

## CHAPTER 12 THE SOMME

As the summer of 1916 drew on it became increasingly evident that the projected British offensive could not be long postponed. The steady increase in the numbers available (1) and the advance in experience and efficiency of the "New Army" Divisions had greatly improved the chances of success. Some relief of the pressure still maintained on Verdun was urgent: moreover, though the second year of the war was nearing its end, the Allies had as yet scored no substantial offensive success in any theatre of importance; despite all their efforts and losses they had merely achieved a negative success by foiling the German efforts to obtain a decision. For months past elaborate preparations had been in progress, involving most careful Staff work as well as tremendous exertions on the part both of the troops at the front and of the munition workers at home. The accumulation of ammunition and other material, the improvement of communications and water-supplies, the digging of assembly trenches and gun positions, the manifold arrangements for the support and supply of the troops engaged, for the wounded, for the safe housing of ammunition, and for the multifarious other requirements for a modern battle on a great scale—all these were a lengthy and laborious process. The point selected for the attack lay at the junction between the British and the French on the Somme. Here the German positions ran along the Southern and Western slope of the low hills which form the watershed between the middle Somme and the rivers which drain away E. and N. towards Belgium. The French were to attack astride the Somme in an Easterly direction, the British

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(1) The rifle strength of the British forces in France rose by nearly 50 per cent. between January 1st, 1916, and June 30<sup>th</sup>.

right from Maricourt to Fricourt was to strike North, while from Fricourt, where the enemy's lines formed a sharply marked salient, across the Ancre to Serre the centre and left also attacked East.

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More formidable defences than the German lines on the Somme have hardly ever existed. The ground had been in German occupation since October 1914, their hold on it had been unshaken by any serious offensive or bombardment: they had had labour and material in abundance and had constructed two systems of defences about two to three miles apart, each consisting of several lines of trenches, lavishly provided with bombproof dug-outs, with strong and elaborate wire entanglements many yards in breadth, all the villages and houses in the neighbourhood had been turned into veritable fortresses, the woods had been carefully prepared for defence, and the whole position bristled with well placed and protected machine-guns. Every device known to the military engineer had been utilized to make these lines impregnable; and tremendous as was the volume and intensity of the bombardment which the British opened a week before the assault, even it did not achieve all that had been hoped for: so many machine-guns survived the bombardment that a tremendous toll was taken of the attackers who, too often, reached the German trenches in such diminished numbers that they were unable to withstand the vigorous counter-attacks of the enemy or to retain the ground captured at the first assault. On the British left and centre this was conspicuously the case. Though the German front line was carried at most points the gains could not be maintained, and only on the right, and to a less degree on the right

centre between Fricourt and Ovillers, was any ground secured. Fortunately the gains that were secured were so well turned to account that despite the disappointment on the left July 1st 1916 proved the beginning of the turn of the tide.

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Of the six battalions of The Queen's Own then in France only the 7th was actively engaged on that day. The 1st was still in front of Arras, the 6th, though within the battle area, was held in reserve, the 8th was opposite Messines, and the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> were still completing their apprenticeship at Ploegsteert. But the 7th was fully to sustain the Regiment's reputation. To it, as to its Division as a whole, July 1st was the first great test, and the Eighteenth Division came through the strain splendidly. The frontage allotted for its attack was the ground so familiar to it just S. and W. of Montauban. The Division was the second from the right of the British line, the Thirtieth, who attacked Montauban itself, coming between it and the French. All its three brigades were in line, the 55<sup>th</sup> being on the right and having the 8th E. Surreys on the right, the 7th Queen's on the left, the 7th Buffs in support, and the 7th R.W.K. in reserve.

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7<sup>th</sup> Battalion

At 7.30 a.m. the attack was launched, and though The Queen's and East Surreys met with determined resistance, they made splendid progress. But before long they were held up, and first the Buffs and then the Battalion had to be thrown into the fight to complete the success. A and C Companies were sent up at 11 o'clock to help the East Surreys capture Train Alley, the back trench of the front system; after securing it they were to push forward against Montauban Alley, an intermediate line parallel with the village itself. Simultaneously D was to advance to and consolidate the Pommiers Line, of which Train Alley formed a part, but its runner was hit and never delivered the orders, and over an hour later the Adjutant discovered D still in the British trenches.

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See sketch 17

A and C both came in for hard fighting. The German front system had not been completely "mopped up," and A lost nearly all its officers and could not get beyond the Pommiers Line, where Germans were still putting up a stubborn resistance, which, however, was

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before long overcome. Meanwhile C on the right got on better, and Captain Waddington and two platoons had established themselves in Montauban Alley just as, about noon, the Thirtieth Division reached and mastered the village. Here they maintained themselves, consolidating the position with the assistance of the R.E., and gradually other detachments of the battalion worked their way forward. C.S.M. Klein, with the bulk of A Company, pushed up Mine Alley and ultimately joined Captain Waddington; another platoon of A under 2nd/Lieut. File with the other two platoons of C had already reinforced him, and with the assistance of parties of the three other battalions Montauban Alley was made good, despite hostile sniping and machine-gun fire. Splendid work was done by Lieut. Lewin, who laid and repaired telephone wires under heavy fire and successfully maintained Communication between Battalion Headquarters and the troops in front; Captain Watkin Williams, R.A.M.C., the Medical Officer attached to the battalion, and his orderly, Sergt. Cook, were also conspicuous; the latter went repeatedly into the open under heavy fire to dress the wounded and bring them into safety. By 2 p.m. the Colonel had brought Battalion Headquarters up to the Pommiers Line, which D was consolidating. He himself pushed up to the front line to

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find the troops well established, but running short of ammunition. This was replenishing by carrying parties of B and D, but for the rest of that day there was nothing in the nature of a real counter-attack, though the line was for some time rather “in the air,” as touch was only obtained with the 53rd Brigade on the left flank quite late in the day. By evening, however, a firm grip on the ridge West of Montauban had been secured.

If the distinction of leading the Division into the enemy’s trenches had not fallen to the 7th, it had contributed substantially to confirm the gains achieved by the leading battalions, thereby making

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the day one of real success for the Eighteenth Division, which had penetrated as far as any other into the hostile lines and had made good all its objectives. It was here that the winning advantage had been secured: the Northward advance of the Eighteenth Division and those on its flanks turned the German positions on the Fricourt-Ovillers front, and this, coupled with the success of the troops who had penetrated the German trenches North of Fricourt and maintained themselves there, forced the Germans back to their second position on the crest of the ridge. They only retired to it, however, after a week’s sharp fighting. In this the 7th R.W.K. had only a minor part. It had taken over the new front line of the brigade West of Montauban on the early morning of July 2nd and maintained the position till the evening of the 4th, coming in for a good deal of heavy shelling, but getting some good targets in enemy withdrawing from advanced positions which they could no longer retain. By the time relief came the battalion had suffered 180 casualties, Lieut. Innocent and 36 men being killed, Captain Latter, 2nd Lieuts. Freeman, Heaton, Woodhouse, Phipps and Gregory and 136 men wounded, and one man missing. Considering the importance of the results achieved the 7th could be reckoned fortunate in escaping so lightly. It was to enjoy a week out of the line before it was thrown into an even severer struggle.

