

Shrapnel balls picked up by the author from the fields of the Somme with a pound coin for comparison.

#### CHAPTER 4: NEUVE CHAPELLE, FESTUBERT, GIVENCHY

*Through darkness curves a spume of falling flares  
That flood the field with shallow, blanching light  
The huddled sentry stares. . . .*

Siegfried Sassoon

On July 6th, both battalions left the Somme area. The 16th Battalion marched to Lestram, where they spent almost three weeks before moving to Les Lobes. The 18th Battalion marched to L'Eclème. Here they were addressed by the Divisional Commander who congratulated them on the fighting of July 1st to the 4th and spoke of the necessity to inspire all reinforcements with the same efficient spirit as that shown by all ranks. He expressed his extreme regret that the Battalion had lost so many officers, N.C.O.'s and men, especially their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kennard.

On July 27th, the 18th Battalion plus a composite company from the 16th, known as 'X' Company, took over the front line trenches from the 13th York and Lancaster Regiment in the Neuve Chapelle Right Sub Sector. Here, unlike the valley of the Somme, the landscape was flat and enclosed. Owing to the wet nature of the ground the defences consisted, in the main, of breast works. The front line had, before the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, been the German third and fourth support lines. Most men who fought in this sector were never to forget the dead, most of them British, who lay in putrescent rows in No Man's Land. It was said that parapets were built up with them and that corpses served as landmarks for patrols and direction aids to dug-outs and communication trenches. In his history of the 6th (Territorial) Battalion of the Regiment. Captain E. V. Tempest described the area as "a vast cemetery where no one had been buried" and said that "the heavy stench which lay like a cloud over the trenches, could be felt miles away."

On completion of the relief, Headquarters Company had established themselves in the ruined farm in Square S3d. 'X' Company held the right section. 'A' Company, commanded by Lieutenant R. S. Cross, held the centre section and 'B' Company, led by Lieutenant L. C. Watson, held the left section of the sub-sector. 'D' Company, commanded by Lieutenant A. Howarth, were in support at Port Arthur and Edgware Road, Captain B. Tooke, together with 2nd Lieutenant J. L. Wood and 'C' Company, were in reserve at Lansdown Post, Hen Post and Edward Post. These positions are shown in Map 3.

In the meantime the 16th Battalion, less the composite company, marched to Croix Barbes and took over from the 11th East Lancashire Regiment the front line posts, 'Rags,' 'Bones,' 'Grotto,' 'Angle' and Saint Vaast, Loretto and Euston. The verdict of the Field General Courts Martial (dated 14th July, 1916) who had considered Private Patchet's crime of 'writing by candlelight' was now received and he departed to base to begin his sentence - after his experience on July 1st, perhaps thankfully. Nevertheless, by today's standards this would seem a strange reward for a gallant soldier.

At 9.30 p.m. on the night of the 27th, the 18th Battalion left company section, came under heavy H.E., shrapnel and minen werfer bombardment, whilst the entire front line was swept continuously by machine gun fire. At 10.27 p.m., a runner from 'D' Company arrived at Battalion Headquarters saying that German troops had broken into the front line trenches 10 minutes previously, and Lieutenant Howarth had sent a message to Port Arthur for bombers, as he had none with him. Brigade ordered 'D' Company to launch an immediate counter-attack.

At 11.30 p.m. Private H. L. Riley of 'B' Company arrived at Battalion Headquarters supporting Corporal Lee who was wounded. He said that a minen werfer had struck a sentry post and immediately afterwards a party of Germans, dressed in black, 25 to 30 strong, had broken into the trench. The Germans, in two parties of about 16, armed with pistols and bombs and under one officer, broke into the British front line at two points: working inwards. On uniting they left with several prisoners, including Dickie Bond. Their arrival was unexpected and rapid, they advanced under cover of their own bombardment and broke into the line immediately after the barrage lifted. Many of the Pals were surprised in their dug-outs, the first inkling of the raid being when electric torches carried by the raiders flashed in their faces. Corporal Lee and Private Riley were in such a dug-out when a German, armed with a pistol and a Knob Kerry or, perhaps, a hand grenade, threw a light on them and told them to put up their hands. Lee and Riley made a dash for it and got away; Lee being hit in the leg whilst making his escape.

