

War Diary 8th Battalion South Staffs – April 1917

8th Battalion, The South Staffordshire Regiment –

The 8th (Service) Battalion The South Staffordshire Regiment was raised at Lichfield in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second New Army and joined 51st Brigade, 17th (Northern) Division. After initial training close to home, they moved to Wareham, Dorset to continue training, moving to West Lulworth and then to Wool in January 1915. In June 1915 they moved to the Winchester area. The division had been selected for Home Defence duties, but this was reversed and they proceeded to France in July 1915 concentrating near St Omer. They moved into the Southern Ypres salient for trench familiarisation and then took over the front lines in that area. In the spring of 1916 they were in action at the Bluff, south east of Ypres on the Comines canal then moved south to The Somme seeing action during The Battle of Albert in which the Division captured Fricourt and The Battle of Delville Wood. In 1917 they moved to Arras and saw action in The First and Second Battles of the Scarpe and The Capture of Roeux. In late summer they moved to Flanders and fought in The First and Second Battles of Passchendaele. on the 23rd of February 1918 the battalion was disbanded in France with men transferring to the 2/6th and 7th Battalions of the South Staffordshire Regiment and the 7th Entrenching Battalion. - See more at:

<http://www.wartimememoriesproject.com/greatwar/allied/southstaffordshireregiment8-gw.php#sthash.oMmzEOLh.dpuf>

Copies of the diaries for the period during which Pte Cowdell was killed are below. They give an almost hour by hour account.

22/4/17

7.25pm Artillery programme received
7.30pm Brigadier calls to see CO.
8pm Artillery programme issued to Companies.
8.09pm Bn HQ moves to C Coy HQ in front line.
8.30pm Covering party B Coy sent out to cover working party Yorks and Lancs digging Assembly trenches.
10pm 20 men A Coy carry forward smoke bombs for special Coy RE
9.45pm gas projectiles into the wood west of Roens.
10.30pm CO goes to Bde HQ for final arrangements as to liaison with 132nd brigade on the left. Return to Bn HQ at 12 12 MN
Hot tea issued to all men.

23/4/17

2.00am Coys commence moving to assembly trenches. 2nd Lieut Scott lays telephone wire from Bn HQ to assembly trench and reports completion at 3.05am.
3.30am Capt. Foster reports that all Coys are in position in assembly trenches. CO reports this to Bde.
4.00am CO and HQ move forward to assembly trenches leaving telephone operating staff to transmit messages from HQ to Bge HQ.
4.35am CO inspects ** who are all in position lying down ready to advance. Men in excellent spirits.
4.45am Artillery barrage opened on a line 200 yards west of enemy trench.

- 4.47am First wave advances.
- 4.49am Artillery barrage lifts 100 yards. [Luvh?] were close in behind.
- 4.51am Artillery barrage lifts onto enemy trench. [Luvh?] were close in behind, arrives at enemy wire and under falling M G (machine gun) fire from left flank.
- 4.55am A Coy in support joined final wave. Most officers and all 3 Coys killed or wounded. Men hold on firing until 5.00 am when they withdraw slowly having no guides.
- 5.00am CO pushes forward and attempts to rally and reorganise the Coys which are much messed up. Also asks artillery liaison officer to get barrage which has now gone on to the * back on the enemy front trench.
- 5.10am *** and when Battn rushes forward to enemy trench again. For a second time they come under falling machine gun fire from the left flank. Many more casualties are suffered.
- 5.30am CO and two officers reorganise Bn in two lines extended and when this is securely completed we observed that our artillery have brought back the barrage on the enemy's trench.
A general advance is again made this time with the men of the front line joining from the *. The same cause viz MG fire from the left stops the attack at the enemy wire.
- 5.40am Bn finally withdrawn. Remaining officers and NCOs collected and instructed by CO to organise in 2 corps to reoccupy the assembly trench and to dig.
About this time the 7th Lincoln Regt arrives at about 700am; receives orders from Bge to make counter attempts. This was done but had no success.
During remainder of the day Staffords and Lincolns reorganise and dig in whilst the enemy put down a very heavy barrage on the position chiefly of 5.9s.
- 6pm 6th Dorsets advanced to take over position occupied by Staffords and Lincolnshires as far as the enemy wire when they had to withdraw also.
- 8pm CO receives notification that enemy were preparing for heavy counter attack down the Petres Valley. Ordered B Coy to ***. This was done in spite of casualties inflicted by enemy MGs.

24/4/17

- 4.00 am Battalion withdrawn to Railway Triangle being relieved by 7th Yorks.
The diary goes on to records the Battalion move to Beaudrecourt on the 25th. A fire occurred in one billet causing bombs and ammunition to explode "freely". This last page also lists casualties from the action of 21st to 23rd. Four officers and 26 Other ranks were killed, including Cowdell. 133 men were wounded and 58 missing.

[Scroll down for Images](#)

WAR DIARY

Army Form C. 2118.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.

(Erase heading not required.)

