

CHAPTER 13

THE SOMME (continued)

The third month of the Somme opened with ten days of heavy fighting which saw the final overthrow of the barrier which Guillemont and Ginchy had so long presented to the British advance. In this phase The Queen's Own was represented by the 1st Battalion, though it was not actually against either of those points that it was employed. South and East of Guillemont the chief feature was the ridge on which stood Falfemont Farm with Leuze Wood beyond it. These strongly fortified localities formed part of the same defensive system as Guillemont and their capture was essential to any widening of the area of the attack, more especially if the French were to come up level with the British to attack Combles and the ridges between the Combles valley and the Tortile river.

September 1916

When the Fifth Division returned to the line after its rest it was put in on the extreme British right S.W. and S. of Guillemont and next the French. The 1st R.W.K., who were in the centre of the Divisional front, had to prepare new assembly trenches 400 yards in front of the existing line. This work, of course, could only be undertaken at night, and to cover it patrols had to be thrust out further ahead, which led to a good many brushes with the enemy and not a few casualties, the battalion having over 60 before it was drawn back into reserve on the night of August 29th. But it had carried out its task, an excellent trench had been dug and the preparations carried so far forward that on September 3rd the Falfemont Farm position could be assaulted. The task was entrusted to the 13th Brigade, who had the K.O.S.B.'s on the right and the 14th R. Warwicks supported by the R.W.K. on the left. At 9 a.m. the K.O.S.B.'s attacked, but though

August 25th
1st Battalion
See sketch 22

September 3rd

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they went forward magnificently they were unable to capture the Farm, and when at noon the 14th Warwicks and the 95th Brigade on their left delivered the main assault the Warwicks were checked by enfilade fire from the right. However, the 95th Brigade got on well, and in a renewed attack the Warwicks secured some gun pits which B Company assisted them to consolidate. Meanwhile orders were received for the battalion to advance, but they were soon cancelled, not before D Company, which was some way to the left rear of the rest of the battalion, had come under very heavy fire, losing both its officers. Evening, therefore, found the battalion still in support and Falfemont Farm untaken, though Wedge Wood and the trenches N.W. of it had been secured.

September 1916
1st Battalion

Next day, however, the 15th Brigade having relieved the 13th, a renewed attack at last mastered Falfemont Farm, and that afternoon the battalion, which had been left in support to the 15th Brigade, received orders to exploit the success by advancing between the Farm and Wedge Wood. C and D Companies promptly pushed forward towards Leuze Wood, crossing the open with little loss and capturing or otherwise disposing of quite a large number of Germans who were found in shell-holes on the way. About 200 yards short of Leuze Wood a trench was dug which served as the jumping-off ground from which next day the 15th and 95th Brigades advanced successfully through Leuze Wood, though in this advance the battalion was not employed, having been drawn back into support. It was in the front line, however, in front of Leuze Wood on the 10th and 11th, being heavily shelled and having nearly 70 casualties, and then, after a period of rest at Mericourt, returned to the front on the 18th

September 4th

September 5th

for another week of hard work under shellfire. Its chief task in this tour was to dig new trenches in front of Morval in preparation for the successful attack of September 25th, in which Morval, Lesboeufts and

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Combles were captured. But as the 13th Brigade was in Corps Reserve the battalion was not actively engaged, merely providing stretcher and carrying parties for the 95th Brigade, On September 26th the Twentieth Division began relieving the Fifth and the end of the month saw the 1st R.W.K. established once again in billets near Abbeville. Its second turn on the Somme, a period of hard and useful work rather than of any exceptional incidents, had cost it 250 casualties, including 2nd Lieuts. Martin, Hallows and Pracy and 28 men killed or died of wounds, and ten other officers wounded, making a total casualty list for the Somme of nearly a thousand all told. Lieut.-Col. Buchanan-Dunlop had also had to relinquish command through ill-health on September 12th, on which Major Lynch White was recalled from his Staff appointment to command.

September 1916
1st Battalion

But before the 1st Battalion finally withdrew from the area of active operations two other battalions of The Queen's Own had made their debut in offensive warfare, and the 7th was becoming familiar with that second portion of the Somme battlefield with which the Eighteenth Division will always be associated, Thiepval and the ridges above the Ancre. The immediate result of the gains made in the first ten days of September was that a substantial portion of the forward crest of the main ridge was in British hands and with it the advantage, hitherto lacking, of observation over the slopes beyond. It therefore became possible to launch a general attack on a wider front than had been attempted all through August. On the right the Fourteenth Corps was to master the spur which ran N.E. from Ginchy to Morval, in the centre between Delville Wood and High Wood the Fifteenth Corps had the Flers Line as its immediate objective, and on the left between High Wood and the Albert-Bapaume Road the Third Corps was to advance against Martinpuich should the progress of the attack elsewhere warrant it.

