

**CHAPTER 28**  
PREPARING FOR THE DECISIVE BLOW

While the 1st, 6th and 7th had been contributing notably to the great victories of August 1918, the other two battalions of The Queen's Own in France had been less actively engaged. As yet the Germans had not had to give ground seriously either round Lens or on the front S.E. of Ypres, and neither to the 8th nor to the 10th R.W.K. were July and August specially noteworthy. The 8th found it busy enough, however, for the hostile aircraft displayed the greatest activity, though after several unsuccessful encounters with the 8th the German patrols completely abandoned all effort to contest No Man's Land. At the beginning of September the first indications were noticed of a German retirement on this front; on the evening of September 1st a platoon under 2nd Lieut. Killick pushed forward into Lens and established a post in what recently had been German territory, under cover of which working parties started clearing the two main roads leading into Lens and set to work establishing a new forward line. By September 12th, when the battalion was taken out for a rest, a good line had been constructed.

Aug-Sept 1918  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

see sketch 52

Returning a week later the 8th soon became involved in a series of sharp actions memorable in the battalion's story, for the Germans were anxious to delay the Allied advance at this point. The first episode was the recapture of a post at the junction of Claud and Canary Trenches which had changed hands several times already. Then on the night of September 23rd/24th the Germans attempted to retake it but were promptly counter-attacked and driven off by Lieut. Trenchard Davis, who led two sections across the open, covered by a rifle-grenade barrage. Next evening half

September 19<sup>th</sup>

Sept 23<sup>rd</sup> / 24<sup>th</sup>

421

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No. 16 Platoon of D Company under 2nd Lieut. D. J. Dean, formerly of the 11th Battalion, took over the advanced post in Canary Trench. Hardly was the relief complete before the enemy attacked from the N.E., but were beaten off. 2nd Lieut Dean promptly repaired and improved his defences and though attacked again held his own. Then about 6 a.m. a heavy barrage was put down, completely isolating the post. But its defenders, though heavily trench-mortared, never wavered, and when the enemy simultaneously attacked down the continuation of Canary Trench and across the open they were again repulsed. After that the day passed quietly, though the garrison was far from idle, any amount of work being done to strengthen the post; and that night the rest of No.16 relieved the garrison, though 2nd Lieut. Dean insisted upon remaining in charge.

September 24<sup>th</sup>  
1918  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

September 25<sup>th</sup>

Early next morning came another attack, rather halfhearted, which the defenders' rifle-fire stopped easily enough, but it was followed by an intense bombardment which forced the remnants of the garrison back some fifty yards and then at last the Germans could rush the post. Their triumph was not for long; 2nd Lieut. Dean rallied his men and headed a counter-attack across the open; and at the same time 2nd Lieut. Cambrook, whose platoon was in Cinnabar Trench on the right of "Dean's Post," displayed marked promptness and initiative, and by a dashing attack across the open threatened to take the Germans in flank and cut them off. Sergt. Alderman gave him splendid help and the stroke proved most effective. The double attack dislodged the enemy, who bolted, many being shot as they fled. (1) The Germans did not try another

September 26<sup>th</sup>

attack; they had been too heavily punished, and the equipment which they left about the post would have fitted out a platoon. 2nd Lieut. Dean, who had set a splendid

(1) 2nd Lieut. Cambrook, who was badly wounded, subsequently died of his wounds, but had been awarded the M.C.

422

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example of courage and leadership and had handled his command with remarkable skill and judgment, inspiring his men with his own daring and contempt for danger, was fittingly rewarded by the much coveted Victoria Cross, Sergt Skinner, his Platoon Sergeant, who had backed him up splendidly, received the D.C.M., and M.M.'s were given to Sergt. Alderman, Corpls. Eversfield and Goodwin and Pte. Yates.

