

36) 200187 Private Sidney Ralph **JACOB**
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

DoW 7/12/17, **Age** 23
2nd/4th Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment

Born Aldermaston
Enlisted Aldermaston

Awarded: British War Medal
Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: not known

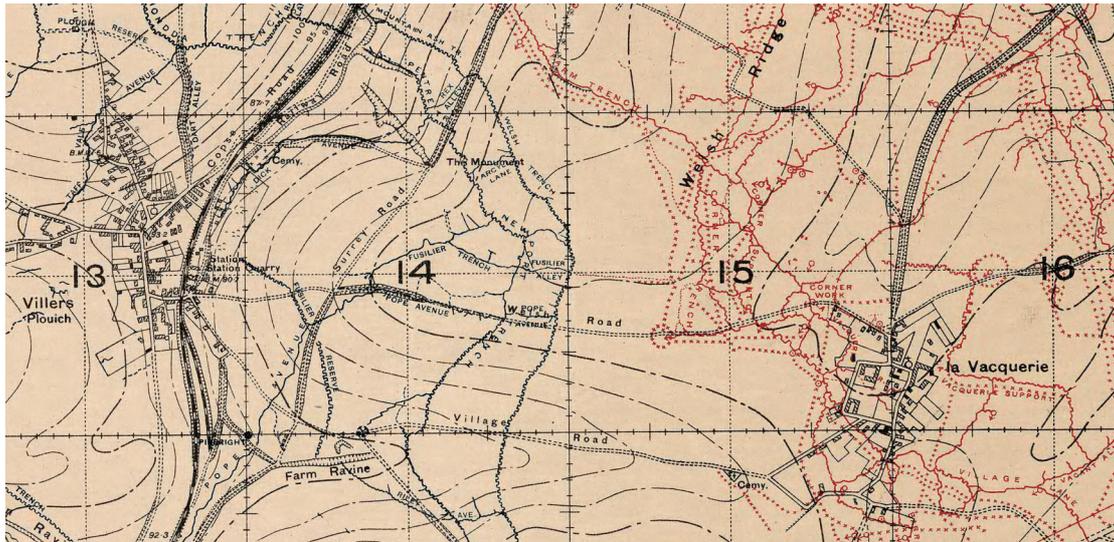
The 2/4th Battalion Royal Berkshire regiment was formed at Reading on 6 November 1914 as a second line Territorial unit and moved to Maidenhead. In February 1915 the battalion was attached to 2nd South Midland Brigade in 2nd South Midland Division, at Northampton. They then moved to Chelmsford in April 1915 and in August 1915, they became part of 184th Brigade in 61st (2nd South Midland) Division. They moved to Salisbury Plain in March 1916 before sailing to France and, on 27 May 1916, they landed at Le Havre.



A group of soldiers of the 2/4th Royal Berkshire

Sidney Jacob's six-digit regimental number (with no previous associated 4- or 5-digit number) and his medal entitlement indicate he arrived in France some time after January-February 1917. It is perhaps a remarkable coincidence that two men (the other being Walter Brown, 1st Buffs qv), though in different units fell within two days of one another and practically in sight of one another in similar circumstances.

The 2/4th Royal Berkshire had also been brought into the Villers Plouich area as a reserve unit to be used to stop the major German counter-attack on 3/12/1917, this being the second phase of the Battle of Cambrai.



Area of operation of 2/4th Royal Berkshire – December 1917

Their War Diary paints only a limited picture of the events of this first week in December 1917 but does indicate the initial confusion brought about by the successful German counter-attack:

1/12/17

Battalion marched at 3.45am and after a long night march through mud and water, reached FINS. Division or Brigade HQ had not arrived [?] again. Battalion had to staff for itself and got accommodation in some tents and huts and broken down houses. Cookers had been kept going and hot tea was served. The cold was intense, so much so that even though tired out men could not sleep.

Battalion was ordered to equip in fighting order. Transport was organised into fighting and rear portions, ammunition made up and arrangements made to dump packs.

Orders to move at short notice were issued, and blankets and kits collected. These orders were cancelled as Battalion was not to move until 10am on 2nd. Blankets and kits re-issued and all ranks turned in to rest.

At 11.40pm Battalion was ordered to be ready to move at once.

The 2/4th Royal Berkshire was being rushed up overnight, marching in miserable conditions towards the Villers Plouich area.

2/12/17

At about 1am a GSO of the GUARDS DIVN came to see Lt Col J.H.S.Dimmer and explained the situation. It appeared that the GUARDS DIVN had re-captured GOUZEAUCOURT from enemy. Prisoners had reported that enemy were going to attack in force this morning. The battalion was to be attached to 2nd GUARDS BDE as centre attack troops. Battalion was marched to GOUZEAUCOURT at once. Lt Col A.THORNE DSO 3rd Gren Guards conducted Lt Col J.H.S.Rimmer over area occupied by 2nd GUARDS BDE around GOUZEAUCOURT and arrangements for disposition of Battalion along a railway were made. Battalion was in position by 5.30am.

