camp also had a Y.M.C.A. hut where C of E men attended church parades.<sup>87</sup> The R.C. men attended their Mass elsewhere. Drury's opinion of the Dubs R.C. Chaplain was condescending. 'Father W.J. O'Carroll...is a perfect specimen of the Maynooth-trained young priest-bigoted, narrow-minded and (from a worldly point of view) absolutely uneducated.'<sup>88</sup> He also had a poor opinion of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF. He called them 'the Comitadjis.'<sup>89</sup>

Both RDF battalions spent about three weeks at Moascar camp when orders were received to move to Rafa, via El Ferdan, Ballah and Kantara. Occasionally they marched through the night and slept during the day.<sup>90</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF reached Rafa at 05:00 a.m. on the morning of 27 September. Drury noted that the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF didn't arrive in Rafa until 07:00 a.m. on 29 September.<sup>91</sup> The high wind and sand cut into the eyes and throats of the men as they marched to their camp about one kilometre north of Rafa Station.

<sup>80</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/4583. (London: The National Archives, 1 September 1917 to 31 May 1918). 2 September 1917.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 4 September 1917.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 14 October 1917.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 9-10 September 1917.

<sup>84</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.32. (p.352).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Vol.3.p.32. (p.352).

<sup>86</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 9-10 September 1917.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 8 September 1917.

<sup>88</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.27. (p.347).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* Vol.3.p.58. (p.377). Comitadjis were a guerrilla / rebel band operating in the Balkans during the final period of the Ottoman Empire. See also Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Macedonia. From the Spring of 1917 to the End of the War*. p.232.

<sup>90</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.40. (p.360). Rafa / Rafah, now just on the Egyptian side of Egypt-Israel border. The Mediterranean lies approx. six kilometres north of Rafah.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* Vol.3.p.44. (p.364).

Drury noted that the men looked like ‘coal heavers’ after the march.<sup>92</sup> No surprise to note that the same training routine began here too. Essentially both battalions of the RDF spent the month of October in Rafa either training or on route marches to the sea and inspections. However their time was spent wisely. A session of night route marches began where officers and companies had to find their way using compass which were, ‘essential things in country so devoid of landmarks.’<sup>93</sup> Battalion attack schemes were carried out in the desert with special emphasis on aspects of the attack such as consolidation and ‘attention to runners, systems of ammunition supply and signalling.’<sup>94</sup> Demonstration in attack tactics such as, ‘Company in attack’ and the use of Contact Aeroplanes was occasionally carried out.<sup>95</sup> It is interesting to note, in the context of the infantry learning, that the new assault tactics using Contact Aeroplanes following the failures of the Somme and subsequent campaigns, was now in use by battalions in Egypt and Palestine. Their rifle range was set up in the desert near what the diarist of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF referred to as the ‘Battle of Magrontein.’<sup>96</sup>

The desert life seemed to agree with the RDF battalions. The war diary noted that most of the men were looking fitter than when they left Salonika. Occasional route marches to the beach not doubt helped keep mind and body in good shape.<sup>97</sup> However some men when medically examined were classified as ‘P.B. mostly on account of age.’<sup>98</sup> Few if any cases of sickness were reported. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted that the ‘men are healthier in the main but malaria still asserts itself.’<sup>99</sup> To be on the safe side, both man and beast (mules) were inoculated during October 1917. The men were inoculated against Cholera. The mules were inoculated against ‘Glanders.’<sup>100</sup> Night-time over the desert was particularly dark and one hazard was getting lost, which, apparently, ‘was an easy mater.’<sup>101</sup> Occasionally, ‘moonlight’ religious services were held in the sands east of the camp that were ‘well attended and the singing heartily entered into.’<sup>102</sup>

Their final training exercise in Rafa was an assault training exercise with the other brigades of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division to ‘test signalling communications in a moving attack’ which ‘worked fairly smoothly.’<sup>103</sup> Towards the end of October, the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division moved from Rafa via Abu Kayli to El Girheir and Hill 630 in particular which was an ‘outpost line...with forward posts...to be held at all costs’.<sup>104</sup> The Turks had attacked the post at Hill 630 on 27 October and the Dubs along with other units from the 53<sup>rd</sup> (Welsh) Division were brought in as reinforcements to defend this position after it had been retaken from the Turks, late in the evening. Moreover, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) was assembling for an attack on Beersheba in which the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division’s role was that of support and reinforcement. (Note El Girheir and Hill 630 lie between Beersheba and Gaza)

On 31 October 1917, Beersheba was taken from the Turks by British and Commonwealth troops, mainly from The Desert Mounted Corps. The attack by the EEF marked the beginning of the Southern Palestine Offensive; an offensive that led to the capture of Gaza on 1 and 2 November and ultimately Jerusalem on 9 December 1917. During five and a half weeks of almost continuous offensive manoeuvring desert operations, the EEF captured 47.5 miles (76.4 km) of territory.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. Vol.3.p.44. (p.364).

<sup>93</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 October 1917.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 5 October 1917.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 22-23 October 1917.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 1 October 1917. Possibly an ancient Roman site.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 8 October 1917.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 25 October 1917. The letters P.B stand for Permanent Base – a term applied a soldier who could not manage active service in the field.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 19 October 1917.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 22-23 October 1917. Glanders is a rare contagious disease that mainly hits horses; the effects of which are characterised by swellings below the jaw and mucous discharge from the nostrils.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 13 October 1917.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 21 October 1917.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 25 October 1917.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 31 October 1917.

The main participation of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division in these operations was in the roll of support behind the offensive and consolidation of ground taken. For example, following the capture of Beersheba the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted on 3 November:<sup>105</sup>

Works and wire are now in good condition and the line is quite a good outpost one... We have been working steadily, but are of course getting pretty tired as we have been on 'Stand By' or on the move the last few days and very little rest, however, our hardships, if they can be called such, are very much lighter than those Divisions on our right who are without packs etc. and are on a very scanty supply of water.

Thus, all throughout the month of November, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF as part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division were on a steady move northward through southern Palestine. They were also kept on regular 'stand by' in case they were needed to assist a faltering attack or reinforcement. For example in the attack on Sheria and Rushdi by the 53<sup>rd</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Divisions on 7 November, the 31<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division took part in the successful attack on Rushdi while the 30<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Brigades were in reserve.<sup>106</sup> Beginning at 07:00 a.m. on 7 November, the attack on the Hureira Redoubt on the Gaza-Bersheba Road took place over open ground and in full view of the Turks.<sup>107</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers and 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers of the 31<sup>st</sup> Brigade took the Hureira Redoubt with two new 5.9 inch (150 mm) Krupps guns and 'about 40 prisoners and a lot of trophy.' News had come through too that day to RDF battalion headquarters that Gaza had been evacuated by the Turks and all along the line they were 'fleeing in disorder.'<sup>108</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers suffered the highest casualties in the attack which was in total 122.<sup>109</sup>

The gruesome job of burying the men who died in the attack on Rushdi, Turk and Tommy, was assisted by the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>110</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions along with the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division moved to Karm, about fifteen miles west of Beersheba. Dust and sand kicked up by the wind on the move made it 'almost impossible to see 25 yards.'<sup>111</sup> There was a large watering station at Karm. Drury noted the water pipeline that ran along the railway line. 'It is wonderful to think of this water coming the whole way from the Nile across the Sinai desert.'<sup>112</sup> It is interesting to note in the context of the continuous learning curve the British Army experienced whether on the Western Front or in Southern Palestine, that following the successful attacks on Gaza and Beersheba, feedback learning notes were issued to brigades of the EEF. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted on 13 November; '30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade circulating a typed written account of the battles of Gaza and Beersheba and salient points are being explained to N.C.Os and men.'<sup>113</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 3-4 November 1917. Note the Divisions on right were 53<sup>rd</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup>, 74<sup>th</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 3-4- November 1917.

<sup>107</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. Pp.109-110.

<sup>108</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 November 1917.

<sup>109</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. Pp.109-110. Casualties of 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers were: Killed, Two officers and twenty-one other ranks; Wounded, Five officers and ninety-four other ranks.

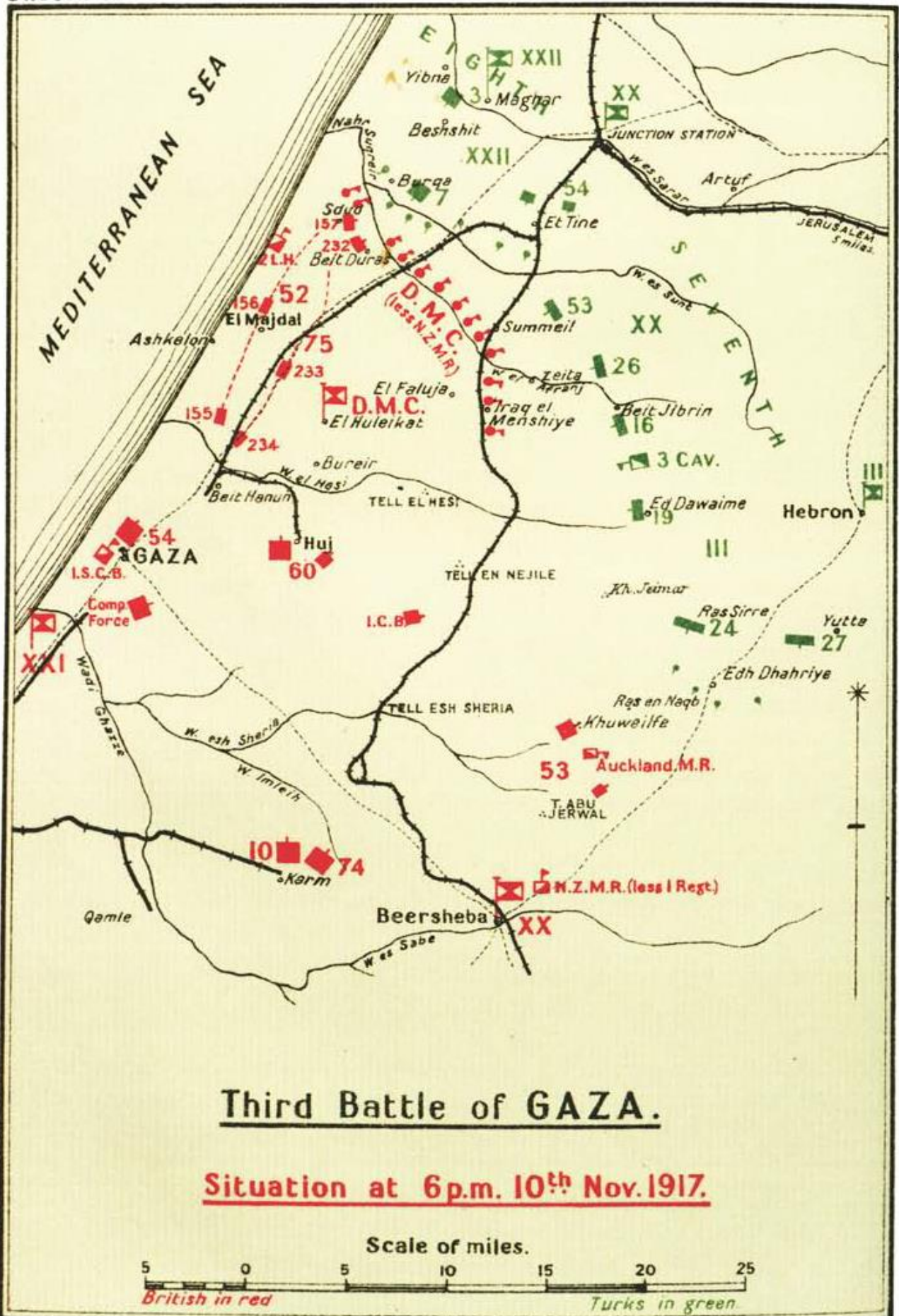
<sup>110</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 November 1917.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 11 November 1917.

<sup>112</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.79. (p.398).

<sup>113</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 13 November 1917.

Sketch 9.



Compiled in Historical Section (Military Branch).  
3000/30.

Ordnance Survey, 1927.



Before they moved on from Karm on 14 November, more news of collapsing Turkish lines came through.<sup>114</sup>

Yeomanry Division have captured Yebnah (Yibna about 25 miles north of Gaza along the coast) and later news states Railway Junction in our hands, probably Ramleh (Ramle). We have thus cut their railway communication with Jerusalem while Yebnah itself is north of Jerusalem.

The push northwards had been rapid by the EEF. The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted on 19 November:<sup>115</sup>

News locally continues to be good. 20<sup>th</sup> Corps (10<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Divisions) communique states: - Out of estimated enemy forces against us on this front of 45,000, estimated casualties inflicted over 28,000 including 10,000 prisoner and over 100 guns besides many machine guns and endless stores, dumps and ammunition of all descriptions...The rout of the enemy is complete and it is now obvious that he is not going to hold Jaffa-Jerusalem line as at first thought.

With their railway lines of supply and communications cut, the Turks were indeed routed, and their columns being pursued north of Jaffa by ANZAC cavalry and the RFC.<sup>116</sup>

By late November, the 'long expected rainy season had arrived' turning roads and tracks into mud.<sup>117</sup> Continuing with their role in support, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF marched on to Gaza which had been taken at the beginning of November. Turkish machine gun emplacements in their defence of Gaza were reported as, 'cunning', insofar as they were 'hidden among the cactus foliage...the whole place looked well-nigh impregnable frontally.'<sup>118</sup> It is worth noting that as the fighting to push the Turks out of southern Palestine was in progress, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF were having a relatively easy time behind the fighting. For example, while camped in Gaza, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF won the 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade Scouting Competition.<sup>119</sup> The lack of action drove Drury to note on 26 November: 'Still here, goodness only knows why. Men trained to staleness and bored to tears.'<sup>120</sup> However, on the same day, orders were received for, yet another move northward. Over the following three days, both battalions, along with the other brigades of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division marched from Gaza to Latron a distance of about seventy kilometres. (Latron is about thirty kilometres west of Jerusalem). The latter being the depot of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division at the junction of the Jaffa-Jerusalem Roads and set in hilly country.<sup>121</sup> Latron was, 'a fine looking place', which had a handsome monastery on the hill-side built of stone.'<sup>122</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 14 November 1917. See Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. Sketch 9. Between Pp. 138-139.

<sup>115</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 19 November 1917.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 19-20 November 1917.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 20 November 1917.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 22 November 1917.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 22 November 1917.

<sup>120</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.88. (p.407).

<sup>121</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 30 November 1917. See also Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*.p.313.

<sup>122</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.92. (p.411).



Overnight stops along the way were made at Beit Hanun, Beith Duras and Junction Station reaching Latron on the afternoon of 30 November. Midday stops for one and half hours were made to rest the men. Few fell out and 'shirt sleeves orders' were observed along the march.<sup>123</sup>

On 1 December 1917, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF took over a part of the line 'drawn in front of Beit Ur Et Tanta to Wady Zaip' where they relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> Cameronians (156<sup>th</sup> Brigade) and a battalion of the Argyle and Southerland Highlanders, of the 157<sup>th</sup> Brigade 52<sup>nd</sup> Division. The 6<sup>th</sup> RDF had been transferred to the 31<sup>st</sup> Brigade.<sup>124</sup> Over the coming weeks while based at Beit Likia near Latron, essentially their task was to defend and consolidate the new lines captured from the retreating Turks such as building sangers from stones and wiring. Their position was among the hills and their place in the line was in fact on the 'reverse slope of a hill in the middle of an olive grove full of trees which gives good cover from observation.'<sup>125</sup> Apparently, the Turks at this stage were only 300 yards away in places. However, the Dublins were ordered 'to be as aggressive as possible' against the Turks. It wasn't until 3 December 1918 that the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF reported contact with the Turks. It was when the 16<sup>th</sup> Devons of the 229<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 74<sup>th</sup> Division attacked a Turkish position named Beit el Foka which overlooked the Dublins.<sup>126</sup> The following day the Turks counter attacked the Devons who, 'suffered heavy casualties and were finally forced to leave their position and give up the village. It is feared they left many of their wounded behind but every effort was made to get them in during afternoon and at nightfall.'<sup>127</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> Devons lost 286 men which included three company commanders. Killed; Three officers and forty-nine other ranks. Wounded; nine officers and 132 other ranks; Missing; two officers and ninety-one other ranks. This was a worthless use of men. The Official History noted. 'It was obvious that local attacks of this nature were not worth their cost, and General Chetwode, (Lieut.-General Sir P.W. Chetwode G.O.C. XX Corps) who had now time to reconnoitre the front, ordered them to stop. The Turks had been defeated and fought to a standstill; he had now all the fresh troops of his own corps up – the 10<sup>th</sup> Division having relieved the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division-and could afford to mature his preparations for the capture of Jerusalem.'<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 29-30 November 1917.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*. See also *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/4583. (London: The National Archives, 9 July 1915 to 30 June 1918.). 1 December 1917.

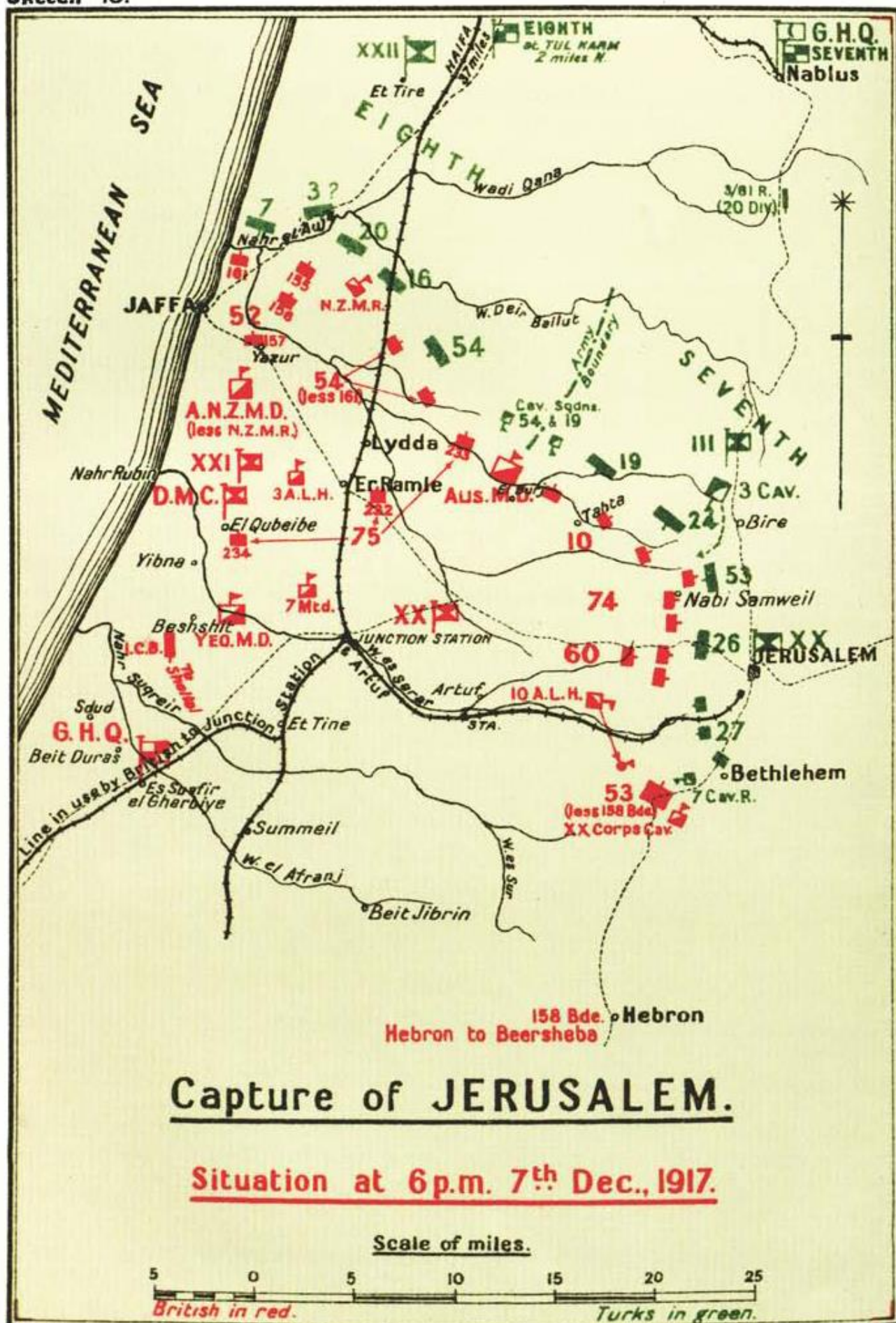
<sup>125</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 December 1917.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*. See also Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.235.

<sup>127</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 December 1917.

