

WAR DIARY
1st/5th Battalion the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey)

May 1940

LA CRECHE

2nd May

0900 hrs. Capt. G.J.S. Chatterton proceeded to the school of Air Co-operation, Old Sarum, Salisbury on a course.

3rd May

0515 hrs. Code word was received from Bde. "meaning Enemy Air landing may be expected" full precautions to be taken.

0810 hrs. code word was cancelled by Bde.

1030 hrs. Gen. The Viscount GORT C in C B.E.F. visited the Bn.

4th May

0900 hrs. The Bn. moved by march route to NIEPPE arriving at about 1030 hours.

9th May

2214 hrs. Air raid warning Red received from Bde.

2306 hrs. All clear received.

10th May

1340 hrs. Message received from Bde. "BEF Zero Hour 1300 hrs. T hours 1600 hrs.

1430 hrs. A bivouac party consisting of Capt. A.U. Clark, Sgts. Spooner & Hayman, Cpl. Fuller, L/Cpl. Hatsell and driver proceeded to area North of MENIN. Heavy bombing from enemy aircraft impeded their work considerably.

1535 hrs. The Bn. proceeded by march route crossing the Franco, Belgium frontier at 1600 hrs. and arriving in bivouac area NORTH of MENIN about 2200 hrs. M.T. Column left NIEPPE at 2300 hrs.

MENIN

11th May

0350 hrs. M.T. Column arrived.

1300 hrs. Bivouac party consisting of Capt. A.U. Clark and 4 O.R's left for KLEINE RONSSE.

1910 hrs. The Bn. proceeded by march route to KLEINE RONSSE arriving about 0130 hrs. "A" Coy Being boarded outside CONTRAIL.

2200 hrs. Bn. transport left for KLEINE RONSSE and just escaped heavy enemy ariel bombing arriving at 0330 hrs.

KLEINE RONSSE

12th May

Constant Air Raid warnings RED

13th May

1440 hrs. Parachutist alarm.

1621 hrs. Parachutist alarm.

14th May

"B" Coy. (Capt. H.B. Watson) assumed duties bridge guard river ESCAUT, with H.Q. at KHERKHOVE.

GESELBRECHTEGEM

16th May

Bn. moved by march route to area GESELBRECHTEGEM where Bn. billeted. Coy. Locations were as follows: "A" Coy. CASTER, "B" Coy. At KHERKHOVE and R. ESCAUT bridges, "C" Coy ELSEGEM, "D" Coy. BROEKSTRAAT, "H" Coy.

Area LANGESTRAAT. Section Posts were sited and digging commenced.

Maj. L.C. East relinquished appointment of Adjutant and was appointed 2nd in command.

Maj. Lord Sysonby relinquished appointment of 2nd in command. Capt. Dewsnap was appointed adjutant.

- 17th May 2100 hrs. All Bn. transport less bare essentials for administrative purposes was withdrawn to Bde. Transport Park area MEULEWIJK.
- 18th May 1800 hrs. Maj. Lord Sysonby and Capt. A.G. Neale commenced operation of T.C.P. at KHERKHOVE for withdrawal of I and II Corps. Major East commenced blowing up Barges on R. ESCAUT.
- 19th May 1025 hrs. Orders received from Bde. for battle Positions to be occupied forthwith.
- 21 May 0130 Hours. Major East returned to Bn. having blown all bridges on R. ESCAUT.
0900 hrs. Bn. occupied reserve position with company locations as follows:
6 Queens occupied, Right Forward sector on R. ESCAUT, 2 Buffs Left forward sector R. ESCAUT, Battalion H.Q. immediate vicinity, Farm 028561.
"A" Coy. SMEIR. "D" Coy. BROEKSTRAAT, "C" Coy. ELSEGEM, "B" Coy. GESELBRECHTEGEM
1100 hrs. onwards from 1100 hours numbers of the enemy were observed to arrive on the high ground SOUTH of R. ESCAUT.
1445 hrs. Bn. area heavily shelled by enemy Arty until about 2100 hours.
2130 hrs. Verbal orders were received from Bde. For "C" Coy. O.C. Major Clark to go forward and relieve pressure on 1/6th Queens.
- 20th May 2300 hrs. The Commanding Officer was summoned to Bde. H.Q. during absence of Bde. Commander at PETEGEM
- 21st May 0130 hrs. Verbal orders were received from Bde. for carrier platoon O.C. 2/Lt. J.P.P. Turner to report to 2nd Buffs at Crossroads, NORTH of PETEGEM to help wipe out enemy, who had crossed canal NORTH of R. ESCAUT.
0430 hrs. Carrier Platoon returned.
0630 hrs. Orders received from Brigade for Carrier platoon O.C. Major Lord Sysonby to Attack Enemy who were in and around PETEGEM.
Verbal orders received from Bde. for Reserve Coy. "B" O.C. Capt. H.B. Watson to enter PETEGEM from the north by infiltration methods and strengthen 2 Buffs who had suffered considerably from enemy crossing canal.
Major Clark reported that "C" Coy. had returned from helping 6 Queens and were re-established in ELSEGEM.