7th, 10th and
11th Battalions

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In the Fifteenth Corps was now included the Forty-First Division, which had reached the battle area at the beginning of the month and had begun relieving the Fifty-Fifth in the centre of the Corps front on the night of September 10th/11th. The 10th was the first of the Regiment's two battalions in the Forty-First Division to come into action. After 24 hours in support positions in Montauban Alley the battalion sent two companies forward on the evening of September 11th to pass through the 23rd Middlesex, who were holding the front line North of Delville Wood, and to construct six strong points 150 yards in advance. This operation was successfully carried out and the posts were held next day by B Company, while that evening the remaining companies relieved the 23rd Middlesex in the front line. They were fairly heavily shelled, especially on the following night, when their brigade was being relieved by the 124th Brigade, which was to be on the right of the Division in the attack with the 122nd on the left and the 123rd in reserve.

September 1916

10th & 11th
Battalions

September 12th

September 13th
& 14th

The great feature of September 15th was the employment of the new weapon whose preparation had been so carefully concealed. If at their first effort the "tanks" hardly accomplished all that had been hoped or that was claimed for them at the time, they un

September 15th

doubtedly introduced an element of surprise which produced a great effect upon the German rank and file. The German Higher Command may have obtained some idea that this new device would be tried; their men in the fighting line were certainly unprepared for the appearance of these extraordinary and formidable if clumsy and rather uncertain objects. That they were an encouragement to the British rank and file may also be accepted as true, if the amount of that encouragement varied considerably with the performances of the particular tanks with which individual units happened to co-operate.

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The 11th, the first battalion of The Queen's Own to have experience of co-operation with tanks, was in support trenches N.E. of Delville Wood when the attack opened. It moved forward at "zero" in rear of the 15th Hampshires, the right battalion of the 122nd Brigade, which had as its objectives Switch Trench, Flers Trench and the actual village of Flers. As the 11th started the enemy put down a heavy barrage on the front line and on the assembly positions in rear, causing many casualties which unfortunately included a large proportion of officers whose loss was sorely felt later. However, the Hampshires made short work of Switch Trench and then, as they swept on towards Flers Trench, the 11th caught them up and went forward together with them. Flers Trench was full of Germans, but very few put up a stiff fight; many surrendered, others bolted towards the village under heavy fire from the machine-guns of the tanks which had by now overtaken the infantry. However, the British barrage was still coming down on Flers so there was a short halt till it should lift. Owing to the heavy casualties among the officers little reorganization could be effected during this pause, and when the lifting of the barrage allowed infantry and tanks to go forward the advance lacked organization and cohesion. Still Flers was cleared after sharp fighting, and some of the battalion pushed on in pursuit of the Germans beyond the village towards its final objective, reaching some trenches known as Box and Cox. In this phase of the attack splendid work was done by C.S.M.'s Hayley and Judge in rallying the men and leading them forward against Flers, where C.S.M. Judge further distinguished himself by capturing 30 prisoners with the aid of a couple of men, while C.S.M. Hayley, whose courage and initiative were conspicuous, was instrumental in capturing a large number of Germans and in organizing the position. Largely by their efforts the advanced line was held

September 15th
1916
11th Battalion
See sketch 23

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despite counter-attacks, and meanwhile some of the 124th Brigade established themselves on the East of the village where they also held on.

But in the meantime touch had been to a great extent lost between the advanced troops and those in rear; very little exact information ever reached even Battalion Headquarters, and to the higher authorities further back the situation was most obscure. The Assistant-Adjutant, 2nd Lieut. G. D. Henderson, had gone up to the front just in time to see the battalion pushing into Flers, but except for a message from C.S.M. Judge, "going strong through Flers," no more news came back till about 9.30, when it was reported that the enemy were putting down a heavy barrage upon Flers and the trenches West of it and that men were coming back from the village. Upon this Colonel Townshend went forward to Flers with all the men from Battalion Headquarters. but finding men coming back on both sides of the village he took up a position in Flers

September 15th
1916
11th Battalion

Trench and rallied many stragglers. A further retirement to Switch Trench became necessary a little later, and while here Colonel Townshend was mortally wounded by shrapnel. On this the Adjutant, Captain Jiminez, took charge of the party, now some 25 strong, and led it forward again about mid-day and took post in Flers Trench, and this position was retained till after 5 p.m., when orders were received to withdraw to a position S.W. of Delville Wood, where the Brigade was to re-assemble. By this time the Headquarters party had increased to about 40, and on arrival at the rendezvous many other small detachments came in, parties who had spent the day in various positions in and around Flers. Actually it would seem that, despite the shelling and counter-attacks, the village was never lost. There was a good deal of confusion and a good many men seem to have straggled back, but the Germans certainly never recovered the village, for 2nd Lieut. Cooksey and C.S.M. Judge with a party of the 11th

remained continuously in occupation of part of the third objective until in the course of the afternoon some of the 124th Brigade relieved them and secured the Hog's Head and Flea Trenches East of the village.

