

CHAPTER 25 THE ELEVENTH DISBANDED

Long before the 7th and 8th Battalion had succeeded in bringing their pursuers to a stand two other battalions of The Queen's Own had been involved in the great struggle. Of these the 10th was the first to become engaged. Returning from Italy it had detrained in the neighbourhood of Doullens in the first week of March and had since then been quartered at Beaudricourt. The battalion had returned somewhat below establishment, but on March 16th it was brought well up to strength by a draft of five officers and 250 men. But this reinforcement was only available because a most regrettable measure had had to be adopted. On the Forty-First Division's return to France the order had gone out that it, too, was to be cut down to ten battalions, and as one of the junior units of the Division the 11th was among the three to be reduced.

March 1918
10th & 11th
Battalions

It may safely be asserted that on no other grounds would the 11th have been selected for reduction. The reputation it had so soon established as a fighting unit, which it had maintained and enhanced in action after action, the remarkable number of honours won by its officers and men, the fact that it was nearly always selected for any particularly difficult task, all marked it out as one of the battalions that the Division could least afford to lose. Brig-Gen. Towsey, under whom it had served so long, had always sworn by the 11th, whom he was wont to call "Corfe's Irregulars," and both he and the Divisional Commander, MajorGen. Lawford, were emphatic in their regret at having to part from such a battalion, and in their recognition of the merit of its achievements. The junior Service battalion had certainly added pages to the annals of The

11th Battalion

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Queen's Own by which even its records are notably enriched; it had from the first set itself the ideal of reaching the standards of discipline, determination, tenacity and enterprise, which membership of the Regiment involved. It had attained that aim in no meagre measure.

March 1918
10th & 11th
Battalions

While the bulk of the 11th went off to Reinforcement or Entrenching battalions the draft which joined the 10th included Colonel Corfe himself, whose splendid example and leadership had been so important a factor in the great successes of the 11th. With him came Major Jiminez, Captains R. Kerr and C. F. Hall and Lieut. Hale, Colonel Corfe taking over command of the battalion from Major Wallis, who had been commanding since March 1st when Colonel Beattie had left on a month's special leave.

When the bombardment which crashed down on the British lines on the morning of March 21st proclaimed in unmistakable fashion the beginning of the German attack, there was little delay about getting the Forty-First Division to the front. It was actually on its way to Albert when the battle opened, but its destination was altered and the trains diverted, and before midnight the 10th R.W.K. had detrained at Achiet le Grand. Next afternoon it pushed forward to Fremicourt on the Bapaume road, and at 5 o'clock orders were received to prepare a position South of Beugnatre which was to join up with the 122nd Brigade on the Beugnatre-Bapaume road. The work had barely been started before the order was cancelled, and the 10th was ordered forward to Beugny to relieve the troops who were holding a line N. and N.E. of that village. These troops belonged for the most part to the Sixth Division, which had been in front line near Lagnicourt when the attack started and had been forced back after two days of heavy fighting and stubborn resistance to a line four miles in rear.

March 21st
10th Battalion

March 22nd
See sketch 43

By 3 a.m. on March 23rd the 10th was in position, and before daybreak new trenches had been dug, and all

March 23rd

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four companies were in line, A. B C and D from right to left, facing about North just West of Morchies. On its left, though not actually in touch with it, for there proved to be a gap on this flank of nearly 1,000 yards, was the 124th Brigade opposite Vaulx-Vraucourt, on its right the 11th Queen's with the Nineteenth Division beyond them and nearer Beugny. The position was not a good one, the line ran through a valley and observation of what was happening on the flanks was difficult. During the early morning, however, the enemy made little serious attempt to press, though he started shelling about 8 a.m. and machine-guns caused some casualties. One of these was successfully rushed by a patrol ably led by Sergt. White, the crew being killed or taken, but at first the battalion had had few good targets. About 10 a.m. the enemy began to show in strength, delivering an attack in mass which was beaten back, while a whole battalion advanced over the ridge on the 10th's left flank, giving its Lewis-gunners a chance of which they took full advantage. From this time the shelling got heavier, and the enemy attacked repeatedly.

