

1/2nd London Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force

Introduction

The following presents fragments of the history of one of the two heavy batteries of the London Heavy Brigade, Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force, and relates the 1/2nd London Heavy Battery's first actual war engagement on 22nd April 1915. It is given that the battery's war diary could complete the story, but unfortunately I have not had the opportunity to study it. If it were a puzzle, you could say that most of the frame is present and that there are enough pieces to get an impression of what the picture represents.

The prehistory

2nd London Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, was established on 1 April 1908 as part of the 1st and Territorial Force. The soldiers came from the 1st London Engineers (Volunteers), who after a short time came to master the skills of their new weapon.

As an administrative measure the two batteries merged into the London Heavy Brigade, Royal Garrison Artillery, which in peacetime belonged to the 1st London Division. On mobilization included the batteries Division. associated ammunition columns in 1st and and their 2nd London

Mobilization

When the First World War broke out, the 2nd London Heavy Battery mobilized with its division, which quickly moved to the standby area in the county of Hertfordshire. The divisional artillery was concentrated around the town of Hemel Hempstead and the heavy was stationed in the town of Kings Langley.

In November/December 1914, all units in the Territorial Force were duplicated, whereby the main battery became the 1/2nd London Heavy Battery, while the new battery, the reserve battery, was designated the 2/2nd London Heavy Battery. My sources do not shed light on this part of the battery's history, but analogously to other Territorial Force units, the part of the crew that does not want to report for overseas service will be separated from the main unit and transferred to the reserve unit, which was then built up to almost full war strength. In March/April 1915 the reserve units are duplicated, creating the 3/2nd London Heavy Battery. *2nd Line*) Reserve units (called *1st Reserve*, later personnel formed part of the defense of England and served as the replacement for the active unit (called *2nd Reserve*, later *3rd Line*).

The training of the divisional artillery is described in the book *The London Gunners Come to Town - Life and Death in Hemel Hempstead in the Great War* (Source 2), which, however, does not mention specific incidents at the heavy battery.



"1914" 10-1914-

Pièces d'artillerie anglaise en Belgique.

d'après l'illustration

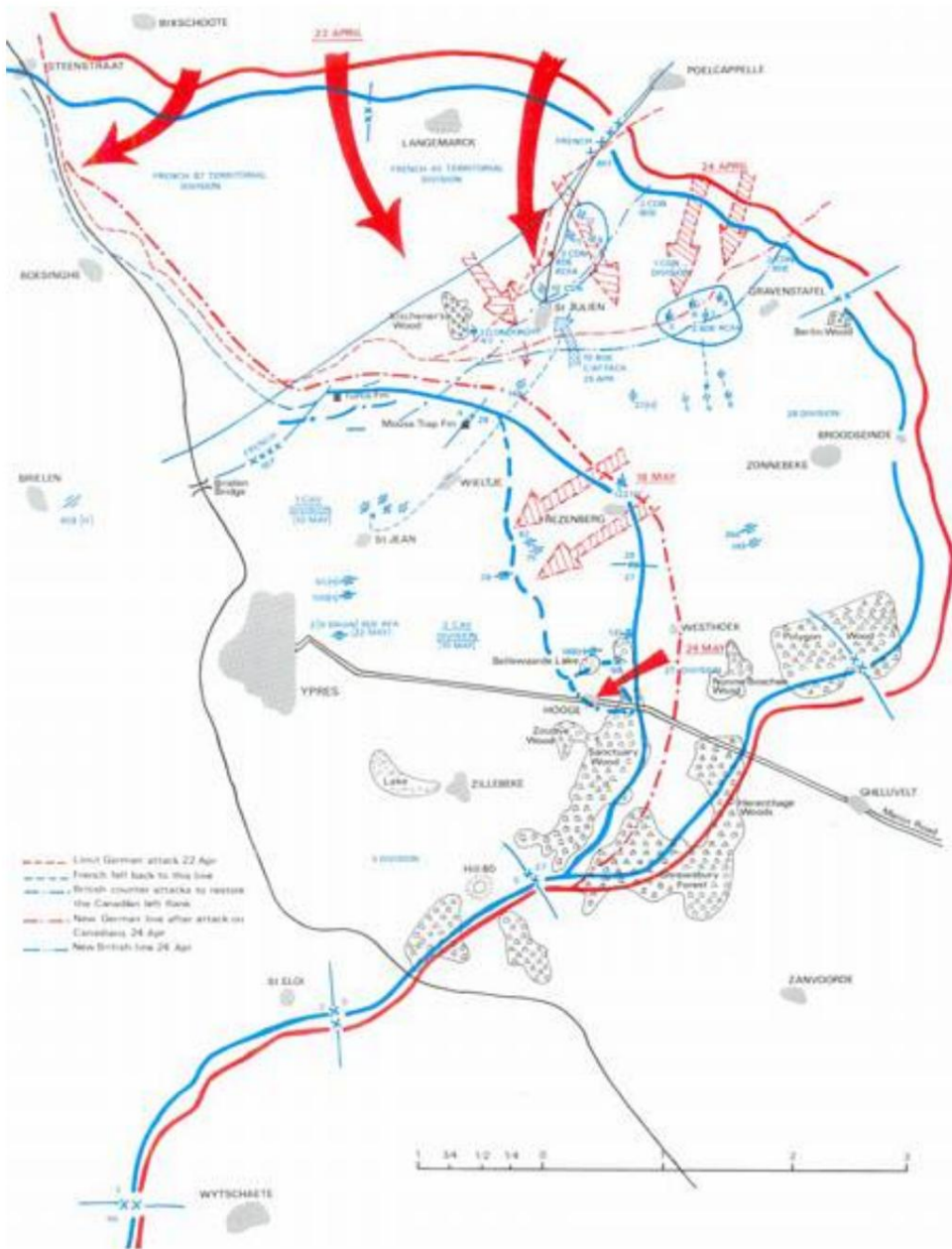
Pièces d'artillerie anglaises en Belgique.

