

10th (Service) Battalion Devonshire Regiment: detailed account of 27-29 January 1918

On 27 January 1918, Lts Whitehouse and Herapath led a patrol towards Akindzali village. As the patrol was making its way through Hodza Wood it encountered a sentry post. The post was rushed and taken but, due to heavy machine gun fire, the patrol was forced back. Lt Whitehouse halted his men just outside the wood and dug in. The Bulgarians attacked the patrol twice, but each time they were beaten back by Lewis gunfire. When things had quietened down, Lt Whitehouse re-entered the wood in an endeavour to find Lt Herapath who was missing. Lt Whitehouse failed to find Lt Herapath, who had been wounded and taken prisoner by the Bulgarians, but he did discover a wounded private, who he subsequently rescued and brought back to safety. For his gallant actions at Hodza Wood, Lt Whitehouse was awarded the Military Cross.

Two days later the Battalion, together with 8th DCLI, took part in a big raid on Akindzali. The enemy wire ran across the plain past Akindzali village and wood, to the mouth of the Hodza Su, with outposts at Karali, Hodza Wood and Brestbridge. The plan was that the DCLI, in two parties, was to get through the wire on the left near the Lake, after which, one party would turn half-right and push through Akindzali Wood from south to north, cooperating with five platoons of 10th Devons under Capt. Dunning, who would advance through Hodza Wood onto Akindzali village. Three other platoons from the Devons, under 2/Lt Mathew, were to move directly against Karali covering Capt. Dunning's right flank. It was hoped that the DCLI would then intercept the retreating garrison from Akindzali, who were expected to be driven out from the village by the Devons.

At 0400 the 10th Devons left their positions in York Redoubt and proceeded to Broken Ridge, where an advanced first aid post was established. Just after 0520 the Devons crossed the Hodza Su. At 0630 the Battalion was about 500 yds short of Hodza Wood when heavy rifle fire broke out to their left. Undaunted, the Devons pressed on and soon Capt Dunning's party was through Hodza Wood and up against the wire. The wire turned out to be eight feet thick and five feet high. Under fire, Royal Engineers placed Bangalore Torpedoes under the wire which, when detonated at 0655, blew a gap in the wire nearly 60 ft. wide. No. 13 Platoon led the way through the wire and cleared the eastern part of the village, driving the Bulgarians out in a northerly direction. Meanwhile, D Company swept on through the village and, despite stubborn opposition, drove out the garrison. After gaining their objectives to the north and south of the church, 14 and 16 Platoons saw about thirty enemy soldiers bolting from Akindzali wood towards Gevsekli. Both platoons immediately opened fire with Lewis guns, inflicting many casualties on the fleeing group. With the garrison in full retreat, the three platoons under 2/Lt Mathews entered Karali. The defenders were quickly driven out and several casualties were inflicted on them. By now, the Bulgarians were thoroughly alarmed and started to lay down a heavy barrage on Akindzali. Shortly after the barrage had started, the Battalion received the order to retire.

During the course of the action the Battalion destroyed wire and found two concrete strong points under construction that were blown up with Bangalore Torpedoes. Later, when the Battalion returned to their lines, it was discovered that the DCLI had been unable to intercept the escaping garrison, as they had withdrawn so quickly. However, if the garrison of Akindzali had managed to escape capture, it had not escaped heavy casualties. Battalion losses during the raid amounted to **two men killed** and nine wounded; the DCLI had eight

men wounded. After the raid a message was read to the men from the Brigade Commander which stated:

“The Brigade commander wishes to convey to all ranks who took part in this morning’s most successful raid, his appreciation of the manner in which the whole operation was carried though. He wishes particularly to congratulate the officers commanding parties, as he considers the success was mainly due to their splendid leadership, coupled with a previous careful reconnaissance.”

Sources

1. Darlington, Lew, A Hill in Salonika, The New Mosquito: the Journal of the Salonika Campaign Society, 1915 – 1918 Issue no. 18 Sep 2008 p.7-12, p.25
2. Atkinson, C.T. The Devonshire Regiment, 2002 N & M reprint (original pub 1926)

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