

St Julien First Hand Accounts

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1/1 Herts Operational Order

SECRET

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OPERATION ORDERS No. 44

by

Lieut. Col. F. Page. D.S.O. Comdg. 1st. Bn. Herts. Regt.

Ref. Maps.:- St. Julien 1/10,000. July 29th. 1917.
Sheet 29 N.W.
Zonnebeke 21 N.E. 1.

1. Information. (a) The 5th Army is to capture the hostile trench systems east and N.E. of XPRES on "Z" day. (to be notified later).

(b) The XVIII Corps will capture the hostile trench system on its present front .N

Right Division..... 35th.
Left Division..... 51st.
Reserve Divisions.. 48th. (R) & 11th. (L.)

(c) The 36th. Division will attack at zero hour on Z day and will capture the German trenches on the frontage shown on attached map as far as the green line, which will be known as Cuthbert Trench when consolidated.

(d) The 33rd. Division (Prussians) is holding the area to be attacked by the 36th. Division. Its probable dispositions are, 1 Battalion 448th. Inf. Regt. and 2 Battalion 448th. Inf. Regt. in front line system; The same in the KITCHENER system and the same in LANGLAERE LINE. 480th. Inf. Regt. is said to be in the neighbourhood of POELCAPILLE .

(e) Appendix A shows the dispositions of Divisions and troops on flanks and dispositions of Units of the 36th Division.

(f) The objective of the 118th Inf. Bde. is the GREEN LINE . The attack on the green line will be carried out with :-

1/20th. Cheshires. on right. objective D.7.b.30.C.C. to D.7.a.5.a.5.3. both inclusive.
1st. Herts.. in centre . objective D.7.a.58.53. to C.6.d.3.1. both exclusive.
4/5th Black Watch. on left.. objective C.6.d.21 to C.6.d.20.15. both inclusive .
1/1 Cambs. will be in Brigade reserve near BORDER HOUSE. C.12 b.0680

The dividing lines between Battalions are shown on attached map.

(g) 3 machine guns of 118th. M.G. Coy. and 2 Stokes Mortars are allotted to the 1st. Herts. Regt.

2. ASSEMBLY. The Brigade will move into the assembly position on Y/Z night .

The 1st. Herts will leave Camp at 8.45 pm. and march via QUEENS ROAD - BRIDGE 2 - and overland track to assembly positions . No. 1 & No. 3 Coys. near IRISH PARK ; No. 2 & No. 4 Coys. and Battalion Headquarters to LA BELLE ALLIANCE and CONRY STREET .

Order of March :- No. 2, No. 4, H.C., No. 1, No. 3...
All movements by platoons at 100 yards interval.
The greatest care will be exercised when marching to the assembly positions. Every man is to know beforehand where he is going and there is to be no delay in getting into the available dugouts. No smoking or talking during the assembly and no movement after the assembly.

3. ADVANCE :- (A) At zero plus 1 hour 40 min. the 118th Inf. Bde will advance from their assembly position. Herts and Cheshires from the X line and Black Watch and Cambs from the Canal Bank.

Appendix B shows movement and barrages.

(b) The Herts. will arrive just west of the BLUE line at zero plus 2 hours 10 min. The further advance will be made so that the three attacking Battalions are on the east bank of the STEENBECK by zero plus 6 hours 10 min.

4. ATTACK :- The Battalion will attack in four waves No.1 Coy. (right) and No.2 Coy. (left), forming the first 2 waves, the two Coys. being in line, each on a two platoon frontage. No. 3 & No.4 Coys. will each provide 1 platoon as "moppers up". These platoons will follow the 1st wave of the leading Coys.

No. 3 and No 4 Coys (less 1 platoon each) each on two platoons frontage will follow and support No.1 & No.2 Coys. respectively.

1 machine gun will move with the rear platoon of No.3 Coy. 2 machine guns will move with the rear platoon of No.4 Coy.

The two Stokes/Mortars will follow the attack and take up position near No.3 & No.4 Coys. to fire on selected points in advance of CUTHBERT TRENCH.

5. OBJECTIVES :- Objectives of right Coys. D.7.a.58.53 to D.7.a.10.90.

Objective of left Coys. D.7.a.10.90. to C.6.d.65.35.

6. CONSOLIDATION Coys. will consolidate a line of platoon posts on our side of the crest line, No.3 & No.4 Coys. forming a support line 100 yards in rear of leading Coys. and covering the gaps in the line of posts.

No.1 & No.2 Coys. will push out Observation Posts over the crest and Lewis Gun Posts in or near the Captured German trench which will be filled in.

No.2 Coy. will form a strong post astride enemy trench about C.6.d.83.

Trench will be established with the CHESHIREs on the right near ABRE and the BLACK WATCH on the left near VANCOUVER.

Trenches will at first be dug 4' 6" deep by intensive digging. Afterwards joined up and deepened to 6' with fire step 4' 6".

7. AEROPLANE :- A contact aeroplane will fly over our lines during the attack and the leading infantry will light flares on the aeroplane dropping a white Very light or sounding a series of "A"s. on the klaxon horn or daylight signalling lamp. Flares will be lit in the bottom of shell craters or trenches by the foremost troops only.

8. COUNTER ATTACKS :- The main line of resistance will be the consolidated line of platoon posts (Cuthbert trench) which must be held. The support Coys. will if necessary assist to repel counter-attacks and regain the Observation Line.

9. MEALS :- Breakfast at assembly position at zero, it is hoped to issue hot tea and rum at the blue line and on Z/A night. Every man is to use the contents of his water bottles most sparingly as the supply of water will be difficult.

10. - S. O. S. :- If a counter-attack is made during the operations, a protective barrage will if still on increase

to intense ; If barrage has ceased it will open intense along the whole front.
S.O.S. Signal is 3 red and 3 green lights in rapid succession, either the grenade S.O.S. rockets or very lights.

11 - REPORTS :- Headquarters and forward station will probably be - Brigade Headquarters . CORNER COTT C.17.b.80. /35.

Brigade forward station..C.12.a.50.50.

Battalion Headquarters . C.11.d.75.80.

Battalion Forward Station C.12.c.99.
(Aid Post)..near Bn. forward Station)

Cheshire H.Q. C.11 d.85.50.

" " Forward Station C.12.d.12.40.

Black Watch H.Q. C.11.a.60..60.

" " Forward Station C.12.a.15.50.

Camb. H.Q. C.12.a.75.85.

Re H.Q. of the 1st Bn. Herts. Regt.
During the advance Battalion forward station will move with the leading LEFT platoon of No.1 Coy.
It is the duty of every Officer and N.C.O. to report the exact position of his command to his immediate superior on the completion of every move.

Capt. & Adjt.
1st. Bn.Herts. Regt.

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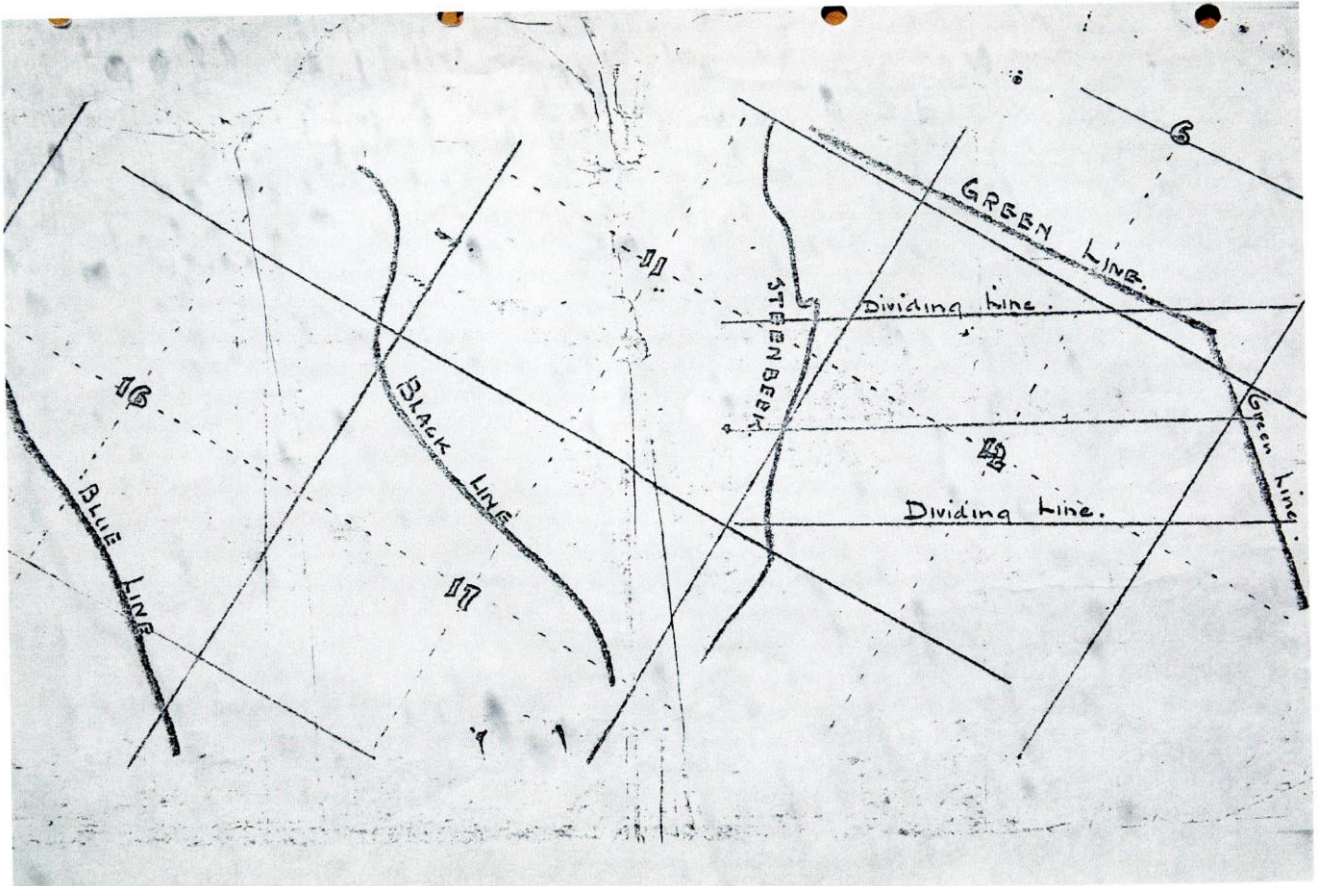
No. 1	to O.C. No.1 Co.
No. 2	" " " 3 "
No. 3	" " " 3 "
No. 4	" " " 4 "
No. 5	" Signalling Officer.
No. 6	" Commanding Officer.
No. 7	" Medical Officer.
No. 8	" 4/5th Black Watch.
No. 9.	" 1/6th Cheshires.
No.10	" Transport Officer.
No.11	File.

Dispositions of 39th, 51st, & 55th Divns.

<u>XVIII Corps.</u>		<u>XIV Corps.</u>	
<u>51st Div.</u>	<u>39th Div.</u>	<u>55th Div.</u>	
153. IB. 152. IB.	117th I. B.	116. Bde.	166. IB. 165. IB
- 1/8 Argl. 1/5 Sfs. 16. RB. 17. N&D.	14 Hts. 13 Ssx. 10. Lps.	-	-
- 1/8 Sfs. 1/8 Gdns. 17. KRR.	16 " 11 Ssx. 12 Ssx. 1/5 Lcs.	-	-
<u>154 Bde.</u>	<u>118th. Inf. Bde.</u>	<u>164 Bde.</u>	
4 Sfs. 9th. R. Sets.	4/5 BW. 1/1 Herts. 1/6 Ches.	2/5 LF. 1/4 NL.	
4 Gdns. 5th Argl's.	- 1/1 Caubs. -	1/8 Lps. 1/4 R.L.	

Dispositions of 1/1 Herts.

3 platts. No. 2	{	— — — —	}	2 Platts No. 1
1 Platt No. 4		— — — —		1 Platt No. 3
2 platts No. 3	{	— — — —	}	2 Platts No. 1
3 platts No. 4		— — — —		3 Platts. No. 3
		— — — —		Bn. H.Q.



1/1 Herts Battalion War Diary

31-7-17 [The Battles of Ypres 1917 - the Battle of Pilkem]. About 3.50am the Bn moved forward in 4 lines behind the 116th & 117th Inf. Bdes. east of the river STEENBEEK. Up till this time the casualties had been very slight indeed but as the Bn advanced from the STEENBEEK toward the LANGEMARCK line (the Bn objective) casualties grew heavier from sniper and machine gun fire. However the Bn continued advancing. About half way to the objective some of No.3 Coy came upon a German strong point which they gallantly charged, capturing or killing most of the garrison and sending the remainder back as prisoners. On reaching the enemy wire this was found to be practically undamaged (except in one place) & very thick. 2/Lieut Marchington [Eric William MARCHINGTON, MC] & a handful of men of No.3 Coy got through the only gap and got into the enemy trench & killed a lot of Germans.

The remainder of the Bn, being unable to get through the wire and suffering severe casualties from enfilade MG fire & the Germans making a strong counter attack from our left flank about this time, had to fall back having suffered exceptionally heavy casualties. The remnants of the battalion subsequently dug themselves in in line with the 1st Cambes Regt. on the west side of the STEENBEEK.

Casualties to Officers were: Lt. Col. F. Page D.S.O. [Frank PAGE. DSO & Bar], Captain S.H. Lowry M.C. [Sidney Henry LOWRY, MC], Captain A.R. Milne [Alexandra Richard MILNE], 2/Lts Gallo [Antonio Marie GALLO], Secretan [Reginald Herbert SECRETAN], Scott [Cecil SCOTT] & Macintosh [Eric MACINTOSH] killed. Lt Lake [Frank Gilbert LAKE], 2/Lts Walthew [Frederick Selby WALTHER], Thompson [Wilfred John THOMPSON] & King [Sydney or Simmonds KING] missing. Lt Head [Basil William HEAD] & 2/Lts Hardy [Robert L. HARDY] & Francis [Wilfred Frederick FRANCIS, MC] wounded & missing. Captain Fisher [Lionel Robert D'Arcy FISHER, MC], Captain C. Charles [John James Percival CHARLES, MC] RAMC, & 2/Lts Marchington [Eric William MARCHINGTON, MC], Edwards [Ronald Irving EDWARDS, MC], Gilbey [George Harold Yates GILBEY, MC] & Ritchie [Kenneth James RITCHIE] wounded.

Estimated casualties to the other ranks were 29 killed, 5 missing believed killed, 132 missing, 68 wounded & missing, 223 wounded & 2 died of wounds, making a total of 459 casualties to other ranks. Died of wounds; Officers 2, OR's 6. Missing; Officers 9, OR's 120. Wounded; Officers 8, OR's 180.

THE TERRITORIALS' SACRIFICE.

MEN OF HERTS WHO TOOK ST. JULIEN.

REMNANT GETS BACK.

From W. BEACH THOMAS, War Correspondent, Headquarters, France, Tuesday.

The highest sacrifice in the third battle of Ypres was perhaps paid by the Hertfordshire Regiment, who with other Territorials as gallant as themselves, took St. Julien and pushed forward deep into the enemy's country beyond.

