

REPORT ON THE PART PLAYED BY THE 139th INFANTRY BRIGADE

 IN THE ACTION ON THE 1st of JULY, 1916.

On the morning of the 1st July the Brigade was disposed in Assembly Trenches in accordance with orders as follows.

1st Wave. Advanced Trench.

2nd & 3rd waves. Old Front line Trench.

4th wave. RETRENCHMENT.

Carrying Companies)	GREEN STREET.
Assaulting Battalions.)	
Two leading Companies)	1st SUPPORT LINE
Supporting Battalion)	
LEFT COMPANY)	1st SUPPORT LINE North
1st MONMOUTHS.)	of RAYMOND AVENUE.
RIGHT COMPANY)	2nd SUPPORT LINE South
1st MONMOUTHS)	of REGENT STREET.
2/1st N.Mid.Field)	2nd SUPPORT LINE North
Company R.E.)	of REGENT STREET.
2 rear Coys. SUPPORT Bn.		3rd SUPPORT LINE.
Reserve Battalion.		NAMELESS ROAD, with one Company in BUSH and BASTION TRENCH.

The trenches were still very wet and muddy and to assist in this matter, Units had taken up as many floorboards as possible they could carry with them when they filed up into the trenches overnight.

Hot tea and rum had been served to every Company under Brigade arrangements before 6-30 a.m.

At 6-25 a.m. the bombardment commenced as arranged, and at 7-25 a.m. the smoke cloud started.

The wind was none too favourable to commence with and subsequently changed to a less favourable quarter.

At 7-27 a.m. in accordance with orders, the 2nd wave began to move out through our wire and at 7-30 a.m. the attack was launched. The 1st three waves got away to time but there was a little delay in the 4th wave getting out, owing to the deep mud in the trenches, and still more delay in the Carrying Companies moving forward (due to a similar reason) and also on account of the enemy's barrage of Artillery, Rifle and Machine Gun Fire, which was now very heavy on our old front line trench.

It was therefore not till 8-17 a.m. that the Carrying Company of the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters moved over the old front line parapet.

The Carrying Company of the LEFT BATTALION (7th Battalion Sherwood Foresters) got away in better time, but suffered tremendously in going forward.

The doings of each Battalion will now be taken separately as far as they can be ascertained from statements given by survivors

The 5th BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS (RIGHT ASSAULTING BATTALION)

As stated above, the first three waves of this Battalion got off to time, the 4th wave was a little late and the Carrying Company took a considerable time to get going. To begin with the smoke cloud over this Battalion was good and so dense that men of the waves found it very difficult to keep

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touch with each other - many therefore lost their line of direction almost at once.

The first and second waves reached the German 1st line fairly easily but were very scattered by the time they had reached that point.

The third and fourth waves suffered very severely in getting up particularly from Machine Gun Fire from the direction of GOMMECOURT WOOD.

The majority of the former two waves passed on over the German 1st line but there is no evidence forthcoming to show what happened to them there, for not a man of this Battalion who reached the 2nd German line has returned.

Assalready stated the remaining waves suffered very severely in reaching the German wire which was reported well cut at almost every point. By the time individuals from these waves arrived at the German 1st line, they found that the enemy who had been taking refuge in their deep dug-outs had now come up and manned their parapets in parties.

Practically all these parties used Bombs and Hot rifles.

There is evidence to show that portions of the 3rd wave advanced over the 1st German line towards the 2nd, but very few of the 4th wave appear to have got beyond the 1st German line. Here much bomb fighting took place and our men inflicted much damage on the enemy.

Eventually owing to being outnumbered and bombs running out, those of our men who survived had to retire into shell holes and lie there till dark. In process of time one Officer and 24 other ranks found their way back to our lines.

The Carrying Company in the mean time had been held up by the heavy and accurate barrage and very few if any got beyond our advanced trench, and those who did, only a very little way beyond it.

Of the 6 Lewis Guns that advanced with the 4th wave only one was got back. This gun got as far as the 1st German line where two out of three of its team became casualties, after firing off one drum. The third man in this case was able to withdraw it. Two other guns came into action in the German 1st line trench until their teams became casualties. There is also evidence to show that another gun was seen passing over the 1st German line towards the 2nd German line; what became of the other two guns is not known.

7th BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS (LEFT ASSAULTING ABATTALION)

The first three waves of this Battalion who was assaulting on the left of the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters, moved out to time. As on the right, they found the wire well cut and easy to get through.

Out of the above three waves only about 20 men as far as is known reached the German 2nd line. Here this small party remained till the smoke cleared, when finding they were not supported and that the Germans were bombing them from both sides, they fell back on the 1st German line, about 5 reaching it. In this trench they found about 24 of our men who had been endeavouring to make some sort of a fire position. Before this could be done the enemy made a bombing attack from both sides. Our men offered a stubborn resistance till their supply of bombs ran out, when those who survived retired and took cover in shell holes immediately West of the German line and remained there till dusk.

In the original advance a small party of bombers under 2/Lieut. BURTON worked their way up what would appear to be OUSE C.T. and advanced beyond the German 2nd line bombing dug-outs on the way and accounting for a number of Germans. This trench was found badly knocked about by our Artillery and as no further progress could be made up it, the party got out and started for the German 3rd line 'overland'.