September 15th
1916
11th Battalion

When all remnants had been collected the 11th Battalion was found to have left three officers, Captain Jiminez and 2nd Lieuts. Cooksey and G. D. Henderson, with some 150 men out of a total of 18 officers and 592 other ranks who had gone into action. However, many more stragglers turned up at intervals and the final casualty list was reduced to 13 officers (Lieut.Col. Townshend, Captain Culley, Lieut. Jones, 2nd Lieuts. G. Smith, Barrs and Mansfield killed, Major Heron, Captain Dickinson, Lieut. Puttock, 2nd Lieuts. H. R. Smith, C. F. Hall, Platt and Cooksey wounded) and 330 other ranks. (1) Colonel Townshend's loss was severely felt; he had been indefatigable in his efforts to bring the battalion up to a high level of efficiency, and it owed not a little to him.

Meanwhile the 10th, whose brigade had been in reserve, had been much less severely tried. About 10 a.m. orders were received for the 23rd Middlesex to leave the reserve position South of Delville Wood and for the battalion to follow. After a short halt in the original front line the two battalions moved up about 1 p.m. to Switch Trench in face of a heavy barrage, which caused the two companies on the left to swing away to the flank, with the result that they lost touch and became mixed up with the New Zealand Division, who were notably successful to the N.W. of Flers, reaching and crossing the Abbey Road. On reaching Switch Trench the rest of the battalion found plenty of occupation in consolidating and clearing up the position, useful work of an essential character which cost it several casualties from shell-fire if it did not afford much opportunity of earning distinction. It remained in

10th Battalion

(1) C.S.M.'s Hayley and Judge received the M.C. for their good work in this attack.

position until the night of September 17th/18th, when its Division was withdrawn to the Becordel and Dernancourt area for rest and re-organization. Of this the shattered 11th was in sore need, but the 10th had escaped much more lightly, for its casualties for September 11th – 18th only came to 7 officers and 94 other ranks, including Captain H. H. Logan, 2nd Lieuts. Laurence and Stones and 16 men killed, 7 men missing, Colonel

September 1916
10th & 11th
Battalions

Wood-Martyn, (1) Major Beattie and 2nd Lieuts. Edmett and Percival wounded. But despite heavy losses the Forty-First Division and the 10th and 11th R.W.K. had made a good start in active warfare. If its final objective had not been reached, Flers had definitely passed into British keeping, and the advance in this quarter had been carried as far as anywhere.

The attack of September 15th had not realized the full expectations that had been formed, but its success had at least sufficed to allow of extending the area of active fighting to the West of the Albert-Bapaume road; here since July 1st but little progress had been made against the exceedingly formidable positions on the heights overlooking the Ancre, particularly at Thiepval. If anywhere on the Somme battlefield there were defences which the Germans reckoned impregnable it was the Thiepval section. However, the gains now made in the centre allowed of a converging attack in which the Eighteenth Division had the honour of tackling Thiepval itself while the Eleventh on its right struck at the defences just S.E. and E. of the village.

The 7th Battalion had had an easy time since its hard fighting in July. Its stay on the Flanders front had been uneventful. The trenches it had taken over from the New Zealanders near Bois Grenier were in excellent condition and the Germans opposite proved unaggressive. Casualties, therefore, were few, and thanks to

July-Sept 1916
7th Battalion

(1) During Colonel Wood-Martyn's absence, Major W. F. Soames commanded the battalion with the acting rank of Lieut.-Colonel.

the arrival of some large drafts—one of 138 joined the battalion just as it left the Somme and another of 102 men from the Suffolk Yeomanry, splendid fighting material, arrived early in September—with twenty new subalterns, the battalion was nearly up to strength again when it returned to the South. It rejoined the Fifth Army before the end of August, but nearly a month elapsed before it went into action again, and in this time it had three weeks of intensive battle training at Puchevillers, S.E. of Doullens. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that it was by the careful, systematic and definite training which all ranks received in these periods out of the line that units were made capable of returning to the attack after such heavy losses as those of the Eighteenth Division in July, and these periods must not be overlooked even if they must be but briefly passed by.

July-Sept 1916
7th Battalion

In the actual attack on Thiepval the 55th Brigade was in reserve and the 7th R.W.K. therefore spent the morning of September 26th in a position of readiness. Not till nearly 2 p.m. was it summoned up to Crucifix Corner, the cross roads W. of Aveluy, and placed under the orders of the 54th Brigade who, aided by the 53rd, had taken most of Thiepval but were having great difficulty in completing the reduction of the position in the face of the desperate resistance of a stubborn and confident garrison. By 8.30 next morning, however, the task had been completed without the 7th being employed. The battalion had merely moved up to positions closer to Thiepval, being heavily shelled while doing so and suffering 40 casualties from one single shell. Then on the 28th the indefatigable Eighteenth Division proceeded to attack the extremely strong Schwaben Redoubt some 1,000 yards to the North of Thiepval. In this attack the 54th Brigade was on the left with the 53rd on its right. Here again a stubborn resistance was encountered, and about 11 a.m. D Company had to be put in, partly to

September 26th

September 27th

September 28th

See sketch 24

assist in consolidating and partly to act as carriers. A little later Battalion Headquarters with C and three platoons of B, all that remained in hand, as several parties had been detached on various errands, moved up to Thiepval Chateau under heavy shellfire. This party remained in Thiepval all night and moved forward at 3.30 next morning to relieve the troops who had captured the Southern and Southwestern portions of the Schwaben Redoubt.