I have heard no more splendid or moving tale of gallant men going out to death and glory since the war began, not even that of the Lancashires, told the other day. The achievement of some of the same troops in the final capture of Thiéval, St. Pierre-Divion, and the Schwaben redoubt a year ago went almost unrecorded. It would be a double injustice if this second and yet more heroic venture also were left unrecorded, and it is vital to a true history of the war, for the impression has grown that we at one time lost St. Julien. We never lost the whole of it. Some of the gallant men who took it always clung to their ring of posts.

A doctor had his dressing station there on August 1 and discussed with a wounded German officer, whom he most carefully tended, the probability of their being taken prisoner, and the German, not without cunning, suggested that if the doctor took extra pains with him, bandaged him well, and gave him plenty of rum, he would ensure him a pleasant captivity. But the doctor is still working with us and the German is still our prisoner.

We may regard St. Julien as the centre of the battle. We took most prisoners here—nearly a thousand—and most guns—15. In St. Julien itself we inflicted the heaviest losses, and nowhere did the fighting so ebb and flow. Its intricacy was such that the Germans shot down scores of their own men in their rage to drive these gallant Territorials back.

TANKS' FEAT.

I will briefly pass over the early part of the fighting. Hot though it was, the Germans surrendered easily in the front trenches, and the first check came in front of Alberta Farm, not far from the village. A wide band of wire was sprung by our shells, but a tank, greatly damaged, slid through the edge of our barrage and as deliberately as if on sentry-go patrolled up and down the wire till it was fattened, at the same time driving the garrison into their dug-outs. It was perhaps the most useful tank feat of the day, but it was far beyond this feat that the greatest infantry adventure began.

At about ten o'clock, after St. Julien was captured and, indeed, the core of the battle won, the German shelling with 5.9 howitzers grew hotter than many officers had ever seen, and it had varied effects. In front of one little knot of men dodging shells under very cool and expert leadership there broke such an explosion that all believed a land mine had gone up. But in spite of it all—the shock and continuous bursting of this noisiest of all shells—the men felt quite safe and comfortable in their shell-hole. At one of them said, when they got out of it after the earth had stopped shaking, they found that the land mine was a dump of 5.9 shells ex-

LAST OFFICER FALLS.

Leading men all the time, but never checked, these troops pushed on a good 1,200 yards to the next line of German trenches. One officer was wounded and set on fire by a fragment of shell which exploded some S.O.S. lights in his pocket. He put out the fire by rolling over and over in the mud. The wound he disregarded, and carried on as before, but without his signals and a good part of his clothing. Such was the conduct of regiments reduced in number, but not in spirit.

The men reached the approaches to a trench defended by 400 yards of uncut wire six yards deep and running along a contour steep by machine guns from the left, front and flank. Still they did not stop. Some made their way round, some hacked at the wire and forced a way over it. They took the trench, with a good number of prisoners, and began to consolidate.

Somewhere about this time the last of the officers in the Hertfordshire Regiment fell, and the sergeant, himself severely wounded, took command. In front of this occupied trench was a shallow ditch manned by a considerable garrison of the enemy, who now threw up their hands and came forward to give themselves up, when the sound of machine guns was heard away in the rear of the Territorials, and both German and British saw more or less what had happened. These regiments had advanced almost alone.

A wide space on one flank was occupied by just four men, and ground now far in the rear was still held by the enemy. Very much the same thing was develop-

ing on the other flank. The surrendered prisoners, suddenly appreciating the position, took up arms again, and even prisoners in their midst attempted to fight. The Territorials were more than surrounded, if one may say so, for they were also mixed up with the enemy, but they fought on. They shot down scores of the enemy in front, especially among those who had taken up arms after surrendering, and they dealt with a full-dress model counter-attack, carried through to the letter, according to the new German formula, in waves some 150 yards apart. They had even time to see some German field guns move forward under the lee of a hill to their right front.

At last in the afternoon, when it was found that so few men from the troops on the flank had got through and machine guns continued to fire from the rear, they decided to fight their way back, and they fought back quite undefeated, though every officer was gone and most of the N.C.O.s.

HUNS SHOOT HUNS.

Among the men still with them was a padre, a chaplain of many fights, who cheered them on and at the end, being the last man to cross a little stream, carried, and when he could no longer carry dragged, a wounded man to safer quarters a mile or more in the rear. But this was later.

As they struggled back towards St. Julien a group of Germans who had thrust through from their flank held up their hands in surrender and called out for mercy. It happened that at the same time the German counter-attack from the opposite flank had made some progress, and their men and these men, seeing their fellows surrendering, ruthlessly turned machine guns on their own kin. No more ghastly plight could be imagined. If they surrendered their own men shot them. If they took up arms they proved themselves traitors as well as enemies and were shot down

COOL HEADS THROUGH ALL.

Nor was that all. The German artillery about this hour had received orders to barrage the whole field, and 5.9 shells, mixed with some high-velocity shells, fell indiscriminately on prisoners, on German counter-attackers, and on our troops fighting homewards. In the worst of the confusion our men kept a clear head, and at last, thanks in great measure to the skilful assistance of their friends in reserve, fighting all the way but now almost without ammunition, they came through. Some few of these supporting companies occupied a small hillock and set up in position as many as 13 machine and Lewis guns. These raked the Germans both on the left and right front and did great havoc. Though our losses were perhaps heavier here than at any part of the 16-mile battle front, the enemy's losses were probably on yet a greater scale.

I write especially of a regiment known to me personally better than any regiment in the Army, and one whose words with special care in writing of friends. The fight was one of the stoutest fights of the war, worthy of the Guards at the first Battle of Ypres. The men were "Hertfordshire Guards" indeed, and their homes should ring with their story of sacrifice and valour.

HUMOUR AMID HORROR.

In the midst of it all, at the very worst, many of these Englishmen among the Hertfordshires and their neighbours never lost their native humour. There were in the foremost line reached a number of undamaged concrete dug-outs with very small bolt-holes, like wig-wams, through which you must crawl to enter. From one of these the lurking enemy was very loath to come out, so a soldier hid out a bomb and said "You'll divide this among you if you don't come out quick!" His language, if not just, was understood. It was a little farther back, but in a hot place, that the full contents of a tarpaulin roof, sagged in a thunder-shower, were tipped down a soldier's neck by the agency of a big shell fragment. All he said was, "Sergeant, can you tell me what it feels like to have sunstroke?" Such men who allow themselves to be called heroes or any such high term, and dislike to permit emotion, but in talking over a battle Englishmen have the defensive habit of dwelling only on any slipshod details they can rescue from the welter.

In talking of this battle they will all tell you of a certain German officer who came out from his concrete box wearing white gloves and smoking the stumpy of a very stout cigar, and gave much amusement by telling his captors in good English that he was an officer and must be treated with all respect. So, like the men who fought, the onlooker must not underlie the heroism or sacrifice, but does not the less remember that both were there.

Some day the names and deeds will go hand in hand down the path of glory. It was a Cheshire officer who said to a neighbour in hospital, "they would like to know in Stockport how well their boys had done," and so feels every Territorial soldier.

British Library Reference
M.L. 20 b

Private F V Burch account

17/1/19

Dear Mrs Lee,

I hope you will not think badly of me for not answering your lovely letters before, but really my time seems so full that I have had to neglect my correspondence. Miss Rendell certainly did wonder why you had not answered her letter, but was sure you had a good reason for it. We are both deeply sorry that it was the death of your sister-in-law, and pray that God in all his goodness has given you strength to bear this additional sorrow. (*A reference to Aunt Bessie who had passed away in December 1918*)

I am so pleased that you liked the photo group so much, the dear old Dad has gone nearly white-haired since it was taken but Miss Rendell and myself have not altered in the least.

Now to the best of my ability I will tell you about that fateful July 31st. Some of the things that happened I have forgotten, but the majority are of course impressed on my memory. You know of course that the 6th Cheshires and 1st Herts were brigaded together, so that by reading what my regiment did you will know what Captain Lee's did.

Our Brigade had to go over last of all in the Division as our objective, called the Langemark Line, so that we had to pass through the first two Brigades on our way. At about 4.15 am we received our order to go over the top, and away we went. The sight which met our eyes I shall never forget, but it was also one which I cannot describe. All went well with us until we reached the half-way line, where we had to rest two hours just behind a ridge, after which we had a rather warm time, but with only two casualties. We had to take Kitchener's Wood which the Germans were shelling heavily but we got through all right. A little further on we came to the River Steenbech which we crossed with only two more casualties although we were swept with heavy machine gun fire from the right flank. From that point we had to advance in open order, the Black Watch on the left, Herts in the centre, Cheshires on the right, and as I was in charge of the extreme right section in our regiment, I was in touch with the Cheshires all the way afterwards. Our next job was to capture the village of St Julien, the Herts and the Cheshires taking a half each, and it is needless to say that we got it. But now our real task was in front of us, the taking of the Langemark Line, and we saw that it was a stiff task for we had to advance over 500 yards of completely flat open country and the trench was in the form of a semi-circle, simply packed with Germans. We were immediately subjected to severe machine gun and rifle fire, and to make matters worse our own barrage was falling all amongst us and not touching the Germans. But even then all might have been well if one single British aeroplane had been above us to see what was happening. We all looked in vain though and kept on pegging away.

Hundreds had fallen or were falling, but we managed to get within 50 yards with every officer hot and almost every NCO. It was just before that that I saw your son lying in a shell hole, a shallow one, but strict orders had been issued that we were not to stay and assist wounded men as it would hinder our advance, so I had to go on. When we found we hadn't enough men to continue, we thought that the best thing to do was to get into shell holes and wait for the supports to come up, but on looking behind us to see where they were we could see only Germans – they had got in behind us and cut us off. Just at that point the order 'every man for himself' was passed down the line so we started trying to get back, at first in a group but men were falling so fast that it soon became ones and twos. At one place there were three of us in a small shell hole and we decide to try for one farther back. The other two were killed and I reached the hole alone, almost falling on top of your son who said 'hello corporal' straight away.

I set to work to see what was wrong with him and found he had been hit in the small of the back in the region of the right kidney. The wound had stopped bleeding but I could see he was badly hit internally and by the shape of the wound it was shrapnel. He told me he felt no pain whatsoever but on looking into his face I saw he was too far gone to feel anything so I cut his equipment off and removed a khaki covered steel plate which the shrapnel had penetrated, and then made a pillow for his head out of his respirator so that he could lie as comfortable as possible. Then I saw that he had begun to write a letter to his mother – it was on the back of a torn photograph of

German trenches taken by one of our aeroplane observers. He finished the letter but the latter half was unintelligible and I only glanced at it as I put it in my pocket. I cannot remember any actual sentences but I know it was to the effect that he was thinking of you at the time, that he had done his bit and you were to have the M.C. he had won at Ypres a month before. About his wife and child I saw nothing. I did not know he was married until I received your letter in Germany, but he may well have put a message for them in the part I could not read through. If I had had the time I might have been able to decipher it. He told me to take the little gold ring off his little finger (I remember it was so tiny it would not go on me, so I put it in my purse and if I remember rightly it had the date 1915 on the inside). Next he asked me for a drink and when he had had that he told me to take his revolver, field glasses and an electric torch, and also a couple of correspondence books which were in his pack, and send them all with the ring and his letter to you.

He then asked me if we had taken the final objective as it seemed to be so much quieter, which it was – I told him we were waiting for reinforcements to come up first. More than once he asked me for a drink, and repeatedly said he felt no pain. I don't think he did but he was so brave I could have cried over him. While I was with him the Germans singled us out, and one big shell burst within a foot of my head, but by a miracle we both escaped. Bullets flew all round us but we were unhurt by them, and my belief to his day is that your son was hit by one of our own shells. So many were – the Germans couldn't hit us.

After I had been about a quarter of an hour with him I looked down to see that he had gone – and so peacefully that I had not noticed it. After that I tried the almost impossible task of getting back and, getting into one hole after another, I at last found a comrade in the shape of a lance corporal of the Cheshires. We stayed together shooting Germans all around us until four of them got quite close without our noticing them. We immediately jumped out after them to make a fight for it and actually reached them before we saw there were scores of Germans lying in shell holes all around us. The Cheshire with me took the rifle out of my hands almost before I knew it and I remember I laughed and he and I shook hands. The Germans (they were Saxons) were jolly decent and only took your son's revolver from me, but everything else I had to leave behind except the ring and letter in my pocket. I saw a few more men captured round about but you will be pleased to know that none of us put our hands up.

We were escorted through 'no man's land' and along a trench to some headquarters. Here an officer who spoke excellent English was joking with us so, being afraid everything would be taken off me, I asked his advice with regard to the letter and the ring. He was full of sympathy and said he would see that you got them within three weeks if I left them with him. I could see that he was speaking the truth so I gave them to him, writing a letter to you myself to go with them. Your address I memorised and I was not likely to forget it. We had to be moved quickly after that as our gunners began knocking the whole place to pieces with high explosives and my belief is that he must have been killed because I know he meant to keep his word, that is probably the reason why the ring and letter did not reach you.

These are all the facts I can at present think of Mrs Lee of what happened on 31st July 1917, and I tender you my deepest sympathy on losing such a brave tender son and to Mrs Jack Lee on losing

a husband who was loved so much by his men. All that I have written is true, not just to show you what I did, but to tell you everything that happened as it happened, for your son's men went through it as well as myself. A man of the 6th Cheshire whose name I have forgotten but who lives near you was captured on the same day as myself, and he told me all about Captain Lee, saying how he was well loved by his men and considered the best officer in the battalion.

Any questions you like to ask I shall be only too pleased to answer to the best of my ability, and please do not think you are causing me any trouble. I am sorry I cannot give you a definite date just now for my visit to Wilmslow as I am awaiting orders for my discharge but be assured I shall manage to see you during February.

With sincere regards from Miss Rendell and myself,

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

F.G.Burch 1st Herts Regiment

PS I may mention that only one sergeant, 2 corporals and 56 men out back out of my regiment and only one corporal and myself with the men were captured. Everyone else (including officers) were killed.

Nancy was left as a widow and mother at the age of 19. As if this wasn't enough for her and her father to bear, her surviving brother Ralph Erskine who had joined the Royal Flying Corps, was killed on New Year's Day 1918 when his Sopwith Camel was shot down behind enemy lines over Italy. The previous March, Ralph had married Jane Lennox Higgins, known as 'Lennie'; a mere two weeks after Ralph's death, Lennie gave birth to his son, Ralph Barrie Erskine, always known as Barrie. Barrie subsequently became great friends with my father and was best man at my parents' wedding in 1941. But to complete the cycle of tragedy in the Erskine family, two years later he too was killed in action during the Allied invasion of Tunisia.

The losses and associated suffering in the Lee and Erskine families were typical of those suffered all over Europe in the Great War. A century later, Europe is peaceful but we must all remain vigilant and ensure such conflicts never happen here again. I hope this record makes a small contribution to the understanding of the stoicism and suffering of that generation.

Private Harold Martin account

My most vivid memory of the First World War was the way I spent my 20th Birthday, the 31st July 1917, the opening day of the 3rd battle of Ypres. After over 46 years the details of that day are still clear in my memory.

I was no. 9223 private H. Martin, 1st Battalion Herts Regt. We were in the 39th Division and our Brigade consisted of the 1st Cambs, 1st Cheshire, 4th Black watch and the 1st Herts.

On the opening day of this battle the Division's target was a ridge, some distance beyond St. Julien. The two other brigades were to attack first, one passing through the other + we were to advance last + capture the objectives.

