

War Diary of the 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps - 14 September 1914.

Late in the evening the Battalion received order to advance on the plateau above Troyon and to dig themselves in. The Battalion of the Sussex Regiment was to follow in support.

At midnight orders were sent to C. Company to send an Officers' patrol to get into touch with the enemy on the road running across the plateau above Troyon and ascertain their position. 2nd Lieutenant Balfour and eight men were detailed for this purpose. The patrol moved straight up the road on to the high ground north of Troyon and succeeded in locating a German picquet at the point where the road turns north-west immediately north of Troyon. Five Germans were seen, and apparently they heard the approach of the patrol, owing to a man slipping down the bank, which caused his mess-tin to rattle. Some of the enemy followed down the road, but the patrol got away on the grass siding and returned at 2 a.m. their report reaching Battalion Headquarters about 40 minutes later.

About 3 a.m. the Battalion moved off, and leaving the main road half a mile beyond Vendresse halted at Troyon, C. Company remaining in their outpost position. So far the advance was evidently unknown to the enemy, but the village had apparently been hastily evacuated by a German Cavalry picquet, as they had left some of their lances and helmets behind them.

The leading company of the Battalion, D. Company was then ordered to press forward and rush the picquet, which had previously been discovered by the patrol. Day was just beginning to break and the morning was thick and misty. About this time a Trooper of the 9th Lancers came back from the front and reported all clear. D Company pushed on up to the high road and moved silently down the sunken road. When they got within about 80 yards of the German picquet a patrol of the 9th Lancers came up. They were stopped and told that there was a German picquet just in front. They said "That alright; we'll go on". They had gone not more than 30 yards when the German picquet opened fire straight down the road. They hit some of the patrol, including Lieutenant Riverside Grenfell, who was killed on the spot. The patrol at once turned and galloped straight back, taking some of our men with them. The Riflemen however, stopped when they got to the bank on the edge of the high ground. The situation then was as follows:- D Company were lining the bank at the corner of the Vendresse road and the cavalry patrol, the bank on the main road just south of the turning. The remainder of the 9th Lancers had halted on the main road towards Vendresse. D Company after remaining a minute or two behind the bank, advanced again, but were only able to go forward about 10 yards as they were fired at from three sides. The men were magnificent and held their ground under very difficult conditions.

Meanwhile the remainder of the Battalion had halted in Troyon, but when the firing started B Company was ordered up the hill to reinforce the 9th Lancers on the main road, which at this point went through a sort of cutting. Daylight now appeared, but the mists still held, and the

enemy, to judge by the amount of firing were evidently increasing in numbers, and had brought some machine guns into action. It was tolerably certain that we had struck an advance position of the enemy's main line and it was obviously impracticable to drive them from the position they were holding with the numbers available.

Captain Cathcart, Commanding D. Company therefore sent Lieutenant Seymour Mellor back to the Commanding Officer, who, with A Company was by this time in close support under the slope of the hill to describe to him the situation as far as it could be ascertained.

From Mellor's report the situation appeared to be very critical. D. Company, who has pushed on, were committed to an Infantry on the forward slope of the hill and were badly in need of support. The crisis was only momentary, for D. Company with the tenacity of the best traditions of the Regiment, doggedly clung to their position until the arrival of A. Company, who were sent to reinforce them, and to counter an attempt on the part of the Germans to outflank our right. The Battalion was now more or less in line, astride the sunken road, the right being slightly thrown back. The mist was driving across the hill, at times lifting and exposing the action of the troops to view, at times coming down and concealing them, but the movements unfortunately caused us heavy casualties, as, being on the forward slope of the plateau, we were exposed to heavy artillery fire, whilst our own artillery were able to give us very little support. There were twelve German Field Guns in action, partially entrenched, about 600 yards to our front.

