

8th Battalion  
4th November

growth. This Company, a little while before this report was sent, had encountered three hostile machine guns and a sniper. Fire with rifles and Lewis guns was opened on the enemy, who were seen to withdraw carrying a wounded man. An attempt made to follow up the Germans failed owing to the thickness of the Wood. B Company, farther south, had a similar experience, the hostile machine-gun crew withdrawing as the Somerset men advanced, the enemy escaping into the darkness.

The Support and Reserve Companies of the 8th Battalion, led by strong platoon patrols supported by a second platoon, were then pushed along the main rides of the Forest on the Battalion front. They worked their way gradually eastwards and eventually found themselves on the eastern exits of the Forest. Three officer patrols then went forward to a point on the railway about fifty to one hundred yards from the eastern edges of the wood where, in the near distance, small parties of the enemy were observed round camp fires.

5th November

Very early next morning Colonel Sheringham was informed that the 5th Division was going to pass through the 37th Division and would use the main drives and railways through the Forest. He therefore ordered all Companies to establish posts at the eastern exits of the Forest and along the Battalion front in order to draw the enemy's observation away from the drives and railway. Between 3.20 and 4.20 a.m. on 5th November leading Battalions of the 5th Division reached Battalion Headquarters, 8th Somersets, with the intention of forming up along the western edge of the Forest and attacking through it, being unaware that the Somersets and troops of the 112th Brigade had already reached the eastern edge. Colonel Sheringham urged them to push on down the drives.

Between 6.30 and 6.40 a.m. the 5th Division troops passed through the Somersets and flanking units, crossing the eastern edge of the Forêt de Mormal. Shortly afterwards a report was received that they had reached their objective.

During the morning the 8th Somersets were withdrawn to Pont à Vache where the Battalion cooks were found, and all ranks enjoyed a well-earned breakfast.

Throughout the operations the Battalion Signallers had done splendid work: they maintained unbroken communication between Div. H.Q. and Bn. H.Q., no easy task where the situation was changing continually.

The last page of the final "Narrative of Operations" in the Battalion Diary records: "The Battalion then marched by companies via Louvignies and Salesches to billets in Neuville, reaching Neuville between 15.30 and 16.00 hours (3.30 and 4 p.m.)."

In this final and very creditable fighting the 8th Somersets lost Captain O. Briggs and 2/Lieut. H. W. Brooks killed, and 2/Lieut. S. A. Palmer wounded. The losses in other ranks were: killed—8, wounded—22, "missing, believed wounded"—3. The Battalion captured 20 machine guns and one 5.9 howitzer.

*Horace Brooks, 8th Bn*