

1917.Appendix.May.7th  
(Contd.)

A party of 1 Officer and 50 O.R. from the 1/D.C.L.I. was again available for carrying. Authority was given to draw Screw Stakes and Barbed Wire from the Advanced Dump, but as these were not brought up no use could be made of the party.  
Casualties - Wounded 1 Officer (S/Lt. P.H. DRAKE-BROOKMAN)  
O.R. 3 killed, 10 wounded.

8th

A good deal of rain fell during the night 7th/8th and during the morning.  
Attached is a Report on the Operations that took place this day.  
95th Inf. Bde. C.O. 235 was received with C.O. 235/1 as follows :-  
C.O. 235 - 1. The WOOD and VILLAGE of FRESHOF will be attacked this evening and our original line re-established.  
2. The Attack will be made by the 15th Inf. Bde. on the Right, the 95th Inf. Bde. on the Centre and the 2nd Canadian Division on the Left.  
3. BOUNDARIES. (a) Between the 15th and 95th Inf. Brigades, Road running from CRUCIFIX B.6.c.6/6 to U.25.c.0/0 thence to original front line at U.25.b.6/0, all inclusive to 15th Inf. Bde.  
(b) Between 95th Inf. Bde. and 2nd Canadian Division will be the present Northern Divisional Boundary.  
4. 1st NORFOLKS, who are attached to 95th Inf. Bde. will attack on the right, 1/DEVONS on the left.  
Boundary between Battalions HENIN LIETARD Road inclusive to DEVONS.  
5. C.O.'s of DEVONS and NORFOLKS will select "jumping off" places beforehand E. of ARLEUX and be ready to attack by 7 p.m.  
6. The Advance will be made under cover of a creeping barrage of Artillery, moving at a uniform rate of 100 yards in 5 minutes. Standing barrages of field and heavy Artillery will also be established moving forward in bounds within safety limits of attacking Infantry. Barrage will commence on line from T.30.A.6/3 - B./6.D.66/75.  
7. The position to be attacked OPPY WOOD and VILLAGE, and all ground to the East will be kept under a heavy fire of field and heavy artillery during the day, increasing to short bursts of concentrated fire once an hour, at irregular intervals.

1917.Appendix.May.8th  
(Contd.)

There will be no marked increase in the intensity of the fire as ZERO hour approaches.

8. When the objective is captured a protective barrage of field and heavy artillery will be put down till Infantry Brigadier Generals report situation as normal.

9. E.SURREYS, D.C.L.I. and GLOUCESTERS will remain in present positions and hold line at all costs.

10. ZERO hour - 7 p.m.

95th Inf.Bde. O.O. 235/1.

Reference O.O.235 the following alterations are made.

1. ZERO hour will not be before 2.30 a.m. 9th May.

2. GLOUCESTERS and E.SURREYS will withdraw to positions E. of VIMY RIDGE after dark tonight under the orders of the O.C. Exact locations to which they proceed will be telephoned later.

3. D.C.L.I. will re-organise as a Battalion in the ARLEUX LOOP, retaining their present Headquarters.

4. DEVONS and NORFOLKS in their positions of assembly will be responsible for holding the line, and will attack at ZERO as previously arranged.

The Battalion and two Companies DEVONS B. of the Road were relieved by the 1/NORFOLKS 15th Brigade in the evening. At dusk the remnants of the Battalion moved out, and in two parties made for their bivouacs at A.18.c. The C.O. (Lt.Colonel E.M.WOULFE-FLANAGAN D.S.O.) stayed for the night at Brigade H.Q.'s. 2/Lt.F.T.GOODLIFF left today to conduct a party of men to the 1st Army Rest Camp 8 of whom were from this Battalion.

ROCLINCOURT.

9th

Fine.

In the afternoon the Battalion moved to A.28.b.5/3 N.W. of ROCLINCOURT where they were encamped in tents. The Transport did not move.

While the weather remained fine everyone was quite comfortable.

The Brigade is in Divisional Reserve to the 15th and 16th Brigades in the Line.

REPORT ON OPERATIONS RESULTING IN THE LOSS  
OF FRESNOY, May 8th, 1917.

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1. Defences of FRESNOY. (1) Positions.

The defences of FRESNOY formed a salient in the line held by First Army.