When they left, the trench was held by Germans. Those who were not taken prisoner defended themselves with rifles but were reluctant to use bombs for fear of injuring their comrades. Witnesses reported that several of the enemy inflicted slight wounds on their prisoners, presumably to prevent them escaping, although it is noteworthy that one man was bandaged up by a German who had wounded him first with a bomb and then a pistol. Lance Corporal Denton of 'B' Company was

## THE BRADFORD PALS



Captain Harry H. Dalley

taken prisoner in this trench and led about 300 yards towards the German line. There he knocked over his man and escaped, reaching his own lines at about 10.00 a.m. the following morning. He was slightly wounded. Lieutenants Howarth and Watson and 2nd Lieutenant Walton were all taken prisoner. According to a soldier who was left behind because of his wounds, the raiders were in the front line for about twenty minutes. In addition to their prisoners they took away with them a Vickers gun and a box of ammunition. A dead German left in the trench was identified as a member of the 3rd Ersatz Company of the 248th Ersatz Battalion Reserve Infantry Regiment. This identification was made from the only document found on his body, his leave pass from April, 1916.

When news of the raid was received at Battalion Headquarters, 'B' and 'D' Companies were ordered to report their situation. In the meantime a message was received from Brigade that 150 men of the 15th Battalion were proceeding down Lansdown. 'C' Company was ordered to move to reinforce 'D' Company by way of 'Covered way' as soon as the 15th Battalion men arrived. Runners brought in news that 'B' Company was uncertain of the situation but that they had a bombing party proceeding to clear the line from the left. At 12.50 a.m. a message, timed 11.35 p.m. was received from the officer then commanding 'D' Company, probably the Adjutant, Captain Harry L. Dalley, which read: "Am in front line of 'B' Company. Have found Williams but practically only ten 'B' Company men. Am manning front line with 25 men. Several wounded but cannot spare men to bring them out. No bosche. Lieutenants Burton and Fletcher with me".

By 4.00 a.m. the front line had been reinforced and a party of sappers despatched to repair the heavy damage in the trenches caused by the shell fire. In the preceding affairs the Battalion had lost six killed, including Lieutenant Cross, 2nd Lieutenant W. R. Humphries and Company Sergeant Major G. H. Lipton, 42 wounded, of whom four died later, and 36 missing, believed prisoners.

From this time, until the Battalion was relieved on August 4th, little of significance beyond patrol activity, enemy sniping and shelling, is recorded in the War Diary. On that day the 16th Battalion was relieved by the 13th Battalion the York and Lancaster Regiment and marched to billets in Les Lobes whilst the 18th Battalion were relieved by a composite battalion of the 16th East Yorkshire Regiment and the 11th and 12th York and Lancaster Regiment, and moved to billets in Lestram. The

composite company, X Company, rejoined their own battalion after their spell of duty with the 18th but less Sergeant W. Culling of 'D' Company and Lance Corporal McConnel and Privates J. Moore, Cussons and W. Ackroyd, all of 'C' Company who had lost their lives in the preceding actions.

After a few days rest in billets, both battalions received orders to take over the Festubert left sub-sector. Both had completed the relief by midnight on August 10th, the 16th Battalion occupying positions on the right, the 18th Battalion on the left. The terrain was similar to the Neuve Chapelle sector, the defences consisting, in the main, of breast works. This was a sector in which enemy snipers were constantly active and in which the parapet was swept at regular intervals by machine gun fire. Enemy artillery was very active, making Cover, Richmond, Shetland and Pioneer trenches particularly unhealthy locations. On the evening of the 15th, the 18th Battalion suffered four casualties, one other rank killed and three wounded by snipers. One sniper was reported to be in Canadian Orchard, not 60 yards from their positions.

A patrol which attempted to move into No Man's Land from three successive bays was met by sniper fire on each occasion. On the following evening snipers again prevented a patrol from going out from Islands 31 and 32 and also drove back a wiring party.

On the night of the 17th, the 18th Battalion were relieved by the 11th East Yorkshire Regiment and moved to billets in Rue de L'Épinette as mobile reserve. 'B' Company and 30 men from 'A' Company however, remained in the trenches moving to the right sub-sector in the old British front line and coming under the orders of the 15th West Yorkshire Regiment. The following day the 16th Battalion was relieved by the 11th East Yorkshire Regiment. Four officers and 75 other ranks were attached to the 15th Battalion of the Regiment whilst the remainder of the Battalion took over the defence of the Village Line which consisted of five posts named Le Plantin North, Festubert (Central), Festubert (East), Cailloux South, Cailloux East and various other small posts. Shortly after occupying these positions Lieutenant A. S. Gibson suffered a serious wound to the left hand and was evacuated to a casualty clearing station and, subsequently, struck off the strength.

