

**WAR DIARY**  
**1/6th Battalion the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey)**  
**C.O. Lt. Colonel I.T.P. Hughes, DSO, M.C.**

**MAY 1940**

**MSSING PAGES**

**IN THE FIELD**  
15th May

During the day, a general recce of some of the main features, viewpoints and lines of approach was carried out.

**IN THE FIELD**  
16th May

Approximate areas were given to Coy. Comdrs. for detailed recce, namely. "A" Coy., (Major J.V. Godfrey) on right, "B" Coy. (Capt. K. Lockwood) Coy. in centre. "C" Coy. (Capt. R.H. Pontifex) on the left. "D" Coy., (Capt. R.N.J. Rutherford) in reserve area KWAADestraat Chateau. "H.Q." Coy. Major E.S. Bingham M.C. Western edge of Chateau grounds. Bn. H.Q. Lodge by Entrance Gate Northwest corner of Chateau grounds.

During morning, Recce was made with the Bde. Comdr. and O.C. 2nd Buffs of centre of Bde. position about ELSEGHEM Chateau.

Brigade Commander, Fix Junction Point and arrangements made for the left forward Pln. of "C" Coy. the left Coy. to cover right of Buffs. Fixed lines decided on.

Description of the sector allotted to the battalion.

The frontage allotted to the battalion from exclusive EUWHOEK HAMLET on the right to a wooden shanty some 200x North of the ELSEGHEM Chateau. Grounds was approximately 3000 yards. The varying winding course of the ESCAUT in this sector made a sighting of posts and fixed lines of greatest importance. Especially as it was for the most part, difficult to follow the course of the canal from a distance.

Parallel to and about 500 yards to the West runs the main road between OUDENARDE and KERKHOVE.

The ground between this road and the canal afforded on the whole good cover.

The grounds of the two Chateaus provided ample concealment, and between the grounds were several belts of woods. The right forward Pln. of "A" Coy. (2/ Lt. Mullins) was more exposed. The rear of the centre Coy. "B" was extremely open and both H.Q. Coy. and the Reserve platoon occupied cornfields. West of the main road the country was almost devoid of cover except for isolated buildings and the village of ELSEGHEM slightly to the left of the Bn. Sector.

It was originally intended to occupy ELSEGHEM with the Reserve Coy. ("D" and Bn. HQ. This would have given greater depth to the position and made an ideal strongpoint for a Coy. It would however, have caused even greater dispersion of the Bn. and so the idea was discarded. This proved to be a correct decision.

The sector was overlooked from the enemy (Eastern) side of the ESCUAT by a Ridge of high ground, culminating in a pronounced wooden feature left of MELDEN.

Parallel to and 600x East of the canal was a straggling line of houses of inferior quality constituting the village of MEERSCHE. There were several approaches from this village to the canal.

At 1600 hrs. C.O. walked along the Bn. front with each Coy., starting with "C" Coy. on the left, and sited all forward Bren guns and decided on fixed lines. The marking out, etc. of these posts began at once. Emphasis was laid on the following:-

(1) Concealment.

All positions to be approached from the rear and a Sentry placed on each post to prevent anyone trampling down grass, etc. in vicinity. Every possible use to be made of existing buildings and natural objects.

A track plan for every post to be arranged.

(2) Alternative positions.

(3) All round cover of parapets and parados.

## **IN THE FIELD**

17th May

The Bn. moved into the sector during the morning. The move was carried out in small parties at irregular intervals to make it as inconspicuous as possible. Officers and men were quartered in barns and sheds near their defensive positions.

Bn. H.Q. opened at the lodge of KWAADestraat Chateau.

Work on defensive positions continued.

C.O. completed sightings of the guns of "A" Coy. (Right forward 8 platoon). The position of this platoon was rather exposed, but full use was made of numerous wood stacks. As a temporary arrangement pending the arrival of Tps. on the right one section of platoon occupied EUWHOEK.

The location of "B" Coy. H.Q. and its reserve platoon (P.S.M. Burns No. 12) was decided on.

The defensive arrangements of the Bn. H.Q. were begun. Trenches were dug round the lodge facing the left and rear. These were connected up with the cellar of the lodge which was a vaulted one and particularly strong. One antitank Gun of the Bde. A/T Coy. was sighted in each forward Coy. Area.

In the case of the two right forward companies, (B & C) these guns were sited on the line of the F.D.L.'s. The gun with the right Fwd. Coy. ("A") was located near the reserve pln.

