

## OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY 139th INFANTRY BRIGADE.

JUNE 8th - JULY 2nd 1917.

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- JUNE 8th. In connection with the Raid on HILL 65 carried out by 138th Infantry Brigade.
- (i) 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters strengthened their Advanced Posts in N.18., and selected positions from which Rifle and Lewis Gun fire could be directed into the enemy trenches in N.13.c. and N.19.a. From ZERO plus 3' (8.33.p.m.) to ZERO plus 30' bursts of fire were directed on to these points; by this means the fire of several enemy Batteries was drawn on to the Brigade front.
- (ii) 139th Trench Mortar Battery opened fire on to enemy trench in N.13.a. and N.19.a. at ZERO plus 3' from advanced positions. The enemy put down a heavy barrage on to CROCODILE TRENCH, knocking out one Stokes team and severely wounding the Battery Commander.
- (iii) 139th Machine Gun Company placed 2 sections at the disposal of the 138th Infantry Brigade for barrage fire - These guns were posted in CRIMSON TRENCH.
- JUNE 9th On the Night 9th/10th June one Company 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters made an unsuccessful attempt to surround an enemy Post about N.19.a.2.9g.
- JUNE 10th. 139th Infantry Brigade relieved in L.2. Subsector by the 138th Infantry Brigade.
- JUNE 15th. 139th Infantry Brigade relieved 137th Infantry Brigade in ST. PIERRE Sector.
- JUNE 16th. 139th Infantry Brigade relieved on HILL 70 Subsector by 18th 18th Infantry Brigade.
- Between 17th and 21st of June, covering parties were found by 139th Infantry Brigade for Divisional parties working on CAVALRY and GYG 1ST Trench in N.7.c. N.18.b.
- JUNE 21st. 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters placed at disposal of 138th Infantry Brigade and took over front line near FOSSE 3.
- JUNE 23rd. 7th Battalion Sherwood Foresters took over front line as far South as CROCODILE TRENCH from 6th N. Staffs Regt. During this time enemy wire in N.1. and N.7. was being cut by 2" Trench Mortars and 6" Howitzers.
- JUNE 24th. On night 24/25th June, 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters raided enemy trenches between N.1.d.16.44. and 11.20. The Party (about 119 all ranks) reached their objective without difficulty - several dug-outs were bombed and blown up with Stokes Mortar bombs, and it is estimated that at least 30 Germans were killed. One prisoner was brought back. Our casualties were slight and the enemy artillery barrage is stated to have been weak.
- JUNE 28th. In cooperation with an Attack carried out by 137th & 138th Infantry Brigades on ADJACENT & ADULT TRENCHES between AGUE TRENCH and SOUCHEZ RIVER.

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JUNE 28th  
Contd.

- (i) 7th Sherwood Foresters consolidated Posts at M.24.b.68.95. and N.18.d.5.8. at 7.10 pm.
- (ii) 5th Sherwood Foresters with 465 Field Company R.E. carried out a feint Attack with dummies on the line M.18.b.60.52. - N.1.c.4.3. covered by a smoke screen. Enemy put down a heavy barrage of Trench Mortars, 77mm and 4.2 howitzers.
- (iii) 139 Machine Gun Company with 5 guns barraged N.19.b.8.4. to N.19.b.5.9. With 5 guns swept ALARM Trench.
- (iv) ~~139 Machine Gun Company~~  
Stokes Mortars bombarded enemy front line in N.1.d. and N.7.b.

OPERATIONS FROM JUNE 30th - JULY 2nd.  
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JUNE 30th.

7th Sherwood Foresters Attacked and captured ALARM Trench N.19.a.25.58. to N.13.c.5.1. at 2.34 am in conjunction with an Attack by 137th Infantry Brigade on enemy front line in N.19.a.

On the left the wire had been well cut and the party reached their objective without difficulty.

On the right the wire was found intact and strong and had to be cut by hand under rifle and machine gun fire. After suffering a number of casualties (including 4 Officers) the party reached and consolidated their objective.

By this time 1 Company of 2nd Sherwood Foresters had been moved up from GALLONNE to CROOK REDOUBT.