Meanwhile another battalion of The Queen’s Own had taken a part in the attack. The Twelfth Division had been in reserve on July 1<sup>st</sup>, but as the Eighth Division on the left of the Third Corps, to which the Twelfth belonged, had suffered heavily and made but little progress in its attack on Ovillers La Boisselle, the Twelfth relieved it on the night of July 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup>. Thus the 6th R.W.K. found themselves in the front trenches with orders to resume the attack early on July 3rd. The position it had taken over lay just West of the ruins of Ovillers and the task assigned to the 37th Brigade

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July 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>  
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was the capture of two small salients in the German front line, which here ran almost due N. and S. To its right the 35<sup>th</sup> Brigade was also attacking E. and at the same time a larger attack was to be delivered further to the right in a Northerly direction against the line Contalmaison-Mametz Wood, and it was hoped that the two attacks would ultimately unite and cut off the German garrisons still clinging desperately to Ovillers and La Boisselle. But the task before the 37th Brigade was one of no small difficulty. Much of the German wire had escaped destruction by the bombardment, and the two salients to be attacked by The Queen’s and the battalion respectively were separated by a stretch of uncut wire 300 yards long, while an even longer belt to the left of the Northernmost salient, the one which the battalion was attacking, put an extension of the

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attack to that flank out of the question. The Royal Fusiliers, who were opposite this frontage, were told off to give covering fire from rifles and machine-guns, and a smoke barrage had been arranged for the protection of this flank, but the prospect of enfilade fire was a serious menace.

The attack was to be delivered by A and C Companies, the former under Captain Barnett on the right, the latter under Captain Hatton on the exposed left flank. Their objective was the German front line, but after capturing it they were to bomb along the trench to both flanks, A having to connect up with the 6th Queen's, C to reach a junction with a communication trench which was to be secured and a double-block erected. Meanwhile B and D under Captains H. C. Harris and Matthews were to pass through A and C and assault the German second line about 300 yards further on. The attack was then to be carried on by the East Surreys, whose objective was a third line of trenches, just North of Ovillers.

It was still dark when at 3.15 a.m. the barrage lifted off the German front line and A and C dashed forward.

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They were met by heavy machine-gun fire, but it failed to stop them, and without a check they were into the German trench and had killed, taken or driven off its defenders, mostly machine-gunners. 2nd Lieut. Coombs led the way with magnificent gallantry: he was the first man of C into the trench, shot down a German who was about to shoot his company commander, and promptly started bombing and clearing the dug-outs. A Company was equally successful, though Captain Barnett was killed after reaching the German trench, and its bombers at once began pushing along to the right with considerable success. Unluckily in the darkness the left platoons of C had gone too far to the left and had come up against uncut wire. Some men managed to win through this and forced their way into the trench, but the majority, including the two platoon commanders, 2nd Lieuts. Montagu and P. V. Roberts, were shot down, and the loss in this way of a specially selected bombing squad severely handicapped the company's efforts to bomb Northward along the trench and secure the junction with the communication trench. However, the first objective had been secured on a frontage of about 250 yards, and A and C opened a heavy fire on the German second line to cover the advance of the second wave of the attack.

As A and B came charging gallantly forward they were scourged. with machine-gun fire from the flanks, and lost so terribly from this that they altogether lacked the weight needed to carry out their task. Moreover, they had been delayed by the congestion in the British trenches, and by the time they reached the German front trench the barrage had already lifted off the second line, which was their objective, and it could be seen that this trench was thickly manned. But, forlorn hope as an attack was, Captain Matthews never hesitated and led the remnants of D Company forward into a perfect hail of bullets, only to be shot down after covering a few yards. His courage found a parallel in the gallantry

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with which 2nd Lieut. Latimer, a subaltern recently joined from Rugby, dashed forward ahead of his men, pushed through the wire on the left of the salient and stood up on the German parapet to cheer his men on and point them out the way, till he fell shot through the head.

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After the failure of the supports to reach the German second line the survivors of the attack put up a most gallant fight to retain their gains in the front line. Their position was precarious and isolated. The Queen's, on the right, had come up against uncut wire, in front of which they were mown mercilessly down, only a handful getting through into the German trenches. Thus the 6th were without support on the right and were soon hard pressed on that flank, while on the left a strong point at the junction with the communication trench held up C Company's bombers. They were cut off from reinforcements by the enfilade fire of the machine—guns which swept No Man's Land. Several times the men in the German trench saw parties starting out to dash across the open with ammunition and bags of bombs, but time after time the machine-guns caught them, and it was only by dodging from shell-hole to shell-hole that a very few ever reached their goal. Communication was hard to keep up: a telephone wire was run across but was promptly cut, though a few messages were taken to and fro by runners. Moreover, the bombardment had only too effectually damaged the German front line and it gave but little protection to those trying to consolidate it or to carry on a firefight against the Germans manning the second line and the communication trenches. But bad as was the situation, the 6th put up a splendid fight. 2nd Lieut. Buckle behaved with conspicuous courage and disregard of safety, walking up and down along the German parapet to direct the fire of his men. He was ordered to get down into the trench, but persisted nevertheless until

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at last he was hit and killed. Sergt. Knight, of C Company, seeing many of the bomb-carriers shot down in the effort to cross No Man's Land, leapt out of the trench under heavy fire and fetched in two bags of bombs from a fallen carrier, but was himself hit in the head and killed just as he regained the trench. Sergt. Brown and Corpl. Hooker, both of A Company, were also conspicuous by their courage and fine example, and for several hours the 6th stuck tenaciously to their gains, keeping the Germans at bay. Captain Hatton, the senior officer in the captured trenches—for Captain Harris had been killed leading B Company across No Man's Land—had impressed on his men that the Colonel's explicit orders were that the ground taken must be held to the last, and the men responded splendidly. While bombs and ammunition held out they held stubbornly on. But casualties were heavy, the men using the paradocs of the German trench as their fire position were terribly exposed to the machine-guns, and before long Captain Hatton had only men enough for a couple of bombing squads, one at each end of his line, whom he and his servant managed to keep supplied with bombs by moving up and down the trench to collect bombs off the casualties. When things had reached this pass the end could not be long delayed; Captain Hatton himself was badly wounded about 7 a.m., and a final effort dislodged the few survivors from the trench they had so stoutly defended.

Those few who regained their original trenches spent the rest of the day hanging on there under a heavy shellfire from the direction of Pozières. But the Germans did not follow them up, they were content to have recovered their own trenches, and that evening the remnants of the 6th were withdrawn to Bouzincourt. The losses had been terrible: 617 officers and men had gone into action, 375 were casualties.