To the front

The battery, commanded by Major HB Brown, sailed for France on 15 March 1915 and arrived at Béthune (in France) on 19 March 1915, before being sent to the front at Ypres (in Belgium).

The two 4.7" field guns appear to have been photographed in 1914, cf the caption; l'illustration was a French weekly.

See QF 4.7-in Field Gun for a discussion of the pamphlet and the heavy artillery batteries of the Territorial Force.



Second Battle of Ypres, 22 April to 25 April 1915.
From Source 3.

At the front

The battery did not fight alongside the 2nd London Division 1), as the British Army around this time began separating the heavy batteries from the infantry divisions and grouping them into artillery groups deployed at corps or army level.

Along with Canadians and French

The battery was assigned in support of the operations at Ypres (The Second Battle of Ypres) as part of No. 10 In Group Heavy Artillery Reserve.

The northern part of the positions around Ypres was held by the 45th (Algerian) Division (General Quiquandon) - see Postscript - which had on its left wing the 87th (French) Reserve Division (General Roy) and on its right wing the 1st Canadian Division (Lieutenant - General EAH Alderson).

The battery positions were located behind *the Bois de Cuisiniers* (which in English was called Kitchener's Wood).

Kitchener's Wood is located right in the center of the top half of the map.

The first use of war gas

On the afternoon of 22 April 1915, the 45th (Algerian) Division was exposed to the first use of war gas (chlorine gas).

The result was that the majority of the Algerian units in the front line collapsed - many died, some fled, while others again retreated more according to plan. The Canadian official war history states that the only manned position then left behind the French line was a battery equipped with 4.7" field gun guns (about 800 m west of St. Julian).

A good 4 km wide gap was left in the front line, through which German units of the XXVI Reserve Corps (General von Hügel) now flowed; the reserve corps consisted of the 51st Reserve Division and the 52nd Reserve Division.



A London Heavy Battery in Action.

A postcard in the series Official War Photographs (Series 16, No. 105), published by the Daily Mail.

The text on the back of the card reads:

A London Heavy Battery in action. One of the gunners is seen bringing a shell to the breech of the gun.

The 1st Canadian Division, which was to the right of and further behind the Algerian Division, is deployed to close the gap, and two battalions - 10th Bn. (10th Canadians) and 16th Bn. (Canadian Scottish) - on the night of 22-23 April counter-attack during which they recapture the 2nd London Heavy Battery's guns.



The Canadian's night attack "that saved the situation" at Ypres.

The situation is depicted on this contemporary postcard sourced from the Illustrated London News.

The card is published as No. 6 in the "Great War Deeds" series. The following appears from the back:

Canadian Scottish and the 10th Infantry recapture the lost 4.7's at the point of the bayonet.