However, we started about 10pm from C Camp near Brandhoek, between Poperinge + Ypres. We were fully loaded, field pack except for overcoat and personal belongings, rifle, 170 rounds of ammo, 2 Very lights in one trouser pocket + two Mills grenades in the other pocket, 3 days rations and 1 shovel pushed down my back (which the sergeant said would save the back of my head). Also I was only about 5'3" tall and far from physically strong, it was quite a job carrying this lot.

The journey to our support lines was eventually accomplished. The German shelling was very heavy + at certain points we had to make a mad rush (6 at a time) in between two salvos.

The attack started at 3.50 am. The noise was terrific. We in due course began to move forward behind the other two brigades. The ground was in a terrible state owing to the shelling. However, we struggled on and just before we reached the River Steenbeek, which was our starting point, the sergeant said,

"Have you had your rum ration, Martin?"

"Not yet Sergeant."

"Well, take a swig at this." And he gave me the jar. I had a good drink of this, no doubt just what I wanted.

We got to the Steenbeek, just to the left of St. Julien and about 2 sections of our platoon got into a tremendous shell hole for cover. While we were waiting in this shell hole, the Colonel and Adjutant paid us a visit. Shortly after this both these gentlemen were killed, in fact I was told later that every officer in the Battalion was lost early on and two days later the Padre led out the remains of that fine Battalion, 60 men.

But back to my memory. Our turn came to advance. We were being fired on from a pillbox directly in front of us. I was next to the Sergeant and just before we got to it, 2 Germans ran towards us and I ran away. The sergeant shot one and he fell almost at my feet. I fired at the one running away. The other one, the Sergeant took prisoner.

We continued to move forward. My section's job was to clear the Germans from a house on a road running diagonally across our front. We were approaching this house when a terrific explosion almost destroyed it. Someone had done the job for us.

We crossed the road but after about 200 yards we came to rows and rows of barbed wire. I got into a shell hole not very far from the ridge (our objective) + was joined by a pal from my home town (Bishops Stortford). We waited some time. Everything seemed so quiet. He said,

"We must get out of this or we will be captured. Me, being stupid, said,

"No! I have got so far, I'm not going back again." He stayed some time + then, as I was still stubborn, he went. How long I hung on I don't know, but at last, not seeing anyone, I decided to retrace my steps.

Back I went over the road again and up two fields. I was fired on but luck was with me, and I found the Cambridgeshires digging in. I joined them, pulled my shovel out and laid it (ready for digging) on the ground, turned round to look at something + lo and behold my shovel had gone.

With my entrenching tool I scooped a hole out, sat in it for cover + a shell must have exploded very near, it so stunned me I started running towards the Germans. A Captain in the Cambridgeshires called me back.

+ told me to get to a dressing station just behind. I said,

"No, I'm alright Sir." And he said,

"Do as you are told, look at yourself." I looked down and was covered in blood.

I went to the Dressing station + they put a dressing on my face. (Luckily it was a very small wound) then the Corporal said,

"Can you walk?" I said,

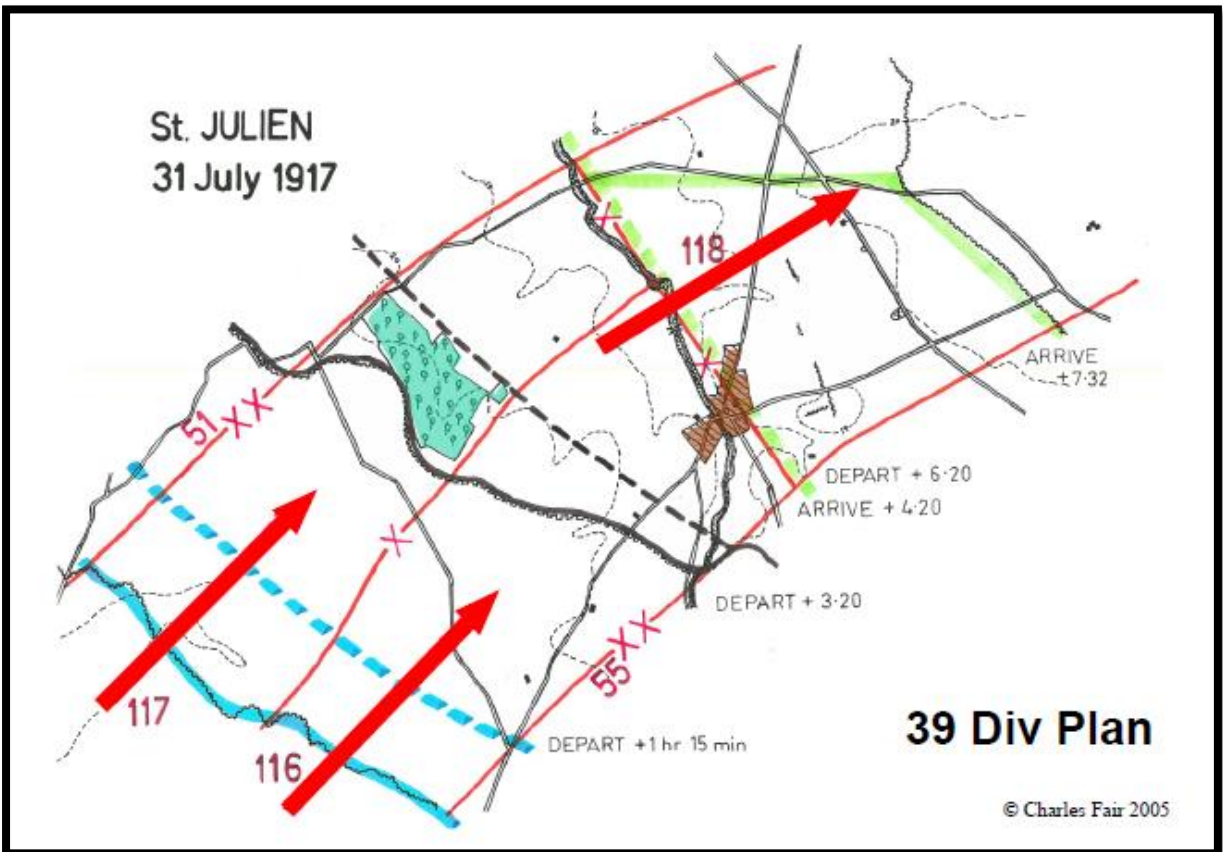
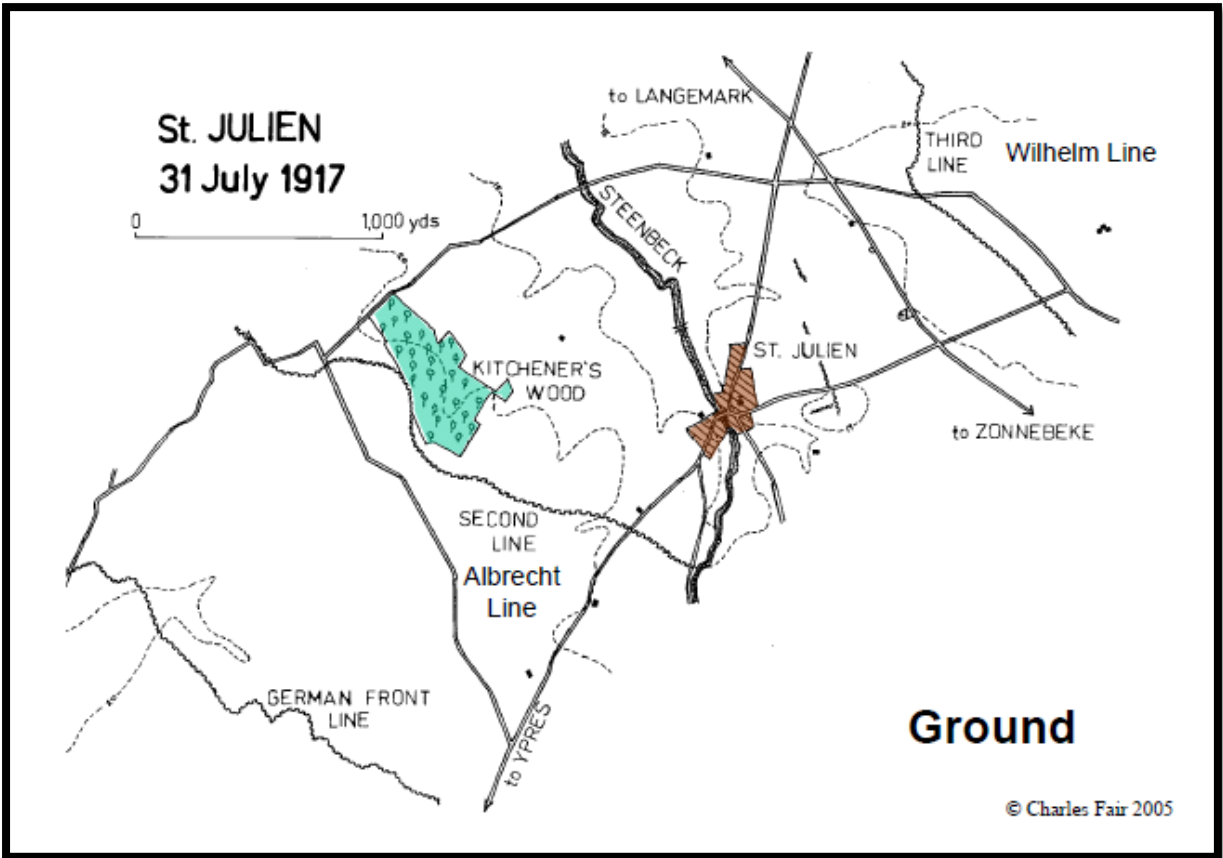
"Yes!"

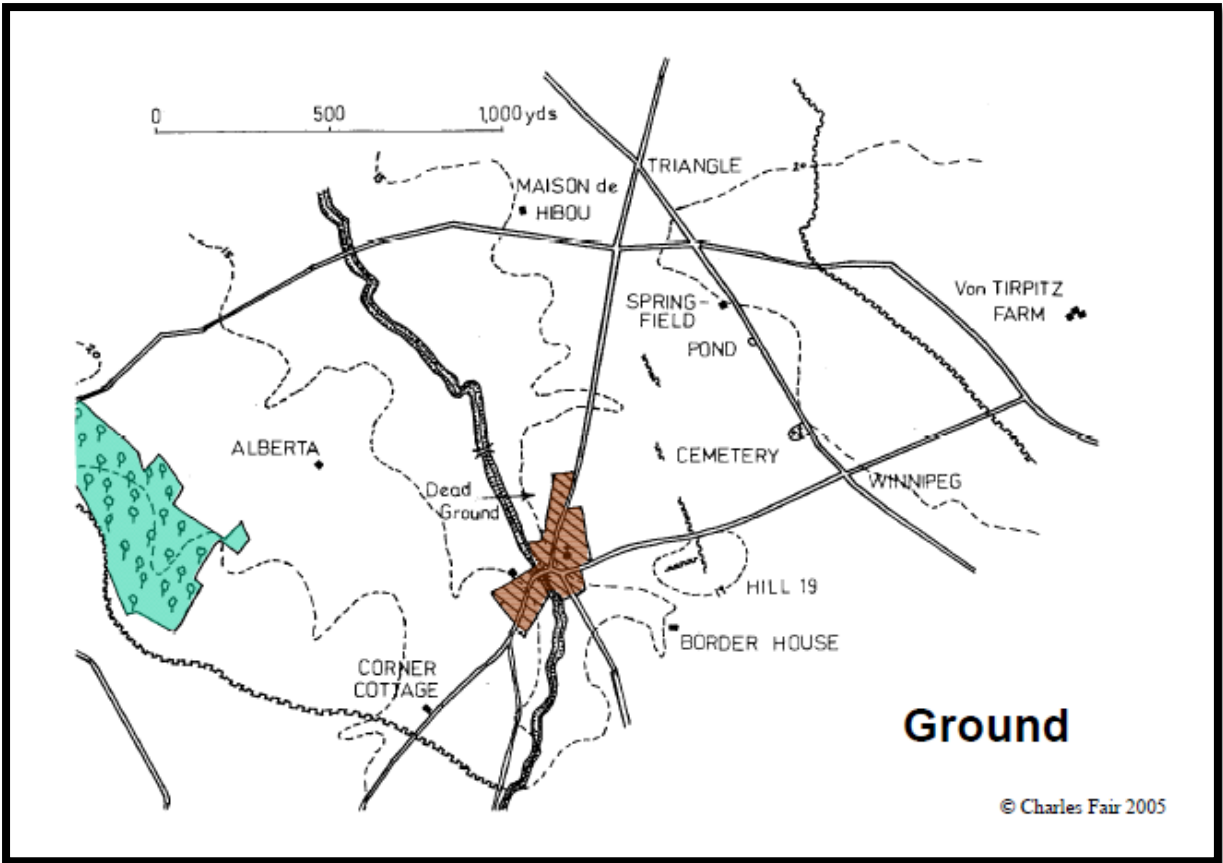
"Then get down that road as quick as you can, the news has just come through that a counter attack is expected any minute."

I gave my rifle to a man who had lost his and down that road I went. It seemed a very long way. Just before I got to the canal bank my leg started hurting very badly. I looked down + saw a hole through my left trouser leg. A few steps and I was in the Casualty Clearing station. A piece of shrapnel had lodged under my knee cap. Loaded onto a lorry + taken to Poperinge where I was operated on two days later.

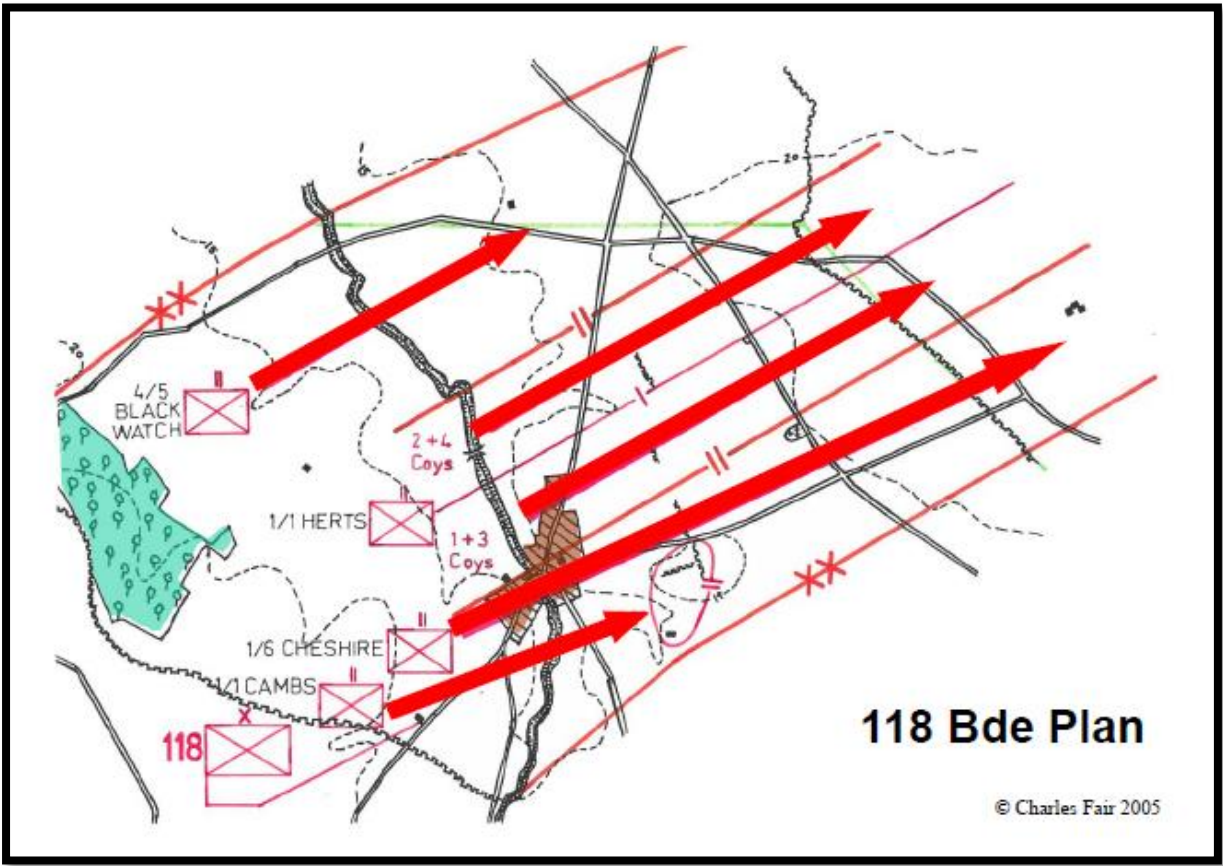
So ended my twentieth birthday.