The losses were the more felt because those who had fallen included many of the original members of

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the battalion. In addition to the officers already named Lieuts. J. H. Hughes and B. V. Wood were killed, 2nd Lieut. Coombs also, who had been badly wounded but managed to crawl back to the British lines, died of wounds shortly afterwards, while in all ten subalterns were wounded, making the total loss of officers nineteen. The four company commanders, three of whom were killed and one, Captain Hatton, wounded and a prisoner, all belonged to the early days of the 6th, and among the N.C.O.'s who had fallen were many who had joined at Purfleet. Loos and the Hohenzollern Craters had made gaps in the 6th in 1914, and July 3rd went far to wipe it out. Fortunately the practice had now been established of leaving out from an attack a proportion of officers, N.C.O.'s and men to serve as a nucleus on which, in case of need, a battalion might be built up again, and thanks to this the 6th had Captain Dawson and a couple of officers and 40 N.C.O.'s and men from each company available, so that reconstruction could be promptly begun when, on the 9th, the Twelfth Division, which had meanwhile made substantial progress in the Ovillers neighbourhood, was relieved and the battalion went back to Vauchelles des Authoy to rest and re-organize. However, though reinforced by half-a-dozen officers, including Captain E. T. Williams, who rejoined on July 20th, its depleted ranks were not adequately replenished. A draft of 253 arrived on the 22nd, but only 31 belonged to The Queen's Own, the remainder being promptly transferred to the other units of the Division to which they properly belonged. The battalion was thus still much below strength when on July 26th it moved up again into front trenches between Ovillers and Pozières. Before this, however, the 1st Battalion had come down to the battle area and the 7th had been through that desperate struggle for Trones Wood, which is perhaps the episode in the whole Somme most closely associated with the Regiment in the popular mind.

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When, on the evening of July 12<sup>th</sup>, the Eighteenth Division took over the right of the British line considerable progress had been made in clearing the intermediate area between the first and second German systems. East of Montauban Bernafay Wood had been taken and a footing obtained in the Southern end of Trones Wood, and it was this last position which B and C Companies took up that night with D in support on the Eastern edge of Bernafay Wood and A a little further back. As a preliminary to the great attack fixed for the morning of July 14<sup>th</sup> it was highly desirable that Trones Wood should be completely cleared, and accordingly orders were issued for the battalion to push through the wood from South to North, to the 7th Queen's to attack its Northern end, and to the 7th Buffs to capture a "strong point" at the S.E. corner where Maltzhorn Trench joined the Guillemont Road. It was a difficult task, the lie of the ground and the conditions prevailing in that quarter of the battle-field, where heavy fighting had been in progress for some days, were all against the attackers. The wood had been badly shot about and was a maze of shallow trenches, strong points and shattered trees, while orders were received very late and there was scanty time to prepare for the advance. However, the 7th went forward with dash and determination.

The attack, launched at 7 p.m. on July 13th, after three hours' bombardment, was delivered in the face of a most effective German barrage which inflicted heavy casualties on the support companies as they crossed the open, both Captain Emden of D and Lieut. Skinner, who was in temporary command of A, being hit. However, the battalion made good progress despite stout opposition and many difficulties from the undergrowth and fallen trees which filled the interior of the wood. Heavy and confused

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See sketch 20

fighting such as occurred in Trones Wood is bound to result in disorganization

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and loss of cohesion and direction, and the attack was further impeded by coming up against a couple of "strong points" inside the wood. However, by 7.30 part of B Company, under Captain Holland, reached the Southern branch of the light railway which runs through the wood, only to find that the Germans had somehow got in between them and their starting point and had retaken a "strong point" in the interior of the wood. Captain Holland's party, which had been reinforced by detachments of A and C, under Lieuts. Bartholomew and Hogg, accordingly dug themselves in along the railway and maintained themselves all night, though without any support, practically isolated and constantly attacked, mainly from S. and S.W.

Meanwhile hardly any news came back from C Company, which had attacked on B's right with orders to change direction to the right on reaching the railway so to line the Eastern edge of the wood, so Colonel Fiennes sent up the Adjutant, Captain Anstruther, to investigate. Captain Anstruther made his way with some difficulty to the middle of the wood there found 150 men of A, C and D all mixed up and scattered about; mostly on the Eastern edge, without any unwounded officers and much disorganized. He promptly re-organized these men, posted about 100 with 6 Lewis guns along the Eastern edge, pushed further North with the rest, obtained touch with the very few of The Queen's who had managed to reach the wood in face of the heavy shelling and machine-gun fire, and established three posts about 200 yards from the apex also. (1) Thanks to his energy and initiative the defence of the central portion of the wood was most successfully organized. Corpl. Chapman, whose Lewis gun section had all become casualties, did splendid work in

(1) The precise position reached by the 7th was extremely difficult to ascertain: what makes it seem that the battalion never quite reached the Northern end of the wood, which it was at first believed to have done, was that none of its dead were subsequently found in the Northern portion.

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collecting men and showing them how to work the guns, so that he was able to keep his guns in action and contributed greatly to beat off the German attacks. Battalion Headquarters meanwhile had moved up to the S.W. corner and, though attacked, beat off its enemies with rifle and machine-gun fire and bombs. About midnight therefore the situation was that some 250 of the 7th R.W.K. and a few 7th Queen's were established in Trones Wood North of the railway; these were cut off from support by the Germans who had reoccupied the portion South of the railway and were attacking Captain Holland's men from the South, while the Buffs and some East Surreys were still fighting for the "strong point" on the Guillemont Road. The situation was precarious; the Germans were counter-attacking vigorously and the party established in the wood was perilously isolated and hard pressed. Still it held its ground and kept the Germans at bay; indeed when in the small hours of July 14th Captain Anstruther was offered two platoons of the 12th Middlesex, who had arrived at Battalion Headquarters, he declined their help, saying that his line was strong enough and that he was beating off all the German attacks. However, as daylight came these attacks increased in force and ammunition began to fail; but eventually, about 6 o'clock, just as a fresh counter-attack was threatening to recover the wood, a dashing counter-attack by the 12th

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Middlesex and 6th Northhamptons, under Colonel F. A. Maxwell, swept Northward through the wood, re-established touch with Captains Anstruther and Holland, and cleared the wood right up to the apex, forcing the surviving Germans out. As the Germans bolted from the wood like driven birds they gave good targets to the riflemen and Lewis gunners along the Eastern edge, who saw their tenacity and endurance well rewarded.

If the story that the 7th had held out, though cut off, for 48 hours must be relegated to the category of war

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correspondents' legends, the battalion's achievement was splendid enough by itself, and the real truth can well stand. General Maxse, the Divisional Commander, wrote warmly and appreciatively of "the brave men of the 7th R.W.K. who, through the night of July 13th/ 14th, maintained their position in isolated parties in the wood." The capture of Trones Wood had helped appreciably to secure the right flank of the British attack, one of the most successful of the whole Somme offensive. The casualties, nearly 250 all told, were heavy, but not out of proportion to what had been achieved. Lieuts. Skinner and Crosse and 2nd Lieuts. Cathcart, File, Forsyth and Saveall were killed or died of wounds with 28 men, 23 men were missing, 5 other officers and 174 men wounded. This added to the casualties of July 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> had reduced the battalion by half and the rest of the Division being in like case after sharing in the fight for Delville Wood it was transferred before the end of July to the quieter Flanders front. (1)

July 14<sup>th</sup> had greatly developed the results achieved on the 1st and had established the British firmly on the main ridge, but the frontage on which the German second position had been penetrated was but narrow and some of the fiercest fighting of the whole Somme took place in the effort to extend our gains Eastward past Guillemont and Ginchy, Northward past High Wood and Westward past Pozières to the heights overlooking the Ancre. The German resistance was perhaps never so tenacious as between the middle of July and the end of August; they contested every yard of trench with skill and obstinacy, launched repeated counter-attacks at every point wrested from them, and bombarded with unremitting fury not only the British positions but all the lines of approach.