The counterattack was planned to take place simultaneously with an attack that the Algerian division would launch. However, this attack never took place; probably the division was too weakened to be able to carry out a coordinated effort.



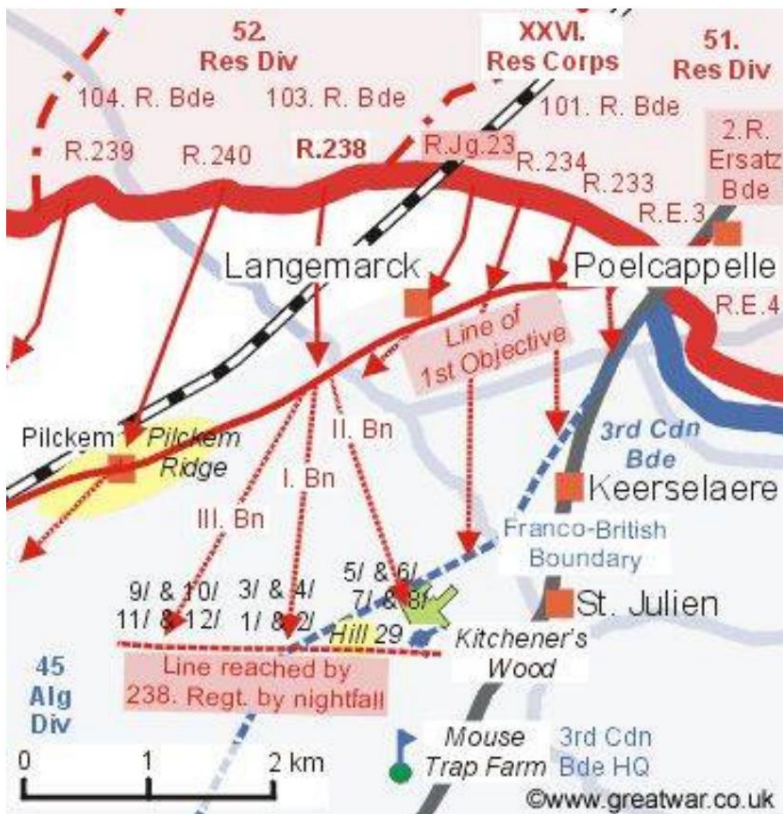
A close Shave.

From a contemporary postcard drawn by Edgar A. Holloway.

When the Canadians later had to retreat, they did not have the opportunity to take the four heavy guns with them, and destroyed the ammunition that was lying around the guns.

A motor order had been sent to the 3rd Canadian Field Artillery Brigade with orders to send horses

forward, but when the orderly was unable to locate the department's command station, he returned the next day with an unsolved case (Source 9).



The Second Battle of Ypres 1915, Battle of Gravenstafel Ridge.

The situation on 22 April 1915, at 19:00.

From Source 10.

A Canadian officer reported (Source 5) that there must have been a hard fight for the guns earlier when they were overrun (before dark), the area being littered with bodies of English, Turks and Germans.

Geschichte des Reserve-Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 238, referred to in Source 10, quotes an account from Oberleutnant Mattenklott, who was the commander of 8. Kompani, II. Battalion, 238th Reserve Infantry Regiment, 52nd Reserve Division:

"... On the southern edge [of the wood] we found four large, heavy guns of the London Garrison Artillery Regiment. The whole wood was full of ammunition bunkers and huts. In one of these we found two Indian soldiers (one was wearing an English medal). They were both suffering severely from the effects of the gas. Later we had them taken back to the rear..."

The English commander-in-chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French mentions the loss of the battery in his report to the English Minister of War (Source 4): "The 2nd London Heavy Battery, which had been attached to the Canadian Division, was posted behind the right of the French Division, and, being involved in their retreat, fell into the enemy's hands. It was recaptured by the Canadians in their counter attack, but the guns could not be withdrawn before the Canadians were again driven back." Sir John French adds that the French division cannot in any way be blamed for having to give way, when the enemy permitted himself to use such methods against a brave and noble adversary ...

Closing

The next information I have about the battery is from December 1917, when a passage in *the 9th Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery 1914-1918 2*) mentions that in December 1917 this battery takes over the 1/2nd London

The guns of the Battery, which then formed part of the 25th Brigade, RGA, supporting the 8th Corps at Passchendaele.

