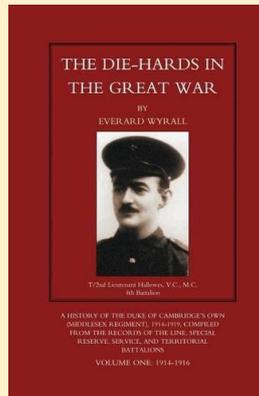


# 11th Battalion Middlesex Regiment

Here is an abridged version of:

***The Die-Hards In The Great War - Vol 1 1914-1916***

by ***Everard Wyrall***



All references to other battalions have been removed.

Only direct references of the actions of the 11th Battalion, plus some additional contextual information has been left to aide the reader.

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Chapter XVIII

**The Battle of Loos: 25th September —8th October, 1915**

For several reasons the Battle of Loos and the subsidiary operations connected therewith will always remain of special interest to the Middlesex Regiment. The first Victoria Cross awarded to the Regiment in the Great War was won by a gallant young officer —2nd Lieut. R. P. Hallowes, of the 4th Battalion —during the Second Attack on Bellewaarde (25 th-26th September); two “Service” Battalions (11th and 13th) for the first time took part in a set battle, therefore all Battalions of the Regiment then in France or Flanders (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 1/ 7th, 1/ 8th, 11th and 13th) were engaged in the main or subsidiary operations, and lastly the 1/ 8th Battalion, having resumed independent formation in August, once again held a portion of the front line.

The official despatches may be searched in vain for the intentions of the Allied Commanders, which British and French troops, with the utmost gallantry, attempted to carry out with only partial success. Without going into a lengthy discussion of the general situation along the Western Front, which gave rise to the operations which began on 25th September and continued until the third week in October, the intentions of the Allies were briefly as follows: —(1) to break the enemy’s front; (2) prevent him re-establishing his line; (3) to defeat decisively his divided forces.

The British attack was to be carried out by the First and Second Armies operating practically along the whole front from just west of Loos to east of Ypres. The main attack was to take place from just east of the mining village of Grenay to Givenchy, north of the La Bassée Canal. In this attack two

Corps, the IVth (3rd Cavalry, 1st, 15th and 47th Divisions), and 1st (2nd, 7th, 9th and 28th Divisions) (from right to left) were to take part, whilst the XIth Corps (Guards, 21st and 24th Divisions) was held in reserve. There were to be three subsidiary attacks: (1) on the Moulin du Pietre by the Meerut Division of the Indian Corps (First Army); (2) at Bois Grenier by the 8th Division, IIIrd Corps (First Army); (3) on Bellewaarde Farm by the 3rd Division (Vth Corps) and 14th Division (VIth Corps) of the Second Army. In the subsequent "Action of the Hohenzollern Redoubt," the 1st and 42nd Divisions (IVth Corps) and Guards, 2nd, 12th and 46th Divisions —all First Army troops —were engaged.

As already stated, every Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment then in France and Flanders fought in the Battle, i.e., either in the main or the subsidiary operations. The 1st Battalion (2nd Division), 3rd Battalion (28th Division), and 13th Battalion (24th Division) were engaged in the main operations. The 4th Battalion (3rd Division) attacked the enemy east of Ypres —at Bellewaarde —with the idea of holding him to his ground, whilst the 2nd, 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th Battalions of the 8th Division were similarly engaged at Bois Grenier; these were the subsidiary operations. The 11th Battalion (nth Division) was engaged in the subsequent Action of the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

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The 11th Middlesex was the first Service Battalion of the Regiment raised. On 8th August, 1914, three officers and 12 N.C.Os. were sent from the 1st Middlesex (then at Woolwich) to the Depot at Mill Hill to form the nucleus of the new 11th Battalion. Three days later, three more officers and 12 N.C.Os. arrived at Mill Hill from the 4th Middlesex, then at Devonport, while several former warrant officers and N.C.Os. re-enlisted and were appointed to their old rank; amongst these were the R.S.M. and the R.Q.M.S.

In a week the whole Battalion was recruited and training was carried on continuously. About 22nd August the 11th proceeded by train to Colchester and there joined the 12th Division of "K.I." Major W. D. Ingle was appointed to command the Battalion, Lieut. L. L. Pargiter was the Adjutant, and Lieut. English the Quartermaster. Many old men and officers joined at Colchester, and the utmost enthusiasm prevailed throughout the whole Battalion.

With experienced officers and formed of the splendid fighting material which was forthcoming in August, 1914, and the early days of the War, the Battalion soon engaged in vigorous training. In October the 36th Brigade proceeded by train to camp at St. Martin's Plain, Shorncliffe, moving in November into a "hutted" camp at Sandling. By the end of 1914 the 36th Brigade had made another move, this time to billets in Folkestone, Battalion Headquarters of the 11th Middlesex being at the Westcliff Hotel.

The 11th remained at Folkestone until February, 1915, when the Battalion, in Brigade and Division, proceeded by march route to Aldershot, there to undergo the final training before going abroad for active service. The march to Aldershot occupied five days, and was by way of Ashford, Maidstone, Edenbridge, Dorking and Guildford. Three months more of strenuous work, and at last, on the morning of the 31st May, the advanced party (consisting of 3 officers, 108 other ranks, and the Regimental Transport) entrained at Farnborough for Southampton, embarking at 4 p.m. for France. The same evening the Battalion, at a strength of 27 officers and 785 other ranks, left the Government Siding at Aldershot in two trains for Folkestone, embarking in the early hours of the 1st June on the Princess Victoria. At 3 a.m. the boat entered Boulogne Harbour. Disembarkation took place immediately, and by 4.30 a.m. the whole Battalion was settled in, in Ostrohove Large Camp, having marched from the harbour, a distance of two miles. From this camp the Battalion (now at full

strength —30 officers and 893 other ranks) moved with other units of the 36th Brigade to the Blendecques area, the Middlesex being billeted at Concardennes.

At 7 a.m. on 5th June the 36th Brigade set out on a 15-mile march for the Hazebrouck area. Although hardened as they were by months of training in England and used to long route marches, this first march along the paved roads of France was an extremely trying experience. The hard dusty cobbles, the heat of the day and the heavy pack carried full, were a great strain on the men, many of whom fell out, and it was a great relief to all ranks when bivouacs in the fields about a mile west of Hazebrouck were reached. At 6.25 a.m. on the following morning the march was continued to Borre Merris and Nootte Boom, and, although the heat was again trying, the roads were better and few men fell out, the 11th Middlesex having three only. On 10th the units of the 36th Brigade marched to Armentières for attachment to Brigades of the 27th Division for instruction in trench warfare. The 11th Middlesex were fortunate in being allotted to the 19th Infantry Brigade, which at this period contained the 1st Battalion of the Regiment, and at 9 p.m. parties of officers and N.C.Os. of the 11th marched into the trenches of the 1st Middlesex and 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers for a twenty-four hours' tour. They were relieved at 9 p.m. on 11th by two companies of the Battalion, who, in turn, were relieved by the remaining two companies at 9 p.m. on 11th. During these tours three men of "B" Company were wounded on 11th, one of whom died of his wounds, and two men of "C" Company wounded were the first casualties suffered by the 11th Middlesex in the front-line trenches. These "period" tours lasted until the 15th, when the Battalion, after relief, marched to billets at School, Nootte Boom, for several days' instruction out of the front line. On 25th, however, at 5 a.m. the Battalion (in Brigade) left Nootte Boom, as the 12th Division had taken over a sector of the line, and the 36th Infantry Brigade had been allotted to the Ploegsteert Wood sub-sector. The 11th Middlesex had been detailed to relieve the 8th Worcesters, and at 8.30 a.m. reached the Wood, where the Battalion laid up all day until the evening. Rain had fallen heavily during the day, and when at 6 p.m. the relief began the "going" was difficult, the ground being sodden and muddy. Ploegsteert Wood at the best of times was not a very delectable spot, and after rain it was always in an appalling condition, so that it is not unusual to find an entry in the Battalion Diary stating that the trenches were "very muddy and dirty." Lieut.-Col. Ingle had his Headquarters at Ash House. But the tour lasted only until the night of 27th June, when the Middlesex men were relieved by Canadians and marched to billets at Oosthove Farm; the tour had cost the Battalion one man died of wounds, one wounded and one accidentally injured.