<sup>128</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.236.

Sketch 18.



In preparation for 20<sup>th</sup> Corps (10<sup>th</sup>, 74<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Divisions) attack on Jerusalem, instructions were issued on 6 December for 'care to be taken of mosques and churches in Jerusalem...not to use any of the main roads through city.'<sup>129</sup> Special instructions were issued regarding the sanctity of the Dome of the Rock and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre within the walls of Jerusalem and the Garden of Gethsemane and David's Tomb outside them. Warning was sent to Major-General Mott, G.O.C 53<sup>rd</sup> (Welsh) Division that the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and Rachel's Tomb north of the town were likewise to be respected at all costs.<sup>130</sup> On the morning of 5 December, patrols from the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and the Australian Mounted Division discovered that the Turks facing them had withdrawn during the night. The divisions were instructed to take every opportunity of improving their positions by seizing points of tactical value but not to become involved in fighting. The 7 December passed quietly. During the day, battalions of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division began to move off eastwards from Tahta (Tabata on map).<sup>131</sup> Both RDF battalions were ordered to hold themselves 'in readiness for the coming operations.'<sup>132</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, at the northern end of the attack line, was to hold itself in readiness for the attack on Jerusalem and be prepared to take part in it, if required. It rained on 7 December, the day before the main attack. The troops waiting outside Jerusalem to advance on the city spent 'a wretched night in cold, driving rain. Whole teams of gun-horses came down together on slippery roads, to kick and founder in the darkness and block the struggling traffic. Camels fell with their legs splayed outwards, split at the quarters, and had to be bundled off the road after their loads had been taken off. Several of their Egyptian drivers died from exposure.'<sup>133</sup>

The rain continued next morning, the day of the main attack on Jerusalem by the 60<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The war diary of the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF noted that Jerusalem was taken on 9 December 1917 by the 60<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Divisions and that next day the Turks were 'reported to be falling back in front of our line.'<sup>134</sup> On 11 December, the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted 'Jerusalem has now been taken by 20<sup>th</sup> Corps. We got about 1,000 wounded prisoners.'<sup>135</sup> General Chetwode ordered the 60<sup>th</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Divisions to resume their advance. The Turks were still holding the ridge (Mount Scopus) north of the city.<sup>136</sup> The 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division found the high ground north of the Wadi esh Shebab and south of Beit 'Ur el Foqa unoccupied and took possession of it. Patrols were ordered to push forward to scout Turkish resistance. A party of twelve other ranks from the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. McCainn pushed forward and met with some resistance near the village of El Tireh which they entered. Assuming the resistance came from some of the locals, McCainn arrested 'all natives and dispatched them to Div. H.Q. for trial.'<sup>137</sup> His suspicions were well founded as there was some heavy sniping reported and one man from the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF was killed as a result. He was 18607 L./Cpl. John McArdle from Ballybean, Co. Monaghan. He was buried in Jerusalem War Cemetery.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 6 December 1917.

<sup>130</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.241.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*. p.241.

<sup>132</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 December 1917.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*. 9 December 1917. See also Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.243.

<sup>134</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 9 December 1917.

<sup>135</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 December 1917.

<sup>136</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. Pp.256-257.

<sup>137</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 9 December 1917.

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.cwgc.org> See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Note. Soldiers Died records Ballybean being in Co. Monaghan. It may well be Ballybay, Co. Monaghan. L./Cpl McArdle enlisted in Glasgow.

Two days previous on 7 December, another scout patrol under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. King was scouting on a ridge beyond El Tireh. 10878 L./Cpl. James Keegan from 'A' Coy, 6<sup>th</sup> RDF, was badly wounded; his thigh had been smashed in following an attack on them by Turks. King and the other scouts stayed with Keegan trying to keep the Turks back. King was able to get back. Before he left, however, he had managed to get Keegan into a hollow for cover. The other men were safe. It was dusk when King and the battalion doctor, Dr Paine, with six volunteers, went back to climb the Sheikh Hassan ridge to get Keegan and other scouts with him out. They returned at 2:00 a.m. having searched everywhere but failing to find any trace of the three scouts or Keegan. They were assumed to have been captured by the Turks.<sup>139</sup> 10878 L./Cpl. James Keegan was never found. He was twenty-one years of age and came from Dublin. His name is on the Jerusalem Memorial.<sup>140</sup> There was no record of what happened to the men with him that were captured by the Turks.

The surrender of Jerusalem on 9 December was 'one of the most dramatic incidents of the war.'<sup>141</sup> Jerusalem had been captured without damage to a single sacred building.<sup>142</sup> Celebrating the capture of Jerusalem came quickly with a parade through the city on 11 November. The 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was represented in the parade by each battalion in the division sending two or three other ranks.<sup>143</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> RDF diary claimed that the men were 'sent to join Divisional Party forming part of General Allenby's Bodyguard on the first entry into Jerusalem.'<sup>144</sup> Between 3 November and 15 December 1917, British, New Zealand, Australian and Indian casualties in the advance on Jerusalem amounted to 18,928. Turkish losses were estimated to be 28,443.<sup>145</sup>

In an effort to keep the offensive momentum moving and remove the Turkish threat from Jerusalem, based on instructions received from General Allenby, 20<sup>th</sup> Corps Commander General Chetwode prepared a plan to push further northwards. On 14 December, Chetwode presented his plans to his divisional commanders. For the first time, perhaps, since their arrival in Gallipoli back in August 1915, the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was assigned an offensive operation. Major-General Longley put forward a scheme for advancing by way of the formidable Kereina and Deir Izbzia spurs, north-east of Beit Ur et Tahta. This was adopted by Chetwode, who thought so well of it that he placed a brigade of the 74<sup>th</sup> Division, at Longley's disposal to advance eastward along the Zeitun Ridge.<sup>146</sup> The Irish attack formation was with 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Brigades up front to take first objectives with 30<sup>th</sup> Brigade in reserve to come through 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade to take final objective. The countryside they had to advance over was described as being, 'devoid of roads, very mountainous and difficult to cross...'<sup>147</sup> At least ten days of hard work were needed on roads and water supply before the attack could take place.<sup>148</sup> Both RDF battalions remained at Latrun and in compliance with preparing roads etc. for their offensive, much of their duties during that period was back working with the shovel and pick as opposed the rifle and bayonet. Essentially manning and consolidating the hilly outposts out from Latrun, supplying working parties to the Royal Engineers improving roads and wadis for artillery positions. One awful job they had during that period was burying both friend and foe from previous battles.

<sup>139</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.101. (p.420).

<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> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.252.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*p.262.

<sup>143</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 December 1917.

<sup>144</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 10 December 1917.

<sup>145</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*.p.262.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p.276.

<sup>147</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 17 and 26 December 1917.

<sup>148</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.276.

The war diary of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF noted on 16 December: 'There are a number of our own and enemy dead in and around Fuka (Foka). The chaplain buried some 45 of the Devons and almost as many Turks.'<sup>149</sup> The weather was cold with rain and biting winds. Supplying the men manning the outposts and working parties was difficult trekking up through the wadis from Latrun. Snow was expected but for the first time in a long time, fresh meat was included in the rations.<sup>150</sup>

On Christmas Eve, General Longley had sent a telegram message to his men wishing them 'the best of Palestine cheer.'<sup>151</sup> Christmas gifts and stores came up to the men. It lashed rain all Christmas Day. For the troops, so near the scene of the event which Christians celebrate by festivity, it was one of misery. Drury noted; 'We spent a miserable Xmas day with chattering teeth and aching bodies.'<sup>152</sup> To add to their misery, in the evening, a warning was received 'that the Turks were preparing to attack along the front of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> Divisions with 5,000 men.'<sup>153</sup> Despite the fall of Jerusalem, the Turks north of the city were still willing to fight on and hold their positions against the British advance northwards. Indeed, shortly after 1:30 a.m. on 27 December the Turks did attack the British mainly along the front occupied by 60<sup>th</sup> Division north of Jerusalem, astride the Nablus Road.<sup>154</sup> However, the attack, conducted with resolution by the enemy's best troops, almost wholly failed.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the Turkish attack on 27 December, General Chetwode ordered his planned attack to push ahead on the same day. The countryside of Longley's line of attack, as agreed with Chetwode, was as stated along three 'rugged and craggy' ridges above boulder strewn gorges and wadis. The attack was to be made in three groups: the Right Group consisting of the 229<sup>th</sup> Brigade (74<sup>th</sup> Division); the Centre Group of the 31<sup>st</sup> Brigade; the Left Group of the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Brigades, (10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division), both brigades under the command of Brigadier-General R. S. Vandeleur, G.O.C. 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>156</sup>

The attack by the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was a complete success. Turkish resistance was negligible. The Irish Division fought against an army in retreat. The only officer casualty the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered was Lieut. George Hare killed by a sniper in the capture of a ridge known as Shamrock Hill.<sup>157</sup> He was the son of Rev. Henry and Helen Hare of 'Fernside' Drumcondra Road, Dublin. He was educated at Mountjoy School, Mountjoy Square, Dublin. Before he enlisted, he was a Civil Servant. He and his brother Edward were both members of The Pals, 'D' Coy. 7<sup>th</sup> RDF when they enlisted in 1914. George was made a Sergeant not long after enlistment and gazetted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. in September 1915 soon after the battalion's action at Suvla Bay in Gallipoli.<sup>158</sup> Aged thirty-one, he is buried in Jerusalem War Cemetery.<sup>159</sup> Furthermore and tragically two days later during the afternoon of 29 December, a Turkish shell hit the wadi wherein the headquarters of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF was located. The one shell killed the signal officer, the assistant adjutant and a company commander. The battalion's second-in-command was also slightly wounded. It was 'a very heavy loss to the battalion.'<sup>160</sup>

<sup>149</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 December 1917.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*. 18 December 1917.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*. 25 December 1917.

<sup>152</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.188. (p.427).

<sup>153</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 25 December 1917.

<sup>154</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*. p.279.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*.p.281.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*. Pp.282-283.

<sup>157</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 27 December 1917.

<sup>158</sup> Hanna, Henry.p.192.

<sup>159</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://Www.Cwgc.Org) See also Wyllly, H.C, *Neill's Blue Caps 1914-1922*.p.163.

<sup>160</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 29 December 1917.

The 7<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted the names as; ‘Captain W.V. Edwards, Lieut. Thomas Fossberry Handyside age thirty-three, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. B. Silicon ? killed by shell fire.’<sup>161</sup> This was the final Turkish resistance noted. Dublin’s patrols pushed out even further into the hills beyond their new line which was about three miles long and very lightly held. They went out ‘without meeting any opposition.’ According to Drury on 29 December; ‘The only place the Turks put up any sort of hand-to-hand show was at Ainein and Khurbet Rubin where we killed a few and shot others.’<sup>162</sup>

The year 1917 ended for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> RDF in the cold and wet hills north of Jerusalem. Drury noted, ‘...the last night of year it poured all night with a steady downpour.’<sup>163</sup> Both battalions finished 1917 relatively strong in numbers with few casualties suffered throughout the year. The effective strength of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF on 31 December 1917 was thirty officers and 703 other ranks.<sup>164</sup> The strength of the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF on same day was thirty-five officers and 616 other ranks.<sup>165</sup> By a curious coincidence in the Spring of 1918, the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division would face the Turkish 40<sup>th</sup> Division in Palestine. They had faced each other in the Struma Valley back on the Salonika front.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 29 December 1917. Unfortunately the print in the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF War Diary for 29 December is difficult to read. Hence the question marks beside one name. No such name is listed in RDF Officers’ Roll of Honour in Wylly, H.C, *Neill’s Blue Caps 1914-1922*. Pp.161-165.

<sup>162</sup> Drury, Noel. Vol.3.p.121. (p.430). Khurbet Rubin is a mountain just east of the Israeli village of Dolev which is approx. fifty-five kilometres through the mountains north of Jerusalem.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. Vol.3.p.122. (p.431).

<sup>164</sup> *War Diary 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 31 December 1917.

<sup>165</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 31 December 1917.

<sup>166</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations Egypt and Palestine from June 1917 to the End of the War*.p.17.



### St Fintan's Cemetery, Sutton, Co. Dublin Sean Connolly, RDFA

Many Irish families had to suffer the loss of a son during the First World War. Some were buried in unknown graves and commemorated on large memorials to the missing. Others had individual graves but many families were unable to visit due to the cost and difficulties in travel before the arrival of air travel. In some cases, the names were added to headstones on the graves of parents or other relatives. The following is just one example of such acts of remembrance in St. Fintan's Cemetery, Sutton, Co Dublin.

#### The Paul Family

When Mr Charles John Paul of Mon Abri, Bailey, Howth, Co. Dublin died on 2 January 1933, aged seventy-two, the inscription on his headstone includes the names of his two sons, Walter and Charles, who were killed in the First World War. Both had joined 'D' Coy. (The Pals) 7<sup>th</sup> RDF which was formed from the 200 plus volunteers from the Irish Rugby Football Union. Walter was killed on 7 August 1915 when the 10<sup>th</sup> Division landed at Suvla Bay in the second attempt to capture the Gallipoli peninsula. It was his first time to come under enemy fire. He is

buried in Green Hill Cemetery. His headstone has the following inscription; *In peace in hope in Christ*. He was nineteen years old. His army regimental number was 14193.



The headstone of Charles John Paul with the names of his two sons, Walter and Charles inscribed.



Walter C. Paul was educated at Howth Road and Wesley College, Dublin. A keen rugby footballer, he was Captain of Clontarf Rugby Football Schoolboy Team for several seasons. He was killed in action during the Suvla landing on 7 August 1915. Charles A Paul was born in Dublin and was also educated at Howth Road and Wesley College, Dublin. Before he enlisted he worked as an Insurance Clerk. He was made Lance-Corporal in August 1915; invalided from Gallipoli suffering from dysentery on 24 August 1915; Gazetted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers in December 1915.<sup>167</sup> Charles was a year younger than his brother Walter. He arrived at Suvla Bay and would have learned of the fate of his brother.

<sup>167</sup> Hanna, Henry.p.223



He had to be evacuated two weeks later due to dysentery. As with most of 'D' Company survivors, he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant and was assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF. He took up duty in present day Thessaloniki in December 1915, still only nineteen years old. As part of the 10<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF had been transferred to Macedonia in October 1915 to assist the French. After a major attack by the Bulgarians, they had to retreat over the Greek border to the city. Charles was promoted to Lieutenant and transferred to the 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. He was injured by a shell and died of his wounds on 2 October 1917, aged twenty. He is buried in Rocquigny-Equancourt Road British Cemetery, Manancourt which is about 12 km South east of Bapaume. The following is inscribed on his gravestone. *He told no pang he knew no fear – Emerson*. Both are commemorated on the Roll of Honour of Clontarf Cricket and Football Clubs, the Great War Window of Clontarf Presbyterian Church and the Great War Memorial of Wesley College. The only other child in the family was a younger sister, Dorothie Margaret, who died in 1935. Their mother, Mary Katherine, died in October 1952, thirty seven years after Walter was killed. The family would have received the standard bronze death plaques for both as well as their medals.

## The 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

On 1 January 1917, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was in the line at York House facing the Germans on the Wijtschate-Messines Ridge.<sup>1</sup> Their comrades in the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF were in Divisional Reserve in billets at Birr Barracks, Loker, doing the 'usual battalion training.'<sup>2</sup> The German gunners opened 1917 with a barrage on 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Divisional front on 2 January. One shell hit the Signal Coy. dugout of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF at S.P.13, a front line Strong Point wounding four men who were in it.<sup>3</sup> As part of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, both battalions had come to Flanders from their Somme campaigns in September 1916. On arrival in Flanders, they relieved Canadian troops. Interestingly when the Irish troops arrived in the Loker / Kemmel region of Flanders, the Germans, or more specially the Bavarians, welcomed them. According to Henry Newman, a member of 'C' Battery, 177<sup>th</sup> Brigade RFA, attached to 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division: 'When we took over, our infantry were not with us, but the Bavarians were in the opposite trenches with a notice put up. WELCOME 16<sup>TH</sup> IRISH.'<sup>4</sup> A regular rotational routine of front, support and reserve line duties occupied much of January 1917 for both the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions. When in the front line, patrols were sent out to check on German activity and check for breaks in the wire. Intermittent German trench mortars were fired at Irish lines. On 23 January, Lieut.-Col. Beddoes took over command of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF. On the same day, Lieutenants Frank Laird and P.J. Gueret reported for duty to the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>5</sup> Again, while in reserve, battalions trained to pass the day away and keep active and warm. Trial tactical exercises with Contact Aeroplanes were carried out during late January. Pigeon flying courses were offered in Bailleul.<sup>6</sup> The main enemy for troops on both sides of the wire at Wijtschate in January 1917 was the freezing weather. The war diary of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF noted on 29-30 January. 'Very cold, impossible to use picks or shovels in front lines...camouflages and wiring is about only work that can be done.'<sup>7</sup> Pte. Christy Fox of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF wrote to Miss Roberts in Stillorgan, Dublin and told her how things were. 'I am wearing two pairs of socks at present and still can't keep my feet warm.'<sup>8</sup> The billets at Birr Barracks in Loker were only partly built. The work on the chimneys was held up because of the cold.<sup>9</sup> Lieut.-Col. H.R. Beddoes had his men cutting up trees for fuel. On one Sunday Mass in early February, Fr. Bourne, a chaplain with the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF, had to stop the Mass and send for an oil stove as the wine had frozen solid during the Mass.<sup>10</sup> By the end of January 1917, more men from the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF went to hospital suffering from the effects of cold weather than did from injury fighting the Germans. The number who went to hospital with complaints related to cold weather such as trench fever and trench foot etc. was approximately ninety-five. By comparison, about twenty-nine were wounded due to encounters with the Germans.<sup>11</sup>

In mid-February, the Germans began exploding small land mines in particular locations along the Irish front lines. The objective was to establish strong points in the craters at places they considered vulnerable to attack.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 January 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* WO95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915-31 October 1917). 1 January 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 January 1917.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary of R.H. Newman Royal Artillery*. MD 1169. (Woolwich: Royal Artillery Museum).

<sup>5</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 23 January and 11 May 1917. And *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 23 January 1917. Papers of Lieut. Paul Gueret and Lieut.-Col. Beddoes are in the RDFA Archive, Dublin. On 11 May 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Gueret was sent to England and struck off the strength of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 4 March 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 29-30 January 1917.

<sup>8</sup> *Monica Roberts Collection*. (Dublin: RDFA Archive). Letter from Pte. Christy Fox 20 February 1917.

<sup>9</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 28 January 1917.

<sup>10</sup> H.R. Beddoes, Lieut.-Col., *Diary of Lieut.-Colonel H.R. Beddoes 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*, 24 January 1917 to 10 May 1917, Dublin. 27 January and 6 February 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-30 January 1917.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 16 February 1917.

Despite the relative quietness of the place, between 1 January and 28 February, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF lost twelve men either through intermittent German shelling or snipers. The 9<sup>th</sup> RDF lost six for the same period.<sup>13</sup> The youngest man killed was nineteen year old 19207 Pte. Michael Byrne from No. 21 Gordon's Place, South Richmond Street, Dublin. He was killed bringing rations up to the men in the front line during a brief salvo of German artillery. He is buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery near Kemmel.<sup>14</sup> On 8 March, German artillery opened 'a heavy bombardment' in the afternoon on the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division front. It was followed by a German raiding party who got through the Irish wire 'causing casualties and leaving some dead and wounded...'<sup>15</sup> The attack may well have been a response to a large raid carried by the 41<sup>st</sup> Division on 24 February launched from part of the Irish front at Petit Bois.<sup>16</sup>

Ever since Queen Victoria issued the instruction that all her Irish regiments were to wear a sprig of Shamrock on 17 March, St Patrick's Day held and still holds, a special place in the hearts of all Irish servicemen. St. Patrick's Day 1917 in Flanders fell on a bright and sunny Saturday. From her home at Stillorgan, Monica Roberts sent out some shamrock in her comforts parcels and anyone who could get their hands on a bit of Shamrock, wore it with pride. Cpl. Arthur Brennan of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins wrote to Miss Roberts and told her. 'Everyone that was free attended Mass this morning in remembrance of the great St. Patrick. The 17<sup>th</sup> was well marked out by the great display of shamrock amongst the boys.'<sup>17</sup> In the morning, some of the Irish battalions out of the line held a Church Parade and in the afternoon a sports day.<sup>18</sup>

On 19 March, all three Dublin Fusilier battalions in Loker were taken out of the line. By that time the weather was typically spring-like. That biting cold wind had eased up. At least when the trenches were frozen, the ground was hard; with a thaw and rain, back came the mud, wet feet and usual bout of trench fever among the men. During March eighty-six men from the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins had been sent to hospital suffering from the damp and wet conditions.<sup>19</sup> The routine trench life the Dublins had experienced up to now was over. From now on, the buzzwords around the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters was *training* and serious *preparation* for a large offensive.