September 28th
1916
7th Battalion
September 29th

The relief was a most difficult matter; the situation in the Redoubt was obscure, it was uncertain how much had already been taken, the trenches had been badly damaged, the Germans still held a considerable portion of the Redoubt and several blocks and strong points had to be mastered before any advance could be made. Captain Waddington, going on ahead of his company, C, to reconnoitre the position it was to take over, came upon Germans in possession of a point believed to be in our hands, and was wounded by a bomb, being, indeed, fortunate in escaping capture. In moving up, the company was heavily shelled, which added greatly to the difficulty of the relief, and only No. 9 Platoon was even getting into position when the Germans suddenly delivered an attack in force against its right. No. 9, however, though without any knowledge of the ground or of the enemy's dispositions, and for the moment quite "in the air," put up a stubborn fight and managed to beat the enemy off, inflicting heavy losses upon them. By this time the remaining platoons were reaching the front, and the three available platoons of B, under Captain Holland, were coming up on the left. But the 7th were given little time in which to settle down to their arduous task. The Germans, undeterred by their first repulse, promptly returned to the attack and a savage and determined struggle followed. The Lewis guns did good service, but early in the fight they were all put out of action by German bombs, and the fight resolved itself into a

regular "soldier's battle," in which all depended on the courage and tenacity of individual N.C.O.'s and men. Most of the officers were hit and the survivors could only exercise control over their immediate neighbourhood. But the men of the 7th were not found wanting. Pte. Tobin, a C Company runner, was conspicuous by his example; he was prominent in repulsing the first German attack and, though badly wounded in the jaw and throat, stuck to his post, encouraging his comrades to keep up their resistance till a second severe wound finally disabled him. He, too, was only one of many. Indeed, when C finally beat the Germans back not a bomb was left nor a round of ammunition, though luckily a little later carrying parties made their way up to the front with fresh supplies.

September 29th
7th Battalion

All through that day extremely hard fighting continued; the German bombing attacks pressed especially heavily against the right, where C Company, after repulsing one attack, was driven back but quickly recovered the ground by a vigorous counter-attack. In the evening an effort was made to master two strong points known respectively as Points 19 and 39; but though the attack was at first successful bombs and grenades ran short and the Germans, who were in great force, at length forced the assailants back. In the intervals between the attacks the position was steadily shelled by the Germans and this and the activity of their snipers made consolidation extremely difficult. However, the work was pushed steadily on, and during the day the various detached parties rejoined so that it proved possible during the night to take over an additional section of the captured trenches on the left, as far as a point known as the Pope's Nose. C Company, moreover, managed in the course of the day to get touch with The Queen's

on the right, and thanks to the training the men had received in intensive digging, one of the points on which the Divisional Commander, General Maxse, was most insistent, a fairly good line

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was established. But the ground was a mass of churned-up earth and half destroyed trenches, and one of the greatest difficulties was to make certain where the line actually did run.

September 29th
1916
7th Battalion

September 30th opened with a powerful German attack against Point 45 on the right, held by A Company. Once again shortage of rifle grenades and the superior handiness and range of their egg-bombs enabled the Germans to gain ground; but a counter attack, ably organized by Sergt. Weller, partly along the trench and partly across the open, recovered most of it and would have done more but that our own guns suddenly opened fire and, firing short, disorganized the advance. However, when the guns lifted, 2nd Lieut. Sutherst headed a fresh attack which drove the Germans right back to the bomb stop from which they had started. For the rest of the day the battalion held on stoutly and about 2 p.m. a detachment of the Buffs came up for a fresh advance against Points 19 and 39 to co-operate with an assault by the 8th East Surreys against the portion of the Redoubt further to the East. This attack was delivered at 4 p.m., D Company detailing two platoons to help the Buffs. Unluckily the Buffs went too far to the right, Point 19 was left unattacked, and though 2nd Lieuts. Grist and Griffith with their platoons made a most gallant effort to rush it, they were still in No Man's Land short of the objective when the barrage lifted, and were caught by the German artillery and machine guns and badly cut up.

