

Summary of Service:

4th August 1914: Tientsin, Northern China. 23rd September 1914: Landed at Lao Shan Bay for operations in conjunction with Japanese forces against German garrison at Tsingtao. 4th December 1914: Embarked at Hong Kong for Plymouth. 12th January 1915: Stationed at Rugby as part of 87th Brigade, 29th Division. 17th March 1915: Embarked at Avonmouth for Egypt. 29th March 1915: Arrived at Alexandria. 11th April 1915: Mudros. 25th April 1915: Landed at Gallipoli. 11th January 1916: Evacuated and arrived at Egypt. 15th March 1916: Arrived at Marseilles as part of 29th Division. 11th November 1918: Part of 87th Brigade, 29th Division near Lessines, Belgium. 13th December 1918: Cologne, Germany. 4th April 1919: A cadre strength, embarked Dunkirk for Brecon arriving on 5th April.

TSINGTAO

In August, 1914, the 2nd Battalion had nearly completed two years of its tour at Tientsin, in Northern China. In early August the Japanese entered the war and sent a division to capture the German port of Tsingtao. The Twenty-Fourth and half the 36th Sikhs were sent from Tientsin in September to represent the Allies and take part in the capture of the place. After much hard digging in heavy rain and in great discomfort Tsingtao fell on 7th November, at a cost to the battalion of 14 men killed or died of wounds or disease and 2 officers and 34 men wounded. 'Tsingtao' is a battle honour held by no other British Regiment.

GALLIPOLI

On 12th January, 1915, the battalion on its return from China landed at Devonport, and, with the 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB), 1st Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and 1st Border Regiment joined the 87th Brigade of the 29th Division billeted at Coventry, Rugby and neighbouring towns. This, the last of the foreign service Regular Divisions, after a memorable inspection by His Majesty the King, left England in March for the attack on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The object of the expedition was to open a passage for ships through the Straits of Helles into the Sea of Marmora and on through the Bosphorus at Constantinople into the Black Sea, thus enabling Russia to export the grain needed by the Allies and to import munitions of war.

On 25th April, 1915, the 29th Division made its historic 'Landing at Helles', a feat of arms which could have been achieved by no soldiers in the world but seasoned British infantry. They landed in broad daylight on open beaches defended by barbed wire covered at close range by rifles and machine guns. The battalion landed three Companies at S Beach on the shores of Morto Bay just inside the Straits at the comparatively light cost of 2 officers and 18 men killed and drowned and 2 officers and 40 men wounded. A Company was detached to land with the KOSB and Marines at Y Beach on the Mediterranean shore. This attack though successful was unsupported and had to withdraw, A Company making a most gallant counter attack with the bayonet to cover the retirement. It had heavy fighting, losing the Company Commander and 26 men killed and missing, and an officer and 42 men wounded.

The Battalion served throughout the rest of the Gallipoli campaign. In the efforts to advance from Cape Helles in May and June it fought with great determination and stubbornness. In August it moved round with the rest of the 29th Division to Suvla Bay, where a new landing by five fresh divisions from England had been brought to a standstill. In a final effort here the 29th put in a most gallant though unsuccessful attack on Scimitar Hill, in which the battalion suffered nearly 300 casualties. Brought back to Helles in October, the battalion took part in the final evacuation of the Peninsula on 8th January 1916, and was sent to Egypt.

FRANCE AND FLANDERS

In March 1916, the 29th Division arrived in France. Its first big action was on 1st July 1916, the opening day of the great Battle of the Somme, when it attacked the impregnable position at Beaumont Hamel. The 2nd Battalion advancing south of the village in the leading line was mown down by machine guns in the first few minutes and lost 11 officers and 235 men killed and missing and 4 officers and 149 men wounded out of a total of 21 officers and 578 men. Some gallant fellows reached the German wire 300 yards away, but neither here nor at other places did the Division's attack succeed.

The battalion was reformed and after periods in various parts of the Line fought most gallantly at Monchy Le Preux in April and May 1917, where Sergeant White won the Victoria Cross for magnificent leadership and self-sacrifice. During an attack the leading company, D Company, was held up by machine guns which had escaped our artillery fire. Both company officers were hit. Sergeant White, seeing that all depended on these machine guns being put out of action, made for the nearest one. Followed by Corporal Nowell, he dashed at the party covering it, shot three and bayoneted a fourth, and was within a few yards of the gun when he caught its full discharge and fell riddled with bullets. His self-sacrifice diverted the fire from the other attackers.

CAMBRAI 1917

The 2nd Battalion fought through the desperate Third Battle of Ypres in the Summer and Autumn of 1917, and then at Cambrai in November and December it earned what is perhaps its greatest honour in the War.

