

Copy of letter from Major A.C.Clarke. (2nd-in-Command,
2/6th Sherwood Foresters) to Br.-General T.W.Stansfield.)

January 14/19.

March 21st, 1918.

During the night 20/21st March, our artillery did a great deal of firing, but after 2 a.m. on 21st very few shells came over. Weather fine but misty.

5 a.m. Enemy bombardment opened - guns of all calibres being used against our ~~front~~ Reserve trenches - Trench Mortars were chiefly used against our front and support lines. A large quantity of gas shells were used. All communications were destroyed as soon as the bombardment began. The shelling continued with great intensity until 9 a.m. From 7.15 to 9 a.m. hurricane bombardment. The front line was completely obliterated and considerable damage was done to the Reserve Line. "Battle positions" were manned soon after 5 a.m. As soon as it was light enough to see I went up to Post No.18 to find out what the situation was.

9 a.m. Enemy reported to be advancing. I at once went up to Post No.18 and saw the Bosche moving forward from his support line in 3 waves - 50 yards between each - a line of mopper's up followed the first wave. I then ran down to B.H.Q. dug-out to inform the C.O., and on my way back to Post No.18, put up 2 S.O.S. rockets, one having been previously put up. The enemy on our immediate front moved slowly forward to the dead ground East of our front line - meanwhile I noticed large numbers of Bosche moving West, on the high ground - the spurs running East of Ecouste & Noreuil, north and south of us respectively. I at once ordered fire to be opened on them, they being some 800 - 1,000 yards away. There was no reply to our S.O.S. except a few heavies. Enemy barrage on Rly. Reserve still continued and men were continually hit. Owing to the formation of the two spurs mentioned, the enemy disappeared from view soon after fire was opened. I next saw the enemy moving forward from the dead ground in front of us and at once went down to inform the C.O., and returned (to) Post No.18 almost at the same time. Crowds of Bosche appeared on the high ground S. of us - 400 yards away, and these began to enfilade us with M.G's and rifle fire. We were also being enfiladed from the high ground North of us. I immediately ordered all available men to fire on the enemy South of us, as they were densely packed in large numbers (some 200 of them) at the same time I ordered a corporal to make his way back to Bde. H.Q. to inform them of the serious, not to say desperate, position we were in. I myself picked up a Lewis gun and got off 3 magazines at 400 yards - the gun then jammed. As soon as the high ground North & South of us had been secured, the Bosche in front of us advanced up to the Railway Embankment and lobbed bombs over. Heavy casualties had by this time been sustained from M.G's, Rifles and Bombs. When the L.G. jammed I picked up a rifle and continued to use this till I felt a tap on the shoulder and on looking up, saw a Bosche with rifle and bayonet standing over me.

(sgd) A.C.Clarke

Major.