From the middle of March on, the 16<sup>th</sup>(Irish) and indeed 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division operated with one brigade in the line, one brigade in reserve and one brigade in training at villages in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army training area. Over the next ten days or so, apart from those that were in hospital and those who were sent to work with the Royal Engineers, the three Dublin Fusiliers battalions cleaned up and prepared themselves for their period of training over at a 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Training camp at Zouafques which is a little village about eighteen kilometres north-west of St. Omer. Over the next two months, every brigade in both the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division would spend at least a month at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Training Camp preparing for the attack on Wijtschate in June.

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<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 January to 28 February 1917.

<sup>14</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.Cwgc.Org) See also *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. His nephew is Mr Christy O'Sullivan, member of the RDFA.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 8 March 1917.

<sup>16</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 24 February 1917.

<sup>17</sup> *Monica Roberts Collection*. Letter from Cpl. Arthur Brennan, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 6th Royal Irish Regiment* WO95/1970/3. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915-28 February 1918). 17 March 1917.

<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-31 March 1917.

Before they left Loker, the Dublins officers played a rugby match against the 16<sup>th</sup> Divisional Train (Transport) and just for the record, the Dubs were beaten by thirteen points to nine.<sup>20</sup> At 8:30 a.m. on 31 March, the three battalions of Dublins along with the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles formed up in Loker and led by their pipes and drums began their route march to Recques. At the end of the column, came their German prisoners guarded by the battalion police.<sup>21</sup> One can only assume that these German prisoners were used as labourers and carry parties. Marching order and discipline were strictly enforced. Officers had to pay strict attention to march duty, especially when they marched through villages. Regimental image and pride were at stake. Any soldier who fell out along the way had to report to Captain Massey the Medical Officer. Men who were not sick but could not walk too far were assigned to the battalion's transport as loading assistants. The men that walked carried their full pack with their steel helmet strapped on to it. Their route took them through the villages of Bailleul, Strazelle, and Hazebrouck. The distance from Loker to Zouafques was about sixty-four kilometres and it took the column three days to march that distance with a couple of stop over spots along the way.<sup>22</sup> On the day the Dubs march out of Loker, George Soper wrote back to Monica Roberts. The newspapers had told him the Yanks were coming.<sup>23</sup> (34)

I thought we were going to see America in along with us according to the papers but they have changed their minds and sent a note. Again, what a pity there is not a paper shortage in America. I wonder what they would do for notes then. Well, we can carry on without them.

The build-up for the attack on Wijtschate had begun, and as far as one Dublin Fusilier was concerned, they were going to knock the Germans off the Wijtschate-Mesen Ridge, with or without the Yanks.

Over the following ten days or so, both RDF battalions practiced the new attack formation tactics mainly in the mornings. The afternoons were used up with battalion and brigade sports such as football matches, relay racing and cross country runs. On 12 April, both General Sir Herbert Plumer and General William Hickie observed one such brigade size exercise.<sup>24</sup> Writing about arrangements for exercise, Lieut.-Col. Beddoes noted. 'The staff arrangements of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were about as bad as they could be. We were supposed to be attacking a known set of trenches marked by flags. Most of the flags were missing. The positions of the various battalions had not been fixed and the whole affair was a muddle.'<sup>25</sup> Yet however, despite some early morning snow, the actual event went off 'fairly well' in front of Hickie and Plumer.<sup>26</sup> Sgt. Edward Heapey of the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins wrote to Miss Monica Roberts in Dublin to let her know how things were with the Dublins. He seemed cheery enough.<sup>27</sup>

We have been out for a rest and we have had some sports. I am quite proud to say my platoon had won the shooting by 21 points out of 64 entries. My battalion plays in the football final today and we have won several other prizes... We all have made our Easter duties to God as well and now we are ready once more for the fray. I suppose in a couple of weeks from now, some of our brave chaps will be laying low as after rest as a rule comes plenty of dirty work.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 25 March 1917.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 'Routine Orders in conjunction with Order No. 89.' 30 March 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Laird, Frank, *Personal Experiences of the Great War (an Unfinished Manuscript)* (Dublin: Easons, 1925), p.133.

<sup>23</sup> *Monica Roberts Collection*. Letter from Pte. George Soper, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, 31 March 1917.

<sup>24</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 12 April 1917.

<sup>25</sup> H.R.Beddoes, Lieut.-Col. 11 April 1917.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 12 April 1917.

<sup>27</sup> *Monica Roberts Collection*. Letter from Sgt. Edward Heapey. 8<sup>th</sup> RDF. 14 April 1917.

Thank God we all know what we are preparing for and once more we will show what Irish men are made of and keep up the credit of our auld country as we done in days gone by.

On 15 April the brigade began their march back to Loker. When they got back, they relieved the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade and following the changeover, the battalions from both brigades lined up as follows.

Incoming battalion 48 <sup>th</sup> Brigade. 19 April 1917.	Outgoing battalion 47 <sup>th</sup> Brigade. 19 April 1917.
In front line. Left sub sector. The 8 <sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers Battalion headquarters. York House.	The 7 <sup>th</sup> Leinsters. Moved to Doncaster Huts, Loker.
In front line. Right sub sector. The 7 <sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles Battalion headquarters. Turnerstown Right.	The 6 <sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers. Moved to Birr Barracks, Loker.
In support line. The 9 <sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers Battalion headquarters. Rossignol Estaminet.	The 6 <sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. Moved to Kemmel Shelters, Kemmel.
In reserve. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers Battalion headquarters. Butterfly Farm.	The 1 <sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers. Moved to Tally-Ho Camp and Clare Camp near Croix de Poperingue.

For the remaining days of April, neither battalion of the three Dublin Fusiliers battalions lost a single man from enemy action. Most of their work was again with the pick and shovel and patrols with the odd raid. Strangely, the only recorded death loss to the regiment was Pte. Robert Doyle aged twenty-six, a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins who died when his battalion were in the village of St.Martin-au-Laert, a stop-off point on their march back from Nordausques (village in which they were billeted during training) to billets at Kemmel Shelters. No details as to how Pte. Doyle died are recorded in the battalion's diary. Pte. Doyle came from 695 Lower Palmerston, St Lawrence, Chapelizod in Dublin and to add more mystery to this mans' death, he has no known grave and is mentioned on the Menin Gate Memorial in Ypres, Panel 44-46. The only loss was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Forrest of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF. He went out on a patrol on the night of 27/28 April and was never seen again. Despite efforts made to find him in the front lines by 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Richards and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Clear, Lieut. Forrest was never found. He is not listed in the RDF war dead listings. He may well have been captured by the Germans on the night.<sup>28</sup>

As stated, on Saturday 5 May, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved in the line by the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The former went into Divisional Reserve at the Curragh Camp and Doncaster Huts at Loker. Much of the brigade's activity was in co-operation for the coming attack on Wijtschate, be it supplying working parties to the Hampshire Pioneers, Royal Engineers doing reinforcing work etc. on the front line particularly along the Chinese Wall, or training. Between 6 and 8 May, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF supplied between 245 and 320 men to the Hampshire Pioneers and Engineers for such work.<sup>29</sup> Some men were sent to work with the 250<sup>th</sup> Tunnelling Company.<sup>30</sup> The mines under the German strong points facing the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's sector at Petit Bois, and Maedelstede Farm were dug by the 250<sup>th</sup> Canadian Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers under the command of Major Cecil Cropper. They also dug the Peckham House mine in the Ulster Division's sector. Ever since the Irish troops arrived on the Wijtschate front, much of the German machine gun fire came from these three places and thus the targets of the miners.

<sup>28</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 27-29 April 1917. For further details on the disappearance of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Forrest, see H.R.Beddoes, Lieut.-Col.27-29 April 1917.

<sup>29</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 6-8 May 1917.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*15 June 1917.

Squads of Lewis Gunners, Bombers and Stretcher-bearers were given instruction in their duties. Officers and senior N.C.Os attended demonstrations in Vickers and Stokes gun and gas shells demonstrations at the Divisional Gas School, Canada Corner.<sup>31</sup> One Divisional gas expert let samples of gas off over some men in the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF which gave them a 'whiff of various kinds' so they could recognise the smell and identify the gas. They had the demonstration 'in a clover field and the clover all died over which the gas passed.'<sup>32</sup> Occasional accidents occurred during some of these training sessions. For example, 14736 Cpl. James Appleton from 'C' Coy. in the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was accidentally wounded while training with a grenade rifle.<sup>33</sup> During time off, which was rare, inter-company sports competitions were carried out amongst the RDF battalions. While at Butterfly Farm, 23389 Pte. James Hughes won the inter-company cross-country Race on 2 May. <sup>34</sup> Church parades were held at the church and the Hospice in Loker.<sup>35</sup> Baths for the men were offered at Westoutre. <sup>36</sup> The nuns in the Hospice in Loker also provided baths for the men. A young nineteen and a half year old subaltern of the 6<sup>th</sup> Connaught Rangers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Brett, described the convent baths. Having a bath at the convent was certainly not for the shy young men with sexual inhibitions: <sup>37</sup>

It was a large hall with a concrete floor and a platform at one end (where entertainment had been held before the war). The hall itself was completely full of British type baths, about two feet apart and the floor swimming in water. The place was full of completely naked males; officers and men, while on the platform were three or four nuns in full uniform boiling water in three large boilers. One undressed completely in an adjoining room, paid one franc to a man at the door who handed you a bucket, this you (stark naked) took through the hall to the platform where the ladies (nuns) were where you dipped it full of very hot water, which you carried it to the first unoccupied bath you could find and tipped it in, cold water was laid on and free, you made the temperature of the bath to suit yourself and when you had your bath you pulled the plug, the water ran out on the floor and you retired wet to the next room where your clothes and towel were. But it was very nice and I admired the complete unconcern of the nuns.

On 18 May, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went back into the line and replaced the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The 8<sup>th</sup> RDF relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. The other brigades of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, i.e. the 47<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigades, were in Clare Camp and Loker making final preparations for their attack on Wijtschate. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade occupied the entire front line for which the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was responsible. The Dublins held this front line position until the night of 2 / 3 June 1917. Much of their time was spent building fire steps, repairing and strengthening wire, parapets and paradoss. <sup>38</sup> That tour of the line in the days leading up to the attack on Wijtschate was particularly dangerous. On 27 May, the war diary of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF noted: 'There is a noticeable increase in hostile artillery activity.'<sup>39</sup> They also encountered small raiding parties from the German side eager to know what was going on. One German raid on 8<sup>th</sup> RDF line on 19 May resulted in the death of one man and the wounding of another. The man killed was 24908 Pte. Peter Grogan, age thirty-eight and married. He and his wife Catherine lived in Swords, Co. Dublin. Pte Grogan was born in Clane, Co. Kildare. He was buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery, grave reference IB27. <sup>40</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.9-10 May 1917.

<sup>32</sup> H.R.Beddoes, Lieut.-Col. 9 May 1917.

<sup>33</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.5 May 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.2 May 1917.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.12 May 1917

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.10 May 1917.

<sup>37</sup> Brett, C. *6th Connaught Rangers*. Box Reference 76/134/1. (London: Imperial War Museum).p.15.

<sup>38</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 May 1917.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 27 May 1917.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 19 May 1917. See [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) and *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919,Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

Occasionally German artillery either got lucky or knew where specific targets were. On 21 May, they had a direct hit on the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF Signallers Dugout in the communication trench named Rossignol Road, killing one and wounding three. Two days later on 23 May, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF front line H.Q. was again shelled with three direct hits demolishing the runner's dugout nearby. The 8<sup>th</sup> RDF front line H.Q. in S.P.11 was a regular target of German gunners.<sup>41</sup> German and or Belgian spies living among the battalions in Loker and Kemmel were suspected of giving information to the Germans. Lieut. May from the 49<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division had an interesting theory on this matter of local spies. Siege Farm was just off the York Road which was essentially the support or second line. It was a large red-roofed farmhouse. 'For some reason,' wrote May, 'this farm had always remained intact, whereas all others in the vicinity had been shelled though many were not totally destroyed.' When Lieut. May first visited the farm, 'an old man, his wife and three sons lived there.' According to Lieut. May, the three sons were shot as spies at different times. He had a doubt as to whether or not the three men were the sons of the old man at all. After the third 'so called son' was shot for spying, the old man and his wife were still allowed to live at Siege Farm. This seemed to have amazed May. A week before the attack on Wijtschate in June 1917, the old man too was shot for spying, his wife disappeared and no one knew whatever happened to her. Rather strangely, not long after the old man was shot, the farm was shelled and practically demolished.<sup>42</sup>

The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade made one more internal rotation on 26 May before coming out of the front line on night of 2 /3 June 1917 and heading back to Clare Camp. All three battalions of the RDF suffered casualties in the days prior to the move back to Clare Camp. The 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins shared the front line with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins during that period. Again, just like the diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins, the 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins war diary for their period in the front line mentioned nothing about casualties. And, like their comrades in the Old Troughs, the 9<sup>th</sup> Dubs too had their fair share of grief. During their six-day tour of the front line, seven men were killed. They died probably from what the diarist called, 'direct hits on the front line about N.18.B ', which was around Byron Farm.<sup>43</sup> One of the seven killed was sixteen-year-old L./Cpl. Daniel Hayes from No. 2 Cottage, Back of 53 High Street in Dublin. He was very young to be a Lance Corporal, in fact he was too young to be even in the army. The other men killed were L/Cpl. Albert Stock from Bath and Pte. William Redmond Courtney, a prophetic name in that part of the world. Pte. Courtney came from Manchester. Pte Patrick Hillin came from Glasgow and formerly served with the Highland Light Infantry. Pte. Owen Mc Alinden, age twenty-eight, came from Lurgan, Co. Armagh. He formerly served in the Connaught Rangers. L/Cpl. James Fleming, age twenty-eight, came from a tenement house at No. 17 D, Corporation Buildings, Dublin. Finally, Pte. Thomas Augustine Connolly, age thirty-six, came from New Ross, Co. Wexford. All except Hillin and Connolly were buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery. Hillin was buried in Kemmel Chateau Cemetery and Connolly, more than likely, died of wounds in a Casualty Clearing Station down near Loos in France and was buried at Noeux-Les-Mines Communal Cemetery.<sup>44</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins headquarters at Rossignol Estaminet was hit by German artillery 1:30 a.m. on 2 June too. The first German shell fell short; the second shell burst overhead and set fire to the camouflage covering a heavy artillery piece nearby. Apparently there was a battery near the Dublins headquarters and may have been the target of the German shelling. As the German gunner ranged his target, his third shell was a direct hit on the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins headquarters. The shell hit the kitchen and killed 19894 Company Sergeant Major Daniel Doyle who was running for cover to the basement when the shell struck. Pte. James Downes was also killed.

<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 25 May 1917.

<sup>42</sup> *May, Lieut. A.G. 49th M G C.* Box Reference 88/46/1. (London: Imperial War Museum ).

<sup>43</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 June 1917.

<sup>44</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://Www.Cwgc.Org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Note. Pte. Thomas Augustine Connolly may not have been with the battalion when he died of wounds. He may well have been one of the victims of the German gas attack that hit the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins at Hulluch on 27 and 29 April 1916. He may well have been kept at this CCS where he died. Some of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF who died at Hulluch are buried in Noeux-Les-Mines Communal Cemetery near Loos.



The same blast killed three more men who had run into the house looking for cover, two from the Royal Engineers and one from the Royal Irish Rifles.<sup>45</sup> Since it was dark, this was excellent German shelling. Its accuracy was spot on. The German gunner knew where his target was. How he knew would be interesting to know. C.S.M. Doyle came from a tenement area of Dublin's north inner city that was No. 110 Summerhill. Pte. Downes came from Tallaght (Ballinascorney) in south county Dublin. Both men were buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery. The three battalions of the RDF suffered more casualties between 18 May and 2 June, their time in the front line, than they did in the attack on Wijtschate on 7 June.<sup>46</sup>

Table 2

RDF casualties between 18 May and 2 June 1917 compared with casualties on 7 June 1917.

Date	2 <sup>nd</sup> RDF	8 <sup>th</sup> RDF	9 <sup>th</sup> RDF	Total
18 May to 2 June 1917	12	12	10	34
7 June 1917	2	6	7	15

The 4 June was a pleasant day. Like many of the other camps, the men at Clare Camp spent their day getting themselves and their kit ready for the big day on 7 June. At about 6:00 p.m., around tea time, a shell from a naval gun mounted on a canal barge landed at the corner of the Clare Camp where there was an old farmhouse used by some of the Dublins officers as a billet. Tragically the explosion killed two Dublins officers. They were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Edmund Cooney of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Charles Marchant of the 5<sup>th</sup> RDF attached to the 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins. Charlie Marchant joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins in Loker in January 1917. As children, Charlie and Michael Wall, now serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment, played together in the garden of Michael's house named 'Glentora' in Howth, Co. Dublin. His loss was devastating to Michael. 'Marchant,' wrote Frank Laird, 'had been in the next cubicle to me at the Divisional School and Cooney had come out with me from Dublin. They were, as Laird noted, 'two decent chaps.'<sup>47</sup> Charles Marchant came from No 2 Greenmount Road, Terenure, in Dublin. He was only twenty-one when he was killed. He played cricket for Clontarf Cricket Club. Edmund Cooney came from Harmony House, Donnybrook also in Dublin. He was twenty- seven years of age when he died alongside Charles. Both men are buried beside each other in Loker Churchyard British Military Cemetery.<sup>48</sup> Sadly there was no mention of either of these men's death in any of the Dublin's war diaries. For fear of another attack that night, the men at Clare Camp were yet again ordered to sleep under the stars along the hedgerows around the camp.<sup>49</sup>

On the morning of the attack on Wijtschate on 7 June, as stated earlier, the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles assembled at Vierstraat Switch trench north of Desinet Farm on the eastern side of the York Road. The 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins assembled along the Peking Trench section of the Chinese Wall; battalion headquarters was at S.P.13. The 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins assembled along the Hong Kong section of the Chinese Wall. Their battalion headquarters was at Irish House dugouts. By 9:30 a.m. on 7 June, the entire 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade and its complement of engineers were assembled along the Chinese Wall. The place became very overcrowded. By that time, of course, Wijtschate was in Irish hands.

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 June 1917.

<sup>46</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>47</sup> Laird, Frank. p.150.

<sup>48</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Charles Marchant's name is on the Clontarf Cricket Club's WW1 War Memorial in the clubhouse.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .3-6 June 1917.

The Dublins had a long wait along the Chinese Wall before they were eventually called up. It wasn't until 11:30 a.m. on 7 June, five hours and twenty minutes later than their scheduled time of departure, that the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins received orders to move up. They didn't actually move up until 11:55 a.m.<sup>50</sup> They had left their billets in Clare Camp at about 8:30 p.m. on the evening of 6 June and were awake for a little over fifteen hours. For hours therefore, all throughout the morning of the attack, this entire brigade was a sitting target for German artillery. They simply couldn't move and German artillery, despite reported as being feeble, was effective and caused casualties amongst the waiting Dubs. Fr Willie Doyle S.J., who had come up with his battalion, wrote about a particular bit of shelling he and his fellow Dubs had to endure during that waiting period. It seemed pretty horrific: <sup>51</sup>

The shells were coming over thick and fast now, and at last, what I expected and feared happened. A big crump (shrapnel) hit the wall (Chinese) fair and square, blew three men into the field fifty yards away and buried five others who were in a small dug-out. For a moment I hesitated, for the horrible sight fairly knocked the starch out of me and a couple more crumps did not help to restore my courage. I climbed over the trench and ran across the open, as abject a coward as ever walked on two legs, 'till I reached the three dying men, and then the 'perfect trust' came back to me and I felt no fear. A few seconds sufficed to absolve and anoint my poor boys and I jumped to my feet only to go down on my face faster than I got up as an express train from Berlin roared by. The five buried men were calling for help, but the others standing around seemed paralysed with fear, all save one sergeant, whose language was worthy of the occasion and rose to a noble height of sublimity. He was working like a Trojan, tearing the sandbag aside and welcomed my help with a mingled blessing and curse. The others joined in with pick and shovel, digging and pulling, 'till the sweat streamed from our faces, and the blood from our hands, but we got three of the buried men out alive, the other two had been killed by the explosion.

