

17 Battalion Sherwood Forester

War Diary Extracts March 1918

(with thanks to Sherwood Foresters' museum)

NOREUIL SECTOR H.O. (C. 11.c.65.98.

17th.Situation. The enemy still remained very quiet and very little movement was seen by our observers.

18th.Operations. At 10.45 p.m. on the night 18/19th our engineer discharged gas projectors into the enemy lines. No retaliation by the enemy;

19thSituation Very quiet. Our observers reported considerable numbers of the enemy being carried away on stretchers, presumably casualties from our gas.

20thThe day was very quiet Practically no movement in the enemy's lines was reported by our observers Weather fine and bright."

21stAt 456 a.m. the enemy put down a very heavy barrage on the front line system, trench

mortars and field artillery continued the bombardment at an intense rate until about 945 am. At the same time, our battery positions were heavily engaged by the enemy's heavy and field artillery. At 5.05 a.m. communication by wire to Bde. H.Q. was broken; the only message that went through after that was one by pigeon timed about 6 am. reporting a heavy bombardment. At about 8 a.m. the shelling, which had been very largely gas, changed to H.E.

At about 10 a.m. the barrage was reported to have lifted on to the second system, i.e. it was behind the Battalion. Only 14 men of the Battalion escaped unwounded from the trenches and it appears from their reports that the enemy broke through on both flanks, and, coming round,behind the QUEANT-ECOUST railway cut off and completely surrounded the Battalion. This must have been between 9.30 and 10 a.m. Captain H.C. WRIGHT and Lieut. G.W. BLOODWORTH were wounded and escaped; all the other Officers are still missing, with the exception of 2/Lieut. J.L. MOY and 2/Lt. A.G.J. MELHUIISH who were reported killed.

Owing to this and the capture of all documents at Battalion Headquarters, no accurate or detailed account of the action is possible. During the evening a few men who were not in the trenches were collected by the Brigade H.Q.and sent up to man the Reserve Line of the Third System. The Support Line of the Third System was taken over by the 177th Infantry Brigade, who had been relieved in the firing line of

the Third System by the 40th Division.

Casualties, and appreciations by the Corps and Brigade Commanders are attached in the Appendix. [\[scroll down fro appendix\]](#)

NOREUIL SECTOR H.Q. at C.IIc.65.98 - 3rd DEFENCE LINE B.23.b.3.6. ,

22nd. The remaining men of the Battalion who had not been in the line were collected and sent up to the Reserve Line, 3rd System, on the right of MORY, with details from the rest of the Brigade.

Situation. 45 O.Rs were collected consisting of men returned from leave and courses etc. and sent tip to reinforce the 3rd Defence line under 2nd Lieut. SPATCHER.

The Transport moved back to COTIRCELLES in the early, morning of the 22nd. Wagons being parked on ground to the West of the village, it was again ordered to move to ground West of the AFLAINZEVILLE- AYETTE Rd.

23rd. Situation. The unit under Capt. QUIBELL took up a position on the high ground about B.23.c.2.8 and were not attacked again. '

24th. Move. The Transport moved to SENLIS on the night 24th and were joined at this place by 2nd Lieut. SPATCHER and 37 O.Rs.

25th. On the night 25/26th the Battalion moved from SENLIS to BAVINCOURT.

26th. The Battalion remained at BAVINCOURT during the 26th and moved to FIEFFES on the

27th.

[Scroll down for appendices A,B,C.](#)

R.B. RICKMAN, Major.
 Comdg. 7th (Robin Hood) Battn.
 (Sherwood Foresters) Notts. and Derby Regt.

APPENDIX "A"

Officers. O.Ranks.

Total Strength of Battalion March 1st 1918.	50	1040
<u>Total Fighting Strength</u> <u>on. Command.</u>	36	834
Bde. and Div. Employ.	2	55
T.M. Battery.		9
Leave.	4	25
Hospital.		26
Courses.	7	42
Depot Battalion.	1	34
2 Coy. A.S.C.		2
170 Tun. Coy. R.E. _____		13
	50	1040

Total Strength March 1st 1918. 50 1040 :

Increase.

Reinforcements.	31	
Rejoined. _____	1	17 1 48
	5	1088

Decrease.

Missing. 23 614

Killed.	1	2		
Wounded.	3	18		
Died of Wounds.		2		
Evacuated.		76		
England (Tour of Home Duty).		2		
England Sick.		1		
Base.	1			
Surplus Per	1	5		
Employment Base.		2		
England Comm		2		
To M.G. Coy. _____		4		
	<u>32</u>	<u>725</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>363</u>
Total Strength of Battalion Mar. 31 st 1918. 19				363
<u>Total Fighting Strength on Command</u> 12 189				
On detachment		<u>7</u>	<u>174</u>	
_____		<u>19</u>	<u>363</u>	<u>19</u> <u>363</u>

APPENDIX B

2/5th2/6th 7th SF. 470 Field Coy. R.E.

178 T.M.B.

I would like to have been the first to tell the Brigade personally how much I appreciated their efforts on 21st and 22nd March, but now that His Majesty The King and the G.O.C. Division have both inspected the Brigade and talked to them, I feel I cannot possibly add anything to what they have said in the way of praising their high fighting qualities.

It might be of interest to all to know that all my telephone lines to the 3 Battalions in the line were broken during the first 10 minutes of the bombardment, and beyond talking to the Signalling Officer of 2/6th Battalion, Lieut. HICKMAN, about 5.5 a.m. I had no communication whatever with them except as follows:-

A wireless message came in from 7th Battalion to say that their right and left front Companies reported they were being heavily bombarded at 6.30 a.m. A message by pigeon was sent off at 10.30 a.m. by 2/6th Bn. to say the enemy had broken through on both their flanks but they were still holding out. Three or four messages by runner were received from 2/5th Bn; the last one was timed 12 noon saying that Colonel GADD and 150 men were holding out in the Sunken Road between NOREUIL and LONGATTE and that the enemy had taken DEWSBURY and PONTEFRAC TRENCHES and was working round to his right.

There is no doubt that the Brigade delayed the enemy's attack long enough for reinforcements to be brought up - to stop it altogether would have been impossible.

It took the enemy 4 hours to advance 2,500 yards.

There were undoubtedly 4 Divisions if not 5 against us.

I only wish to add that I am prouder than ever of the Brigade and that I deeply regret the heavy losses incurred to all those gallant Officers and men who are killed, wounded or missing.

(Sd.) T.W. STANSFIELD, Brig.-Genl.,
Commdg. 178th Inf.Bde.
30.3.18.

1730/16.G.
30/3/18.

176th Inf.Bde. 59th Bn. M.G.G.
177th Inf.Bde. 6/7th R.Scots Fusrs.
178th Inf.Bde. Div. Train.

Appendix C

The following extract from a letter addressed to the Divisional Commander by Lieutenant-General Sir J Aylmer Haldane, K C B , D S O , Commanding Vi Corps is published for information

R.H.G. GORTON, Bt.Colonel, G.S. 59th Division.

Will you please convey to all ranks of your Division my admiration and thanks for the very gallant stand they made against overwhelming numbers of the enemy supported by a tremendous artillery.

The Division nobly did their duty on the right of Vi Corps and from all accounts that have reached me have inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy. I grieve for the heavy casualties among your gallant Officers, N C O's and Men but the 59th Division have the satisfaction of knowing that they did their duty in as trying circumstances as can possibly happen in war.