(1) Captain Anstruther received the D.S.O. and Corpl. Chapman the D.C.M., while 12 N.C.O.'s and men were awarded the M.M.

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The 1st R.W.K. therefore, whose Division came into line between Longueval and Bazentin le Grand on July 19th, came in for heavy and costly fighting. The battalion was in reserve when the Fifth Division made its first attack. This was on July 20<sup>th</sup>, and had as objective a road running S.E. from the E. corner of High Wood. Partial success only was achieved, and that evening the battalion took over the left of its brigade's front, its left resting on the Southern angle of the wood from which its line followed a track running S.E. It was a hot corner, the situation in High Wood was most obscure and the German artillery most active, while the battalion had to push out many patrols to locate the enemy, and the day's casualties came to 90 in all, though the majority of them were accounted for by a heavy barrage in which one company was caught when

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See sketch 21

moving up. Sergt. Traill distinguished himself greatly by the coolness and skill which he displayed, keeping his platoon together and bringing it through the barrage with very few casualties and then setting a splendid example to his men while they were digging in under heavy fire. Sergt. Davis and L/Cpl. Butler also were conspicuous for the devotion and gallantry with which they went out repeatedly to relay and mend the telephone wires and keep up communication between the front line and Battalion Headquarters. Then, after two strenuous days in the line came another big effort all along the front from Guillemont to Pozières.

In this attack the battalion's special objective was Wood Lane, a trench 400 yards ahead and just beyond the road which the brigade had tried to reach on July 20th. This trench lay over the crest of a gentle slope and could not be seen from our front line. Its capture was essential as a preliminary to the attack on Switch Trench, the main objective of the Division. This, which ran more or less E. and W. through the Northern end of the High Wood. Was

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to be attacked at 1 a.m. on July 23rd, the preliminary attack by the 13th Brigade being timed for 10 p.m. This allowed but little time for bombarding or for accurate location and registration of the object.

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However, the lie of the ground allowed the leading companies, A and B, to advance almost to the crest before the barrage lifted. Thanks largely to this they reached the road almost without a casualty and pushed on towards their objective. But as they topped the crest rifle and machine-gun fire caught them in flank from High Wood and in front from Switch Trench. Many officers and men fell, and though at two points the trench was reached and a lodgement made both parties were unsupported, for the battalion on the right had not got as far forward, and High Wood itself had again proved impregnable. A platoon of C, under Lieut. Peachey, had been detailed to guard the left flank and to capture the strong point believed to exist just inside the Wood, but it was shot down almost to a man and the enfilade machine-gun fire from this strong point proved most effective. Nevertheless both detachments held on with great determination. On the right 30 men of A established themselves in the trench though all their officers had fallen and were only at length dislodged when their supply of bombs ran out. On the left a platoon of B under Lieut. J. J. Scott and Sergt. Franklin occupied about 40 yards of the trench, inflicted many casualties on the Germans and maintained themselves firmly for nearly four hours, though the enemy made several bombing attacks from the left. These were repulsed mainly through the skill and gallantry of Pte. Butlin, who sprang over some German bombs which were just about to explode and, hurling his own bombs at the Germans, drove them back and secured the flank of his party. At another point Sergt. Traill collected a few men, dug in 15 yards from the German trenches, and hung on in this advanced position for several hours, killing several

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Germans who came out to capture some of the British wounded, and when he finally retired brought back several wounded with him. In the end, however, all these scattered parties had to be withdrawn to the original line. Nearly 400 of those who had started to the attack were casualties, Captain Bennett, Lieuts. Healey and Bartlett, 2nd Lieuts. Cornford, J. A. Fleming, Leatherdale, Cross, Lewinstein, Fox and Gillett were killed,

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and four other officers wounded. Many who would otherwise have been missing were brought safely in, thanks to the splendid courage and devotion of Corpl. Hatch, the N.C.O. in charge of the stretcher-bearers. He was indefatigable in the work of succour, although he was out for over seven hours, working from shell-hole to shell-hole, carrying men on his back under the heaviest fire, and altogether rescuing nearly 50 wounded before he himself was at last hit. The standard required for the V.C. must indeed have been high when such gallantry only received the D.C.M. (1)

The 1st Battalion's initiation into the Somme had been unfortunate, but no blame could attach to it for failing against a very strong position which was dominated by the all but impregnable High Wood. Officers and men alike had distinguished themselves by numerous acts of devotion and gallantry, and the tenacity with which the advanced parties had clung to their gains had been worthy of the best traditions of The Queen's Own. Indeed, the Divisional commander paid a special visit to congratulate the battalion on its behaviour. At its next attempt it was again confronted with an extremely difficult task. Since the original capture of Longueval and Delville Wood by the Ninth Division on July 14th repeated German counter-attacks had won back much ground, and several divisions

(1) Captain Baines, R.A.M.C., who had been serving with the battalion since early in 1915, received the M.C. for his gallantry and devotion to duty in this action.

had tried to deprive the Germans of these bones of contention. On the night of July 29th/30th the 13th Brigade went up to relieve the 95th at Longueval, the battalion being in support to the K.O.S.B.'s, who were in Delville Wood itself. It had the greatest difficulty in establishing itself in its proper positions among the ruins of the village; the Germans put down a tremendous barrage, communication between companies and Battalion Headquarters was lost, and merely to reach and hold a support position cost the battalion over 60 casualties. It did not actually take part in the attack, merely having to endure an absolute deluge of 8 inch and 5.9 inch shells while the K.O.S.B.'s succeeded in finally completing the work which the 15th Brigade had begun on July 27th, clearing most of the orchards N.E. of Longueval.

After this the Fifth Division was withdrawn to a training area S.E. of Abbeville, where it had three weeks before being called on for yet another effort. When the R.W.K. reached this area it was certainly in need of rest and reinforcements. Its losses had amounted to little short of 600, and included many valuable and experienced officers and N.C.O.'s. It was over a year since the battalion had been engaged in any very heavy fighting and consequently there had been relatively few changes since Hill 60, so that in a way these losses were the more acutely felt. However, about 16 new officers turned up during August with drafts amounting to over 300 men, though a large proportion of these men were recruits with only four months' service, whose training was in so elementary a stage that it was a superhuman task to render them fit to go into action in less than three weeks.