The first six-day tour in the front line began on the night of 3rd-4th July, when the 11th Middlesex relieved the 9th Royal Fusiliers in Trenches 95 and 101, Battalion Headquarters being at Despierre Farm. Casualties during this tour were 6 other ranks killed and 15 wounded. The first officer casualty was also reported —Captain H. A. Hill being wounded on 8th.

It is of interest to read what the Battalion Diary records of this first prolonged tour in the front-line trenches, written after the Middlesex had been relieved by the 6th Buffs during the night 9th-10th June: "During the above tour of duty in trenches the Battalion obtained a marked superiority over Germans in trenches opposite. In all ten enemy snipers are known to have been hit, and two of their men on working parties and one of their stretcher-bearers. One of the above snipers, a red-haired man nicknamed 'Rudolf,' who had been very active for some months past, was shot by No. 5350 C.S.M. Bentley, 'C' Company. Another was shot by No. 233 Lance-Corporal Hazley, 'B' Company. All our casualties were caused by snipers and H.E. shell, of which the enemy made great use. Battalion Headquarters was shelled on 5th, but had no casualties. Good work was done by all ranks, and there was never any lack of volunteers for working parties in front of our lines, patrols, &c."

Thereafter tours in and out of the line occupied the Battalion for some weeks. During one of these, on 27th July, 2nd Lieut. H. G. Hawkins was shot in the head and died later in a Field Ambulance. He was the first officer of the 11th Middlesex to lose his life. On the 4th August (the Battalion was then in the Houplines sector) Capt. T. L. Mills was also shot in the head whilst looking over the parapet, and died the following day.

Demonstrations were carried out by the 11th Middlesex on 25th September, while the main operations at Loos were in progress, but there is nothing abnormal to record, and on 26th the Battalion was relieved and proceeded to billets near Armentières Station.

On 27th the Battalion (in Brigade) marched to Bailleul, entraining at the latter place on 28th at 9 a.m. The 12th Division was now under orders for the Loos area, and the Middlesex men (in Brigade), having reached Chocques at 11.30 a.m., marched to La Vallée, continuing the march on 29th at 10 a.m. to Verquigneul, arriving at 3.30 p.m. On the morning of 30th September, at 10 a.m., Colonel Ingle and the Adjutant (Captain Pargiter) set out to inspect the trenches about Lone Tree, west-south-west of Hulluch, and at 4.30 p.m. the Battalion, marching via Vermelles, took over the line (the old German front line) from the 2nd Coldstream Guards, the 12th Division having orders to relieve the Guards Division; the relief was completed at 1 a.m. on 1st October, rain falling heavily during the time the Middlesex men were "taking over." The disposition of Companies was: "C" in the front line, "D" in support, then "B" Company, "A" Company and Battalion Headquarters in the old German fire trench. The exact position given in the Battalion Diary is "G. 17. d. and north part of G. 23. b. and G. 24. a."

It is apparent from the official records that the 11th Middlesex (as a whole) neither attacked the enemy, nor did the latter attack the Battalion during the Actions of the Hohenzollern Redoubt, 13th-19th October. Nevertheless the Middlesex men played an important part in the operations, for the bombers were always more or less engaged, and on several occasions with splendid tenacity and courage discomfited the enemy and beat him back to his own trenches, on one occasion, indeed, recapturing trenches which he had taken by a surprise attack from another Battalion. The casualties suffered by the Battalion for the month of October, viz., 3 officers wounded, 36 other ranks killed and 114 wounded, also show how it was possible for battalions to suffer heavy losses though not engaged in any direct attack.

The sector taken over by the 36th Infantry Brigade on the night 30th September-1st October lay due west of Hulluch and just south of the Hulluch road. The 12th Division had relieved the Guards Division. On the left of the 36th Brigade lay the Hohenzollern Redoubt, one of the most fiercely contested points in the whole line from Hill 70 to the La Bassfée Canal.

The morning of 1st October was comparatively quiet, but about 2 p.m. the enemy opened fire with H.E. and shrapnel, and shelled the trenches of the 11th Middlesex and both flanks incessantly until dusk. The fire then slackened off, but about 7.30 p.m. very heavy firing broke out on the left of the Battalion, apparently about the Hohenzollern. The 3rd and 4th October were days of considerable anxiety—heavy shelling characterised this period—though casualties were fortunately small there was little rest for those in the front line. On the night of 5th the London Scottish filed into the trenches, relieving "C" and "D" Companies of the Middlesex, the former moving back to the old British support trenches immediately north of Le Rutoire, while "D" Company went back into the second line. On the 7th the 1st Division took over the front line from the 12th Division and the latter moved back into reserve. The 11th Middlesex were relieved by the 2nd Black Watch and marched back to bivouacs in the Château grounds at Vaudricourt, where in great discomfort the Battalion arrived about 1.30 a.m. on 8th and had to pass the remainder of the night in swampy woods. On the

12th the Battalion marched into houses and trenches on the southern side of Vermelles, everyone being settled in by 6 p.m. The operations known as the Actions of the Hohenzollern Redoubt were to begin on the following day.

In his despatch dated 31st July, 1916, Sir John French thus refers to the confused fighting which took place between 13th and 19th October, 1915: "Up to the end of October the most important operation was an attack, which commenced about noon of the 13th, by troops of the XIth and IVth Corps against Fosse No. 8, the Quarries, and the German trenches on the Lens-La Bassée road. The Divisions chiefly engaged were the 1st Division (IVth Corps) and the 12th and 46th Divisions (XIth Corps). Speaking generally, the objective of the 1st Division was the enemy's trenches on the Lens-La Bassée road; that of the 12th Division was the Quarries; whilst the troops of the 46th Division attacked the Hohenzollern Redoubt and Fosse No. 8."

Of the 12th Division, the 37th Brigade on the right and the 35th Brigade on the left were to attack the Quarries and secure a line beyond, the 36th Brigade was in reserve at Noyelles and Vermelles and therefore did not take part in the initial attack, which began at 12 noon under cover of a heavy artillery bombardment and a smoke screen. But from the regimental point of view the chief interest in the whole of the operations is centred in the action of the Battalion bombers of the 11th Middlesex, of whom a party of 50 men, under 2nd Lieut. Leach, were sent up to assist the 35th Infantry Brigade. Unfortunately none of the official diaries (Battalion, Brigade or Divisional) contain detailed narratives of the operations, and all that can be gathered from them is the fact that the gallant Middlesex men acquitted themselves splendidly, and that they were still fighting side by side with troops of the 35th Brigade when their own Brigade (36th) moved up to relieve the 37th Brigade in the front line on 14th October. The 11th Middlesex (less the bombers) took over the trenches of the 6th Royal West Kent and East Surreys, which, the Battalion Diary states, "extended from G. 12. d. central (road exclusive) to G. 12. a. 54." The Battalion Diary also adds: "Staff arrangements for relief very poor; we were not told which units we were relieving, and had to find our own ration dump during night. No arrangements for water." Good staff work was rare during the whole of the operations at Loos in 1915; the absence of it was one of the most potent reasons that greater results were not obtained from the splendid efforts made by the troops of all divisions.