21st May cont/...

0645 hrs. Verbal orders received from Bde. for another Coy "D" O.C. Capt. J.S. CHALDECOTT to follow "B" Coy. and attack PETEGEM from the NORTH with remainder of battalion moving Eastward limits PETEGEM. 4th R.W.K. were likewise moving westward to PETEGEM.

0700 hrs. The Commanding Officer returned from Bde. H.Q. at 0715 hrs. with one platoon "A" Coy. and A.A. Pln. went forward to PETEGEM.

0730 hrs. Bn. H.Q. O.C. Maj. East and remainder of H Coy. moved forward to area NORTH of Level Crossing at ELSEGEM by which time carrier platoon reported PETEGEM clear of enemy except for ----- elements. The carrier platoon had met with considerable opposition.

0730 hrs. Cont. Losing two carriers and Corporal Peters Wounded, (Since died of wounds). Sergeant Wynn displayed exceptional bravery in rescuing Corporal Peters from his immobilised carrier with the help of Cpl. Barr and Private Cassell. It was without doubt due to The dash and daring of this platoon and the gallant and fine leadership of Lord Sysonby that the manoeuvre was accomplished with so little loss.

flanking Companies on ground as follows. "B" Coy. Level Crossing PETEGEM area limit of main road SOUTH of PETEGEM facing EAST. "B" Coy. Right, "A" Coy. left. The Commanding Officer then went to H.Q. 1/6th Queens to report to Bde. and ask for orders.

By this time, Captain A.G. Neil had been wounded and Capt. Watson wounded and evacuated to our R.A.P. The carrier platoon had reformed and were established near Bn. H.Q. at DRIESCH.

Major East could find no trace of "A" Coy. and only very few elements of "B" Coy. in PETEGEM itself Southwards from the Ry Line, and instructed Capt. Merriman to report this situation to the Commanding Officer, also that "D" Coy. were in temporary position facing PETEGEM – area MIDDLEWUK in conjunction with one Coy. 2 R. Sussex. "A" & "B" Coys. were in fact in position facing EAST some ¼ mile EAST of PETEGEM.

One Coy to be at ELSEGEM with another Coy. also at ELSEGEM to be in a state of readiness to help 1/6 Queen's.

1330 hrs. The Commanding Officer returned to Bn. H.Q. and received Maj. East's report from Capt. Merriman. He then journeyed to PETEGEM and gave a message to "B" Coy. to move to DRIESCH at dusk.

1435 Hrs. The COmmanding Officer returned to Bn. H.Q.

1430 hrs. Maj. East returned to Bn. H.Q.

1545 hrs. Request received from 6th Queen's for "C" Coy. who had previously been ordered by Bde. to hold themselves in readiness to come under command of 6th Queen's if required to go forward as H.Qrs. 6th Queen's was surrounded by enemy.

KNOCKE 2100 hrs. On arrival KNOCKE Brig. Whitty, commanding 133 Inf. Bde. Assumed control of fighting elements of the Bn. which were formed into a composite Coy. u.c. of Lord Sysonby and attached to 5th Bn. R. Sussex, total about 120 men. Captain. A.U. Clark assumed command of the Carrier platoon.

2330 hrs. The commanding officer, Major East and. Adjutant reported to 44th Division H.Q. at HUTTEGEM.

HUTTEGEM
22nd May The Commanding Officer received orders from 44th Div. H.Q. to form composite Bn. at HUTTEGEM consisting mainly of 2nd Buffs and minor elements of 5th and 6th Queens.

1600 hrs. Orders were received for withdrawal of this force to HEULE, NORTH of COURTRAI at time of ??? departure, orders were received from 44th Div. H.Q. to take up a defensive position to cover withdrawal of Div. H.Q. Based on information received that enemy had broken through on West bank. Withdrawal continued about one hour afterwards covered by divisional Cavalry Regt.