Among the Divisions which took up the struggle after the Fifth withdrew from Delville Wood was the Twenty-Fourth. so that it fell to the lot of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion to push on to the N.E. and E. against the next tactical feature of importance, the ruins which had once

July 1916  
1<sup>st</sup> Battalion

Aug 1916  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

been Guillemont. The 8th reached the Somme area at the end of July, and went into trenches East of Trones Wood and facing Guillemont on August 11th. Its first trenches were mere apologies for shelter, but the men dug with such vigour that by daybreak they had provided themselves with quite respectable protection, which stood them in good stead next morning when they were subjected to a very severe bombardment. During its first week on the Somme the battalion was mainly occupied in being shelled and in digging; there was no actual hostile attack, but the severity of the shelling may be calculated from the battalion's casualties, which, between August 10th and 18th, came to 6 officers and 146 other ranks, among the killed being 2nd Lieut. S. E. Dove, who had just succeeded Captain Penton, wounded on August 11th, in command of D Company. The chief work put in by the battalion was its construction in two nights of a new trench 800 yards in length and 400 yards further to the front, an operation which it was fortunate to complete without being interrupted by the enemy. The battalion also distinguished itself by good work in bringing in many wounded who were lying out in front of the line, casualties of an attack on Guillemont some days earlier. In this work Captain McLarty, the Medical Officer of the battalion, distinguished himself greatly, labouring incessantly and devotedly and dealing with literally hundreds of cases.

Aug 1916  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion  
See sketch 22  
August 12<sup>th</sup>

On August 18th the Twenty-Fourth Division attempted the task which had already baffled several others, the capture of Guillemont, and succeeded in establishing a foothold in the ruins of the village and in taking the railway station some distance in the North. The 72nd Brigade was in reserve during the attack, but next night the 8th R.W.K. sent up A Company to take over the post in Guillemont. This consisted of shell holes rather imperfectly consolidated, and as the Germans were in strength in some quarries only 40 yards

Aug 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>

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off A had a lively time, contending with no little success against bombers and snipers. Moreover they managed to dig a continuous trench facing South and to consolidate two large shell-holes facing East, while on the night of August 20th 2nd Lieut. Roscoe took out a fighting patrol of one platoon which worked its way Eastward and then South into the village, met and disposed of several enemy, and established two new posts to the South which proved useful in preventing the enemy from interfering with the digging of the trench. It was a much improved position which was handed over next night to the 8th Queen's.

August 1916  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

A week out of the line followed, and then came orders to move up to Delville Wood itself. (1) The night of August 30th was perhaps the most trying experience in the battalion's service, a march up in pouring rain, under heavy shellfire, over tracks which were deep in slippery mud. and this for men burdened with an astonishing load of ammunition, rations and equipment of every kind. The battalion took eleven hours from leaving its assembly trenches to cover one mile and get into position with A Company on the right in Inner Trench and B on its left in Edge Trench, C in support in the wood, D in reserve behind it. "Wood" was already a misnomer, for the constant shelling had reduced the trees to mere stumps amid a tangle of debris.

The 8th's first day in Delville Wood coincided with the Germans' last and most formidable attempt to recover the high ground between Guillemont and High Wood. Hardly had a scanty breakfast been finished than the enemy's guns opened a terrific shelling, which they maintained for five hours, inflicting terrible casualties on the troops in the front line, so that two platoons of D had to reinforce. The message from Captain Wenyon of A asking for them was carried down in

August 31<sup>st</sup>

the face of the greatest danger by two wounded men, Ptes. Skerry and Tyrrell, who not only volunteered for the duty but, after managing to deliver the message, actually returned to the front line. At last the German guns lifted, and then, to the satisfaction of the surviving defenders, infantry were seen coming forward and collecting for the assault in a trench about 500 yards away. So admirable was the fire discipline of the British troops that their fire was withheld for nearly another hour till the enemy's advance in force began. Then, indeed, their rifles and machine-guns let him have it and with such good effect that on the right, where the field of fire was good and several guns of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Company M.G. Corps had escaped the bombardment, A Company stopped the Germans in about 50 yards, inflicting very heavy losses. On the left there was more cover and B was very closely pressed, its commander, 2nd Lieut. Flowers, being among the killed, but it also kept its immediate opponents out. The Germans lost heavily both in the advance and later on when the survivors of the attack tried to get back to cover, but in the evening they made a second attempt. As before they were beaten off both by A and B, but the latter had to throw back its left flank as the Germans had effected a lodgement in the next battalion's frontage at Orchard Trench. This was successfully done by 2nd Lieut. E.G. Brown, who had succeeded to the command of B, and he was ably seconded by C.S.M. Rankin; thanks largely to their efforts the enemy was prevented from improving his advantage and next day a counter-attack threw him out of Orchard Trench. The repulse of this attack was a great feather in the battalion's cap; its steadiness under a heavy bombardment had been equalled by the excellence of its musketry to which the losses inflicted on the Germans testified. The strength in which the Germans had attacked was some testimony to the value they attached

August 31<sup>st</sup>  
1916  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

September 1<sup>st</sup>

to the position and to the service rendered by the 8<sup>th</sup> in repulsing such a determined attack.

On the evening of September 2nd the 8th were relieved and went back to Caterpillar Valley between Bernafay and Delville Woods to come in for a gas bombardment lasting five hours; this, however, thanks to good "gas discipline," caused more discomfort than loss. Here the next three days were spent, though it was a period of "fatigues" rather than of rest, as large carrying parties had to be found to take rations, water and ammunition up to the front line. One of these errands cost the battalion 2nd Lieut. Roscoe, who had done so well at Guillemont, but on his fall Sergt. Greenaway took charge of the party and carried through the task, though it had to be completed in daylight and under severe fire. By September 5th, when it was relieved and taken back to a village near Abbeville to rest, the 8th R.W.K. had had over 300 casualties, including 13 officers, 3 of whom, with 91 other ranks, had been killed. If it had not taken part in any big forward movement the work the 8th had done in holding and exploiting the advanced positions and in carrying, in digging, and in succouring wounded, had been of no small merit and value.

September 1916  
8<sup>th</sup> Battalion

September  
3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>

While the 8th Battalion had been hotly engaged on the right of the British line the 6th had come in for a strenuous fortnight at the opposite end of the battle-front when, on July 27th, it relieved the 7th Worcesters near Ovillers. Here the fighting was of a

July-August  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

different character, systematic nibbling away at the German positions rather than large-scale attacks. Hence the 6th experienced much local fighting, attacks on strong points and sections of trenches in which the bomb and the machine-gun were more important than artillery. Since it had been in action progress had been made beyond Ovillers, and on the night of August 3rd/4th a lodgement had been gained in Ration Trench N.E. of Ovillers. Here the battalion relieved the 6th Buffs

See sketch 22A

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next day and that evening attacked and captured a strong point on the left of its position, at the same time

August 4<sup>th</sup>  
1916  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

as the 36th Brigade further to the right assaulted and took the greater part of Ration Trench. To maintain and consolidate the ground gained was no easy task; the position was heavily shelled, and in its two days in this bit of line the battalion had nearly 80 casualties, including Captain Alderman and five other officers wounded. But it not only held the ground, beating off one vigorous bombing attack, but actually added to the gains and captured a couple of machineguns. Sergt. Cooker distinguished himself in this fighting by re-organizing a party of bombers who had been driven back, erecting a new barricade, and then climbing over it to bring in a wounded man under the very noses of the enemy. A short rest followed, in which the battalion received a reinforcement of twelve subalterns, and then on the 10th it returned to the trenches for another effort.

