



*The author of this article retains the copyright of the material. No part of this article may be reproduced or distributed in any form other than for private use without the express permission of the author. Permission may be sought via the [BCMh Newsletter Editor](#)*

Page 1 / 1

John Sheen *The Steel of the DLI: 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Durham Light Infantry at War 1914-1918* Pen and Sword 2009 H/b £25 320pp ISBN: 1 848841 434

The DLI is very well served with battalion histories but, surprisingly, the regular 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was never written up. John Sheen has filled that gap, making good use of the local press to provide contemporary letters and reminiscences to bring the story alive. The book is particularly well illustrated.

The battalion joined 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 6<sup>th</sup> Division and went to France in September 1914. To demonstrate just what a lot the BEF had to learn in the new kind of fighting on the Western Front, consider this. Late in 1914 the battalion was near Armentieres. Having lots of ex-miners in its ranks, the battalion took early to underground warfare. But so many men crowded out of curiosity around the entrance to a new mine that they were spotted by enemy artillery and severely shelled. Not a mistake you would make twice!

The battalion's war history was curiously checkered. They missed engagement in First and Second Ypres, but were part of the successful counter-attack at Hooze in August 1915. They put in a grim six months holding the Salient from January to July 1916. They were on the Somme in September and October. (A word of complaint here. The narrative got so vague at this point that I had to go to other reference books to work out which engagement was being written about). In 1917 they missed involvement in Arras, Messines and Third Ypres, but were busy trench raiders. They were at Cambrai that year. They put up a terrific resistance in March 1918, did another long spell in the Salient and were in the advance to victory from Albert to the Sambre between September and November 1918.

Some good appendices round off a useful addition to any library of unit histories. I would love to know more about 18<sup>th</sup> Brigade's use of 'Cards of Honour' to reward deserving soldiers who didn't make it to the medal lists.

**John Lee**

Mars & Clio 27 Autumn 2009