Source 3's overall overview of the English artillery per 11 November 1918 mentions that the 1st and Heavy Battery, 2nd London now equipped with 60-pdr field guns, are thus included at army level:

Royal Garrison Artillery Belongs to 60-pdr gun 6" howitzers

13th Brigade (Mobile) Third Army 22, 1/2 London 201, 379

42nd Brigade (Mobile) Fifth Army 124, 1/1 London 237, 323



A battery of 60-pdr field guns, approx. 1917.

From a contemporary American postcard.

The above-mentioned organization is the result of a restructuring of the heavy artillery that began in December 1917. In this connection, apparently, the 25th Brigade, which had previously housed the 1/2nd London Battery, was disbanded.

Finally, source 11 mentions that the two reserve batteries - 2/1st and 2/2nd London Heavy Battery - were garrisoned in Colchester and Hollesley respectively.

Supplementary material

A supplementary article - *On the first use of war gas on 22 April 1915* - reproduces extracts from the booklet *Protective means against Atomic, Biological and Chemical War* by Lieutenant Colonel AV Skjødt, formerly of the Armed Forces' ABC service. The booklet was published on the occasion of the Tøjhusmuseet's special exhibition 30 November 1990 - 28 April 1991, Copenhagen 1990.

Sources

1. *His Majesty's Territorial Army - A descriptive account of the yeomanry, artillery, engineers and*

infantry with the army service and medical corps, comprising the 'King's Imperial Army of the Second Line' by Walter Richards, Virtue & Co., London (c. 1911).

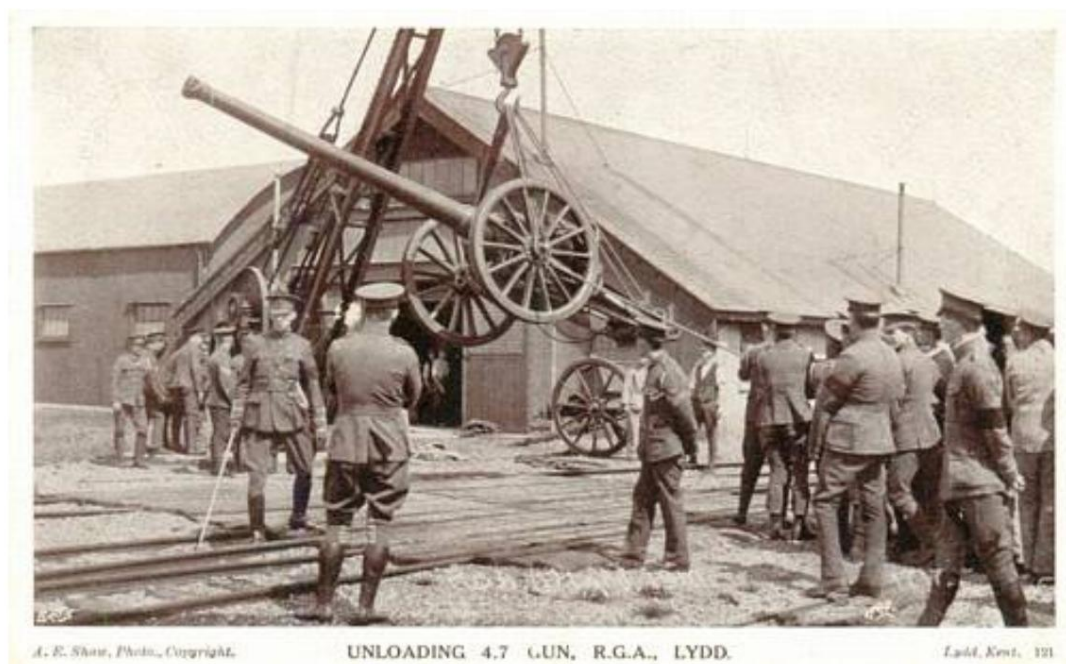
2. *The London Gunners Come to Town - Life and Death in Hemel Hempstead in the Great War* by Bertha and Chris Reynolds, CODIL Language Systems Ltd., Tring, Hertfordshire 1995, ISBN 0-9526552-0-9.
3. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Western Front 1914-18* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1986, ISBN 1-870114-00-0.
4. *Military Despatch dated 15th June, 1915, from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, the British Army in France, to the Secretary of State for War, War Office, London, SW* See *British Battles of World War I - 1914 -15*, HMSO Uncovered Editions, London 2000, ISBN 0-11-702447-3. Also available at FirstWorldWar.com.
5. *Magnificent but not War, The Second Battle of Ypres* by John Dixon, Leo Cooper, Barnsley, South Yorkshire 2005, ISBN 0-84415-002-X.
- 6th Regimental Warpath 1914-1918, Royal Garrison Artillery, Territorial Force.
7. *Canada in Flanders, The official History of The Canadian Expeditionary Force, Volume 1* by Sir M. Aitkin, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1916.
8. *Official of the Canadian Army in the First World War - Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919* by GWL Nicholson, Ottawa 1964.
9. *War Diary, 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1.4.1915 - 30.9.1915*, page 15.
10. *The Great War 1914-1918, Battle Study: The Second Battle of Ypres*.
11. *Royal Artillery, Home Forces, from The Storey of the British Army in the First World War*.
12. *Sound - the history of the city and the area*.