September 26<sup>th</sup>  
1918  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

The defence of "Dean's Post" was a notable feather in the 8th Battalion's cap. It was curious that it should have coincided with the third anniversary of the original 8th 's tragic baptism of fire. The same devotion which had inspired Colonel Vansittatt's men in their attempt to achieve the impossible at Loos had been displayed under more fortunate circumstances and with happier results. But the defence of "Dean's Post" did not stand alone. That afternoon 2nd Lieuts. Trenchard Davis and Killick successfully raided the enemy's post at the junction of Cloud and Cinnabar Trenches; 2nd Lieut. Killick knocked out a machine-gun just as it was opening fire on the raiders, while a dug-out was bombed, other damage done and many casualties inflicted. Next night a German raid was beaten off mainly by the tactical skill of 2nd Lieut. Manley, who kept his men sheltered in a dug-out while the bombardment lasted, brought them out the moment it lifted, placed them so as to get their fire to bear on both of the parties which were advancing and drove the enemy back with heavy losses. 2nd Lieut. Manley was badly wounded and died of wounds later on, but his promptness and insight were suitably rewarded by the M.C.

September 27<sup>th</sup>

The commanding officer of the 8th had ample justification, therefore, for the issue of his congratulatory Special Battalion Order of September 27th. The battalion's conduct had indeed reflected credit on all concerned and promised that when its turn came to pass to the offensive it would fully sustain the records of the

423

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1st, 6th and 7th. That turn was now at hand. On September 29th the battalion was relieved and went back to a camp near Doullens where its Division was concentrated for a short period of training.

September 1918  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

The 10th Battalion had had a quieter time. It had continued with the usual routine of trench duty varied by periods in reserve; several officers had joined, casualties had been fairly low, the enemy opposite being inactive while the Second Army was still holding its hand till the time to strike was ripe. By the beginning of September the Germans had evacuated practically the whole of the Lys salient created by their success of April and the British line on the right of the Forty-First Division's front had come forward again practically to the front held from the end of 1914 to the battle of Messines. When the 10th left the line on September 18th for a week's rest it had done its last turn of trench duty.

Aug-Sep  
10<sup>th</sup> Battalion

But before either the 8th or 10th took part in the great offensive the 1st, 6th and 7th had all been heavily engaged again. Sir Douglas Haig was now convinced that the breaking of the Hindenburg Line was practicable and that success in this operation would go far to clinch the victories of August and might even bring the war to an end in 1918.

Before, however, any attack on the main Hindenburg Line could possibly succeed, the zone of its outer defences must be cleared; and accordingly orders were issued to the Fourth Army to attack on a front of fourteen miles from Holnon to Peizières with the object of establishing itself in striking distance of the main line. As before the Third Corps was on the left of the attack from the Cologne river Northward, having a frontage of 7,000 yards, and, as it had brought up both the Twelfth and the Eighteenth Divisions from reserve, The Queen's Own had once again its 6th and 7th Battalions engaged in the same major operation.

424

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The Eighteenth Division had the right centre of the Corps line from S.E. of Ste. Emilie to midway between that village and Epéhy, the Twelfth continuing the line North to N.W. of Peizières. In the Eighteenth Division the 54th Brigade reinforced by the 7th R.W.K. had Ronssoy and Basse Boulogne as its first objectives, in the Twelfth the 37th Brigade was held in reserve N. of Guyencourt, ready to go through the other brigades and attack the second objective. Beyond the line Basse Boulogne-Peizières a large number of spurs run in an Easterly or N.E. direction towards the St. Quentin Canal, and the second objective of the day's attack corresponded roughly to the old British outpost line along the top of these spurs. On the Twelfth front the 37th Brigade had a line overlooking Vendhuile as its goal.