Advanced Dumps formed in preparation for an Attack on July 1st. Carrying parties being provided - Depot Battalion (250) and 9th Norfolks (150)

June 30th  
10 pm.

1 Company 2nd Sherwood Foresters took over ALARM Trench from 7th Sherwood Foresters and  
2nd Sherwood Foresters less 1 Company moved up from GALLONNE and relieved 7th Sherwood Foresters in Right Subsector - latter returning to CROOK REDOUBT & CRIMSON Trench.  
During night 1 Company 8th Sherwood Foresters relieved 1 Company 8th Battalion in Left Company front of Left Subsector.  
Line of Assembly taped out by 465 Field Company R.E.  
6th & 7th Battalions Sherwood Foresters providing covering parties. Tape was drawn back into a curve opposite railway triangle N.13.a.6.8. to avoid barrage.

JULY 1st

Disposition objectives. As shown in Operation Order 126.

2nd Sherwood Foresters. RIGHT COMPANY. Advanced at ZERO and a party reached clump of trees N.19.a.80.75. from which they drove enemy but were unable to make further progress as enemy were holding house N.13.d.1.3. and railway running S.E. from that point. They are also reported to have been holding houses on LENS - LIEVIN Road N.19 N.19.a.5.5.

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JULY 1st.  
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This party of 2nd Sherwood Foresters established a Post at N.19.a.9.8. while the remainder of the Right Company appears to have consolidated ALARM Trench.

CENTRE COMPANY. "D" had been in ALARM Trench since morning of 30th. The alteration in ZERO hour did not reach this Company with the result that it advanced too soon and was caught in our own barrage with consequent confusion and loss. There appears to be no reason for the alteration not having reached this Company.

The Company subsequently again advanced and reached Houses at N.13.d.05.40. where some fighting took place - the Company Commander, Captain ROBERTS, shooting 15 Germans himself.

An Officer with a Patrol and Lewis Gun from this Company reported (time unknown) that he had got in touch with the left Company and 5th Sherwood Foresters had lighted flares. He stated that he had reached N.13.b.3.5. but this reference is in all probability wrong. He also reported a 200 yards gap between the Right and Centre Companies.

Captain ROBERTS collected parties of all 3 Companies and of 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters and consolidated on the line N.13.c.68.25. - N.19.a.73.60. with a Post under an Officer of the Right Company at N.19.a.92.76.

Later this line was reinforced by the Reserve Company and a Post established at N.19.b.07.88.

LEFT COMPANY. Advanced at ZERO hour and extended a Platoon to its left to gain touch with the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters. This Platoon appears to have reached Trench and Railway junction N.13.c.65.70. and to have worked along the German Trench towards the South. Another Platoon reached the junction of ALOOF and COLZA N.13.d.4.8. A third Platoon under the Company Commander reached the Houses N.13.c.92.43. which were full of Germans. Very severe fighting took place in which this Company suffered heavily. One Officer with 2 Lewis guns and a certain number of men cut their way out and rejoined the Centre Company in ALARM.

#### 5th SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

##### RIGHT COMPANY. "B".

Objective. To seize ALARM Trench N.13.c.76. - N.13.c.60.95.

To push forward along COTTON & AMULER Trench to final objective N.13.d.10.65. - N.13.b.2.2.

The tape on which this Company assembled had to be laid among houses and it appears that touch with the 2nd Sherwood Foresters was not gained and that the men lost direction soon after ZERO and became mixed with the Support Company "A" who were following them and with men of 2nd Sherwood Foresters.

Parties of the above under Captain H.J. COLE reached N.13.c.95.65. where Captain COLE is believed to have been killed.

Posts were established in AMULER Trench with men of 2nd Battalion.

##### CENTRE COMPANY "C"

Objective. To seize Railway cutting N.13.c.6.9. to N.13.a.99.15. to seize COWARD Trench N.13.a.99.15. to N.13.a.98.25. and to push on to final objective N.13.b.2.2. to N.13.b.22.42.

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JULY 1st.  
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At 5 am. a message was received stating that this Company had reached its objective.