The reserve Coy. ("D") was situated in the KWAADestraat Chateau Grounds. Two pln's. occupied posts on the far edge of the grounds from which they could thicken up what was obviously a dangerous part of the front. The remaining Pln. was dug in in the rear of the grounds, and given a counter attack task.

B Echelon transport remained in the back area near HAELENDRIES.

**IN THE FIELD**  
18th May

Work on defensive positions continued.

Major E.S. Bingham M.C. carried out a thorough recce of the area to the right of the Bn. with a view to helping the incoming unit when it arrived.

A complete report with sketch map was completed and handed to Brig. Anderson, commanding 12th Infantry Brigade the same evening.

In the afternoon the C.O. and acting adjutant Capt. P.E. Trench drove across KERKHOVE Bridge to MEERSCHE and examined likely lines of approach to and from the village.

At the same time, a forecast was made of the probable action of the Germans.

The village of MEERSCHE afforded a likely forming up area and several covered routes, ran from the village to the canal bank. The best of these entered a loop of the canal about the junction point of "A" & "B" Coys. This loop was rapidly drying out and provided shelter for over 100 men. The forecast made proved surprisingly accurate. An inspection was next made of the fwd. positions. All posts were manned and then examined (from the enemy side) through field glasses.

Several minor alterations, chiefly to camouflage, were made and in one or two cases Parados were raised. The steel helmet without any cover in most cases was the first indication of a post.

In addition, a readjustment of post was made to fit in with the forecast of likely enemy action.

The majority of Officers during the evening and following day examine their positions from the east Bank of the canal.

Visit from Lt. Col. T Lion-Smith R.A. to decide on artillery support.

Slight adjustments were made to the S.O.S. line which was finally fixed on the lines of MEERSCHE village. The SOS signal was two green Verey Lights.

During the battle that followed, this target was most successfully engaged and throughout the supporting artillery provided valuable assistance.

The Battalion was ordered to find T.C.P. at BERCHEM and KERKHOVE. These were commanded by Lieut. G.J.H.D. Collins and Capt. G.N. James, respectively and were manned from 2300 hrs. till the following afternoon.

During the evening the 5th Northants came in on the right of the battalion and the section of 8 Pln. "A" Coy. vacated EUWHOEK.

## **IN THE FIELD**

19th May

Work on defence positions continued.

Emphasis was laid on the following:-

1. Erection of some form of wire obstacle, especially along line of the canal. Full use to be made of existing fences by moving those at right sides of the canal across the front parallel to the canal.
2. Completion of alternative position Trenches.
3. Connecting up with crawl trenches, completion and checking by companies of range cards.
4. Maximum sleep at night.

A Pln. of the 5th Bn. South Staffordshire Regiment Pioneer Battalion reported for work and was employed on:-

Assisting in construction of the "B" Coy. H.Q. Wiring of post beginning at the junction point between 'A' & 'B' Coy's. Strengthening. Bn. H.Q. Bn. Pioneers continued loopholing buildings in "A" Coy. area and construction of R.A.P. An order to blow up all barges in sector.

A Dutch barge was blown up near ferry on "C" Coy. Post.

During the day, there was a marked drop in the level of the canal. A level gauge was constructed and fixed in the canal.

The Fighting Patrol carried out Recces of the canal and on the outskirts of MEERSCHE.

Distribution of reserves of ammunition, food and water to FWD posts was completed.

All routes to forward posts in the grounds of the KWADESTRAAT Chateau which were overlooked from the enemy side was screened. This was done by wire netting interlaced with branches. Etc. Several 100 yards of this camouflage was erected and proved an unqualified success.

Battalion O.P. was completed in a tree on the outskirts of. KWADESTRAAT Chateau.

The conservation of local food supplies was undertaken. Cattle and fowls were rounded up and arrangements made for the milking of cows. 2/Lt. P.R.D Collins was placed in charge of these operations. All dogs were destroyed.

All transport not required was withdrawn to. Bde. Transport line in rear.

All positions were manned during the night.

**IN THE FIELD**  
20th May

**0330 hrs.** to 0430 hrs. "Stand two".

All Bren guns checked by compass in fixed line.  
Further drop in level of canal.

**1100 hrs.** visit of Bde Comd.

C.O. accompanied Bde. Comd. to artillery O.P. on left of Bn. in a farm near ferry.

**Noon.** Movement of cyclists down steep hill into MELDEN, at first thought to be refugees, later realised that they were Germans.  
Artillery engaged them, apparently with good effect.