Starting at dawn on 20th November three divisions preceded by 400 tanks and covered by a terrific bombardment broke through the great Hindenburg Line and the Hindenburg Support Line, built by the Germans after months of work and thought by them to be impregnable. The 29th Division followed, and passed through to secure the crossings of the Scheldt Canal 4,000 yards on between Masnières and Marcoing, and to get a footing in the Beaufort Line 1,500 yards beyond the canal.

On reaching the canal the Battalion was stopped by rifle and machine gun fire from houses on the far bank covering the lock where A Company was trying to cross, and suffering heavy casualties. Without waiting for orders Captain Mumford, who was in reserve behind A Company, brought C Company forward. He worked round to the flank under heavy fire from the machine guns until he could enfilade them and give covering fire. His initiative was successful, and both A and C Companies got across at the lock. About 2 p.m. the Inniskillings went through to take the Beaufort Line, but they were unable to reach it.

Next day the attack was renewed, the 2nd Battalion advancing very gallantly with insufficient artillery support under heavy machine gun fire from the front and from Masnières Village on the right. B, D and A Companies from right to left advanced through C Company with the 1 KOSB on their left. The battalion reached its objective, but neither the 86th Brigade in Masnières nor the 1 KOSB made much progress. Finding very little cover in the enemy's line B and D Companies lost heavily. D Company lost both their officers, but CQMS Ruffle took command, and led his men into the position most gallantly. An immediate German counter-attack drove out the few attackers who had survived the devastating machine gun fire. CQMS Ruffle, whose leadership had been so marked, was last seen fighting with the bayonet.

The men falling back were rallied at Battalion Headquarters and by their bold front and steady shooting stopped the further progress of the counter attack and enabled a new line to be taken up and dug.

On 23rd November the battalion was relieved, and on 28th occupied the bridge head defences covering Marcoing and the Canal crossings. They were here on the morning of the 30th November, when the great German counter attack developed on the southern face of the salient formed by the Third Army's advance. The first intimation the battalion got of any attack was seeing Germans advancing along the far side of the canal in rear of them towards Marcoing. Battalion Headquarters turned out and opened fire. The Germans stopped and a counter attack from Marcoing drove them back. D Company was then sent to help the battalion in front, half of B Company to the 86th Brigade in Masnières and the rest moved back during the day to the south side of the canal where they threw back a flank facing south, their left in touch with 86th Brigade in Les Rues Vertes, a village south of the canal and opposite Masnières, their right continued by the

Newfoundland Regiment. On 1st December heavy attacks were made on Les Rues Vertes and Masnières and in the bridge head defences. D Company north of the canal were thrown in to help in Masnières and A Company were just on the edge of the fighting in Les Rues Vertes. During the night 1st/2nd December 1917 the 86th Brigade was withdrawn from Les Rues Vertes and Masnières, and a new line was taken up west of those places. This enabled A Company to be drawn into reserve.

The 2nd December 1917 was fairly quiet and was spent in improving defences. On the 3rd December a heavy bombardment was renewed, and about 11 a.m. the enemy advancing in great force from Les Rues Vertes rushed the front trenches held by B and C Companies, but were stopped there by the fire of A Company and Battalion Headquarters in the reserve trench about 400 yards further back. The men fought magnificently in spite of bullets and shells bursting on the parapet. An officer in the trench was calling for ammunition to be passed along; as he spoke a shell mortally wounded the man next to him. Even as he sank down this gallant fellow handed the officer a bandolier of ammunition. With such men imbued with the fighting spirit of the 2nd Twenty-Fourth the enemy was held. That evening the battalion was relieved. They took out of action 3 officers, the medical officer and 73 men.

In this great German attack the 29th Division were holding the point of the salient formed by the original advance of 20th November. The Germans drove in the three divisions holding the southern face of the salient and for a time overran the 29th's battery positions. At the same time fierce attacks developed on the northern face where the 12th Battalion, South Wales Borderers gained much honour at Bourlon Wood. The stand of the 29th Division enabled the Guards to counter-attack, the line was restored, and the situation saved. But for the steadfastness of the 29th Division a great disaster would have ensued. The 2nd Battalion played a part second to none in one of the greatest actions of this famous Division.

The 2nd Battalion served the rest of the War in France. It helped to stem the German offensive on the Lys in April 1918, and joined in the final advance to victory, taking part in the re-capture of Gheluvelt, the scene of the 1st Battalion's historic stand in 1914, and crossing the Rhine to form part of the Army of Occupation in Cologne. As in the case of the 1st Battalion, the 2nd Battalion Colours were brought out from the Depot and the Battalion had the honour, after four years of warfare, of carrying them into Germany.