The Sergeant that helped Fr. Doyle was recommended by the priest and received the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Doyle in a letter to his father noted. 'The poor chap is very proud of his medal, which I told him he won by his eloquent language.'<sup>52</sup> Frank Laird, who was not with the battalion in the attack, wrote an account of the same incident in his book.<sup>53</sup>

Father Doyle ran out at once and gave absolution to the three dying men. Then he ran back to the wall, where the men seemed paralysed into inaction, except one sergeant who was tearing away sandbags and cursing volubly. The Padre came to his assistance and, his presence having the usual effect, the others plucked up heart to give a hand so that they dug out three of the five men alive, the other two having been killed by the explosion. After this, as some of the troops were getting unsteady under the heavy fire in their exposed position, the good padre restored their confidence by walking along the line without his tin hat or gas mask, which, as frequently happened him, he had forgotten.

Fr. Doyle noted the effect the German shelling had on the men around him. Despite the protection of the Chinese Wall, many of his men were out in the open. 'It was quiet evident,' he wrote 'they were rapidly becoming demoralized, as the best of troops will having to remain inactive under heavy shellfire. Little groups were running from place to place for greater shelter, and the officers seemed to have lost control.'

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<sup>50</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 June 1917.

<sup>51</sup> O'Rahilly, Alfred. p.300.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p.300.

<sup>53</sup> Laird, Frank. p.153.

Fr. Doyle walked along the line encouraging the men and doing his best to calm them down. The sight of him without his steel helmet on and without his gas mask seemed to have given them a bit of solace and courage. 'So many,' he noted, 'are mere boys.'<sup>54</sup> Yet, 'despite heavy shelling by 5.9s,' the diarist of the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins noted, 'casualties were light.'<sup>55</sup>

In the heat of the mid-day sun, Lieut.-Col. Thompson's 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins and Lieut.-Col. Jack Hunt's 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins came up through the battlefield along the tracks the Hampshires were clearing and on through the ruins of Wijtschate. The 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins passed up through the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade's sector along the southern edge of the village around the square and what was left of the church. They walked past men busily digging defences and consolidating. One must wonder what the banter was between these men as they passed each other. The 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins passed through the men of the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade at the northern edge of Wijtschate around the Hospice and on out beyond the Wijtschate to Messines Road. 'In spite of the heat and the material to be carried', wrote Thompson, 'the men made good progress and crossed the Black Line (an objective) at 1:30 p.m. At this stage', he noted, 'the battalion came under hostile shell fire from 5.9's and 4.2's falling frequently.'<sup>56</sup> Fr. Doyle S.J. and Fr. Browne S.J. came with the Dublins on their way up and were called upon yet again to help treat some of the wounded.<sup>57</sup>

When the regiment moved forward, the Doctor and I went with it. By this time the impregnable ridge was in our hands and the enemy retreating down the far side. I spent the rest of that memorable day wandering over the battlefield looking for the wounded and had the happiness of helping many a poor chap, for shells were flying about on all sides

When they reached their pre-arranged assembly positions at the eastern end of the village, the Dublins, some of whom were carrying Yukon Packs, set up a dump. The commanding officers from both battalions immediately ordered off their men into attack formations. There were reports of shelling around the Hospice up to 2:30 p.m. Nevertheless Lieut. Col. Thompson set up his 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins headquarters at Sonen Farm and Lieut.-Col. Jack .P Hunt set his 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins headquarters at Torreken Farm. 'A' Company of the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins went out 228 meters beyond the Oil Trench and set up posts manned by Lewis Gunners. Under the command of the 155<sup>th</sup> Field Company, who had come with them, the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins began to build one of the strong points south of Leg Copse.<sup>58</sup>

This was the furthest point the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division had achieved on 7 June. They relieved 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. V.J. Lynch of the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers who had captured Leg Cops earlier in the morning. Lynch must have been delighted to see the Dubs come up to relieve him and his men. Up to the early afternoon, Lynch and his men were out there on their own. They had cleared Leg Copse, took some prisoners and pushed out patrols that found posts of the 8<sup>th</sup> Gloucesters establishing themselves in front of Oosttaverne Wood.<sup>59</sup> On their way through Wijtschate, the Dublins witnessed some strange sights. Frank Laird noted.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> O'Rahilly, Alfred.p.300.

<sup>55</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 7 June 1917.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.Narrative of Operation 6/9 June 1917.

<sup>57</sup> O'Rahilly, Alfred.p.302.

<sup>58</sup> *War Diary 155th Field Company, Royal Engineers* WO95/1965. (London: The National Archives, 1 December 1915 to 31 May 1919). 7 June 1917. Instructions for offensive, and *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative of Operation 6/9 June 1917.

<sup>59</sup> *War Diary 7th/8th Royal Irish Fusiliers*. WO95/1978. (London: The National Archives, 1 November 1916 to 28 February 1918). 7 June 1917.

<sup>60</sup> Laird, Frank. p.154.

Some strange sights were seen by the 8<sup>th</sup> (Dublins) as they went forward over the hill to consolidate the position and hold it against counter-attacks. In one spot, a train of transport wagons and horses were lying completely smashed up, having been apparently caught by the barrage. In a regimental headquarters dugout, the adjutant was found lying dead at the top of the stairs, and the Colonel had been killed as he was getting out of his bunk when the mines went off.

From about 3:00 p.m. onwards, hundreds of men worked hard at placing wire, linking shell holes, setting up outposts, constructing new strong points, carrying up ammunition and water. Lewis Gun teams protected the men working. The odd cup of tea and a smoke, which at this stage was allowed, was vital. With still no sleep, they must have been dog-tired and yet they had to work on.

To be on the safe side, Col. Hunt sent out scouts to keep an eye on what was happening in front of his sector. At 9:15 p.m., Lieut. Dixon sent a message back to 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters informing them that his men had successfully wired their line and the men on the strong post construction were working away. These men worked building the strong points all through the night of 7/8 June.<sup>61</sup> Lieut. -Col. Thompson of the 8<sup>th</sup> Dublins noted in his report. 'The night passed with nothing of unusual occurrence and the morning commenced quietly with no artillery.'<sup>62</sup>

Although the attack on Wijtschate was successful, the day did not end without a terrible blunder occurring late in the evening, again arising from poor communication, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of men. At 9:30 p.m., General Hickie received reports that the Germans were attacking Van Hove Farm and most alarmingly that 'our guns' were 'shooting short.' The diary of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division noted. 'During the night 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> owing to heavy shelling by enemy and alleged short shooting by our artillery, elements of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Inf. Bde. withdrew from Odour and Odious Trenches but subsequently pushed forward and re-occupied their former positions.'<sup>63</sup> As a result of this short firing, large numbers of men fell back, including men from the 33<sup>rd</sup> Brigade at Van Hove Farm. It wasn't until 10:00 p.m. just as the fresh relief battalions from 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Divisions were beginning to move up, that the barrage ceased and Van Hove Farm was re-occupied.

The casualties for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Brigade reported at 11:00 p.m. on the night of 7 June amounted to twenty-four officers and 423 other ranks killed, wounded or missing. If one can reasonably assume the Brigade's losses attributed to the fight with German infantry were minimal, one can only conclude that their own gunners and indeed the German gunners too inflicted the maximum of their casualties. The 33<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was tragically on the receiving end of a British and German barrage. The casualties on 7 June for this one infantry brigade were roughly half that of the entire casualties suffered by the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division for the same day which were fifty officers and 971 other ranks killed or wounded (1,183). What an absolute blunder this was.<sup>64</sup>

As stated, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade came out of the line at Wijtschate on 9 June and throughout the remaining days of June, the battalions moved to various stations at Merris, Westoutre and St. Sylvestre Cappel. However, before they left Clare Camp on 11 June, some officers and men of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF had their photograph taken 'with their souvenirs' by official photographers from G.H.Q.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *War Diary 155th Field Company, Royal Engineers* .7-9 June 1917.

<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative of Operation 6/9 June 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. WO95/1956 (London: Public Records Office, May-June 1917). 7 June 1917.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 7 June 1917.

<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 11 June 1917.



Men of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF in Clare Camp on 11 June 1917.  
 Showing off their souvenirs and celebrating their victory over the Germans in capturing Wijtschate on 7 June 1917.  
 Source: Imperial War Museum, Photographic Archive. Ref. I.W.M. Q5629.

While at Merris, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF diary noted that following a Field General Courts Martial (F.G.C.M), 9970 Pte. T. Molloy of 'B' Coy. was given a sentence of Field Punishment No.1 which was remitted by General Hickie, 'for gallant conduct on night of 29 May 1917.' <sup>66</sup> No specific details were recorded on what he or 14487 Pte. C. Dorgan also of 'B' Coy and recipient of the same Field Punishment No.1 and remittance did on night of 29 May to be granted a remittance of sentence. On the night of 29 May, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was in support lines. The war diary noted, 'shelling by enemy at intervals throughout the day, four O.R's wounded.' <sup>67</sup> Regardless of what these men did to be punished and remitted, sadly 9970 Pte. T. Molloy of 'B' Coy, who was transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF, died of wounds on 29 April 1918. Pte. Molloy was twenty-seven years of age when he died. He came from Renton in Dunbartonshire. He was buried in Wimereux Communal Cemetery. <sup>68</sup> It seems 14487 Pte. C. Dorgan survived the war.

As stated, on 9 June, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade came out of the line at Wijtschate and the battalions moved back westwards to various stations at Merris, Westoutre and St. Sylvestre Cappel ending up at Rubrouck training area in France a distance of about forty-three kilometres from Loker. The main activity for the month of July of all four battalions of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was essentially training and refitting.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 19 June 1917.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 29 May 1917.

<sup>68</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

On 8 July, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF moved from Rubrouck to Tatinghem. For some reason or other, before they left Rubrouck, all the men's underwear was disinfected.<sup>69</sup> While billeted at Tatinghem, battalions marched each day to the Tilques Training Area where they carried out training in fighting tactics such as 'advancing in sections.' They did so for the next eight days or so.<sup>70</sup> The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade had been in this region before, back in April, preparing for the attack on Wijtschate. The weather was high summer although there was the occasional rain shower reported. The men were in good spirits with training in the morning and intercompany and battalion sports such as athletics events, running and jumping and intercompany rugby and soccer matches; all taking place in the afternoon. Fine weather helped the sports events pass off well.<sup>71</sup>

At the end of their training in the Tilques Training Area, at 10:30 a.m. on 15 July, the R.C.s of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade paraded at their billets in Tatinghem and marched a distance of about six kilometres to the Cathedral in St. Omer for Mass offered by Fr. Willie Doyle S.J. and 'the Bishop of the Diocese.'<sup>72</sup> After the Mass, the brigade marched past General Hickie. The C of E members of the brigade held their own separate service at 9:30 a.m. near 'A' Dublins Transport Field', presumably back at Tatinghem.<sup>73</sup> After Tatinghem, they moved about thirty kilometres northwards to Eringhem for more training and a somewhat more relaxing time. While there, medals were presented to some men of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF. For example 16725 Sgt. P. Kavanagh of 'A' Coy was awarded the Medaille Militaire by the President of the French Republic.<sup>74</sup> From Eringhem, they moved eastwards on to Winnezele on 22 July. Before they left Winnezele, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Douglas Phillipe who had been awarded the Military Cross on 17 July, was told he was being transferred to the R.F.C. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was getting closer to the battle zone and 24 July they received orders for the coming operations. Next day on the 25<sup>th</sup> they moved on again to Watou near Poperinghe. During all these stop offs, the battalions carried out training exercises which would suggest that by the time the next major offensive would begin, the men would be ready for it. On 20 July the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF moved from Watou to the forward area. Before they left Watou, Lieut.-Col. Jack Hunt D.S.O. gave a short speech to his men in the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF, 'reminding them of past records of the Regiment and the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion in particular, saying that he had every confidence that they would uphold those glorious traditions.' At 8:40 p.m. they moved off, 'in high spirits singing all the popular songs.'<sup>75</sup>

Next morning, 31 July, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF was back in the battle zone in the Brandhoek area just east of Poperinghe, back in the noise of the guns.<sup>76</sup> Appendix 'B' in the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary dated 24 July 1917 outlined the coming operations of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division which essentially were the battle plans for the attack by the XIXth Corps on the Frezenberg Ridge on a line running from Langemarck to Zonnebeke. The main attack was led by the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) and 55<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Divisions were in behind these attack divisions in Corps Reserve. The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division came in behind the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division as their support. Interesting to note that the 55<sup>th</sup> Division used 'Message Dogs' to relay messages to and from the front lines.<sup>77</sup> Despite the use of dogs and pigeons, communications systems had improved since the Somme. In 1916, the forward tactical use of wireless communications in the British army was very limited.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5 July 1917.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 9 July 1917.

<sup>71</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* 2-6 July 1917.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 15 July 1917.

<sup>73</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 15 July 1917.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 19 July 1917.

<sup>75</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .30 July 1917.

<sup>76</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 31 July 1917.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* Appendix 'B' Offensive Operations of the XIXth Corps. 24 July 1917. See also Holmes, Richard, *The Western Front* (London.: BBC Worldwide Ltd., 1999).p.165.

<sup>78</sup> Hall, B N, *The British Army and Wireless Communication, 1896-1918*, War in History 9, no. 3 (2012). p303

It was not until March 1917 that the manual SS 148 *Forward Inter-Communication in Battle* was issued by GHQ.<sup>79</sup> It was the British Army's first 'authoritative manual' devoted entirely to the issue of communications.<sup>80</sup> Communication systems used in the attack on Frezenberg Ridge was in accordance with SS 148.<sup>81</sup> This is a fine example of the learning curve the British Army travelled in the First World War.<sup>82</sup>

As stated earlier, at 3:50 a.m. the bombardment commenced.<sup>83</sup> By the evening of 31 July, the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division had taken their objectives.<sup>84</sup> The day's advance by the British averaged some 2,700 metres at a cost of 30,000 casualties.<sup>85</sup> All throughout that day, the three battalions of the RDF remained in their respective camps at Brandhoek waiting to be called up.<sup>86</sup> By late evening, between 6:45 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. led by guides from the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division whom they met at the Menin Gate, the RDF battalions moved up to support trenches that 'were in a very bad condition and dug-outs and shelters very poor.' Moreover 'the men were drenched with rain, the majority having being exposed during the whole night' of 31 July / 1 August 1917.<sup>87</sup> Synonymous with Third Ypres was rain. It began to fall towards evening on 31 July 1917 and continued through most of August, the result of which was to turn the countryside into a quagmire. The battlefield began to break up. Lieut. Arthur Glanville of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF described the scenes; 'mud awful, no trenches, no shelter, no landmarks, all movement by night.'<sup>88</sup> All throughout the day, the Dubs performed supporting tasks to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 55<sup>th</sup> Divisions. The 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF were placed at the disposal of the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division; the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> RDF were placed at the disposal of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>89</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, for example, supplied parties of men to carry up Trench Mortar ammunition or act as stretcher-bearers.<sup>90</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was assigned the gruesome task of burying the dead of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>91</sup>

On 3 August, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division took over the front line sector from the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division which had suffered heavy casualties.<sup>92</sup> It was also the day that Capt. Fr. Frank Browne S.J., Chaplain to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, left the battalion and was posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish Guards.<sup>93</sup> Between the 2nd and the night of 15 August, battalions of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division rotated in the line captured by the 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division. Dublin Fusiliers and other Irish battalions marched through the ruins of Ypres to and from their billets at Brandhoek along the Menin Road out to the line facing the Frezenberg Ridge.

<sup>79</sup> Beach, J, *Issued by the General Staff: Doctrine Writing at British G H Q, 1917-1918*, War In History 19, no. 4 (2012). p470. For further reading on wireless communications in First World War see Hall, B N.

<sup>80</sup> Priestely, Raymond E, *Work of the Royal Engineers in the European War, 1914-1919: The Signal Service (France)* (Uckfield, 1921; new edn 2006).p88

<sup>81</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Preliminary Instructions for the Offensive. Instruction No.4. Signal Communications.1 General. Dated 25 July 1917.p.1.

<sup>82</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>83</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* . 31 July 1917.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 31 July 1917.

<sup>85</sup> Holmes, Richard.p.165.

<sup>86</sup> The names of the camps the three RDF battalions were billeted in Brandhoek were named after towns or places in Canada.. They were: 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, St. Lawrence Camp; 8<sup>th</sup> RDF, Erie Camp; 9<sup>th</sup> RDF , Toronto Cam. See respective War Diaries.

<sup>87</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* .Narrative of Battalion Operations from 31 July to 2 August 1917.

<sup>88</sup> Denman, Terence.p.116.

<sup>89</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Order No. 137 dated 31 July 1917.

<sup>90</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1 August 1917.

<sup>91</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 2 August 1917.

<sup>92</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 3 August 1917. The 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade took over the front line; the 49<sup>th</sup> in Support Line and the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade were kept in Reserve in Brandhoek area.

<sup>93</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Appendices to War Diary for August 1917.



All throughout those dreadful two weeks in and out of the Frezenberg Line, battalions were constantly hit by German shelling assisted by aircraft and all 'suffered severe casualties.'<sup>94</sup> They were occasionally caught in the open during reliefs with Mustard and Phosgene gas shells. Major Standish Smithwick of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was taken to hospital suffering from the effects of gas following one change over.<sup>95</sup> Between 6 and 7 August for example, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered a loss of twelve men killed and fifty-four wounded mostly from German shelling. At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of 7 August, a German shell hit the entrance to the dugout of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF H.Q. staff. The shell hit several boxes of Very Lights packed at the entrance causing them to explode and burn. The gases emitted by these burning Very Lights caused the men inside to vomit and suffer from asphyxiation. Using gas and high explosive shells, German artillery, was particularly accurate and heavy on the night of 6/7. By the end of that day, 7 August, ten men were dead and thirty-one of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF alone were severely wounded from German shelling.<sup>96</sup> On 8 August, the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF were badly hit by German artillery. Three officers from 'C' Coy. of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF were killed They were; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. John J. Coyne, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. F. Dowling, age nineteen, from 'Glencoe', Hollywood Road, Clontarf, Dublin and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. W. A. Harty. The only officer left in that Company was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. J. McGrath who 'did valuable work in keeping the company together under most distressing circumstances.'<sup>97</sup> As well as the shelling, the Dublins and others were hit by German infantry raids. It was an awful time; and the mud didn't help either. Between 1 and 15 August 1917, the three battalions of the RDF suffered a total loss of 498 men, killed in action, died of wounds, wounded or missing. The following is a breakdown for each battalion.<sup>98</sup>

Table 3  
Casualties of 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF between 1 and 15 August 1917.

Rank	Killed in Action	Wounded	Died of Wounds	Missing
Officers	0	5	0	0
Other Ranks	13 (14)	212	0 (9)	2
Total	13	217	0	2

Total 232  
Total Dead 23

Table 4<sup>100</sup>  
Casualties of 8<sup>th</sup> RDF between 1 and 15 August 1917.

Rank	Killed in Action	Wounded	Died of Wounds	Missing
Officers	0	16	0	0
Other Ranks	27 (32)	108	0 (11)	9
Total	27	124	0	9

Total 160  
Total Dead 43

Note: The figures displayed in **Red** are the numbers of men who died according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records for those periods listed. Some of the men listed in the War Diary on the day the entry was made as being wounded, later died from their wounds, hence the increase in numbers of Killed in Action.

<sup>94</sup> War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers . 7 August 1917.

<sup>95</sup> War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 7 and 14 August 1917.

<sup>96</sup> War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 7 August 1917. Note the numbers in Red are those who actually died as per. [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

<sup>97</sup> War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers . 7-9 August 1917

<sup>98</sup> War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Appendices to War Diary for August 1917.

<sup>100</sup> War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1-15 August 1917.

Table 5 <sup>101</sup>  
Casualties of 9<sup>th</sup> RDF between 1 and 15 August 1917.

