

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE LINE: INCIDENTS AND ITEMS OF INTEREST

AFTER the Battle of Loos and the subsidiary operations connected therewith to the close of the year 1915, no one of the four Battalions of the Somerset Light Infantry then in France and Flanders was involved in attacks of tactical importance on or by the enemy. Nevertheless, there happened many incidents and items of interest which cannot be omitted from the history of the Regiment.

1ST BATTALION

The 1st Somersets encountered nothing but the rigours of trench warfare—always dangerous and full of discomfort—from the close of the Battles of Ypres (26th May) until the Battalion assisted the Rifle Brigade in a small attack which took place on 6th July; the Somerset men digging communication trenches to the trenches captured by the Rifles. After satisfactorily completing its task the Battalion went back to bivouacs in Elverdinghe Chateau grounds, having (though not known then) served its last tour in front-line trenches in the Ypres Salient.¹ This operation, though of a minor character, cost the Battalion one officer (2/Lt. H. V. Webber) and 27 N.C.O.'s and men killed; three officers and 102 N.C.O.'s and men wounded, and 5 N.C.O.'s and men missing. 6th July

On the 9th July the 11th Bde. (in Division) moved to the Houtkerque-Watou Area, the 1st Somersets marching to billets near the former place, a distance of 14 miles, over pavée roads, a tiresome march. Sir Herbert Plumer, C.-in-C., Second Army, inspected the 11th Bde., and after the inspection thanked the Brigade for its good work during the Battle of Ypres and particularly the successful attack which terminated its stay in the Ypres Salient. He then informed the Brigade that the 4th Division was to leave the Second Army "for another destination." On 21st July preparations were made for the move, 21st July and at 3 p.m. on 22nd the Battalion (in Brigade) marched out of billets to Gudewaersvelde, from which place the move southwards was begun on 23rd. Doullens was reached at 4.30 p.m. the same day, where the 1st Somersets detrained and marched to bivouacs at Freschvillers. Heavy rain had made the

¹ On 28th May Colonel Compton assumed temporary command of 85th Inf. Bde. (28th Div.), handing over command of 1st Somersets to Major Hume-Kelly, 3rd N. Staffs. R. On 30th May Bt.-Major Watson took command of the Battalion from Major Hume-Kelly, the latter becoming 2nd-in-command. Colonel Compton rejoined the Battalion on 17th June, but left again on 27th to take command of the 14th Bde., Captain G. Fleming assuming temporary command of the 1st Somersets. Several officers of the Battalion were wounded, and 2/Lt. T. E. Williams was killed by a sniper on 1st July. Yet another C.O. arrived on 2nd July—Major (Bt. Lt.-Col.) Crosthwaite, D.L.I.—to take temporary command of the Battalion.