By this time the battalion's numbers were much reduced, C Company was down to 2 officers and 56 men, and the long line it had to hold taxed all its resources and endurance. Nevertheless the ground was held, and on October 1st 2nd Lieut. Sutherst, skilfully using a Stokes mortar to assist his bombers, cleared the Germans out of a double bombing block on the battalion's right, successfully re-establishing communication with

October 1st

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the Buffs. On the left and centre also there was desperate fighting. Next day a German attempt on Point 86 was beaten off, but the Germans attacking from Point 16 gained about 60 yards and held it in face of counter-attacks by B Company, which at first regained the ground but were ultimately forced back by weight of numbers and lack of bombs. The 3rd saw a heavy German attack on the centre beaten off by B, the 4th an advance from Point 16 repulsed by C. On the 5th the battalion co-operated by Lewis gun and rifle-fire in an attempt of the 8th Norfolks to complete the capture of the Schwaben Redoubt, getting good targets in the Germans retiring from before the Norfolks, though in the end little progress was made. That evening the 16th Rifle Brigade (Thirty-Ninth Division) arrived to relieve the battalion, now completely exhausted and terribly reduced by a week of the most strenuous and arduous fighting under difficult conditions of wet and mud. This had cost it heavily. Of all the officers who went into action on the first day only one was still at duty, and he had been wounded three times. Captain R. B. Holland, Lieut. Hackett, 2nd Lieuts. Hudson, Fricker, Ward, Griffith and Roberts had been killed, Captains Waddington and Warren and eight subalterns wounded; of "other ranks" 70 were killed and missing and over

October 2nd
1916
7th Battalion

October 3rd-5th

200 wounded. Colonel Fiennes too had gone sick, and in his absence Major Phillips was in command. After such a trial, “ the worst days of its life” one of its officers called this time; with all the companies reduced to mere skeletons, it was natural that the battalion was not called on for another serious attack for some weeks, but it had covered itself with credit, had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, and the positions it had helped to secure were among the most important gains made anywhere on the battle front. Well as the Eighteenth Division had done on July 1st and at Trones Wood, Thiepval

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and the Schwaben Redoubt were an even bigger achievement.

As the 7th was withdrawing from the front line for its well-deserved rest no less than three battalions of The Queen’s Own were preparing for another big attack. After the capture of Combles (September 26th) the French had made substantial progress North of that town towards Sailly—Saillisel, while N.W. of Gueudecourt the Fourth Army had gained ground towards Eaucourt l’Abbaye and Le Sars and was now to attack along its whole front from Les Boeuifs to Le Sars. In this not only was the Forty-First Division to participate but the Twelfth was brought down from Wailly (South of Arras) where it had been since the last week in August, having a fairly easy time and escaping with comparatively few casualties. In the last week of September the 6th R.W.K. had been at last brought up to nearly 800 effectives by the arrival of a large draft. On October 1st it took over reserve trenches West of Gueudecourt, which it held till the 4th, when it moved up into support, getting heavily shelled but escaping lightly. On the evening of the 6th it took over the front line on the Northern edge of Gueudecourt ready to attack next day, having the 6th Buffs on the right and the 36th Brigade on the left.

The Forty-First Division were further to the left again, East of Eaucourt l’Abbaye. Since the battle of Flers the 10th R.W.K. had had another turn in the front line from September 28th to October 1st, but it had been comparatively uneventful. The enemy shelled the positions continuously and heavily but did not attempt any counter-attack or succeed in preventing the battalion from pushing forward on the night of September 29th/30th and constructing a fresh line of posts 100 yards further in advance. After three days in the line had cost it just 50 casualties the 10th was relieved and drawn back to Pommiers Redoubt.

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The 11th R.W.K. had meanwhile had a much needed chance of reorganization. Major Corfe had succeeded to the command and with Lieut. Puttick as Adjutant had done a great deal to get the battalion into fighting trim despite its heavy losses at Flers. A big draft from the Royal Fusiliers and the arrival of eight officers from the Base had brought it more or less up to strength, but to be called on for another attack so soon after such losses as those of September 15th was a big demand on any unit. In the course of October 3rd and 4th the Forty-First Division relieved the New Zealanders, who had just carried out a highly successful attack on the German trenches of Eaucourt l’Abbaye, capturing a substantial portion of Gird Trench and Gird Support together with a redoubt known as the Circus, between those trenches and Eaucourt. The 124th Brigade went in on the right, the 122nd on the left, so that the 11th R.W.K, who took the left of the brigade frontage, found themselves next the Forty-Seventh Division and with the 15th Hampshires on the right. The objective of the Division was the ridge

September-
October
1916
6th, 10th & 11th
Battalions
See sketch 23

October 1916
11th Battalion

overlooking Ligny-Thillov and La Barque, and the battalion before it a part of the Gird Trench system which had so far defied all assaults and was again to prove a formidable obstacle.