March 23rd
1918
10th Battalion

Against the 10th they made no progress, but between 10 and 11 the enemy pushed forward through the gap on the left of the 10th, and about the same time the troops on the right of the 11th Queen's retired. Soon after midday the Germans reached Lebuquière, South of the Bapaume road. On this the Forty-First Division issued orders for its advanced line to retire in conformity with the Nineteenth Division, who were falling back on Beugny. These orders apparently reached The Queen's, some of whom, though not their battalion headquarters, withdrew about 2.30 p.m. as ordered, but they never got to the 10th R.W.K., who continued to maintain their position long after their flanks had been uncovered by the retirement and though the enemy were some distance in rear. Indeed it was 6 p.m. before the Germans finally managed to overcome

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their resistance. About 1 p.m. a runner who had been sent with a message to Brigade Headquarters had returned reporting that the enemy were between the battalion and its brigade and that it was impossible to get through, and shortly afterwards the enemy had begun to threaten from the flanks the trench and sunken road in which the headquarters of the two battalions (1) were defending themselves. For some time these were kept at bay, but converging attacks in increasing strength at last compelled the survivors to surrender to save the numerous wounded who had been brought in to this post. Colonel Corfe himself was among the wounded and the position was perfectly hopeless. The front line companies held out as long, they beat off all attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, until all ammunition was expended. Casualties had been heavy and the position had long been hopeless. But their long stand had been of great value in keeping the Germans back and enabling the main position of the Division to be maintained intact.

March 23rd
1918
10th Battalion

To this line but few of the 10th ever got back. Captain Holden displayed great resource in extricating a substantial part of A Company³ fighting his way back to the new defensive line in front of Beugnatre through the enemy who threatened to envelope

him; here he collected his men with a few survivors of the other companies, but they were a scanty remnant, well under 100 in all. In this work he received great assistance from 2nd Lieut. Cheel and C.S.M. Cooper, both of whom distinguished themselves greatly. Colonel Corfe himself, Major Jiminez, Captains Waydelin and Hall, ten subalterns and over 400 men were returned as "missing." Two officers, 2nd Lieuts. Percy and Cooper, were wounded and the men known to be either killed or wounded came to nearly 50. Those who had reached Beugnatre were promptly reinforced with all the details, some 70 or so, whom Major Wallis

(1) The 11th Queen's had their headquarters in touch with the 10th.

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could collect from the transport lines, but they saw no more fighting in this battle, being placed in reserve positions near Bihucourt, when next evening they fell back to Gommecourt. Here a defensive flank was taken up reaching back to Fonquevillers, but on the evening of the 25th the whole 123rd Brigade, now a mere fragment, was withdrawn to Bienvillers to be hastily reorganized before being put into line again near Ablainzeville on the 27th, by which time the 10th's "fighting strength" had been brought up to 18 officers and 204 men, with Major Wallis in command. The 10th's share in the great battle had been briefer than that of either the 7th or 8th, and it had not been fortunate. The miscarriage of the orders which should have reached it turned its own tenacity into a misfortune. It was hard in particular on Colonel Corfe, whose fine record as the commander of a hard-fighting battalion was likely to have brought him before long to the command of a brigade, that his first action at the head of the 10th should have ended in his falling into the enemy's hands. But the fight which the 10th had put up did not go unrecognized; Captain Holden received the D.S.O., 2nd Lieut. Cheel the M.C., C.S.M. Cooper a bar to the D.C.M., Sergt. White the D.C.M., and L/Cpl. Laing and Ptes. Russell and Taylor the M.M.

March 1918
10th Battalion

Two days after misfortune had overtaken the 10th Battalion the 6th took up the effort to stem the German advance. This battalion had been pushed off in haste from Pont de Nieppe on the 23rd, and after a long and tiring journey in motor-buses had arrived at Bouzincourt just North of Albert early on March 25th. After some hours of waiting the 37th Brigade at last received orders to cross the Ancre and take up the line Montauban-Bazentin le Grand, but as it moved forward these orders were cancelled and Contalmaison substituted as its goal. However, as its leading battalion, The Queen's, reached Ovillers, the Forty-Seventh Division demanded the assistance of the brigade in a counter-

6th Battalion
March 25th
See sketch 44

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attack on Pozières on which place the Germans were reported to be advancing. The Queen's and the battalion were detailed for this but before the attack could be launched it also was cancelled and orders were issued to take up an outpost line outside the Bapaume-Albert road near Ovillers, the battalion being on the right of the brigade with the Forty-Seventh Division beyond it. In this position the night was spent. Patrols found Pozières unoccupied, so a screen was formed to cover the destruction of a vast dump at that village which was finally fired about 9.45 p.m. But a position East of the Ancre could no longer be maintained and during the night the Forty-Seventh Division

March 25th
1918
6th Battalion

and the fragments which had rallied on it fell back to the right bank, the 37th Brigade following suit as soon as the Forty-Seventh were across.