**1400 hrs.** Considerable movement on the whole Battalion front. Engagement at long range was complicated by a large number of refugees and the fact that covering troops of the formation on the Bn. right were reported to be still east of the canal.

**1530 hrs.** Enemy advances across the open from MEERSCHE village begun. These were engaged with Bren guns with great effect and none succeeded in reaching the banks of the canal.

After a while it became evident that parties of enemy were working up the various covered approaches and sniping and mortar fire began. The 3" mortar fired a salvo on the loop already mentioned. The success of this was shown by the heavy burst of Bren gun fire which followed the bursting of the mortar as the enemy bolting to other cover was engaged by our forward posts.

Pressure continued, especially on the centre of the Bn. and reports which proved to be exaggerated, were received that the enemy had crossed the canal on a wide front. Many of these reports were undoubtedly due to the winding course of the canal which resulted in the enemy appearing to be West of the canal, when in reality still east of it.

The rear platoon of the reserve Coy was taken forward and re-established some of the forward posts which are being destroyed or badly damaged by enemy mortar fire. A Coy of 2/ Buffs which had been sent to cooperate, was not required and rejoined their Battalion. Capt. R.N.J. Rutherford was mortally wounded by direct hit on a section post.  
Throughout the evening and well into the night, heavy mortar and artillery

fire continued followed by attempts to cross the canal.

These attempts necessitated frequent counterattacks to establish forward posts and reorganise the defence. All and sundry took their turn in this, including the Pioneer platoon of the Staffordshire Regiment which during a critical period did valuable work in restoring the situation.

The absence of adequate reserves and the length of the Battalion front made the organisation of these counterattacks a matter of some difficulty.

Carriers were used extensively on the more exposed portion of the front. Their moral effect on both sides was most marked. The three-inch mortar. (Lt. C.A. Walmsley) did great execution, firing from a number of alternative positions but it was quite inadequate. A few rounds of two-inch smoke were also fired, but with little effect.

The speed and accuracy with which the enemy mortar fire engaged our positions was remarkable. These shells appeared to consist of light canister with a big charge of explosive and though having comparatively little killing power had enormous shattering effect.

Our inability to deal with parties of enemy undercover owing to the absence of any 2 inch mortar H.E. was a severe handicap.

During the night, there was a lull and reports were received of a general movement to the left.

Enemy recce aircraft were active during the early evening, flying up and down the line of the canal. These were heavily engaged by A.A. guns but the aircraft were generally just out of range. Owing to the great care, which had been taken over concealment. The only positions that appeared to have been spotted were the H.Q. and Reserve platoon of "B" Coy. As already stated, these had to be out in the open and dummy trenches were dug to confuse enemy observers. The R.A.P. on the western edge of the KWADESTRAAT Chateau grounds were also seen and apparently mistaken for an H.Q.

Casualties during the day were one officer, Captain R.N.J. Rutherford and 17 O.Rs.

**IN THE FIELD**  
21st May

Mortar firing and shelling re-commenced as it became light with Spasmodic attempts to cross the canal. The heaviest fire was now directed against the Battalion left flank. The right to which up to now had been but lightly engaged received some heavy concentrations. One of the posts received a direct hit.

Noon. The Bde. Commander and Colonel G.V. Palmer, commanding 1/5th Queens arrive at Battalion headquarters to discuss the situation on the left flank.

At about 1200 hrs., Major J.G. Bevington, 2/I.C. was severely Wounded.

**1400 hrs.** A carrier lead. By Lance Sergeant Baker F. did good work in getting S.A.A. To "C" Coy under heavy fire.

**1430 hrs.** All available transport was used to evacuate wounded fit to be moved.

**1500 hrs.** The Left forward Coy. "C". Reported heavy firing and considerable activity on the left and all reports indicated large enemy forces moving through the ELSEGHEM Chateau Woods.

**1730 hrs.** (about). Number 14 platoon. (2/Lt. G.L.M. Worke) The left forward platoon of the Battalion was attacked from the left and rear. Heavy fighting ensued and 2/ Lt. G.L.M. Worke led a bombing attack in an attempt to extricate his platoon and form a defensive flank.

This officer was last seen in close contact with the enemy. The enemy then pressed on in rear of No. 14 platoon when they came in contact with "C" Coy H.Qs. and the reserve platoon. No. 13.

**1910 hrs.** O.C. "C" Coy. (Captain R.H. Pontifex) reported by telephone, he was in close touch with the enemy on his front, Left and rear. Heavy firing could be heard in this direction. All enemy shell and mortar fire ceased.