The moment the troops left their trenches (1.45 p.m., October 7th) heavy machine-gun fire enfiladed them from both flanks, and brought the attack to a speedy standstill after 100 yards had been covered. A sunken road leading N.N.E. towards La Barque proved a special hindrance to progress, and as no better success had attended the rest of the Division, all that could be done was to consolidate the line gained. This involved a strenuous night for the survivors of the attack but they received useful assistance from a party of the 12th East Surreys and eventually touch was established with the troops on both flanks, while the great majority of the wounded were safely got away after untiring efforts

October 7th
1916
11th Battalion

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by the stretcher-bearers. Casualties had been heavy, all four company commanders had been hit, Lieuts. Purves and Prior being killed, Captains Stone and Richardson wounded; still, though there were only four officers and less than 100 men (1) left, the line was successfully held till the early hours of the 9th, when the 123rd Brigade replaced the 122nd. Lieut. Henderson was conspicuous for good work in re-organising the end and consolidating the position, and his efforts were fittingly rewarded by the grant of the M.C. (2) The remnants of the 11th were then relieved by the 23rd Middlesex and went back to Switch Trench, where all available reinforcements joined them. Meanwhile the 10th had taken up its position in support to the Middlesex. This battalion once again came off much more lightly than the 11th. It had been in reserve on the 7th, had moved up into the British front line that evening and had found working parties to help consolidate the advanced position. Notwithstanding this, and despite being quite heavily shelled while in support, it escaped with one officer killed (Lieut. Grant), two (Captain Wallis and 2nd Lieut. Samuel) wounded, and under 100 casualties in all. It was relieved on the night of October 10th/ 11th, when the Forty-First Division was replaced by the Thirtieth and bade farewell to the Somme.

October 7th
1916
11th Battalion

10th Battalion

The 6th R.W.K., on October 7th, had fared no better than the junior Service battalions. The hostile artillery supporting the front to be attacked had increased considerably in the days preceding the assault and the enemy had in addition organized an extremely powerful machine-gun defence while their trenches were screened from direct artillery observation. The

6th Battalion

(1) The battalion had taken 16 officers and 465 other ranks into action.

2 The same honour was deservedly bestowed on Lieut. Bainton, the Transport Officer, who, despite the most adverse conditions, had done splendidly in getting rations and water up to the front trenches and in helping to remove the wounded.

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battalion had been heavily shelled all the morning and had suffered seriously before it went over the top at 1.45 p.m. in the face of a fierce rifle and machine-gun fire which the British bombardment was unable to subdue. From the first losses were heavy. Neither R.W.K. nor Buffs could get far, though C Company on the left advanced about 150 yards before being held up. It got some shelter from a bank along a road which crossed its front but, being ahead of the troops on its flanks, could do no more than

October 7th
1916
6th Battalion

hang on till after nightfall when it got back, bringing in all its wounded. (1) The battalion had to hold on for the rest of the day under a steady barrage, but at midnight The Queen's took over and the remnants of the battalion—companies were down as low as 50 each—took up a position in support, which it held till relieved by the 1st Essex, of the Twenty-Ninth Division, on the evening of the 10th. The casualties were very severe, little short of 300 out of a bare 500 in action. Captain Hall, Lieut. Wilks and 2nd Lieuts. Longuehaye, Stuart and Gray were killed with 23 men, 89 men were missing; Captains Williams and Carré, 2nd Lieuts. Dickinson, Dunt, Hogbin and Paulson and 185 men wounded. The Twelfth Division did make some progress beyond Gueudecourt in the next few days, but the 6th was too shattered to be employed and spent the next week in camp near Montauban, resting and incorporating two large drafts, one of 68 and one of 143, which arrived before the whole Division was drawn out and transferred to its old positions at Wailly.

The 7th had been the first battalion of The Queen's Own to go into action on the Somme. It was to be the last also to take part in that protracted struggle. Sadly reduced by the long fight for the Scliwaben Redoubt, it

7th Battalion

(1) Pte. F. Brown, one of the battalion stretcher bearers, distinguished himself in this work, collecting some thirty wounded and getting them into shelters in some old dug-outs, whence they were safely brought in after dark.

was in reserve on October 17th when the 53rd Brigade, in conjunction with some Canadians further to the right, attacked and took Regina Trench. The 55th Brigade took over the position then captured by the 53rd Brigade and held it till the 29th. The 7th was in the front line from the 26th to 29th, and was notably active in patrolling, 2nd Lieut. Macdonald in particular obtaining most valuable information. After four days' rest at Warloy it came forward again to Albert, had two days in Brigade Reserve, two in the front line, and then moved into reserve trenches, where it remained till the night of November 17th when it took up a battle position in readiness for yet another big attack.

October 1916
7th Battalion

November 1916

The plan of this attack was that the 55th Brigade, with the Nineteenth Division on its left and the Fourth Canadian on the right, was to attack the portions of Desire and Grandcourt Trenches between Twenty-Three Road, on the right, and Stump Road. All four battalions were in line, the 7th R.W.K. being in the right centre between the E. Surreys and the Buffs. It had B and D Companies in front, each attacking on a two-platoon front; A was in support, C in reserve. By this time the persistent wet weather which had set in early in October and had contributed so much to the ill success of the attack of October 7th, had given place to frost and snow. The ground was frozen hard and covered with snow, so that when the attack was launched at 6.10 a.m. the troops showed up clearly against the white ground. However, the attack was pressed with much determination, and the right company, B, got into Desire Trench and established itself there despite much opposition. Its left, however, was "in the air," for D had lost direction and, going off left-handed, soon lost touch with B. Only a few of D ever got back; the company had pushed on over its first objective and had come under very heavy machine-gun fire from a strong point