Rank	Killed in Action	Wounded	Died of Wounds	Missing
Officers	4 (2)	1	0	0
Other Ranks	20 (28 +1 Unknown)	80	1 (3)	0
Total	24	81	1	0

Total 106

Total Dead 31

Having had a relatively easy role in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's attack on Wijtschate, being in reserve, it was now the turn of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade to take the leading role in the Division's attack on Frezenberg Ridge. The weather and bog-like condition of the battlefield prevented the push on from the gains made on 31 July. Consequently a new attack by XIXth Corps didn't commence until 16 August. The Order of Battle for the XIXth Corps was; Left 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, Centre 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, Right 8<sup>th</sup> Division. The Order of Battle for 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division was; 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade in centre attacked on a two battalion front with 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade on left and 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade from the 8<sup>th</sup> Division on right. A Detachment of Irish Horse would act as liaison between the 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>102</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles on right of attack and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF on left were the two leading battalions of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>103</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> RDF came in support. The task of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was to mop up behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF who attacked Potsdam and Vampire Farms respectively.<sup>104</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF assaulting strength was three Companies made up from fourteen officers and 293 ORs. They also had a Company of six officers and 85 ORs from the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>105</sup> The task of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was to supply carrying parties to the two leading battalions and working parties to the Royal Engineers in their consolidation of the captured line. The 1<sup>st</sup> Munster Fusiliers was available in Reserve. The magnetic bearing for the advance was 73 Degrees under a creeping barrage moving at a rate of 100 yards every five minutes. The German opposition were Bavarians from the 5<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Division and specifically the 19<sup>th</sup> Bavarian Infantry Regiment.<sup>106</sup> On 14 August, Brigadier-General F.W. Ramsay, G.O.C 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, wished his men the best of luck and 'God Speed.' He hoped they would fight with courage which was 'so characteristic of the Irish race, and which won for the Brigade, the Battle of Ginchy.'<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Casualty list for August 1917.

<sup>102</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. 48 Trench Mortar Battery. p.4.

<sup>103</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operation Order No. 146. Dated 14 August 1917.

<sup>104</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.91.

<sup>105</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14-17 August 1917. Due to losses and lack of men, companies by this stage in the war had drastically reduced in numbers by almost 50%.

<sup>106</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Order No. 146, dated 14 August 1917.

<sup>107</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operation Order No. 146, dated 14 August 1917. Message to the Troops. p.4.



53

At 9:00 p.m. on the night of 15 August, companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF left their billets in the Vlamertinghe Area No. 3 and marched to their assembly positions along the Black Line. (See map on previous page). By 11:30 p.m., companies reported to be in position for the attack. Right throughout the night, German artillery intermittently hit the Dublins and Rifles in their assembly trenches. It intensified for a while around 3:00 a.m.<sup>109</sup>

At 4:50 a.m., Zero Hour, on 16 August, exhausted and weak from close on two weeks of being on the receiving end of German artillery, the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Irish brigades launched their attack on the Frezenberg Ridge, with the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade in reserve.<sup>110</sup> During the previous few days, there were many casualties sustained from shell fire, gas poisoning and sickness - the latter due to very adverse weather conditions, rain having fallen continuously during the previous four days and nights. Consequently the strength of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was reduced in strength by twenty-seven officers and nearly 678 other ranks.<sup>111</sup> After supplying the carrying parties, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF could only muster one company of men.<sup>112</sup> To add to their lack of punch in attack, the two Trench Mortars assigned to each battalion in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 'were put out of action before Zero Hour.' Although managing to get off a barrage some two and a half hours before Zero Hour, six of the twelve Vickers Machine guns assigned to the brigade, suffered a similar fate during the morning.<sup>113</sup>

About fifteen minutes before Zero Hour, the Germans set down a heavy barrage on the assembly trenches of the 9<sup>th</sup> Dublins and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles; they lost approx. 65 % of the men in each battalion before they even began their attack.<sup>114</sup> As soon as they attacked over open wet and muddy ground, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was badly cut up by machine gun fire from German machine gun positions at the Potsdam, Vampir and Borry Farms which were in direct line of the advancing troops. The creeping barrage offered no protection. Every one of the officers in the leading attack companies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles was hit and 'their companies ceased to exist as fighting units.'<sup>115</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> RDF on their left suffered equally appalling casualties from machine gun fire from Vampir Farm. They attacked at the same time as the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. The attacking companies were all either dead or wounded within one hour of their attack. The little ground the Dublins and 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles had costly gained could not be held, 'on account of heavy machine gun fire from undamaged concrete emplacements.'<sup>116</sup> Referring to the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary grimly noted:<sup>117</sup>

At 7:30 a.m. Battalion Headquarters (9<sup>th</sup> RDF) received a message, time 5:40 a.m., from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Hickey stating that the battalion was held up one hundred yards west of Bremen Redoubt and that nearly every Officer and man had been killed or wounded. An Officer was at once sent from Battalion Headquarters with three orderlies to investigate the situation. The three orderlies were killed on leaving Battalion Headquarters and the Officer also immediately on his return. No communication was subsequently again established with the assaulting companies.

<sup>109</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative of Events of 9<sup>th</sup> (S) Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August 1917. p.1.

<sup>110</sup> Johnstone, T, *Orange Green and Khaki* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992).p.288.

<sup>111</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917.p.1. See also Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.p.90.

<sup>112</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917.p.1

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*. Do. p.4.

<sup>114</sup> Wylly, H.C, *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*.p.91. Note. Wylly noted that 'A' Company was behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Fusiliers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF War Diary noted 'A' Company was in behind the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. The latter is correct.

<sup>115</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. The 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. p.2.

<sup>116</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 August 1917.

<sup>117</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. The 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. p.2.

The officer in question killed was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Richard A.W. Martin. He was shot through the head by a German sniper just eighteen metres from his battalion's headquarters. He was killed instantly. His body was searched for messages but none were found. Any information this brave young man had about how things were going up ahead died with him.<sup>118</sup> The two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF assigned to mop up advanced behind their respective attacking battalions. The idea of mopping up resistant Germans tucked safely into their machine gun nests was laughable. Both these companies suffered severely from German shelling in their assembly trenches before Zero Hour. 'A' Coy. 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF under Capt. W.I. Black M.C., moved forward in the rear of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles. They managed to get to the Support Company of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles but they too got held up from machine gun fire and dug in. They held on out in that position east of Bit Work for much of the day pinned down with shell and machine gun fire. By 4:10 p.m., all the officers of 'A' Coy. had become casualties. They were thus compelled to fall back with only one N.C.O. and six other ranks.<sup>119</sup> 'B' Coy. of the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF under Captain L.C. Byrne was practically annihilated before reaching Vampir Farm behind the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF; only two officers and three other ranks survived their attempted attack.<sup>120</sup> A message had come back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublins headquarters at Frezenberg Redoubt that the German machine gun post at Vampir Farm contained five machine guns.<sup>121</sup> At 9:30 a.m., 'C' Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dublin Fusiliers, in accordance with orders from Brigade, moved up in support of the 9<sup>th</sup> Dublin Fusiliers who had suffered severely from intense machine gun fire. This company succeeded in getting to within ninety metres of Bit Work which was their objective but again suffered appallingly in doing so with only two officers and ten other ranks surviving. They too fell back.<sup>122</sup>

As if things were not bad enough, at 10:00 a.m., British artillery 'of all calibres' was reported to be 'falling short.' The result of this was that men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Middlesex Regiment on the right of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles, who had reached near their objectives, suffered 'very heavy casualties' and had to fall back.<sup>123</sup> This falling short of British artillery throughout the morning was also reported by the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF to 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade H.Q. using 'pigeon and wire asking for corrections to be made.'<sup>124</sup> Communications from Front and Support Battalions to Brigade Headquarters was very slow; most messages took fully two hours to come through.<sup>125</sup> By 11:00 a.m., apart from a few scattered outposts, Artillery Forward Observation Officers reported that most of the attacking companies of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade had withdrawn to their original assembly positions along the Black Line. So too had units from the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division on left and 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 8<sup>th</sup> Division on right. From fear of German counter-attacks and losing their entire line, the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters comprising eight officers and 200 other ranks were called up.<sup>126</sup> By 4:30 p.m., the battle had subsided and 'the situation was quiet.'<sup>127</sup>

<sup>118</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative of Events of 9<sup>th</sup> (S) Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August 1917. p.1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Martin's body was never found. His name is on Panel 144 on The Tyne Cot Memorial.

<sup>119</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 August 1917. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. p.3.

<sup>120</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 16 August 1917.

<sup>121</sup> Wyllly, H.C., *Crown and Company, the Historical Records of the 2nd Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 1911 - 1922*. p.91.

<sup>122</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. p.3.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* Do. p.2

<sup>124</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative of Events of 9<sup>th</sup> (S) Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers on 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August 1917. p.2.

<sup>125</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. p.4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* Do.p.4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Do.p.4.



The night of 16 August passed off 'comparatively quite.' During the night, in order to defend their line, the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters occupied the Black Line original jump off positions. At 8:00 a.m. on the 17 August, orders were received for the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, or what was left of it, to be withdrawn and relieved by two battalions from the 46<sup>th</sup> Brigade namely 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> King's Own Scottish Borderers and 12<sup>th</sup> Highland Light Infantry. The day was reported relatively quiet with the exception of intermittent shelling and sniping. Wounded men lay out in no man's land; some in terrible pain. Search parties went out to gather in these wounded men of which there were 'considerable numbers.'<sup>128</sup> They also gathered the dead. The relief of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade didn't begin until 10:00 p.m. on 17 August. By 4:00 a.m. next morning, 18 August, the relief was complete and the brigade withdrew to where they kicked off from, their billets in the Vlamertinghe Area No. 3.<sup>129</sup>

The battlefield around the Frezenberg Ridge was later described by Denys Reitz, an officer in the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles.<sup>130</sup>

On every side lay relics of the recent battle: broken rifles, machine-guns and mortars, blood stained tatters of clothing, and out in no-man's land were withered corpses that could not be fetched in, and several derelict tanks. Occasionally the rampart for yards on end was constructed of dead men walled in by sandbags. The trenches were crawling with rats.

The 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division too suffered the same fate as the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division on the day. Professor Richard Holmes, a fond member of the RDFA who sadly passed away in April 2011, noted about the Irish Divisions at Frezenberg. 'It is to their enduring credit of soldiers from both sides of Ireland's cultural divide that they pushed well up the ridge beyond the Hanebeek and into the German pillboxes. Then the inevitable counter-attack swept them away, and the corps commander pulled the survivors back to the start line.'<sup>131</sup> Back in June, the same Irish Divisions were used to take a similar heavily defended ridge-type objective along the Wijtschate-Messines Ridge. In order to remove these machine gun strong points at Wijtschate, General Plumer used mines. The result was that with the removal of these machine gun emplacements, the Irish troops practically walked into Wijtschate with relatively few casualties. Had similar tactics been used to remove the German machine gun emplacements along the Frezenberg Ridge, a similar positive result would have occurred and hundreds of lives could have been saved. The British barrage destroyed the German trench defences but left a number of concrete dugouts and machine gun emplacements intact. The after battle report in the war diary of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted; '...the continuous direct hits from guns of 5.9 inch calibre had little or no effect' on the dugouts. 'A far more effective method of dealing with them would appear to be the use of gas.'<sup>132</sup> Tragic echoes of the Somme. The Germans also had superiority of the sky above the Frezenberg Ridge. Men who had actually reached their object stated, 'that they were fired on by enemy Air-Craft (sic) as they lay out in shell holes.'<sup>133</sup> Poor communications, as usual, was another cause of failure. One simple example of communications going wrong was at 9:00 a.m., Capt. Cowley of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was told that the Royal Irish Rifles and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF 'had captured all their objectives.'<sup>134</sup> They had not. Moreover, despite the use of Contact Aeroplanes to communicate between the troops on the ground and the British artillery, the delay in getting information from the front back to brigade and artillery headquarters resulted in the artillery not knowing exactly the real time situation and location of the attacking troops, thus leading to friendly fire incidents.

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<sup>128</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers* Do.

<sup>129</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack. p.5.

<sup>130</sup> Denman, Terence.p.124.

<sup>131</sup> Holmes, Richard. P.166.

<sup>132</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 5.General Remarks. p.5.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Do.

<sup>134</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Narrative August 14-18, 1917.

As the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted; ‘The employment of heavy artillery when doubt exists as to the true situation involves great risks to the assaulting troops.’<sup>135</sup> In fact at about 9:00 p.m., British 18-Pounder shells fell on men from the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF, ‘causing us some casualties.’<sup>136</sup> On 20 August, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade casualties were reported. Many of those laughing faces photographed after the capture of Wijtschate were now either dead or severely wounded. Between 31 July and 17 August 1917, the number of casualties suffered by the brigade was; eighty-two officers (38% of 16<sup>th</sup> Division losses) and 1,550 men of other ranks (36.6% of 16<sup>th</sup> Division losses).<sup>137</sup> Between 1 and 31 August 1917, the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division suffered a loss of 215 officers and 4,225 other ranks either killed wounded or missing.<sup>138</sup>

Table 6<sup>139</sup>  
Casualties of 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles 16 August 1917.

Rank	Officers	Other Ranks
Assaulting Strength	21	423
Casualties	17	269
Percent Losses	81%	63.5%

Table 7  
Casualties of 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers 16 August 1917.

Rank	Officers	Other Ranks
Assaulting Strength	14	293
Casualties	7 (3)	115 (32)
Percent Losses	50%	39.5%

Table 8  
Casualties of One Company of 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers 16 August 1917.

Rank	Officers	Other Ranks
Assaulting Strength	6	85
Casualties	4 (4)	43 (10)
Percent Losses	66.6%	50.5%

Table 9  
Casualties of 9<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers 16 August 1917.

Rank	Officers	Other Ranks
Assaulting Strength	17	353
Casualties	15 (8)	229 (81)
Percent Losses	88.3%	64.8%

<sup>135</sup> War Diary 48th Brigade. Do.

<sup>136</sup> War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Narrative August 14-18, 1917.

<sup>137</sup> War Diary 48th Brigade. Do.

<sup>138</sup> War Diary 16th (Irish) Division. 31 August 1917.

<sup>139</sup> War Diary 48th Brigade. Operations East of Ypres-August 16<sup>th</sup> 1917. Section 3.A. Narrative of the Attack..Pp.2-4. Note the numbers in Red are those who actually died as per. [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://Www.Cwgc.Org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*



Table 10  
Casualties of 48<sup>th</sup> Machine Gun Company 16 August 1917.

Rank	Officers	Other Ranks
Assaulting Strength	7	110
Casualties	5	36
Percent Losses	71.5%	32.7%

These numbers are faceless, cold statistics. Each number was a human being; a son, a brother, a father or an uncle. There are so many names of men that could be included in this reflection. To represent all those men I have chosen the youngest casualties simply because war robbed them of their life and unfulfilled potential. There was eighteen year old 28007 Pte. James Raftis, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, whose parents were Michael and Nora from Mill Street in Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. Jimmy Raftis and Johnny Doolan were best friends. They enlisted together into the Dubs. Johnny's regimental number was 28004, very close to his pal Jimmy's regimental number of 28007. Jimmy was only sixteen years of age when he enlisted. According to Berni Egan nee Doolan, Johnny Doolan's granddaughter, Jimmy's mother wrote to the War Office about him being too young to fight, enclosing his baptismal record. The reply from the War Office saying they would look into it arrived in Thomastown the day before Jimmy was killed.<sup>140</sup> There was eighteen year old 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. James William Mallen, 8<sup>th</sup> RDF, whose parents were John and Margaret from Grangecon, Wicklow. There was seventeen year old 27778 Pte. John Quinlan, 9<sup>th</sup> RDF, whose parents were Andrew and Rose Ann from No.130 Oldpark Road, Belfast. And of course there was Chaplain 4<sup>th</sup> Class The Rev. William Joseph Doyle S.J., M.C. 8<sup>th</sup> RDF from Dalkey, Co. Dublin. Apart from Fr. Doyle, whose name is on Panel 160, all of these young men are listed on Panel 144-145 of the Tyne Cot Memorial simply because their bodies were never found.<sup>141</sup>

Haig's breakout project of the Ypres salient raged on to the 10 November 1918 when the Canadian Corps took the village of Passchendaele. As Prior and Wilson concluded: 'The termination of the Third Ypres campaign constituted no sort of a climax. The undertaking did not cease because it had reached some meaningful culmination. It simply came to a halt.'<sup>142</sup> Including Messines, the Third Ypres cost the BEF approx. 275,000 casualties.<sup>143</sup> Passchendaele contributed some 238,313 casualties.<sup>144</sup> The British official history estimated German losses at 400,000.<sup>145</sup> However, according to David Stevenson, 'modern estimates suggest a figure of somewhat over half that number.'<sup>146</sup> Apart from the human tragedy of Passchendaele, the land where so many men died between July and November 1917 'was impossible to hold. What had taken four months to win was evacuated in three days' with the opening of the German offensive of March 1918.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>140</sup> I would like to thank Mrs Berni Egan of the RDFA for giving me this account of her grandfather Johnny Doolan and his best friend who never came home, young Jimmy Raftis. According to CWGC records, his age was nineteen when he died. This was wrong; he died just days after his eighteenth birthday.

<sup>141</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>142</sup> Prior, Robin and Wilson, Trevor, *Passchendaele the Untold Story* (London: Yale University Press, 1996).p.194.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.p.195.

<sup>144</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General), *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 2, 1917* .p.365.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.p.363.

<sup>146</sup> Stevenson, David, *1914 -1918 the History of the First World War* (London Penguin Books, 2004).p.336.

<sup>147</sup> Prior, Robin and Wilson, Trevor.p.200.

As stated, days after the shattering of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division at Frezenberg, they were moved to the Third Army's VI Corp. Much like their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, these days in late August were spent at Enniskillen Camp in Ervillers recovering and receiving drafts of men to make up for the losses. By the end of September 1917, the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF had received some eight officers and 265 other ranks.<sup>148</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup> RDF received less of a draft being zero officers and 126 other ranks. By early September the strength of the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was back up to normal being twenty-seven officers and 542 other ranks.<sup>149</sup> On 16 September, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF went back into the line near Croisilles. Apart from two occasions, one on 20 September and other on 25 September when German gunners hit the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> RDF respectively when in the front lines, it was 'generally quiet.'<sup>150</sup> Yet casualties were suffered by both battalions. At 4:00 a.m. on 20 September, German shelling 'opened up an intense bombardment along the whole line' occupied by the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF which lasted about fifty minutes inflicting only one other rank killed in action; one died of wounds and eight wounded.<sup>151</sup> The CWGC records three men from the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF who died in September 1917. They were; 27294 Lance Sgt. James Byrne, aged nineteen from No. 17 Philipsburgh Avenue, Fairview, Dublin; 26586 Pte. Thomas Doherty from Dunsany, Co. Meath and 24595 Pte. Hugh Doyle from Rathnew, Co. Wicklow. All three were buried in Croisilles British Cemetery.<sup>152</sup> Again, in an early morning barrage, German trench mortars hit the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF line at Lump Lane and according to the CWGC, three men were killed. They were; 20739 Lance/Cpl. James Develin, age thirty-six and a married man who was a piper in the Highland Light Infantry. He came from No. 31 Garngad Square, St. Rollox, Glasgow; 29891 Pte. Jeremiah Tracey, age twenty-six from Dunfermline. Both men were buried at Bucquoy Road Cemetery. Finally there was 24788 Pte. Patrick Cosgrove from Naas, Co. Kildare.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Statement of Losses and Drafts for August and September 1917. Note these total figures included two officers and 89 other ranks for August 1917. At the end of October a draft of six officers and a further 176 other ranks had joined the battalion.

<sup>149</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. August and September 1917. Note, the above totals include thirty one other rank drafts for August 1917.

<sup>150</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22 September 1917.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* September 1917 Casualties and Drafts.

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

<sup>153</sup> [Http://www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.



Pte. Jimmy Raftis, 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF from Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

On 22 October 1917, for the last time as individual units, the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF was relieved in the support line and went back to Enniskillen Camp in Ervillers. On the same day, the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF was relieved in the front line opposite Fontaine les Croisilles and they too went back to Enniskillen Camp. It was the one and only time the five battalions of the RDF who served on the western front were together in the one camp in the one brigade.

The 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was at Armagh Camp; 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF was at Belfast Camp and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF at Clonmel Camp all in Ervillers.<sup>154</sup> Two days later, on 24 October, 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>155</sup> The amalgamation came about because of the falloff in recruitment; consequently it was difficult to keep so many battalions in the line. A debate among the 'Home Authorities' on amalgamation of battalions in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division had been afoot since early July 1917 even before the large losses in some the Irish battalions at Frezenberg Ridge in mid-August 1917.<sup>156</sup> Over the following week or so to the end of October, both officers and other ranks were cross-posted to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> RDF Battalions in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade. For example, Capt. G.E. Cowley went to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF and Major H.R. Strike went to the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF.<sup>157</sup> A surplus of other ranks from the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF went to the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>158</sup> Following the formal amalgamation, inspections and parades were carried out at Ervillers on 27 October. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was inspected by Brigadier-General Ramsay, Major-General Hickie and Cardinal Bourne who 'addressed the troops after the inspection' from the back of a horse and cart.<sup>159</sup> After he addressed the men, led by their pipes and drums, the entire Brigade marched past the Cardinal and generals in a grassy field.<sup>160</sup> The men were kitted out in 'Dress Drill Order.'<sup>161</sup> Three days previous on 24 October 1917, Cardinal Francis Bourne of Westminster, along with a group of Chaplains, visited the grave of Major Willie Redmond in Loker.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>154</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. WO95/1973/3. (London: The National Archives, 20 August 1917 to 22 October 1917). March Table To Accompany 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Operation Order No.163.

