



.303" Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE) Mk3 rifle with Bayonet. MOD Pattern Room,

CHAPTER 5: HEBUTERNE

*I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain
Bank holidays, and picture shows, and spats,
And going to the office in the train.*

Siegfried Sassoon.

On October 21st, the 93rd Brigade took over the Hebuterne Sector, the 16th Battalion occupying the right sub-section with the 18th Battalion on the left (see map 5). This sector had originally been held by the French, who had made several novel innovations. In the centre of the village they had sunk a deep well into which drained several others. It was equipped with a pump, driven by a petrol engine, so that there was always a plentiful supply of water. Under a small waterfall they had installed a turbine-driven generator which supplied electricity to light the numerous deep dug-outs in the village. A number of communication trenches radiated from the village, three of the most important being Yellow Street, Yankee Street and Woman Street. The last named got its name from the decomposing body of a young woman which had been discovered near its entrance in a pool of putrid water, once the village pond.

Here undulating country, long grass and bushes, provided excellent opportunities for patrol activity, particularly 'Winkling', an activity first practised by the Canadians. This exercise involved a small party surprising an enemy sentry in an isolated post and then winking prisoners out of the dug-outs behind him.

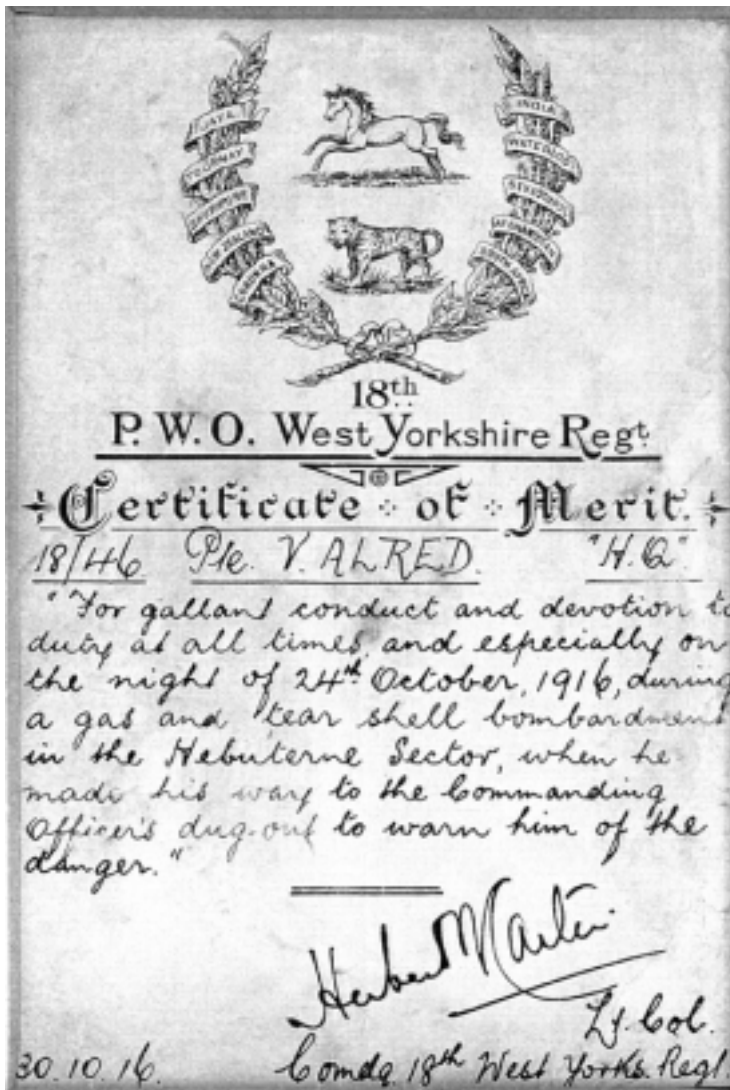
On the night of the 23rd and again on the night of the 26th, the 16th Battalion sent out raiding parties under 2nd Lieutenants C. P. Graham and D. T. King with 30 other ranks. Their intention was to find two gaps in the enemy wire, previously reconnoitred, and to penetrate the German line. On both these occasions they were unsuccessful, finding the gaps to have been filled.