**1920 hrs.** O.C. "C" Coy reported that he expected to be overwhelmed at any moment and that any future telephone calls must be treated with suspicion. A few minutes later, this officer was killed and his headquarters overrun.

Pressure on the right and centre was now continuous and enemy could be seen working round the left, and rear of be Coy. Heavy shelling of the KWADESTRAAT Chateau grounds, from guns in rear which appeared to be our own.

After a heavy concentration of artillery and mortars, small parties of the enemy succeeded in entering the grounds of KWADESTRAAT Chateau and a group in the Chateau moat was dispersed by rifle fire from Battalion headquarters.

The Chateau grounds were eventually cleared by a counterattack. The troops for this being composed of signals, Clerks and other personnel of Bn. Headquarters.

The re-occupation of the post was carried out by "C" Coy of the 1/5th Queen's (Major R.E. Clarke), which had just arrived.

The enemy had now reached ELSEGHEM and was firing down the main road and into the rear and left flank of the KWADESTRAAT Chateau grounds.

As no means of communication to the rear had been available for some time it was decided to send Capt. P.E. Trench on a motorcycle to Bde. headquarters with notes on the situation. This officer after being blown off his motorcycle and wounded by a shell on the way back, eventually reach Div. H.Q.

**2030 hrs.** Strong attack made on "B" Coy H.Q. and Reserve Platoon from all sides and posts overwhelmed. This action could be clearly seen from Bn. H.Q. and the enemy were heavily engaged by troops near Bn. H.Q. and the German officer in command was hit. (Reported by escaped prisoner of war).

**2100 hrs.** Arrival of Captain H.A. WOOLLATT Lanc. Fus. in a Bren carrier, the only one of about 12 which had succeeded in getting through. This officer expressed surprise in finding the original position still held and reported that units on the right of the Battalion had withdrawn from the line of the canal and enemy had crossed on that front. This was confirmed almost immediately by heavy fire and white Verey lights from the direction and to the West.

Firing was now continuous on all sides, including salvos of shells from what appeared to be our own guns. In addition, several parties of the enemy had again obtained a footing in the KWADESTRAAT Chateau grounds and no further reserves of any kind were available for dealing with them.

**2115 hrs.** The C.O. decided to extricate what troops remained in the KWADESTRAAT Chateau area before the position was completely surrounded. It was quite clear that there was no time to be lost.

Most of those wounded earlier in the day had been evacuated during the afternoon. As many as possible of the recent casualties were loaded onto Bren carriers and got away.

The rest of the Battalion taking the full advantage of the cover in the Chateau grounds withdrew towards the high ground about ANSEGHEM. This withdrawal was in small parties facilitated by "C" Coy 1/5th Queen's and Captain WOOLLATT in his carrier. During these operations, Major R.M BURTON was wounded. The officer casualties sustained in this action were -Officers- Capt. R.H. PONTIFEX and Capt. R.N.J. Rutherford killed, 2/Lt. G.L.M. WORKE missing, Capt. K. LOCKWOOD, Capt. A.R. TRENCH, 2/Lt. W.W. WAGSTAFF, and I.E. Pearson taken prisoner.

Major are M Burton, Major J.G. Bevington and Capt. P.E Trench wounded. The casualties of other ranks were in the neighbourhood of 400 and owing to the nature of the operation, the majority of these were posted as missing.

Information has since been received that 138 men are prisoners of war.

**IN THE FIELD**

Wed. 22nd May

**The Battalion reassembled outside VICHTE. Small parties arriving during the whole day.** The Battalion was reorganised into three companies. H.Q. under Captain H.W. Mingard. Y Coy under Major J.V. Godfrey and Z Coy under Captain G.N. James. Major E.S. Bingham was appointed. 2nd in command and 2/Lt. A.J.S. Cox took over the duties of adjutant. 2/Lt. J.M. Todd-Moir took over the carrier platoon. The Battalion moved from VICHTE at 2000 hrs. and preceded to HEULE.

On the March, the Battalion was shelled sustained 4 casualties, 2 killed, and two wounded.

**IN THE FIELD**

Thurs. 23rd May

At 0200 hrs. The Battalion arrived at HEULE and moved off again at 1000 hrs. to POESELHOEK. At 1930 Hrs. The Bn. Left POESELHOEK and proceeded to GWELUWE where it embussed for LES ECLUSES. While the Battalion was marching through MOORSEELE the town was shelled and a direct hit was made on a barn in which some Battalion transport was held. Four vehicles were destroyed.

**IN THE FIELD**

Fri. 24th May

The Bn. arrived in LES ECLUSES at 0800 hrs.

