

8TH (S) BATTALION THE EAST SURREY REGIMENT

The Attack on MONTAUBAN RIDGE 1st July 1916

1916.
July.

A/1. SUBSECTOR. —. MONTAUBAN RIDGE

- 1st. From midnight on the enemy shelled our front line and *the* assembly trenches mostly with 10.5 cm. and 15 cm. shells knocking in the trenches in several places and several small dugouts, causing a total of 13 casualties 3 killed and 10 being -wounded. Enemy Artillery was less active from about 5 a.m. until 6.30 a.m. when he started an intense but distributed bombardment, a large amount of which fell round the Right Battalion Headquarters. At 5.30 a.m. Companies reported that they were in position and that all the necessary stores etc. had been issued. At 7.15 a.m. Adjutant left the Headquarter Dugout to observe the attack from our parapet. At 7.27 a.m. 'B' Company started to move out to their wire. Captain Neville strolling quietly ahead of them, giving an occasional order to keep the dressing square on to the line of advance. This Company took four footballs out with them which they were seen to dribble forward into the smoke of our intense bombardment on the Hun front line. The first part of "B" Company's advance was made with very few casualties, but when the barrage lifted to the second Hun trench, a very heavy rifle and machine gun fire started from our front and left, the latter coming apparently from the craters and the high ground immediately behind them.
- At 7.50 am The Adjutant reported that the Battalion was in the German trenches. Hand to hand fighting went on for a long time in the German trenches and news received that both Captain Flatau and Pearce had been killed and later it was known that Captain Neville Lieuts, Soames, Musgrove, and 2/Lieuts Kelly and Evans had also been killed. At 6.05 a.m. the Battalion Bombing Section was sent forward and at 8.07 a.m. 2/Lieut P.G. Heath i/c two Stokes Guns was sent out with orders to proceed as far as he could with reasonable safety, and report to the nearest East Surrey Officer and find out how best his Guns could be used. At 8.10 am, and again at 8.25 am. The Adjutant returning from our front line trenches reported heavy machine gun and rifle fire from the left and that apparently the craters and the high ground immediately behind them had not been successfully dealt with by the Battalions on the left. Owing to reports of heavy casualties the C.O. sent to O.C. 7th Buffs for reinforcements. At 8.40 a.m. the Adjutant again reported heavy fire from the left causing us a large number of casualties, O.C. 7th Queens was asked whether the craters had been taken, and the reply received at 8.47 a.m. was that he believed the craters had been taken, but as it turned out later this was not the case.
- At 9 a.m. 2/Lieut Stimson, who had been wounded in the arm reported at Battalion Headquarters. He said that the Germans were along the Railway Line and advancing along the Valley Trench and VALLEY SUPPORT TRENCH. At 9.08 a.m. a message was sent to O.C. 7th Buffs asking him to send 2 Platoons to proceed along the Valley and into TRAIN ALLEY. At 9.20 a.m. this message

was acknowledged O.C. 7th Buffs sending one Platoon forward and keeping one Platoon in Reserve.

- At 9.21 a.m. An intercepted message on the telephone told us that the Queens were held up in BACK TRENCH, and at the same time. Private_BILLSOM one of the Battalion Orderlies, who had been sent forward to remind Companies to wave their Artillery flags returned with the report that our men were now in the POMMIERE LINE, and a few minutes afterwards information was received from the F.O.O. that the Surreys were in TRAIN ALLEY. At the same time an Orderly from 2/Lieut Wightman brought in a report that the Brigade on the right were getting up reinforcements splendidly, and going ahead well A few minutes earlier 2 Huns ran into the Trench near our Battalion Headquarters crying for mercy. At 9.44 a.m. Major Irwin handed over command at Report-Centre to the Adjutant, and went forward to ascertain and if possible to bring back, news as to the actual position. At 9.49 am. a message was intercepted from the craters that the enemy was still holding out in the craters and the high ground. Strong point at the end of Craters. At 9.55 a.m. the Commanding Officer and Adjutant 7th Royal West Kent's. And a numerous staff ,reported at Battalion Headquarters. The Adjutant sent 2/Lieut Wightman forward with 2 Signallers and a telephone line to proceed to POMMIERE and try to get into touch with Major Irwin. At 10.10 a.m. Lieut, Thorley reported that the Brigade on the right were advancing well, but that nothing could be seen on our front. The Adjutant reported the position to the Brigade which was that we had taken POMMIERS, but had suffered extremely heavy casualties in doing so and that the line was too weak to advance without reserves being put in. Thereupon at 10.23 am. A message from the Brigadier ordered 3 Companies 7th W, Kent's to advance and push the line forward. Their position in A. I. Sub sector would be taken by the Suffolk's. The 7th W,. Kent's to detail 1 Company to consolidate the POMMIER LINE.
- At 10.30 a.m. A message was received from Lt, Griffin F.O.O. through Lieut Carver, liaison officer, that the enemy were leaving MILL. TRENCH and MINE ALLEY and converging on the MILL and the ORCHARD, also that they were seen to have machine guns with them. We ordered an immediate intense bombardment on these two points, and this was done practically at once.
- At 10.45 a.m. the Adjutant with the remainder of Head-quarters left Battalion Report Centre to find the wire which had been laid forward, and to establish a forward Report Centre. Some difficulty was experienced in finding the wire and it was not until 10.45 a.m. that the forward end of the wire in the German third line Trench was found. The Signalers here reported that Major Irwin was in the POMMIERE LINE, and that he would be returning to the telephone shortly. From this point a splendid view of the whole slope of MONTAUBAN could be obtained and the dispositions of our troops could be clearly seen. They have advanced from POMMIERE and lined the parapets of BRKSIAU ALLSY. The position was reported by telephone to the Brigade, and also the urgent necessity for hurrying the West Kent's and pushing the attack home. At about noon the 1st of the West Kent's appeared in BACK TRENCH. Major Irwin returned to the telephone at 12 noon and gave orders for /2 Lieut Wightman to see Captain Bowen who was still engaged on the left, and tell him if possible to disengage and go forward with all men he could collect, the Adjutant was ordered to carry the line on from BRESLAU ALLEY to MILL TRENCH and either consolidate there, or carry on to HONTAUBAN as he thought best,

according to the situation.