On the night of the 24th, 2nd Lieutenant D. A. Gill, Sergeant G. Quigley and Private H. Sutcliffe of the 18th Battalion left their lines at 8.45 p.m. to investigate the German wire. They proceeded eastward to the enemy wire and then about 100 yards to the south, where they found a gap, about 30 yards wide. They proceeded through the gap to within 10 yards of the enemy parapet. Unfortunately at this

THE BRADFORD PALS

point they were seen by a German sentry who fired three shots, mortally wounding 2nd Lieutenant Gill. The enemy immediately swept the area with machine gun fire. Sergeant Quigley and Private Sutcliffe succeeded in extricating themselves from their predicament and returned to their own lines, unwounded, and carrying their officer's body.

From 11.00pm until approximately 11.15pm, in response to British shelling, the enemy opened a rapid retaliatory barrage, apparently searching for a British battery east and south east of 18th Battalion headquarters. About 500 high explosive, tear gas and gas shells were fired, the gas shells causing several casualties. These casualties may well have been higher if it had not been for Private Victor Alred who, regardless of personal risk, made his way to the headquarters dugout to give warning.



HEBUTERNE

Both battalions were relieved from the front line on October 26th, and returned to support billets in Sailly aux Bois. From there they provided nightly working parties and fighting patrols.

Again on the night of the 27th a raiding party of 30 other ranks led by 2nd Lieutenants J. Luke and H. R. Mason, left the lines at 10.30 p.m., intent on penetrating the enemy trenches. Unfortunately whilst the advanced parties were engaged in getting through the wire nearest the enemy trenches they were spotted by a sentry and heavily fired on. They were compelled to withdraw, suffering one other rank killed. 2nd Lieutenant Luke and three other ranks were wounded.

On the 30th October the 16th proceeded to billets in Thievres whilst 'C' and 'D' Companies of the 18th went into bivouacs near Courcelles. The rest of the Battalion went into hutments at Coigneux. Both battalions now enjoyed a brief respite from front line duties but, on November 7th, they moved back into support billets in Sailly aux Bois. On the 11th November, between the hours of 10.00 p.m. and 3.00 a.m. and again at 6.00 a.m. the village was heavily shelled with high explosives and gas shells.

One of the last H. E. shells fired in this bombardment was a direct hit on one of the 16th Battalion's billets, killing eight other ranks and wounding 11 others, including 2nd Lieutenant G. Nicholls.

November 13th marked the beginning of the British offensive on both banks of the River Ancre. The 18th Battalion occupied the Hebuterne left sub-sector whilst 'A' and 'C' companies of the 16th Battalion occupied the left company section of the right sub-sector, coming under the command of the 18th. 'B' and 'D' Companies remained in bivouacs at Sailly aux Bois under the command of Major G. S. Blagbrough pending further orders. Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy moved his headquarters into the dug-out which housed the 18th. Headquarters in Vercingetorix trench. The battalions were to hold the line during the attack on Serre and the German positions further south, while two battalions of the 92nd Brigade attacked on their front to cover the left flank of the assault. Zero hour was fixed at 5.45 a.m. when the British barrage opened promptly. Until 7.45 a.m. the enemy made no attempt to fire upon the front trenches. From then until 10.00 a.m. the enemy exhibited slightly more activity, shelling Brissoux and Knox trenches. This shelling became less as the morning advanced until about 11.45 a.m. when a heavy barrage was opened, chiefly directed at Jena Bart and Knox trenches and the junction of Jena and Vercingetorix trenches. During this time the 16th suffered ten casualties. The 18th Battalion suffered similarly. Just before noon 'C' Company Signals dug-out was blown in, killing two and wounding three. By 12.30 p.m. 'C' Company had lost nine dead and ten wounded. The bombardment slackened shortly after noon but increased to an intense barrage again around 2 p.m., costing the 16th a further ten casualties. The barrage had slackened by early evening, leaving the two battalions with a total of 55 casualties suffered.