Operation orders were issued, Battalion dug itself in. Forenoon was passed in reconnoitring and instructing.

Mess Sergt (Sgt Burton) came up to Battalion with food for officers, but was killed on his way back to Mess Cart. Enemy activity was reported.

Reconnoitring patrols were again sent out and a scheme of attack arranged. Battalion was also ordered to be ready to assist SECUNDERABAD Cavalry Brigade if required.

Orders were received to rejoin own Brigade and necessary action taken. Capt FIELD was sent ahead to obtain information.

Battalion marched at midnight.

An aborted advance to support the Guards Division only resulted in another long march, digging a trench and then marching back – all to no purpose.

3/12/17

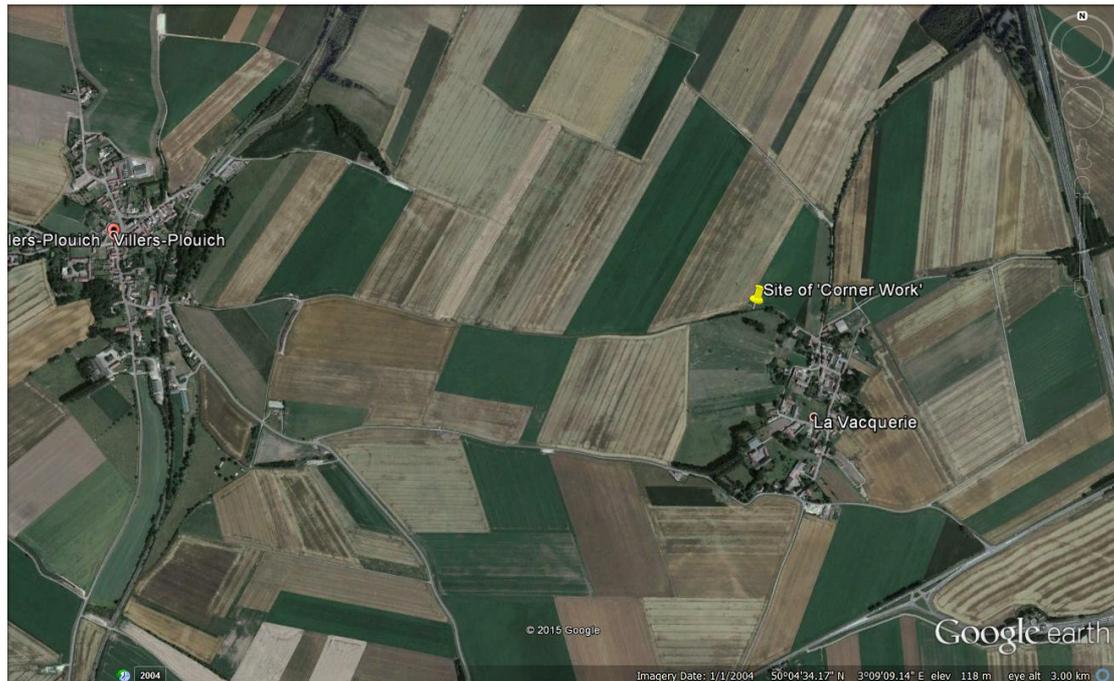
Battalion moved into trenches of old British line. Battalion placed under orders of 183 Bde for use as storming or counter-attack troops.

Trenches severely shelled.

Enemy attacks in great force taking place all around. 2/5th GLOSTERS ordered to counter-attack.

At 1pm dispositions were altered and C Coy sent to take up a position facing enemy on East. D Coy moved to help C

Battalion ordered to occupy CORNER WORK

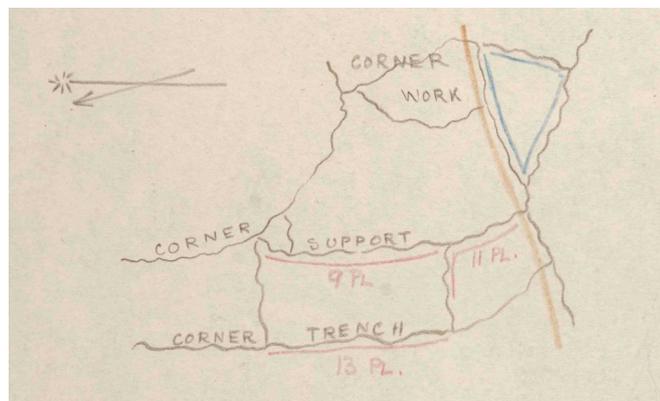


Site of the 'Corner Work'

The details of this small 'attack' to come in the war diary involving C and D companies 'occupying' the Corner Work are quite limited. However the messages exchanged between the Commanding Officer (Dimmer) and the Company Commander of C Coy (Knott) show clear exasperation between the former and the latter...in the end to no purpose

4/12/17

Battalion ordered to get into German line.