2330. Arrival HEULE, Where Force was billeted in conjunction with 6th Queen's. Bn. H.Q., "B" Coy and Carrier Pln. fought on with 5th R. Sussex finally, withdrawing, with them and acting as rear guard. "D" Coy. fought with 2 R. Sussex withdrawing with them. "C" Coy. withdrawing with 6th Queen's on night 21 May missed them owing to the dark and reported to 2" R. Fusiliers in the TIEGHEM area.

HEULE.

23rd May Bn. reformed and moved by march route to HELLE arriving about 1100 hrs. 2/Lts D.U. Clark and Cowen with party of "A" Coy. rejoined the Bn.

HELLE
24th May 0100 hrs Bn. moved by march route to GELUWE (Menin, Ypres Rd) to meet M.T. for transport to LE TOUQUET where on arrival about 0900 hrs. enemy ariel bombing was in progress.

LE TOUQUET
H . 6045 0900 hrs. The Bn. was billeted

25th May 0500 hrs. The Carrier Pln. u.c. of 2/ Lt. Turner reconnoitred landing grounds in locality with view of preventing their use by enemy troop carrying planes.

0900 hrs. Bn. moved by march route to STEINWERCK area where it was billeted in farms WEST of STEINWERCK, arriving about 1300 hrs. Heavy enemy ariel bombing operations were observed area BAILLEUL, ARMENTIERES and ESTAIRES.

STEINWERCK
26th May 1000 hrs. Major Clarke, 2/Lts. Wilkinson and Salmon with remainder of "C" Coy. rejoined the Bn. Further aerial bombing as above observed.

1600 hrs. Capt. J.S. Chaldecott and P.S.M. Haybriette left the Bn. and proceeded to DUNKIRK to report to the I.T.C. The Queen's Regt. As instructors from B.E.F.

27th May

The Commanding Officer acted as President to F.G.C.M.

STRAZEELE

0900 hrs. Bn. moved by march route to area STRAZEELE where on arrival about 1200 hrs. u.c. of Maj. East orders were received from Bde. Comdr. To take up a defensive position as enemy force with tanks were in vicinity operating from FORET de NIEPPE. Enemy tanks were reported on road STRAZEELE-CAESTRE. Bde. Comdr. Also ordered Carrier Pln. u.c. Capt. Merriman to go forward to PRADELLES to cover Bde. Front about half way between STRAZEELE and PRADELLES they encountered enemy tanks and were heavily fired on but by skilful manoeuvring saved both carriers and personnel. Having evaded the enemy tanks Capt. Merriman withdrew the Carriers and occupied the ground as an outpost with their personnel and weapons. A very gallant and able piece of work.

1500 hrs. Position of Bn. as follows: Bn. H.Q. Farm 404488 "C" Coy Right, "A" Coy., Left of road STRAZEELE — BAILLEUL preparing to attack in a Northerly direction "B" Coy taking up position in Southern part of STRAZEELE facing WEST and defending left flank, "D" Coy Reserve area S.E. of Bn. H.Q.

1600 hrs. Maj. East ascertained from Bde. Major 133 Bde. That line of defence plan was rd. CAESTRE - STRAZEELE - SOUTHWARDS facing WEST and the directive previously ordered attack to take up defensive positions on the ?? road down ROUGE-CROIX incl. STRAZEELE incl. "C" Coy Right, "A" Coy. Centre, "B" Coy. Left.

1700 hrs. Bde. Comdr. Ordered Bn. Right boundary to be drawn in to X rds about 1/4 mile N.W. of STRAZEELE. Maj. East pointed out that this would leave a gap between Bn. right Coy. & and 133 Bde. On right flank. Bde. Comdr. Said that he would send forward a Coy. of 2 Buffs to hold this line.

1730 hrs. The Commanding Officer returned to Bn. H.Q. and visited Coys.

2000 hrs. A Pln. of 8th Bn. The Middlesex Regt. (M.G.) came under Bn. Command and established itself in STRAZEELE. A Coy. of French tanks (12) parked in STRAZEELE for its defence offered active co-operation if required.

28th May

0455 hrs. Bde. Comdr. Ordered Bn. H.Q. to move forward to STRAZEELE and reserve Coy. "D" to take up a position on the spur to the WEST of STRAZEELE in front of "A" & "B" Coys who together with "C" Coy. were ordered to push their forward posts WEST to be clear of the shelling on the forward slopes of STRAZEELE. The Bde. Comdr. Said that 6th Queen's would move up to provide depth.