Charles Fair Logistics and Timings



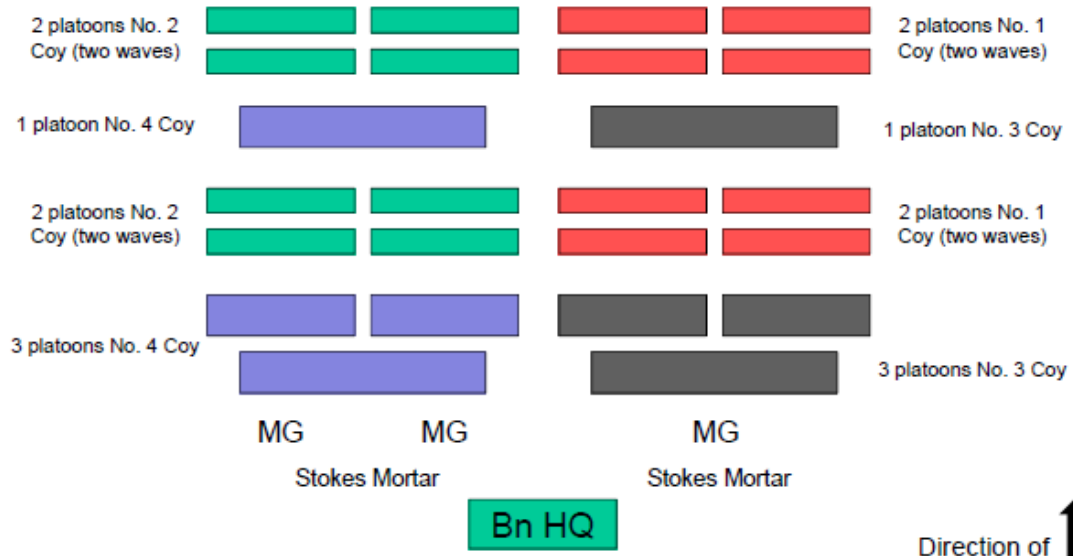


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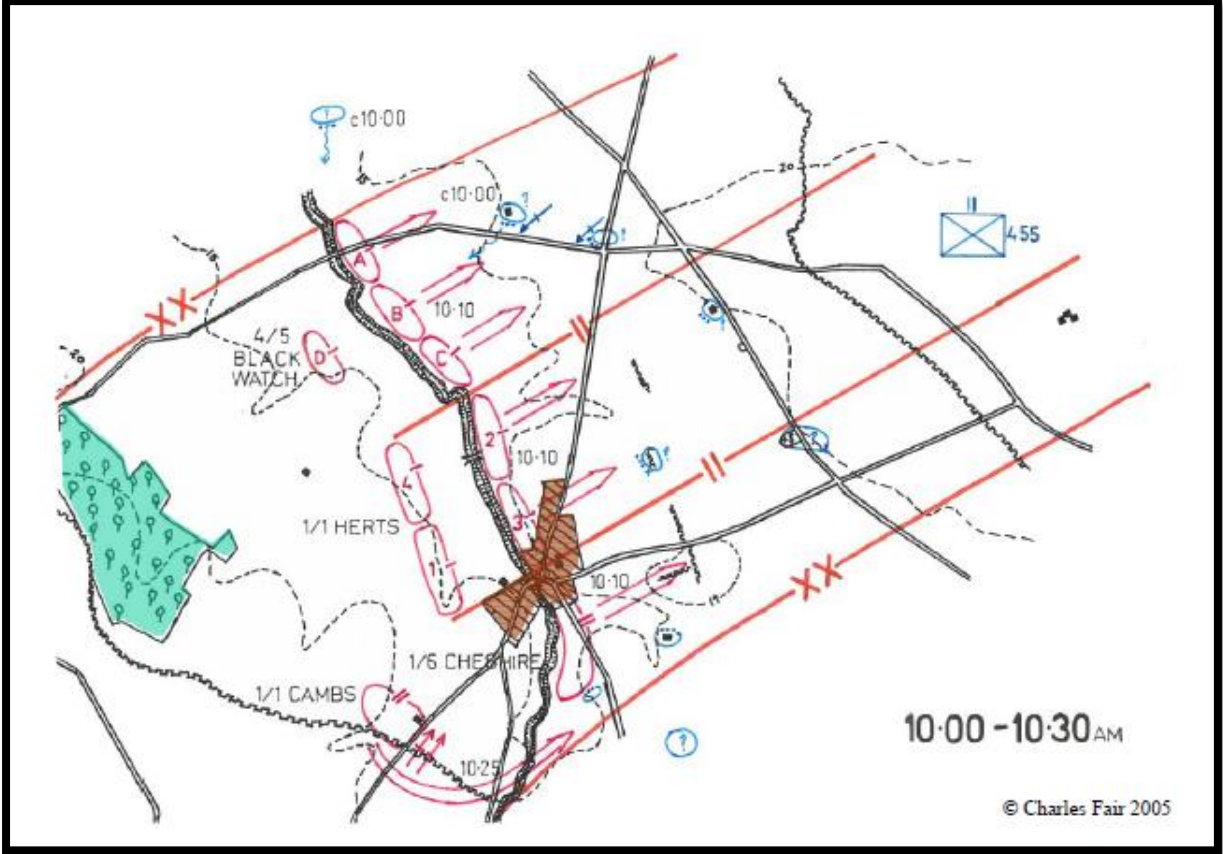


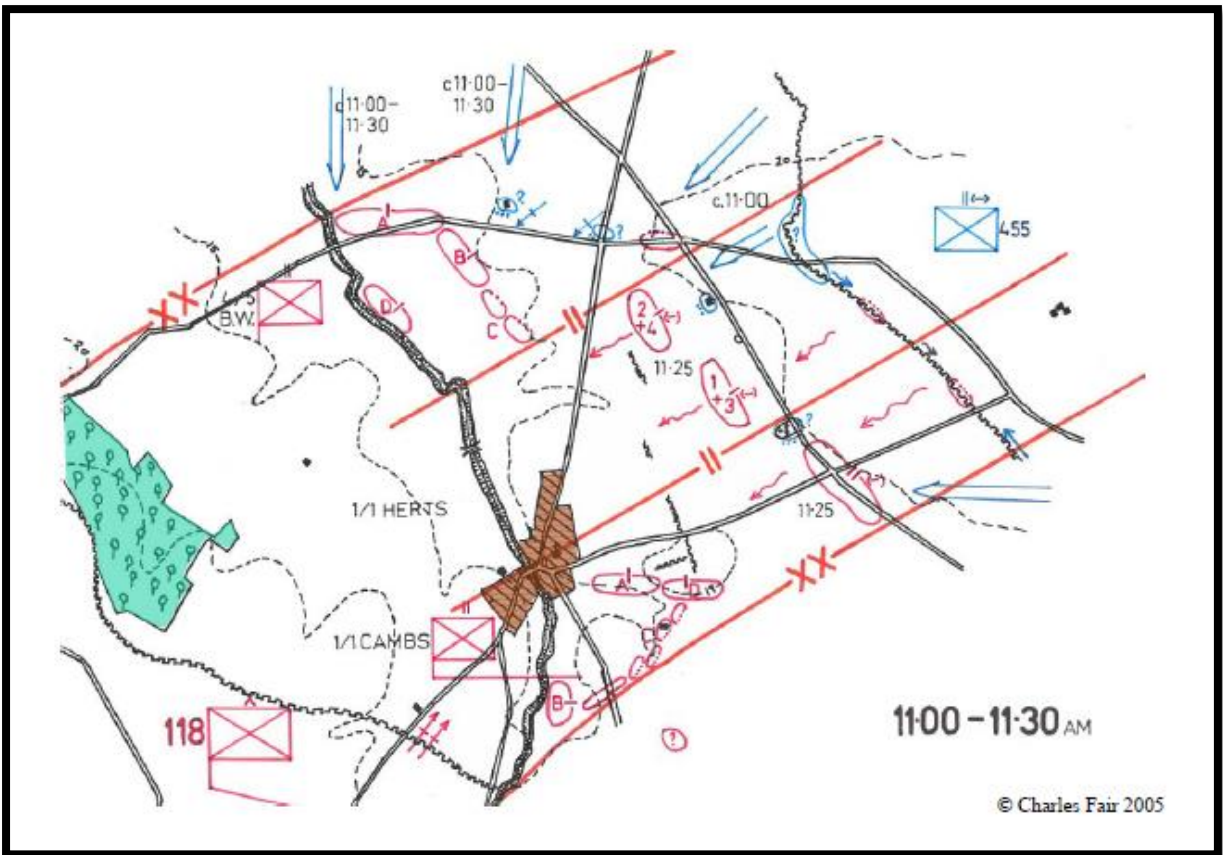
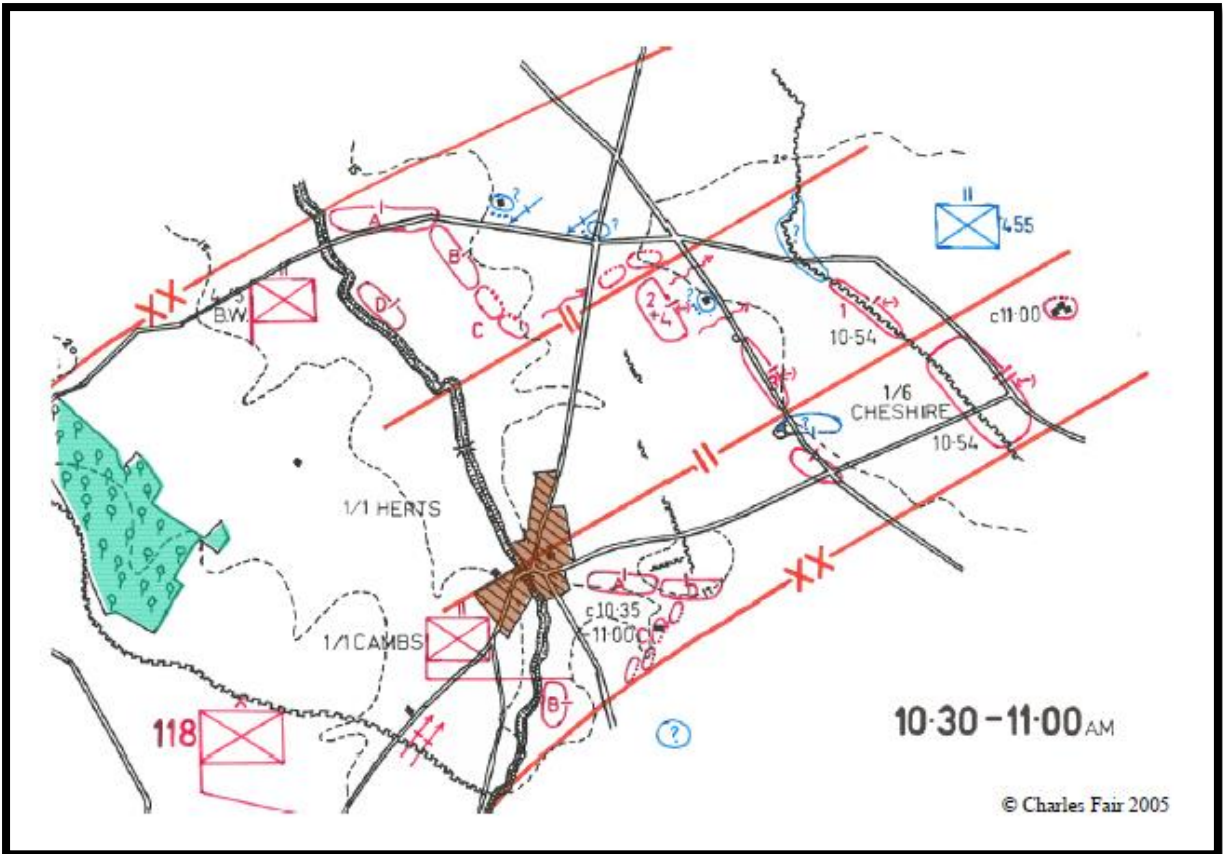
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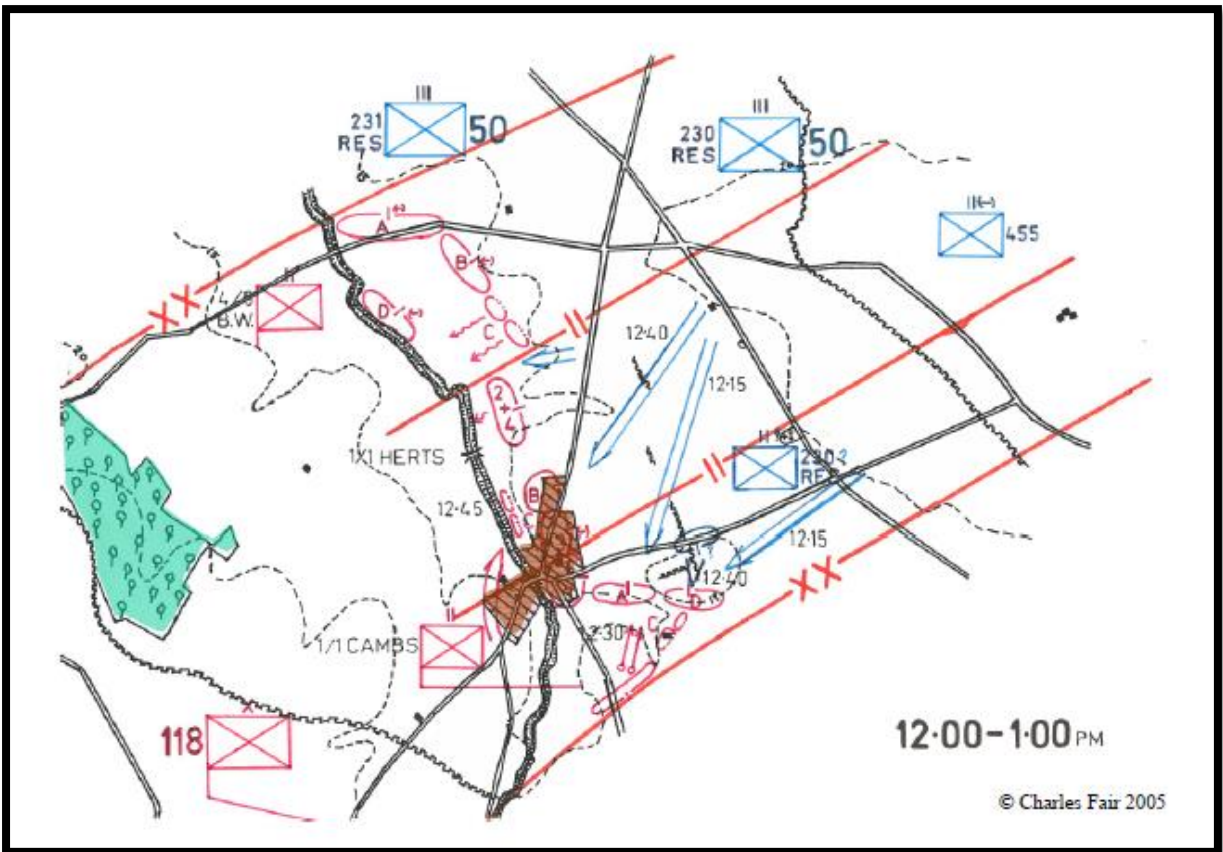
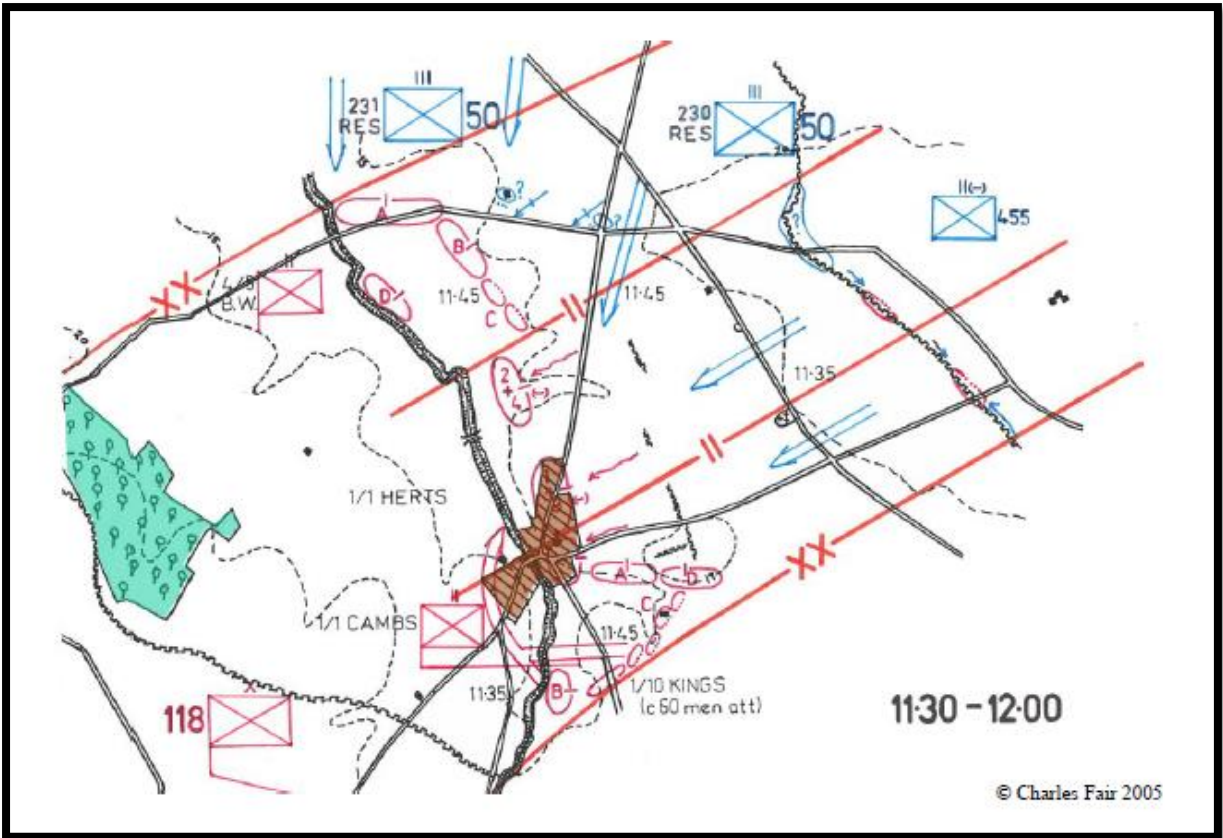
1/1 Hertfordshire Regt Attack formation at St. Julien 31 July 1917

