

1st BATTALION LONDON RIFLE BRIGADE

Herbert Mallett Graut enlisted in the British army in Jersey and was assigned to the 1st Battalion, London Rifle Brigade.

Information from the War Graves Commission indicates that he died on 3 May 1915 (the second battle for Ypres) and has no known grave. His name is recorded on a plaque at the Menin Gate memorial - the LRB personnel are listed on panels 46-48 & 50 .

His date of enlistment is not known, however the following is a record of the LRB's history around the time of his involvement.

On 2 Aug 1914 the regiment went to Eastbourne for training under the command of Brigadier General the Earl of Cavan . Drill was performed in the Merchant Taylors School ground and Bunhill Row was used for recruiting.

While at Eastbourne the unit was asked if it would volunteer for foreign service.

In late August the LRB marched to Bisley and training continued until 8 Sep when the brigade marched to East Horsely and Effingham where Lord Cavan was relieved and sent to France.

On 10 Sep the unit arrived at East Grinstead and on 16 Sep reached Camp Hill, Crowborough, where it went under canvas. Leave was given only sparingly owing to the fear of invasion and on 22 Sep Brig. Gen. W McGregor took over command..

Towards the end of October new kits and rifles were issued and all ranks were inoculated against typhoid. Orders to embark were received on 3 Nov and kit weight limits of 35 pounds were imposed.

The unit disembarked at Le Harve on 5 Nov and entrained at Gore des Marchandises on 6 Nov for St. Omer via Abbeville.

On 16 Nov the move was made to Hazelbrouck. The first casualty occurred here when Rfn. J L Dunnett, 18, was killed by a shell while breakfasting.

The unit moved on to Ploegsteert where conditions were very poor - there was frost and a lot of rain.

At the trenches each company held a section for 9 days then went into reserve for 3 days at Ploegsteert.

In late December a truce was organised and the British and Germans celebrated Christmas, in fact a soccer match with the Germans was suggested by the men but the unit's officers would not agree to this as the Germans may find out how weak the allies defences were.

No shots were fired until new years eve, the time being spent collecting and burying the dead.

The Rifle Brigade came out of the trenches on the night of 17/18 Apr and went into billets around Steenwerck. This was the first rest they had since arriving at the front 5 months before. The use of gas by the Germans against the French was reported on 23 Apr and the LRB was alerted.

They entrained on 24 Apr for Poperinghe and marched south west to Busseboom.

On 25 Apr west of Vlamertinghe they experienced Lachymatory - tear shells - for the first time. This was the beginning of the second battle for Ypres.

Arriving at Wietje on 26 Apr they took up positions facing north east on the south side of the Wietje - Fortuin road (D13c) under fairly heavy shelling. There was intense fighting to the left rear of the position by the Lahore division and the French.

Great difficulty was experienced in setting up their position as the muddy ground caused problems in the filling of sand bags. One man shovelled, one man held the bag and another was needed to scrape the mud off the shovel. They also had little training in the building of protective cover.

On 1 May orders were received for a readjustment of the line and, as the enemy were rather quiet, trench consolidation was carried out. At night a listening patrol in a cottage about a hundred yards in front on the left reported that the enemy were apparently digging. A machine gun party was sent and opened fire in the direction of the enemy who then withdrew.

The next day, at daybreak, the Germans shelled the cottage, setting it on fire with their ninth round.

An attack proposed by the French on the left never developed and by midday the enemy's shellfire had increased to a heavy bombardment and as salvos of H.E. were falling just forward of the line and shrapnel was bursting overhead, all troops with the exception of sentries, kept down in the trenches.

Soon after 5 pm "stand to" was ordered as large numbers of the enemy could be seen approaching from high ground about seven hundred to a thousand yards off.

At 5.20 pm the enemy released gas and a heavy cloud appeared on the left opposite the Royal Irish and in front of No. 3 and 4 Companies, while further to the right, well clear of the battalion front, a very much larger cloud could be seen through the trees. Respirators (the first of their kind issued and of a very primitive description, as they consisted of mere strips of cloth which in the absence of chemicals were recommended to be treated with urine) were at once put on. The gas affected the front line for about ten minutes, causing much discomfort and a few casualties who were evacuated at dusk. As soon as the gas had cleared the enemy, who had been reinforced, began to advance.

The two companies of the LRB on the left had their field of fire screened by a hedge, but the right half of the battalion was able to bring heavy fire on the enemy as they advanced with good results.

By 6.30 pm active fighting had stopped but sniping and machine-gun fire continued till dark and at 6.50 pm. No. 4 Company which had experienced very heavy casualties was reinforced by two platoons of Y Company, 4th Yorks.

An enemy aircraft flew over low, presumably to see what effect the gas had had on the troops, and rifle fire was directed at it.

By this time the men were thoroughly exhausted, for, not only had they been heavily shelled (our guns not having been able to reply in the form of counter battery work), but they had been fighting all the afternoon and were a good deal upset by the gas. Other units were sent in to assist in the evacuation of the wounded as difficulties were experienced due to a shortage of stretchers.

At 8.25 pm. the following report was sent to the brigade headquarters:

"Situation quieter. Fear casualties very heavy, will report later. All supports now in trench. Improbable that we can hold trench without assistance. Men have had no sleep for seven nights. This, with incessant shelling has told on them. Germans are entrenching nearer to us, opposite our centre. No. 3 Company which is there hopes it did a good job on them. Can you send any Very lights."

At night an NCO and three men from each company went out to put up (barbed) wire.

Cpl. G G Boston from No. 1 Company wired the whole company front, although within 50 yards of the enemy, and gained the DCM for his gallantry.

About midnight two German prisoners were captured, the first taken by the LRB in the war, but against this an LRB listening post was lost, the first men to be taken prisoner from the regiment.

At daylight (3 May) it was ascertained that the enemy had dug in all along the line about 200 - 300 yards off, with advanced trenches in some cases under 100 yards away, and that the cottage ruins in front of the left of the line were occupied.

By 9 am. two of the battalion machine-guns had been knocked out and there was intermittent shelling all day.

During the morning, movement orders were received which stated that all wounded were to be evacuated, all dead to be buried and all surplus kit, equipment and rifles which could not be carried were to be buried after dark. Consequently every unwounded officer, NCO and man was hard at work from dusk up to the moment of withdrawal.

The Brigade, which now consisted of four regular army battalions together with the LRB, the 4th Yorks and the 4th E Yorks was very fortunate in being able to carry out a withdrawal with the Germans within 100 yards of the line.

The LRB moved out at 12.45 am. on 4th May along a road 80 yards behind and parallel to the trenches. Elverdinghe Chateau was reached at 5 am. and after spending the day in the grounds the Brigade moved to a wood in A30 central, where it bivouacked.

The casualties in the battle up to this time were; 79 killed, 259 wounded, 9 missing, 62 sick.

References:

The History of the 1st Rifle Brigade 1859 - 1919
356.10941 LB47

Jackets of Green
Arthur Bryant
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Register of Names - Memorials to Soldiers
Part 21 page 586
GRANT Lce Cpl A. Herbert 9173
1st Bn. The Rifle Brigade 3 May 1915

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