The 35th Brigade were attacking a trench running parallel to Ration Trench and the 37th was co-operating on its left. The objective of the 6th Battalion, which was on the left of the 37th Brigade, was two strong points known as 20 and 81 with the intervening trench. This attack, delivered at 10.30 p.m. on August 12th, found the enemy much on the alert, and A Company on the left could make no headway towards 81; D, however, who got quite close to their objective before German bombers held them up, took a few prisoners and managed to build a block in the trench at the point reached and to maintain it. But the battalion on the right of the 37th Brigade had been unsuccessful and it was useless to press the attack. However, the ground gained commanded the German line just opposite and the 37th Brigade's attack had diverted the Germans' attention from the 35th, who captured their objective on a front of nearly 1,000 yards, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. Next day the Forty-Eighth Division

August 12<sup>th</sup>

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August 13<sup>th</sup>

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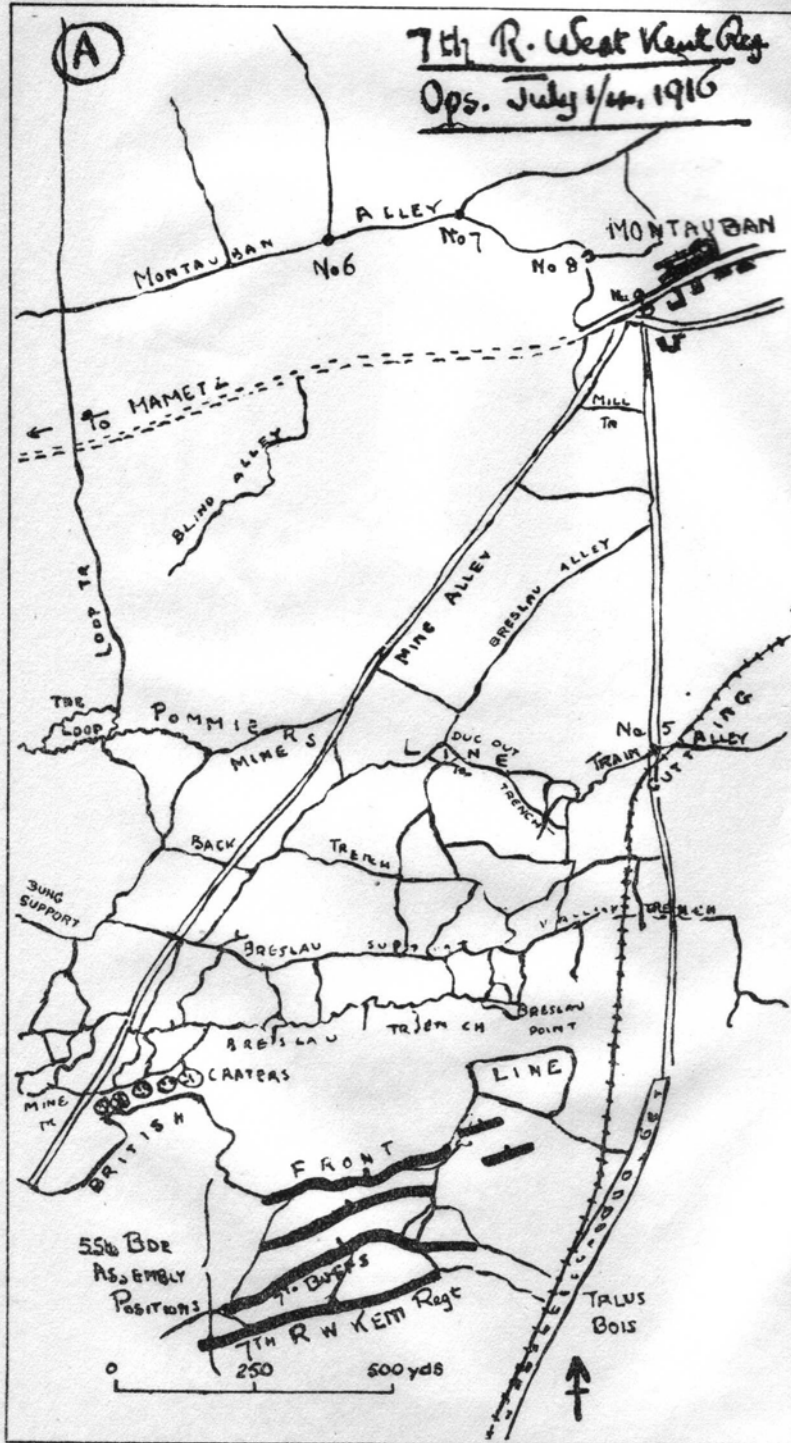
relieved the Twelfth and the battalion moved away to the front South of Arras for a month of relative quiet.

During this phase of the Somme offensive the progress of the attack had certainly been slower than had been hoped; on no one day between the middle of July and the beginning of September had gains been made approaching those secured on July 14th, but the net results had nevertheless been substantial, and if the British casualties had been heavy the incessant counterattacks by which the enemy had delayed the advance had been extremely costly and had necessitated the practical abandonment of the attacks on Verdun to provide troops to maintain the struggle on the Somme. If August had seemed to produce little material change in the situation the efforts then made had contributed in no small measure to bring within reach the more tangible results achieved in September.