About 9.30 am a wounded Officer reported that the whole of the railway cutting N.13.c.69. to N.13.b.22. had been cleared up. Severe opposition had been met with and a number of casualties inflicted on the enemy.

A Trench Mortar emplacement was found and its detachment killed. One Machine Gun was captured and several of the team killed. One prisoner was captured and sent back. A party from this Company crossed the railway cutting N.13.b.18.42. and reached the Trench at N.13.b.22.48. About this time a number of men of the 2nd Battalion S.F. crossed the front of this Company from the right and some confusion appears to have been caused. From this point the Left & Centre Companies appear to have become mixed, but a Corporal of the Centre Company gives the following report.

About 6.30 am his party were dug in about N.13.b.23. with a party of the 2nd Battalion S.F. on their Right. Active enemy sniping from daylight onwards had caused a number of casualties.

About 6.30 am he found about 60 of the enemy were getting into No mans Land round his right flank; 15 or 20 of the enemy were accounted for by Lewis Gun fire but remainder commenced bombing up a trench.

Eventually this N.C.O. & 3 men succeeded in reaching CAVALRY Trench after their Lewis Gun had been smashed by a bomb and the supply of grenades were exhausted.

LEFT COMPANY "D".

Objective. To seize COWARD Trench. N.13.b.05.40. - N.13.a.98.58. and to push on to final objective N.13.b.22.42. - N.13.a.98.65.

The Company appears to have reached their objective without much difficulty but to have become mixed with the Centre Company.

Combined parties reached the trench N.13.b.22.48. while others with men of the 2nd Battalion S.F. took up a line N.13.a.95.65. - N.13.b.32.36. and South to COTTON at N.13.b.2.1. Touch with 5th Battalion S.F. was maintained.

Soon after daybreak enemy made several counter attacks from LENS - BETHUNE ROAD about N.13.b.38. coming over the open in large numbers, but on each occasion were repulsed with heavy losses by Lewis Gun fire.

Further on the right the enemy put up a white flag which was disregarded.

At 4.30 am ground Flares were lit and up to 6 am enemy made no further counter attacks, but caused many casualties by sniping.

At 6.30 am enemy had been reinforced and launched a strong counter attack along trench N.13.a.95.65. across the open as previously and from COTTON Trench and neighbourhood. The Attacks over the open were again repulsed with loss but then the German bombers drove 2 wedges into our line at N.13.a.95.65. and N.13.b.02.15. One party actually got into No mans Land behind our men - in spite of casualties caused by the last 2 remaining drums from a Lewis Gun.

The men between these points were in great danger of being surrounded and 30 men of the 5th Battalion, S.F. withdrew to CAVALRY Trench.

(Support Company

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SUPPORT COMPANY "A"

Objective. To allow Right Company "B" to clear up Railway Triangle N.13.c.55.90 to mop up for Right Company to clear Railway Cutting N.13.c.6.9 - N.13.b.2.2. At 7 a.m., O.C. Company reported that he had reached line N.13.c.70.22 to N.13.c.40.02., with about 40 men of right and Support Companies mixed. Touch had been gained with 2nd Battalion on both flanks. Enemy sniping was active from Houses in N.19.a. and b and N.13.d.10.35. At 2 p.m., enemy made a bombing attack on the post at N.13.c.72.20., advancing in 3 waves but were repulsed. This line was held until this Company was relieved by 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters on following morning.

8th BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

June 29th. Line of forward Posts CAVALRY - HOSPITAL GROUNDS - N.7.c.1.9 - COPPER - N.7.a.20.25.

July 1st.  
1 a.m. Posts had been established in CORNWALL Trench N.13.a.85.90 - N.7.c.85.15.

DISPOSITIONS. No. 1 Party 1 Officer and 37 other ranks assembled in COLLEGE Trench about N.7.c.35.10. Objective to move down COLLEGE and establish Posts N.13.a.85.60 and 70.62.

No. 2 Party 1 Officer and 19 other ranks assembled on the tape line S. of COLLEGE Trench. Objective to assist in clearing COLLEGE S. of N.13.a.85.60 and Railway Cutting N.13.b.1.5.