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
	22/4/18	7:25 p	Artillery Program received	
		7:50 p	Regulation calls to see C.O.	
		8 p	Artillery program issued to Coys.	
		8:27 p	Bn Hdq moves to C Coy Hdq in front line	
		8:30 p	Covering party B Coy sent out to cover working party York's	
			Started digging Assembly trenches	
		10 p	Women A Coy carry forward smoke bombs for special Coy P.E.	
		9:45 p	Gas projected into the wood west of Poivre.	
		10:30 p	C.O. goes to Bde Hdq for final arrangement as to liaison with 154 th Bde on the left. Return to Bn Hdq at 11:30 p	
		12 m	HQ tea issued to all men.	
	23/4/18	2 am	Coy's commence moving to assembly trenches. 2 nd Lt Scott	
			Coy's telephone wire from Bn Hdq to assembly trench & reports completion at 2:5 am.	
		3:30 am	Capt Fortin reports that all coys are in position in assembly trenches. C.O. reports this to Bde.	
		4 am	C.O. & Hdq move forward to assembly trenches leaving telephone operating staff to transmit messages from Hdq to Bde Hdq.	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
Vicinity ATT Co	23/4/18	4:35 am	Co inspect. Looking down who are all in position lying down & ready to advance. Men in excellent spirits.	
		4:45 am	Artillery barrage opened on a line 200 yards west of enemy trench.	
		4:47 am	First wave advances.	
		4:49	Artillery barrage lifts 200 yards. First wave close in behind it.	
		4:51	Artillery barrage lifts on to Enemy trench. First wave close in behind, arrives at Enemy wire & under falling on it from left flank.	
		4:55	A tug in support joins first wave. Most officers & all 3 legs either killed or wounded. Men hold on firmly until 5 am when they withdraw slowly having no leaders.	
		5 am	CO pushes forward & attempts to rally & reorganise the boys which are much messed up. Also asks Artillery Co. to get barrage which has now gone on to be drawn back on. The enemy front trench.	
		5:10 am	A shout is raised that Enemy are surrendering.	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
Vicinas ATTAS	22/4/17	6 pm	During elements of the day Stafford & Lincoln reorganized & dug in whilst the enemy put down a very heavy barrage on the position chiefly of 5.9's. 6 th Dorset advanced in order over position occupied by Stafford & Lincoln as far as the enemy were when they had to withdraw also.	
		8 pm	Co. received notification that enemy were preparing for heavy counter attack down the Paves valley.	
		1 pm	Placed D by to act as across the valley joining up north end of high bank with Luke & dig small strong point. This was done in spite of casualties inflicted by enemy snipers.	
	24/4/17	21 am	Battalion withdrawn to Railway Triangle being relieved by 4 th Gals.	
		3 pm	Major Burnett's personal from Bde Dep't upon ev. given to Bde Dep't for a rest.	
	25/4/17	1 am	oo. for relief issued to logs.	

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Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
Kenny ATTN	25	6 am 7.45 am 9.15 am 11.20 am 1.20 pm	<p>Bn relieved in Ry Trumper by 7th Suffolk & go to ATTN</p> <p>Breakfast -</p> <p>Marched to Station</p> <p>Entered at ATTN Station & detained at Sault, Laibett</p> <p>Marched to billet at Beaudricourt arriving 4.20 pm</p>	
Beaudricourt		6.45 pm	<p>Fire occurred in No 23 billet. Bomb & rifle ammunition exploding freely. When everything quiet personal efforts to get the fire under Major Burnett M.C. Slightly wounded by bomb splinter in right hand.</p> <p>Following casualties sustained in fight 21st</p> <p><u>KILLED</u>:- Capt. J. FOSTER, 2/Lt. S. G. WHITAKER, 2/Lt. R. V. COTTERELL, 2/Lt. F. S. CREAMY,</p> <p><u>WOUNDED</u>:- Lt. A. P. WHITEHEAD, 2/Lt. A. E. HOSBAND, 2/Lt. W. S. BROWN, 2/Lt. W. P. RHODES, 2/Lt. J. A. GREEN, 2/Lt. C. A. SCOTT,</p> <p><u>WOUNDED & MISSING</u>:- 2/Lt. A. S. BOURNE, 2/Lt. A. J. BROWNE, 2/Lt. J. S. STEPHENS,</p> <p><u>WOUNDED AT DUTY</u>:- Capt. G. B. LANGTON, 2/Lt. T. H. SMITH.</p> <p><u>OTHER RANKS</u>:- <u>KILLED</u>:- 26. <u>WOUNDED</u>:- 133. <u>MISSING</u>:- 58. <u>WOUNDED AT DUTY</u>:- 1.</p> <p>A5834 Wt. W4973 M687 750,000 8/16 D. D. & L. Ltd. Forms/C.2118/13. <u>TOTAL CASUALTIES</u>:- <u>OFFICERS</u> - 15. <u>OTHER RANKS</u>:- 218.</p>	Wapp