

Extract from the 8th Battalion East Surrey Regiment's action at Cherisy 3rd
May 1917.

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This is the action where William E Largent was killed

REPORT ON OPERATIONS AT CHERISY.

3rd May 1917.

The Battalion under my command took over the left of the trenches held by 7/Queens on the night of 1st/2nd May the Relief taking place with five casualties. On the night of 2nd/3rd, Companies moved into position for assault.

My dispositions were:-

"A" Co. Right assaulting.

"B" Co. Left assaulting.

each Company being formed in depth on a three Platoon frontage forming two waves, with a 4th Platoon in support forming a 3rd wave.

No.16 Platoon of 7/R.W.K. was attached to "A" Company as "Moppers up" and assembled with the third wave. "C" Company was in support and "D" Company in Reserve. Two Stokes guns were attached to "D" Company.

At minus 1.30 hr. all Companies had reported they were in position and ready to attack, and that a tape line had been laid 30 yards in front of our front Trench on which to form up.

My Reserve Company were lined up in rear of the British Support Line and we were in touch with the 7/Bufs on the right and 8/R.B. on the left.

At Zero our shrapnel barrage started and the Battalion advanced to the attack.

The barrage appeared to take an appreciable time to develop. One or two Batteries started slightly ahead of the others. There was no Moon, so that it was very dark, and within a few minutes of the start there was considerable confusion.

The rear waves had caught up and mingled with the leading waves, and a number of the men of the Battalions on the right and left were mixed with my men. Company Platoon and Section Commanders had great difficulty in keeping their commands together.

There was some enemy machine gun and rifle fire from the front and both flanks which did not at first cause many casualties, and the advance went forward without great opposition to the first objective.

As regards the enemy on our front occupying the ground between the British front line and Cherisy Village a few were made prisoners, some were killed but the bulk managed to run away assisted by the darkness. Some of them mingled with our assaulting troops and were not in every case recognised as being enemy, and afterwards hid in shell holes on the ground our troops had passed over.

The enemy counter barrage started at about X.4 and at first was on, and in rear of, our front line, especially on our Support line.

In rear of the Battalion I had sent forward 2/Lieut. Pease with the Battalion Signallers to establish a Forward Report centre at dugouts reported to be near the Factory in O.26.C. He did this, and communication between here and my Report Centre at O.25.B.93 was maintained from 5.15 a.m. to 11 a.m.

I established my Headquarters at St. Michael's Statue where I arrived at 5.35 a.m. and found the situation to be that a mixed force of 8/E.Surrey and 7/Bufs was correctly disposed along the line of the first objective of the 55th Bde., but Units and Companies were much intermingled.

At X.2 hours the shrapnel barrage rolled forward and two waves of men started forward to the final objective. It was then seen that the right flank of the Brigade was entirely in the air, and that although there were scattered parties of British troops on the left the attack on that flank was not in strength at this stage.

The enemy again retreated before our advance and considerable execution was done by our Lewis Guns it being now light enough for them to recognise targets.

At about 6.15 a.m. Captain Latter 7/R.W.K. reported to me in person with his Company of about 70 men and two Lewis guns, and stated that he had cleared the 55th Bde. frontage in Cherisy. I ordered him to consolidate a position under the Bank at St. Michael's Statue to be in reserve to me and in a position to resist any counter attack from Vis en Artois, and to strengthen our connection with the 41st Brigade.

At 6.45 a.m. I could see our men at intervals along the whole Brigade frontage on the final objective.

At about 7.15 a.m. Lieut. Rollings 55th M.C. Company reported to me with two Vickers guns.

I ordered him to put one gun in position on the South end of the Bank at O.27.C.47 covering the Valley leading to Vis en Artois, and the other in the most northerly house of Cherisy.

Later, I sent orders to 2/Lieut. Gaywood, T.M.B. and 2/Lt. Dove of my Battalion, to get into Cherisy and occupy the north end of the Village. They had a mixed party of 50 men and of this party about 15 men with a trench mortar, but no ammunition, actually got into Cherisy Village, the rest being knocked out by Machine gun fire.

Two enemy aeroplanes were flying comparatively low down and dropping lights to show our positions, and the enemy must also have had excellent Artillery observation

No troops having come up on the Brigade right, I ordered Captain Latter with his Company to extend my line to the right on the final objective with the hope of getting into touch with any troops either of the 54th Brigade or 21st Division who might be on the final objective further to the South than I could observe.

This movement was carried out most gallantly by Capt. Latter and his Company under flanking machine gun fire from which they suffered heavy casualties. When this was done we were occupying somewhat thinly practically the whole of the Divisional frontage on the final objective but still failed to get touch on the right.

At 7.45 a.m. I saw about 40 of the enemy massing in the sunken road at south of Cherisy at O.32.C.74 and taking the range from the Map, was able to get effective machine gun fire on to them at 1400 yards which caused those of them who were in view to scatter but they were too far away to prevent them getting into the South end of Cherisy afterwards.

The enemy then started a systematic bombardment and reoccupation of Cherisy from the South end, the method being as follows:-

Two Very Lights were put up by the leading enemy Infantry. The Artillery then lifted off a Sector of about 100 yards of the South end of the Village continuing to

At the same time the enemy started shelling our troops wherever he could observe them, and I decided that as supports had not put in an appearance it would be necessary for me to move my reserve of 20 men to the Vis en Artois Road to give support to the leading troops. This was found impossible owing to direct machine gun fire down the road from the North end of Cherisy Village. I then attempted to take up a line in shell holes along the 65 Contour line in C.26.B.and D.

I had just given orders for this to be done, when the enemy counter attacked our front and left.

Our leading troops seeing that the enemy were behind them on both flanks retired slowly with the enemy advancing close up to them. The few remaining Officers attempted to rally the men at the line of the Sensee River, and again on the line I had selected but with only limited success.

Owing to the noise from shelling and rifle and machine gun fire it was impossible to make the men hear any orders & with a few exceptions they continued to walk back. Our difficulties were increased by the fact that the enemy were close on the heels of the retreat.

Arrived at Cable Trench I found it full of our men, and I got in touch with two subalterns of 7 R.W.K.

At this time the morale of the men was not shaken and Cable trench was being strongly held.

To my personal knowledge there were five Officers in Cable Trench who had the situation well in hand, and were carrying out the work of reorganization. There were several Lewis Guns in position, and every man had his rifle on the parapet in a position to shoot.

As the remainder of our men were still walking to the rear I left these Officers in charge of Cable Trench, and went back to our front line with a view to reorganization.

Here I found that several Officers were rallying the men in both front and support trenches and the situation was soon well in hand, but meantime the men in Cable trench began to come back, the retirement commencing from the left, through a message which had passed down from man to man that an Officer had ordered them to retire.

As soon as possible Units were sorted out and the Brigade was reorganised in our front and support trenches as follows, From left to right West Kents, Buffs, E.Surreys, and Queens.

Estimated casualties are 13 Officers and 381 Other Ranks.

A.P.B. IRWIN, Lieut.Col.
Cmdng. 8/S.Bn.E.Surrey Regt.