Crossing the Ancre at Aveluy Bridge the 36th Brigade were found taking up the position just West of the river, so the 37th moved upstream to continue the line to the North. Brigade Headquarters were established at Martinsart and the battalion took up its position in front of Aveluy Wood from opposite Authuille to a point due East of Mesnil, thence the 6th Queen's continued the line Northward to Hamel. Beyond The Queen's were portions of the Sixty-Third Division whom the Twelfth were relieving. The position was not bad as the ground rose fairly steeply from the Ancre, which at this point was quite a considerable obstacle, but there were scarcely any prepared defences. However, by this time the force and pace of the German advance had both abated. They had won much ground but they had paid dearly for their gains, and the difficulties of keeping their advanced troops supplied were already proving a serious handicap, and though they made many attacks these lacked the weight and power of their earlier efforts. That evening some few Germans got into Aveluy Wood, having apparently got through the line of A Company, but they were effect-

March 26th

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tively counter-attacked by Colonel Dawson with the personnel of his battalion headquarters and some Buffs, and driven back with heavy losses, two of their machine-guns being taken, while further to the right B beat off some assailants. A more serious attack on The Queen's was also repulsed and some prisoners taken and the brigade's line was successfully maintained, as was also the case all through the morning and afternoon of the 27th, though shelling increased. That evening, about 6 p.m., the Germans renewed their attack; they had already forced back the troops further to the left, and The Queen's had therefore to evacuate Hamel and throw back their flank. The pressure on the battalion was severe; one attack all along the line was beaten off, but a little later the enemy forced B Company back. Some Germans also got through a gap on the left, but 2nd Lieut. Guess organized a counterattack which drove them out and re-established the line, and B managed to make a stand along the line of the railway.

March 26th
1918
6th Battalion

March 27th

But the Germans were not done with. The next morning saw the battalion subjected to an intense bombardment and the enemy, who had made some progress further to the right in the direction of Bouzincourt, were able by means of enfilade machine-gun fire to make the railway cutting untenable. B Company fell back, therefore, about 11 a.m., but Colonel Dawson managed to form a defensive flank and to prevent the Germans advancing any further. A company of the 24th Royal Fusiliers, of the Second Division, was placed at his disposal and at 1.45, after half-an-hour's bombardment, he launched a counter-attack, using this company and all the reserves of the battalion. The stroke was delivered with great spirit and success, 2nd Lieut. Slade, who had already headed two counter-attacks, being well to the fore; the enemy was dislodged and thrust down the slopes into the valley, suffering heavily, and at 3 p.m. Colonel Dawson could report that the line had

March 28th

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been fully re-established. The determination, promptness and energy which he had displayed and which had inspired the battalion to put up so stout a fight were deservedly rewarded by yet another bar to his D.S.O., 2nd Lieuts. Guess and Slade

March 28th
1918
6th Battalion

receiving the M.C.

Next morning a battalion of the Second Division took over the line, but this did not mean a relief for the 37th Brigade, which merely side-stepped to the right and relieved the 5th Royal Berkshires due East of Bouzincourt. Here the battalion was again attacked that evening, but there was not much vigour in the attempt which was easily repulsed, and the incident was mainly notable because Colonel Dawson sustained yet another wound which incapacitated him for a couple of months, Major Cook (1) replacing him in command. That night, however, the Division was drawn back into Corps Reserve, and the battalion marched back to Warloy-Baillon for a four days' rest. Its casualties on the Ancre had not been heavy, 36 men had been killed or were missing, and in addition to Colonel Dawson, Lieut. Brook and 74 men had been wounded, losses which just about balanced the draft of 124 rank and file which had joined just as the battalion left the Lys front.

March 29th-30th

If by the time the 6th faced the German attacks these had lost some of the intensity which had made the onslaught of March 21st so formidable, it had had to withstand the advance in a hastily adopted and practically unprepared position, and its part in bringing the Germans to a standstill had been most creditable. The Twelfth Division had had to face no less than six German Divisions, and its achievement in standing up successfully against such odds was one of real importance. At the point where the Twelfth had planted itself across the Germans' path the line remained practically un

(1) Major Cook had been transferred to the 6th Queen's from the 7th East Surreys, when that battalion was disbanded in February, 1918.

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changed until August saw it begin to move back Eastward.

