

13. Comparative quietude reigned in the front line until 19th when the German guns and machine guns became more active. During a burst of shell fire about noon the Brigade Major—Capt. G. A. Prideaux, 1st Somerset Light Infantry—was killed whilst visiting the front line. The loss of this gallant young officer, who had seen all his military service with the Somerset Light Infantry since he was gazetted to the Battalion in 1911, was keenly felt by the Regiment. On 20th January the Battalion was relieved and moved back to support trenches at Junction Wood. Alternate tours in the front line amidst truly appalling conditions, and days in support and reserve, during which attempts were made by all ranks to cleanse themselves from mud and filth, brings the story of the 1st Somersets to the 22nd February, when the Battalion marched to Hem Wood, returned to Camp 117 and on the following day marched again to billets in Sailly Laurette. On 28th the 4th Division received orders to be ready to move to the Third Army area. Leaving Sailly Laurette on 4th March the Somersets, marching via Allonville, Talmas, Gazaincourt, reached Nœux on 7th, where several days were spent in training and cleaning up. Eventually, on 21st March the Battalion reached Dieval, north-west of Arras, where training for the offensive which was to begin on 9th April was carried out until the time came to move forward to the trenches. This move was begun on 7th April, which as every Somerset man knows is "Jellalabad Day": it was a good omen for the Battalion.

Extracts from entries in the Diary of the 6th Somersets for 1st and 2nd January 1917 give an excellent idea of the kind of life passed by that Battalion when the New Year dawned:—

"1st: Raid on our left put off owing probably to the condition of the trenches and wire not being cut. A dug-out was 'crumpled' in, one of our men was killed and 7 of the 20th Lancashire Fusiliers (Bantams) who were working close by got into this dug-out and are missing. Endeavours are being made to get them out. . . . 2nd: Trenches are in a frightful condition, mud in some places being up to the men's thighs and in many places up to their knees. The trenches are collapsing all round due to no revetment. It looks extremely like as if no work was done on them during the summer. Day quiet."

For several weeks this kind of life, relieved every now and then by a "rest" in some back area, went on until the middle of March, when the Battalion began to follow up the retreating Germans.

On 14th March the 6th Somersets relieved the 6th K.O.Y.L.I. in H.2 Sector, Nos. 2 and 4 Companies going into the front-line trenches while Nos. 1 and 3 Companies were in support in Ronville and the White Chateau.

The German retreat had been timed to begin on 16th March, though Ludendorff admits that in certain parts of the line he was forced to retire before that date. Under the rubric of "Alberich" he had begun the work of demolition—that devastation of a wide area of France which will for ever remain a monument of German brutality—on 9th February, so that when the

1st Battalion  
19th January

22nd February

7th April

6th Battalion  
1st January

16th March