

2/5th Battalion Sherwood Foresters [Notts. and Derby Regt.]
Extract from Battalion War Diary held at NA Kew in WO95/3025

2/5th Battalion SHERWOOD FORESTERS.

Report on operation for night 20/21st March onwards

Reference Map 57 C. N. W. 2 1/10,000

In writing the account of the above action, difficulty is at once encountered, owing to the fact that all records including War Diary, Defence schemes, and Operation Orders were lost.

Indeed the only information available is that afforded by messages sent to the Brigade HQ's during the action, and the statements of the four men who were the only survivors.

On the night of March 20/21st, the 59th Division was holding the front line of the right flank of the 6th Corps round BULLECOURT. The 178th Inf. Brigade. was holding the right forward sector, with the 7th Sherwoods on the right front, 2/6th Sherwoods on the left front, and the 2/5th Sherwoods in support immediately N. of the village of NOREUIL, the latter under the command of Lieut. Col. H. R. GADD, M.C., with Major R. C. TRENCH as second in command.

DISPOSITIONS

Battalion HQ's in the sunken road running from NOREUIL to LONGATTE about C.9.d.8.5. The remainder of the battalion in the trenches and sunken road round about IGAREE Corner at C.10.C.6.9.

An attack by the enemy in force had been expected for some days past.

At about 4.30 a.m. on the morning of March 21st, the enemy commenced a heavy bombardment on the whole area with Gas Shells. Gas masks were immediately put on, and the Companies moved out to their stand-to positions:-

RIGHT FRONT:- 'B' Coy. to NOREUIL SWITCH round C.5.C.4.4.

LEFT FRONT:- 'A' Coy. to SYDNEY AVENUE round C.4.d.8.0.

SUPPORT COY:- 'D' Coy. to DEWSBURY TRENCH round C.10.B.7.4.

RESERVE COY:- 'C' Coy. to Sunken Road round C.9.d.8.5.

NARRATIVE

At 5 a.m. the enemy commenced a heavy bombardment with H. E.

The following messages were received at Brigade. HQ's.:

Message by runner from 2/5th Sherwoods sent off at 7.05 a.m.

"In communication with both front battalions, who report shelling general, but not very heavy AAA. All battalions are being gassed AAA Greater part of shelling going west of NOREUIL-LONGATTE Road AAA No sign of hostile attack as yet AAA"

Message by runner timed 8.30 a.m. *"Hostile shelling still heavy, but gassing has ceased AAA Casualties do not appear to be heavy, but this is uncertain AAA"*

2/Lieut Williamson, Liaison Officer with Bde. HQ's went forward and sent back the following message by runner, timed 9.45 a.m. *"Heavy shelling of front line 2nd System, apparently from QUEANT and HENDECOURT AAA NOREUIL Valley heavily shelled AAA No aeroplane activity, and no machine gun fire. So far as can be ascertained the enemy barrage has not yet lifted from the front line."*

Message from 5th Sherwoods timed 10.40 a.m., by runner states *"Enemy reported to be about C.11.a.1.5. Enemy barrage on PONTEFRACT, and DEWSBURY TRENCHES, and enemy advancing AAA Enemy also attacking near junction of ILKNEY SUPPORT, and HALIFAX AAA"*

Further unconfirmed reports state:- *"Enemy have penetrated DEWSBURY AAA Am manning NOREUIL-LONGATTE Road, and ready to form defensive flanks to the right"*

Message by runner from 2/5th Sherwoods timed 12 noon:- *"Situation as follows:- We are holding NOREUIL SWITCH from C.9.d.9.4. and road near Battalion HQ's. AAA Enemy have captured DEWSBURY and PONTEFRACT, and appear to be digging in AAA Have formed defensive flank down NOREUIL SWITCH from C.9.d.9.4. westwards. Enemy moving in large numbers along ridge C.17.C. AAA Am prolonging my line along road towards LONGATTE AAA Forces at my disposal estimated at 150. AAA"*

2/Lieut Williamson & th [sic – did he mean 7th] Sherwood Foresters returned to Bde. HQ's at 1pm. And reported:- *"At 10.15 when nearing the Battalion HQ's enemy creeping barrage lifted on to the NOREUIL-LONGATTE Road"* He remained at HQ's until 12 noon, and then returned by NOREUIL Village and Valley, at which time the enemy were already in the village.

GENERAL

The bombardment was apparently extremely heavy, commencing with gas shells and followed from 5 a.m. onwards with H.E.

The thickness of the fog made it extremely difficult for the men to see if the enemy were advancing, or whether our men were approaching.

The enemy appears to have pushed down the NOREUIL Valley in large numbers, and turning, to have attacked the Battalion on its flank.

Form information gathered it is certain that the Battalion fought most gallantly, and the last message from Lieut. Col. Gadd bears this out.

CASUALTIES

KILLED Officers 3

Major C. R. C. Trench
2/Lt. F. Walters
2/Lt. C. R. Brandeth

MISSING BELIEVED KILLED

Officers 1

Capt. R. J. Case

Other Ranks 2

WOUNDED & MISSING

Officers 3

A/Capt. H. Waterhouse
Lt. R. E. E. Groner
2/Lt. P. A. Murphy

Other Ranks 8

MISSING Officers 22

Lt/Col H. R. Gadd M.C.
Lt. P. S. Whiston
Lt. F. H. Sutherland
Lt. C. L. Wilkinson
2/Lt. A. H. Chambers
2/Lt. W. Hague

2/Lt. R. Stone
 2/Lt. H. E. Barker
 2/Lt. L. J. de Mauny
 2/Lt. S. E. Grayson
 2/Lt. G. A. Middlemiss
 2/Lt. H. Pickhall
 2/Lt. W. S. Allen
 2/Lt. A. O. Robinson
 2/Lt. C. M. Wright
 2/Lt. W. W. Hacking
 2/Lt. A. E. Silverwood
 2/Lt. F. E. Andrews
 2/Lt. A. J. Smith
 2/Lt. J. W. Jago
 Capt. Mearns [R.A.M.C.]
 Capt. A. C. Judd [Chaplain attd.]

Other Ranks 599

WOUNDED

Officers 2

Capt. T. Nadin [Bde. H.Q. Staff]
 Capt. [illegible] [Bde. H.Q. Staff]

Other Ranks 12

SURVIVORS

Other Ranks 4

Searching 'Soldiers who died in the Great War' by date and Regiment, shows in fact that 4 Officers and 104 Other Ranks of the 2/5th Sherwood Foresters were killed that day. The 4 Officers are named as Allen, Trench, Walters and Whiston. It cannot be determined of the other 'missing' men, how many were wounded, and how many taken prisoner. Of the 2/7th Sherwood Foresters on the same day, 13 Officers and 153 Other Ranks were killed.