

-2-

The position of the Battalion was satisfactory, but the 23rd R. Fusiliers reported that no touch could be obtained with 47th Division on left.

March 23rd. ^{9 a.m.} All quiet on our front except for a certain amount of field gun shelling and some sniping. A great deal of rifle fire and M.G. fire was heard in front of 9th Division.

11 a.m. Message from Brigade saying that 9th Division were withdrawing, and that we and 23rd R. Fusiliers were to conform, holding line V.6.c. central, V.5, 4, 3 and 2 central up to Canal, where the 1st R. Berks. would be on our right. We were to be on right, 23rd R. Fa. on left. This necessitated withdrawing "A" and "C" Coys. over 1000 yards of open ground. I ordered "C" Coy. on right to withdraw through "A" Coy. and to take up position on left of our new front, then "A" Coy. to take up position in centre. "D" Coy. were then retire, and take up position on right.

11.15 a.m. The enemy shelled sunken road in 4 c. & d. heavily but without causing many casualties. The withdrawal was carried out very well in broad daylight under heavy fire from field guns, machine guns and low flying aeroplanes, and the new position was occupied by 12.30 p.m. Our casualties were not heavy.

1 p.m. Our new position, which was on top of a hill, was subjected to intense M.G. fire, and many casualties occurred while the men were digging in. This was particularly the case on the right, where no touch could be obtained with 1st R. Berks. Wave upon wave of the enemy was seen advancing upon ETRICOURT in V.16. and 17. Fire was opened upon them with Lewis Guns, but no Vickers could be found, otherwise the enemy advance could have been checked.

We were in touch with 23rd R. Fa. on left. When the line was secure, Bn. H. Qrs. moved to spoil heap by CANAL du NORD tunnel in P.32.d.

2 p.m. O.C. 23rd R. Fa. came and told me that 47th Division had been forced back on left, and he was swinging his left back to MOURTE TRENCH in P.34.

"C" Coy. on seeing this retirement, thought that the whole of 23rd were withdrawing, and fell back on to VALLUHART WOOD, thus leaving right flank of 23rd R. Fa. in air. Our withdrawal, however, would in any case have been necessary almost at once, as the enemy were working round our right flank in very large numbers and were enfilading our line.

3 p.m. Battalion was now holding R. edge of VALLUHART WOOD. I heard ~~at~~ at this time that some Brigadiers of 47th Division were by the C.C.S. in P.32. I therefore went to see them, and as I had not been in touch with 99th Bde. H. Qrs. since early in the morning, and did not know where they were, put myself under 140th Bde.. This Brigade suddenly vanished, so I then

-3-

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put myself under 142nd Brigade.. This Brigade formed line from hangars in V.L.A. running N.E. in front of LECHELLE towards LITTLE WOOD, YRES. We were to be on left.

4.30 p.m. Battalion therefore withdrew and dug in at V.P. 25.d.. Our left was now in the air, but troops could be seen withdrawing to LITTLE WOOD, YRES.

5.30 p.m. to 7.0 p.m. Village of LECHELLE and all ground round shelled most heavily by H.V. guns and field guns. Many enemy aeroplanes all so circled over us about 100 ft. up.. We were unable to fire at them owing to shortage of ammunition.

7 p.m. Situation quieter. C.O. of 15th Londonspace from left and said there was none there. Large numbers of troops could still be seen withdrawing.

Suddenly right company reported that the 142nd Brigade had disappeared, thus leaving our right completely in air. Bosche getting round our right. It was obvious that if enemy reached hangars he would not only enfilade us from high ground, but would sweep the valley in our rear, so as to prevent any possible withdrawal. I therefore ordered Companies to withdraw from the right and to go back to BUS.

Fortunately, this was carried out with few casualties, though the shelling was still heavy, and there was also a good deal of machine gun fire.

7.45 p.m. Battalion reorganized just West of BUS. I found H. Qrs. of 24th B. Fa. (5th Brigade) there. I left Major J.B. Brady, D.S.O., in charge of Battalion and went back to BARAZEE to see G.O.C. 5th Div., as it was obvious that that part of the 2nd Division facing North had no idea how serious the situation was South. This proved to be the case, as the V Corps flatly refused to believe that the enemy were in LECHELLE.

8.30 p.m. I arrived back at Battalion. Found Major Brady had gone to get touch with 63rd Division on left while the Adjutant had gone to see 47th Division on right.

I then ordered "D" and "C" Coys. to picquet BUS.

9 p.m. "D" Coy. picquets on left of village driven in by enemy. A counter-attack was ~~started~~ organized and was just starting when a large dump of big shells just West of BUS caught fire and caused operations to cease.

Large enemy reinforcements caused "C" Coy. to fall back. As usual both our flanks were in the air. A line was therefore formed about 200 yards West of BUS, with the 24th B. Fa. on left, (then a very big gap) and some men of the HAWKE Battalion on right. G.O.C. HAWKE Battalion wished to make a frontal attack on BUS, but I considered this completely impossible. He sent a Company to work through the village from the South end, but this effort was held up at once.