September 1918  
6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>

Battalions

See sketch 51

But some days were to elapse before the British line reached its objectives of September 18th. From the start the Third Corps met with most determined opposition and had to fight hard to make any progress. The ground was intersected with trenches, part of the old British defences, and largely owing to this, though partly to the misty weather, the fighting developed into a series of separate struggles for small tactical points in which units got very much split up. The fog made maintenance of direction very difficult, and the 7th, starting from just East of Ste. Emilié, failed to keep up with the barrage. However, by 7 a.m. the leading companies, A and D, had reached Ronssoy Wood and pushed on into the village, establishing a line to the Eastward of it while C mopped up the Wood. Soon after 9 a.m. Ronssoy had been secured, and the 54th Brigade "leap-frogged" the battalion and went on to complete the capture of the first objective. The 7th had done its work most effectively and with but few casualties. Later in the day it withdrew to Ste. Emilie and reverted to its own Brigade.

September 18<sup>th</sup>  
1918

7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

425

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On the left the Twelfth Division had found stubborn opponents in the Alpine Corps, troops of high reputation and resolution, and the capture of Epéhy and Peizières was as much as could be accomplished. There was no question of the 37th Brigade going through to the second objective; indeed, though Colonel Dawson at first tried to work round North of the village, the 6th itself became involved in clearing Peizières which it reached about 8.30 a.m., nor were the remaining German posts and machine-guns in the village reduced till mid-day. The battalion was then able to push on N.E. towards Limerick Post to assist the Fifty-Eighth Division on the extreme left of the Corps. Working forward on the left by Beech Trench to Fir Support and Plane Trench two companies managed to establish some posts close to Poplar Trench, but could get no further in face of heavy machine-gun fire from that trench and from Lark Spur behind it. Further to the right little progress could be made, and the railway line just East of

September 18<sup>th</sup>  
1918

6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

Epéhy represented the limit of the battalion's advance. Confused fighting continued most of the night on the Twelfth Division's front; further attempts by the 6th R.W.K. against Poplar Trench were unavailing, and early next morning the battalion was relieved by the Fifty-Eighth Division and drawn back behind Epéhy. Its casualties had been light, not much over 40, including three officers (1) wounded. It was to have two days' rest before it was in action again, but for the 7th these were by no means days of rest.

September 19<sup>th</sup>

While only the right of the Third Corps had secured its second objective, over the greater part of the Fourth Army's front that line had been reached, and Sir Henry Rawlinson issued orders for the flanks of the attack to continue their efforts on the 19th. The Eighteenth Division therefore renewed its attack, advancing from Basse-Boulogne against Lempire. This village was flanked to the South by fortified copses known as X, Y

7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

(1) Captain Parmenter, and 2nd Lieuts. Hunt and Woodcock.

and Z, and on the North by a trench, St. Patrick's Avenue, parallel to the road to Little Priel Farm, behind; which were two fortified posts, Yak and Zebra, with Braeton and Heythorp Posts a little behind them, all on the spur running North from Lempire to the Catelet Valley. These posts were strongly held, for a fresh Division had just been rushed up to this front, and its arrival had been responsible for the stubborn opposition experienced by the Eighteenth Division both on September 18th and on the following day.

September 19<sup>th</sup>

1918

7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

see sketch 51

The 7th had a hard time on the 19th. Assembling behind Ronssoy its orders were to follow the 8th Royal Berkshires through Lempire, to clear St. Patrick's Avenue with C Company, secure Zebra Post with B and then push on A to Braeton. This programme could not be carried out. Machine-gun fire from the right disorganized the advance, and the Berkshires had great difficulty in gaining ground and in clearing the way for the 7th to pass through them. By 12.10 p.m., however, they reported their right on its objective, and that one company of the R.W.K. had gone through them, but at 1 p.m. they had still not taken Yak Post, and till that was secured it was useless to advance against Zebra or Braeton. However, C Company bombed its way successfully along St. Patrick's Avenue and by 6 p.m. had secured it almost to its junction with Bird Trench. But it was slightly ahead of the Twelfth Division on its left, who had again met such stubborn resistance that they did not get beyond a line running diagonally N.W. to S.E. from Poplar Trench to the middle of St. Patrick's Avenue. Next day the fighting continued. It was of a desultory order; there was no attack on a large scale, but ground was gained by local struggles in which the 7th pushed patrols forward to Bird Trench and Zebra Post. That evening the Twelfth Division began relieving the left brigade of the Eighteenth and the 7th was accordingly withdrawn to Lempire to cooperate in an effort to secure the defences along the

September 20<sup>th</sup>

Hargicourt-Vendhuille road, D Company being put in early on the 21st to attack Sart Farm, while the 10th Essex advanced on its left and the 6th Northampton's on its right.

