

Second World War Unit War Diary – 1/8th Bn. Lancashire Fusiliers - Crossland

The following is from the National Archives WO 167/781

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(Page 2.)

PART D.—NOMINAL ROLL OF OFFICERS ON STRENGTH.

(i) Officers posted to Unit (Total to agree with column 2 of Part A).

1	2	3	4	5	6
Substantive Rank.	Higher acting or temporary rank, if held.	Name and Initials.	Corps.	Whether present with Unit (Insert Yes or No.)	If not present with Unit state how employed.
Lt-Col.		BIRD D.C.	1/8th L.F.	No.	Leave.
Major		GAMNER A.H.	"	Yes.	
Major	A/Major.	BATON F.B.	"	"	
Capt.		HANFORTH R.G.	"	"	
Capt.		WYTERS P.C.T.	"	"	
Lieut.	A/Capt.	HAIG W.G.	"	"	
Lieut.	A/Capt.	MOON A.J.	"	"	
2nd Lt.	A/Capt.	STYLL D.C.W.	"	"	
Lieut. Col.		CHRISTIE J.	"	"	
Lieut.		MARTIN A.R.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		RODEN G.D.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		WILMAN J.H.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		BOYLE J.D.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		WARD D.R.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		VERITY P.L.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		Brown K.A.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		CARMICHAEL L.T.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		TAYLOR G.R.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		KORROWER A.G.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		ENTWISTLE R.F.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		SPENCE D.B.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		HARRISLEY G.B.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		BROADHEAD J.R.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		WALTON D.T.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		CLARKE M.S.	"	"	
2nd Lt.		CROSSLAND F.B.	"	"	

(ii) OFFICERS ATTACHED FROM OTHER CORPS.

Substantive Rank.	Higher acting or temporary rank, if held.	Name and Initials.	Corps.	Date of attachment.	Nature of attachment.
Capt. (Rev. Chaplain 4th Class)		PASSMORE J.A.	R.A.Ch. D.	14.5.40.	Chaplain.
Lieut.		STILLAR W.	R.A.M.C.	21.11.39	M.O.

1/8th Bn. The Lancashire Fusiliers.
(Unit.)

11.5.40.
(Date of Despatch.)

Major.
(Signature of Commander.)

2nd Division.
(Bde., Divn., Area, etc., with which Unit is serving.)

1/8th Bn THE LANCASHIRE MILITERS

WAR DIARY

- 9th May, 1940 Bn. stationed at RUGEZIES on 'Gort' Line 7 miles N.E. of St. AMAND.
- 10th May, 1940. 0415 hrs Air Raid warning "Red" received. German planes seen approaching from Belgium. A.A. fire heard from direction of St. AMAND. Plan "D" came into operation for the advance into Belgium and the seizing of the R. DYLE. Learned from wireless reports that both Holland and Belgium had been invaded by Germany. Day spent in preparation for the advance. Leading troops of 2 Div passed through the area at 1200 hrs. 2130 hrs Bn. recces party left with Bde. "C" Gp. Crossing the frontier at 2145 hrs.
- 11th May, 1940 8 L.F. crossed start line which was the frontier at 0200 hrs. Marching personnel in R.A.S.C. T.C. vehicles. Route RUGEZIES, BIEHARLES, ANTOIGN, ATH, ENGHEN, HAL, WEYSERBEEK, FORST DE SOIGNY, TONNIEUX, to R.V. on R. DYLE about 2 miles N. of WARE. 4 Bde at this time was acting as vanguard to 3 Div so Bn was deployed on a long front with all Coys in line, except "D" Coy who were finding an outpost line on the high ground E. of the R. DYLE. Bn spent the remainder of the day improving some indifferent field works constructed by the Belgians.
- 12th May, 1940 Contact was made by "B" Coy with 6 L.B. on our left who had arrived during the night. Owing to further arrivals of our own troops the Bn. was able to shorten its front considerably, sidestepping to BAS WARE and holding in depth a front of about 1,500 yds with the D.L.I. on our left and the 1 R.S. on our right. 2 Mfks went into Bde. reserve. Final positions of Coys were "C" Coy rt. fwd. Coy holding bridge head in BAS WARE, "A" Coy on its left in rather exposed position. "B" Coy behind, "G" and "D" Coy still in outpost positions. Information concerning the situation in front was very obscure though the roads were full of refugees amongst whom were quite a number of Belgian troops. Some minor bridges were blown up in BAS WARE during the day. No contact was made with enemy. Instructions were received in the evening to stand by the main bridge in BAS WARE and to blow it if enemy A.F.V.s attempted to cross. All transport was sent back to TONNIEUX. Considerable air activity.
- 13th May, 1940 Digging and wiring continued. Very little air activity. French A.F.V.s seen going forward. Still no information about the enemy. More Belgian troops seen withdrawing, presumably to re-form on N. side of Brussels. Only one bridge left intact in BAS WARE.
- 14th May, 1940 Instructions received in early morning to blow remaining bridge which was done. "D" Coy were withdrawn from their outpost position. Further instructions were received to send a Pl. to observe any enemy movement from the high ground on our left flank. Pl. under 2/Lt. Hammersley was sent out. About 1200 hrs enemy Artillery opened fire, and there was much ranging fire on both sides. Outpost Pl. withdrawn and reported enemy armoured and motorised troops advancing from N.W. About 2230 hrs enemy launched attack in an attempt to cross the River. The Arty. put down defensive fire and the attack was repulsed by L.M.G.s on fixed lines, Major D.P.P. Stainer, Dorsetshire Regt. took over command of the Bn.
- 15th May, 1940 One Pl. of "D" Coy was sent down in the early morning to assist "C" Coy. as it was thought that enemy elements were infiltrating into the village. Report from "C" Coy that Germans had actually crossed the River but had been driven back by hand grenades. There was no attack on the in front during the day but the French on our rt and the D.L.I. on our left were having a bad time of it. Information received that the enemy had broken through ~~xx~~ the D.L.I. and "B" Coy were sent to BOIS DIT LE BOCK to hold the high ground and form a defensive flank. On arrival it was learned that the D.L.I. had launched a counter attack which was successful. The Coy was withdrawn less one Pl. taking up its old position. Shelling continued during the day and woods and buildings in the Bn. sector were set on fire. It was learned that the enemy had put in an attack between the French and the British. As the French had already left line of the DYLE

