

RECORD OF THE 8th (SERVICE) BATTALION (PIONEERS).
July 1916 to June 1917.
BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL CHRONICLE

The general situation on the Salonika front has been discussed in the 7th Battalion Record a few pages back, so needs no further remarks. The particular duties of a pioneer battalion in a country practically without roads necessitated a considerable amount of work ahead of the force before any movements could take place, and the arduous nature of the work of the 8th Battalion is described in the diary of Lieut. T. N. Watts-Watts which follows.

July 4th.—The Battalion, which at this time numbered 35 officers and 950 other ranks, received orders to proceed towards the Struma front to construct a light railway. All heavy baggage was at once dumped in camp and left in charge of a guard under 2nd Lieut. C. Sheppard, the Battalion, with light kit only, and without tents or bivouacs, marching out of camp the same evening at 18.30 hours.

(i.e., 6.30 p.m. Lieut. Watts-Watts in his diary describes time in the official method in use on this front, viz., counting from midnight by the 24-hour clock. Thus 1 a.m. is 01.00 hours, 2 p.m. is 14.00 hours, 3.45 a.m. is 03.45 hours, 11.45 p.m. is 23.45 hours, etc.—ed.)

The surplus baggage was handed over to 78th Brigade, and the guard rejoined the Battalion a few days later.

The night was spent at 25th kilo, stone on the Seres road just N. of Guvezne. The following day was occupied in endeavouring to survive the intense heat in a spot which afforded no shade of any description; bivouacs had not been issued, and improvised shelters made of blankets hung between the front and rear half of limbers only afforded shade to a favoured few. This day was undoubtedly the hottest and most uncomfortable spent by the Battalion to date, and the effect on all ranks was most marked when the march was resumed that evening at 18.30. An advance of ten miles was made along the Seres road; the heat of the night was intense, the route was almost entirely uphill, and the men were carrying full packs; little water was available, and frequent halts were called in order to keep the Battalion together.

At the 40th kilo, stone the Battalion halted at midnight, bivouacked again in the open, and resumed the forward march the following morning (6th July) to the camp site allotted near the 43rd kilo, stone, about 2 miles W. of Likovan. Water here was very scarce, great difficulty was experienced in finding sufficient for the animals, and the quality of the water available for the men was doubtful. Mosquitoes were numerous at night, and no adequate protection in the way of netting had been issued; sickness was increasing at a steady pace, and several cases were admitted to hospital daily. The highest shade temperature was 112° F.

July 25th.—From July 7th to 24th the Battalion had worked daily on the construction of a Decauville line from 43rd kilo, stone on the Seres road to Merova, a village about 10 miles distant, at which were established the H.Q. of the XVIth Corps. The Battalion being detached from the 26th Division, communication was established by heliograph with the 78th Infantry Brigade at Dremiglava (about 20 miles distant), and by telephone via the 16th Corps lines to 26th Divisional H.Q. The companies of the Battalion were located in various camps along the line of railway, and were accommodated in bivouacs, which arrived on the morning of July 6th. These bivouacs travelled in Indian A.T. carts, 6 of which, with their native drivers, were attached to the Battalion until the end of the month.

On 25th July orders were received to rejoin the Division, which was advancing farther north towards Doiran. Accordingly the Battalion reassembled that night and marched with its transport back along the Seres road, camping in the early morning at the same spot above Guvezne as on the forward journey. This ground, previously fresh, had become by this time exceedingly foul from the large number of troops which had passed through in the interim, and, accordingly, when daylight came (26th July) a new site was selected. (Orders were received that the Battalion would remain at Guvezne for a few days.)

July 28th.—March resumed via the N. side of Deve Kran to the village of Amberkeui (1145/1505), arriving about midnight 28/29th.

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July 29th.—Marches resumed across the River Galiko to Sarigol (138/160) by night; heavy rain commenced in the afternoon and continued for several hours; the Battalion had to ford the river, now in flood, and the greatest difficulty was experienced with the transport; men and officers alike waded waist deep through the rushing stream, and several mule teams were nearly swept off their feet; in some other units casualties actually occurred, riders and animals being carried away and drowned in the flood.