The centre of the line taken over by the 11th Middlesex was still held by one company of the 8th Royal Fusiliers, whose bombers were of great value to the Middlesex, for, as stated by the latter: "Our own bombers not returned though asked for urgently, as the middle of our line can be held only by bombers, about Point 22."

By 12.30 a.m. on the 15th the relief of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and East Surreys had been completed and the 11th Middlesex awaited the breaking of dawn, which was certain to witness a continuation of the struggle which had begun on the 13th. The sun had hardly risen when the Germans began to throw bombs at the Middlesex men, who could make no effective reply, owing to the Battalion bombers being still engaged at the Quarries. All day long the bombing continued, varied occasionally by violent bursts of shelling with H.E. and aerial torpedoes; in two places for a distance of 50 yards the parapet had been levelled. About 6 p.m., tired out and almost exhausted, the bombers at last returned. And what a story they had to tell! They had been engaged in continuous bombing operations at the south-east corner of the Quarries, where they practically held the line themselves. Six other ranks killed, 1 died of wounds, and 8 other ranks wounded were the losses of the 11th Battalion on this day.

On the 16th the trenches again came in for a heavy shelling, and in many places the parapet was levelled; the men of "D" Company in particular had a most trying time, as their trenches appeared to

be specially marked down by the enemy's guns, with the result that the defences were much knocked about. At night time, however, helped by a platoon of 5th Northhamptons, the trenches were repaired.

On this day the Battalion bombers, having rested, took over Points 22 and 39 from the 8th Royal Fusilier Bombers. Casualties during the day were 1 officer (2nd Lieut. C. D. Brodie) wounded, 6 other ranks killed and 11 wounded.

The trenches were again shelled heavily on the 17th and the parapet was once more levelled. Continuous bomb fights day and night kept the bombers busy; they stuck to their grim work with extraordinary tenacity and flung their missiles with great effect.

The 18th was a day of prolonged torture. From early morning the enemy's guns poured H.E. and shrapnel on to the trenches of the 11th Middlesex, "A" and "C" Companies having a particularly bad time. Men were blown up or buried in the debris, numbers of them suffering from concussion. Again the parapet was levelled, though promptly repaired as soon as merciful darkness hid the men from the enemy's observers. To make matters worse, the British shells were bursting short over the position held by the Middlesex men. One officer (Captain H. G. Money) was wounded, 15 other ranks were killed, 1 died of wounds and 35 were wounded.

At last, about 4 p.m. on 19th, a Battalion of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders began to file into the trenches of the Middlesex men, but not before another officer (2nd Lieut. A. A. Allan) had been wounded, 1 other rank killed, and 14 more wounded from the enemy's shell fire.

In those early days of the War, reliefs of Battalions in the front line were not the carefully-organised operations they were during the latter years, and this particular relief took many hours to complete. For about 5.30 p.m. the enemy probably observing that a relief was in progress, attacked the Battalion on the left of the Middlesex, but was bloodily repulsed. During this attack the trenches of the Middlesex were heavily shelled, and everyone had to take cover. Moreover, the enemy's riflemen and machine gunners poured a constant stream of bullets on to the trenches of their opponents. About 7.30 p.m. the fire slackened sufficiently to allow the relief to proceed, but it was 12.30 a.m. on 20th before it was completed, and at that hour "A," "B," and "C" Companies of the 11th Middlesex were in reserve trenches in the old British front line, and "D" Company was in the old German front line in support. The Battalion bombers, still under 2nd Lieut. Leach, were moved up to "D" Company and fitted out with a fresh supply of bombs ready for instant action.

And here the action of the Hohenzollern Redoubt officially ends. But it is not the end of the story so far as the Middlesex Regiment is concerned, for before the Battalion was finally relieved on the 21st October and reached Noyelles, the Battalion bombers and "D" Company had again come into action and had greatly distinguished themselves.

On the night of 20th-21st October the enemy had made a surprise attack on the bombers of the 7th Royal Sussex Regiment, attached to 9th Essex Regiment (to which the 11th Middlesex were in support) and had captured a portion of their trenches about G. 5. d. 9.0. At once Lieut. Leach took his bombers forward (the Battalion Diary stating that "our bombers went from trenches"), and finding the utmost confusion prevailing in the front line, took command and recaptured the lost position, killing many Germans and driving the remainder out in confusion. Captain Brown (commanding "D" Company) moved his Company up to the captured spot and supported Lieut. Leach in his attack, the former lining the parapet with his men as soon as the bombers were at work.

The C.O. of the 9th Essex Regiment wrote to the C.O. of the 11th Middlesex acknowledging the assistance lent by the latter Battalion, concluding his letter with these words: "I am awfully glad to be able to report so well, and am most grateful to you and the Middlesex Regiment for their help."

For the remainder of October the 11th Middlesex remained in billets in Fouquières, Noyelles and Sailly La Bourse.

Such, so far as the Middlesex Regiment is concerned, is the story of the main and subsidiary actions of the Battle of Loos, 1915, and the subsequent actions of the Hohenzollern Redoubt, and it is a record of which the Regiment has every reason to be proud, for Regular, Territorial and Service Battalions had fought most gallantly.

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At 1 p.m. on the 1st the 11th Middlesex relieved the 6th West Kents in the line west of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. "Sticky Trench" was the name of the trench in that part of the line, and "sticky" it was in the extreme, for the Diary states that "all trenches in an appalling condition, with mud and water waist high in most places." The relief was not completed until 7 p.m., i.e., six hours to take over the line, and rain fell steadily the whole time and on through the night.

When dawn of the 2nd broke the position was more hopeless than ever. No one had slept during the night, for it was impossible to lie down, the floors of the trenches being deep in mud and filth. There were no dug-outs or shelters of any kind whatever, and both men and officers had to remain on the fire steps all night. The parapets of the trenches were continually falling in, some twenty or thirty yards at a stretch. Sand-bags were no use, and of revetting material there was none, though urgent appeals had been made for it. Cold and wet, any relief from these horrible surroundings —even death —seemed preferable to the men. Out in front of Sticky Trench the Battalion Bombers from the fire-bombing posts hurled their missiles at the enemy, who shelled the trenches of the Middlesex, knocking them about and adding to the destruction and ruin caused by the incessant rain. On the 4th conditions were much the same, though the rain stopped and the work of clearing the trenches of mud, and rebuilding the fallen parapets was hurried on. A half-company of Pioneers, specially sent up to repair the trenches, declared that it was impossible to mend the parapets, and the Pioneer Officer withdrew his party. On this day five other ranks had been killed and twelve wounded, but these casualties were small compared with those from sickness, for by now the Battalion was in the grip of disease. Rheumatism claimed 25, exhaustion 28, and "frost-feet" 18, most of the latter being men who had already been through the first winter in the trenches. On the 5th[ 117] the sick list totalled 63; on the 6th, 68; on the 7th, 38; on the 8th, 25; and on the 9th, 24; the majority being "frost feet," though rheumatism and bronchitis claimed a goodly number. Survivors of the 11th Middlesex will surely never forget that terrible period in the trenches in front of the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

The Battalion (in Division) was relieved on 14th November, and went back to billets in Saily Labourse, moving to Bourecq on the 18th. The 12th Division moved back into trenches about Festubert on the 10th and 11th December, but the tour was uneventful. On the 23rd December the Battalion took over trenches north of Givenchy; on the last day of the year the 11th Battalion was in billets at Les Choquaux.

