

**Summary of Service:**

**7th (Service) Battalion** was formed at Brecon on 14th September 1914 and moved to Seaford, Sussex as part of 67th Brigade, 22nd Division. December 1914: Moved to St. Leonards on Sea, Sussex in billets. April 1915: Returned to Seaford. End of May 1915: Moved to Aldershot, Hampshire. 6th September 1915: Landed at Boulogne, France. 10th October 1915: Embarked at Marseilles, France for Salonika arriving on 9th November 1915. 30th September 1918: Part of 67th Brigade, 22nd Division at Hasanli, north west of Lake Doiran, Macedonia. 29th November 1918: Battalion disbanded.

**8th (Service) Battalion** was formed at Brecon on 14th September 1914 and moved to Seaford, Sussex as part of 67th Brigade, 22nd Division. December 1914: Moved to Hastings, Sussex in billets. April 1915: Returned to Seaford. End of May 1915: Moved to Aldershot, Hampshire. 6th September 1915: Landed at Boulogne, France. 30th October 1915: Embarked at Marseilles, France for Salonika arriving on 12th November 1915. 30th June 1918: Transferred to 65th Brigade, 22nd Division. 30th September 1918: Part of 65th Brigade, 22nd Division north west of Lake Doiran, Macedonia. 6th December 1918: Amalgamated with 7th Battalion.

### **FRANCE, MACEDONIA, DOIRAN**

Both the 7th (Service) and 8th (Service) Battalions were raised in the middle of September, 1914, and both were posted to the 67th Brigade of the 22nd Division. In September 1915, they went to France, but after a short spell in the line their Division was sent out to Salonika, the port of Macedonia. In this theatre of war the Serbians had been struggling hard against the Germans and Austrians from the north and the Bulgarians from the east. To help them the British and French had decided to send 150,000 men from France.

When the 7th and 8th Battalions arrived the Allies were already falling back, and in December, before the two battalions had had a chance of trying conclusions with the Bulgarians, a defensive position covering Salonika from the north was taken up.

After the winter of hard work in cold and wet weather on bad and monotonous rations the Allies began an advance northwards, and eventually took up line of which the British held the right sector from Lake Doiran to the River Vardar, a distance of about 15 miles, with French and Serbians further west about Monastir. Here, in spite of several abortive attempts to get forward, the line remained until September 1918. In these 2½ years, the 7th and 8th saw no heavy fighting, but took part in many raids and diversions, and were active in patrolling and in maintaining their ascendancy over the Bulgarians. They were much commended for their gallantry, determination and steady hard work under great difficulties of climate and discomfort. In the hot weather there were flies, dust, dysentery, and malaria. In the winter came rain, mud and icy winds which brought on fever in those who had already had malaria. At times battalions had as many as 340 sick daily, and the 7th Battalion sent 300 men to hospital between May and July 1918.

### **8th BATTALION RAID ON FLAT IRON HILL**

In June 1918, the 8th Battalion was transferred from the 67th to the 65th Brigade, and shortly afterwards was detailed to raid a Bulgarian outpost on Flat Iron Hill, a point about 1,000 yards from the British line and protected by two substantial belts of wire. The raiders, 6 officers and 100 men, were divided into two wire-cutting parties carrying Bangalore torpedoes (long tubes full of explosives to be thrust under the enemy's wire and then fired), two assault parties, a blocking party, a demolition party and a reserve. It was not until the Bangalores had been fixed under the wire that the enemy became alarmed and put up Verrey lights. The Bangalores were promptly exploded, cutting gaps through which the raiders rushed just as the Bulgarian barrage came down. The blocking party made its way to the north end of the work, bombing two dug-outs on the way, both full of men, and started building a block. The demolition party blew up several dug-outs and, after spending 20 minutes in the enemy's lines and having secured satisfactory identifications, the raiders withdrew according to programme with a loss of only two men killed and nine wounded.

This exploit elicited the warm congratulations of the Divisional and Corps Commanders.

### **7th BATTALION - DOIRAN 1918**

In September 1918, the Allies decided on a further effort to defeat the Bulgarians. The main attack was to be delivered well west of the Vardar by the French and Serbians, while the British once more assaulted the positions between that river and Lake Doiran. In this attack the British would have the assistance of the Greeks who, previously neutral, had now joined the Allies.

The Allies had a formidable task. The Bulgarians had all the advantage of observation, their lines were well provided with deep dugouts and protected by thick belts of wire, and they had many machine guns.

The attack started at 0515 hrs on 18th September, after a three days bombardment. The 67th Brigade was detailed to capture the Grand Couronné, the key of the defences in the right sector, in conjunction with the 3rd Greeks on their left. The 7th Battalion took the left of the Brigade, linking up with the Greeks and slightly in rear of them.

The two battalions on the right reached their second objective, the line of three prominent features known as the Hilt, the Knot and the Tassel, but were unable to progress further. The 7th, following the Greeks, cleared some trenches over which the Greeks had passed, and pushed on unsupported on either flank against the Grand Couronné.

The advance was most difficult, the ground being rough and rocky, much intersected by wire, and in places precipitous. The darkness of the early morning and the clouds of dust and smoke made direction hard to keep. Only a few gaps in the wire had been cut, the machine guns had been difficult to locate and to silence, and as the 7th pushed forward their fire grew steadily more intense. After losing heavily, the 7th reached the wire in front of the 'Rockies' trenches, nearly a mile from their starting line. The two right battalions had not been able to get forward from their second objective and most of the 3rd Greeks had fallen behind. Thus from both flanks machine gun concentrated upon the 7th and though, when the barrage lifted, the men dashed at the gaps in the wire, they were bowled over in numbers by the stream of bullets, more deadly now because on the barrage lifting the smoke and dust cleared away and the machine gunners could see their targets clearly. A mere handful struggled through the wire and into the trenches, but far too few to effect anything in face of the strong trench garrisons. These few men were driven out and were rallied by two wounded officers on the Tongue, in line with the Knot. But the Bulgarians had recaptured both the Hilt and the Knot, and the survivors had finally to retire to our own trenches. Not more than 50 men were left, and half of these were suffering from gas. Of the 17 officers who went into the attack only the Medical Officer remained unhurt. The Commanding Officer, Colonel Burges, of the Gloucestershire Regiment, was recovered a few days later when the Bulgarians retired.

Disastrous as the day had been, the desperate and ensuring gallantry with which the 7th had pressed the attack, and the skill and leadership of its Commanding Officer had been outstanding. For gallantry on this day Colonel Burges received the Victoria Cross, and the battalion won one DSO, three MCs, three DCMs, and six MMs. It also received as a unit the signal honour of the French Croix de Guerre, a decoration awarded to no other battalion in the Salonika Force, and to only four British units on the Western Front. The Croix de Guerre now has a place of honour in the Regimental Museum.

After further fighting, in which neither the 7th nor 8th Battalion took a serious part, the Bulgarians withdrew on 22nd September 1918, and the 7th, now 100 strong after bringing up every available man from the transport lines, moved forward and had the honour and satisfaction of occupying the Grand Couronné. On 30th September the Bulgarians surrendered. This marked the end of fighting for the two battalions, who by their cheerfulness in sickness and hardship and their magnificent fighting had earned for themselves a place of honour in the record of the Twenty-Fourth.