September 21<sup>st</sup>

1918

7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

D achieved its objects, Sart Farm was taken with some prisoners; but an attempt on Egg Post was beaten back and neither Essex nor Northampton's could achieve much. The German opposition was still tenacious, and with the tactical situation very obscure artillery support was difficult to arrange. On the 22nd three distinct attempts were made upon Egg Post, but despite Lieut. Neill's determined leadership all were unsuccessful, though posts were established in Pomponious and Fleeceall Lanes. The effort was renewed on the 24th when A Company was beaten back from Egg Post by machine-gun fire, though Lieut. Cullerne, with some of B, established himself in a trench a little way South of the Post, taking three machine-guns and 12 prisoners and maintaining his ground. (1) That evening the battalion went back to Maurepas. It had had over 200 casualties since the 18th, including seven officers, (2) but it had hit the enemy hard and had wrested from him ground of real tactical importance.

September 22<sup>nd</sup>

The exchange of frontage between the Eighteenth and Twelfth Divisions had brought the 6th R.W.K. to the spot where the 7th had been fighting. It took over St. Patrick's Avenue from 50 yards South of Bird Trench to Yak Post on the night of the 20th/21st and at 5.40 a.m. attacked in the direction of Braeton Post and Bird Lane. The attack was met by heavy machine-gun fire, only a few men reached the wire in front of Braeton, and machine-guns in Mule Trench on the left prevented the retention of what ground was gained in that quarter. But the battalion kept up the pressure,

6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

September 21<sup>st</sup>

(1) He was awarded the M.C.

(2) Captain Tanner, Lieut. Stevens, and 2nd Lieuts. Peter and Larken were killed; Lieut. Gausden and 2nd Lieuts. Clapham and Robertson wounded.

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many Germans who were retiring across the open towards Heythorp Post were effectively dealt with by the artillery, blocks were made in Bird and Heythorp Trenches and gradually the attack progressed. The junction of Bird Trench and St. Patrick's Avenue was finally made good about 10 p.m., and 300 yards were gained by bombing. This pressure was maintained next morning, and at last, about 3 p.m., after several repulses a fresh attack, organised by Colonel Dawson, whose energy and example inspired the exhausted men with fresh determination, carried Braeton Post and the whole trench line running South to Tombois Farm. The enemy bolted, losing heavily; and the battalion retained its gains undisturbed till that evening the 9th Essex relieved it. In the last few days it had had 36 men killed and missing, Captain G. W. Hill, Lieuts. Bavley and Fleming, 2nd Lieuts. Dark, Darcy, Turner, Warr and Vaughan wounded with 152 men, and was so reduced that it had to be reorganized as two companies. Throughout this period Colonel Dawson's leadership and example had been invaluable; he was constantly up in the front line, superintending operations, encouraging the men and inspiring them to new exertions. His part in enabling the 6th, despite heavy losses and the influx of recruits of little training, to continue to achieve success had been no small one.

September 1918  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

Substantial success had been achieved on the 21st and 22nd along the whole front of the Third Corps, whose line was now sufficiently far advanced for effective co-operation in the great attack on the Hindenburg Line which was planned for September 29th. But though the Fourth Army had borne the brunt of the recent fighting and was confronted with the most formidable of the German defences it was not the Allied plan

to press at one point only. While the 6th and 7th were enjoying their brief rest the French and Americans took up the attack in the Argonne, the Third and First

429

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British Armies attacked on the 29th South of the Sensée, menacing Cambrai from the North, while the Fourth threatened to turn it to the South, and on September 28th the Second in turn was let loose against the German defences East of Ypres.