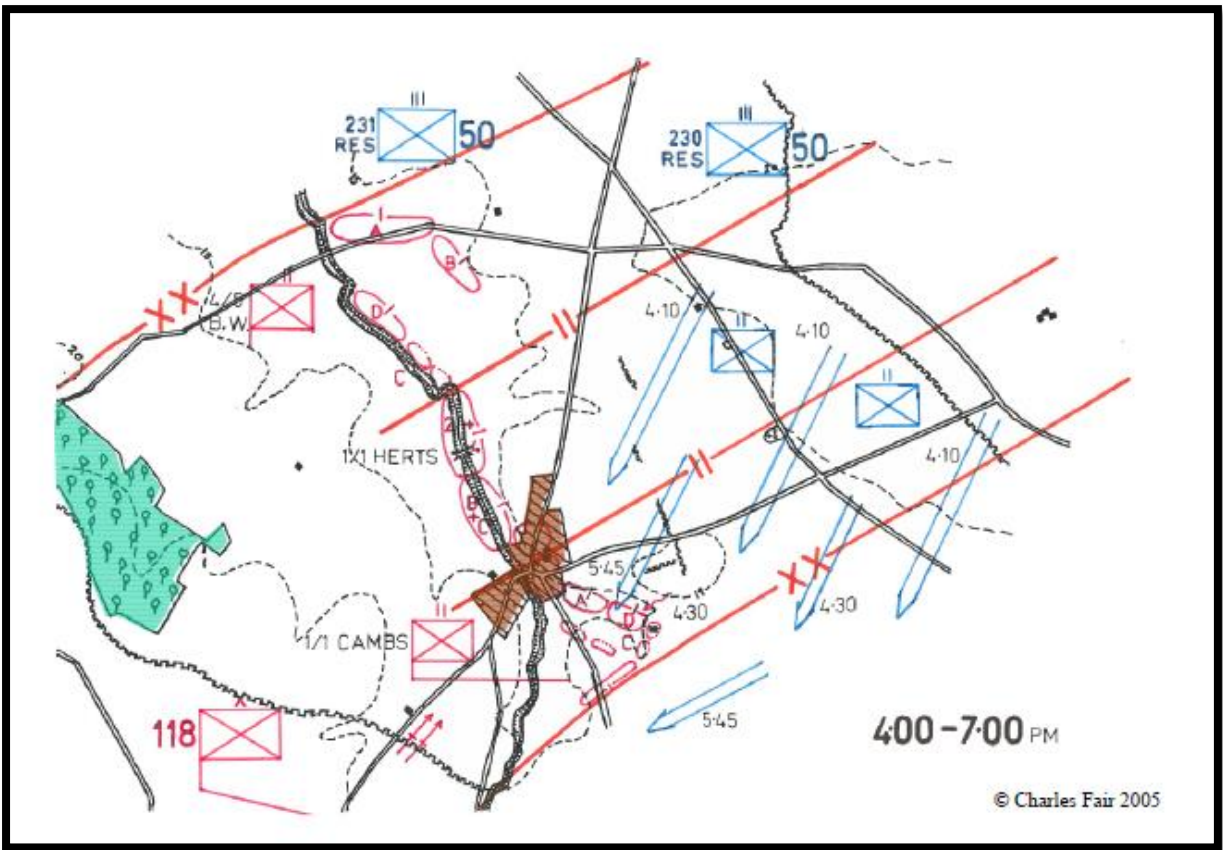
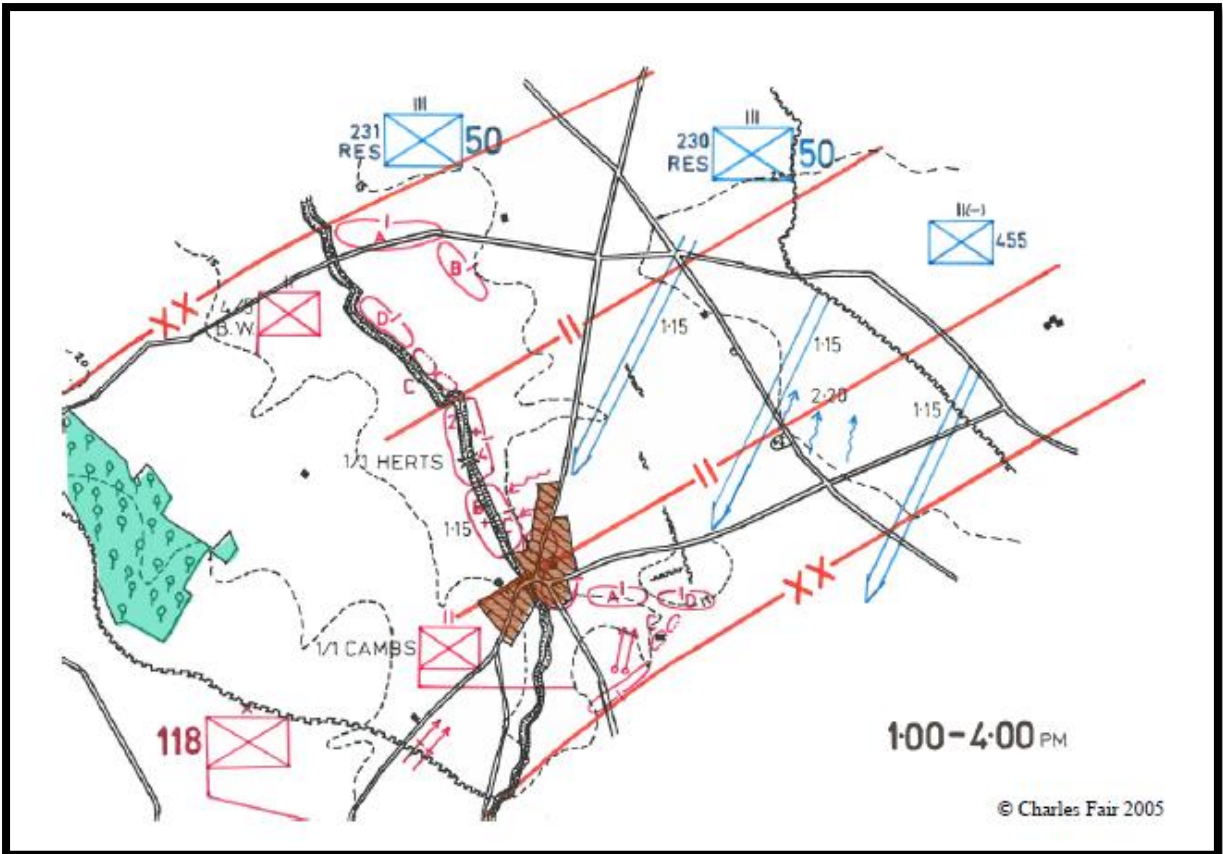


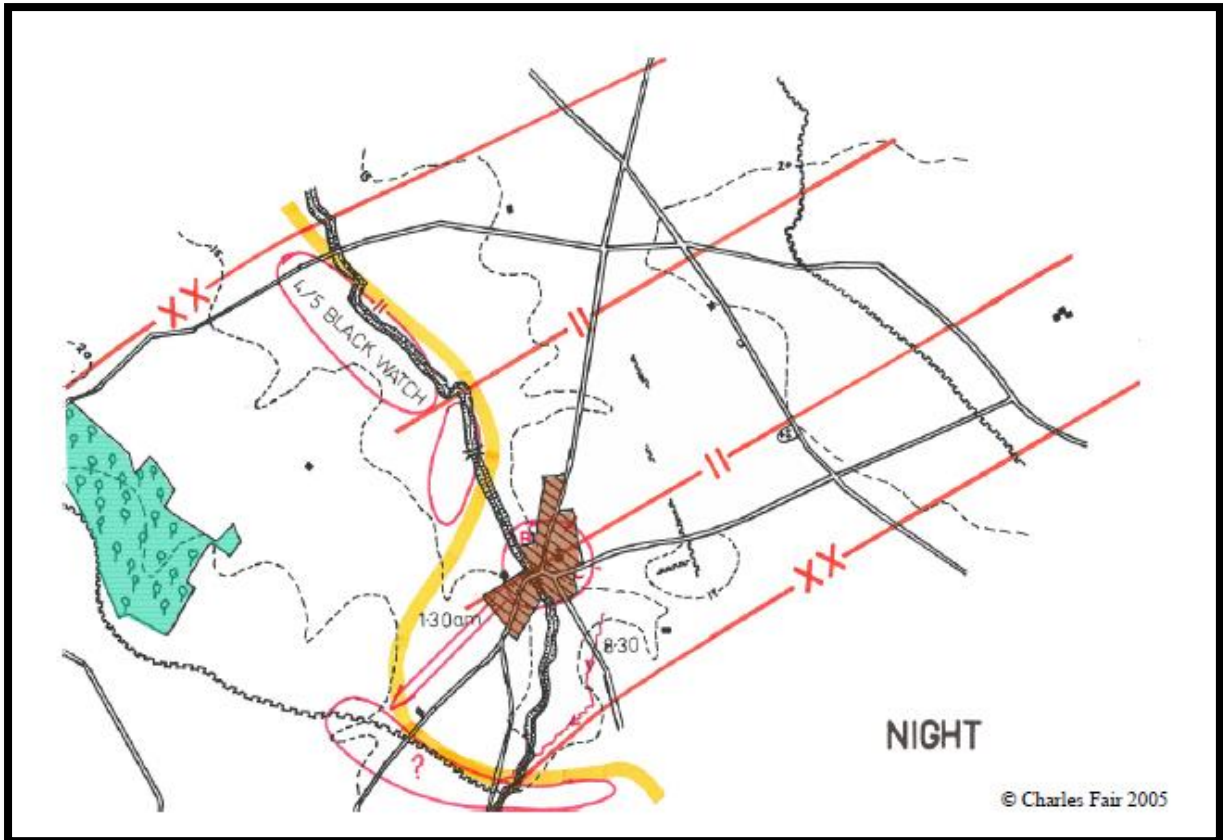
Note: 3 x Vickers machine guns attached from 118 Machine Gun Coy
2 x 3" Stokes mortars attached from 118 Trench Mortar Battery