July 30th.—Battalion resumed the march to Dragomir via Kirec at 19.30 hours after heavy rain all day. Roads almost impassable in places, and camp not reached until 04.00 hours. Following day spent clearing up the camp site. Transport did not arrive until daylight owing to great difficulties on the road and the darkness of the previous night. Great heat prevailed through this month, shade temperatures of about 106° F. being common experiences.

August 1st.—Battalion remained at Dragomir employed on work at Corps H.Q. Kirec, on aviation ground at Kirec, and various other smaller works in the neighbourhood,

August 2nd.—B Company moved to Kalinova to work on roads for the 79th Infantry Brigade (Kalinova to La Patte d'Oie).

On this date the first issue of gas helmets and anti-lachrymatory, goggles was made to the Battalion. B Company also constructed a limber track across Gidemli Ford; this work, being "in view," had to be carried out by night.

August 8th.—D Company moved to Corps H.Q. Kirec for work on the Corps Camp.

August 9th.—A Company proceeded on detachment to Cugunci to make roads and tracks between Kalinova and Asagi-Mahala, the latter place being under close observation from a. Bulgar balloon and subject to frequent shelling.

August 11th.—C Company moved to Hadzi-Junuj to commence work on Decauville line being established between Vanes and Kalinova.

August 13th.—A man was wounded by shell-fire-our first casualty in the war.

August 17th.—Only Battalion H.Q. remained at Dragomir after the 11th, so on 17th the Battalion H.Q. moved to new camp site at Mihalova, just south of the Ford, and was joined the same day by C and D Companies. Work immediately resumed upon the Decauville line, and every available man turned out each day to ensure completion of line at the earliest possible date. A large dump at Kalinova was so placed as to be in danger of shelling, and an assured line of supply by Decauville was a matter of great urgency. Task work was resorted to to ensure the greatest possible output from each man, and the line was practically completed by 28th August. Where the line crossed the Gjol Ajak (a wide and swift river in wet weather) a large and heavy timber bridge was constructed. This bridge and, indeed, much of the line was in full view of the Bulgar positions, but shelling was of infrequent occurrence. (After two years this bridge is still in constant use. and though many times fired at has never been hit.)

August 29th.—Information received from deserters showed that a surprise Bulgar attack was impending, and the Battalion (less A and B Companies) was ordered to move forward immediately in reserve. With as little transport as possible the Battalion moved off at dusk and took up a position at the foot of Mort Homme, standing-by all night in readiness for an emergency. Nothing of importance occurred, however, during the night, and the same programme was followed the next night, the day being spent in sleep and rest.

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August 31st.—The Battalion, still in its temporary advanced camp, paraded at night and marched over the top of the peak known as Mort Homme, down the valley to Wagon Hill, and spent the night in digging new front line trenches. Patrols were furnished by the Battalion in the line, and nothing of interest occurred beyond a little shelling of adjoining positions. This front line trench work was continued by D Company, the Battalion H.Q. and C Company returning to their Mihalova camp on 1st September.

September 2nd.—Work resumed upon the Decaeville line by C Company and by all the available men on H.Q. (chiefly Lewis-gunners). Occasional storms did much damage to the embankments, and making good and draining in various places provided occupation for many men daily.

September 6th.—C Company moved from Mihalova to new camp site near Malovci to continue work upon the Decaeville line.

September 8th.—D Company moved from Kalinova to Vergetor for the same purpose.

September 13th.— About this time the question of a suitable site for a winter camp for H.Q. and transport was considered, and an excellent site decided upon about half a mile to the east (point 1257/1732), in the ravine of the Gjol Ajak, half a mile above the wooden bridge on the Decaeville line at Mihalova.

Here an excellent camp was made, paved lines being laid for the mules, and standings being dug for each officer's horse in a deep mill race which ran through the camp. This race had long since been out of use and was quite dry; it formed a perfect protection for the animals against the bitter Vardar winds and the blizzards of the winter months. The men's lines were sited facing south with a steep cliff on the north side; in every respect the camp, for winter purposes, was ideal.

This camp remained the permanent H.Q. of the Battalion throughout the winter of 1916/17.

September 24th.—C Company moved from the Mihalova summer camp to the winter camp described above, and was joined by Battalion H.Q. on 26th September.

