

## SOUTH WALES BORDERERS

and Marcoing, and to get a footing in the Beaufort Line 1,500 yards beyond the canal.

On reaching the canal the Battalion was stopped by rifle and machine gun fire from houses on the far bank covering the lock where A Company was trying to cross, and suffering heavy casualties. Without waiting for orders Captain Mumford, who was in reserve behind A Company, brought C Company forward. He worked round to the flank under heavy fire from the machine guns until he could enfilade them and give covering fire. His initiative was successful, and both A and C Companies got across at the lock. About 2 p.m. the Inniskillings went through to take the Beaufort Line, but they were unable to reach it.

Next day the attack was renewed, the 2nd Battalion advancing very gallantly with insufficient artillery support under heavy machine gun fire from the front and from Masnières Village on the right. B, D and A Companies from right to left advanced through C Company with the 1 KOSB on their left. The battalion reached its objective, but neither the 86th Brigade in Masnières nor the 1 KOSB made much progress. Finding very little cover in the enemy's line B and D Companies lost heavily. D Company lost both their officers, but CQMS Ruffle took command, and led his men into the position most gallantly. An immediate German counter-attack drove out the few attackers who had survived the devastating machine gun fire. CQMS Ruffle, whose leadership had been so marked, was last seen fighting with the bayonet.

The men falling back were rallied at Battalion Headquarters and by their bold front and steady shooting stopped the further progress of the counter attack and enabled a new line to be taken up and dug.

On 23rd November the battalion was relieved, and on 28th occupied the bridge head defences covering Marcoing and the Canal crossings. They were here on the morning of the 30th November, when the great German counter attack developed on the southern face of the salient formed by the Third Army's advance. The first intimation the battalion got of any attack was seeing Germans advancing along the far side of the canal in rear of them towards Marcoing. Battalion Headquarters turned out and opened fire. The Germans stopped and a counter attack from Marcoing drove them back. D Company was then sent to help the battalion in front, half of B Company to the 86th Brigade in Masnières and the rest moved back during the day to the south side of the canal where they threw back a flank facing south, their left in touch with 86th Brigade in Les Rues Vertes, a village south of the canal and opposite Masnières, their right continued by the

Newfoundland Regiment. On 1st December heavy attacks were made on Les Rues Vertes and Masnières and in the bridge head defences. D Company north of the canal were thrown in to help in Masnières and A Company were just on the edge of the fighting in Les Rues Vertes. During the night 1st/2nd December 1917 the 86th Brigade was withdrawn from Les Rues Vertes and Masnières, and a new line was taken up west of those places. This enabled A Company to be drawn into reserve.

The 2nd December 1917 was fairly quiet and was spent in improving defences. On the 3rd December a heavy bombardment was renewed, and about 11 a.m. the enemy advancing in great force from Les Rues Vertes rushed the front trenches held by B and C Companies, but were stopped there by the fire of A Company and Battalion Headquarters in the reserve trench about 400 yards further back. The men fought magnificently in spite of bullets and shells bursting on the parapet. An officer in the trench was calling for ammunition to be passed along; as he spoke a shell mortally wounded the man next to him. Even as he sank down this gallant fellow handed the officer a bandolier of ammunition. With such men imbued with the fighting spirit of the 2nd Twenty-Fourth the enemy was held. That evening the battalion was relieved. They took out of action 3 officers, the medical officer and 73 men.

In this great German attack the 29th Division were holding the point of the salient formed by the original advance of 20th November. The Germans drove in the three divisions holding the southern face of the salient and for a time overran the 29th's battery positions. At the same time fierce attacks developed on the northern face where the 12th Battalion, South Wales Borderers gained much honour at Bourlon Wood. The stand of the 29th Division enabled the Guards to counter-attack, the line was restored, and the situation saved. But for the steadfastness of the 29th Division a great disaster would have ensued. The 2nd Battalion played a part second to none in one of the greatest actions of this famous Division.

The 2nd Battalion served the rest of the War in France. It helped to stem the German offensive on the Lys in April 1918, and joined in the final advance to victory, taking part in the re-capture of Gheluvelt, the scene of the 1st Battalion's historic stand in 1914, and crossing the Rhine to form part of the Army of Occupation in Cologne. As in the case of the 1st Battalion the Colours were brought out from the Depot and the Battalion had the honour, after four years of warfare, of carrying them into Germany.