April 1918
6th Battalion

Actually it was not till the German offensive on the Lys opened that the Allied line from the Somme Northward towards Arras finally became "quiet." When the Twelfth Division went back to the line, on April 2nd/3rd, relieving the Seventeenth opposite Albert, the Germans were still keeping up their bombardments and making minor thrusts to gain local advantages, but they attempted no serious attack. This tour of duty lasted about ten days; the 6th R.W.K. spent the earlier part of it in Divisional reserve at Henencourt, which was very heavily shelled on April 3rd and again on the 5th, on which day the Division had to bring back its right a little to conform to the retirement of the Australians further South. From April 6th to 10th it was in the same trenches East of Bouzincourt as it had held on March 29th. Here it suffered severely from a very heavy bombardment, but no infantry attack followed the shelling. With its relief on the night of April 9th the 6th's part in the defence of Amiens came to an end. Its second tour of duty had cost it 10 killed and over 40 wounded, Captains Tuff and Green and 2nd Lieuts. Stow and G. E. Harris being among the latter.

If the final efforts of the Germans to force their way through to Amiens had not involved the 6th R.W.K. in any very heavy fighting this was not so with the 7th. Hastily replenished by the incorporation into it of the 12th Entrenching Battalion the re-constituted 7th had been thrust into the line on the evening of April 1st without any time to find itself or get together. It speaks volumes for the straits to which the British Command found itself reduced that after all the Eighteenth Division had gone through it should have been thrust back into the fighting, practically without rest and certainly

7th Battalion

without any real opportunity for reorganization. But the fragments of four British divisions who were holding the right of the British front S.E. of Amiens

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were in even worse plight, and on the night of March 29th/30th the Eighteenth, a battered but unbeaten remnant, took over the line from the river Luce to the Marcelcave-Cachy road. On its left was the Villers-Bretonneux plateau, possession of which gave observation over the Somme valley and Amiens itself and was therefore essential to our retention of Amiens. But the Cachy-Gentelles plateau, which the Eighteenth was covering, was scarcely less essential: it gave observation over the valley of the Ancre and Amiens, and its capture would have rendered Villers-Bretonneux untenable.

March 1918
7th Battalion
See sketch 45

At this moment the German advance south of the Somme had been checked on the approximate line Demuin-Aubercourt-Marcelcave-Sailly Laurette. But they were far from having shot their bolt, and were preparing for yet one more attack in force, which was delivered after daybreak on April 4th. But before this the 7th had been sharply engaged. The battalion had taken up its position East of Hangard Wood on the night of April 1st/2nd, having the 8th East Surreys on its left, and the 7th Bedfords on its right, between it and Hangard. In front of the Bedfords on a spur overlooking Aubercourt was a small copse, the capture of which would greatly improve the British line, and the battalion received orders to co-operate with the Bedfords in attacking it, partly by covering their advance with rifle and Lewis-gun fire, partly by pushing forward another company to link up with the new position which the Bedfords were to reach.

April 1918

At 7 p.m. on the 2nd the Bedfords launched their attack, covered by the fire of the 7th. The enemy had apparently seen the troops forming up and opened a heavy fire which brought the attack to a standstill. But the lookout man of the 7th mistook some German lights for the signal on which the assaulting company of the battalion was to go over and it accordingly dashed forward. It was met by heavy machine-gun fire, but

April 2nd

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persevered in face of it, reached a copse and succeeded in securing it and digging in: a defensive Rank was formed to link up with the battalion's line, and this was occupied by Captain MacDonald's company, which was brought up that evening. It proved in the end that this copse was not the real objective, but was one not marked on the map, but, although the flinty character of the ground made the work specially difficult to men as wearied by constant marching and fighting and lack of sleep and rest as were the 7th the new position was satisfactorily consolidated and was strengthened next day: it proved a useful acquisition because it gave command over the enemy's lines so that a German working party which was directed in the open at dawn could be fired upon and dispersed with loss. Two officers, Lieut. A. F. I. Jones and 2nd Lieut. Robinson, (1) were wounded in this operation, but the casualties were not very heavy.

April 1918
7th Battalion

April 3rd

That day (April 3rd) passed off quite uneventfully, but a German prisoner captured near the copse warned his captors that an attack in force would be made on the next morning, and his information proved correct, for April 4th brought the battalion a most strenuous time. At 5 a.m. the enemy's barrage opened and soon developed into a really heavy bombardment. An hour-and-a-half later his infantry swarmed forward. The 7th

April 4th

had two companies in its front line and met the attackers with a steady fire, in face of which and of the excellent barrage which the British artillery promptly put down, the Germans could not advance nearer than 300 yards from the British line. But further to the left the force of the attack broke through the Australians and flung them back almost to the outskirts of Villers-Bretonneux. The 7th Buffs on the left of the Eighteenth Division had to fall back and form a defensive flank.