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An entry in the Diary of the 11th Middlesex (Lieut.-Colonel W. D. Ingle commanding), dated the 5th January, after moving back into the Festubert sector on the 4th, briefly describes the kind of existence the Battalion was eking out in the front line at the beginning of 1916: "Pumping and baling carried out almost continuously in 'A' and 'D' Companies' trenches. 'D' Company's Island Group relieved every twenty-four hours, and go back to Le Touret for twenty-four hours to get dry. Enemy quiet, a few shells on 'B' Company's right during the morning, and a few 77-mm. shells on Rue de Bois —casualties nil." Relief came on the 13th, and the Battalion moved back into billets. On 11th February the Battalion marched to Saily Labourse, preparatory to moving into trenches near the Quarries on the morning of the 12th, the 12th Division having taken over a portion of the line between Loos and the La Bassée Canal.

The 13th February was a day of trial and heavy loss to the Battalion. As soon as it was light enough to see each other's trenches a duel with trench-mortar bombs and rifle grenades broke out between the opposing forces. About 10 a.m. the enemy's artillery joined in the combat, bombarding the trenches of the Middlesex with H.E. and (as the Battalion Diary has it) "smaller stuff." The trenches were damaged considerably and several casualties were suffered. But the Divisional Artillery and the "Heavies" retaliated, and, after some hours (about 3 p.m.), things were once more normal, although only for a little while. At 5.30 p.m. the enemy's artillery fire broke out again, and hostile shells of all calibre, up to 9-inch, fell in considerable numbers on the front line, support and communication trenches, which were blown about, and, in many places, completely wrecked. There were very few dug-outs in the line, and the Middlesex men had poor shelter from this hail of shell, with the inevitable result —heavy casualties. Just after 6 p.m. there were two enormous explosions, one from beneath the Kink and the other under Alexander trench, and clouds of earth, equipment, timber and the bodies of men shot up into the air —the enemy had exploded mines. Immediately following the explosions five groups of Germans, each of about ten men, rushed across from Bill's Bluff and tried to enter Bigger Willie. Rifle and machine-gun fire, and a storm of grenades, caused most of them to fall back; others fell dead or wounded, but six were successful in getting into the trenches of the Middlesex. Their triumph was, however, short-lived, for they were either shot down, bombed or bayoneted. They had already filled their pockets with Mills grenades when they were killed. As the Germans advanced, the enemy's artillery had lifted to the support trenches behind Bigger Willie and the Kink. At 6.25 p.m. the hostile bombardment died down, but twenty minutes later fires were lighted by the enemy in his front-line trenches, and he threw smoke bombs, though the wind carried the smoke northwards. At 7 p.m. normal conditions again reigned. The losses suffered by the Middlesex on the 13th were 2 officers wounded, 10 other ranks killed, 49 wounded and 5 missing — a costly day. The Battalion had clung to its position with great tenacity and gallantry, and a fitting acknowledgment of the steadfastness of all ranks was contained in a message from the G.O.C., First Army, which arrived during the 14th: "The G.O.C., First Army, wishes his congratulations conveyed to the officer commanding and troops who counter-attacked and drove back the enemy who had effected a lodgment in our trenches in the neighbourhood of the Kink on the evening of 13th." Lieut.-Colonel Ingle had every reason to be proud of his officers and men.

The 14th was comparatively quiet. The 15th was similarly uneventful, though several aerial torpedoes were fired by the Germans, one of which caused six casualties. Relief came on the 16th, the 9th Royal Fusiliers taking over the line from the 11th Middlesex, and the latter moved back to Railway Reserve and Lancashire Trenches and Vermelles.

On the 29th the Battalion again took over the trenches previously occupied opposite the Quarries.

It was not long, however, before the 11th Middlesex were again involved in heavy losses, even more serious than on the 13th February, for an attack had been ordered on the Chord, a particularly strong sector of the German line opposite the left of the 36th Brigade front. The attack was to be carried out by the 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers. Three mines were to be exploded close to the Chord and the craters formed by the explosion, as well as the Chord itself, were to be occupied. It was expected that the enemy would make a desperate resistance. As all the orders referring to this little operation concern the two Battalions (8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers) making the attack, it is unnecessary to give more than the above outline. It was in rendering assistance to the attacking force that the 11th Middlesex became involved and sustained heavy losses. The attack was to take place on the 2nd March at 5.45 p.m. On the previous evening at 6.20 p.m. a party of 11th Middlesex, consisting of one N.C.O. and 15 other ranks, was sent to Clarke's Keep to detonate grenades. Another party of one N.C.O. and 20 men followed on the morning of the 2nd at 9 a.m. to the same place and for the same purpose. Two hours later the first party returned, having been hard at work all night. That afternoon at 3.30 detailed orders for the attack reached the O.C., 11th Middlesex, and these were followed, half an hour later, by orders to detail a party of four N.C.Os. and 50 men (half from "C" Company and half from "B" Company) to be at the junction of Saville Row and Support Line under the O.C., 9th Royal Fusiliers; this party reached its destination at 5.15 p.m. Five minutes later the "Heavies" opened heavy fire on the enemy's trenches. At 5.30p.m. all men of the Middlesex Regiment were moved out of their dug-outs, and when fifteen minutes later the mines were exploded, all ranks were "standing to." No less than 32,000 lbs. of explosives were used, and the explosions were deafening. Three large mines and one small mine were blown under the Chord, and the infantry advanced immediately. But instead of being taken by surprise and shaken by the explosions, the Germans lined the parapets of their trenches and opened a steady fire on the attacking Fusiliers. No word reached the O.C., 11th Middlesex, until 7.30 p.m., when orders came to hand to render all possible assistance to the 9th Royal Fusiliers, who were on the left of the Middlesex. Half an hour later, 2nd Lieut. Marcus, with 50 men from "A" Company, was sent off to the junction of Saville Row and Support Line under the O.C., 9th Royal Fusiliers. At 8.40 p.m. 2nd Lieut. Moore, 50 men of "A" Company, and two grenadier squads were similarly despatched to come under the orders of the O.C., 9th Royal Fusiliers. At 9.30 p.m. orders were received by Colonel Ingle to place two of his companies at the disposal of the 9th Royal Fusiliers, and as these left the Battalion area, "B" Company extended to the left, taking over "A" Company's front, with its left flank in Poker Street, the remainder of "A" Company moving back to Vigo Street. "D" Company also extended its left to the junction of Massa Alley with Bigger Willie. About midnight on the 2nd March the dispositions of the 11th Middlesex appear to be as follows: "B" and "D" Companies held the front line; "A" Company on the left and "C" Company on the right of Vigo Street. The Middlesex men were reinforced at 11.55 p.m. by a company of 6th Connaught Rangers: this Company was attached to "D" Company of the Middlesex. Of the desperate fighting which had taken place during the day not a word is mentioned in the Battalion Diary of the Middlesex, nothing but moves and dispositions. But from the casualty list given later, from the 2nd to 4th March, it is obvious that the Battalion was heavily engaged with the enemy during that period.