September 27th.—C Company moved to camp site E. of Kalinova for road work under 77th Infantry Brigade near Table Hill.

September 29th.—D Company moved from Vergetor and relieved B Company at Kalinova, latter company rejoining H.Q. same day. The distribution of the Battalion was now as follows : H.Q., with B Company, at the camp on the Gjol Ajak; A Company at Cugunci; D Company at Kalinova; C Company at Table Hill (adjoining the village, in ruins, of Asagi Mahala).

At this time D Company was working on the Patte d'Oie road (commenced by D Company); C Company on roads in the vicinity of Table Hill, and on front line wiring for 77th Brigade for this work. Captain Giffard, then O.C. C Company, acted as officer in charge of defence works for the Brigade, and Infantry Battalions of that Brigade acted under his orders, working with C Company nightly on the improvement of the defence system, which work included the siting and construction of new trenches at various points of the 77th Brigade front.

B Company, after relief by D Company on 27th September, carried on with maintenance work on the Decaeville line near Mihalova.

A Company were employed in the Kalinova-Asagi Mahala road, and on other tracks in the vicinity of Cugunci. Shelling of the A Company work was of frequent occurrence, but no casualties were sustained.

September 30th.—The effective strength of the Battalion was 33 officers and 796 other ranks.

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October 2nd.—B and D Companies both working on maintenance of Decauville line between Malovci and Kalinova.

October 4th.—Twenty O.R. from Wilts Yeomanry and 30 O.R. from Scottish Horse arrived on transfer for transport duties. These men replaced an equal number of the original transport drivers of the Battalion, and constituted the first draft of importance received by the Battalion since leaving England.

October 10th.—2nd Lieut. C. Sheppard and 2nd Lieut. G. L. Huggen, with 53 O.R., representing all the available men with railway experience in the Battalion, proceeded on detachment to Janes to form the nucleus of the permanent staff of the Janes-Kalinova light railway. The line was under the charge of 2nd Lieut. Sheppard for several months, and the men were ultimately transferred to the R.E.

October 11th.—H.Q. represented by the C.O., Adjutant, and M.O., with A and B Companies, moved to Hill 420 for work on a second-line 53 system of trenches and defence works.
(Remainder of H.Q. personnel, with D Company and transport, stayed at H.Q. camp on Gjol Ajak.)

On arrival at Hill 420 the half Battalion stood by all night in support for an attack being made by 11th Worcesters (78th Infantry Brigade) on the Doiran front. The following day was spent in settling into camp, and at night (October 12th) both companies marched via Vladaja Church to Hill 316 (just N.E. of Hill 420), afterwards named Pioneer Hill, to commence work upon the new second-line trench system (under 78th Infantry Brigade). This work consisted of five support and communication trenches, with deep barbed-wire entanglements, and occupied A and B Companies for the next two months. The work was all done at night; the march to and from Hill 420 occupied an hour each way, and the track via Col de Kates and Vladaja Church was of the worst description. The weather was unusually wet and cold, and marching proved heavy work in the deep mud. Damage to the work was caused by enemy shelling in the daytime, but beyond the destruction of an occasional fire bay, no serious hindrance resulted. B Company were employed during this period also in making emplacements for a Battery in Pearse Ravine, and in constructing a rough track by which the guns could be lowered by hand to their new positions in the steep sides of the ravine.

October 12th.—Some shelling of French heavy battery just south of Hill 420 occurred, the shells burst on the foothills below our camp, but no damage was occasioned, either to the French or ourselves.
2nd Lieut. Curtis left Battalion on transfer to R.E.

October 25th.—D Company moved from Kalinova to new camp site at Vergetor to make good damage caused to the Decauville line, by recent heavy rains.

November 1st.—Detachment of D Company (Lieut. Miller and 52 O.R.) proceeded to Armutci to construct hangars for the 47th Squadron R.F.C., and for general clearing work on the flying ground; rejoined Battalion on 17th November.
Effective strength of Battalion, 32 officers and 849 other ranks.