The furthest point reached in the advance on May 3rd had just failed by a few yards to gain the crest of the small hill C.1.b & d. (FOOT HILL). From there the line fell back to the N.W. and to the S.W., forming the N. & S. flanks of the salient respectively.

It was quite clear that either, or both, these flanks might be attacked at any time by the Enemy, as our capture of FRESNOY had made a breach in his main line of Defence. The breach was a narrow one, and the position not yet strongly consolidated for permanent defence.

The chief danger appeared to be on the N. flank, where the line fell back to W. & N.W. for several miles.

Here the Enemy had good observation from the Ridge running E. & W. through U.19.a & b.

He could enfilade the trenches E. of the village with Artillery posted on the N. slopes of this ridge, and with M.Gs on the S. slope.

He was nearest to the village on this flank.

Both Battalions of the 95th Inf. Brigade in the Line quite realized the possibility of an attack on this Sector from the N.E. (The matter was discussed at the Left Battalion H.Q. on the evening of the 6th.)

As regards the S. flank of the salient there appeared to be less danger of an attack on a large scale, as our possession of GAVRELLE and the higher ground N.W. of OPPY would make the Enemy's preparations more difficult, and would expose him while massing and during an advance to enfilade fire from the S.W.

He had, however, already carried out a successful counter attack on a limited scale on the trenches in C.7.a & B.12.d. which were now in his hands; as a result any further progress on his part, even on a small front would make our advanced position in C.1. untenable.

(2) Dispositions.

On the night 7/8th the Battalion was holding the Front Line from Trench junction C.1.e.6/7 - C.1.d.4/6 - along road to C.1.b.Central - N.W. to road U.25.d.0/6. These trenches were held by 3½ Companies (from Right to Left 2 Platoons No.4 Coy., No.3, No.1 No.2); 2 Platoons No.4 Coy. were in Support on the W. edge of FRESNOY C.1.a.2/8 Battalion H.Q. was at B.5.d.5/3.

On the left were the 12/GLOUCESTERS.

On the right the 2/K.O.S.B. 13th Inf. Bde.

In Support the 1/D.C.L.I. in trenches E. of ARLEUX. In Brigade Reserve F. of FARBUS were 1/DEVONS. The Defences of FRESNOY on the S.E., therefore, consisted of a single line of trenches supported by 2 Platoons. These trenches had only just been dug and joined up. No wire had as yet been put out and no communication trenches dug. The "field of fire" was fairly good.

The only Communication to Batta. H.Q. was by Runners during hours of darkness. On two nights telephone lines were run out, but these were almost immediately broken and could not be repaired by day. Visual was impossible owing to the contour of the ground. Nos. 1 & 3 Coys. had pigeons.

## 2. Operations (1) Preliminary.

Between 3 & 3.30 a.m. on the 6th and 7th Enemy put Barrages along the Front Line. On these days, and especially on the 7th, hostile aeroplanes flew very low over our trenches for a considerable length of time.

Most of the hostile fire, however, fell just behind our front line and on the 2 Support Platoons. The villages of FRESNOY & ARLEUX were also bombed.

As a result of this activity the possibility of an attack early on the 8th or 9th was fully realized by the evening of the 7th. There appeared no need for anxiety however as our own front trenches were now well dug and strongly manned, and the hostile barrages had not been very accurate. Orders had been issued to Companies to send down for any ammunition required.

### (2) On the 8th.

Between 3 & 3.30 a.m. the Enemy opened fire with Rifle Grenades and attacked while still dark. He was easily repulsed on the Batta. front with Lewis Gun and Rifle Fire. Reports differ as to the time when the attack started.

3.55 a.m. Hostile Barrage started. This was the first warning that Battalion H.Q. received.

4 a.m. As no S.O.S. Signals could be seen and there was the possibility that the rain and mist might have made them invisible, the Artillery, who had already been warned were asked to fire "Rapid".

Immediately after this information was received that S.O.S. had been sent by the GLOUCESTERS.

4.30 a.m. Two Snipers brought verbal message from Centre (No. 1) Company stating that hostile attacks had been easily repulsed, and asking for S.A.A., Bombs & V.P.A. They referred to the first attacks and had left the trenches just before the barrage started. The enemy had advanced in line extended several paces and had been stopped 80 yards from the trench.