September 1918

These extensions of the battlefront involved two more battalions of The Queen's Own in active fighting. The Fifth Division had relieved the New Zealanders in front of Gouzeaucourt in the middle of September. The 1st R.W.K. had received some small drafts since the battle of Bapaume, amounting to about 60 men with 12 officers, two of whom had the misfortune to be hit in their first tour of trench duty: this was when the battalion was in the line from the 14th to the 20th N.W. of Gouzeaucourt, coming in for an increasing activity on the part of the enemy's heavy artillery. On the evening of September 25th it went up again in readiness for the general attack. In this it was told off to capture African Trench, N.W. of Gouzeaucourt, which was about the Southern end of the front attacked. It had the 15th and 14th R. Warwickshire's on its left, and the 15th Brigade beyond them.

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

See sketch 53

The 13th Brigade was not to attack until over two hours after the advance had begun elsewhere, and before the battalion left its trenches it had been under fire for some time and had some casualties. Its objective was just over the crest of the ridge, out of sight from its starting line; the configuration of the ground enabled the Germans to get in an effective grazing fire and the attack, though gallantly pressed, was soon brought to a standstill. Even when Colonel Johnstone reinforced his attacking companies, A on the right, then B, then C, with three platoons of his reserve company, D, there was not weight enough to drive the attack home through the grazing fire. Some ground was gained; Sergt. E. J Smith once again distinguished himself by leading his company forward after all its officers had fallen and establishing them close up to the German

September 27<sup>th</sup>

430

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trenches, and at 8.30 a.m. Lieut. Burden, in the centre, reported the attack held up on his right but going better on his left; a little later some 40 of the battalion were digging in not very far from their objective and ultimately some men of C Company crawled back to report that they had got into a trench but had been held up by a block and a "strong point," and had later on been forced back by bombing. Another party under Corpl. Piggott got within 20 yards of the enemy's trenches and bombed the Germans, but seeing that the position was untenable the Corporal skilfully organized a retirement, which he covered by accurate rifle-fire and by bombing, but was himself mortally wounded in withdrawing. Sergt. Gilbert and Ptes. Burton and Colk all made gallant attempts to work forward and use bombs and rifle-grenades, and L/Cpl. Degavino established his Lewis gun within 40 yards of the enemy and put one of the German machine-guns out of action. But the position was too strong to be mastered and all that could be done was to hang on to the line reached.

September 27<sup>th</sup>  
1918  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

Finding that the officers with the attack had nearly all been hit, Lieut. Corke, who was acting as Intelligence Officer, went up to the front and did great work in organizing the consolidation of the line reached. 2nd Lieut. Ticehurst, the Signalling Officer, was

assiduous in laying wires to the forward companies and keeping them in repair, though they were repeatedly broken by the shellfire. On neither flank had much progress been made, but the battalion hung on and was rewarded for its tenacity next morning when patrols discovered African Trench clear, the enemy having evacuated it so hurriedly as to leave behind his own wounded, some British prisoners, ten machine-guns and a great quantity of ammunition. The attack had cost the battalion three officers (1) killed, and six wounded, (2)

September 28<sup>th</sup>

(1) Lieuts. Hemmerde and Lewin and 2nd-Lieut. R. M. Stephens.

(2) 2nd Lieuts. Burden, Bernard, Luscombe, Nott, Smith and Thorning.

431

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with 62 men killed, 2 missing and 153 wounded. It had in consequence to be reorganised as two companies of two platoons each and one of three, A and C being temporarily united.