The bombardment of the MILL and the ORCHARD continued most satisfactorily, and when the line went forward from BRESLAU ALLEY and MILL TRENCH at 12.10pm not a shot was fired from our immediate front, and it was decided to carry on from MILL TRENCH to MINE ALLEY, and after a short halt there and finding that the Artillery evidently having seen our men go forward had lifted, the whole of the East Surreys advanced to the Road West of

MONTAUBAN, which they reached at 12.22 p.m. with their right resting on the two Westerly houses of MONTAUBAN, their Left about 100 yards East of the Orchard. There was no sign of any troops on the left so Sgt, WILLIS was sent with half a dozen men to the WINDMILL to watch the left flank, and as other men came up from time to time reinforcements were sent him until the line stretched from the Windmill across the road and along the road from the small copse to MONTAUBAN ALLEY. When Sgt. WILLIS first got to the MILL he took prisoners 1 Officer and 2 men.

At 12.36 p.m. Major Irwin arrived with Headquarters and took command of all troops of the 55th Brigade West of MONTAUBAN. A number of Buffs and West Kent's had arrived by this time and were ordered to hold on in MONTAUBAN ALLEY with the E, Surreys In close support. When Lieut HEATON, 7th Queens arrived he was ordered to extend the line to the left so that the whole Brigade objective was reached by 1.30 p.m. Captain Gimson had arrived close behind Major Irwin, and later L/C. Brame turned up with a bottle of champagne to be drunk: In MONTAUBAN "ON DER TAG" This bottle was sent round from officer to Officer, those who shared In it being Major Irwin, Captain Gimson, Captain Bowen, 2/Lieut Derrick, 2/Lieut Janion, Lieut Thorley 2/Lieut Wightman, 2/Lieut Alcock, and Captain Clare, In fact all the East Surrey Officers engaged In the attack who had not been killed or wounded.

Major Irwin having fully reported the position to the Brigade, and having satisfied himself as regards the dispositions moved Headquarters and B & C Companies down MINE ALLEY, putting Headquarters in MILL TRENCH and B & C Companies in MINE ALLEY either side of MILL Trench in a position where they would be able to resist any counter attack from the left, where our flank was still in the air.

Headquarter Officers and 2/Lieut, Janion put their kit on the firestep in MILL TRENCH, and had only just finished tea when the first of a large number of 5.9 shells landed almost on MILL TRENCH. A rapid decision was arrived at, and Headquarters were moved further away to the right. One of the next few shells landed plumb on the firestep on which all the Officers had been sitting. The shelling was also on MINE ALLEY. At the junction of MINE ALLEY and MILL TRENCH where the brigade had ordered a strong point to be made we suffered several regrettable casualties both Sgt, Simons and Sgt, Abrey being killed and a number of men wounded.

At 9pm It was hard to know where to put the men for safety, but as the top of MINE ALLEY seemed to be suffering somewhat less all men were moved forward. a party of Suffolks reported with 25 canvas buckets of water were extremely welcome.

Major Irwin left for a conference of commanding Officers with the Brigadier at No.2. strong point where Pommere line joins MINE ALLEY and returned later with the news that the Battalion would be relieved at daylight, but must remain till then in a position forming a defensive flank on the left.

At midnight 2/Lieut DERRICK was carried down from the front line a large piece of shrapnel having torn through his right foot. There was great difficulty in attending to this and all other casualties in the crowded communication trench and Captain Gimson got no rest that night.

GERMAN TRENCHES OPPOSITE A/1 SUB-SECTOR

2ND July From midnight on the enemy steadily shelled MILL TRENCH and the MONTAUBAN ROAD and MINE ALLEY, 5.9" Howr. Shells bursting regularly at the rate of about 2 per minute.

The men were dog tired and there was nowhere else for them to lie except in the bottom of the trench.

Carrying parties and relieving troops coming up and wounded and returning parties coming down all tried to force a passage.

Orders were received that the Battalion might go to a trench in rear as soon as the West Kents were in position, and were satisfied regarding their disposition. This took place at about 4.30am Major Irwin started to move the battalion down MINE ALLEY, but just before arriving at the lower end found that the enemy was putting an artillery barrage on the bottom of the trench at that point, so the battalion had to wait for 15 minutes until this lifted. Everyone was relieved to get out of MINE ALLEY and into a trench which promised to allow them an opportunity to sleep. Lt, Col Ransome 7th Buffs did all in his power to make both Officers and men comfortable. The G.O.C. 55TH Inf, Bde. came up in the morning and met Col. Fiennes and Col. Ransome and Major Irwin.

After dinners the Battalion proceeded to Lobin Huts in CARNOY VALLEY, the advantages of this position being somewhat lessened by the fact that 2 60 pdr. Batteries had been placed so that they fired just clear of the tops of the Huts, from only a few yards behind them

Volunteers from each company went up to the Battle Field to bring in our dead Officers, this being done by dark.

Our Officer casualties during the attack were Captains, Flatau, Pearce, Nevill, Lts. Soames, Musgrove, 2/Lieuts Evans, Kelly, killed.

Lieut. Ackerley, 2/Lts. Morse Hetherington and Pegg wounded. 2/Lieut. Pegg subsequently died of his wounds.

Casualties among other ranks were 140 killed, 272 wounded 20 missing.