On receipt of disposition sketches from Capt KNOTT, it was discovered that the enemy and not our troops held CORNER WORK.

Captain Knott's orders from his commanding officer would now be quite direct, he clearly furious at the delay believing this being caused by Knott:

Capt KNOTT.

Immediately you receive this message
ATTACK at ALL COSTS with all available men, CORNER WORK.

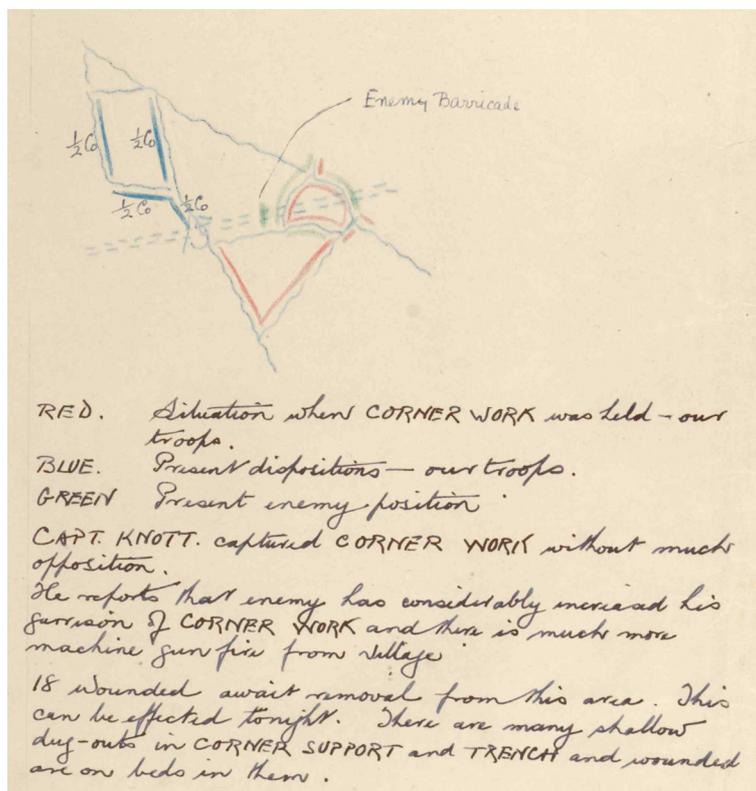
Your delay is seriously affecting the
situation

Acknowledge this message to me, and to
183 and definitely state that you are attacking at once.
State time you receive this order.
Afterwards state time you occupied CORNER WORK.

(Sd.) J. S. Dimmer. Lt Col

9.15 p.m.
4-12-17.

And the result taken from Knott's report:



5/12/17

C and D Coys driven out of CORNER WORK by enemy attack.

"C & D Coys. driven out of CORNER WORK by enemy attack.

"

Organised attack from village in large numbers compelled us to withdraw before bombs arrived and we are now in our original line

Present garrison 79 rifles

(Sd.) E. Knott. Capt.
O.C. C Coy.

3.45 a.m.
5.12.17.

Coys ordered to retake CORNER WORK.

There was little sympathy from the CO who had received information about C (and D) company's expulsion from his superiors and not from his own officers:

"C & D Coys.

I understand from 183 that you have been driven out of the position of CORNER WORK that you held.

At daylight you will commence a bombing attack and capture whole of CORNER WORK and trench R. 15. d. 5. 8 to 4. 5.

Clearly understand that it is of no use calling on me for supplies of ammunition &c. You have more than ample supplies of S.A.A., bombs, in front line trench about 14. d. 9. 9. and either side NTS of same and you must organise your own system of supply.

(Sd.) J.H.S. Dimmes. Lt. Col.

5.25 a.m.
5.12.17.

The proposed bombing attack would never take place – the enemy had other ideas...

Enemy made three attacks but was driven off. Reorganisation of our line was effected.

After an intense bombardment lasting 30 minutes enemy made three attempts in succession to advance from WESTERN side of CORNER WORK against my company in CORNER SUPPORT but was driven back.

Our casualties:-
3 Killed
6 Wounded (including *Lieut JANAWAY* very serious).

All above of 'C' Coy.
'D' Coy had casualties number unknown at present.

Situation normal at 6 p.m.