Sat. 25th May

At 1000 hrs. the Bn. moved off and arrived at NIEPPE at 1300 hrs.

Thurs. 26th May

At 1640 hrs., the Bn. left NIEPPE and marched to LE ROSSIGNOL. During the march, there was considerable enemy air activity, but no casualties were suffered.

**IN THE FIELD**

Mon. 27th May

Orders were received that the Bn. was to take up a defensive position around STRAZEELE and the Bn. moved off from LE ROSSIGNOL at 1600 hrs. and proceeded to JOYE FARM near STRAZEELE. From their "Z" Coy went forward in support of 1/5th Queen's who were the left forward Bn. of 131 Brigade 2nd Buffs being on the right.

The Commanding officer, Lt. Colonel I.T.P. Hughes MC, was awarded the DSO for the battle on the ESCUAT river.

**IN THE FIELD**

Tues. 28th May

Z Coy. went forward and took up a defensive position on the left flank of 1/5th Queen's. During the day, there was enemy bombing and heavy shelling of the Bn. positions and at 1700 hrs. the Carrier Pln. went forward to assist 1/5th Queens.

The frontline was held and at 2100 hrs. H.Q. Coy. went forward to close a gap between 2nd Buffs and 1/5th Queens.

At 2230 hrs. orders were received that the positions were to be vacated and that the Battalion was to proceed to Dunkirk as soon as possible.

Orders were sent to the transport officer who was at JOYE FARM that all trucks were to be unloaded so that the whole Battalion could proceed to Dunkirk in vehicles. The Commanding officer issued his orders to Coy commanders, stating that the Bn. was to withdraw immediately to JOYE FARM, an embuss there.

On arrival at JOYE FARM, this plan was found to be impracticable owing to the state of blockage on the roads. Accordingly, orders were given that companies should proceed independently on foot.

At 2230 hrs. "Y" Coy headed by Major J.V. Godfrey and the intelligence officer disappeared into the night, followed by "Z" and H.Q. Coys. The remnants of the Carrier platoon under Major E.S. Bingham M.C. brought up the rear. After the departure of the Battalion from JOYE FARM, the transport was blown up by the Royal Engineers. information as to the whereabouts of the enemy on the route to Dunkirk was very vague and for the first few miles enemy Verrey lights were much in evidence. Needless to say, these were avoided and the following route was taken. METEREN, BERTHEN, BOESCHEPE, L'ABERLE, WATOU, OUST CAPPRL, BERGUES, Dunkirk. Progress along the roads was extremely difficult and companies had to split up into small parties owing to the transport blockage on the roads. The carriers could not proceed by the suggested route and accordingly went via the MONT DES CATS where they were heavily bombed and shelled the following morning by the enemy. The remainder of the Bn. carried on through the night and at dawn the head, was on the road to BOESCHEPE.

#### **IN THE FIELD**

Wed. 29th May

Six o'clock found small parties halted for the first time and consuming hard rations, which had been acquired on the route. Despite a 6 hour march without rest, all were in good spirits.

At this point, a long French convoy came through and some of the older soldiers were given permission to travel on the lorries. After this brief halt, the journey was continued and at approximately 1600 hrs., the first members of the Bn. arrived on the beach at Dunkirk where they were welcomed by a visit from the German Air Force. These visits were continued throughout the evening.

Undeterred, the Battalion prepared to spend the night there, having been informed that there was a possibility of embarkation before dawn but this was not to be.

#### **IN THE FIELD**

Thurs. 30th May

Dawn broke to find Bn. still on the beach and very hungry. Accordingly, Captain James and the adjutant searched the town and found food.

There was no time to eat this food, however as part of the Bn. were ordered to proceed down the MOLE and embark. The rest of the Battalion, who were further down the beach, upheld the right to the privilege of wearing the Naval Crown on the regimental buttons by rowing out during the afternoon

to the transports. The greatest proportion of the Battalion embarked on HMS MALCOMBE which left DUNKIRK at 0930 hrs. and crossed to Dover in 2 1/2 hrs.

During the day practically, the whole Bn. was safely evacuated, with only one known casualty.

As the boats arrived at Dover, men were entrained and sent off to various destinations TIDWORTH, CREWE, DEVISES YEOVIL, DORCHESTER, SHRIVENHAM, HAVERSEDGE and SWINDON. These were rest camps and every possible comfort was given to all.

**IN THE FIELD**  
Fri. 31st May

The day was spent in Rest Camps and a census of those present in each camp was Taken.