(1) Cheshire Regiment, attached 7th R.W.K.

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A second advance against the R.W.K. early in the afternoon was no more successful than its predecessor, but a little later the attack was renewed in force. This time the Germans left the 7th out of the attack, pressing hard against the French at Hangard and on the 6th Northamptons, who had replaced the Bedfords. The French were ousted from Hangard, and to escape being rolled up the Northamptons had to go back, while simultaneously on the battalion's left the Germans broke through the Buffs and East Surreys, whom events further North had compromised. About 5 p.m., therefore, the 7th found the enemy coming through the wood East of the Demuin-Villers-Bretonneux road behind their left, while the retreat of the Northamptons had uncovered their right. But the company in reserve was brought up to form a flank facing North from Hangard Wood Eastward, and as long as their ammunition lasted those in front held on. Then with their retreat in grave danger - for the reserve company was hard put to it to hold its ground—the 7th fell back towards Hangard Wood, losing heavily from the German machine-guns. Here a stand was made, but the battalion had been forced back more than half way through the wood when relief came. The 8th Royal Berks, with the 7th Queen's beyond them, delivered a vigorous counter-attack which checked and thrust back the Germans on the left, beyond them two Australian battalions were even more successful, and to the right the Bedfords came up to help the Northamptons; and, thus covered, the French regained much of the lost ground. The evening closed with the Allied line thrust back but unbroken, and with the two all-important plateaux denied to the Germans. It had been a hard day for the 7th; four officers (Captain Dewdney, (1) 2nd Lieuts. Dainton, (1) Walker (1) and F. G. Norris (1)) had fallen, one (2nd Lieut. Bentley (1)) was taken, two (Cap-

April 4th 1918
5th Battalion

(1) These officers all belonged to other regiments, but had been attached when the 7th incorporated the Entrenching Battalion.

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tain McDonald and 2nd Lieut. Ablett) were wounded, and the casualties among the rank and file had been heavy. But its tenacious resistance had been of the greatest service, and was all the more creditable since the battalion was little more than a scratch collection of officers and men largely strangers to each other.

That night saw the battalion relieved and drawn back to Gentelles, where it remained for nearly a week. It was placed at the disposal of the Australians (who had relieved the 53rd Brigade) for counter-attack purposes, but was not employed until, on the morning of the 12th, a fresh German attack once more drove the French out of Hangard village and Copse. The situation was critical: the Australians' right was uncovered and the recapture of the position was essential. Accordingly the 7th was sent up to retake the Copse.

April 1918
7th Battalion

April 12th

The advance was made in the face of a heavy barrage, but nevertheless B Company (1) reached the copse and took several prisoners, though its casualties from shells and machine-gun fire did not allow it to do more than consolidate a line 40 yards from the Western edge of the copse. Still this was enough to achieve the immediate object, and at this critical juncture it was of the greatest value. Other companies prolonged the line to the right, linking up with the French in the valley West of Hangard, while on the left touch was obtained with the Australians, so that an unbroken line was once more established and the Germans prevented from pushing on. This position the 7th maintained till the evening when the 10th Essex came up and, attacking through the battalion's line, retook both the copse and village. Thereupon the 7th were relieved by the Australians and went back West of the Avre to Boves, where and at St. Fuscien, a little further West, it obtained ten days of rest and reorganization.

(1) This was the company formed from the survivors of the 7th; it owed much to C.S.M. Roffey, who was largely instrumental in maintaining the traditions of The Queen's Own in this company and keeping its fighting efficiency up to a very high level.

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It needed both. The first fortnight of April had cost it 13 officers and 320 men, 2nd Lieuts. Marsh and Blew having been killed on the 12th, when Captain Edwards (1) and 2nd Lieut. Skotowe were mortally wounded. Already nearly half the officers who had joined from the Entrenching Battalion had become casualties, and the battalion was sorely in want of the two drafts who joined it, one of 160 men on the 14th another of 86 a week later. These were composed of good material, being mainly from the Kent Cyclists and from the 3rd line Yeomanry units hitherto employed in guarding the coasts, and were very welcome. At the same time it had the satisfaction of getting back Colonel Hickson, who had now recovered from the wounds he had received at Cherisy, and was also joined by over a dozen officers. With some of them, notably Lieuts. Smythe and Sutherst, it was a case of rejoining rather than joining, and the others included Lieut. Morley, who had distinguished himself with the 11th Battalion at Ypres in 1917, and Lieut. H. J. M. Harris, who had won the M.C. with the 6th on the Somme in 1916. It was well that it should have been thus reinforced, for it had still a trial to endure in the region between the Somme and Avre.

