

1st/6th BATTALION, EAST SURREY REGIMENT

1940

Appendix

May BAILLEUL

- May 1st Bn. in billets at Bailleul
- May 2nd Brigadier Steele addressed the Bn. on the eve of its departure from the Bde. and the 44 Div. to the 4 Div.
- May 3rd Bn. preparing to move.
- May 4th Bn. left Bailleul and arrived at Wattrelos, adjacent to Roubaix and Tourcoing.

WATTRELOS

- May 5th Coy. Cmds. tour of prepared positions on Belgian frontier.
- May 6th - 11th "J1" Belgian and Dutch frontiers crossed (May 9th). Considerable air activity on 10 and 11 May.
- May 12th Continuous air raid alarms and on 13 May.
- May 13th Bn. standing by to move.

VILVORDE

- May 14th 07:00 Div. convoy left Roubaix. Convoy diverted to avoid Alost which had been heavily bombed during the night. Bn. arrives at Vilvorde without incident and is billeted. Bn. HQ. established. Parachutist activity reported and also news of strong enemy attack in region of Louvain. Orders received to advance and take up reserve position at Deighem. 22:30 Bn. moves off.

DEIGHEM

- May 15th 01:00 Battalion arrives and Companies rest for a few hours while Company Commanders recce. positions east of town. Battalion Headquarters established. Defensive positions dug. Enemy activity - ME109 shot down in flames by three Lysanders. Pilot shot right through by troops during descent.
- May 16th Shelling and demolition observed at Louvain, and bombing north of Brussels and Vilvorde. Enemy air activity - 10 Dorniers bombed area and machine gunned, but no casualties in Bn. News of strong enemy pressure ahead and order is arrived to withdraw the following morning. 22:00 Part of transport leaves.
- May 17th 05:00 Withdrawal commenced. Battalion Headquarters established at railway bridge and Carrier Platoon takes up positions on railway line to cover withdrawal of Brigade over canal. On completion of withdrawal through railway bridge advanced enemy scouts on bicycles observed and fired upon. Demolition of ammunition column, oil, wood and other important stores etc. carried out. All bridges over canal destroyed and barges sunk. Bn. moves via the Belgian Royal Palace to a village 10 miles due west of Vilvorde and takes up a defensive position at 16:00 hours. Almost immediately attacked by three low-flying enemy aircraft machine-

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gunning the positions.

20:00 Orders for further withdrawal received.

22:00 Tpt. and marching troops withdraw westwards.

- May 18th The Bn. arrived at a village west of Alost and Coys. take up defensive positions. Bn. HQ. established. Enemy air recce.
17:00 Bn. moves again. 17 enemy aircraft overhead but convoy not attacked.
23:00 Bn. arrives at Avelghem and rests in billets.

AVEIGHM

- May 19th 2 D.C.L.I. and 2 Beds & Herts take up defensive positions along the line on the river Escaut and Battalion moves into Reserve 2 miles back in the villages – Driesch, Bosch and Knock.

DRIESCH

- May 20th Companies prepare positions.
17:00 Considerable enemy artillery activity commences over whole area. Enemy recce. planes active. Own artillery active. Battalion suffers a few casualties.
- May 21st Heavy shelling continues on both sides. News received at 18:00 hours of heavy casualties in the D.C.L.I.
22:00 Battalion leaves Driesch and relieves the D.C.L.I. on line of River Escaux at 23:00 hours under continuous shell fire. "A", "B" and "C" Companies up. "D" in reserve.
- May 22nd Patrols sent out to make contact with the enemy and report on activity on river banks. 2/Lt Smithers takes one patrol across demolished bridge and meets heavy opposition. Returned safely. 2/Lt Emmett is shot through the head by an enemy sniper whilst endeavouring to obtain information about a patrol led by 2/Lt Williams, who had come under machine gun fire, and had been wounded with several of the patrol. He was believed to be killed. Enemy aircraft active directing artillery action. Many casualties in the battalion through shelling and also through the mortar bombs which were very effective. P.H.M Harris and his platoon HQ wiped out by mortar fire. Our own Mortar Platoon active all day - reported to have caused a number of casualties.
18:00 Orders received to withdraw from Escaut. F.D.L. abandoned at 23:30 hours. Covered by Carrier Platoon until 01:30 hours. Battalion withdraws in the direction of Roubaix.