AT ZERO. Both parties advanced and entered enemy trench through gaps in the wire about N.13.a.9.6. No. 2 Party losing its Officer and 6 O.Ranks before reaching the trench. Shortly afterwards the party became mixed with men of the 2nd and 5th Battalions Sherwood Foresters who must have lost direction during advances. A bombing squad from No. 1 Party bombed the enemy back along COWDRAY to N.13.b.10.75 supported by a Lewis Gun in sap at N.13.b.05.80. A block was established at the former point. A party of the 5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters had by this time crossed the Railway Cutting and reached the Houses N.13.b.4.3 - N.13.b.2.6 which the enemy were holding in strength. The 5th Battalion party stated to have occupied the trench about N.13.b.2.5. At 4.30 a.m., a message was received from Officer i/c No. 1 Party 2/Lt.DOLLEY, that he had occupied his objective N.13.b.9.6 with light casualties. Later the Post formed at N.13.b.10.75 was heavily counter-attacked and driven back to the S.W. side of the railway cutting about N.13.a.92.62 from where the enemy made several unsuccessful attempts to dislodge them. Later 2/Lt.DOLLEY went along COLLEGE Trench and is thought to have been killed or captured by a party of Germans who were seen to jump into the trench close to him. Later again the N.C.O i/c of the Post at N.13.a.92.62 reports that strong parties of the enemy advanced over the top about N.13.b.25.50. along the cutting about N.13.b.18.45 and from the direction of COTTON TRENCH. As his party had been reduced to 4 men and his right flank was exposed, this N.C.O. withdrew the Post up COLLEGE Trench.

6.

Casualties to Units of this Brigade were as follows : -

JUNE 8th - 30th

NOON JUNE 30th - NOON JULY 2nd

KILLED. WOUNDED. MISSING. KILLED. WOUNDED. MISSING.

		OFFICERS.			O.RANKS.		
		KILLED.	WOUNDED.	MISSING.	KILLED.	WOUNDED.	MISSING.
2nd Sher.	OFFICERS.				2	3	
Fors.	O.RANKS.				15	45	117
5th Sher.	OFF.	-	1	-	-	1	4
Fors.	O.R.	6	39	2	13	78	60
6th Sher.	OFF.	-	-	-	-	2	1
Fors	O.R.	1	20	-	8	27	9
7th Sher.	OFF.	1	3	-			
Fors.	O.R.	8	83	1	2	4	
8th Sher.	OFF.	-	1	-	-	2	
Fors.	O.R.	11	41	-	-	2	
M. Gun.	OFF.	-	-	-	-	-	
Coy.	O.R.		4	-	-	2	
T. Mortar	OFF.	-	-	-	-	-	
Batty.	O.R.	-	3	-	-	-	

7.

Many points are still obscure but from the above it is clear that generally very few of the objectives were reached, and that the line formed was irregular with several gaps in it. On the right the Germans in the houses about N.13.d.1.4 held up the attack and caused loss of direction and mixing up of Units.

The reasons for the failure of the attack appear to be as follows :-

- (i) The ZERO hour was too early owing to the darkness of the morning of the 1st July and it was impossible for the troops to see their way through the houses and consequently were left behind by the barrage and lost direction.
- (ii) The attacking troops were not sufficiently strong in depth so that the mopping up was not complete and there were insufficient reserves to fill up the gaps caused by the loss of direction or by the casualties in a thin attacking line.

There can be no doubt that the German counter-attack was in very considerable force and suffered very heavy casualties and that the portions that advanced through the gaps turned the flanks of our troops with the result that they had to retire or be captured. Only a comparatively small number of our men thus retired and the remainder were killed or captured.

I am of opinion that many Germans were left in the Houses behind and on the flanks of our troops and they were harassing our men before the real counter-attack commenced, with the result that very few messages came back from the front and no action could be taken in time with the very small reserves at their disposal on account of ignorance by Battalion Commanders of the general situation.

Brig - General.

Commanding 139th Infantry Brigade.