See sketch 25

November 18th

on the left and the survivors had been surrounded by the enemy and killed or taken almost to a man. (1)

A similar fate befell the Buffs and Queen's further to the left. They, too, captured their first objective but, apparently pushing on beyond, were cut off by a German counter-attack which got in behind them, this being the more successful because the Division on their left had been forced back, completely exposing the flank of the 55th Brigade. B Company's position in Desire Trench was, therefore, most precarious, but Major Glare, of the E. Surreys, who was temporarily commanding the battalion, (2) promptly pushed up all available reinforcements, including a Stokes mortar and a bombing party. Thus assisted, B not only maintained its ground, but, inspired by Captain Knight's splendid example, actually extended its gains and cleared Desire Trench as far as Sixteen Street, the point originally fixed as the left of the battalion's objective. Several barricades had to be broken down but the trench was successfully cleared by 2nd Lieut. Dix, who led a bombing party with much courage and determination, while another detachment rushed over the open and got into the trench farther along. Pte. Keleher, who led the bayonet charge with great dash, disposed of a large number of enemy himself, while Corpl. Coleman threw bombs with the greatest skill and accuracy, doing splendid service. Most of the garrison endeavoured to escape by bolting back across the open to Grandcourt Trench but were shot down by the leading platoon of A Company, which 2nd Lieut. Kent (3) brought up opportunely.

(1) The fate of D. was cleared up after the Germans were driven back from this part of the line in February, 1917 (c.f. Chap. xiv).

(2) Colonel Fiennes was still away and did not return to the battalion, receiving an appointment at home: a skilful tactician, whose knowledge of his profession inspired respect in officers and men alike, his great ability as a trainer of troops had been no small factor in the 7th's successes.

(3) Captain Knight and 2nd Lieut. Dix were subsequently awarded the M.C., while Corpl. Coleman and Pte. Keleher got D.C.M.'s.

Next morning patrols pushed along Desire Trench as far as Stump Road, the left of the 55th Brigade's objective, and found it evacuated. A welcome supply of food and wine was found in the dugouts with many other evidences of the haste with which the Germans had departed. It should be added that several British wounded were now recovered who had been most carefully tended and looked after by the Germans, a somewhat unusual occurrence greatly to the credit of the defenders of Desire Trench. During the day the Buffs took over the Western portion of Desire Trench, which allowed the battalion to concentrate its energies on Cross Trench, a communication trench running diagonally across its front. Snipers from this trench had given trouble during the day, but in the evening Captain E. S. Holland and C Company made a most successful advance; reached a strong point at Point 85, three quarters of the way to Grandcourt Trench, and established a block there. Two nights later the 55th Brigade was relieved by the Sixty-First Division and withdrew to an area North of Abbeville.

The casualties of the 7th in this last action, by no means its least creditable exploit on the Somme, came to nearly 200; 2nd Lieut. Carter and 22 other ranks were killed, Lieut. Stevenson and 2nd Lieut. Fryer missing with 94 men, mainly of D Company, and 2nd Lieuts. Godley and Taylor wounded with 77 men. With the rest of the Eighteenth Division it could look back on the Somme with special pride. Hardly any other Division had been so frequently or successfully engaged and none had achieved more. It had established a great reputation as a fighting unit and the 7th R.W.K. had proved as

efficient and formidable as any battalion in the Division. Indeed, of all the battalions of The Queen's Own engaged in the Somme offensive the 7th had perhaps the finest record; no one would claim for it that it had surpassed the others in devotion and gallantry and endurance, but it had been more often in