5 a.m. (Approx.) Verbal 'Phone Message from Adjutant 1/D.C.L.I. :-

"Following news from GLOUCESTERS - GLOUCESTERS still holding their front line, but the situation to North of them is obscure and they think the Germans have got in there, i.e. opposite 2nd Canadian Division".

At that time the Support Coy. 2/K.O.S.B. on our Right had no news. (Connected by 'phone).

Wounded from the front reported hostile attacks repulsed. They spoke of two attacks.

5.40 a.m. Following message received verbally on phone from 1/D.C.L.I. :-

"Situation of Canadians on Left of Brigade is all right. Situation of GLOUCESTERS is apparently not all right. Two Coys. D.C.L.I. are moving up to Support GLOUCESTERS. 5.40 a.m.

6.30 a.m. (Approx). Two messages received from No.3 Company almost simultaneously; one timed 4.50 a.m. and one untimed :-

"Attack on Left flank. No.4 Coy. fell back a bit. Could you reinforce my Right Flank."

"Attack on my Right Flank. No.4 Coy. has fallen back a bit. Could you reinforce". 4.50 a.m.

About this time (6.30 a.m.) wounded from No.2 Coy. were reporting that that Company had been taken in flank and rear from the N. and were in difficulties.

Orders were sent to O.C. No.4 Coy. to get in touch with No. 2 Company and assist him if required either by reinforcing his left flank or by forming a defensive flank. As much ammunition as possible was to be taken up. This message never reached No.4 Coy. owing to the fact that the enemy was already between the D.C.L.I. and No.4 Coy. H.Q. when the Runners reached the former's trenches.

The question was then considered whether the 2 Companies D.C.L.I. at our disposal should be moved up to support our left Flank.

In view of the 5.40 a.m. message from the D.C.L.I. and the fact that it would take some time to get the 2 Companies D.C.L.I. forward it was thought best to keep them in their trenches to hold the line in case the Enemy attempted a further advance. If the position of the Gloucesters had been restored by the counter-attack the pressure on our left would have been relieved. If the Counter-attack had failed it was now too late to throw in the remaining 2 Companies D.C.L.I. It appeared more important to take sure of a rallying point in the Support Line.

6.45 a.m. (Approx.) Following message received from No.3 Coy. "Enemy attacking along whole of front. They have been repulsed for the present except I cannot get information from my Right flank. O.C. No.1 Coy. has cleared his immediate front, but Enemy are massing in Wood in front. He wants Artillery to fire there. Will send up Red Rocket if Attack continues - Ends 5.50 a.m. O.C. No.3 Coy."

Between 7 a.m. & 8 a.m. wounded reported that our men were retiring all along the line after orders had been given to withdraw from the left.

No.2 Coy. appear to have been overwhelmed in hand-to-hand fighting, being attacked from the N.

No.1 Coy. attempted to hold their trenches by manning both parapet and paradocs, and then sent parties under 2/Lieut.C.HYDE-EDWARDS to check the hostile advance from direction of FRESNOY Village and Wood while the remainder withdrew.

Owing to the wet and damaged state of the ground the men could not charge and were shot down from nearly every direction as they moved back.

No.3 Coy. (with 2 Platoons No.4) were under heavy fire from left rear and were likewise unable to extricate themselves.

The 2 Platoons No.4 Coy. in Support suffered heavy casualties from Shell fire and were probably overwhelmed by Enemy advancing against their left flank. Some of them were last reported to be fighting about 50 yards behind their trenches.

With the exception of wounded the number that survived out of the 4 Companies was very small.

From left company (No.2) a few men in advanced posts got back with one Lewis Gun. After beating off the Enemy in front they found themselves being surrounded and retired, but could not find the rest of their Company. This points to the fact that the Enemy probably broke in from a flank or rear. From 3 Platoons of this Company not a single unwounded man returned.

From the Centre Coy. (No.1) a Corporal and several men got back. They reported that practically everyone was shot down as they tried to drive off Flank Attacks, or while retiring. Orders for withdrawal were definite and carried out from the left.

From No.3 Coy. only Runners got back and a very few wounded.

From No.4 Coy. one officer wounded (with the 2 Platoons on Right of No.3 Coy.) O.C. Company unhurt (with 2 Platoons in Support), and a few other ranks.