September 1918  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

The other battalion to share in the offensive was the 10th. On the opening day of the Flanders attack it was not actively engaged; the Forty-First Division was in reserve to the Nineteenth Corps and only the 124th Brigade, which passed through the Thirty-Fifth Division, reached the front line. The 123rd Brigade followed to Ravine Wood, halted there, and then advanced to pass through the 124th at Kortewilde and continue the attack next morning.

10<sup>th</sup> Battalion  
September 28<sup>th</sup>

September 29th opened fine, but with a ground fog, which made direction keeping difficult but helped to conceal the advance and so contributed to the surprise of the Germans. So complete was this that the crews of a 4.2-inch howitzer battery were at breakfast when the 10th came rushing in on top of them, and in addition three 77-mm. field guns, five machine-guns and many prisoners were taken with surprisingly low casualties. By 9.15 the battalion was on the railway N.E. of Comines, but the 23rd Middlesex on its right had been kept back by meeting very stubborn opposition on the canal bank and both that unit and the 10th had outrun the troops on their flanks and found themselves in a pronounced salient under a heavy converging fire from artillery and machine-guns. It was necessary to fall back; and under cover of B Company, which was well handled by 2nd Lieut. Weston, a successful withdrawal to a position a little in advance of the Houthem line was made, though casualties were heavier in the withdrawal than they had been in the advance. Splendid work was done by Corpl. Malyon and Sergt. Pilcher. the former, whose Lewis-gun section had done good service in the advance, covered the withdrawal most effectively and in the end got his gun and his whole party back in safety, although himself wounded. The

September 29<sup>th</sup>

432

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Sergeant rallied two platoons which were in disorder because their officers had fallen, and led them forward just in time to repel a counter-attack. The Germans indeed had counter-attacked twice in force hoping to recover their guns; they were met with steady rifle and Lewis-gun fire and by an effective barrage, and lost very heavily without gaining their ends. That night the battalion was relieved by the 10 Queen's.

September 29<sup>th</sup>  
1918  
10<sup>th</sup> Battalion

September 29th had been a notable day for the 10th, really its first real experience of open warfare, but it had carried out its unfamiliar task well. Direction and extensions

had been well kept, ground had been skilfully used to encircle and outflank the hostile machine-guns; and if losses had been severe—three officers (1) and 35 men killed, 20 men missing and five officers (2) and 90 men wounded—important gains had been made.

The Forty-First Division was now transferred to the left to press the advance on Menin; the move brought it into line just South of the Ypres-Menin road. On October 1st the 123rd Brigade advanced towards Gheluwe, the battalion, which was in reserve, moving through Tenbrielen to the America Cabaret under heavy shelling from Comines. The leading battalions were held up by a trench system called the Gheluwe Switch, which the 10th had to attack next day, (3) when the 122nd Brigade's progress on the left gave the 123rd a better chance to get on. A and B Companies were sent forward about noon and pushed on some way, but a counter-attack on the battalion on their left, which drove that unit back, compelled the two companies to conform, though one platoon of B managed to maintain its ground. Sergt. Pilcher was again to the fore, rallying

October 2<sup>nd</sup>

(1) Lieut. F. E. Norris and 2nd Lieuts. J. H. Russell and Hickmott.

(2) Captains Hindle and Doubleday, 2nd Lieuts. George, Lawrence and Hudson.

(3) It was on this day that Captain Holden, who had served so long with the 10th Battalion, was killed when in command of the 11<sup>th</sup> Queen's.

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433

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retiring troops and bringing them into the firing-line in the face of heavy machine-gun fire; and in the end the Germans, who had suffered severely from the rifle and machine-gun fire to which they had exposed themselves, retired in disorder. The Second Army was now practically up to the left bank of the Lys, and for the moment its advance was suspended.

Sep – Oct 1918  
10<sup>th</sup> Battalion

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434

TO ILLUSTRATE  
 OPERATIONS OF 8<sup>TH</sup> R.W.K.  
 NEAR LENS APRIL 1917 & SEPT. 1918