April 1918
7th Battalion

Repulses notwithstanding, the Germans had not abandoned hope of mastering the Villers-Bretonneux plateau, and their attack in the early hours of April 24th began with a complete success. Partly by using tanks, partly by an overpowering bombardment, they managed to overwhelm the garrison and for the time being the all-important position passed into their keeping. Preparations for a counter-attack in force were immediately set on foot, and the 7th were among the troops ordered up, being lent to the 54th Brigade, which was placed under the orders of the Fifty-Eighth Division to counter-attack between Villers-Bretonneux and Han-

April 24th

(1) A.S.C. attached.

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gard, the recovery of the actual village being entrusted to the Australians and some of the Eighth Division.

April 24th 1918
7th Battalion

The 7th started off from St. Fuscien at 6 a.m., and after some delays reached an assembly position East of the Cachy-Domart road. Here it deployed with the 7th

See sketch 45

Bedfords on the left and the 9th Londons (Queen Victoria's Rifles) on the right. At 10 p.m. the advance began, but as touch could not be obtained with the 9th Londons before the attack started D Company was kept back to guard the right flank. The other companies pushed forward steadily, though machine-guns took a heavy toll of them. In this advance Captain Lovett's good leadership was conspicuous, and it was largely through his example and his hold on his men that the objective, the new German positions North of Hangard Wood, was reached and taken. However, the battalion was not in touch with the units on its flanks, and after a gallant effort to retain its gains it recoiled to a position N.W. of the wood, and almost along the Villers-Bretonneux road. Here it dug in, though Colonel Hickson found he had under 200 rifles to hold a front of 800 yards: all the same he managed before long to get touch with the Victoria's, who were found to have reached Hangard Wood, but on the left, where B Company had lost very heavily, there remained a gap.

This proved very troublesome next morning, for German snipers and machine-gunners crept forward and established themselves in the gap. However, despite this the battalion held on, 2nd Lieut Goddard, who had led his company in the attack with conspicuous gallantry, doing good work in keeping his men in hand under heavy fire. Indeed the 7th not only consolidated its position but beat off all the enemy's efforts to oust it from the ground it had won, ground whose retention was essential to the safety of Villers-Bretonneux, which had also been won back. Its part in the action, if not the most conspicuous, had been of the greatest value, and had only been accomplished at a heavy cost, for

April 25th

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the Germans had put up a good fight and gave way most reluctantly. Two officers (Lieut. Farley and 2nd Lieut. Moody) were missing, four (Captain Lovett and 2nd Lieuts. Salt, Singleton-Gates and Chandley) were wounded; and of 481 men who had gone into action 228 were killed, wounded or missing, bringing the battalion's total losses for April nearly up to 600. It had certainly deserved the relief which arrived for it on the night of April 25th/26th in the shape of a Moroccan division. Then at last it was taken right back out of the battle-area to Metigny.