and gone back to high ground about LA HAIT it was clear that the right flank of the Bde was in danger. Our Arty kept up a constant fire to try and assist the French, but the chances were we would have to withdraw. Meanwhile advance elements of the enemy had reached "B" Coy's position where they were successfully held off with fixed lines and grenades. There was considerable sniping of Bn. H.Q. possibly from parachute troops. About midnight, orders were received to withdraw owing to situation on the Bns Right. The Bn got out successfully though in close contact with the enemy and took up positions on the RIVER LASNE, about five miles to our rear.

- 16th May, 1940 The Bn. found itself very short of ammunition, but it was learnt during the morning that there were about 40000 rounds the other side of the river. 2/Lt. Crossland, Carrier Officer, took a party of men and managed to recover it. The enemy did not appear until the afternoon and did not attack. There was slight aerial activity, and three of our recon planes were seen to be brought down. "B" Coy shot a parachutist in uniform. There was sniping from the rear. Many French stragglers passed through on our right. They attributed the breakthrough to the enemy's use of dive-bombers. At 2130 hrs orders were received to once again withdraw. One Pl of "C" Coy and the Carrier Pl were left to cover our withdrawal which they did without loss, in spite of heavy enemy fire. The Bn. marched back via FORET DE BOURNI where in the darkness men and vehicles got all mixed up together, and many got lost owing to the inaccuracy of the maps.
- 17th May, 1940 The Bn finally arrived at RUYSEBEEK having covered about 35 miles. There the Bn had a good meal and rest and about 1500 hrs the Bn proceeded in T.C.V.s to GRAMMONT just missing being heavily bombed en route. The Bn finally reached COEPELDINGE and went into billets for a nights rest.
- 18th May, 1940 At 0500 hrs orders were received to take up positions on the River DENDRE. The Bn found itself in Bde reserve and was deployed in and around a small village near the main HAL - GRAMMONT road. One rather interesting incident has since come to light, though not concerned with this unit. It was reported that a new and very strong bridge in GRAMMONT was still intact. The 16th Pz Bgt was ordered to destroy it. 50 rds were fired from a distance of 80 yds, 47 hits were registered and the bridge was demolished. The rest of the day passed quietly and no contact was made with the enemy.
- 19th May, 1940 About 1800 hrs Coys were congregated at Bn H.Q. about GELMEREKE. At 0200 hrs shelling was heard to our front the Bn withdrew by T.C.V.s. The Carrier Pl., which by now had been Brigaded, being left behind as rear guard. During the move we were very considerably hampered by refugees and a certain amount of bombing, in consequence of which many vehicles got detached from the column. In addition we had to contend with the fact that at least 3 Divisions were moving down the same road. The Bn. eventually arrived at FROIDMENT, via TOURNAI; the convoy had to circle the town as it had been practically razed to the ground, by enemy bombing. On arrival at FROIDMENT, the Bn went into billets. Coys cleaned up generally, both weapons and persons and retired for a good night's sleep, their first since going into Belgium. The Transport lines were bombed during the evening, but nothing was hit.
- 20th May, 1940 Orders were received that we were to relieve a Bn of the Warwickshire Regt on the RIVER ESCAUT. The C.O., and all Coy Commanders were ordered to recon a position with Brigadier from ST. AMER, but owing to the open nature of the ground, no detailed recon. was possible. The Bn moved up that evening by road to CHEROQ on the River bank expecting to be shelled any minute but we were fortunate and received no casualties. The Bn was in position by 2330 hrs, the dispositions being:- "D" Coy in CHEROQ with the Norfolks on their left; "A" Coy on the right; "B" Coy about 500 yds in rear of "D" and "C" behind "A". Bn H.Q. was behind CHEROQ on the main ST. AMAND-TOURNAI road.
- 21st May, 1940 Enemy attacked at 0440 hrs, the S.O.S. being fired by the Norfolks on our left. We were subjected throughout the day to heavy fire, both from mortars and light guns. About 0630 hrs one Coy of the Norfolks were seen advancing to reinforce their Rt. Forward Coy.