NEUVILLE-EN-FERRAIN

- May 23rd 09:00 Battalion arrives at Neuville-en-Ferrain at 09:00 hours, having covered about 20 miles over night. Companies occupied prepared defensive positions on Belgian frontier. "B", "C", "D" Companies forward with "A" Company in reserve. Carrier Platoon under Brigade control in defensive position until 20:00 hours. Battalion HQ established.
- May 24th Large number of the enemy aircraft observed flying south west. Carrier platoon made contact with enemy patrols of cyclist troops accompanied by armoured cars with trailer guns and M/C combinations.

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- May 25th Patrols sent out to keep in contact with the enemy. Carrier Platoon clear troops from houses on Bn. right flank. One carrier lost and driver killed by A/T gun fire. Infantry patrol led by Major Duncombe- Anderson is fired upon and the latter was killed together maintained with several wounded. 2/Lt Smithers was also slightly wounded. Artillery quiet. Enemy reported at Halluin.
- May 26th Contact with the enemy by patrols. Some artillery action. Battalion suffered a few casualties. Orders received of a probable withdrawal next day.
- May 27th 13:00 Enemy observation balloon up. Battalion HQ shelled. Evacuated to new position.
17:00 Orders for withdrawal received at 17:00 hours.
19:00 Battalion withdraws leaving three platoons to be relieved by the Guards. Carrier Platoon recce. Bn. area and makes contact with own forward troops near St Eloi. Enemy pressing hard and positions taken up on road. Considerable artillery action on both sides.

LANDSLIJCHT

- May 28th 16:00 Battalion arrives at Landslijcht and takes up positions on the forward edge of three woods. Considerable artillery action on both sides, a large number of our own guns being just behind us. Mortar Platoon in action. Bn. ordered to attack Voormezele. Carrier Platoon enters village and holds positions until the arrival of "C" Company. Village under artillery fire from both sides and also under machine gun fire. Considerable casualties in "C" Company. 2/Lt Smithers was killed, 2/Lt Johnson wounded, and a large number of NCOs and men, also one of the Carrier Platoon which evacuated a number of the wounded. Orders received for withdrawal.
21:00 Withdrawal started. Casualties from shelling and mortar fire in all Companies, and 2/Lt Molyneux killed by a machine gun bullet in the head whilst moving from a wood to another position.
22:00 Battalion halted at Dickebusch for one hour. Shelling continued and withdrawal re-started. "A" Company and Carrier Platoon cover withdrawal of Brigade.

POPERINGHE

- May 29th 08:00 Battalion arrived at the village west of Poperinghe for two hours sleep. Battalion continues withdrawal in direction of Dunkirk. Number of enemy aircraft observed overhead and bombing Dunkirk. Enemy shelling along whole route. At Ferne all transport was abandoned except Carriers.
16:00 Battalion arrived at Oostdunquerque and Companies took up defensive positions. Much enemy sniping. "C" and "D" Companies amalgamated under control of Major Keane on left, "B" Company in the centre in the "Bricquetrie" and "A" Company on right, in defensive positions behind the Nieupart Canal. Enemy in the town and on the canal banks.

OOSTDUNQRQUE

- May 30th Numbers of enemy aircraft passed overhead all day bombing positions and towns. Considerable shelling also. A number of casualties throughout the day. Enemy observation balloon in Nieupart.

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May 31st

Battalion holds enemy attacks on right and left. Heavy shelling continues on two fronts directed by aircraft and balloons. Signals platoon under 2/Lt. Thompson sent forward to give support on left. The latter is wounded. 2/Lt Holt also wounded slightly, both by shrapnel. Captain Culverhouse also wounded by shrapnel whilst going forward to report to Battalion Headquarters. Capt. Creasey and 2/Lt James wounded when their truck was hit by a shell. "B" Company held their position against heavy attacks causing the enemy heavy casualties, and were later relieved by "B" Coy 1st Battalion the East Surrey Regiment.

18:00 Orders for withdrawal of Bn. for embarkation received.

22:00 Bn. commences withdrawal towards La Panne.

23:30 Withdrawal completed. Rearguard carried out by Transport.