November 6th.—Half A Company commenced construction of battle H.Q. for G.O.C. Division on the western slopes of Hill 420. This consisted of a series of splinter proof dugouts, with communication trenches and an observation post. The work being in view, only night work was possible until cover for the working parties had been provided, screening of the whole of the work had to be carried out as it proceeded, and most of the excavated earth had to be carted away and tipped out of view. The work occupied three months or so. On February 21st all men were withdrawn from the work except twelve. The whole of the dug-outs and C.T.'s were excavated from solid rock, and much trouble was experienced from water which, even at this elevation, continually percolated through the walls and floors.

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November 9th.—By this date the original work upon which A and B Companies were employed on Pioneer Hill (Hill 316) was completed, and on the following night C.T.'s were commenced to connect Hill 316 with the defensive works on Hill 288 on the E., and with Pearse Hill on the W. (These latter works were carried out simultaneously on our right and left by infantry units of 78th Brigade.) All the work was under observation from Hill 535 and from Grand Couronne, and done, therefore, at night only during the early stages. From 17th November onwards sufficient cover was provided to enable day work to be carried on.

November 22nd.—First party of O.R. (9) proceeded on leave to England.

December 1st.—Exceptionally wet weather for several days, work of all companies greatly interfered with, and on one or two occasions entirely suspended. Heavy shelling occurred (1/12/16) of the antiaircraft batteries in vicinity of our 420 camp, but no casualties by the Battalion were sustained.

B Company, while at work by day on Junction Hill (Hill 288, just E. of Pioneer Hill), adjoining Vladaja Ravine, were heavily shelled and narrowly escaped casualties.

Effective strength of the Battalion, 31 officers and 858 other ranks.

Battalion Equipment.—During November 1916 travelling kitchens were loaned to the Battalion (one per company), and remained permanently on charge, though not included in establishment. Extra teams were not provided, but the kitchens proved of great value, especially in the matter of economy of fuel during bad weather and as a convenience during moves.

December 12th.—Acting R.-S.-M. G. J. Beckett awarded Military Service Medal.

December 13th.—Lieut.-Colonel B. Cruddas proceeded to Base for leave to England; following day H.Q. moved back to transport camp at Mihalova, and Major A. E. Burt assumed temporary command.

Reinforcements.—On 13th December 112 O.R. draft from Royal Fusiliers arrived from England and received one month's training before joining their companies. Parade ground used by draft was shelled on 17th December, and new ground had to be selected.

December 20th.—B Company moved to new camp site at Dobrovica to work on second line wiring between Rifle Pit Hill and Doiran Lake. All this work was performed at night; being in full view, the work was occasionally shelled. On the lake side the wire extended some distance into the water, the men on this section being provided with waders.

One platoon, A Company, remained at Hill 420 to continue work on command post; remaining 3 platoons moved (20/12/16) to Piton Rocheux to work on a diversion of the main Kilindir-Doiran road, in the neighbourhood of Dobrovica, the main road under enemy observation from Grand Couronne being subject to shelling and only available for use by night. The diversion was taken through a low lying swamp which necessitated the use of brushwood and fascines to obtain a solid foundation for the road bed. Considerable drainage work had to be carried out also, but an excellent road was completed by the middle of March (total length about half a mile).

December 21st.—Half D Company moved to Hill 420 to work a quarry for 78th Brigade near Three Trees Fountain, Rates.

December 25th.—Second Christmas Day spent on active service by the Battalion. An excellent dinner was provided for the Battalion from the funds of the Regimental Institutes and a half day's holiday granted.

At this time D Company, employed on Malovci-Cugunci main road, had one company of the 2/18th London Irish (T.F.) attached for work.

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C Company, previously working under 77th Brigade, came under C.R.E. for road work in the neighbourhood of Table Hill.

December 29th.—B Company's transport lines at Drobrovica were shelled, and some damage was done to the pack saddlery and transport equipment. These lines were moved to a new site the same day, farther away from the Doiran road, parts of which were in view from Grand Couronne, and were subject to occasional shelling. At about this time A Company, working on the Doiran road diversion, commenced the demolition of the stone walls and ruined cottages in Dobrovica village to provide metal for the road. The village was in view of Grand Couronne, and as the demolition was carried on in daylight, and involved limbers and teams entering the village, enemy fire was ultimately drawn. Some limbers, being filled with stone, were taken off at a great pace by the drivers, who went down hill and up again in their endeavours to dodge the shells. No casualties occurred, and the incident caused much amusement to those of the company who were merely spectators.