At 9 a.m. on the 3rd Major Overton of the 9th Royal Fusiliers arrived at Colonel Ingle's Headquarters with orders for the Middlesex to relieve the Fusiliers, the Connaughts to relieve the Middlesex. At what time the relief began it is impossible to say, but apparently it was completed by 2.10 p.m., the dispositions of the Battalion being then: "D" Company —two platoons (right) in Kaiserin Trench from Clifford Street to Poker Street, two platoons in Vigo Street; "B" Company —two platoons (left) in Kaiserin Trench from Poker Street to Saville Row; "A" Company —in Northampton Trench; "C" Company —15 men in No. 1 Crater, 20 men in No. 2 Crater and 30 men in "A" Crater; the remainder of the "C" Company was on the right of Northampton Trench. The Battalion Bombers, thirty in number, were in Triangle Crater. Nos. 1 and 2 Craters were just south of the Chord and "A" Crater was on the left of it. Triangle Crater was just south of No. 2.

The 36th Brigade Diary has an interesting note on the relief: "The two Battalions which delivered the attack on the night of the 2nd were relieved on the 3rd, and their place taken by the 11th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, on the right, and the 7th Royal Sussex Regiment, on the left. These two Battalions had heavier casualties than the Fusilier Battalions, which took the positions and held them during the first night. All the men of these two Battalions had been employed throughout the previous night as reinforcements and working parties."

The Middlesex and Sussex Battalions were, however, soon called upon to beat off repeated heavy and desperate counterattacks. The position won on the 2nd March was magnificent; it commanded the whole of the German trenches as far as Fosse 8, and gave possession of practically the whole of the remainder of the Hohenzollern Redoubt, for which much bloody fighting had already taken place. Moreover, the British trenches between the Hohenzollern Redoubt and the Vermelles railway were no longer overlooked or exposed to the enemy's rifle and machine-gun fire. It was, therefore, unlikely that the enemy would allow the possession of this valuable position to remain undisputed. Nor did he, for three separate attacks were launched against the Middlesex before, at 8.15 p.m. on the night of the 3rd, the Battalion Diary records, "shells and bombing quietened down." All these attacks (launched against the Sussex also, on the left of the 11th Middlesex) were beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy, though at 10 p.m. he was reported to be in occupation of the further lip of Triangle Crater. The night was passed in comparative quietude, all ranks being engaged in strengthening the defences and in sand-bagging the Craters. But at 5.45 a.m. on the 4th the Germans made fresh heavy bombing attacks, and more bombs and S.A.A. were called for to resist these attacks. A German sniper had, during the night, established himself in the further lip of Triangle Crater, commanding the trench between Craters Nos. 2 and "A." This man could not be shifted and caused many casualties. The latter hours of the 4th seem to have been fairly quiet, but again, at 1 a.m. on the 5th, another heavy bombing attack was launched against the Middlesex men in Crater No. 2. It was beaten off with loss to the enemy.

At 9 a.m. the 6th Buffs began to arrive in order to relieve the Middlesex men. But the relief took hours to carry out, and it was 4 p.m. before the line, with the exception of Crater "A," was taken over by the incoming Battalion. Repeated attempts to relieve the troops in Crater "A" had failed, and it was not until darkness had fallen that the exhausted garrison was replaced and marched back to Saily Labourse.

During those three days —the 2nd to 4th March inclusive —not a single casualty is recorded in the Battalion Diary of the 11th Middlesex, but from the Diary of the 36th Brigade Headquarters the following list is taken: —"Officers killed: Capt. A. F. Henty; Lieuts. H. L. Hughes-Jones, L. A. Hughman, C. V. Dodgson; wounded, Lieut. W. E. G. Henkel; 2nd Lieuts. R. Underhill, F. A. Moore, S. W. Hedgecock, D. S. Marcus; other ranks, 35 killed, 207 wounded. Total, 9 officers and 242 other ranks."

Several days were spent in billets cleaning up and reorganising and then, on the 11th March, the 11th Middlesex again took over front-line trenches in the Quarry sector. The 12th and 13th were quiet days, but during the evening of the latter date a little incident occurred which amply demonstrated the good comradeship which existed between officers and men, even to the point of sacrificing their lives one for the other.

In front of the trenches occupied by the Middlesex, and outside Lookout Crescent, there were a number of mine craters, in which the Tunnelling Company had received orders to set off a small mine. Colonel Ingle gave orders for the disposition of his men so that no one should be injured by the explosion or falling debris. At 5 p.m. the mine was fired, and after the explosion Lieut. Crombie (O.C., "B" Company), 2nd Lieut. C. K. Smith and a few men went along the trench and found some miners stretched out senseless in the mine shafts. The two officers led the way and tried to drag the unconscious miners out, but were themselves gassed, together with three other ranks. The second officer (2nd Lieut. Smith) was so badly gassed that he died within an hour. The fine heroism of this young officer and the "greater love" for others had cost him his life. Apparently a mistake in putting only seven-foot tamping, when ten-foot tamping had been ordered, was the cause of the explosion coming back up the shafts and filling the place with gas fumes. "This gross neglect of orders," records the Battalion Diary, "caused the death of one of our best officers."

Towards the end of March (on the 24th and 25th) the enemy exploded two mines, and for several days there was much activity in bombing, trench-mortaring and the firing of rifle grenades by both sides. The Middlesex suffered a number of casualties during these operations —2 officers were wounded and 41 other ranks were killed, wounded or missing. April was uneventful, and May was spent entirely out of the front line. In June the 12th Division received orders to move south, and on the 16th the 36th Infantry Brigade entrained at Fouquereuil Station for "a new area." All units reached Longeau during the night 16th-17th, and on the latter date marched to billets in Vignacourt. The 11th Middlesex had now a new C.O. —Lieut.-Colonel G. L. Oliver (who had joined the Battalion on the 14th June), vice Lieut.-Colonel W. D. Ingle. On the 30th June the 36th Brigade proceeded to fresh billets at Fréchencourt, arriving at midnight.

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[Chapter XXIV]

### **The Battles of The Somme, 1916: 1st July-18th November**

Introduction.

In no other series of battles fought on the Western Front were more Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment engaged than in the operations on the Somme in 1916. Nor alas! were the losses of the Regiment heavier. So far as officer casualties were concerned, the percentage was extraordinarily high; but a week or two from the first day of the Battles, and the common saying was that a subaltern's life was worth about a week's purchase. Fierce and bloody as were the operations of the first day of the Battles, the struggle abated not a whit until, for a while, the winter put a stop to the terrible sacrifice of human life: and it was mud, filth, slush and abominable conditions which beat the opposing forces in November of that year and forced them to stay their hands. Controversy will continue to rage as to whether the Somme Battles of 1916 were justified: whether the objects of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief were sound tactics and strategy: whether the enormous expenditure of life was worth the relatively small gains of ground.

The objects of the offensive, which Sir Douglas Haig calls "the wearing-out battle," were briefly: (i) To relieve the pressure on Verdun, (ii) To assist the Allies in other theatres of the War by preventing any further transfer of German troops from the Western Front, (iii) To wear down the strength of the opposing forces. Such were the intentions of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, and Regimental historians are not so much concerned with the tactics and strategies of the higher commands as with the endeavours of the gallant troops to carry out the orders given to them, and whether their brave efforts met with success or failure.

For months, preparations on a scale hitherto unknown had been going on in the Somme area and, as many Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment were engaged in preparing for the great offensive, it is as well to quote from the official despatches details of the work in which, between the intervals of maintaining the front line, they were employed, for it must not be forgotten that, in addition to the vast preparations, trench warfare of more or less intensity still went on.