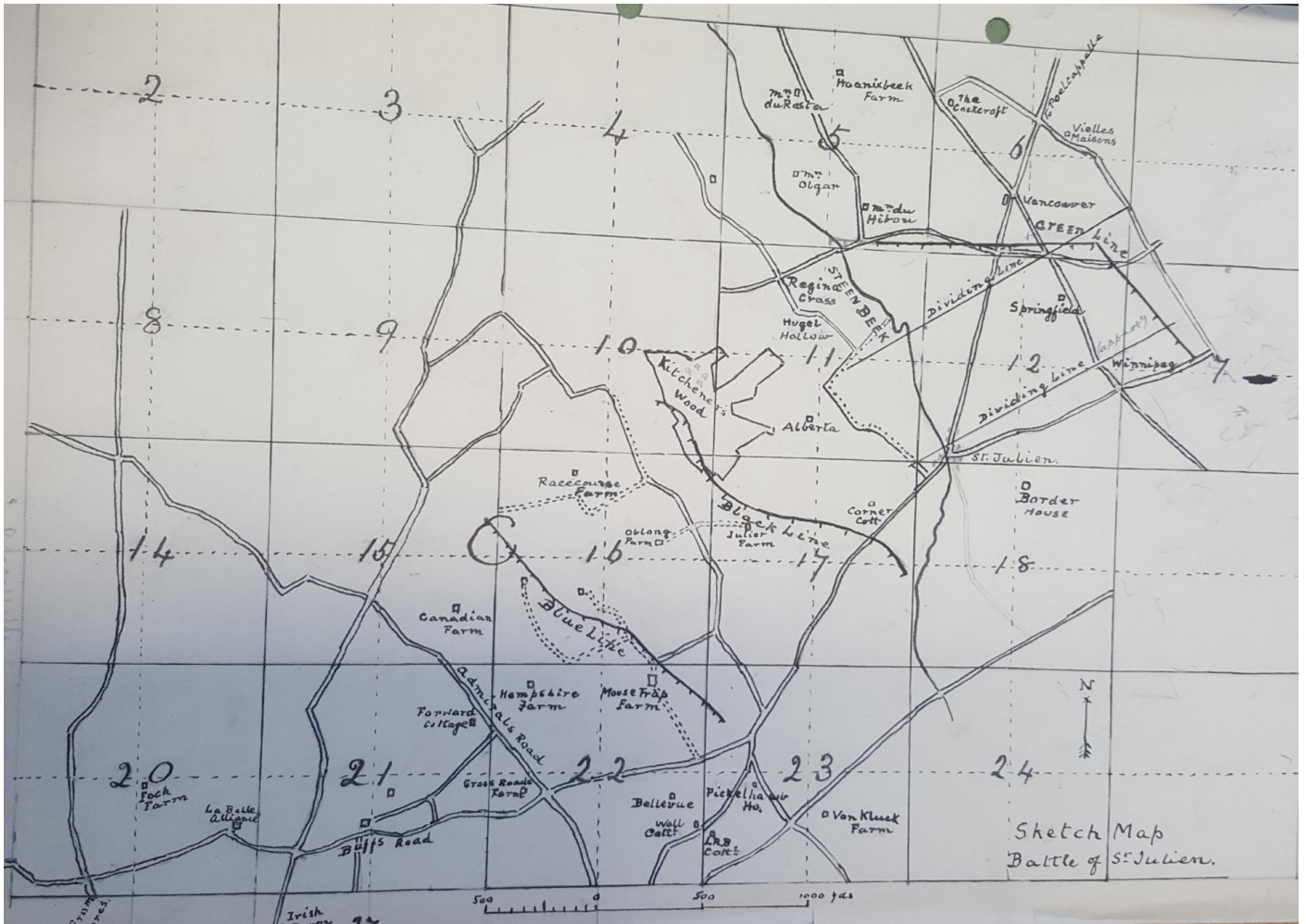




Reasons for failure

- Rain and mud!
- Ineffective artillery support
 - Mud prevented the field artillery from moving up
 - Weak barrage on the German third line, so no neutralising fire
 - Strongpoints not destroyed or neutralised
- Lack of Tank Support – bogged down by the time they got to the Steenbeek
 - Lack of close support from tanks to overcome strongpoints
- Lack of air support, and strafing by German aircraft
- Loads carried by attacking infantrymen
- Timings – too long a pause on the dotted Green line (Steenbeek)

Lieutenant Gripper Battlefield Sketch Map:



Lieutenant Thompson Post-War Account

NOTES on the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment

BY

(Please write on one side only.)

to
1917.

The Battle of St. Julien

The Battalion was moved to right positions to the battle (July 30th) on the outskirts of Poppevinghe. Shortly before dusk the Regiment left its quarters, per platoons at intervals. The gallant Major (Phillips) stationed at a corner of the camp bidding good luck to each as it passed.

A thick mist, after a heavy rain, hung over the landscape as the Regiment made its way up to the position it was to occupy previous to the attack.

It was dark as the Battalion approached the Canal bank, (Ypres) & here encountered a heavy gas barrage. Gas helmets were obliged to be worn. This rendered it difficult to keep in touch with the right division.

By midnight the Regiment was in position (left of Irish Farm) for the attack at dawn (July 31st)

But for a little intermittent shelling the night passed without incident, & the casualties were few. At dawn the battle opened, but the Regiment had some time to wait for its appointed hour to advance.

When the moment arrived the Battalion moved forward in "oblique formation", passing over the first German line (which had been taken with little opposition) on to the second line (which had offered more stubborn resistance). Here the Regiment had some considerable time to wait while the Artillery was doing its work. At this period the enemy

NOTES on the 1st Hertfordshire Regiment

(Photo with on one side only)

had no doubt sustained the loss of their second line and were getting down a heavy barrage upon it.

Sections were being in shell holes getting some protection they could, while that gallant officer, the Padre of the Brigade (R. Rev. Gifford) came amongst us. Where he was, I never see him now, as he sat in the shell hole passing his cigarettes around & chatting to the men, amid the din of the battle.

Why he should have chosen to be with us, when he could have been with either of the other Battalions, I do not know!

Oh! he knew the Regiment had the floor of Somme that day, as the Brigadier had previously told us, & he was going to be with them.

From this point the Battalions slightly altered direction, & officers were now engaged taking their new bearing.

There stood the Colonel, compass in hand, ascertaining that all officers knew their new direction, leaving nothing to chance, as was always his way.

It was an anxious wait on this second line, with the shelling all the time increasing in intensity.

At the appointed hour the Regiment moved forward to its position on the Stenbeck river, facing St. Julien.

The bank of the river afforded protection for the troops as they lay lined out in extended order ready for the advance.

(Please write on one side only)

Date

Another half hour passed before the order of the day, while the artillery barrage was ~~there~~ still further forward. Some officers were busy despatching messages to the Commanding Officers informing him of their position, & that they were in touch with the Chishires on their right flank.

When all appeared to be going according to plan, a message came up to Lt Hardy (in command of Co. 1 Coy) with information to the effect that the enemy were counter-attacking on our immediate front. On receipt of this Lt Hardy despatched one of his Subalterns to make a reconnaissance & ascertain the situation. The investigation proved the report to be correct; for the enemy could be seen advancing, & re-occupying some 'string points' on our immediate front. (We all knew of the existence of these string points from our maps & aeroplane photos, but Messrs Treble was not contemplated from them, as the heavy artillery was to deal with them.)

This information was immediately delivered to the Commanding Officer.

Shortly after this the movement was due for the Regiment to advance (artillery time table) leaving the bank of the river bank. The troops were now in full view of the enemy, & from this point the battle opened for the Regiment.

Lewis Guns and rifles were now in full action and the battle raged furiously

No. 1. Coy under Lt. Hardy was on the Right
Front-line Subalterns - Watkes -
Scott - de Thompsons,

No. 3. Coy under de Gatto was Left Front-
Subalterns. Luke - Francis. Edwards.
Manakingtons.

No. 4 Coy under Capt Fisher was Right
Second line. Subalterns. Gilby -
King - Mackintosh.

No 2 Coy under Capt Sawrey was Left Second
line. Subalterns. Ritchie, Head.
Secretan.

Lilly was Det with the Regiment that day,
& I cannot recollect his being with the
Battalion at that period.

William Thompson

Unknown Eyewitness account (possibly Marchington)

St. Julien 6

At 10.10 a.m. the Creeping Barrage was due to recommence in order to cover the advance to the third objective, the Green Line, but this completely failed to materialize on the 1st. Herts front owing, as it transpired later, to the impossibility of moving the guns up through the mud. Had this barrage been available there is little doubt but that the advance would have been carried out to a successful conclusion.

Practically no casualties had been suffered till then, the men were in excellent spirits, and the counter attack would never have been launched.

As it was, the attack had to be proceeded with, and the men followed their officers without a moment's hesitation, into a veritable hail of rifle and M. Gun fire proceeding from the shelters about 300 yards away.

In spite of all their weeks of special training for this very attack in advancing at a walk in comparative safety behind a barrage, they adopted the only possible course under the circumstances, viz. Open warfare methods of short sectional and individual rushes, with a promptitude and adaptability which defies all praise, and which does infinite credit to the initiative of the rank and file of the Regiment.

The casualties were devastatingly high, Lieut. Scott was killed almost at once, and many other officers, including Lieut. Hardy commanding No. 1 Coy. were put out of action in the first few yards, but the N.C.Os. carried on, and those who got in front lay down and opened a steady enfilade fire on the shelters, taking a heavy toll of the defenders, as was discovered later when the position was taken at the point of the bayonet, together with some 70 prisoners.

On this position being captured the Germans, presumably as a result of signals from their aircraft previously mentioned, put down a very heavy barrage on a line about midway between it and St. Julien, thus entirely cutting off the 1st. Herts from any reinforcements which might have been supplied by the 1st. Cambs. in reserve.

A few survivors, led by Lieuts. Thompson and Francis, pushed on to the last German line, where they encountered two thick and undamaged lines of wire, but in the interim, unknown by them, heavy counter attacks had set in behind them on both flanks. This of course could not have occurred had the promised barrage been available: Meanwhile the Germans manning the trench came out to surrender, but, realising the turn events had taken and the small number of attackers, they returned and took up arms again, as they heavily outnumbered the 1st. Herts.

Lieut. Hardy while being carried off the field by the Germans, saw isolated groups of the 1st. Herts, although surrounded, gamely trying to fight their way back to the English lines.

The remnants of the 1st. Herts having penetrated as far as their objective, the Green Line, found themselves practically alone, entirely surrounded and heavily outnumbered, had no option but to surrender after holding out for 5 hours.

No. 2 Company. From notes by Lieut. Ritchie the only surviving officer of the Company.

The opening barrage was a ~~very~~ beautiful sight. We moved forward at Zero plus 1.40. A few prisoners started coming down in about half an hour.

No. 2 Company went forward to the Blue line in half platoon waves, where there was a wait.

In crossing the old No Man's Land No 7 Platoon lost two or three men from Shrapnel. Colonel Page came round while we were halted under the crest of the rise, which was the last time we saw him.

No. 2 Coy. passed through the Sherwoods in the German lat. system, the ~~Black~~ Blue Line, the Hampshires being in the 2nd. Black Line, by Kitchener's Wood. Behind here the ground sloped gently down to the Steenbeek and St. Julien.

On crossing the rise we came under M. Gun fire from St. Julien direction, apparently untaken, and lost a Section Commander killed and my servant wounded.

We got down to the Steenbeek at the right place, to Schedule. There was no rain, ~~but~~ but it was very cloudy with low visibility.

There was no sign of the Black Watch on our Left who had apparently got hung up in Kitchener's Wood.

We had a long wait at the Steenbeek, according to Schedule, in crossing which I lost my Platoon Sergt.

The unpleasant features at this time were (a) No sign of the Black Watch. (b) Persistent M. Gun fire from some Blockhouses half left. (c) One or two of our Guns firing short among us and also short of the Steenbeek.

I saw Captain Lowry and reported the absence of the Black Watch. Head was buried and ~~badly~~ badly shaken. As I was talking to Lowry two German 'planes came down very low along our line Machine Gunning.

Shortly afterwards we were told to expect an immediate Counter attack, and the enemy put down a very heavy and accurate barrage on all ground forward of the Steenbeek.

We advanced according to Schedule, in two waves the Counter barrage being very heavy: The ground was very sticky, half way up to our knees, and men were going down right and left. Our Left flank was entirely in the air.

During one of our two minute rests I brought up No. 5 Platoon in line with No. 6 as we could not cover the front.

Captain Lowry was now reported hit and the whole company was now in one line and their appeared to be nothing between us and the enemy.

(? whether No. 2 was in support of No. 1 or of No. 3 or in front line)

When we reached the St. Julien-Poelcappelle road Head and I had each about 5 men left.

There was a hedge running more or less at right angles to the road. Head took his lot up the left side, while I went up the right. I do not think anyone saw Head or any of his men again.

St. Julien

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About 200 yards on there was a ~~big~~ row of Block Houses held by the enemy, so I tried to work round them. I was carrying my Lewis Gun as the L. Gun Section was knocked out except one man, but the gun was choked in mud and useless. While trying to get at these Germans I got knocked out.

When I came to I found I had no N.C.O. left so I sent Private Atkins on with the 3 remaining men. At this time we were a bit behind Schedule. I could see Secretan further on on the right, the counter barrage being still unpleasantly heavy.

Going back I got in touch with the Black Watch who were certainly behind time, and I think that it was in the gap on our left between us and the Black Watch that the enemy came down and cut us off.

Most of our dead and dying were lying between the Road and the Steenbeek, which was where we suffered most of our casualties.

I did not hear of the death of our Colonel nor how badly things were going on the right until days afterwards. It seemed a bad show on our left flank, but I never thought it was general.

Lieutenant Francis Account:

Just before reaching the Steembek,
The Hampshires reported heavy machine
gun fire from just the other side of St. Julien.
We had few casualties however & the battalion
safely crossed the stream to the dead ground
just the other side. The tanks were unable
to cross & ~~most of them~~ ^{one} completely stuck
in the muddy banks.

Up to now everything had gone exactly
to the programme - we were absolutely on
time, our barrage was doing its work well
just in front of us. In the dead ground
we were free from machine gun fire &
the heavy shells the German Artillery were
pouring onto us were doing little harm.
We were able to get well organised & sort
ourselves out into our proper positions.
Colonel Page was full of optimism &
~~to~~ the example he set us kept us
cool & collected - this was the last moment
I saw of him I believe.

The Padre wandered from Company to
Company cheering the men up showing
absolutely no fear & as calm as if such
a thing as war never existed.

Disquieting reports of heavy machine gun
fire & a strong German resistance the
other side of St. Julien came through.

Co. Z Company was moved up into St. Julien
& found the place deserted beyond a few
snipers in the trees who were quickly disposed
of. They were unfortunate in getting into our
gun barrage. They found the German

fire particularly heavy especially machine
gun fire. The Germans were seen coming
out of the pill box X on sketch map & taking
up a line X Y. Co 3 Company were ordered
up to reinforce Co 1 Company & the two
Companies took up a position along the wall
just to the North of 9th Trench behind ^a ~~some~~
low bank. The Germans were now in open
order & we were firing at them at a range
of about 300 yds. - Casualties on both sides
were extremely heavy, it was here that Fallo &
Scott were killed. After a time Co 1 Coy
advanced in short rushes to some low mounds
some 200 yds from the Germans ~~with~~
Part of Co 3 Coy supported them the remainder
forming a second line ~~behind~~ - Naturally at
this stage Companies & platoon were hopelessly
overrun. Heavy fire with Lewis guns & rifle
fire was opened on the Germans at this ^{short} range.
The casualties continued to be exceptionally
heavy. Corporal Preeny ^{MM} of base - a most gallant
soldier who had volunteered for this attack when
he had ample opportunity of being left out was
killed at this stage.