December 31st.—Effective strength of the Battalion, 32 officers and 983 other ranks.

1917.

January 1st, 1917.—At this time companies were distributed as under :—

A Company : Piton Rocheux (Kilindir), working on Doiran road; detachment of A (35 O.K.) at Hill 420; Div. O.P.

B Company : Dobrovica; second line wiring for 79th Brigade.

C Company : Table Hill; roads under C.R.E.

D Company: Mihalova; (H.Q. camp) working on Cugunci-Malovci road. Detachment (1 officer, 46 O.R.) camped at Hill 420 quarrying at Rates for roads; rejoined D Company 16th January.

Training of the draft, which arrived 13th December, was completed by the middle of January, and the men were distributed to the companies on 16th.

Weather during the month was chiefly cold and wet, with periodical visitations of the bitter Vardar wind for which Macedonia is notorious.

January 9th.—Captain Giffard and 8 O.R. proceeded to England with the third leave party.

January 27th.—Two platoons C Company moved to Grand Ravine (foot of Mort Homme) to construct ammunition shelters for the Corps Artillery.

January 31st.—7 O.R. proceeded to England with fourth leave party.

Effective strength of Battalion, 32 officers and 977 O.R.

February 16th — Lieut.-Colonel B. Cruddas rejoined from leave in England.

B Company moved from Dobrovica Camp to new camp at Rates to work on the road from Three Trees Fountain to the Col de Rates. This road (unmetalled at this date) was in an appalling state, and had to carry heavy lorry traffic with gun ammunition, etc., in addition to all supplies for troops in the Vladaja area.

Continued wet and frosty weather alternating, rendered the metalling of this road absolutely imperative, and the greater portion of this stretch was finished in two months.

February 21st.—Detachment of A Company at Hill 420 (less 12 men) rejoined A Company at Piton Rocheux to assist in the diversion of the main Doiran road near Dobrovica.

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February 22nd.—D Company (camped at H.Q. camp, Mihalova) completed the reconstruction of the Malovci-Cugunci road, and commenced repairs to the old Turkish main road between Cugunci and Kalinova.

This road has a special interest attaching to it, as it appears to be the only road in Macedonia which has been constructed in recent times under Turkish rule.

When the British force landed at Salonika in 1915 only two roads of any importance existed, one to Seres and the other to Monastir. Outside the town of Salonika there is no evidence of development of any kind, and no attempt has been made to open up the country. But this road, which commences at Kilindir and runs through to Karasuli (connecting the two lines to Seres and Uskub respectively), a total distance of about 15 miles in length, was apparently constructed by the Turkish Government as a strategic road, running as it does throughout its length roughly parallel to the frontier line between Macedonia and Serbia.

The original road was well laid, and intended to carry heavy traffic. It is built on Roman lines, well drained and bridged, and is provided with a hand-packed foundation. It is remarkable that, in a country in which the Turk chiefly devoted his attentions to cutting down timber and to a general disregard for the requirements of the future, he should expend time and money on the construction of a work of so permanent a nature. The original width of the road as laid out (about 12 feet) has been doubled by British and Allied labour since February 1917, in order to meet the requirements of modern military transport.

February 23rd.—Draft of 34 O.R. from York and Lancaster Regiment arrived. About this time a bombing squadron arrived on the Bulgar front, and frequent raids were carried out over our lines. Formation Headquarters, camps, transport lines, and dumps received a great deal of attention, and life at times was most unpleasant.

This bombing squadron, consisting of about 30 machines, stayed about three months, and was ultimately withdrawn, presumably for more pressing work in the Western theatre.

March 3rd.—Captain Giffard and 8 O.R. rejoined from leave in U.K.

March 8th.—3 platoons D Company moved from H.Q. Camp to join B Company at Rates and to work on the same road.

March 10th.—C Company (3 platoons) moved from Table Hill, where they had been camped since the previous September, to a new camp near Kilindir, to construct new Headquarters for 26th Div. Staff at Buck Hill. On 15th March they moved again to Piton Rocheux, their camp site being handed over to another unit.