At 12 noon, the line was as follows :-

Front Line. This was the previous Support Line E. of ARLEUX held by the 1/D.C.L.I. and a few SURREYS. On their Right were the 2/K.O.F.B. Support Line. ARLEUX LOOP, N. of the Road B.S.C. manned by a few D.C.L.I. (Bn. H.Q.) & GLOUCESTERS (Bn.H.Q. & 1 Coy. in road T.29.d.), S. of the road held by EAST SURREY H.Q. etc. (about 70 men) on their Right, with a gap in between, came the Support Coys. K.O.F.B. in B.12.a.

Later in the afternoon 2 Coys. DEVON reinforced this line N. of the Road and 2 Coys. S. of the Road, so that a continuous defence of the ARLEUX LOOP was established.

In accordance with O.O. 235 & O.O. 235/1 received at 6 p.m., the 1/NORFOLK came up and took over the ARLEUX LOOP S. of the road. At dusk the remnants of the Battalion were to leave the trenches.

At 8.15 pm while the trenches were still rather crowded, the Enemy put a heavy barrage on the front line and on ARLEUX, and the S.O.S. was sent up from the Front Line. If it had been the intention of the Enemy to attack, he was stopped before getting properly started.

Ultimately the Battalion vacated the trenches about 9.50 p.m. and moved back to Bivouacs in A.18.c.

### 3. Conclusions. (1) Origin of the Reverse.

The line seems first to have been pierced just N. of the road U.25.d.0/6. It is at present impossible

for us to say on what lengths of frontage the Defence gave way to the Frontal Assault. The Enemy coming through the gap took in flank & rear the forces to the S. of this point. The Support Company of the GLOUCESTERS counter-attacked but too late or not in sufficient strength, to save the situation.

From that time onwards the position of all our Companies in the Front Line became hopeless and none were able to extricate themselves. The Enemy seems to have got completely in rear, probably into PRESNOY WOOD.

There is no evidence at all that any of the Enemy broke through the Front held by the Battalion. Survivors and wounded from every Company agreed that hostile attacks had been beaten off without much difficulty.

(2) Causes of the Reverse.

- (i) The exposed nature of the position which was very open to attack, and needed careful dispositions for Defence.
- (ii) Lack of immediate Supports of effective strength for counter-attack. Neither Battalion nor Companies were organised in depth.
- (iii) Inadequate Artillery Support. Several of the guns taken over from the Canadians a few hours before the attack were out of action very soon after the hostile barrage commenced and "Rapid" fire had been asked for.
- (iv) Lack of means of communication between Front Line and Battn. H.Q.

(3) Remarks.

(i) The Battalion held a single line of trenches with only two Platoons in immediate Support. There was no Support Line and no Switch Line to check any local success of the enemy.

The Battalion on the left appear to have had 1 Company in immediate Support to the 2 Companies in the Line. This alone proved inadequate. Their Reserve Company near Battn. H.Q. was not used.

In view of the obvious danger stronger forces were needed to work on the consolidation of the position and the digging of Support and Switch Lines, which should then have been manned until the front line at any rate, had been wired. The Battalions in the Line were fully occupied in improving and joining up their own trenches. Moreover orders had actually been issued for a re-arrangement of the forces to take place on the night 8/9th which would have resulted in the whole Brigade Sector being held by 2 rather weak Battalions in the Front Line and no Battalions in Support nearer than PARBUS.

(ii) As regards the front held by this Battalion the lack of stronger Artillery Support probably made little difference as the frontal attack was beaten off with Lewis Gun & Rifle Fire.

Nor was the Enemy's barrage particularly effective, as it fell most intensely just behind the trenches, while the howitzers had concentrated their heaviest fire on the Village and Wood. The preparatory fire was never as fierce or prolonged as that withstood

on some previous occasions by the Battalion, but may have been more accurate against the Battalion on the left.

All ranks did their best and it was through no fault of their's that the position was lost.

(iv) Power Buzzer needed.

Total Casualties. On May 8th.

Officers	-	Killed	2
		Wounded &	
		Missing	11
		Wounded	1
		Total	<u>14</u>

Other Ranks	-	Killed	21	
		Wounded	54	(excluding 11 at duty)
		Missing	420	
		Total	<u>495</u>	

Lewis Guns lost			15
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