"Vast stocks of ammunition and stores of every kind," said Sir Douglas Haig, "had to be accumulated beforehand within a convenient distance of our front. To deal with these, many miles of new railways, both standard and narrow gauge, and track tramways were laid. All available roads were improved, many others were made and long causeways were built over marshy valleys. Many additional dug-outs had to be provided as shelter for the troops, for use as dressing stations for the wounded and as magazines for storing ammunition, food, water and engineering material. Scores of miles of deep communication trenches had to be dug, as well as trenches for telephone wires, assembly and assault trenches, and numerous gun emplacements and observation posts. Important mining operations were undertaken, and charges were laid at various points beneath the enemy's lines. Except in the river valleys the existing supplies of water were hopelessly insufficient to meet the requirements of the numbers of men and horses to be concentrated in the area as the preparations for our offensive proceeded. To meet this difficulty many wells and borings were sunk, and over one hundred pumping plants were installed. More than one hundred and twenty miles of water mains were laid and everything was got ready to ensure an adequate water supply as our troops advanced.

"Much of this preparatory work had to be done under very trying conditions, and was liable to constant interruption from the enemy's fire. The weather, on the whole, was bad, and the local accommodation totally insufficient for housing the troops employed, who, consequently, had to content themselves with such rough shelter as could be provided in the circumstances. All this labour, too, had to be carried out in addition to fighting, and to the every-day work of maintaining existing defences. It threw a very heavy strain on the troops, which was borne by them with a cheerfulness beyond all praise."

The enemy's position on the Somme was of great strength: how great was not known until after the first day of the Battles, when the formidable nature of his defences and the extraordinary depth and security afforded by his dug-outs were indeed a revelation.

The following description of the Somme Battlefields-to-be is also from the official despatch, which cannot be paraphrased without loss: The enemy's position to be attacked was of a very formidable character, situated on a high, undulating tract of ground which rises to more than 500 feet above sea-level, and forms the watershed between the Somme on the one side and the rivers of south-western Belgium on the other. On the southern face of this watershed, the general trend of which is from E.S.E. to W.N.W., the ground falls in a series of long, irregular spurs and deep depressions to the valley of the Somme. Well down the forward slopes of this face, the enemy's first system of defence, starting from the Somme, near Curlu, ran at first northwards for 3,000 yards, then

westwards for 7,000 yards to near Fricourt, where it turned nearly due north, forming a great salient angle in the enemy's lines. Some 10,000 yards north of Fricourt the trenches crossed the River Ancre, a tributary of the Somme, and, still running northward, passed over the summit of the watershed about Hebuterne and Gommecourt, and then down its northern spurs to Arras. On the 20,000-yard front between the Somme and the Ancre the enemy had a strong second system of defence, sited generally on or near the southern crest of the highest part of the watershed, at an average distance of from 3,000 to 5,000 yards behind his first system.

During nearly two years' preparation he had spared no pains to make these defences impregnable. The first and second systems each consisted of several lines of deep trenches, well provided with bomb-proof shelters and with numerous communication trenches connecting them. The front of the trenches of each system was protected by wire entanglements, many of them in two belts forty yards broad, built of iron stakes interlaced with barbed wire often about as thick as a man's finger.

The numerous woods and villages in and between these systems of defence had been turned into veritable fortresses. The deep cellars, usually to be found in the villages, and the numerous pits and quarries common to a chalk country, were used to provide cover for machine guns and trench mortars. The existing cellars were supplemented by elaborate dug-outs, sometimes in two storeys, and these were connected up by passages as much as thirty feet below the surface of the ground. The salients in the enemy's line, from which he could bring enfilade fire across his front, were made into self-contained forts, and often protected by mine fields, while strong redoubts and concrete machine-gun emplacements had been constructed in positions from which he could sweep his own trenches should these be taken. The ground lent itself to good artillery observation on the enemy's part, and he had skilfully arranged for cross-fire by his guns.

These various systems of defences with the fortified localities and other supporting points between them were cunningly sited to afford each other material assistance and to admit of the utmost possible development of enfilade and flanking fire by machine guns and artillery. They formed, in short, not merely a series of successive lines, but one composite system of enormous depth and strength.

Suffice it has been said to show the formidable nature of the task before the British troops, and it is time to enumerate first those Divisions which were to carry out the initial attack, and then those Divisions in which Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment were contained.

From north of Maricourt (where the British right joined up with the left of the French) to Gommecourt, the Divisions holding the front line and ready to attack at Zero hour on 1st July were as follows: the 30th Division held the right of the line, i.e., just north of Maricourt, having on its left the 18th Division, which, as already stated, occupied the Carnoy sector: the 12th Middlesex formed part of this Division. Next in line, south of Mametz and Fricourt, came the 7th Division, and to the N.W. of Fricourt the 21st Division: it will be remembered that the 4th Middlesex were now with this Division. On the left of the 21st Division the 34th lay opposite La Boisselle; south and north of this village were those two death-traps Sausage and Mash Valleys. The 8th Division was on the left of the 34th opposite Ovillers La Boisselle (known as "Ovillers" to distinguish it from the former village of a similar name). The 2nd Middlesex formed part of the 8th Division, which had on its left the 32nd Division (opposite the Leipzig Salient) and the 36th Division (facing Thiepval). The line was here intersected by the Ancre River and the Albert-Arras Railway, but just north of the latter lay the 29th Division (the "Incomparable Division" of Gallipoli fame) opposite Beaumont Hamel, in which the 16th Middlesex were contained. The 4th Division (north of Beaumont Hamel) and the 31st (west of Serre) held the line on the left of the 29th. All these Divisions belonged to the Fourth Army: there

were others in reserve, but they will be dealt with later. On the immediate left of the Fourth Army, however, holding the Hebuterne and Gommecourt sectors respectively, were the 56th (London) Division, commanded by an old 4th Middlesex officer —Major-General C. P. A. Hull —and the 46th Division: in the 56th Division were the 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th Battalions of the Middlesex.

Thus there were six Battalions of the Regiment in the front line at Zero hour, i.e., from right to left, 12th, 4th, 2nd, 16th, 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th, either ready to go “over the top” as soon as the signal was given, or else lying close at hand in support or reserve. Of the Divisions in reserve to the Fourth Army, two only contained Middlesex men, i.e., the 12th and 33rd.] The 11th Battalion was in the 12th Division and the 1st Battalion and 18th Battalion (Pioneers) in the 33rd Division. [From the 24th June the British guns had hardly ceased pounding the enemy’s front-line and support trenches and back areas. Guns of all calibre poured shell with unheard-of prodigality on to the enemy’s positions.

From 24th June to 1st July, in more than forty places along the line between Maricourt and Hebuterne, gas had been discharged with good effect on to the enemy’s trenches; over seventy raids had taken place between Gommecourt and north of Ypres, and the results had given Sir Douglas Haig much information as to the enemy’s dispositions. The final hour of this terrible bombardment, to which the enemy had been subjected since the 24th June, took place between 6.30 and 7.30 a.m. on 1st July. In fury and violence it far surpassed anything which had preceded it: thousands of guns were in action, and their fire was so accurate and murderous that later, when many Germans were taken prisoner, they were in a state of collapse bordering on insanity. Knowing that the destruction of the enemy’s defences meant fewer casualties to them, the British troops watched with keen interest and satisfaction the work of their own guns.]