<sup>155</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. And *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22-24 October 1917. See also. *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 July 1917.

<sup>156</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 14 July 1917.

<sup>157</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 26 October 1917.

<sup>158</sup> *War Diary 9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 24 October 1917.

<sup>159</sup> *War Diary 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 27 October 1917. Note. The 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade noted Cardinal Bourne inspected the brigade on 29 October 1917.

<sup>160</sup> See IWM Video on Website: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022633>. Catalogue No 111.

<sup>161</sup> *War Diary 8th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 27 October 1917. Dress Drill Order was the uniform men wore on formal parades.

<sup>162</sup> *Names of Visitor's Who Have Visited the Grave of the Late Major W.H.K. Redmond M.P.* Original in In Flanders Fields Museum, Ieper. Copy in possession of Tom Burke.



Cardinal Francis Bourne speaking to the men of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers at Ervillers  
on 27 October 1917. <sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup> *Cardinal Francis Bourne Visiting Royal Dublin Fusiliers. 27 October 1917.* Q 6148. (London: Imperial War Museum, Photographic Archive ).

## The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers

Having enjoyed their rest at Ervillers Camp, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade went back into the line on 1 November in fine but sharp weather. However before they went back, the battalions went to Mass or Divine Service at Ervillers.<sup>1</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF occupied the front line. The first job the new 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF had been to come into a support line behind their comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Over the following couple of weeks the battalions of both the 48<sup>th</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Brigades rotated in the lines. The first men killed with the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF were 29595 Pte. Thomas Joseph Lynch from Knockbridge, Co. Louth and 22683 Lance-Cpl. Michael Farnan from Blackrock, Co. Dublin. They both were killed in action on 20 November 1917.<sup>2</sup> The activities of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF in the days leading up to the attack on Tunnel Trench were much the same as the activities of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Artillery from both sides using a variety of shells was very active and destructive with attacks and responses from both sides almost every day. On a couple of occasions, the odd German, mainly from the 470<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in the 240<sup>th</sup> Division, came across the line and surrendered. For example at 7:20 a.m. on 12 November, one 'Unteroffizier' from the 470<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment was captured by the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF when he was found wandering around the Dubs front line during a British gas bombardment. Perhaps the poor man had lost his mind and wandered into no man's land.<sup>3</sup> The 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF was in reserve at Ervillers Camp for the attack on Tunnel Trench and was not involved in any action. On the day, they were training in 'attack in new formation, special training of moppers up...' <sup>4</sup> However, two men are listed as being KIA on 20 November. They are 29595 Pte. Thomas J Lynch from Knockbridge near Dundalk, Co. Louth and 22683 Lance Cpl. Michael Farnan from Blackrock, Co. Dublin. Both are buried in Croisilles British Cemetery, France.

The first real losses the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered were in the closing days of November 1917. On the evening of 25 November about 6:20 p.m., they relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF in the front line and over the next few days they worked as usual on, 'repair of front line, digging and reveting and draining' the line. Next day on 26 November, a patrol led by Capt. H.C. Poulter went out to Copse Trench to inspect the wire which was reported as 'good' and was held by Germans Copse Trench lay beyond Tunnel Support Trench on the southern outskirts of Fontaine-les-Croisilles.<sup>5</sup> Moreover the Germans were reported to be 'in strength' in Copse Trench. At 5:00 a.m. on 28 November, a large patrol of four sections of one officer and fifty other ranks with covering parties on either side crossed into Copse Trench but were met by stiff resistance coming from German machine guns driving the patrol back to where they started. At 5:30 a.m. next morning, the Germans bombarded the point where the raiders came from, i.e. Lincoln Support trench. Three men were reported killed and Capt. H.C. Poulter was severely wounded as a result. They hit the same spots again on 30 November. Sometime during the day, Sgt. Byrne and Capt. H.C. Poulter died from their wounds. That evening, they went back to Enniskillen Camp missing a few of their comrades.<sup>6</sup> During that tour of the front line facing Fontaine-les-Croisilles, between 29 and 30 November 1917, eight other ranks and one officer of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF were killed. They were 14728 Pte. Edward O'Leary, age forty-one, a married man from Carlow; 25024 Pte. Michael O'Connor, age twenty-two, also married from St Helen's Street, Galway; 26404 Pte. Michael Gregory from Rathgar, Dublin; 26119 Pte. Peter Tierney from Bansha, Co. Tipperary; 40478 Pte. Henry Thomas Foley, age thirty-six, a married man from Southwark, Surrey; 21993 Cpl. Joseph Carlton from Ballinamallard, Co. Fermanagh; 24664 Cpl. Thomas W Clarke, age twenty-two, from Upper Bridge Street, Skibbereen, Co. Cork.

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO 95/1974. (London: The National Archives, 1 November 1917 to 19 February 1918). 1 November 1917.

<sup>2</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>3</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 8 November 1917. On 8 November, two Germans handed themselves over to the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF. An 'Unteroffizier' is a German army N.C.O.

<sup>4</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 19-20 November 1917.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* See Trench Map showing British and German trench lines around Fontaine-les-Croisilles. *Trench Map-Sheet No: Croisilles 51b S W 3 and 4 Edition 3a*.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20-30 November 1917.

21807 Sgt. Thomas Byrne was previously a member of the 9<sup>th</sup> RDF and came from Dublin. He is buried in Bucquoy Road Cemetery, France. Most of the other men are buried in Croisilles British Cemetery, France.<sup>7</sup> Henry Chapman Poulter was twenty-three years of age when he died of wounds. He had enlisted into 'D' Coy. The Pals of the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF back in August 1914. His brother Edgar had joined with him in the same unit. The Poulter brothers were born in London but lived at St Brigid's, Roebuck, Clonskea, Co. Dublin. Both Henry and Edgar were educated at St. Andrew's College, Dublin. Henry worked as a Clerk in the Atlas Insurance Company before enlisting. He was invalided from Salonika on 26 October 1915 but recovered and was Gazetted a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. in the 7<sup>th</sup> RDF in February 1917 but soon after transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>8</sup> He is buried in St Leger British Cemetery, Bapaume, France.<sup>9</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division began their move from Hamelin court / Ervillers area to St. Emilie on 2 December 1917.<sup>10</sup> By route march and lorry, it took them five days to travel a distance of some forty miles (sixty-three kilometres). Having travelled through Achiet-le-Petit, Rocquigny and Templeux-la-Fosse, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> arrived at around 3:00 a.m. in the morning at St. Emilie on 5 December. Along their way, they left some of their wounded in hospitals and gathered some new men. Little time was wasted, that evening. At about 5:00 p.m. they relieved a battalion of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division in the line in front of Lempire.<sup>11</sup> The usual trench routine began with inter-company reliefs in and out of the front line, strengthening the wire on the battalion front and watching the German movements. It was a quiet enough tour of duty with reports of intermittent shelling etc. Yet one man died of wounds and another was killed in action. They were; 26626 Pte. Thomas Lavelle, age twenty-one, from Dugort, Achill, Co. Mayo who died of wounds and 40795 Pte. Edward Smith, age nineteen, from Leicester.<sup>12</sup> They were relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Munster Fusiliers of the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade on 11 December. They went back to Hamel which was the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division's reserve area to wash down in evening baths, catch up on some rest and the usual training. The VI Commander called by to award the Military Medal to 5696 Pte. Butler. Yet such was the fear of a German attack that, despite being in reserve, the battalions were on call to turn out 'at half and hours' notice.'<sup>13</sup> In fact on 10 December, 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division H.Q. received a special order 'containing instructions in the event of the enemy attempting to recapture the lost Hindenburg Line.'<sup>14</sup> It was December, cold and wet. During this period of rest before they went back in the line on 17 December when they relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> (South Irish Horse Bn) Royal Irish Regiment in the support lines at St. Emilie, some seventy-nine sick men were sent to local field hospitals 'due to the severity of the cold.'<sup>15</sup>

With two years of combat under their belt on 20 December, General Hickie sent a message of congratulations to all ranks of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division.<sup>16</sup> Quite a lot of accommodation improvements were made by the battalion while in support at St. Emilie. They built protection huts from German aerial bombers; additional bivouacs; a new battalion headquarters consisting of a mess, kitchen and sleeping quarters for the C.O.; new sanitary and latrine facilities.<sup>17</sup> At 3:15 a.m. on the morning of 23 December, before the battalion went back into the front line, a German raiding party of about thirty men had surrounded a bombing post out in the front line on Lempire Road, killing one man and taking four prisoners.<sup>18</sup> However, some German raids were not so successful.

<sup>7</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>8</sup> Hanna, Henry. Pp.223-224.

<sup>9</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division.* 2 December 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 1-5 December 1917.

<sup>12</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 12 December 1917.

<sup>14</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division.* 10 December 1917.

<sup>15</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 11-17 December 1917. See also 22 December 1917.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 20 December 1917.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 23 December 1917.

<sup>18</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade.* 23 December 1917. See also *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division.* 23 December 1917.



At 5:30 p.m. under the cover of darkness on 10 December, they raided a part of the front line held by the South Irish Horse who beat the raiders back, killing one of them whose body was left close by in no man's land. Documents taken from the dead German revealed that he belonged to the 184<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 183<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>19</sup> Later in the evening of 23 December, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF went back into the front line where they relieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF. Before they moved off, a welcome mug of hot tea was served from Dixies packed on Lewis Gun carriages. Company officers had to ensure the men left their billets 'scrupulously clean... all wood chippings to be swept up.'<sup>20</sup> German aircraft were very active over the Irish lines during December. On one occasion, at 10:30 a.m. on 28 December, ten German aircraft flew together unchallenged over 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade lines. Moreover, some of them painted British colours on their machines to deceive the observers below.<sup>21</sup> It seems they had control of the skies. Perhaps, however, not total control because at about 2:00 p.m. on 12 December one British aircraft shot a German observation balloon down. Later in the day, German aircraft retaliated by bringing a British observation balloon down in flames near Villers Faucon where 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division H.Q. was located.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of this one success, precautions were taken to protect men marching in the open. So, if on the march up to the front lines a German aeroplane approached, an alarm of three blows on an officer's whistle was to be made and men were to take cover or, if in the open, stand still.<sup>23</sup> On Christmas Day, the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF war diary noted that twenty-six men from the battalion were sent to hospital and that one man was killed, yet there is no record of him in the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF casualty listings. He may well be 14611 Pte. James Hopkins from Kells, Co. Meath listed as being in the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF.<sup>24</sup> He was the last man of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF to die in 1917 and what a day to die, Christmas 1917.

Apart from some night time wiring, deepening and widening of St. Patrick's Avenue trench, there was 'very little activity' reported in the final front line tour of duty for the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF over the Christmas period. Yet at around 11:00 a.m. on Christmas Day, the Germans shelled part of the Irish division's lines near Priel Farm, Mule Trench and St. Patrick's Avenue to which retaliation was given. Moreover, between 25 and 28 December, German artillery was active along the entire Irish division's front causing casualties.<sup>25</sup> The Christmas spirit of 1914 had long gone. On 30 December the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF went back to the baths and comforts of Hamel, maybe even some belated Christmas dinner. They had lost only one man in this tour, Pte. Hopkins from Kells, Co. Meath. They could ring in the New Year of 1918 out of harm's way.

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<sup>19</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 10 December 1917.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Orders in conjunction with move. 23 December 1917.

<sup>21</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Summary of Intelligence for 24 hours ended 6:00 a.m. 29 December 1917. And 27 December 1917.

<sup>22</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 12 December 1917.

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 8th/9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Orders in conjunction with move. 23 December 1917.

<sup>24</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Note. Pte Hopkins is listed in CWGC as being in the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF and as being in the 8<sup>th</sup> RDF in *Soldiers Died*, Part 73.

<sup>25</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. 25-28 December 1917.

## The 10<sup>th</sup> (Commercial) Royal Dublin Fusiliers

Following their costly success at the Battle of Ancre in mid-November 1916 when they lost over 50% of their officers and other ranks, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was in no state to carry out any offensive or indeed defensive operations for much of late November and all of December 1916. Indeed, a 5<sup>th</sup> Army memorandum dated 31 February 1917 on the fighting capabilities of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division noted that, while not doubting the 'gallantry and fighting qualities of the personnel in the Division', without training 'in the elementary duties of a soldier' compounded with the 'lack of officers with sufficient experience', the Division should be withdrawn 'from the line for a considerable period of training and re-organisation.'<sup>1</sup> And indeed it was. Back on 1 December 1916, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was in 'rest billets' at Noyelles-sur-Mer near the French coast. They had travelled there, a distance of some thirty-seven miles (60 kilometres) from Authieule following their part in the Battle of the Ancre. Letters of congratulations came in respect of their role in the Somme campaign from a variety of people such as the Lord Mayor of London, Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Jellicoe, Sir Douglas Haig, Major-General L.D. Cooper, Colonel of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and none other than Sir Arthur James Balfour. Mindful of the fact that the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were in the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division, Jellicoe wrote: 'Officers and men of the Grand Fleet beg to offer their warmest congratulations to their gallant comrades of the sister service on their recent success...' <sup>2</sup>

The battalion remained at Noyelles-sur-Mer for the month of December 1916 mainly carrying out the recommendations outlined in the 5<sup>th</sup> Army memo with training in tactics, route marches to Ponthoile Wood north of Noyelles, lectures, inspections and generally rebuilding of both mind and body in terms of building back up their numbers at command an operational level. Out went their brigade commanding officer, Brigadier-General Heneker (190<sup>th</sup> Brigade) and in came Brigadier-General Finch. On 8 December they received a draft of nine junior officers, all second lieutenants. A few days later a draft of eighty-two men arrived.<sup>3</sup> Because of their battle experience, men from the ranks were promoted. For example, there was 2319 Pte. G. Barry and 1198 Lance/Sgt. P. Carroll of the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters who were given temporary commissions as Second Lieutenants.<sup>4</sup> New Chaplains arrived too. Rev. C.G. McDonnell arrived just after Christmas day. Interestingly in mid-December 1916, they were still not sure as to how many men were missing from the battalion following the Ancre campaign on 13 November. Notes appeared in the diary as to the whereabouts of some men. This occurred during mid-December 1916 and into mid-January 1917. There were worries of men deserting and one measure established to keep an eye on the numbers was to do spot checks on battalion strengths and account for each man. No reports of men deserting from the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were made. <sup>5</sup>

The 10<sup>th</sup> Dubs were still at Noyelles-sur-Mer doing the same things up to 14 January 1917. Major E.F.E Seymour assumed command of the battalion and for his efforts in bringing in walking and wounded German prisoners at the Ancre, Rev.Fr. Thornton received a D.S.O. on 3 January 1917.<sup>6</sup> With a new commanding officer, lots of keen junior officers, confidence was returning to the battalion. They took part in brigade size tactical exercises and despite the rain and snow, morale was good. One of their officers, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. A.W. Julian was appointed Town Major for a while. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *War Diary 190th Infantry Brigade* WO95/3116. (London: The National Archives). 5<sup>th</sup> Army II Corp memorandum written by Lieut.-General C.W. Jacob dated 21 February 1917.

<sup>2</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. WO95/3118/4. (London: The National Archives, 11 July 1916 to 30 June 1917). 25 November 1917.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 11 December 1916.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 17 December 1916.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* See 4,14 and 24 December 1916 and 13 January 1917. See also. *War Diary 190th Infantry Brigade* .Investigations on the actions on 17 February 1917. Fr F. Bourke R.C. Chaplain to the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF arrived on 24 July 1917.

<sup>6</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 3 and 4 January 1917.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 11 January 1917.

However, their rebuilding period came to an end on 13 January 1917 when they marched out of Noyelles-sur-Mer back to the same Somme front and into billets at Forceville, stopping off at various villages such as Longuevillette and Puchevillers, a journey of some fifty-six miles (90 kilometres) arriving at Forceville in the early afternoon of 20 January 1917 when a draft of twenty-seven other ranks boosted their ranks. Sadly on the same day, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. W.R. Carson was found dead in his billet from asphyxiation. Over the coming days, they prepared and trained for going into the support line first on 27 January and later into the front line in the Beaucourt sector.<sup>8</sup> They remained in the line, both front and support until 14 February when they were relieved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Marines.

It was a difficult enough tour for the Commercial; regular reports of heavy German shelling, and as usual, British shells falling short; snipers and of course the terrible cold nights. During that period they lost thirty-two men killed in action or died of wounds, on average two men every day.<sup>9</sup> In fact eight men were killed on 8 February following an all-day German bombardment on Puisieux Road. The British response was noted as 'poor'. German snipers were reported very active too and contributed to the death count. The war diary noted that the snipers were 'very difficult to locate.' In fact the German snipers had a field day at their work. They bagged two officers, two other ranks killed plus wounding a further two or three other ranks.<sup>10</sup> Among the other ranks that died of wounds was nineteen year old 18215 Pte. Henry Conroy from Mountmellick, Co. Laois. The two officer sniper casualties on 8 February were 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. P.C. Carroll age twenty-two and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. C.M. Armstrong age twenty-three. Carroll had arrived to the battalion on 22 November 1916.<sup>11</sup> Charles Martin Armstrong was born in Portadown, Co. Armagh. He lived with his parents in the Rectory in Finglas, Dublin. His father was a clergyman. Charles was privately educated and was student at Trinity College Dublin. He served in 'D' Coy. The Pals, 7<sup>th</sup> RDF as a Private in Gallipoli; invalided on 8 September 1915 and gazetted into the 6<sup>th</sup> RDF in January 1916.<sup>12</sup> Along with two other officers, Charles arrived to the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on 29 December 1916. The battalion were off in Ponthoile Wood (Noyelles-sur-Mer) practising attacking trenches 'by companies.'<sup>13</sup> He was with the battalion only close on six weeks when he died. He may well have been in Dublin with the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF during the Easter Rising. Later in the evening of 8 February, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. A.W. Henchy received news that he had been awarded the Military Cross, 'in connection with the Dublin Rising.'<sup>14</sup>

Their final trench tour in February in the Beaucourt sector ended on 27 February when they went into billets that had been built in Thiepval Wood; that dreaded wood forever engrained into the history of the 36<sup>th</sup>(Ulster) Division. But again, during that particular trench tour they suffered further casualties as a result of a fruitless raid on 26 February. In the darkness of early morning at 5:30 a.m. 'a strong patrol under 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Higgins' tried to get into a German trench named Gudgeon Trench and was driven back. The result was six casualties, four of whom died. Later in the evening news came through that the Germans in Gudgeon Trench had evacuated the trench.<sup>15</sup> The four men killed were: 26948 Pte. Raymond Hutchinson from Wrexham; 25106 Pte. John Francis Christie, age twenty-four, from The Shankill in Belfast; 26820 Pte. Robert Beattie from Monaghan and 24713 Pte. James Knox, age nineteen, from Chapelizod, Dublin. Their names are on the Thiepval Memorial, Pier and Face 16 C.<sup>16</sup> (A point of note: While at Thiepval Wood, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. T.C. Dickie arrived to the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on 1 March with a draft of officers. See his account of the Easter Rising in *The Blue Cap*, Vol. 21. 2016.<sup>17</sup> No doubt he and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Henchy shared some interesting words on the Easter Rising.)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 20-27 January 1917.

<sup>9</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>10</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 8 February 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 22 November 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Hanna, Henry. p.156.

<sup>13</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 29 December 1917.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 8 February 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 26 February 1917.

<sup>16</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers.*

<sup>17</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers.* 1 March 1917.

During the month of March and into the middle of April 1917, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF spent much of its time out of the lines and on the move, transferring to a number of billet areas in the region such as Cabstand Huts on the Aveluy-Martinsart Road and Hericourt, essentially training and participating in brigade-size exercises.