March 15th.—H.Q. moved from the winter camp at Mihalova to Piton Rocheux (near Kilindir), joining the 2 platoons of C Company same day. This move was necessitated by the change of the Divisional front, which now comprised the Doiran Sector, recently taken over from the French, and also in preparation for the spring offensive. The two platoons of C Company on detachment at Kalinova rejoined C and H.Q. on 21st March.

March 12th.—Draft of 25 O.R. arrived.

March 23rd.—The new pattern Box Respirators (anti-gas) were issued to the Battalion, and several parades held about this time for training all ranks in their use.

The weather had now greatly improved, and fine warm days were increasing in number.

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The offensive, which was due to commence the following month, was now responsible for numerous preparations of all kinds and for various company moves.

March 31st.—Effective strength of the Battalion, 29 officers and 1,012 O.R.

April 5th.—D Company from Rates to new camp in Pearse Ravine, just south of Pioneer Hill, to do road work in Pearse Ravine for 78th Infantry Brigade in connexion with the forthcoming operations. B Company moved from Rates and joined H.Q. at Piton Rocheux. On 8th March B Company moved again to new camp at Hill 221, near Bath Valley in the Vladaja Ravine, for road work in Bath Valley and on the forward end of the Doiran road under the 79th Infantry Brigade.

April 10th.—D Company's camp shelled by Bulgar artillery searching for our batteries in Pearse Ravine. Two shells fell among a group of men in the camp, killing 2 O.R. and wounding 8. (Of the latter 2 O.R. subsequently died in hospital.)

The following day D Company moved back to a new camp near the Col de Rates, but continued the road work for 78th Brigade in Pearse Ravine.

April 12th-22nd.—The senior officers of each company reconnoitred "No Man's Land " between Doiran Lake and the west side of Petit Couronne on their respective company fronts, as allotted for the operations commencing 24th/25th April.

April 17th.—Lieut.-Colonel B. Cruddas left to assume temporary command of 9th Battalion South Lancashire Regiment.

April 22nd.—Enemy bombing planes very active; bombs were dropped at each end of our H.Q. Camp, but outside the area of bivouacs, etc. An adjoining unit had very narrow escapes, and A Company, at Piton Rocheux, had one bomb actually in their camp, which wounded some of the transport animals. No other casualties occurred, however, all ranks being sheltered by the bombardment slits which formed a part of every camp.

April 23rd.—To prepare for the offensive of the following days A, C, and H.Q. Companies moved to Vladaja Ravine (Hill 221) and joined B Company.

D Company moved the same day to Elbow Ravine to operate with 78th Infantry Brigade.

The work of A, B, and C Companies (attached to 79th Brigade), as planned, consisted of 3 separate communication trenches to be dug after the capture of the enemy's front-line trench to connect the latter with our own. The intervening ground varied in width from about 200 to 600 yards, and between the lines on B Company's front a wide and deep ravine had to be crossed. On the fronts of A and C Companies the ground was easier, but it provided no cover from view or from fire, and everywhere only a few inches of earth overlay the rocky subsoil.

D Company, away a mile to the left, had assigned to them the task of making a track for pack transport down Hand Ravine into the Jumeaux Ravine.

All officers were dressed in the uniform of the ranks, and carried a rifle and bayonet. Every man carried, in addition, a pick, shovel, or crowbar; and extra tools (spares) were dumped near the positions of assembly.

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April 24th/25th.—At zero hour (21.15) Battalion H.Q. and A, B, and C Companies moved off from the camp in Vladaja Ravine, marching direct across country to their respective assembly positions : A and B Companies, with Battalion H.Q., to Swindon Camp (7th Wilts H.Q.); C Company to Sunken Road (12th Hants advanced H.Q.).

The march to these assembly positions was an inspiring event: the battle was in full progress; the whole battle front was in view from the high ground of the Hampshire Ridge, across which we passed; and the night was at times almost like day with the incessant use of Very lights by the enemy. These searchlights were constantly playing on our positions from points in rear of the enemy lines, and these were on several occasions directed straight at us as we advanced across the open. By calling an immediate halt, however our presence was not detected, and all the companies arrived at their assembly positions with a total loss of only 3 other ranks, wounded from stray bullets. As we descended the forward slopes of the Jumeaux the air was thick with "strays," but they passed generally well overhead. One humorous incident cheered us greatly on our way: in one of the breathless moments when the searchlight played upon us, when guns and shells were creating a deafening noise all around, and stray bullets were humming in the air, it was passed up from the rear of one company, "Private does not feel well."