Aug-September  
1916  
6<sup>th</sup> Battalion

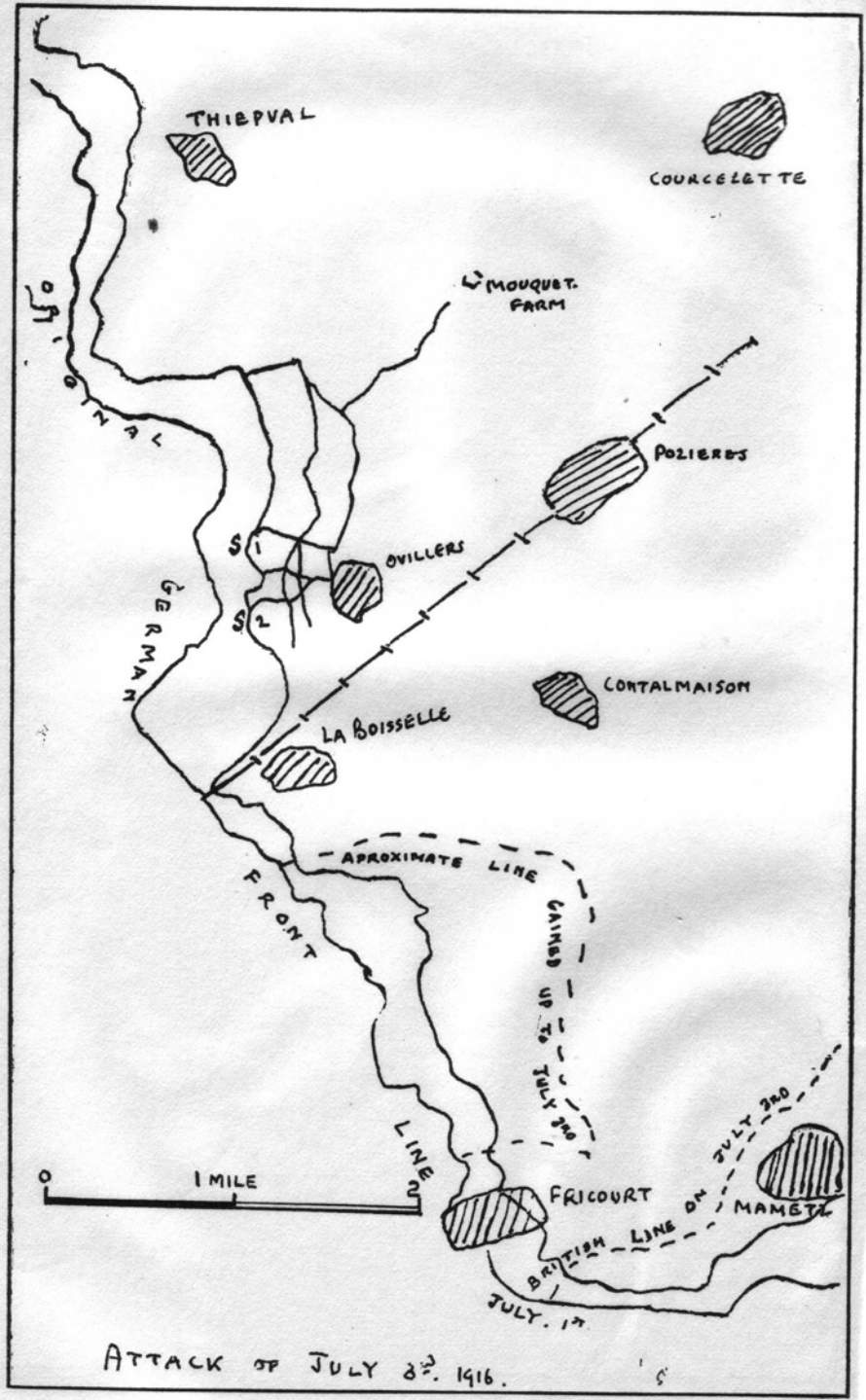
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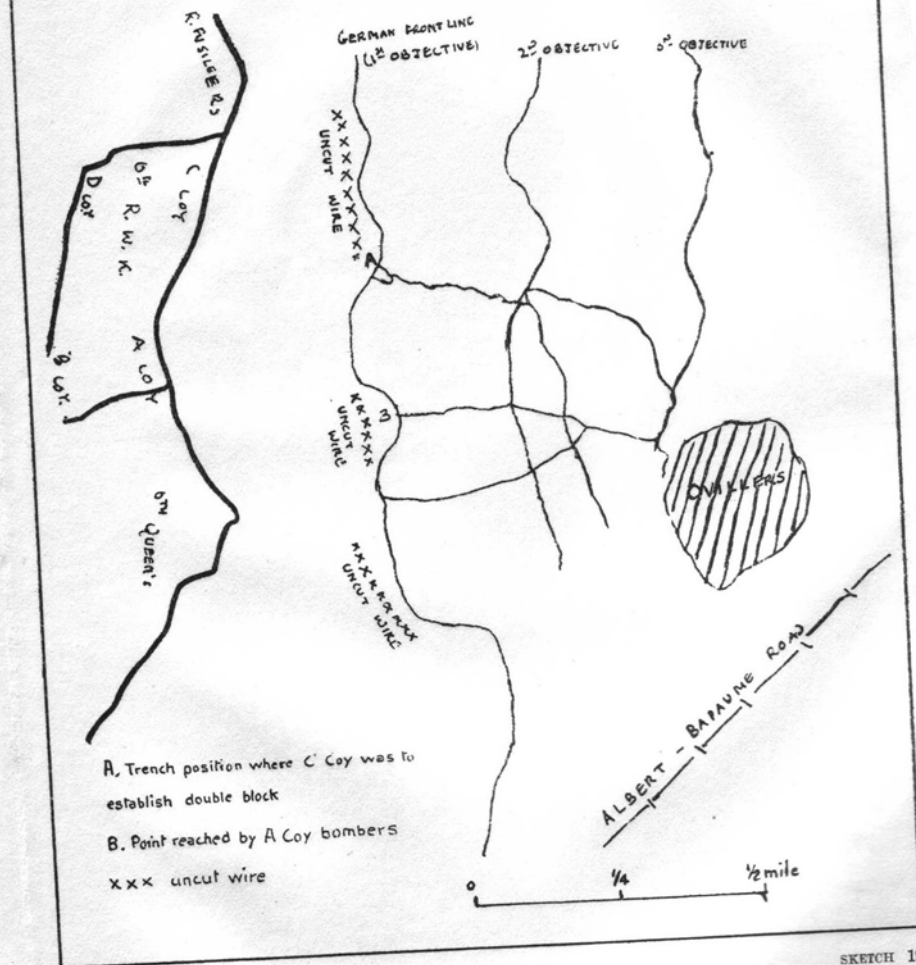


Face Page 184.

SKETCH 17.