By the middle of April, they had moved south from the Somme sector towards Arras finally ending up in billets at Macnicourt in preparation for what the diary referred to as 'the Vimy Push' or commonly known as the Battle of Arras, a British offensive which began on 9 April.<sup>18</sup> For their part in the Battle of Arras, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF along with the 4<sup>th</sup> Bedfordshire Regiment, both still in the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Naval Division, attacked the village of Gavrelle about seven miles (10 kilometres) north-east of Arras on 15 April 1917. It was a fruitless and costly affair for the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF; fourteen men were killed on the day alone. Two men aged nineteen were killed, they were 27623 Pte. Edward Jackson from Roscrea, Co. Tipperary and 43424 Pte. George Perry from Hammersmith, Middlesex. One soldier, 27096 Pte. James O'Connor was born in Bombay in India but lived and enlisted in Dublin.<sup>19</sup> Their comrades in the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF also took part in the Battle of Arras as a reserve unit mainly used in supplying working parties in consolidating hard earned positions around Monchy. Several previous attempts had been made to take Gavrelle but had failed. So too did the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF's attempt. They attacked Gavrelle without any artillery preparations and suffered accordingly. Their casualties were five officers and eighty other ranks, fourteen of whom were killed in action.<sup>20</sup> However the village was subsequently captured by the 190<sup>th</sup> and 189<sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal) Naval Division between 23 and 24 April 1917. The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was confined to a support role behind the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade in that attack.<sup>21</sup> Yet even in this role, and in the days between the two attacks on the village when they supplied working parties rebuilding defences along the Bailleul-St. Nicholas Road and carrying parties to consolidate the gains in Gavrelle, the battalion suffered casualties from German artillery. Thus, between 15 and 30 April 1917 when they came out of the line and marched back to billets at Ecurie, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF lost forty-one men killed or died from wounds.<sup>22</sup> By that stage the 'Vimy Push' was over.

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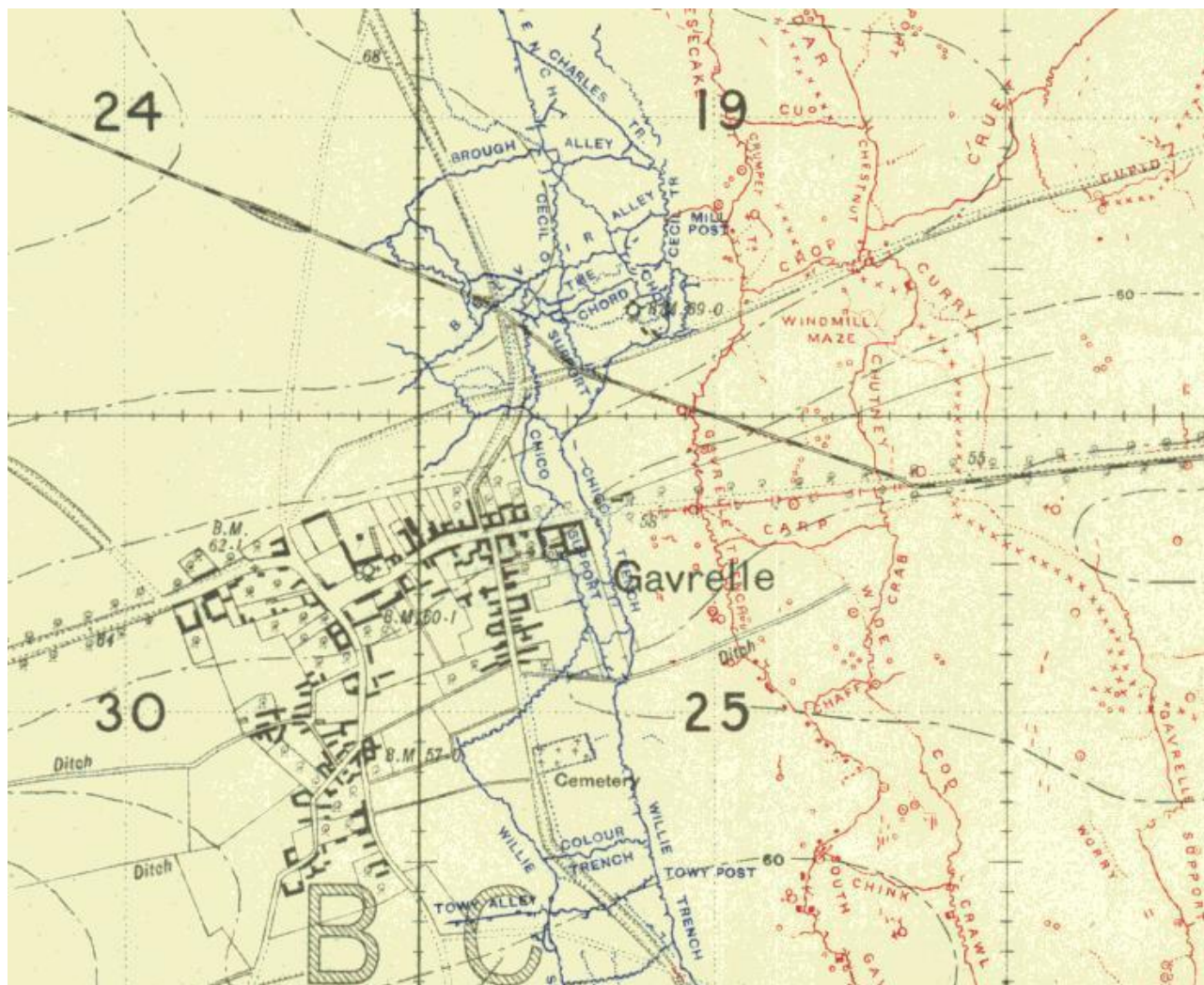
<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 12 April 1917.

<sup>19</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>20</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 15 April 1917. See [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. For an excellent account of this and subsequent attacks by the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on Gavrelle see: <https://www.dublin-fusiliers.com/battalions/10-batt/campaigns/1917-apr-gavelle.html>

<sup>21</sup> Falls, Cyril, *Official History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 1 the Battle of Arras 1917* (London: The Imperial War Museum, September 1939). Pp.399-400.

<sup>22</sup> [Http://Www.Cwgc.Org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. These include the fourteen men killed on 15 April 1917.



Trench Map prior to the attack on Gavrelle by 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division 23/24 April 1917.  
 Note the location of The Windmill in section C.19. C - Windmill Maze.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *War Diary 190th Infantry Brigade* . 190<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Defence Scheme (R.2 and R.3 Sub-Sector of R Divisional Section). Map Reference 51B.N.W. 1/20,000. Section 4. Distribution of Troops.p.2

For the first week or so in May, the battalions of the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade worked on roads and light railway lines under command of the Royal Engineers. On 10 May, they moved to Mont-St-Eloi which is a little over six miles (10 kilometres) northeast of Arras. Over the next few weeks or so, whether in or out of the line, most of their days were spent training as usual. On 20 May, they went back into the line and relieved 94<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 31<sup>st</sup> Division in the Oppy-Gavrelle Sector which lay about eight miles (13 kilometres) northwest of Arras. This was an important sector of the line to hold and consolidate which demanded constant work by battalions in the front line. Too many men had died taking it and the Brigade had established a strict set of defensive instructions and standing orders for battalions to follow when in the line. It contained a spur named Windmill Spur which 'was to be held at all costs'.<sup>24</sup> The line they moved into was described as being a few scratches of earth. The 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade war diary noted on 21 May: 'The day was fairly quiet with intermittent hostile shelling throughout the area, a normal day in 'trench life' Without the trenches what we have are a few scratches in the earth.' The remaining days in the line were relatively quiet with 'nothing unusual to note.'<sup>25</sup> 'Unusual to note' included the destruction of the Brigade's Machine Gun Company headquarters by shell fire on 27 May resulting in the occupants being gassed. That's how mundane trench life had become. Despite the relative quiet period, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered the highest number of deaths and casualties in the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade for the month of May 1917. Out of a total casualty count of 159 officers and other ranks killed, wounded and missing, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF contributed fifty-five; the next highest was the 1<sup>st</sup> Honourable Artillery Company (The H.A.C.) being thirty-four.<sup>26</sup>

On 1 June 1917, the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved by the 189<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The 10<sup>th</sup> RDF went back to billets in Anzin-St.-Aubin. All defence scheme operations, aeroplane photos, current intelligence reports, details of works in hand and proposed were, as was the usual practice in a change-over, handed to incoming brigade and battalions.<sup>27</sup> Much of June was spent at training, supplying the usual working parties doing salvage work where they were needed. However on 19 June, they, along with the 1<sup>st</sup> H.A.C., were moved out of their billets in St. Aubin to camps about three and a half miles (5 kilometres) northeast of Roclincourt. There they were assigned the dangerous task of digging communication trenches in the forward area of 5<sup>th</sup> Division during the night. Essentially they, along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry with help from 1<sup>st</sup> H.A.C., dug a communication trench named Tommy Alley, the completion of which was crucial to the success of an operation to be carried out by the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>28</sup> Nine days later on 28 June 1917 in heavy rain, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Divisions assaulted a front of, 1,130 yards (1,033 meters) between Gavrelle and Oppy, one objective being Gavrelle Mill which was taken. The heavy rain 'interfered with the work of consolidation.'<sup>29</sup> It was the last time the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF took part in any operation with the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division. Because on 20 June 1917 a 'secret message was received' from H.Q. 63<sup>rd</sup> Division, 'ordering the battalion to be ready to move on or after the 22<sup>nd</sup> Instant to 16<sup>th</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army.'<sup>30</sup> And so, early on the morning of 22 June 1917, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF marched back from their digging of Tommy Alley to their billets, cleaned up, packed all their kit and supplies and at 4:15 p.m. marched off to a small railway station at Maroeuil, a village a little over six miles (9 kilometres) northeast of Arras.<sup>31</sup> Their place in the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade was taken by the 1<sup>st</sup> Artist Rifles on 26 June 1917.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 20 May 1917. 190<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Defence Scheme, 25 May 1917. No. 2 Tactical Features,

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 28 May 1917.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 'Casualties for May 1917.'

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Brigade Order Number 99; 30 May 19017.

<sup>28</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 19 June 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Edmonds, J.E. Sir. (Brigadier-General), *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium Volume 2, 1917*. Pp113-114.

<sup>30</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 20 June 1917.

<sup>31</sup> *War Diary 190th Infantry Brigade* . Brigade Order No. 106; 21 June 1917.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Brigade Order No. 107; 26 June 1917.

They got a great send-off from the 190<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The battalion's war diary noted: <sup>33</sup>

The band of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bedford Regiment played the battalion into Anzin (Anzin-St.-Aubin) and here the band of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers was in waiting to accompany the battalion into Maroeuil. Here the battalion entrained. The Divisional and Brigade Staffs were present to bid the Regiment goodbye. At 8:30 p.m. the train left Maroeuil, the Royal Fusiliers Band playing 'Auld Lang Syne.'

Later Major-General C.E. Lawrie in a letter to the Commanding Officer, Lieut.-Col. F Seymor, expressed 'regret at the departure of the battalion from his command, thanking the battalion for its excellent work while with the 63<sup>rd</sup> Division and wishing it continued success in the future.'<sup>34</sup> The long finger of Irish politics had found its way to the trench lines north of Arras resulting in the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF being transferred to the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. One must wonder how the politically motivated move went down with the men of the battalion and indeed the Staff of the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Navy) Division.

Their train journey took them first to Bavinchove Station, approx. forty-seven miles (75 km) north of Maroeuil where they overnighted in billets. Next day, they marched on a further three miles (5 km) to Noordpeene which is roughly about nine miles (14.5 km) northwest of St.Omer. <sup>35</sup> They were met at Noordpeene by their new Brigadier, General F.W. Ramsay on 27 June. He had travelled from his Brigade headquarters Rubrouck training area to Noordpeene, a short distance of about four miles (7 km) where he inspected the battalion and addressing them afterwards stating that he welcomed the battalion and was very proud to have them in his brigade; 'a Dublin Fusiliers Brigade.' In view of their hard work in recent days, he gave them 'a few weeks real rest' before joining the Brigade. <sup>36</sup> And so, the 10<sup>th</sup> Dubs remained in Noordpeene, until 6 July, when at 6:00 a.m. they marched out to through Watou to Wynnezeele to join up with the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade. While they were at Noordpeene, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Edgar Poulter was posted to 'D' Coy.10<sup>th</sup> RDF on 5 July 1917. His brother, Capt. Henry Chapman Poulter at that time was with the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> RDF. The two brothers came together at Wynnezeele for a while. <sup>37</sup>

For July and much of August 1917, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was essentially used as navvies. In July, they had a battalion strength of forty-two officers and 843 other ranks. <sup>38</sup> From that, they supplied working parties of between 500 and 600 men working day and night in building roads and making dumps north west of Ypres; essentially building the road infrastructure in preparation for the attack on 31 July. German aircraft regularly flew over the reserve area camps and dropped their bomb loads. Again, it seems they had the freedom of the sky. At 2:45 p.m. on 13 July, German aircraft dropped 'several bombs' on camps and the vicinity where the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was in reserve at rest. The result was three other ranks killed and two officers and sixteen other ranks from the battalion wounded. <sup>39</sup> The three men that died comprised of a man from Ireland, England and Wales. For the record they were 25215 Pte. Edward Rehill from Dublin, 40733 Pte. Mathew Taylor, age twenty-one from Bolton, and 40760 Cpl. Francis Pumford from Glamorgan. All three are buried beside each other in Poperinghe New Military Cemetery, Flanders. <sup>40</sup> In fact during the month of July, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF suffered a casualty count of thirty-one all ranks, four of whom were killed. <sup>41</sup> Edgar Poulter was one of the wounded casualties while out with a working party following German shelling. <sup>42</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 22 June 1917.

<sup>34</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 31 July 1917.

<sup>35</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 23 June 1917.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 27 June 1917.

<sup>37</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 5 July 1917.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Statement of Battalion Strength for the month of July 1917. 31 July 1917.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 13 July 1917.

<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*.

<sup>41</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Casualties for the month of July 1917. 31 July 1917.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 17 July 1917.



On the day these men died in camp, ie 13 July 1917, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was moved from the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division to 15<sup>th</sup> Division for 'Ordnance Service' and remained with the 15<sup>th</sup> Division right up to 19 August when they returned to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. The transfer didn't go down to well with the battalion. There was a worry that with the amalgamation of some battalions going on at the time, the battalion might be broken up and absorbed into some other battalions. With a fear of being an easy target for amalgamation or absorption and therefore loss of identity, the C.O. of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF, Lieut.-Col F. Seymor hinted at those who wanted to amalgamate or break up battalions to leave the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF alone and 'preserved.' He noted; 'When the question of which battalions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division are to be amalgamated again arises, it should be borne in mind that the Home Authorities are averse (strong dislike) to breaking up or absorbing the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers. The identity of this battalion should therefore be correction preserved.'<sup>43</sup> During that period, i.e. between 13 July and 19 August which included the 16<sup>th</sup> Division's attack on Frezenberg Ridge in which the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF did not participate because of being temporarily transferred to 15<sup>th</sup> Division, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF worked as 'Corps Troops' to the XIX Corps, again supplying large working parties on road and dumps construction and providing guards at XIX Corps H.Q. such as guarding and escorting German prisoners captured by the 55<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Divisions in their attack on 31 July 1917 at the opening of Passchendaele.<sup>44</sup>

On 20 August, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was transferred back to the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division. They joined the Brigade at Wormhoudt and over the next few days or so, they travelled by lorry and train on to Courcelles-le-Comte before finally reaching Ervillers on 26 August. The next day they went into the front line and relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Lincolns of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>45</sup> While in the line, their main concern was German machine guns firing during the night. There was sound logic to this as the Germans knew wire maintenance and reconnaissance patrols went out in the bright nights of late August. For much of August and September, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF slotted into the routine of front line duties and rotations with the other RDF battalions of the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Billeted at Clonmel Camp in Hamelin court which is only two and a half miles (4km) north of Ervillers, their activities for that period were much the same as the other RDF battalions in the Brigade. Their casualties were few considering the number suffered by their comrades in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> RDF during August at Frezenberg Ridge. There were three other ranks of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF killed and twelve wounded for August, two other ranks killed and seventeen for September along with two missing.<sup>46</sup> In fact the death count amounted to eleven for August and September, some of the wounded died.<sup>47</sup>

The only incident to report during that period was that which occurred on a night patrol on 24 September. Practically every night in late September, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF, much like the other battalions in the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade, sent out night patrols to examine the German wire and defences etc. around Tunnel Trench. The battalion sent out three patrols to examine the German wire on 24 September at the junction of Oldenburg Lane and Tunnel Trench. The wire was reported as being 'very thick; but with a gap of about five meters.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 14 July 1917.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 28 July 1917. See between 13 July and 19 August 1917.

<sup>45</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 20-27 August 1917.

<sup>46</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. Casualties for the months of August and September 1917.

<sup>47</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

Moreover, it was feared to be booby trapped as boxes were reported hanging from the wire in places.<sup>48</sup> One of these patrols from 'C' Coy. consisting of one N.C.O. and three other ranks got lost 'owing to the thick mist.' They accidentally wandered into the German front line and were caught. In attempting to escape, they were bombed by the Germans. Only two of the patrol, Lance Cpl. Smith (?) and Pte. Nevin returned. Both men remained in shell holes. Pte. Nevin was badly wounded and remained in the shell hole for two days before being brought back in at 12:30 p.m. on 26 September. The other two men reported missing were never found despite subsequent patrols sent out to look for them. On the same day, Lieut.-Col. Seymour went back to England 'sick' as the war diary somewhat interestingly noted. He too never returned to the battalion and was struck off their strength.<sup>49</sup> His place was taken over by Lieut.-Col. G. Mc M. Robertson, formerly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> North Staffordshire Regiment.<sup>50</sup> Sadly, 27508 Pte. Patrick Jeremiah Nevin, age twenty-one, from No. 13 St. John's Avenue, Waterford, died of his wounds on 26 September. He is buried in Bucquoy Road Cemetery, France. One of the missing men was probably 18851 Cpl. William Jennings, age twenty-eight from 8 Hamilton Row, Dublin who was reported dead on 24 September. His body was never found and he is listed on the Arras Memorial, Bay 9.<sup>51</sup>

The main event for the battalion in October was of course the visit of Cardinal Bourne along with Generals Hickie and Ramsay to the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade parade at Ervillers. Ramsay presented 40768 Pte. Harris of the battalion with a Divisional Parchment, 'for gallant conduct and devotion to duty in the field on 12 October 1917.'<sup>52</sup> There was no record of what Pte. Harris actually did on 12 October to merit this award. On that date, the battalion diary simply noted they were 'working under R.E. supervision at erecting English Shelters in the support line.'<sup>53</sup>

Apart from their role in the Battle of the Ancre with the 63<sup>rd</sup> (Royal Naval) Division back in November 1916, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF were seldom if ever used in the vanguard of an attack on the German front lines. Their turn came on 20 November when, along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, they led the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade's attack on the Tunnel Trench. In preparation for the attack, their war diary noted they undertook 'Intensive Training' which began when at Clonmel Camp in Hamelin court on 9 November.<sup>54</sup> On 18 November, as ready as they could be, they moved off from Clonmel Camp up into their assembly trenches which faced Tunnel Trench between Fontaine les Croisilles and Bullecourt. On the night of 19 November, much like their comrades in the 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF, men from the battalion crept out and cut sections of the German wire in the sector which they were to attack. This was a regular tactic. The Germans were reported as being 'very quiet.' A possible relief was taking place.<sup>55</sup> At 6:20 a.m., under the cover of the smoke barrage, Major Hartigan led his men in the attack on Tunnel Trench. As stated previously, the attack was a complete success mainly due to little or no German resistance. The change-over might have caught them off-guard. The consolidation wire set out by the 1<sup>st</sup> RDF was completed by 7:30 a.m. and was well appreciated by the 10<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> RDF who led the attack.

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<sup>48</sup> *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Intelligence Summary No. 17. 25 September 1917.

<sup>49</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 24 September 1917.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 2 October 1917.

<sup>51</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. His brother may have died in the war too.

<sup>52</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 27 October 1917.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 12 October 1917.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 9 November 1917.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 18-19 November 1917.