After a time it was seen the German resistance
was weakening - we had superiority of fire. As
one our men got up cheering & charged. ~~With~~
The Germans did not wait for us to come but
put up their hands long before we reached them.
It was a thrilling moment & our men were
splendid. The prisoners were I believe estimated
at about 300, a few lightly wounded soldiers
were put in charge to take them back though
they required little prisoner were completely

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Crews. Our men quickly reorganised themselves & formed up in line. The machine gun fire for the moment was fairly quiet though the Artillery fire was heavy. Now the excitement was over & we were able to look round a bit. The outlook seemed terrible. True we were up to time & our creeping barrage was out in front of us. Our line was extraordinary thin less than a yard per man. Existing mostly of No 1 Company some of the men of No 2 Company & some of No 3 Company mostly by our platoon No 9. The remainder of No 3 Coy could be seen some 300 yards in the rear forming a second line. It was here that Thompson the only other Officer that could be seen. We held a hurried consultation. Our left flank was bare obviously non-existent our right flank was in touch with a Company of Cheshires but beyond that, in our rear it could be seen the Cemetry was still untaken, heavy fighting could be heard going on & the German showed their presence by the number of Webbs being sent up. In front was our creeping barrage - nothing to that which we had seen early in the morning - we heard afterwards most of the guns had been unable to move up owing to the mud. Every where around was the same cry "Stretcher bearers wanted". We remembered our ~~superior~~^{stretcher} order "Never mind your flanks - Carry on with your own job" & decided to push on taking advantage of our barrage & hold waiting for our second line - the time now if I remember was somewhere round 12 AM. It was rather like leading lambs to the slaughter.

As we had a pretty fair idea of what the Lanyemarch line was going to be like though as yet we couldn't see it owing to the ledge lining the road in front of us & we also knew that beyond these few men in our second line there was no further help. It cannot be wondered at that our men who had behaved up to now so magnificently began to lose spirit. It was just at this time that a private of the Cheshires came up to us, saluted as if on a parade ground & said "Connecting file (? by) Cheshires, Pn." The way this man behaved was wonderful he stuck to us the whole time & was eventually captured with us - he kept in front with Thompson & I shouting "There are the Cheshires, come on the Heels." I believe Thompson has his name, as he certainly deserved a medal.

We carried on at a walking pace keeping a good line & having comparatively few casualties until we reached the ^{road} wall. On going through the ledge lining the road we had our first view of the Lanyemarch line - a great big trench in top of a rise & what was worse two thick lines of uncut wire in front - but it was our objective & the Germans in the trench in front of us could be seen running away. It was here Sgt Hammond came up to me with a broad grin on his face & said something about at last getting at the Boche & would he tell the men to get ready to go absolutely all out - immediately afterwards a private came up to me & said Sgt Hammond badly wounded in the leg - he died immediately I believe - I won't say much about

(5) 11
Pvt. Hammond as anyone who was out in France with the Kets. knew him but I should like it to be known that he died just as he had always earned on absolutely fearless & looking as if there was no finer fun on earth than going over the top.

We were now faced with this terrible encounter & the German fire was beginning to be particularly heavy again. Thompson & a few managed to scramble through with ~~about~~ ^{a few} men the remainder following. The Germans unfortunately - who were bearing the trench looked & round - saw how few we were & from both flanks & from the front the most murderous machine gun fire was poured into us. Those who had not yet reached the wire went back & the few who had had got through were unable to go back went on a little way & finally took cover in a shell hole our little party was now reduced to about 6 including (as two ^{opinion} & the Cheshire company. The Cheshire company on our right had been more successful & reached the trench & entered it - our hopes were now centred on them. Our barrage had now reached the Langemarch line & was rushing it to pieces in front of us - it seemed deserted though immediately in front, though on the flanks it was obviously occupied. It was better to sit there & think that with a few more men & more ammunition (our P.A.A had mostly been used in St Julien) the trench was ours for the asking. For a while nothing happened - we lit flares for our aeroplanes - but they quickly went away &

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A German one appeared flying low & firing.
It may be mentioned that though our airplanes
were obviously doing good work we were harassed
& worried ever since leaving St Julien by low
flying German machines.
Germans could be seen well in our rear both
to the right & left of us though our immediate
rear was clear, & soon our own men could
be seen advancing again. They reached the
line & we shouted to them & tried to join
them - it was hopeless the fire was too strong.
Three of the men with us tried to get back
through the line & were shot at once we went
to shelter again in a shell hole. The men
who had come off went away again. I gather
that they were ^{almost} completely wiped out as they
found that the Germans had occupied St Julien
& were therefore surrounded on all sides - of
course we didn't know this at the time.
We were still mystified as to what had
happened to the Chesnie Company but we
quickly knew, as Thompson pointed out some Boche
with some English coming out of the trench on
our right & said "those prisoners" & said "I
had never seen Boche prisoners like that
before" & to our horror it was the English
who were the prisoners & they were picking up
the wounded & searching the ground. The Germans
were now everywhere - the time was about
1.30 P.M. we were taken about 4 P.M. & it
seemed to us we were the only two survivors of
that awful day. There was a Corporal with us
Corporal OLIVER of the 1. Coy. I believe who Thompson
(I am not sure of the name)

Wished to mention - he had been badly wounded getting through the line & died very shortly afterwards. He had shown very fine spirit.

I know little of what happened on our left. The Black Watch obviously failed early. No 2 Company I believe got held up at the Oil pit (X), where Head was killed. No 4 Company I don't remember at all.

After being captured we crossed the laymarch line & were taken to Paschendale. The Germans had evidently had a bad fright as every arrangement for a human line was obvious - guns left lying unattended in the fields & everything very much in confusion. There were however many battalions trained at Paschendale ready to move up & obviously very reluctant to go.

We wondered at the time how even if we had had no casualties, our line would still have been very thin for such a ~~distinct~~ distinct objective especially as it was so little damaged. ^{so as to make use of the} whether it was intended to sacrifice us - perhaps this is an unfair criticism. This was the first time I'll ever recall where a line which I believe existed & which caused us so much trouble existed & believe.

St. Julien

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~~Notes~~
Battalion Headquarters, 11th Division

From Notes by The Rev. E. Popham, M.C. Chaplain the the Battalion and R. Sergt. Major Tite, D.C.M.

The Battalion Headquarters ^{moved} up to the Steenbeek over the ground already captured by the 116th. and 117th. Brigades. led by the Colonel, the latter part through heavy shell and M. Gun fire, all available cover was there taken in shell holes, and the Chaplain, as usual, went among the men with cigarettes, and found them in excellent fettle.

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The Chaplain writes, "Then two Hun Planes found us, and flying low they machine gunned us as we lay, and probably disclosed our position to the enemy. The moment came and the Herts Guards swept up the hill. The shelling was now heavy, though we heard nothing of the monster barrage which had been promised us in our support. We heard afterwards that no barrage had been put upon the Guns could not get up in time. It was during this time that The Doctor, Capt. Charles did such magnificent work, going from shell hole to shell hole dressing wounds. Shortly afterwards a message came asking for re-inforcements and I lost sight of Colonel Page, hearing a few minutes later that he had been killed instantly by a piece of shell."

The Sergeant Major writes, "About 12.30 p.m. the Adjutant, Captain Milne, told me the Germans were advancing on us, having as we learned later, cut off our main body. While speaking to me Captain Milne was hit and died almost at once. I got together all available men, about 25, mainly Signallers and Officers' Servants, and formed a line in Shell holes. We then opened fire and the enemy, who were advancing over undulating ~~country~~ country at about 1500 yards distance, were compelled to halt. We continued to hold them with the aid of a few stragglers who found their way back, including a Sergeant and about 20 Other Ranks of the 14th. Hants. (116th. Bde.) but running short of ammunition we had to retire to a partly dug trench on the opposite side of the River. Just before this I stopped a bullet in my left arm, which put that limb out of action, and a few minutes later the M.O. Captain Charles was hit in the thigh. The Chaplain at once went to him, but I yelled to him to lie down. I was later reinforced by Sergt. Ashwell who turned up with a Lewis Gun and one man carrying magazines. This was a great help and I placed him on our left flank where there was an interval of about 1000 yards between us and the Black Watch.

During the whole of this time the Chaplain, with total disregard for personal safety, did all possible to aid the wounded, and when we retired, he was the last to leave and brought with him, almost carrying him, a man who was wounded in the leg.

About 6 p.m. Lieut. Walker of the 1st. Cambs arrived with half a company and took over command, ordering me to go back and get my arm seen to. This I did and after walking until nearly midnight, found our Transport near Elverdinghe, where I reported to Major Phillips, afterwards receiving treatment at the Corps Dressing Station nearby."

The Chaplain also writes, "We had a few badly wounded men in a Pill Box; while I was with them, I heard that Capt. Charles had been hit, and crawling to him we found that his thigh had been shattered by a bullet. After making him as comfortable as we could, four of our splendid Stretcher Bearers crawled down the hill side with him and eventually got him back, one of the bravest bits of stretcher work ever done by the Herts. I wish I could remember their names. By this time we were number with sorrow and also a bit anxious as we did not know ~~what the British, Army was doing after a time R.S.M. Tite managed~~

Bn.Hdgrs.

St.Julien

where the British Army was, but after a time R.S.M. Tite managed to get in touch, and found that a Company of the Cambs. were digging in in our rear, and we felt easier. Some hours must have passed when suddenly the alarm was given, a man looked into the dug out where I was with the wounded, and cried "They're coming, We're off" and before I could do anything, I saw our boys going back over the Steenbeek to the Cambridge-shires' trench. The men in the Pill Box also went, but I do not think they got back, and left me with a man who had twice been wounded in the legs. I tried to keep him there telling him the Huns would not hurt him, but he began to crawl back, so I had to get him on my shoulder and drag him back.

On arriving at the Cambs Trench I found an officer in charge and our boys fighting happily, and as it was the place for a badly wounded man, I decided to try and take him back, and we managed to get to a Dressing Station about 7.p.m. The next morning I found the Brigade Hdgrs. and the Brigadier asked me to take charge of the remainder of the Battalion until Major Phillips could come up, which I did until relieved on the evening of September the 1st."

Colonel Gripper – Compiled account (Post-War):

The Battle of St Julien -31st July 1917:

Before the attack on the St Julien position, which has been given the name of the Battle of Pilkem, the 1st Herts with other units of the 39th Division ad to undergo a special course of Training.

On the 21st of June the Battalion was billeted in the Moulle-Moulle-Serques Area, about 7 kilometres out of St Omer on the Calais road.

In this district a full scale model of the section of the line to be attacked had been prepared, woods being shown by branches of trees, and dummy trenches indicating the German positions.

In in and day out the troops were put through the part to be played by them in the attack, advancing first in Artillery formation, then extending at a given point, which represented the crest of a ridge at the Southern edge of Kitchener Wood, on which was situated the famous Falkenhayn Redoubt, and continuing in extended order to the line of the second objective, where in due course the barrage would be picked up.

The plan of attack for the 39th Division was as follows:-

The Section to be attacked was divided into three separate objectives, roughly the first, second, and third German Defence systems, called in Operation Orders the Blue, Black and Green lines respectively.

There was to be a very thorough artillery preparation from some days previous to the offensive, to be followed by the Infantry advancing in 'Leapfrog' formation behind an impenetrable barrage. The 116th and 117th Inf. Bde composed of the 4/5th Black Watch, the 5th Cheshire Regt, the 1st Cambridgeshire Regt and the 1st Herts, the Green Line.

This latter objective was rightly considered the most difficult as it was not possible to give it the same amount of artillery preparation as the others, on account of lack of direct observation and the distance it was situated from the Guns. In fact the Brigadier in his address to the Regiment on the day before the offensive was launched, stated this, and added that 'Pride of Place' in the centre of the line had been allotted to the 1st Herts.[PAGE GAP?? – SEE FILE GOES FROM 555 TO 562]

[??] intrepid German Machine gunner might remain under cover and in action, in spite of the barrage, and might possibly hold up the advance, on a limited front, until they could be dealt with by Tanks or other means, and as anyhow the action would be very local, it was not considered advisable to delay the general advance, especially as the success of an attack of this nature primarily depended up on the close proximity of the Infantry to their creeping barrage.

To fully appreciate the work performed by the 1st Herts on the 31st July, it must be remembered that all ranks had had it impressed on them, day after day for some time that their part practically speaking, of the actual advance, was to consist of merely walking behind a creeping barrage with slung rifles, and that no opposition would be met with, other than an improbable M. Gun nest, which if necessary, would be dealt with by Tanks.

In due course the Battalion reached almost as high a state of perfection, as was possible to expect, in their training, and on the 22nd July, with the remainder of the 118th Inf. Bde it was moved by motor 'buss to the Camps near S. Jean Ter Biazin, preparatory to taking up their assembly positions for the battle.

Routes to the line were arranged and one officer from each company went forward on the 27th and 28th to arrange for the assembly positions, which consisted for the most part of Shell holes behind Hill Top Farm.

On the night of the 30/31st the 1st Herts left the bivouacs near Vlamertinghe, which they had occupied on the previous day, and after a rather trying march across country through desultory shell fire and gas, in the pitch dark, finally reached their assembly position just after midnight, suffering only a few [????]

The following are extracts from Operation Orders issued by Lt. Col. Page, dated the 29th July 1917.

1. (a) *The 5th Army is to capture the hostile trench system East and North East of Ypres on Z day.*
(b) *The XVIII Corps will capture the hostile trench system on its present front.*
Right Division, 39th Left Division, 51st.
Reserve Division 48th Right, and 11th Left.
(c) *The 39th Division will attack at Zero hour on Z. day and will capture the German trenches on the frontage shown on the attached map as far as the Green Line, which will be known as Cuthbert Trench when consolidated.*
(d) *The 23rd Division (Prussian) is holding the area to be attacked by the 39th Division. It's probable dispositions are 1 Battalion 448th Inf. Regt and ½ Battalion 449th Inf. Regt in the front line system; the same in the Kitchener system, and the same in the Langmark Line.*
The 450th Regt is said to be in the neighbourhood of Peolcappel.
(e) *The objective of the 118th Inf. Brigade is the green Line. The attack on the Green Line will be carried out with: -*
6th Cheshires on the Right. 1st Herts in the Centre.
4/5th Black watch on the Left. 1st Cambs in reserve near Border House.
The division lines between Battalion are shown on the map.
(f) *Three Machine Guns of the 118th M.G. Company and two Stokes Mortars are allotted to the 1st Herts.*
2. *Assembly. The Brigade will move into the assembly position on Y/Z night.*
The 1st Herts will leave Camp at 8.45pm and march via Queen's Road – Bridge 2 – and overland track, to the assembly positions. Nos 1 and 3 Companies near Irish Farm, Nos 2 and 4 Companies and Battalion Headquarters to La Belle Alliance and Coney Street.
3. *Advance.*
(a) *At Zero plus 1 hour 40 minutes the 118th Inf. Brigade will advance from their assembly position.*
Herts and Cheshires from the X. line and Black Watch and Cambs from the Canal Bank.
(b) *The 1st Herts will arrive just West of the Blue Line at Zero plus 2 hours 10 minutes. The further advance will be made so that the three attacking Battalions are on the East bank of the Steenbeck by Zero plus 6 hours 10 minutes.*

The Orders for the attack of the 1st Herts were, No 1 Company on the Right and No 2 Company on the Left, each in two waves, in the Front Line.

In support No 3 on the Right and No 4 on the Left, also in two waves.

The Company Officers were:-

No 1. Company Lieut. Hardy. Commanding Lieuts. Walthew, Thompson and Scott.