X
About 0900 hrs, 1 Pl of "B" Coy were sent to help "D" Coy, and as "B" Coy were supplying a guard for Bde. H.Q. this left the Coy with only one Pl which was sent back to Bn H.Q. Later in the morning, "C" Coy went to assist the Royal Scots on our right who were having a pretty thin time. During the day, "D" Coy suffered about 25% casualties so in the afternoon the remainder of "B" Coy were sent down to help. Very little was seen of the enemy and it was found out that except for snipers he was not within 1000 yds. During the hours of darkness an attempt was made to break through between our left hand Coy and the Norfolks. This was successfully beaten off.

22nd May 1940 Things were fairly quiet in the morning and Coys carried out improvements and repairs to their positions. Later on, shelling and mortar fire continued and there were 30 casualties at Bn H.Q. At 2100 hrs orders were received to withdraw to BACHY on the "Gort" Line. The Bn got out safely and marched the 14 miles back to the frontier. For once, the roads were not unduly congested.

X
23rd May, 1940 On arrival at BACHY the Bn manned the blockhouses on the frontier. This was only a temporary position and during the afternoon and evening, we were relieved by the French Regt of Zouaves. About 2200 hrs the Bn moved by T.G.V.'s to LE TOURET about 3 miles North of LA BASSEE Canal on the road VIEILLE CHAPELLE - BETHUNE arriving on the morning of 24th May.

24th May, 1940 Having arrived here we hoped we were to have a rest but we had only just had a mid-day meal when we heard that the Div was to move up to the canal, the Divisional Front being between AIRE and LA BASSEE. The Bde had been allotted another Bn., the 1st R.I.F. They and the Norfolks took up positions on the canal opposite BETHUNE. Ourselves and the Royal Scots were in reserve at EPINETTE. During the afternoon the Bn moved to LE CORNET A LEUX a few miles South of MERVILLE. We were ordered to have one Coy ready to move at a moment's notice, and the rest of the Bn to move within the hour. We were also warned of the danger of attack from A.P.V.'s from any direction.

25th May, 1940 Orders were received to be prepared to take up a position at CORNET - ST MALO and one Coy were to be sent there immediately to help the Norfolks. "B" Coy were chosen to go. The situation in front appeared to be unstable, as no detailed recon. was possible and consequently Coys of other Bns were out of touch with each other. This increased the danger of a break-through by the enemy A.P.V.s. During the day, we received orders to relieve the R.I.F. who were holding a position on the Canal on the left of the Bde front with H.Q. at LESGLATIGNES about 2½ miles from LE TOURET on the BETHUNE road. The Bn moved up the relief actually being completed the next day.

X
26th May, 1940 Arty. fire was directed on the Bn position and the farm in which Bn H.Q. was situated was repeatedly hit, many of the Amn trucks being set on fire. The Bn had collected various stragglers to assist Coys including 40 men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (M.G. Bn) 30 R.E.s, 25 men of an A/Tk Regt R.A. and a detachment of French troops who had come up from LESTREM. The Bn reported a heavy attack on SEVELINGHE which was partly successful in establishing a bridge-head. Local counter attacks failed to dislodge the enemy. Leaflets were dropped in the morning, text of which was as follows:-

"BRITISH SOLDIERS.

Germans around! You are encircled! German troops invaded COURTAI, TOURNAI, VALENCIENNES, LILLERS, AIRE, ST. OMER are occupied. CALAIS will be taken immediately. Why do you fight further? Do you really believe this nonsense that Germans kill their prisoners? Come and see yourselves the contrary! The match is finished! A fair enemy will be fairly treated".

At 1800 hrs the line held by the brigade was: N. Edge of BOIS DE PAQUEAUT CORNET - ST. MALO - LES CAUDRONS - CORRE. No first-hand information is available from this time onwards concerning the part played by the Bn in the battle and all subsequent information is based on the Bde War Diary. At 2200 hrs Bde received a report from the Bn. that Germans

had broken through their centre, and further rumours received made it appear that the enemy were streaming through. Actually at 2350 hrs Lieut Col Stayner reported by wireless that the Bn was still in position and holding its own except for one Coy. with which no contact could be made.

