

150th Brigade Diary report for the battle south-east of Arras on 23rd April 1917 (part of the Second Battle of the Scarpe).

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VI and VII Corps resumed the attack on the enemy today.

In accordance with O.O. 92 dated 22nd April 1917 and appendixes &c attached 150th Inf Brigade being the assaulting Brigade of 50th Division attacked the enemy at 445am. 149th Inf Brigade being in support and 151st Inf Brigade in Reserve.

30th Inf Brigade* 30th Division on right. [* Note: Actually 90th Inf Brigade]

44th Inf Brigade 15th Division on left.

Order of Battle:-

Right assaulting Batt'n. 4th East Yorks. Lt Col W T Wilkinson DSO Cmdg.

Left assaulting Batt'n. **4th Yorks Regt.** Lt Col F F Deakin DSO Cmdg.

In support on right. **5th Yorks Regt.** Lt Col C H Pearce Cmdg.

In support of left. 5th Durham LI. Lt Col G O Spence DSO Cmdg.

On their way to assembly positions, or previous to zero several officer casualties occurred; at least two company commanders being put out of action.

4.15am. Capt Hart (at N.24.c.0.5.) reported both front line battalions OK. Night had been quiet in front line.

Barrage started punctually – if anything a trifle early.

Within two minutes of zero enemy started putting up red lights on our front; these broke into two red stars.

By zero plus 20 minutes the enemy had ceased putting up flares.

At 430am. Two tanks were moving slowly up to their positions, one following the other at 150yards distance. At zero minus 4 minutes the leading tanks was at N24 Central moving N.E.

445am. One 18 pdr battery opened rapid fire a few seconds before zero, but otherwise the burst of fire was simultaneous from all guns and hows.

The creep of the barrage was too slow at this point, all taking part in the assault seem to agree. The men could not be got to move slowly enough, this resulting in considerable loss from our own artillery.

At 5.50am first message came in from Capt Hart N.24.c.0.5. (Advance Bde H.Q.) stating that 25 prisoners had just passed. Apparently 4th Yorks moved forward too rapidly for the barrage as they suffered from our own gunfire within the first 100 yards.

Both tanks went over punctually; enemy barrage was severe on either side of WANCOURT at 6am.

6.15am. An urgent appeal for ammunition arrived; half a Company 5th DLI was sent up to carry. This half company melted away, portions only dribbled back, mostly wounded; a certain amount of SAA was delivered to 4th East Yorks Regt.

Owing to the fact that the officer casualties were so heavy at the outset, practically no reliable information could be obtained, a few runners came in, mostly with verbal reports, those coupled with accounts of wounded were the only data from which to fix where the frontline actually was.

At 6.25am. 4th East Yorks reported that they were well on their way. Several men had been hit by our own barrage. Enemy only put up slight resistance to this battalion at the beginning of the attack.

At 6.30am. The first batch of prisoners reached Divisional cage.

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4th Yorks wire timed 6.5am, stated that they were in the German second line.

At 6.40am. Telephone message from N.24.c.0.5. stated that 1st objective had been reached in our extreme right : also that a field battery had been captured, position not stated; our troops were being held up in wood 0.19.d., and position on left obscure.

At 6.44am. 4th East Yorks (Right battn) wired Support Company reported that they were in first objective.

6.45am. Message received from F.O.O. 251st Arty Bde stating that our troops had reached 1st objective in 0.20.c. and were consolidating.

At 6.55am. 4th East Yorks wired that wood in 0.19.d. was not yet taken; but that their right was in the first objective.

At 7.03am. One company of 5th Yorks was placed at disposal of 4th E Yorks. Two companies 5th Yorks moved to reinforce centre of Brigade just S. of railway about N.24.d.8.0 along O.G. frontline.

At 7.20am both assaulting Battalions were reported to have reached their 1st objectives, but no definite news of the capture of wood 0.19.d. was received.

At 7.21am. Following message timed 6.55am. Was received from OC 4th Yorks Regt :-

Situation at present is as follows:- On left 4th Yorks Regt have got 1st objective 300 prisoners, 1 battery, and personnel ; am out of touch with 4th E Yorks. 4th E Yorks have objective on right flank but are held up in neighbourhood of wood 0.19.d. by MG fire. One company 5th DLI have been sent to reinforce 4th Yorks and 1 Coy 5th Yorks sent to reinforce left flank 4th E Yorks. A MG firing from E. Of GUEMAPPE was still giving trouble at this time.

At 7.45am. 4th E Yorks reported that their left still held up by wood in 0.19.d. though some men appear to be past the wood. At 7.55am. Capt HIRSCH Cmdg left company 4th Yorks Regt. Reported that it was impossible to check the rate of advance owing to the large number of Germans who surrendered, the men pushing on to take them, in this way the left Battalion created a very exposed outer flank.

At 8am a message timed 7.30am was received from liaison officer with 44th Inf Bde. To say that 2 tanks were burning on 0.19.d. and that 44th Inf Bde were held up in N.18.b. & 0.7.c.

90th Inf Bde reported their left flank forward towards 1st objective with 2 M.G.s - remainder held up in QUARRY in N.30.b.