0630 hrs. Bn. H.Q. moved forward and was established around a house about 50 yds N.W. of X rds. in centre of STRAZEELE.

28th May cont/...

0900 hrs. Heavy shelling started on STRAZEELE and continued for about next 12 hrs.

The Coy of 6th Queen's u.c. of Capt. James was put under comd. of the Bn. as Z Coy and took up a position on the left of "B" Coy. to cover the gap between the Bn. and 132 Bde. Situated in Pte Sec Bois.

1100 hrs. After heavy shelling enemy attacked down PRADELLES area along the front of "D", "A" & "C" Coys. while 133 Bde. At CAESTRE to ROUGE CROIX was also heavily attacked.

1300 hrs. The Commanding Officer despatched a section (3) of French Tanks on a sortie to PRADELLES and BOIRE where they shot up and broke up the attacking enemy infantry.

1400 hrs. Rain fell heavily. The Battery of Sussex Yeomanry cooperating put down a heavy concentration on PRADELLES and the area NORTH of it from which the attack was coming. The M.G. Pln. of 8th Middlesex Regt. also put down a barrage in front of "A" and "C" Coys.

1800 hrs. The Commanding Officer was wounded also his servant Pte. Anderson but both continued to fight on.

"C" Coy. reported that the enemy had broken through the gap on the Bn. right flank and also that they were being heavily pressed and owing to Mortar fire and shortages had no Bren L.M.G. left in action.

1930 hrs. Maj. Clarke Comdy. "C" Coy. reported that he was unable to hold his position owing to shelling and was withdrawing his Coy. to area of the ridge N.E. of road CAESTRE - STRAZEELE to form a defensive flank.

2000 hrs. Three French tanks made a recce of the road in the area vacated by "C" Coy. and reported it to be free of enemy and the commanding officer toured the line getting first hand reports from all Coys.

During the whole period from 1100 hrs to 2030 hrs the enemy were pressing heavily but whether they found an easier way NORTH of our position or whether they found the combined efforts of the Bn., R.A., M.G.'s and French tanks had punished them so severely they entirely desisted on the attack after 2030 hrs. and relied entirely on sporadic shelling for aggravation. Great credit was due to the Steadiness of all officers and men in this action for the forces against them were determined and stronger in numbers.

2115 hrs. Captain James commanding Z Coy. reported that he was not yet engaged with the. Enemy but that R.W.K. on his left flank were withdrawing to the r.y line.

2255 hrs. Verbal orders were received by the phone from Bde. to disengage from the enemy and proceed immediately via Bde. H.Q. at X rds. 429492 to

28th May cont/... MONT des CATTs. 4354 leaving behind all transport.

2300 hrs. Companies were instructed to move independently and accomplish this without trouble and without a single casualty.

MONT des CATS
29th May 0500 hrs. Elements of the battalion arrived at MONT des CATS 0700 hrs. The battalion took up a defensive position on the north edge of the Mount and rations were issued.

0830 hrs. Heavy shelling combined with a fierce attack lasting about 30 minutes was made by enemy aircraft using bombs and machine guns. The commanding officer was wounded, and 2/Lt. Hopkins and several Other Ranks killed. Many O.R's were wounded.

0800 hrs. The commanding officer who was in command of 131 Brigade left for a conference. At Div. H.O_'s. situated by the monastery.

0915 hrs Major East ordered the battalion to move to the area clear of the hill to avoid further Casualties from shelling.

0955 hrs. Orders were received from Bde. for the Bn. to move to Dunkirk via POPERINGHE.

POPERINGHE

1200 hrs. The Bn. passed through POPERINGHE and was placed at head of Div. H.Q. column.

1800. hrs. Bn. arrived at PONT AUX CERFS and after one hour rest was ordered to proceed to OXEM.

2300 hrs. The Bn. arrived in OXEM and bulleted for the night.

30th May Bn. proceeded to Dunkirk for embarkation. The majority of the Bn. u.c. of Major East Embarked at 2100 hours. At MALO les BAINS from the eastern side of the DUNKIRK Mole and landed at Dover about 0600 hrs. on May the 31st. May 31st.

31st May 730 hrs. The commanding officer with a party of stragglers embarked at BRAY DUN ES and landed at Dover about 0930 hrs.

1900 hrs. 2/Lt. Nesbitt with a party of stragglers embarked at LA PANNE About 1900 hrs. and landed at Dover about 2100 hours.

2339 hrs. The strength of the battalion was unknown at this time.

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