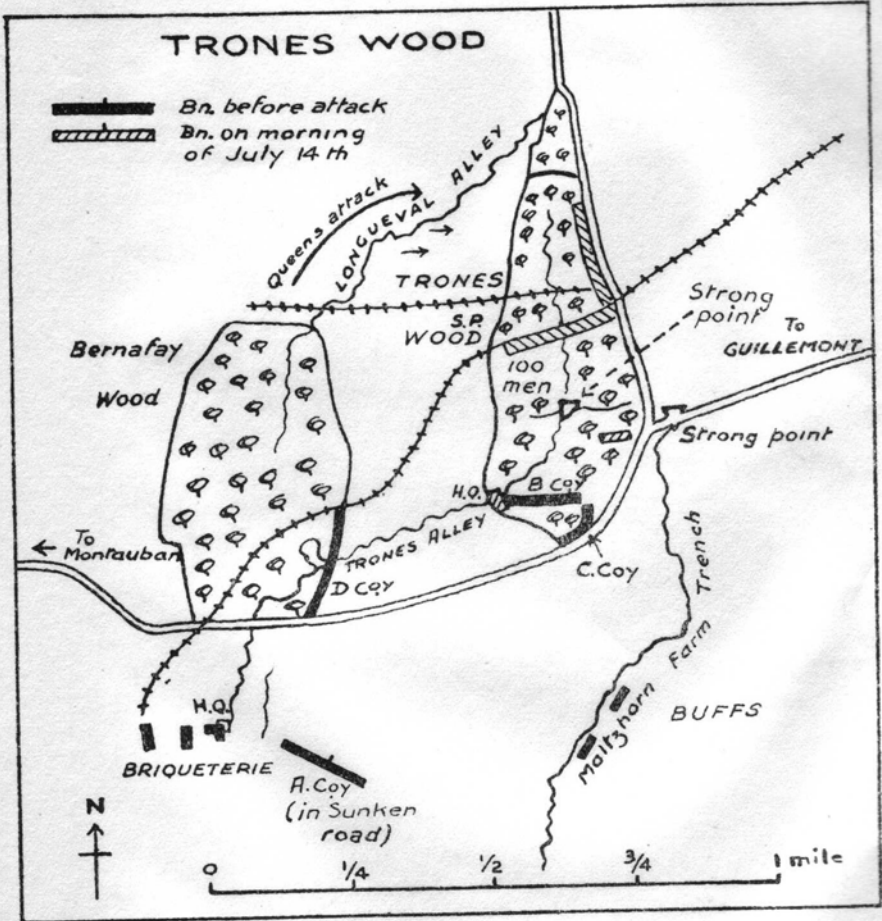


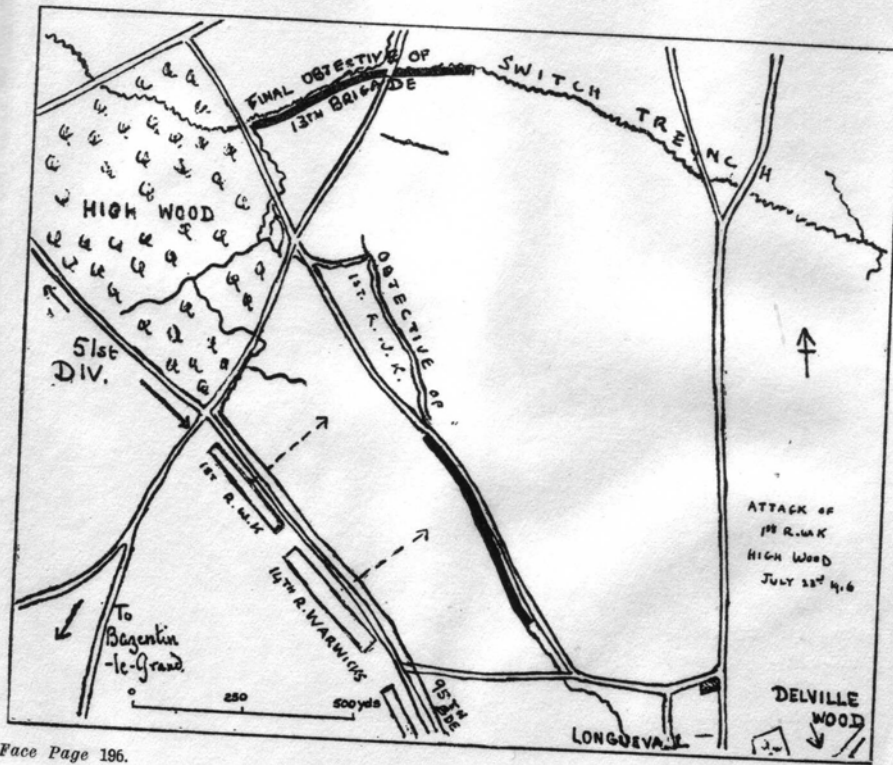
ATTACK BY 37<sup>th</sup> BRIGADE. JULY 3<sup>rd</sup> 1918.



A, Trench position where C Coy was to establish double block  
 B, Point reached by A Coy bombers  
 x x x uncut wire

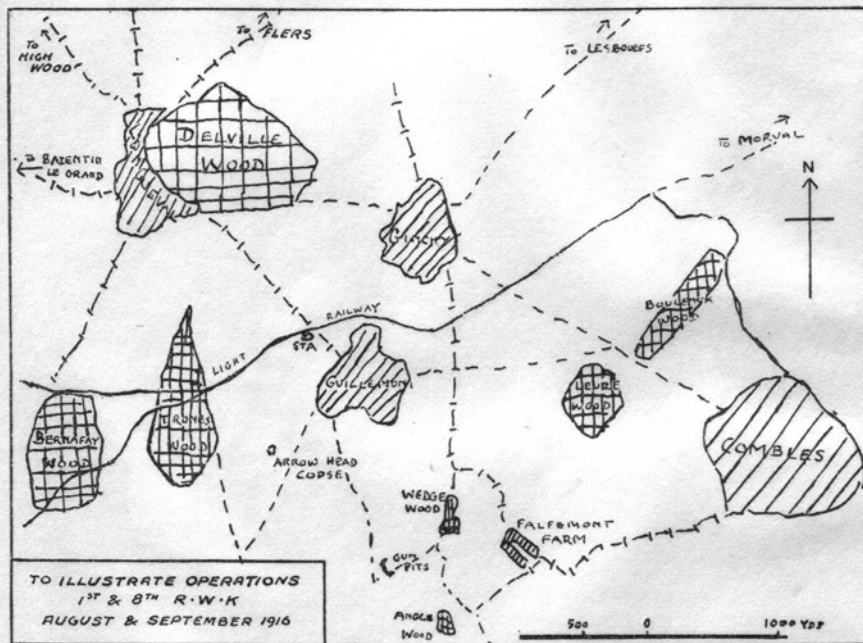
SKETCH 19.





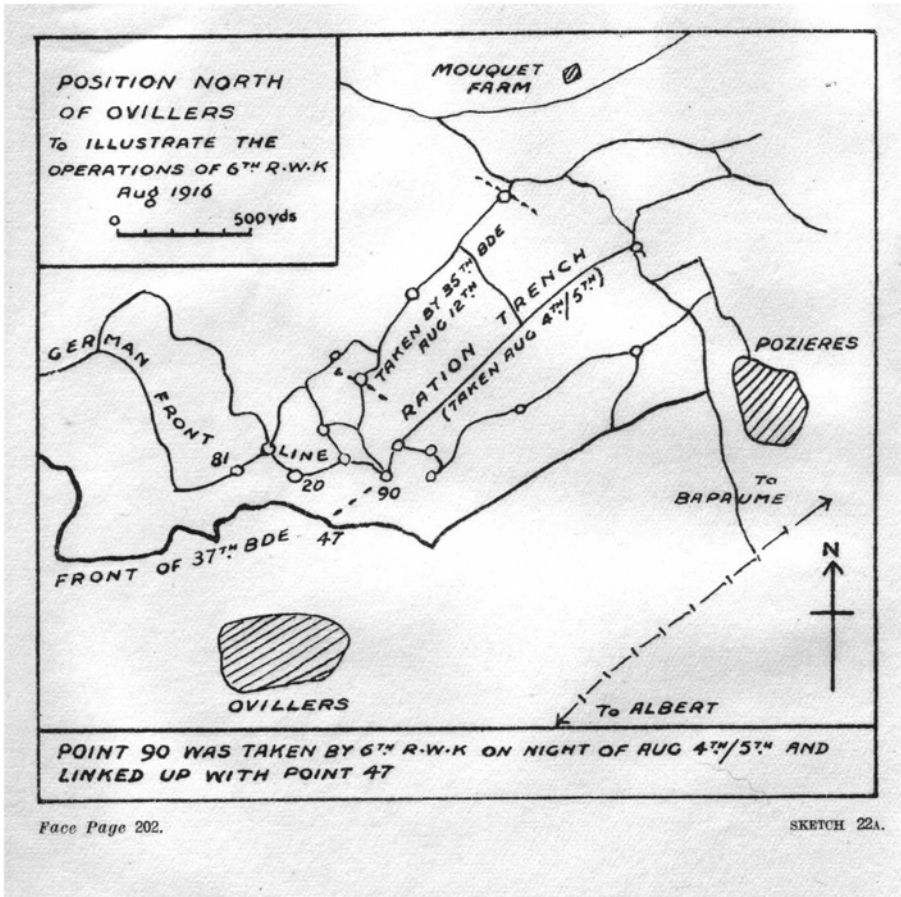
Face Page 196.

SKETCH 21.



Face Page 200.

SKETCH 22.



Face Page 202.

SKETCH 22A.