27th May 1940

From 0500 hrs to 0800 hrs Bn reported frequently on progress of the enemy. All line communications had gone by now owing to heavy shelling. Most Coys had got out from Bn H.Q. by A.P.V.s but they were still holding on. At 0750 hrs Lieut Col Stayner reported that he was cut off from all Coys except one. At 0830 hrs enemy tanks were seen on the aerodrome at Bde. H.Q. which was situated at EPINETTE. Fire was brought to bear on them by 11 Pl of "B" Coy which was acting as Bde. Guard, but as they were 800 yds away, no results could be seen. Shortly afterwards enemy troops carrying aircraft landed on the aerodrome and machine gun fire was opened on Bde. H.Q. By 0930 hrs Bde. H.Q. was withdrawn to LESTER. The Bde Guard being left behind plus a small percentage of the M.G. Coy under Capt. Churchill, 2nd Manchester, and a few stragglers. At 1430 hrs Major Eaton, the adjut, reported that Bn H.Q. had been set on fire and they had had to move to another house. Shortly afterwards he reported that this H.Q. was also on fire and that the Bn was only hanging on with difficulty. From this moment no further messages were received from the Bn, nor could Bde get in touch with them. It was cleared by now that the Bn was surrounded and it was decided by the Bde Commander that it would be too dangerous to attempt a daylight withdrawal. A message was sent through that the Bn. was to withdraw that night, but as the Bde. I.O. who took the message had not been heard of since, it is presumed the order never got through. Meanwhile the detachment at the old Bde. H.Q. at EPINETTE, were heavily embroiled with enemy motorised units. There were about 40 men there all told. Luckily Capt. Churchill had salvaged a M.G. which caused many casualties. The enemy were held off until about 2200 hrs when orders to withdraw were given by Capt. Churchill. ESATRES was given as R.V. 25 men managed to escape under cover of the smoke from enemy mortar fire, but in the confusion of crossing the river at LESTER, the party got very mixed up.

28th May, 1940

Most of them managed to make their way back to DUNKIRK by way of PEPPERLINGHE and it was now realised that the B.E.F. was in serious danger. Bde. H.Q. was eventually found at TETEGHEM where 9 Officers and 25 O.R.s of the Bde were discovered, amongst them was 2nd Lieut. L.T. Carmichael of the 1/8th Bn The Lancashire Fusiliers. The Bde had orders to defend the "last ditch" - the canal about 1 mile from the coast, but owing to the shortage of men it was realised that this would be impossible.

29th May, 1940

Bde H.Q. remained as established and excursions were made to the beach, reminiscent of Brighton Beach on a Bank Holiday. Men packed like sardines and the sea dotted with ships of every shape and size. The whole area of the beaches were dotted with all kinds of equipment, stores and vehicles. DUNKIRK was frequently bombed and soon oil tanks and part of the town were ablaze, spreading a huge pall of smoke over the sky.

30th May, 1940

The day was spent in awaiting orders to embark and also trying to collect salvage, but as the French were looting left and right, this was very difficult. The members of the Bde embarked that night, receiving attention from enemy Arty mainly directed against the mole. The Div arrived in England on the 31st May.

ROLL

Lt.-Col D.J.P.F. Stanger	
Major A.H. Gardner	
Major F.S. Eaton, Adjutant	
Capt. R.G. Saxton	
Capt. P.O.P. Lutyens	
Capt. A.G. Haig	
Capt. A.J. Noon	
Capt. D.C.W. Style	
Lieut. A.B. Martin	
2/Lt. G.C. Noden	
2/Lt. J.M. Gilman	Missing
2/Lt. Style	do
2/Lt. D.R. Ward	do
2/Lt. F.L. Verity	Prisoner
2/Lt. R.A. Brown	do
2/Lt. L.F. Carmichael	With Unit.
2/Lt. G.B. Taylor	Missing.
2/Lt. A.G. Komrover	Wounded
2/Lt. D.E. Spiera	Missing
2/Lt. P.K. Dintwistle	do
2/Lt. G.F. Hameraley	do
2/Lt. J.E. Broadhead	do
2/Lt. D.T. Walton	Wounded
2/Lt. N.S. Clarke	Prisoner of War.
2/Lt. C.J. Wilson	With Unit
2/Lt. F.S. Crossland	Wounded and Missing
Lt. & Q.M. J.L. Christie	With Unit

ATTACHED:

Rev. W.A. Passmore, R.A. Ch.D.	With Unit.
Lieut. W. Sillar, R.A.M.C.	Missing.