8.05am. 100th MG Coy reported it had lost 2 guns and 1 and a half teams. Enemy barrage at this time was across N.17.d. and N.24.a.0. heavy guns and MG fire in N.15.s. and N.21.n.

At 8.07am. OC, 5th DLI was ordered to send one company up to cutting in N.19.a.1.7. He stated he thought 4th Yorks Regt were 250 yards short of their objective and that the enemy were advancing up COJEUL valley.

At 8.10am. 4th E Yorks that they are held up with left flank resting in 0.19.d.6.7. and not in touch with Battalion on their left – the enemy was massing for a counter attack.

At 8.30am. It became obvious that the situation was obscure – the flanks of each Battalion being in the air. This was actually the case, and touch was never maintained with Brigades on right and left who were always in rear; left Battalion of right Brigade is thought to have lost direction to its right and this would account for the enemy being able, as he undoubtedly was, to push in a counter attack through the gap thus formed.

At 8.15am. 1 Coy 5th DLI was ordered to cutting O.19.a.1.7. to guard our left flank. 24 guns were ordered to search valley from St Roharts factory to O.20.a.5.9.

BGC had had intended to move forward to N.24.a.o.5. at 8.30am but in view of the situation he decided to remain at N.15.d.4.4. until situation was cleared up.

At 8.40am. Reports from OP's came to the effect that our men were seen moving towards wood in

O.19.d. Centre and right of 15th Divn held up N and S of GUEMAPPE; enemy was seen in trench S of GUEMAPPE and N of River COJEUL, in strength.

Two companies (one 5th DLI and one 5th Yorks Regt) were pushed up to right of the tower to old German line.

At 8.50am. A wounded NCO (SGT BECKETT 4th East Yorks) reported the wood 19.d was in our hands and that A Coy had dug in E of it. This was the first definite information received on the subject; this NCO had left the firing line at about 8am.

At 9.15am. 4th Yorks were reported by Tanks to be in O.19.b.9.5. FOO reported that enemy had been seen retiring from the wood O.19.d. and that his artillery was shelling it.

At 9.30am. A message arrived from Capt Hart in N.24.c.0.5; " At 8.15am. Brigade on left advanced against GUEMAPPE and apparently were not checked".

9.30am. Message was received by 4th East Yorks from 17th Manchester's (timed 8.30am.) to say they had reached 1st Objective.

9.55am. 4th East Yorks HQ telephoned that SOS signal had gone up and that enemy was massing in sunken road O.26.c. H.A.C. were at once informed as also were 90th Inf Bde and 50th Div.

9.40am. Enemy put gas and lachrymatory shells over COJEUL valley.

Capt HART telephoned that all was going well on our extreme left and right. Situation in centre still obscure. No touch with either of flanking Brigades.

9.55am. Information was received from 150th M.G. Coy that a Sergt. with 3 of the reserve M.G.'s had reported being in QUARRY N.30.b.8.3. with Manchester's.

10.0am. B.G.C. issued orders for the Brigade to resume it's advance at 11.45am – 5th Yorks and 5th DLI being the assaulting battalions. A message was received that 2 sections of 149th and 151st M.G. Coys had moved forward to second position.

10.20am. Following message was received from 151st Inf Bde (Addressed 5th Borders) timed 9.45am. "Copse in O.19.d. is reported to be in our hands. Leading lines of 150th Inf Bde are in 1st objective though line is apparently not continuous. Your leading two companies will move according to programme. Be prepared on receipt of further orders to move remainder of Battalion to bank running from N.23.d.3.0. to N.24. c.O.6. with HQ at N.24.c.O.6.

10.30am. Situation of 44th Inf Bde was sent by liaison officer.

10.50am. B.G.C informed 50th Division of situation on our left, - as it was apparent that left flank* of this Brigade was in the air. [* Note: Right flank?]

11.05am. OC 5th DLI reports by telephone to B.G.C that enemy has counter attacked heavily and broken through 4th Yorks Regt in COJEUL valley. Orders for attack on second objective were cancelled after reference to the Division.

11.20am. 5th Division* wire timed 11am. "As situation of 15th Division is uncertain left of 150th Inf Bde will conform to this movement and occupy a line O.26.b.O.4. O.2.d.O.5**. O.13.b.6.4. A verbal message was received at the same time from OC 4th East Yorks Regt to the effect that his Battalion was holding its original trenches with both flanks in the air.

[* Note: 50th Division] [** Note: O.20.a.0.5?]

11.25am. Flanking Brigades were informed of the change in the situation. Message was received from 50th Division timed 11.15am. "Further advance will not take place; 5th Borders will move up to bank N.24.c. at once and come under orders of 150th Inf Bde. 9th DLI will move up at once to NEPAL trench. BLUE line will be consolidated."

11.20am. Message received from 5th DLI timed 11.40am. "One Company holding sunken road in

O.19.a.3.5. – Heavy casualties from M.G. fire and gas shells. There are also some men of 4th Yorks. They have sent forward an officer to reconnoitre and clear up the situation.”

11.30am. OC 5th DLI telephoned to say 5th Yorks hold tower . 4th E Yorks on their right are back in original line. 1 half Coys 5th DLI are on left of 5th Yorks.