April 25th 1918
7th Battalion

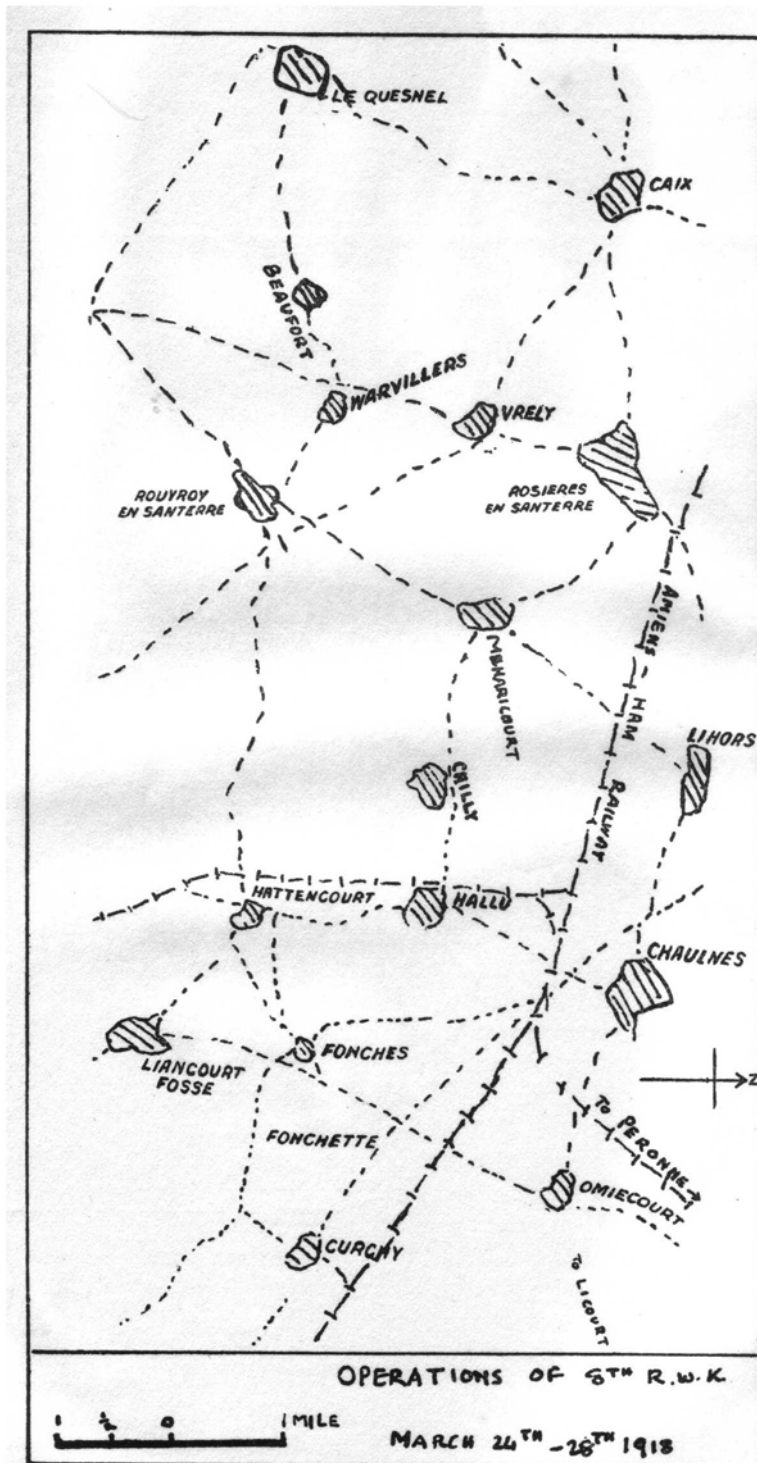
As in the Somme offensive of 1916 the 7th had had a larger share of fighting than any other battalion of the Regiment, so also in the Somme defensive of 1918 it had been in at the beginning and had also shared in the final episode. To have lost forty officers and over a thousand men within three weeks and yet be required to return to the fighting line after less than a fortnight's rest shows what the demands were to which the British infantry of 1918 proved themselves equal. That battalions so constantly shattered, so constantly reconstituted and almost re-created, could possess a full measure of cohesion, training and skill was not to be expected, but it was extraordinary how quickly the new drafts assimilated the old traditions and how they emulated the standards of courage, devotion and endurance which their predecessors had established. It is hard to do justice to the men of the 7th Battalion who went through the long strain of these days, in which they were constantly fighting rear-guard actions against heavy odds under trying and disadvantageous conditions. They were short of sleep - for a fortnight from March 21st they never got a real night's rest; after the first week the supply of rations was erratic and intermittent, when they were not fighting they were usually digging new positions which they often had to evacuate without a fight because things had gone wrong elsewhere. It is rather invidious to single out names

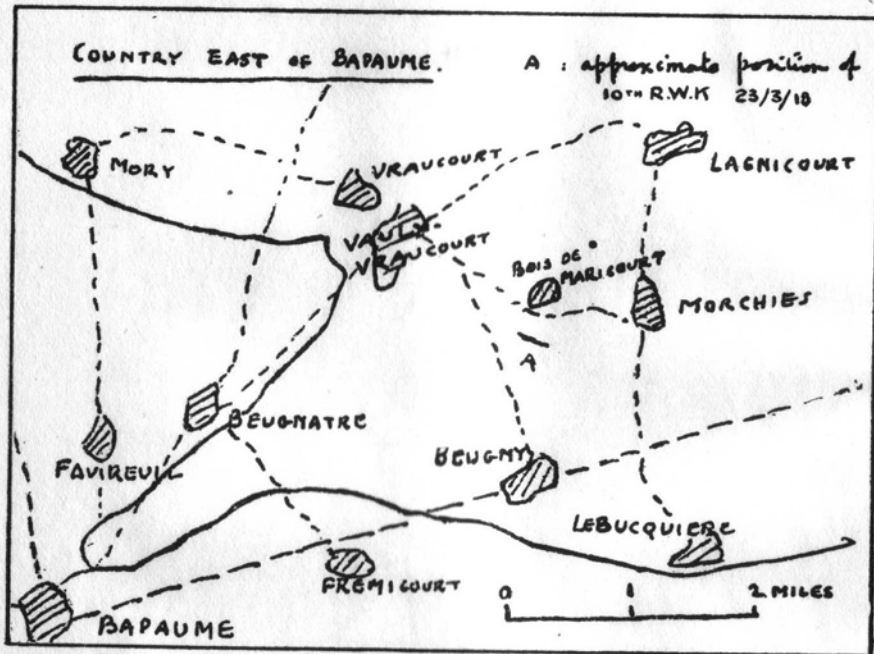
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for special mention, but there are a few which stand out. Mention has already been made of C.S.M. Roffey and Sergt. Hubble, but Sergt. Smith, the Pioneer Sergeant, who, although 55 years old, proved a marvel of courage and endurance, Pte. Breeds who commanded a platoon with real gallantry and skill, and the resourceful and daring runners, Ptes. Rough, Stacey and Simpkins, should also be remembered as conspicuous for their devotion to duty in a time of special trial.