Lieut. BURTON and several of the party were then hit and the remainder took momentarily cover in a shell hole to which Lieut. BURTON crawled and fired several Rifle Grenades from.

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The remnants of this party eventually made their way back to the 1st German line, where they found about 12 of our men including Captain LEAMAN who though wounded in two places, was doing all he could to organise the defence. They were then bombed from three sides and eventually had to retire into shell holes from which the survivors made their way back to our lines after dark.

We now go back to the doings of the 4th wave. The advance of this wave was at first checked owing to the muddy state of the trenches, and they were consequently late in moving out over the old 1st line parapet. On reaching our advanced trench it was found that the smoke had cleared - The wind had altered somewhat - and very little progress was made beyond this owing to the very heavy Machine Gun Fire from GOMMECOURT WOOD.

The Carrying Company moved out immediately in rear of the 4th wave and in doing so suffered severely from enfilade Artillery fire from the direction of MONCHY. The Captain and two Subalterns being hit, the Coy. Sergt-Major led the leading wave of this Company on until he eventually from casualties found himself alone, somewhere near the German wire. He still worked forward himself to the German 1st trench and finding no one in it at the spot where he struck it, eventually crawled back to our lines. This N.C.O. reported the Machine Gun Fire from GOMMECOURT WOOD most severe, and the smoke having cleared, the German Machine Gunners were presented with an excellent target. This original advance took place about 8 a.m.

Several efforts were made to get the remainder of the Carrying Company on, but without smoke and with the number of Machine Guns enfilading the advances, all efforts proved fruitless.

As regards the Lewis Guns of this Battalion, not one of the 6 guns which advanced with the 3 leading Companies reached the German 1st line. Either all the personnel or the guns themselves were knocked out before reaching it, excepting one man who managed to bring one gun back, from between the German lines and our advanced trench.

The SUPPORTING BATTALION.

The two leading Companies of this Battalion were much hindered to begin with by the slow progress made by the Carrying Companies of the Assaulting Battalions, and when these Companies eventually got into our old front line trench the enemy's barrage was very heavy and accurate.

As a consequence when these Companies moved over the parapet to advance they suffered very severely and progress was found impossible. It should be stated that the smoke by this time - 8.45 a.m. had practically cleared off and the enemy's lines were well in view.

In the meantime no word whatever has come back from the two Assaulting Battalions till about 9.30 a.m. when Captain NAYLOR of the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters returned from the right of the line and reported he had become separated from his Company in the smoke, and in company with 3 other Officers and two N.C.Os had got into the first German trench somewhere on the right of our line. There they found a number of the enemy and after a very spirited fight, in which our party took good toll of the enemy, from lack of bombs they had eventually to retire into a shell hole, from which he eventually made his way back to our lines.

About the same time the Coy. Sergt-Major of the Carrying Company of the 7th Battalion Sherwood Foresters returned and reported what already has been recorded.

Except for these two, no message or signal was received from our men in the enemy's lines. Several efforts were made to get bombs and Ammunition over to the 1st German line but all proved failures.

The smoke had now completely cleared and the light was very good. An advance was ordered for two Companies (with bombs and Ammunition) of the SUPPORTING BATTALION to take place at 12.15 p.m. in conjunction with an attack by the 137th Infantry Brigade on our right.

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This was countermanded to 1.15 p.m. and then 2.45 and eventually 3.30 p.m. This advance was to take place under cover of smoke which was then only feasible by Mortars, the direction of the wind now being daigonally back across our lines. The light was very good and owing to the presence of our men in them, the German trenches opposite (against which these Companies were to advance) were absolutely immune from our Artillery fire. An advance against them except under cover of smoke would therefore have been impossible.

It was arranged that the smoke barrage was to be thrown by the 4" Stokes Mortars on the right of the 137th Brigade, and another one to the right of our advance. The Barrage on the right of the 137th Brigade was thrown and drifted thinly over our line, but the smoke barrage on our right never materialised owing to the men carrying up the bombs getting stuck in the deep mud of the C.T. The two Companies were lined up ready to move and one platoon who got rather a thicker cloud of smoke than the remainder dashed forward - 18 out of the 20 becoming casualties almost at once; the Officer leading them however reached our advanced trench, slightly wounded.

THE MACHINE GUNS.

Out of the twelve machine Guns which followed the 4th attacking waves, seven were either knocked out of their teams became casualties, for they never returned. Three of them are known to have passed the German wire, and another to have had the man carrying the gun killed as he was getting it through the wire. Nothing however is known as to any of these particular guns having come into action. The two guns moving forward on the right are known to have come into action (about 20 yards short of the German 1st line) against the Machine Guns in COMMECOURT WOOD. These guns remained in action until eventually knocked out by the enemy's fire. Out of this Section only 1 gun and 3 men returned eventually to our lines.

THE STOKES MORTARS.

Of the six Stokes Mortars which advanced in rear of the 4th wave, none ever came into action as far as is known. Two reached the German wire but each had by that time only one man left and no ammunition. The remaining Guns did not get so far and were either knocked out themselves or their personnel became casualties.

CASUALTIES.

The following is a statement of the Casualties suffered by Units during the day.

	OFFICERS	OTHER RANKS.
5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters.	24	415
6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters.	9	155
7th Battalion Sherwood Foresters.	18	445
8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters.	4	44
Machine Gun Company.	4	42
Trench Mortar Battery.	3	26
TOTAL.	62	1127