The Givenchy sector had been very active, the engineers on both sides competing to blow up large mines beneath opposing trenches. The sector became a line of very large craters with both sides building saps on their sides of the craters. Being only yards from each other there was considerable hand and rifle grenade activity from both sides. At 8 pm. on the 20th, a mine was blown by the enemy in the Givenchy Sector which destroyed 'I SAP'. This was followed by a heavy bombardment which switched on to the right of the Festubert section, being particularly intense between Islands 9 and 13. At 8.45 p.m. the barrage lifted on to the old British lines and then dropped again on to the front line. At this time a strong party of the enemy attempted to force an entry into the British lines between Islands 10a, 11 and 12, but were driven off without achieving their objective. A barrage was put down in

## THE BRADFORD PALS



31st Division Men in a SAP-Head, Givenchy. Imperial War Museum, Q7265.

No-Man's Land in an attempt to cut off their retreat. Later a patrol went out to try to obtain identification, but failed to find any dead or wounded.

The 16th Battalion received news in August that Major H. H. Kennedy was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant-Colonel. Sergeant A. W. Ashforth was granted a field commission, becoming a 2nd Lieutenant with the Battalion. Also, Company Sergeant Major G. Cussons and Private T. Pearson were both awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for bravery in action and for their devotion to duty on July 1st, 1916.

The first part of September found the 16th Battalion in the right sub-section in the Neuve Chapelle section of trenches. The 18th Battalion were located in the Festubert left sub-section occupying positions in Hun Street and Port Arthur.

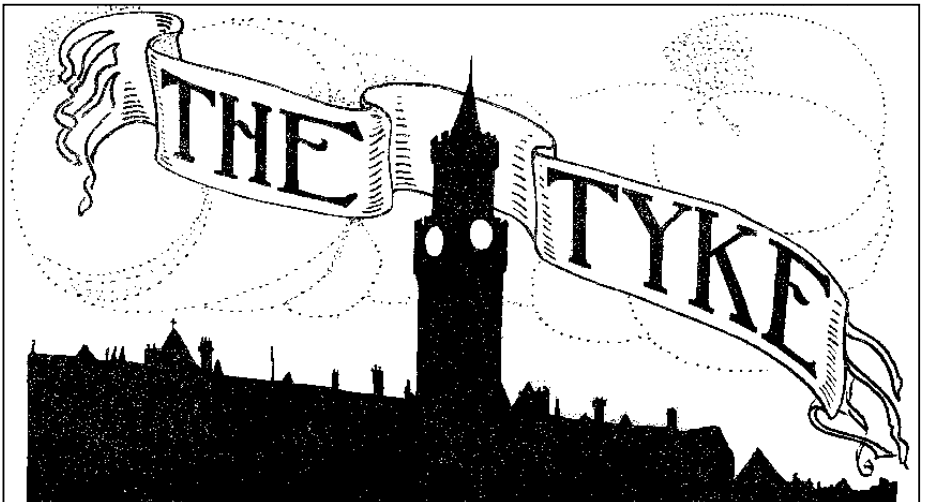
The 18th Battalion then spent a few days resting at Croix Barbes, but mid-September found both battalions employed in the right sub-sector of the Givenchy sector. As the month closed, the 16th Battalion were holding the 'Village Line', a series of posts known as 'Givenchy Keep', 'Orchard Redoubt', 'Moat Farm', 'Hilders Redoubt', 'Herts Redoubt', and 'Pont Fixe South'. The 18th Battalion were occupying positions at 'Windy Corner' and in 'Poppy Redoubt'.

On October 3rd, the 31st Division was taken out of the line and moved to the Bethune area. After a brief respite in billets in the town the 18th Battalion moved to billets in L'Eclème whilst the 16th marched to La Miquellerie. Here they occupied billets which had been organized by 2nd Lieutenant E. Wilson, the billeting officer,

and Sergeant Harry Drake, the Battalion interpreter. A sample of the latter's work can be seen further on in this book, as Sergeant Drake was to be the secretary of "The Tyke", the Battalion magazine. In later years he was to teach in several Bradford schools and was to be revered by generations of young Bradfordians.

On the 7th October, the 93rd Infantry Brigade, left the 1st Army area, marching to Lillers where they entrained for Doullens, arriving in the late afternoon. Here they detrained and marched to the village of Thievres where the 18th Battalion took billets. The 16th marched on to billets in Famechon.

In October news was received that Captain Harry L. Dalley, Adjutant of the 18th Battalion, had been awarded the Military Cross for his conspicuous gallantry during the recent fighting and that Major H. F. G. Carter was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.



THE BRADFORD PALS



Captain Harry Dalley with his wife after receiving the Military Cross at Buckingham Palace from George V on June 20th, 1917