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### **THE BATTLE OF ALBERT**

At the close of the first day of the operations Sir Douglas Haig decided that it was necessary to limit the area of the Battle. He therefore, gave orders that the attack was to continue from the junction of the French and British line (just north of Curlu, on the Somme) to a point about half-way between La Boisselle and Contalmaison, limiting the offensive to a slow and methodical advance. North of the Ancre the enemy was to be held to his ground, so that the attack could be resumed if desirable.

Of the six Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment which took part in the fierce fighting on the 1st July, only one —the 12th —had escaped with slight loss, and at 1.30 a.m. on 3rd July was just south of Caterpillar and Mametz Woods: the 4th, 2nd and 16th Battalions had been withdrawn from the line, but the 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th were still in the trenches at Hebuterne.

Meanwhile several reserve Divisions had been moved up into the front line, and amongst them was the 12th, which contained the 11th Middlesex (commanded by Lieut.-Colonel G. L. Oliver, Lieut.-Colonel Ingle having been sent down to the base ill). On the 1st July the 11th Battalion (in Brigade) had moved to Baizieux Wood, and there bivouacked until 6.30 p.m., when the 9th Royal Fusiliers moved up into the front line from Mersey Street to Longridge Street; the 11th Middlesex, with the remaining units of the 36th Brigade, were in Divisional Reserve in the Intermediate Line (Albert-Bouzencourt). The 2nd July was uneventful. At 3.15 a.m. on the 3rd the Battalion moved to the railway cutting north of Marmont Bridge, Albert. Early that morning the 35th Brigade of the 11th Division had been ordered to attack Ovillers, and at 4.30 a.m. “A” and “B” Companies of the 11th Middlesex were moved up in support to Ribble Street. Four hours later Battalion Headquarters, with

“C” and “D” Companies, moved to a field north of Crucifix Corner to support the 37th Brigade, also attacking Ovillers. Apparently, however, the Battalion was not called upon, for at 8 p.m. Companies collected at Crucifix Corner and marched back to reserve trenches and dug-outs on the south-east side of Authuille Wood, where the Middlesex men were in support of the 9th Royal Fusiliers. On the 4th, at 5 p.m., the 11th Battalion took over the front line from the Fusiliers, “A” Company from Longridge to Quarry Brae, “C” from Quarry Brae, Nab Salient to Mersey Trench, “D” Company in support, Quarry Brae and Nab Trench, “B” Company in reserve in Glasgow Street.

The Battalion now had its first sight of No Man’s Land, and it was truly a horrible spectacle. Dead bodies were everywhere, and many poor fellows, who had been lying out wounded in that terrible space of dead ground between the opposing trenches, were brought in. At intervals the guns on both sides were active. One officer —2nd Lieut. D. G. Gilfillan —and six other ranks were wounded during the day.

All along the line from east of Maricourt to Thiepval the “slow and methodical advance,” which Sir Douglas Haig had ordered, was in progress, and continued until the night of 13th July, when the first phase of the Battles ended, by which date Montauban, Mametz, Fricourt, Contalmaison, and La Boisselle had fallen into the hands of the British.

On the night of 2nd-3rd July the 12th Middlesex (18th Division) had relieved the 11th Royal Fusiliers in the front line, the Battalion taking over White Trench (“A” Company), Beetle Alley (“B” and “C” Companies), Maple Trench from junction of Black Alley to Strong Point No. 5 (“D” Company). Throughout the 3rd the Battalion remained in the same positions, all Companies consolidating the line. In the evening “B” and “C” Companies set to work to dig a communication trench between White Trench and Beetle Alley. The enemy shelled both the latter trenches during the day, but his shell fire was weak and not very effective: 2nd Lieut. Souster and two other ranks were wounded. At night, “D” Company was withdrawn from Maple Trench and took over Strong Points from the 6th Northants. The 4th was also without incident, but during the evening the dispositions of the Companies were again slightly altered: “A” remained in White Trench, “B” was in Montauban Alley, between Caterpillar Trench and Pommiers Redoubt, with four strong points in the Caterpillar Trench, one at the junction of Loop Trench and Montauban Alley and one at White Trench. These posts were garrisoned with one Vickers gun and section. “C” Company was in Caterpillar Wood with two sections and one Vickers gun as a detached post in Marlborough Wood. “D” Company was in Pommiers Trench with a strong point at the Loop. The 12th Middlesex now held part of the 53rd Brigade front as well as the front line of their own Brigade, the 54th, The 5th was similarly a day of comparative quietude, though hostile shelling was at times heavy. Patrol work was carried out each night. During the afternoon of 6th, “B” and “D” Companies were relieved by the 7th Bedfords, and “A” Company in the early hours of the 8th. The Battalion marched back and bivouacked west of Bonfray Wood, putting up what shelter they could from pieces of corrugated iron. On the 7th a violent thunderstorm broke over the camp, making everything muddy and wet, so that later two Companies were sent back to Carnoy. On the 8th the Battalion was ordered to move to the east side of Bonfray Wood, the two Companies in Carnoy having been recalled. At 9.30 p.m. the Battalion was again on the move, on this occasion to huts in Bois des Tailles. But the camp was in such a filthy state that, on the 9th, Colonel Maxwell moved his men to some cleaner ground.

The 12th Battalion remained at Bois des Tailles until the morning of 13th, when a move was made to Maricourt. On arrival Companies occupied the old British line, “B” and “C” in the front-line trenches on the western side of the Montauban Road, “A” Company on the eastern side, and “D” Company the support trenches on the western side of the road.

It was from these positions that the Battalion was moved forward by Companies to take up preliminary positions which ended in the now-famous attack on Trônes Wood.

About 4 p.m. orders were received to send a company forward to support the 55th Brigade which was going to attack Trônes Wood: "C" Company was detailed and took up a line of trenches on the west face of Bernafay Wood. Two hours later "D" Company was ordered to take over Dublin Trench from the East Surreys: at 8 p.m., "B" Company was moved up to the Sunken Road. Thus when, during the night of 13th-14th July, Colonel Maxwell was sent for and told that his Battalion and the Northants were to capture and hold Trônes Wood, his Companies were already scattered. For a little while, however, it is necessary to leave them in their positions and turn to other portions of the battlefield where the "slow" advance had also been in progress.

The 2nd and 4th Battalions of the Regiment, of the 8th and 21st Divisions respectively, had, as already described, been withdrawn from the battlefield. The latter had reached Vaux with other units of the 63rd Brigade on 4th July. The losses of the Brigade had been so severe that it was now transferred from the 21st to the 37th Division, so that very shortly the 4th Middlesex again found themselves with new comrades.

On the 7th July a footing was gained in the outer defences of Ovillers by the 25th and 12th Divisions. The latter was one of the reserve Divisions, and had been moved up after the first day of the operations.

The 11th Middlesex, of the 36th Brigade, 11th Division, on the night of 4th July, occupied the front line from Longridge to Mersey Trench, which included the Nab, north-west of Ovillers. The Battalion was, however, relieved on the 5th, and moved back to billets in Albert. Their stay in this town was short, for on the 6th they were again moved up to the trenches in Ribble Street, where they were in Brigade Reserve to the front-line units of the 36th Brigade.

On the night of 6th-7th the Battalion furnished carrying parties for the R.E. as the three front-line Battalions of the Brigade which were to make the attack on Ovillers on the morning of 7th. At 1 a.m. on 7th, Lieut. Eden, with a party of "D" Company, tried to establish a new bomb store in the Sunken Road which crossed No Man's Land in a south-westerly direction, but the trenches were in such a congested state with troops that he could not get through. Moreover, he was wounded with a bullet through his left forearm.