The three Companies of the Battalion thus thrown forward, covering the advance of the 2nd Infantry Brigade, had succeeded in making a lodgement on the southern edge of this formidable plateau just south of the Chemin des Dames. A most important success was thus achieved and it remained for the other Units of the Division to advance and complete it. A message was now sent to the 2nd Bn of the Sussex Regiment, who began to arrive about 6.40 a.m.. One of their Companies reinforced A and D. Companies, and thus considerably relieved the pressure upon our right flank. The remainder of the Battalion reinforced B. Company on the left of our line. The troops on the left then all moved forward together and were able to get on the flanks of the Germans who were entrenched in front of D. Company and part of A. The enemy in these trenches were completely surprised and surrendered.

During this time we had been somewhat annoyed by shots coming from the ridge to our rear, which was known to be held by our own troops, so Colonel Serocold sent Major Phillips back to explain the situation. He found a battalion of the Northants Regiment holding the ridge to the north-west of Paissy. Having explained to them that the edge of the plateau was in our hands, he went on and gave the same information to a Battalion of Turcos on their right. This French Battalion was advancing at the time in the direction of Ailes. On his way back Major Phillips found General Bulfin and explained the situation on the plateau. General Bulfin said that he would send on the North Lancashire Regiment at once and also stated that the 1st Guards Brigade were just in front. General Maxse asked how he could help us and said that

his orders were to advance on Cerny. He agreed to come up through the woods on our left flank so as to turn the German right. The Coldstream Guards were in front, and their Commanding Officer, Colonel John Ponsonby with his leading Company got right into Cerny, where they held a small wood all day, getting back to our lines after nightfall. Colonel Serocold later on met General Maxse on the spur above Vendresse and arranged with him to combine our efforts.

Just before 8 a.m. C. Company joined the Battalion and two platoons were put into the fight at once; the remaining half Company was practically the only reserve kept in hand. About the same time the North Lancashire Regiment arrived and pushed straight on to the Sugar Factory D and A Companies also progressing on their right, and we succeeded in making good our position and thoroughly establishing ourselves on the plateau digging in on the reverse slope. The firing line was built up from time to time, and as men were driven back they were collected and taken up again after a little rest. The remainder of the Coldstream Guards reinforced our right flank and established connection with the French.

During the advance our firing line pushed right through two German batteries which were in action near the sugar factory, but subsequently had to come back under heavy pressure from the enemy. These guns remained there; but the Germans were unable to use them again that day. However, under cover of a counter-attack about 4 p.m. they succeeded in removing the guns, and left the limbers behind. The fight continued throughout the entire day, the Germans making several counter attacks which were repulsed with loss.

Our batteries opened fire about 10 a.m.; Peel with the 54th Battery and Gilman with the 114th did specially good work in helping us to maintain our ground. Towards evening it was recognised that the trenches on the reverse slope would have to be occupied at night. This necessitated a with-drawal, and it was represented that many of our wounded were lying out in front. The stretcher bearers had done what they could and had continually been shot at, but it appeared useless to communicate with the enemy with a view to collecting the wounded, as they probably would have ignored any message of that sort.

Rain fell heavily all the afternoon, but the artillery fight went on until after dark, and it was not until 9 p.m. that the Battalion was relieved by the Northants and North Lancashires and went into reserve on the scarp of the hill immediately north of Tryon.

Our casualties during the day were 8 Officers killed and missing (of whom we could only bury 2):- Major H.F.F.B. Foljambe, Captain A.E. Cathcart, 2/Lieut. G.S.R. Thompson, 2/Lieut. J. Forster, 2/Lieut. S. Davison, Lieut. M.F. Blake, Lieut. B.W. Jackson, 2/Lieut. R.H.M. Barclay, 7 wounded:- Major R.G. Jelf, Capt. J.E.H. Heseltine, Captain G.J. Jackson, Lieut. C.T. Ellison, Lieut. R.H. Bond, 2/Lieut. O.H.C. Balfour, Lieut. J.S. Mellor and 306 killed, wounded and missing amongst the Rank and File."