THE BRADFORD PALS

The tour continued with spells in the trenches and brief respites in billets at Rossignol farm or Saily aux Bois, although these 'respites' included the provision of working and carrying parties to, and into, the front line. On December 3rd, whilst occupying the right sub-sector the 16th Battalion were subjected to a heavy minenwerfer bombardment. The enemy scored one hit which killed five and wounded three other ranks.

Some relief from the monotony and hardships of trench life was provided to the 18th Battalion on December 9th when, around noon, an enemy deserter was seen approaching their lines along the Gommecourt-Hebuterne road. He was taken into custody and found to be very drunk. The inebriated German soldier was escorted to Brigade Headquarters by 2nd, Lieutenant Boweden and Corporal Broadhead of "C" Company. Corporal Broadhead recorded the incident in his diary with the comment "Got him to H.Q., after a bit of a struggle!"

On the same day the 16th received news that Corporal C. Higgins had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for gallantry and devotion to duty.

On December 23rd, Major G. S. Blagbrough was killed during a whizz-bang bombardment of the 16th Battalion's front. The Major, a former master at Bridlington Grammar School where he had been known affectionately by his pupils as Blags, had been with the Battalion since its formation and was second-in-command at the time of his death.

On December 31st, the 93rd Infantry Brigade were relieved by the 92nd Infantry Brigade. The 16th moved to Coigneux to rest but the 18th Battalion were required to remain in Hebuterne Keep and Saily aux Bois until January 10th, 1917, when they were relieved in the front line by the 8th Battalion of the Gloucester Regiment.

The entire Brigade then spent over a month resting in the Doullens-Bernaville area. During this period both battalions commenced training in accordance with the newly introduced system of platoon organization under which platoon and company officers were entirely responsible for the training of their units including bombers, Lewis gunners and rifle grenadiers. Work was principally devoted to platoon drill, musketry, reorganization of platoons and route marching. Only half each working day was devoted to these tasks, the remainder on alternate afternoons and mornings by half battalions, being set aside for recreation. Football matches, running, tug-of-war, bayonet fighting, bomb throwing, and boxing matches were organized and all men, the diaries record, took part.

In January, Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy left the Battalion to command the 6th Battalion of his own regiment, the Scottish Rifles. A tall genteel Scot, he always insisted on wearing the 'trews' and glengarry of his own regiment, and was well liked and respected by all. His place was taken by Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Croydon, an officer who had risen from the ranks. Before receiving his commission he had been a Sergeant Major in the Lincolnshire Regiment. He was a strict disciplinarian

HEBUTERNE

of gruff manner. Coming events were to prove him a very proficient and professional officer.

Public concern at this time caused the War Office to forbid the employment of soldiers under the age of nineteen in the front line. Lance-Corporal Morgan and nineteen other young soldiers were, therefore, detached for instructional duties at the Infantry Training Depot at Etaples, known to British Tommies as "Eat Apples". The Depot included a large tract of land laid out with trenches, barbed wire, etc., known to soldiers as the Bull Ring. Here new drafts from Britain were taught the techniques of trench warfare by instructors who were known to their students as Canaries because of their yellow arm bands. George was to find, with some disgust, that many Canaries had never seen the front line. He described the shrieks, grunts and screams which these instructors urged recruits to utter whilst thrusting bayonets into straw-filled sacks, as "rather silly." A detailed description of the regime at Eat Apples is to be found in Denis Winter's book "Death's Men".

Lance Corporal Morgan was to rejoin his battalion on achieving his 19th birthday.



.303" Lewis Machine Gun. MOD Pattern Room, Nottingham