

1st Battalion

The 11th Brigade had been ordered to attack with three battalions in the front line and three in support; the 10th and 12th Brigades were to continue the attack through the 11th. Of the latter, the East Lancs R., Rifle Brigade and 8th Warwicks (in the order given from right to left) formed the front line; the Hampshires, Somerset L.I. and 6th Warwicks (also from right to left) were in close support. Battalions were to advance on a frontage of one company.

The three first Battalions had been ordered to assault, capture and consolidate the line Q.5.c.8.9.—K.35.c.6.2.—K.36.a.0.5., upon which the three supporting Battalions were to advance through the leading Battalions and in the same way assault, capture and consolidate the final objective of the Brigade—the line Q.6.c.5.3. (inclusive)—Q.6.a.3.9.—K.36.a.8.2. inclusive.

1st July

At 7.20 a.m. there was a roar as a huge mine under Hawthorn Redoubt, south of Beaumont Hamel, exploded. This mine was stated to have been the largest fired during the War: it was 80 feet below the surface and contained 20½ tons of explosive.

Ten minutes later the advance began: "The 11th Brigade advanced in magnificent style," records the Diary of the 1st Somersets: the latter in four lines as follows: 1st line, 2 platoons of A Company on right, 2 of B on left; 2nd line, 2 platoons of A Coy. on right, 2 of B on left; 3rd line, 2 platoons of C Coy. on right, 2 of H on left; 4th line, 2 platoons of C Coy. on right, 2 of H on left.

At the outset the advance was carried out in excellent style and an officer of the 1st Battalion said: "The sight was magnificent, line after line of men advancing at a slow trot towards the German line with hundreds of shells, ours for the most part, bursting behind the German line." With but little loss the attacking lines on the left and centre advanced to the first objective. On the right flank, however, heavy machine-gun fire swept the ranks of the East Lancashires and Hampshires, and these two Battalions were unable to get beyond the enemy's wire. The Somerset men, owing to the ridge which they should have crossed being swept by machine-gun fire, had to ease off to the left, and the Battalion found itself in the German trenches in the neighbourhood of the Quadrilateral. The Warwicks gained their objective but were unable to hold on.

From this point onwards all is confusion. The Battalion Diary states that "it is impossible to get a detailed account of the fighting that ensued, but the situation after the first hour or two was that men of various battalions in the Division were holding part of the Quadrilateral and were engaged in a fierce grenade fight. Our men were for some time severely handicapped by shortage of grenades, but these were afterwards sent up." Desperate fighting, indeed, went on in the German first and second lines throughout the day. Unfortunately some of the German front-line trenches which had been captured were not properly cleared of their defenders, who hid themselves in their deep dug-outs until the British troops had passed on towards the second line. The crafty Germans then came out of their first-line dug-