Source 10 deserves special mention as a thorough study of the Second Battle of Ypres. The website documents a very extensive, and ongoing, study of the battle by Joanna Legg (née Parker), in collaboration with her father, retired Lieutenant Colonel Graham Parker. English, German and French sources are combined and presented in an exemplary manner.

Postscript - The shooting range in Lydd

Lydd is a shooting range in Kent.

Before and during the First World War it was an essential element in the existence of the Royal Garrison Artillery.



A. E. Shaw, Photo, Copyright.

UNLOADING 4.7 GUN, R.G.A., LYDD.

Lydd, Kent. 191

Unloading 4.7 Gun, Royal Garrison Artillery, Lydd, c. 1913.

From a simultaneously a postcard.



4.7 Gun Battery in Action, Royal Garrison Artillery, Lydd, c. 1913.

From a simultaneously a postcard.

Lydd was thus also home to one of the artillery's three *Siege Artillery Schools*.

The area was also used for experiments with various explosives, and it is from here that the substance *Lyddite* gets its name.

Postscript - About the 45th (Algerian) Division



The 45th (Algerian) Division (General Quiquandon) consisted in April 1915 of:

90th Brigade:

- *2e bis Zouaves de marche* (3 battalions)
- *1er Tirailleurs de marche* (3 battalions) *1er*
- *Bataillon d'Afrique 2e*
- *Bataillon d'Afrique*

91st Brigade:

- *7e Zouaves de marche* (3 battalions)
- *3e bis Zouaves de marche* (3 battalions)

1 squadron/Regiment *de marche de Chasseurs d'Afrique*

3 artillery divisions (*groupes*) (75 mm)

Source: The Great War 1914-1918, Battle Study: The Second Battle of Ypres.

The parade uniform postcards were at one time for sale at GermanPostcard.com.

The cards are signed A. Palm de Rosa, who may be identical to the Swedish painter Anna Palm (1859-1924), who in 1901 married the Italian officer *de Rosa*.





*French 75 mm field gun, approx. 1914.
From The Great War in a Different Light.*

The uniforms shown here give an impression of the units' uniforms in 1914.

During 1915 the uniforms were to some extent adapted to life in the field and became less variegated.

See also: Uniform plates - About French colonial troops, 1914.

Postscript - Canadian shoulder marks

The post-war heirs to the 10th Bn. (10th Canadians) - *1st Bn. The Calgary Highlanders* and *1st Bn. The Winnipeg Light Infantry* - and 16th Bn. (Canadian Scottish) - *1st Bn. The Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's)* - was authorized in 1934 to wear a brass badge with an oak leaf and acorn commemorating the attack on Kitchener's Wood.



A reference in *The Uniforms of the Scottish Regiments* by R. Money Barnes, Seeley Service & Co., London, c. 1965, brought me on the trail of history, which can be read on The Calgary Highlanders website, from which the reproduction of the badge also originates.

Per Finsted

Notes:

1) From 11 May 1915 named 47th (London) Division. The division was sent to France at the same time as the battery, but was deployed at the battles for Festubert - 15 to 25 May 1915 - approx. 50 km south of Ypres.

2) th Heavy Battery RGA 1914-1919, a Naval & Military Press reprint of the 1919 original.
9 The remark is found on page 10, among the 15 pages available as a pdf file.