Lieut.-Col Robertson noted in his report. 'Having this obstacle (wire) in front gave the garrison in Tunnel Trench great confidence, and allowed them to concentrate on the work of consolidation without danger of sudden counter-attack.' Col. Robertson offered several reasons why his battalion's attack was successful, such as: Communications which worked well because by 6:30 a.m., ten minutes after the attack went in, 'communication by Fullerphone was established with Battalion Headquarters.' His Signalling Officer, Lieut. M.H.K. Kane, 'although hampered by casualties, he succeeded in laying a laddered cable which lasted till 2:00 p.m.'<sup>56</sup> Moreover the pre-attack barrage had done its job. Robertson continued; 'Tunnel Trench had suffered so severely from previous bombardments as to be almost unrecognisable when reached.' And, he too believed the gas / smoke shelling frightened the Germans into wearing their gas masks thus making their firing abilities from rifle and machine gun 'quite ineffective.'<sup>57</sup> The battalion stretcher bearers came in for praise too. 'The field had been cleared of wounded within two and a half hours.' In terms of booty, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF did very well. They captured the following: two machine guns, two Granatenwerfers; Some thousands of rounds of ammunition; two listening sets. In terms of prisoners, they alone took two officers (one died of wounds) and 170 other ranks (about fifty wounded). However, the battalion had its casualties. Capt. G.J. Fitzgibbon commanding 'D' Coy. was killed along with three other ranks. They also suffered twenty-eight wounded.<sup>58</sup>

The usual letters of congratulations from divisional and brigade commanders to battalions were sent congratulating the men on their success in taking Tunnel Trench. General Hickie was very proud of his Division's work. He wrote a 'Special Order' to all the units who took part in the attack on Tunnel Trench noting; 'The trenches captured from the enemy by the Irish Division on the 20<sup>th</sup> November having been now well and safely consolidated and their flanks secure, the task allotted to the Division in the first phase of the BATTLE OF CAMBRAI is complete.' Perhaps thanking them for not hitting their own men, he also congratulated 'the good shooting and steadfast watchfulness of the Artillery, Trench Mortars and Machine Gunners'; and 'the thorough work of the Royal Engineers and Pioneers.' He concluded somewhat patriotically in noting that, '...whatever the fresh tasks which may be given to us, they will be carried out in the old spirit for God, King and Country in accordance with the motto of the Irish Brigade, now a hundred and twenty-five years old; EVERYWHERE AND ALWAYS FAITHFUL.'<sup>59</sup> To the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF he specifically expressed his 'appreciation of the spirit and gallantry with which the attack of the 20<sup>th</sup> November was carried out.'<sup>60</sup>

On 30 November, the 48<sup>th</sup> Brigade was relieved by the 49<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The Dubs went back to billets in the Hamelincourt - Ervillers camp site for a couple of days before, along with the rest of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division, they moved to St. Emilie on 2 December 1917. However, on the day the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF was relieved by the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (49<sup>th</sup> Brigade), i.e. 30 November, the Battalion came under a severe barrage of German artillery. This was just before the relief was complete at 3:00 p.m. as they were preparing to march back to Clonmel Camp. One platoon in particular 'suffered severely from enemy shellfire.'<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Report on attack by the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on Tunnel Trench. Note Complex matrix networks (or 'laddered' wiring) allowed communications to continue even with several line breaks as wired communications always failed during attacks. See Gannon, Paul, <https://Eandt.Theiet.Org/Content/Articles/2014/06/Ww1-First-World-War-Communications-and-the-Tele-Net-of-Things/>, The Institution of Engineers and Technology.

<sup>57</sup> War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Report on attack by the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on Tunnel Trench.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Report on attack by the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on Tunnel Trench. See also Denman, Terence, p.128. Capt. Fitzgibbon is a great uncle of Mr Liam O Carroll. Member of RDF Assoc. The Granatenwerfer was a German WWI grenade thrower which bridged the gap between hand-thrown grenades and the light Minenwerfers. See also McCollum, Ian, <https://www.forgottenweapons.com/granatenwerfer-16/>, Forgotten Weapons.Com.

<sup>59</sup> War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Letter from Major-General Hickie to O.C 10<sup>th</sup> RDF, 26 November 1917.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 30 November 1917.

The shelling may have been retaliatory because British artillery was active all that day and night occasionally using 'chemical shells' specifically targeting a front line German headquarters.<sup>62</sup> According to the diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. H. Traverse and four other ranks were killed outright; twelve other ranks were badly wounded.<sup>63</sup> In fact, nine men from the battalion died on 30 November. The youngest recorded was 40937 Pte. Thomas Smith, age nineteen, from Lancashire. He had formerly served in the East Lancashire Regiment. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. James Hector Traverse was twenty years of age, from St. Helens in Lancashire. 29073 Pte. Hugh James Cullen was twenty-seven, a married man from Knockenarrigan, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow. Six of the men were buried in Croisilles British Cemetery, France.<sup>64</sup> Having come through the attack on Tunnel Trench safely with so few casualties, the loss of these men preparing to march back to camp feeling the job done was an awful tragedy. They were the last men to die from the battalion in 1917.

Having travelled to St. Emilie at 8:00 p.m. on 5 December, the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF went into the front line in the Lempire Defences and relieved the 7<sup>th</sup> Kings' (Liverpool) Regiment.<sup>65</sup> For the remaining days of December 1917, they carried out the usual routine of trench rotations interspersed with training in the frost and snow. One of their main tasks was to wire the outposts during the day with 'thick belts of wire.' The cover of mist resulting in low visibility gave them the opportunity to do the work. It was a dangerous task indeed. At night, the same wiring duties were carried out.<sup>66</sup> They spent Christmas Day in the front line, manning the outposts along St. Patrick's Valley on the eastern edge of Malassise Farm experiencing the 'usual activity' of German shelling throughout the day.<sup>67</sup> The Germans over the wire may have celebrated their Christmas Day a bit later than 25 December because the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF diary noted that at midnight on 27 December, 'bells were heard ringing and a band playing behind the enemy's lines. Neither the exact location of, nor the reason, for this has been ascertained.'<sup>68</sup> Whether they were celebrating Christmas or not, the men of the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF couldn't have cared less, because on 29 December they were relieved by the 7<sup>th</sup> Leinsters. They went by train to billets in Hamel for a bath, a well-earned rest and a good old-fashioned Dubs New Year's Eve knees up. Their battalion strength was healthy enough going into 1918 with forty-seven officers and 796 men of other ranks.<sup>69</sup>

The RDF casualty balance statement at the end of 1917 was better than it was in 1916. The gains at Wijtschate were offset with the losses at Frezenberg Ridge. Bad and all as the losses were at Arras in April and Frezenberg Ridge in August, the losses the regiment suffered in 1917 (952) were less than they were in 1916 (1,338); a drop of some 28%. Perhaps lessons were being learned in how to stay alive longer in and out of the trenches. However, 1918 awaited them with disbandment, amalgamations of battalions and, of course, the German offensive in March of that year.

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<sup>62</sup> *War Diary 16th (Irish) Division*. 30 November 1917. See also *War Diary 48th Brigade*. Intelligence Summary No.54 of 30 November 1917.

<sup>63</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 30 November 1917.

<sup>64</sup> [Http://www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) And *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919, Part 73 Royal Dublin Fusiliers*.

<sup>65</sup> *War Diary 10th Royal Dublin Fusiliers*. 1-5 December 1917.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 17-27 December 1917.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 25 December 1917.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 27 December 1917.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 30 December 1917.

Tables 10 and 11 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 1917.<sup>70</sup>

Table 11 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

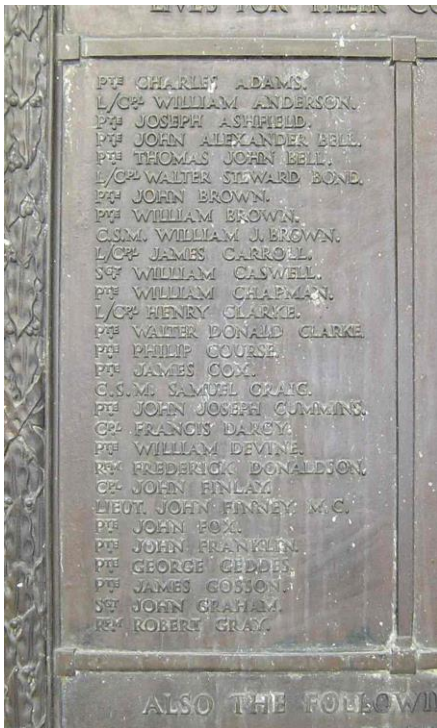
Table 12  
1 January – 31 December 1917.

RDF battalion	All Ranks only KIA,DOW,D	% Irish in battalion	% of Irish born in battalion coming from Dublin
1 <sup>st</sup>	273	60.4	38.8
2 <sup>nd</sup>	141	59.6	42.9
6 <sup>th</sup>	19	68.4	46.2
7 <sup>th</sup>	29	51.7	40.0
8 <sup>th</sup>	103	67.0	50.7
9 <sup>th</sup>	180	65.0	53.0
8 <sup>th</sup> /9 <sup>th</sup>	14	64.5	45.0
10 <sup>th</sup>	155	85.7	33.3
Others	38	47.4	38.9
Total	952		

See bibliography for references and sources used in footnotes.

I would like to thank Sean Connolly, Hon-Secretary of the RDFA for his editorial skills in editing this edition of *The Blue Cap*.

<sup>70</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.



William Brown, 10<sup>th</sup> RDF from No. 35 Buckingham Street, Dublin. Name on War Memorial, Amiens Street (Connolly) Train Station, Dublin.

Photo from Irishwarmemorials.ie

## The Great Northern Railway War Memorial in Amien Street (Connolly) Train Station The story behind one of the names

### James Taylor, author and member of the RDFA

Lance Corporal William Patrick Browne who died while serving with the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Dublin Fusiliers was born in Dublin on 2 February 1896. He was the son of James and Mary Browne *née* Kelly, No. 35 Lower Buckingham Street, Dublin. His father, born in Co. Wicklow, was a railway porter; his mother was born in Co. Carlow. He was baptised at the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin on 5 February 1896. The 1901 Census shows the family at 5 Terrace Place, Dublin. By 1911 they were at No. 14 Buckingham Buildings, Dublin. There were five children William (15, a messenger), Ellen (12), James (10), Mary (7), Annie (5), and Michael (2).

William enlisted in the 10<sup>th</sup> RDF on 31 December 1915, age nineteen years and ten months, regimental number 25599. He worked as a railway servant. He was five foot ten inches tall. He was confined to barracks for three days for being absent from Tattoo on 8 June 1916. He arrived at Boulogne on 27 August 1916. In his will dated 6 October 1916, he left everything to his mother. He was admitted to No. 1 Field Ambulance on 7 November 1916

with a fever and transferred to the 26<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Etaples, on the 12 November. He was discharged and re-joined his unit on 22 December 1916. While he was away, his comrades took part in the battle to capture Beaumont Hamel, the final engagement of the Battle of the Somme.

On 15 April 1917, William suffered a gunshot wound in his right forehead. He was admitted to the 26<sup>th</sup> General Hospital, Etaples on the 17 April. His family was initially notified that he had been shot in the foot, 'Dangerously ill'. He died of wounds at 9.45 a.m. on 15 May 1917. He was buried in Etaples Military Cemetery. His effects were sent to his mother. His brother, Aircraftman James Browne, served with the RAF from 19 September 1918 to 14 September 1921. William's name is among those on the Memorial.



Left to right. Ellen Murphy, Dr Alasdair McDonnell, Bertie Ahern, Barbara Walsh, Dr Chris McGimpsey, Dr Mary Clarke, Tom Burke

## First World War commemorative events and activities of RDFA in 2017

**April 7:** Tom Burke presented a lecture to The Military History Society of Ireland at Griffith College, South Circular Road, Dublin. The lecture was based on Tom's book and titled: *From Messines to Malahide: Letters from Flanders of an Irish esoldier to his mother.*

**April 25:** The Annual Dawn Service of Remembrance was held at 6:30 a.m. in Grangegorman Military Cemetery, Blackhorse Avenue, Cabra, Dublin. The service reflected on the Irish and ANZAC Divisions who took the villages of Wijtschate and Messines respectively on 7 June 1917. At 7:30 p.m. an Irish / ANZAC Service of Remembrance took place in St. Ann's Church, Dawson Street, Dublin to commemorate the centenary of the joint liberation of Wijtschate and Messines by Irish and ANZAC troops on 7 June 1917.

**May 19:** The RDFA and Dublin City Library and Archive presented a seminar titled: *Messines Peace Park – Its contribution to Irish / British reconciliation ?* The seminar took place in the Council Chamber, Dublin City Hall, Dublin. Our speakers were former Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern; Dr Alasdair McDonnell MP, SDLP; Dr Chris McGimpsey Official Unionist Party and Ms Barbara Walsh, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. The seminar is a joint project between the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association and Dublin City Library and Archive. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Brendan Carr, formally opened the seminar. Thanks to Dublin City Archivist, Dr Mary Clarke, her colleague and Deputy City Archivist Ms Ellen Murphy, Tom Burke RDFA and Paddy Harte Junior who read Peace Pledge to formally close the seminar. For details of seminar proceedings and speeches see:

<http://www.dublincity.ie/story/messines-peace-park-its-contribution-irish-british-reconciliation>

**May 25:** Book launch of Tom Burke's book *From Messines to Carrick Hill: Writing Home from the Great War* by Minister Charles Flanagan T.D., the then Minister for Foreign Affairs at Hodges Figgis, 56-58 Dawson Street, Dublin.

**May 31:** The National Library of Ireland presented in words and music, *From Messines to Carrick Hill: Writing Home from The Great War*. Set within the moving story of the lead up to the Battle of Wijtschate-Messines Ridge in June 1917, the letters of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Michael Wall written from Flanders to his mother in Carrick Hill in Malahide, Dublin, were read by actors with interludes of poetry, music and historical narrative that contextualised the readings. Our thanks goes to Brid O'Sullivan of the National Library of Ireland for arranging the actors and musicians. Michael Wall was played by Daniel Monaghan, Michael's mother was played by Cathy Belton and Michael's brother Barney was played by Daniel Norden. After the readings and music, Ronan Kavanagh, a distant relative of Michael Wall, ended a very emotional evening by singing "Willie McBride".





H.R.H Prince William and  
Brian Moroney RDFA at reception in the Island of Ireland Peace Park, Messines, 7 June 2017.

**June 6 to 9:** RDFA committee members Brian Moroney and Capt. (retd) Seamus Greene superbly organised and ran a wonderful battlefield tour of Wijtschate and Messines. Thirty-one members of the RDFA attended the official centenary commemorations of the Battle of Wijtschate and Messines in the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines on 7 June 2017. The ceremony commenced at 2.00 p.m. on 7 June with the arrival of An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD, H.R.H. Prince William Duke of Cambridge and H.R.H. Princess Astrid, Princess of Belgium and the laying of wreaths at the Peace Tower by all three parties. Wreaths were also laid by representatives of the German, Australian and New Zealand governments. Readings from Irish and British defence forces included *After My Last Song* by Francis Ledwidge and from the letters of Lieut. Michael Wall, 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. Later in the day, a second and more discreet ceremony was held at Wijtschate. A bronze plaque telling the story of John Meeke and Willie Redmond was unveiled by members of the Redmond and Meeke families on the road which marked the divisional boundaries between the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Divisions on 7 June 1917. Prince William was introduced to RDFA veteran of many a trip, Nicholas Broughall. To his credit, the Prince didn't betray even a hint of nervousness at meeting such an exalted personage. Master of Ceremonies here was Carol Walker MBE of The Somme Association. Over the following days, Brian had arranged visits to Langemark German Cemetery, Artillery Wood Cemetery the resting place of Francis Ledwidge, site of the Irish Memorial on Frezenberg Ridge and finally Pond Farm Museum where John Doolan, ex- Royal Engineers, took a keen interest in the WW1 tank being constructed. For a detailed account of the 2017 tour, members should contact Seamus Moriarity at: [Seamusmoriarity@dublin.com](mailto:Seamusmoriarity@dublin.com)

**June 18:** a wreath laying service at the London Cenotaph was organised by the Combined Irish Regiments Association, London. Members of the RDFA attended.

**July 8: Saturday afternoon:** A State-led commemoration in conjunction with The Royal British Legion annual wreath-laying ceremony was held at the Irish National War Memorial Gardens, Islandbridge, Dublin. Members of the RDFA attended. And Capt.(retd) Seamus Green paraded the RDFA Standard.



Seamus, Erwin, Tom and Sean at the unveiling of the memorial at Frezenberg Ridge Memorial 18 August 2017.

**July 9:** The National Day of Commemoration was held at The Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin; members of the RDFA attended

**August 18:** The unveiling took place of a memorial to the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) and 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division at Frezenberg Ridge, Ypres. This memorial was initiated and mainly funded by The Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association. Thanks go to all regimental associations, members and friends who kindly donated to the memorial. As ever, special thanks must to Erwin Ureel who initiated the project.

**November 3:** To remember the fallen, a Mass was held at City Quay Church, Dublin. This Mass is annually arranged by The Royal British Legion, Dublin Metropolitan Branch.

**November 5:** Ecumenical Service of Remembrance was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.

**December 1:** As ever, special thanks to Brian Moroney and his wife Theresa for running the RDFA annual dinner at the Masonic Hall, Molesworth Street, Dublin. It was a great night and thanks, Brian and Theresa.

### Exhibitions and other events relating to WW1 and 1917

The successful Dublin City Library and Archive and RDFA Somme exhibition travelled around Dublin city and county libraries throughout 2017. In late February 2017, it was on display at Raheny Library. In March it went to Coolock Library, both on Dublin's north side. It then travelled to Ballyfermot Library in April.

The National Library of Ireland in Kildare Street, Dublin continued to present their on-going First World War exhibition titled *World War Ireland: Exploring Irish Experience*. Guided tours of the exhibition were offered by the library on the second Thursday of every month.

The National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks in Dublin continued with their Soldiers and Chiefs exhibition much of which is related to the First World War with some RDF items on display and documents contained in the museum archive.

The RDFA Archive in Dublin City Library and Archive continues to grow. Some fascinating documents relating to the Not Forgotten Society in Ireland were deposited in the archive during 2017. Details can be found online by searching for "Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association Archive". There is a link to the items which can be viewed online. The Dublin City Archivist is Dr Mary Clarke at: [Mary.Clarke@dublincity.ie](mailto:Mary.Clarke@dublincity.ie) One interesting deposit to the archive in 2017 was a Mace belonging to Newtownpark Fife and Drum Band. The Mace was handed to Dr Mary Clarke by Mr Norman Sinnott in the presence of Dublin's then Lord Mayor Mr Brendan Carr at The Mansion House, Dublin on 27 February 2017. At the outbreak of the First World War, members of the band joined the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

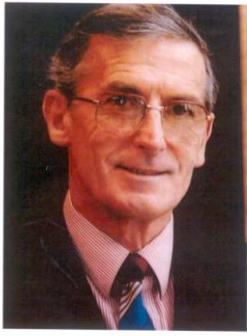


YOUNG IRELAND FLUTE AND DRUM BAND, NEWTOWN PARK, BLACKROCK.  
Winners of the All-Ireland Championship, 1911 - 1912



Back Row: J. Lagan, W. Larkin, B. Ryan, F. Long Vice President, J. Anderson, H. Connor, J. McGovern, C. Tall Blk. Secretary and F. Newman.  
2nd Row: T. Dragan, M. Larkin, F. O'Brien, J. Lally, F. Brown Staff Master, J. Blinn, J. Walker Conductor, J. Reynolds, J. Maher and T. Hony.  
3rd Row: J. Ryan, A. Kavan, P. Mullen, W. Long, W. O'Brien, P. Ryan and W. Tall Treasurer.  
Front Row: M. O'Brien, R. Bould, J. Long, F. Connor, C. Tall and A. Lally.

The Young Ireland Fife and Drum Band,  
Newtownpark, 1911-1912.  
The Mace held by man to left of bass drum player.



Des Byrne

11th February 1934 – 5th October 2017.

## We Will Remember Them – Members of the RDFA who passed on in 2017

One of our original and active members of the RDFA, Des Byrne, passed away on 5 October 2017. Des was a member of The Journey of Reconciliation Trust committee who under the joint chairmanship of Paddy Harte and Glenn Barr, were responsible for the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines. Des was a great believer in the ideals of the Peace Park and work of the RDFA. Both he and Lieut.-General Jerry McMahon, who sadly also passed away on 19 January 2018, joined the RDFA in 2000. Des and his wife Kathleen were regular attendees on our tours to France and Flanders. Both trained singers, his favourite song was *Off in the Stilly Night* which he would sing at our annual dinners in the Masonic Hall, Dublin. On

one occasion, he actually had the distinction of singing his beloved song at the Menin Gate Last Post ceremony. We pay our respects and offer our thoughts to Des, his wife Kathleen, daughters Ciara and Isolde.



Glen Barr O.B.E 1942-2017

Three weeks after Des died, Glen Barr O.B.E died on 27 October 2017. Glen, or Glennie as he was known to friends and family, was a proud Ulsterman who believed in a reconciled Ireland; an island of Ireland at peace with itself. Like Des, Glen had great respect for the work of the RDFA. Both Glen and Paddy Harte, who died on 8 January 2018, now hold their rightful place in modern Irish history for their magnificent achievement in the Island of Ireland Peace Park at Messines. An active trade unionist for most of his life, Glen did a lot of honourable work for the youth in his community and beyond. We offer our respects to his wife Isa, three sons and daughter. For an obituary of Glen, see The Irish Times 28 October 2017.



Niall Leinster RDFA on parade with the RDFA Standard at Menin Gate, June 2017.  
Also on parade was Frank Walsh with the 18<sup>th</sup> Foot Royal Irish Regiment Association Standard.



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