



**DURHAM**  
AT **WAR**



## David Lloyd Brereton

Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel David Lloyd Brereton, commanding  
2nd Battalion, The Durham Light Infantry, describing the events and  
loss of men in action on 21 March

**letter**

**1 April 1918**



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1<sup>st</sup> April 1918

My dear Maugham

We have had a very busy time and I have not found it possible to write many letters. As you are in a very central position and will probably see officers of the Regiment I have decided to write and tell you all that happened and to send you copies of the various documents. As returning have now all been sent in I do not think there is any harm in giving you our losses - We were in the trenches and were fully expecting the attack and were in the act of standing to, when it commenced. I had B & D Companies in the front line and A & C with me in the Reserve Line. The orders the front Companies received were that they were to hold out to the last, and not a soul returned or attempted to return, except two officers who were wounded very early in the day. They were sent with one man to the Aid Post and when their wounds were dressed they reported at the battalion H.Q. and remained with me for the rest of



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the day – The Brigade had two battalions in the front line and we were in the left sub-section. Both flanks of the Brigade were turned in the early afternoon and the right battalion had to join up with us about 4.30 p.m. - We hung on together. Our wire was intact and we could have prevented the enemy coming over the open - He did not attempt to do this but used the communication trench and came round both our flanks. We did not leave the position until 7.15 p.m. and then had about 1,600 yards to go with the enemy on both flanks and following up closely. Five minutes later it would have been too late. When we crossed the Corps line it was only thinly held by odd and ends of troops, R.E. etc.

*Page 2*

We reformed and found we had 6 officers and 128 other ranks of the battalion. These all, except myself, went through another 24 hours of it and only Spencer and 18 came out unwounded. The remnants of the Brigade were put under the O.C. Reserve Battalion. There were in the trenches on the 21<sup>st</sup> 30 officers and 639 other ranks and out of these there are now with the battalion 2 officers and 58 other ranks making the total casualties at 28 officers and 581 other ranks. My report was as follows:-



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Officers - 1 killed, 6 wounded, 13 missing, 1 missing believed killed, 5 missing believed wounded, 2 wounded and missing. Total 28

Other Ranks - 16 killed, 509 missing, 56 wounded and missing (pending advice from C.C.S.) Total 581

The number of wounded officers has been since altered to 7, as McBain got back all right and consequently the missing believed wounded is reduced to 4. I think we have heard of about 70 other ranks in hospital.

I have a fairly good nucleus on which to build up again, as there was a large leave party and several at courses. I have had reinforcements from the other Regiments and we shall soon be up to strength again.

Gilpin was Adjutant and had been doing so well - He went out under heavy machine fire to bring in a wounded man and was shot through the head. His is a great loss – Sopwith was second in Command and must have been hit in the retirement – Pickening was commanding “B” Coy and Griffith Jones “D” Coy. “A” Coy was commanded by Fillingham who is in hospital, and “C” by Fawcett who acted most gallantly throughout the day and evidently in the end, in making sure that his men knew they had to go back, delayed too long and was cut off.

There has been no mention of the Division in the



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papers – One division that has had much mention in the “Times” was on our right and were driven out by 3 p.m. and were the cause of our Brigade being out-flanked. I am convinced that the stand the Brigade made held up the attack and prevented the enemy overrunning the Corps line on the 21<sup>st</sup>. He did not take it until the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. If the Brigade had given way there was nothing whatever to have stopped the enemy – The 3<sup>rd</sup> Prussian Guards were opposed to the Battalion. The Battalion I am satisfied has fully upheld the traditions of the old Regiment and I am thankful that I have been able to be here now and help in the re-organisation - Strangers might have been brought in – I have 13 excellent officers with me and several good N.C.O.s and men with the 1914 star and the battalion will soon be ready again. I have today been over the old ground where we were in the summer of 1915 and where you and I were wounded. It has much altered since then, but it was very interesting seeing it again.

I was so sorry to see Godsal’s death announced – Sgt Morris, S.M.Johnston, Sgt Jones, and several who have been out the whole time are now missing. I am trying to write to all relatives of officers but it takes a very long time - I was told to bring five men for the King to see at his visit the other day, one was a Sgt of “A” Coy, 2 were runners, and



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two were duty men - I have sent in the names of 24 officer and men who did especially good work - What happened to "B" & "D" Companies after 9 a.m. I am unable to say. The smoke and the shelling prevented one seeing.

My very kind regards to your wife,

Yours ever,

(Sgd.) D.L. Brereton

I have just missed seeing Irvine and his Brigade.

The officer who did particularly well and are not missing, are Spencer, McBain, Pearson and Hutchinson. McBain is a son of the old S.M. Spencer was in the ranks as a Signaller. The Army Commander (Plumer) inspected the battalion on Saturday and was much pleased with the turn out and march past.

Watson is my right hand man.