A little unconscious humour at such a time proved very popular.

Another remark, made in all seriousness by an N.C.O. who had not previously been under fire, was to the effect that "there seemed to be a lot of bees about tonight." This in reference to the "strays" which "pinged" on all sides.

D Company, meanwhile, moved from its camp in Elbow Ravine at zero hour and commenced work upon the track in Hand Ravine. It was found that this ravine was the target for heavy shelling on the part of the enemy; when work was no longer possible in the ravine, Lieut. N. W. Elliott, i/c of the party, showed great coolness and resource in removing wounded men to safety.

From their assembly positions A, B, and C Companies moved forward during the early stages of the attack to prepare to take up positions for commencing their work. C Company, on the left, stood by on the N. slope of the Jumeaux until about 1 a.m., when they were ordered to occupy our front line to support the attack. Later they were ordered to prepare to join in the attack, but this order was cancelled when it was decided to withdraw our troops from the enemy front line owing to our inability to hold out against the heavy counter-attacks of the enemy C Company ultimately covered the retirement of our attacking troops on that portion of the front.

A Company, operating with the 7th Wilts Regiment, were unable to commence their work owing to the inability of the attacking troops to establish themselves in the enemy front line, and were obliged to return from our front line trenches to Swindon Camp to relieve the congestion which was caused by wounded returning and carrying parties going forward.

B Company, also under 7th Wilts, assembled in Doiran Road Camp (just behind the front line trenches at B.4), and later occupied the support trenches at B.4, and provided a platoon to protect the right flank of the attack, on the Doiran road, close to the lake edge.

None of the companies carried out its programme of work, and at 6 a.m. on the 25th A, B, and C were recalled and marched back to camp in Vladaja Ravine via the Out Trench and Rifle Pit Ravine, D Company returning to camp in Elbow Ravine.

Total casualties.—3 O.R. killed, 9 O.R. wounded.

The day of 25th April was spent in resting by all companies except D. The latter moved back from Elbow Ravine to their old camp at Col de Rates.

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April 27th.—Captain Donald, R.A.M.C., left the Battalion for England, and was replaced by Captain G. Davidson, R.A.M.C.

The next three weeks (with the exception of 8/9 May) were spent by A, B, and C Companies in working nightly on the construction of saps and trenches in advance of our front line. This work was carried on in the face of a certain amount of destructive and harassing fire from the enemy, and proved very unpleasant. The digging was all in rock, and in the early stages of the work no cover of any kind was available for the working parties, whose drills and sledge-hammers made considerable noise. The work was on the forward slopes of our positions and in full view of the enemy by day. A good deal of sniping had to be endured, and this, though generally ineffective, was very trying to work under. During this period D Company remained under the 78th Infantry Brigade on road work, 2 platoons moving on 7th May to Stonehenge (on the Doiran road) in preparation for the second attack. During this time also B Company employed a small party each night constructing searchlight positions on La Tortue and Rifle Pit Hill, and some machine-gun emplacements on La Tortue.

May 8th/9th.—The offensive operations of 24th/25th April were resumed, and the Battalion "attended" what is known as the Second Battle of Doiran.

The general plan of this attack differed only in minor details from the first, except that the assaulting battalions had a smaller front allotted them, and reserves from another Division were in waiting.

The tasks allotted to the companies of the Battalion were precisely the same, and the approach from the 3 company camps in Vladaja Ravine was carried out in the same manner as before, each company marching out at "X hour" to the following positions :—

A Company to Swindon Camp for attachment to 12th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (77th Brigade).
B Company to Doiran Road Camp for attachment to 11th Scottish Rifles (77th Brigade).
C Company to Silbury Fort for attachment to 10th Black Watch (77th Brigade).
Half D Company to second-line trenches Hampshire Ridge under 107 Company R.E.
Half D Company under 78th Brigade to La Tortue for consolidation work on Petit Couronne.
Battalion H.Q. were situated in Swindon Camp.

On the way to the foregoing positions of assembly only 4 O.R. casualties were sustained.