D 35

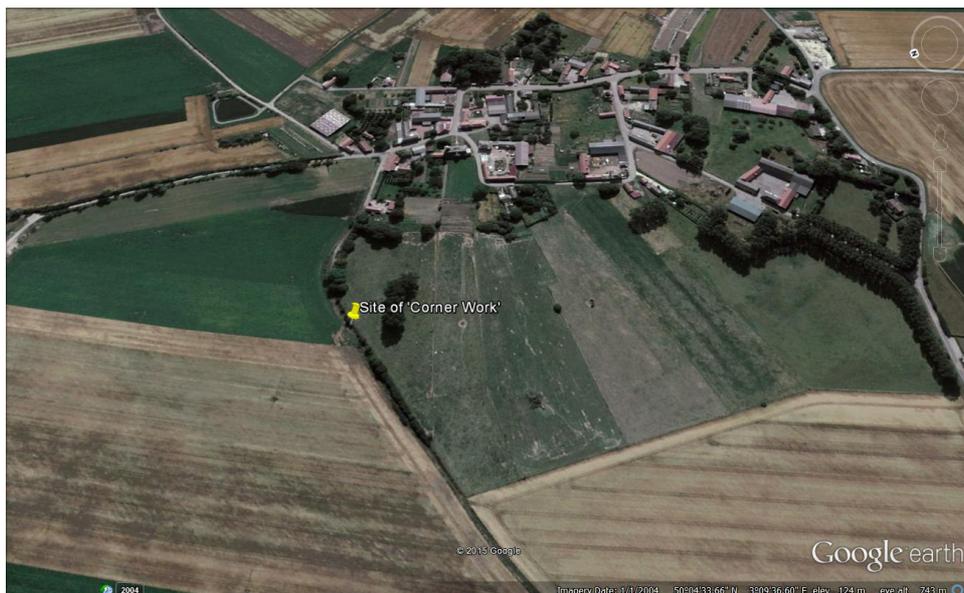
URGENT.

Lieut. WILLIAMS
MO i/c R-BERKS

2 Officers, 1 very seriously wounded and about 40 O.R. wounded are being brought to the relay stretcher post at R.H.C. 2.8.

A Major RAM.C and 3 stretcher squads have arrived for duty. 8 more squads are coming.

The Corner Work had not been taken, both C and D companies had suffered casualties. There would be concern now that the enemy might push forward further. The battalion commander would now take personal charge of this next phase



6/12/17

Preparations made for unexpected enemy attack. C.O. visited line and arranged a defensive scheme

7/12/17

Readjustment of 61 Division front took place. C.O. visited line and working parties preparatory to sending over to 2/5th GLOSTERS

Casualties to date [1-7/12/17]:

Officers wounded: Lt Legett, Lt Janaway

Other ranks:

<i>Company</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>67</i>

8/12/17

Relief commenced at 12 noon and last of Battalion reached Reserve Battalion shelters in Villers Plouich at 8am.

There are no further details in either the War Diary or the copies of messages regarding individual casualties. Clearly C and C companies had borne the brunt of 'contact with the enemy'.

It is known that Sidney Jacob died of wounds on 7/12/1917 and was buried in the cemetery generated by the Casualty Clearing Station at Rocquigny/Equancourt. He would most likely have been here for two days maximum before succumbing to his wounds. It is therefore probable he was one of those wounded in the actions at the 'Corner Work' on or around 5/12/1917

Sidney Jacob is buried at:

ROCQUIGNY-EQUANCOURT ROAD BRITISH CEMETERY, MANANCOURT, France, V. E.
17

SON OF MR. F. W. JACOB, OF ROSE COTTAGE, ALDERMASTON, READING, BERKS.

ROCQUIGNY-EQUANCOURT ROAD BRITISH CEMETERY, MANANCOURT



Location Information

Rocquigny and Equancourt are two villages in the Department of the Somme, some 13 kilometres north of Peronne and 12 kilometres south-east of Bapaume.

Historical Information

Etricourt was occupied by Commonwealth troops at the beginning of April 1917 during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. It was lost on the 23 March 1918 when the Germans advanced, but regained at the beginning of September.

The cemetery was begun in 1917 and used until March 1918, mainly by the 21st and 48th Casualty Clearing Stations posted at Ytres, and to a small extent by the Germans, who knew it as "Etricourt Old English Cemetery". Burials were resumed by Commonwealth troops in September 1918 and the 3rd Canadian and 18th Casualty Clearing Stations buried in it in October and November 1918.

The cemetery contains 1,838 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War. 21 of the burials are unidentified and nine Commonwealth graves made by the Germans which cannot now be found are represented by special memorials. The cemetery also contains 198 German war burials and the graves of ten French civilians.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield.



200187 PRIVATE
S. R. JACOB
ROYAL BERKSHIRE REGIMENT
7TH DECEMBER 1917 AGE 23



ROCK OF AGES CLEFT FOR ME
LET ME HIDE MYSELF IN THEE