April 1918
7th Battalion

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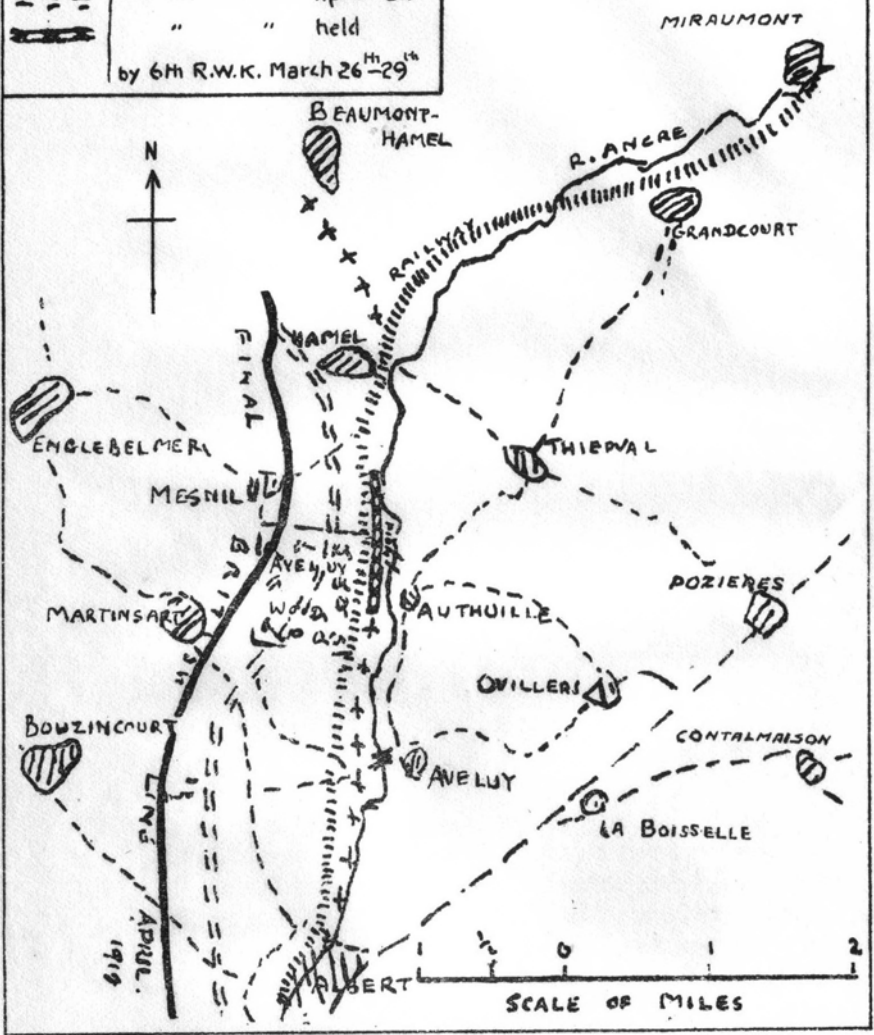


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SKETCH 43.

OPERATIONS ON THE ANCRE, MARCH - APRIL, 1919.

⊕ + ⊕ +	Approximate Line March 26th
⊕ - ⊕ -	" " April 5th
⊕ - ⊕ -	" " held
	by 6th R.W.K. March 26 th -29 th





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SKETCH 45.