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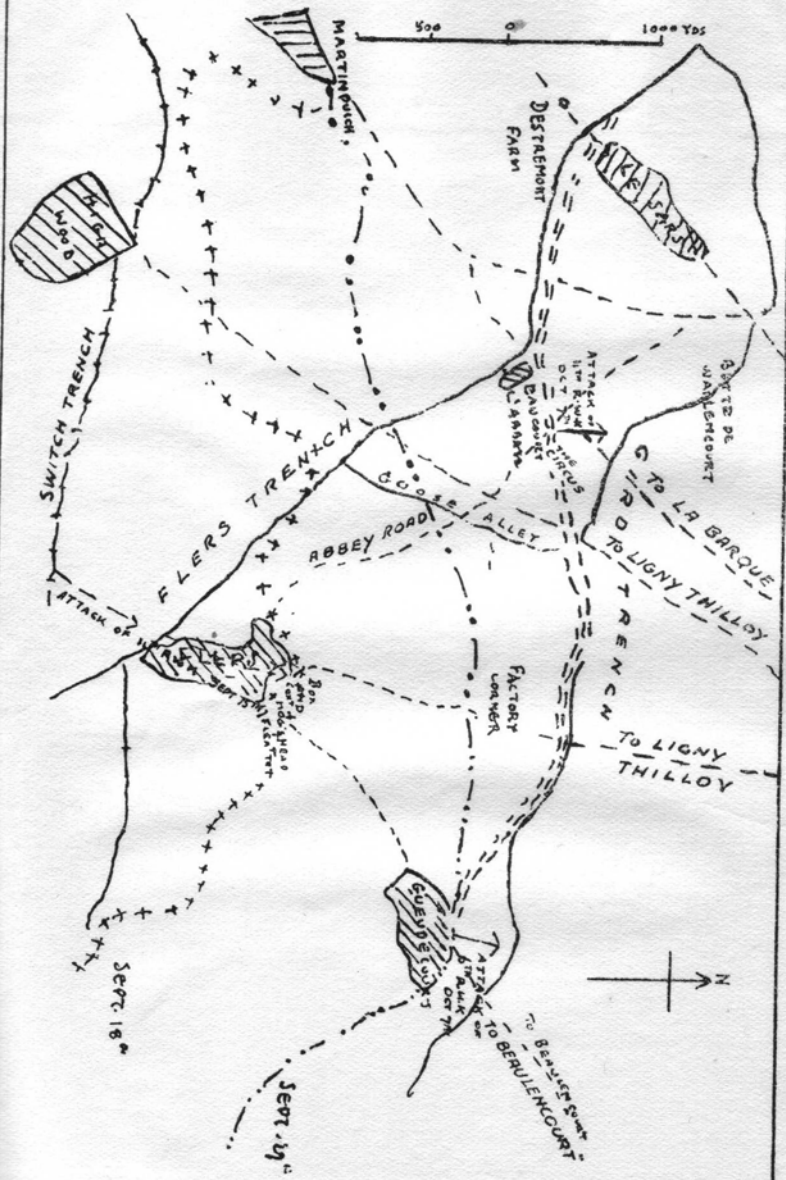
action and always with success. The new drafts who had replaced the old hands who fell in July had shown themselves inspired by the same zeal and high spirit as their predecessors. Certainly a high spirit and high standard of courage and devotion had been required, for the fighting had been very bitter. The 7th's losses during the period give some clue to the intensity of the fighting and the great part it had played. Its "parapet strength" in the last week of June had been 36 officers and 837 other ranks; it had received drafts amounting to 28 officers and 955 other ranks, yet could only muster 20 officers and 59 men at the end of November.

November 1916
7th Battalion

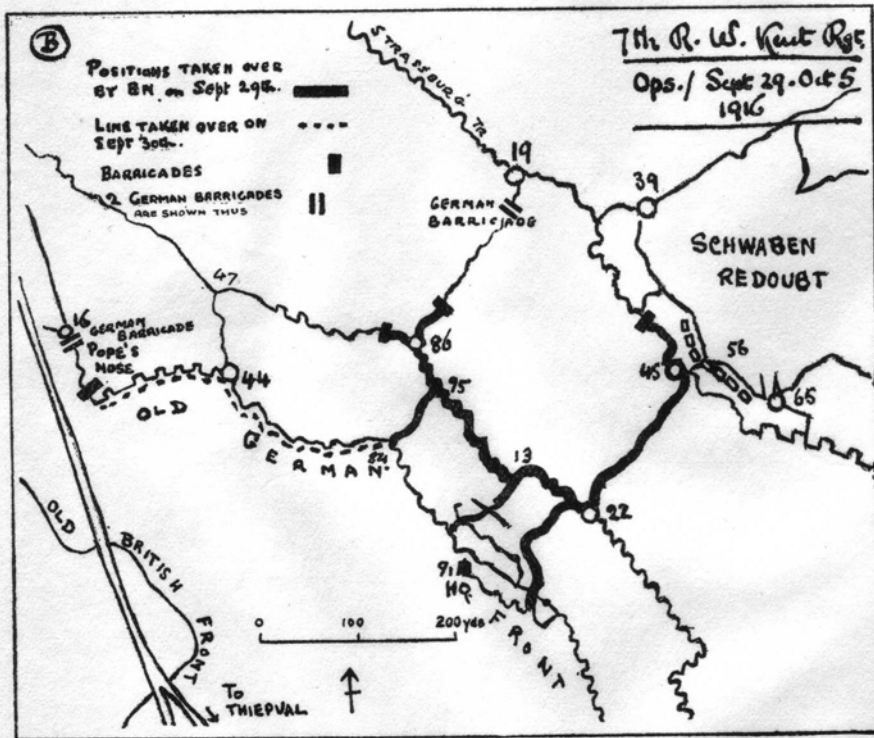
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THE SOMME BATTLEFIELD (N.E. portion)

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1916



- ++++ Approximate line gained Sept 15th
- o-o- " " " Sept 26th-27th
- ==== " " " British Front Oct 6th
- German Trench lines. ----- Roads



Face Page 216.

SKETCH 24.