No 2. Company Captain Lowry. Commanding Lieuts. Ritchie, Head and Secretan.

No 3. Company Lieut. Gallo. Commanding Lieuts. Marchington, Francis and Edwards.

No 4. Company Capt. D'Arcy Fisher. Commanding Lieuts Lake, Macintosh and S. King.

At 3.45 am on the 31st July, just as dawn was breaking, the barrage opened with a burst of flame along the whole line of the Divisional Front, the most intense barrage that had been put up, to that period of the War.

The 1st Herts were not due to move off some time so, as no reason for secrecy existed, fires were lighted and the men had breakfast.

The weather, which had been fine practically through-out July, had broken on the 28th and during the whole of the 31st, low lying clouds and drizzle rendered cooperation with the Royal Flying Corps almost impossible.

The state of the ground was such, from the rain, that progress of any sort could only be made with great difficulty, and it was this fact, more than anything else, which led to the comparative failure of the operations.

The Germans were well aware of the impending offensive and it transpired subsequently that they were also in possession of most of the details of it.

They had accordingly withdrawn most of their guns in the forward area, and had apparently resigned any idea of holding their first system seriously; which was not surprising in view of the pounding it had received from our guns.

Hardly a shred of wire was to be seen, and what remained of the trenches was lightly held by inferior troops.

The Blue Line gave little trouble, nor did the Black Line, although the Falkenhayn Redoubt, on the Southern edge of Kitchen Wood needed attentions of a Tank before it succumbed.

The 1st Herts left their assembly positions about 5am and advanced in Artillery formation over the captured ground to the first German line of defence, the Blue Line, where they took cover on account of desultory shelling and a certain amount of Machine Gun fire.

The latter was silenced shortly afterwards, by which time the 116th Inf. Brigade had reached the Black Line.

So far the attack had gone exactly to plan.

While the 1st Herts were on the Black Line bearings were taken in order to confirm that the Battalion was keeping direction, and to ascertain the position of St. Julien, which lay over the crest of the ridge.

The 1st Herts resumed their advance according to schedule. Nos 1 and 2 Companies leading in Artillery formation, followed by Nos 3 and 4, being wished 'Good Luck' by the 116th Brigade as they went through them.

On gaining the crest of the first ridge leading Platoons came under M. Gun fire; the signal to extend was immediately given, and the promptitude with which Platoon Commanders and N.C.Os got their men out of Artillery formation, saved any casualties.

The 'Dead ground' West of the Steenbeck was reached and the Battalion had to cross the Stream by a plank bridge owing to its swollen state.

It was here that the 1st Herts had their first disappointment, as the two Tanks detailed to accompany them were both out of action. One stuck irretrievably in a shell hole, and the other fell into the Steenbeck, and although its crew made gallant efforts to get it under way again, they would not do so.

The 1st Herts after crossing the Steenbeck, having plenty of time to do so, re-organised in the 'Dead ground' on the far side of the stream.

The Colonel was full of optimism and the example he set kept everyone cool and collected.

The Padre wandered from Company to Company, although shelling was pretty continuous, cheering the men up and giving them cigarettes, showing absolutely no fear, and as calm as if such a thing as war never existed.

The moment for the advance came, and although the intense Barrage promised did not exist, as it appeared that only two 18 pounders and two 4.5" Howitzers were in action on this part of the line, the Herts Guards swept up the hill.

Reconnoitring Patrols from No 1 Company under Lieuts Walthew and Thompson, pushed on and cleared St Julien, which was only lightly held.

Two Platoons of No 1 Coy were then extended along the St. Julien-Poelcappelle Road, but one of them, No 4, was shortly afterwards compelled to withdraw a little owing to 'Shorts' from the two Howitzers.

At this time the 1st Herts were in touch with the Cheshires on their Right, but there was no sign of the Black Watch, which had apparently got hung up in Kitchener's wood.

A Battery of 77 Guns had been discovered between the Steenbeck and St. Julien, which were duly appropriated.

The unpleasant features on the left of the line at this time were (a) No sign of the Black Watch and (b) Persistent M. Gun fire from some Pill Boxes half left.

At about 9.35 am a message received from the Officer Commanding the left Company of the Cheshire Regt intimating that the Germans were massing for a Counter attack on the Springfield-Winnipeg road, and at the same time a reconnoitring Patrol of the 1st Herts reported that the Germans were holding a line of old artillery dug outs about 400 yards East of the Peolcappelle-St Julien road.

This information was sent to Battalion Hdqrs on the Steenbeck, and Colonel Page ordered the two leading Companies to move up and man the latter road, with a view to forestalling any counter attack that might be in contemplation by the enemy.

The road was manned and the enemy were in sight of the 1st Herts for the first time, in any force, that day.

On the Left the counter barrage was very heavy, the left of the 1st Herts was entirely in the air, and the ground was very sticky making the going very heavy.

The casualties on this flank were getting heavy, and still the promised intense barrage was conspicuous by its absence. During this advance Capt. Lowry, commanding No 2 Coy was killed.

About this time two German aeroplanes, flying very low, passed over the 1st Herts, firing Very lights, and Machine Gunning the Battalion, and shortly afterwards the Germans launched a Counter attack.

This was in some force, commencing with a line in extended order, which advanced up to the line of dug outs previously mentioned, where they joined up with about 100 others who were taking cover there, and who had opened heavy rifle fire to cover the advance.

At this point the counter attack was stopped by rifle and Lewis Gun fire, mainly from No 1 Coy on the right.

The heaviness of the enemy casualties at this point and also later in the day, is vouched for by those of the Regiment who were taken prisoners, Lieut. Walthew estimating that he passed upwards of 150 German Dead alone, on the ground over which the 1st Herts had advanced.

At 10.10 am the Intense Creeping barrage was due to re-commence in order to cover the advance to the third objective, the Green Line, but this completely failed to materialise on the 1st Herts' front, owing, as it transpired later to the impossibility of moving the Guns up through the mud.

Had this barrage been available there is little doubt but that the attack would have been entirely successful.

The casualties up to this time, especially on the Right, had not been heavy, and the Men were in excellent spirits.

The attack had to be proceeded with, and then men followed their officers without a moment's hesitation, into a veritable hail of rifle and Machine Gun fire, proceeding from the shelters about 300 yards in front.

In spite of all their special training, for this very attack, in advancing at a walk in comparative safety behind a barrage, the 1st Herts adopted the only possible course, namely, open warfare methods of short sectional and individual rushes, with the greatest promptitude and gallantry.

The casualties were at once devastatingly high. Lieut. Gallo, Commanding No 3 Coy and Lieut. Scott of No 1 were killed almost at once, and many officers including Lieut. Hardy, Commanding No 1 Coy were wounded, but the 1st Herts carried on, taking a heavy toll of the enemy, as was discovered when the position, - about 400 yards East of the Poelcappelle-St Julien road -, was taken at the point of the bayonet, together with some 70 or more prisoners.

By this time practically the whole of the supporting companies were in the front line.

On this position begin captured the Germans put down a very heavy barrage on a line about midway between it and St. Julien, thus entirely cutting off the 1st Herts from any reinforcements which might have been supplied by the 1st Cambs in reserve.

Lieuts. Francis Thompson and Walthew on the right, with Lieuts. Ritchie and Head of the left, and Lieut. Secretan in the centre, went on with the remnants of the 1st Herts.

On the Lieut. Ritchie and Head advanced on either side of a cross hedge with about 5 men each, Lieut. Head advanced on the left side and was never seen again, Lieut. Ritchie went on the right side of the hedge and found a row of Pill Boxes about 200 yards on, carrying his Lewis Gun himself, he tried to get round them, but was knocked out, so Private Atkins went on with the 3 remaining men.

In the centre Lieut. Secretan was killed, and the final act of 1st Herts in their gallant fight can best be given in Lieut. Francis' own words, who which Lieut. Thompson was taken prisoner on the Green Line.

"Our line was woefully thin by this time, consisting mainly of No 1 Coy some of my Coy no 3 and No 4. The remainder of No 3 could be seen forming a second line some 300 yards in rear.

It was here I met Lieut. Thompson of No 1 Coy the only other officer that could be seen.

We had a hurried consultation: Our left flank was bare, obviously non-existent: Our right flank was in touch with a Coy of the Cheshires, but beyond them in our rear it could be seen that the Cemetery was still untaken.

Heaving fighting could be heard going on and the Germans showed their presence by the number of Rockets begin sent up. In front we had a small creeping barrage, nothing to what we had seen early in the morning – we heard afterwards most of the Guns had been unable to move owing to the mud -. Everywhere around us was the cry "Stretcher Bearer wanted".

We remembered our strict orders "Never mind your flanks, carry on with your job", and decided to push on, taking advantage of the barrage and not waiting for our second line.

The time now, if I remember right, was somewhere round 12 noon. It was rather like "Leading lambs to the slaughter", as we had a pretty fair idea of what the Landmark line was going to be like though as yet we couldn't see it owing to the hedge lining the road in front of us, and we also knew that beyond those few men in our second line there was no further help.

It cannot therefore be wondered at that our Men, who had behaved up to now so magnificently, began to lose heart.

it was just at this time that a Private of the Cheshires came up to us, saluted as if on parade, and said "Connecting File Cheshires Sir"; the way this man behaved was wonderful, he stuck to us the whole time and was eventually captured with us; he kept in front with Thompson and myself shouting "There are Cheshires, come on the Herts". I believe Thompson has his name, as he certainly deserved a Medal.

We carried on at a walking pace keeping a good line, and having comparatively few casualties, until we reached the road.

Ongoing through the hedge lining the road we had our first view of the Green Line: A great big trench on top of a rise, and what was worse two lines of uncut wire in front, but it was our objective and the Germans in the trench in front of us could be seen running away.

It was at this point that Sergt. Hammond came up to me with a broad grin on his face and said something about at last getting at the Bosche, and would he tell the men to get ready to go absolutely all out. Immediately afterwards a Private came up and reported Sergt. Hammond badly wounded in the leg; he died immediately I believe.

I won't say much about Sergt. Hammond as anyone who was out in France with the Herts knew him, but I should like it to be known that he died just as he had always carried on, absolutely fearless and looking as if there was no finer fun on earth than going over the top.

We were now faced with this terrible uncut wire, and the German fire was beginning to be particularly heavy again. Thompson and I managed to scramble through it with a few men the remainder following.

The Germans, unfortunately, who were leaving the trench looked round, saw how few we were, and from both flanks and from the front the most murderous Machine Gun fire was poured into us. Those who had not yet reached the wire went back a bit, and the few who had got through went on a little way and finally took cover in a shell hole. Our little party was now reduced at about 6, including the two officers and the Cheshire Orderly.

The Cheshire Company on our right had been more successful and reached the trench and entered it: Our hopes were now centred on them.

Our barrage was now knocking the Langmarck line about in front of us; it seemed deserted now immediately in front though on the flanks it was obviously occupied.

It was bitter to sit there and think that with a few more men and more ammunition, -our S.A.A. had mostly been used in St. Julien- the trench was ours for the asking.

For a little while nothing happened, we lit Flares for our aeroplanes, but they quickly went away, and a German one appeared flying low and firing on us.

It may be mentioned that although our aeroplanes were obviously doing good work, we were hampered and worried ever since leaving St. Julien by low flying German machines.

Germans could be seen well in our rear, both to the right and left of us, though our immediate rear was clear, and soon our Men could be seen advancing again: They reached the wire and we tried to re-join them: It was hopeless, the fire was too heavy. Three of the men with us were shot at once, so we sheltered again in a shell hole, and the men who had come up had to fall back. I gather that they were all wiped out as they were practically surrounded on all sides.

We were still mystified as to what had happened to the Cheshire Company but we quickly knew, as Thompson pointed out some Germans with some English coming out of the trench on our right, and to our horror the English were the Prisoners and were picking up the wounded and searching the ground.

The Germans were now everywhere, the time being about 1.30pm. We were finally taken about 4 pm and it seemed to us we were the only two survivors of that awful day.

Corporal Oliver, of No 1 Company I believe, had been badly wounded getting through the wire and died very shortly afterwards, he had shown very fine spirit.

I know little of what happened on our left: The Black Watch obviously failed early. No 2 Company got held up at the Pill Boxes where Head was killed, No 4 Company I do not remember seeing at all.

After being captured we crossed the Langmarck line and were taken to Passchendaele. The Germans evidently had a bad fight, as every arrangement for a hurried leave was obvious; Guns left lying untended in the fields and everything very much in confusion. There were however many Battalions massed at Passchendaele ready to move up, and obviously very reluctant to do so.

What happened with Battalion Headquarters is given from notes by The Rev. E. Popham, M.C. Chaplain to the Battalion, and Regt. Sergt. Major Tite, D.C.M.

The Padre writes; I was while we were at the Steenbeck that the Doctor, Captain Charles did such magnificent work, going from shell hole to shell hole dressing wounds.

After the Battalion had advanced from the stream a message came asking for reinforcements, and I lost sight of Colonel Page, hearing a few minutes later that he had been killed instantly by a piece of shell.

The Sergt. Major writes: About 12.130pm the Adjutant, Captain Milne, told me the Germans were advancing on us, having as we learnt later cut off our main body. While speaking to me Captain Milne was hit and died almost at once.

I got together all available men, about 25, mainly Signaller and Officers' Servants, and formed a line in shell holes.

We then opened fire and the enemy who were advancing over undulating ground at about 500 yards distance, were compelled to halt.

We continued to hold them with the aid of a few stragglers who found their way back, and a Sergeant and about 20 Other Ranks of the 14th Hants, but running short of ammunition we had to retire to a partly dug trench on the opposite side of the river.

Just before this stopped a bullet in my left arm which put that limb out of action, and a few minutes later Capt. Charles, the M.O. was hit in the thigh. The Chaplain at once went to him, but I yelled to him to lie down.

I was later reinforced by Sergt. Ashwell who turned up with a Lewis Gun and one man carrying magazines. This was a great help and I placed him on our Left flank where there was a gap of about 1000 yards between us and the Black watch.

During the whole of this time the Chaplain, with total disregard for personal safety, did all possible to aid the wounded, and when we retired, he was the last to leave and brought with him, almost carrying him, a man who was wounded in the leg.

About 6pm Lieut. Walker of the 1st Cambs arrived with half a Company and took over command, ordering me to go back and get my arm seen to. This I did and after walking until nearly midnight, found our Transport near Elverdinghe, where I reported to Major Phillips, afterwards receiving treatment at the Corps Dressing Station nearby.

The Padre also writes: We had a few badly wounded men in a Pill Box; while I was with them I heard that Captain Charles had been hit, and crawling to him we found that his thigh had been shattered by a bullet. After making him as comfortable as we could, four of our splendid Stretcher Bearers crawled down the hill side with him and eventually got him back, one of the bravest bit of Stretcher work ever done by the Herts. I wish I could remember their names.

By this time we were numb with sorrow and also a bit anxious as we did not know where the British Army was, but after a time R.S.M. Tile managed to get in touch, and found that a Company of the Cambs were digging in our rear, and we felt easier.

On arriving at the Cambs trench I found an officer in charge and our boys fighting happily, and as it was not the place for a badly wounded man, I decided to try and take him back, and we managed to get to a Dressing Station about 7pm.

The next morning I found Brigade Hdqrs. and the Brigadier asked me to take charge of the remainder of the Battalion until Major Phillips could come up, which I did until relieved on the evening of September the 1st.