A Company at 23.30 hours received orders to move forward to B.8 (front line), where they remained until 00 30 hours. They were then ordered back to Swindon on account of the congested state of the trenches. This company stood by until 06.37 hours (9th), when they were sent back to camp in Vladaja Ravine. The progress of the attack on their portion of the front had not been sufficiently successful to allow any work to be done on C.T.'s.

B Company reported to 11th Scottish Rifles at 22.30 hours, and remained in Doiran Road Camp until 05.30, when orders were received for them to proceed to B.2 in support. This order was almost immediately cancelled, however; and at 06.45 they, too, left for Vladaja Ravine, having endured a night of shelling, but having been quite unable to carry out work, owing to the inadequate success of our assault. The attacking battalion on this portion of the front had an impossible ravine to cross (Patty Ravine), which in places was about 100 feet deep, with almost vertical sides of rock near the bottom.

This ravine, constantly deluged with trench-mortar shells, proved a veritable death-trap out of which few survivors returned, and its existence seriously affected the operations of our right flank. With the failure of the attacking battalion to establish itself beyond the ravine in sufficient numbers, work for B Company was impossible.

RECORD OF THE 8th (SERVICE) BATTALION (PIONEERS).
July 1916 to June 1917.

C Company reported to 10th Black Watch at Silbury Fort at 22.15, and proceeded to Sunken Road (a track on the N. side of the Jumeaux Ravine) at 23.30. Here they spent two hours lying down in such cover as could be found among the rocks while the attack proceeded, and awaiting orders.

About 01.30 hours C Company were withdrawn to man 'Silbury Fort in case of a counter attack in force by the enemy, and to cover our own withdrawal to our original line. Here the company remained until about 06.00 hours, when they were relieved by the attacking troops.

D Company for the attack were divided into two parties: the first, under Lieut. N. W. Elliott, was attached to a Field Company R.E. at Stonehenge Camp on the Doiran Road. At the hour of the attack this half-company moved forward to the second-line trenches on Hampshire Ridge in readiness for the construction of "bridges across the Jumeaux and other ravines, but, owing to the limited success of the attack, they were not called on, and returned to camp at dawn.

The second half of the company, under Lieut. Miller, was under the orders of 78th Infantry Brigade, and was attached, to the 7th Battalion of our Regiment as a consolidating party. The 7th Battalion attacked and captured the precipitous height known as Petit Couronne, on the north side of the Jumeaux Ravine, losing in the attack their C.O. (killed) and Second in Command (mortally wounded). The counter-attack by the enemy necessitated the use of this half company of D as reinforcements for the 7th Battalion; trench-mortared, machine-gunned, and shelled, they stayed on the position with little or no cover until after noon on the day following.—Concentrated heavy shell-fire, however, ultimately rendered the position untenable, and the surviving troops were withdrawn later. In this attack D Company suffered 34 O.R. killed or wounded, and Lieut. Miller wounded.

Sergeant Smith received the D.C.M. for conspicuous gallantry in this attack.

May 10th.—H.Q. and D Company moved to Transport Camp near Piton Rocheux.

May 11th.—A Company joined H.Q. at the above place.

May 16th;—A: Company moved forward to Hill 221 (Vladaja Ravine).

May 18th.—Lieut.-Colonel K. C. Dobbs (2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers) assumed command of the Battalion.

May 23rd.—The advance party moved to Karasuli (Vardar Front) to take over the camp site of the 1/12th N. Lanes. (Pioneers).

May 28th.—The Battalion moved to the new Divisional area on the Vardar front; D Company to camp near Kalinova; A to near Selimli Dere Bridge; B, C, and H.Q. to Pulpit Hill. All companies were employed on quarrying and road-making.

May 31st.—B Company moved to camp between Oreovica and Sal de l'Abri.
Effective strength of Battalion: 25 officers and 963 O.R.

June 11th.—A Company moved to new site near P.N., on the Karasuli-Kilindir road, near Lake Ardzan.

June 18th.—Half D Company moved to Caussica, to work on marsh road leading to Galavanci.

June 29th.—26th Divisional Horse Show held at Divisional H.Q., Sal de l'Abri.

June 30th.—Effective strength of the Battalion 26 officers and 979 O.R.