At 6.45 a.m., on 7th, the artillery bombardment began, and continued until 8.30 a.m., when the three front-line Battalions of the 36th Brigade, i.e., 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers and 7th Royal Sussex, went forward to the assault. The 11th Middlesex at once moved up into the line vacated by the assaulting Battalions, "C" Company from Rivington Street to Ryecroft, "B" Company thence to Argyll Street, "A" Company thence to Dorset Street. By 10 a.m. the attacking troops, in the face of fierce oppositions and a very heavy enfilade rifle and machine-gun fire, had carried the first and second German lines and part of the third line. The enemy's shell fire was now intense, and "C" Company of the Middlesex suffered numerous casualties. Lieut. Redford, though wounded in the foot as he was getting over the parapet, succeeded in taking the wireless apparatus across No Man's Land to the captured trenches, but on arrival there found that the accumulators had been damaged by fire and were useless. At 2.30 p.m., six volunteers of "A" Company tried to cross No Man's Land with a fresh supply of bombs for the attacking Battalions who were in desperate need of them, but with the exception of two lance-corporals of the party, all were shot down and brought in wounded. At 3 p.m., "A" Company (under Captain Lewis and Lieut. Moore), which consisted of sixty other ranks only, with one platoon of 7th Royal Sussex and details of 8th Royal Fusiliers, crossed over to the

captured trenches, each man carrying twenty bombs. They obtained touch with troops about the Sunken Road and began bombing their way south of this road. About 4 p.m., Captain G. S. Lewis, who had just shot a German with his rifle, was himself killed by a rifle shot. Lieut. Moore then took charge and established a bombing and Lewis-gun post on his right, being in touch with the Sussex in the front line. Later, at 7.45 p.m., "B" Company (50 other ranks) under Captain Crombie, Lieut. Shaw and 2nd Lieut. Tatham, crossed to the captured trenches. The enemy had now been definitely beaten back, and this Company got across without being fired on. Throughout the remainder of the night 7th-8th, and throughout the latter date, the Middlesex, with other troops of the Brigade, held on to the captured positions, and, though under shell fire and exposed to counter-attacks, no ground was lost. About 10 p.m. on 8th, the 11th Battalion was relieved and marched back to billets in Albert. On 7th, the casualties suffered by the 11th Middlesex were 3 other ranks killed, 54 wounded, 7 shell shock, 3 missing, and 2 missing, believed killed: on 8th, 1 other ranks was killed, 31 were wounded, 10 suffered from shell shock, and 3 were missing. The total casualties suffered by the Battalion, according to the Brigade Diary, were 1 officer killed, 3 officers wounded, and 128 other ranks killed, wounded and missing.

On 9th July the Battalion moved to Senlis, on 10th to Forceville, and on the 11th to Bus, where re-organisation and training were carried on until the 20th. Thus, the 11th Middlesex were not in action when the first phase of the operations closed, nor were they in the opening of the second phase, which began on 14th July.

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#### **THE BATTLE OF POZIÈRES RIDGE: 23rd July —3rd September**

A close study of the official diaries describing the fighting of 1916 will reveal at once the fact that many of the operations classified under the general heading of the Somme Battles, 1916, overlapped. As an instance, the Battle of Delville Wood was in progress simultaneously with the struggle for the possession of Pozières Ridge, the latter involving much bloody fighting about Moquet Farm.

The battle opened on the morning of 23rd July, and by the morning of 25th the village of Pozières had fallen to the 1st Australian Division. But it was not until the 27th that the 11th Middlesex (Lieut.-Colonel L. L. Pargiter), of the 36th Infantry Brigade, 12th Division, moved up into front-line trenches north-west of the village and about half-way between the latter and Moquet Farm: the latter was still in possession of the enemy.

After the attack on Ovillers on 7th July, the 11th Middlesex, in Brigade, had moved back to billets in Senlis, Forceville, Bus, Mailly-Maillet, and Warnimont Wood. From the latter place the Battalion (in Brigade) moved back to the line, spending the nights of 25th and 26th July in bivouacs in Hédauville. On the 27th, at 9 a.m., the Battalion marched to Martinsart Wood, thence to trenches north-west of Pozières, taking over from a battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment: "D," "B" and "C" Companies in the front line, "A" in reserve. The three forward companies were in an unenviable position, "D" especially, seeing that the enemy were both east and west of the trench, which lay about 100 yards west of the Cemetery, north-west of Pozières. Indeed, the Company was hardly settled in its new position when the enemy (about fifty in number) launched a bombing attack from both flanks. The attack was repulsed by means of a bomb and rifle barrage, but Lieuts. Maynard and Scott were wounded. On the 28th the dispositions of "B" and "C" Companies were altered slightly. "B" now held a line resembling two sides of a triangle, just south-west of "D": "C" was south-west of

“B,” with its left joining up with “B” on right. But just west of “B’s” left, and immediately north of “C,” there was a German bombing post of some strength. This post was destined to be the scene of considerable trouble. “B” Company made the first attempt to clear the Germans out, Lieut. E. M. Shaw taking 20 men across for the purpose, but the attempt failed owing to a steady hostile bomb barrage. A second attack also failed, the enemy being very much on the alert. Lieut. Shaw was seriously wounded in this attempt, and died of his wounds on 30th. At about 1.30 a.m. (on 29th) “D” Company made a similar attack on a German bombing stop, on the left of that Company and in the same trench held by the Middlesex men. 2nd Lieut. Wright and 20 men of “D” succeeded in getting inside the enemy’s wire, but were then driven back by bombs, and Lieut. Wright was wounded. The casualties in other ranks are not given, but they were apparently heavy. On 30th, whilst erecting distinguishing marks on the parapets of his trench, Captain I. O. Crombie was killed. At 11 p.m. that night about forty men of “A” Company, under Lieuts. Moore and Newton, again attacked the enemy’s trench, which ran south-west of the hostile bombing post, but in the darkness there was loss of direction and the attack failed. This attempt was repeated on the night of 31st, when 48 men under Lieut. Moore and 2nd Lieut. Tatham again made a gallant effort to capture the enemy’s position. The enemy was, however, prepared, and from the time the party left the trench it was under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Despite the opposition the German trench was reached, but the enemy now put down a strong bomb barrage which the Middlesex men could not penetrate and the order to retire was given. Lieut. Moore was wounded and 2nd Lieut. Tatham collapsed. After the Middlesex attempt had failed, a party of Royal Sussex succeeded in capturing the bombing stop and bombing their way about fifty yards up the enemy trench, but were then held up by machine-gun fire. A very gallant effort was now made by Sergeant May, of the 11th Middlesex, to knock out the machine gun which was doing so much mischief. Taking with him the survivors of the first attempt to capture the stop, he “went over” again from the original “jumping-off” point. The fire from the gun was, however, still murderous, and, though May and his men made a great effort to reach, and indeed got within ten yards of, their objective, the enterprise had to be abandoned, the men being by this time so thoroughly exhausted that they were unable to charge. The total casualties in this affair were 26, and throughout the whole operation Lieut.-Colonel Pargiter (the C.O.) was personally in charge. These various small attempts to capture hostile positions were practically the only fighting the 11th Middlesex saw in the Battle of Pozières Ridge, though, indeed, after the initial stages the operations consisted mostly in “nibbling off” portions of the enemy’s line. On 7th August the Battalion was relieved and moved back to Bouzincourt. On the 11th a move was made by route march to Varennes, on the 12th to Puchevillers, thence to Vauchelles, Ivergny, and Manin. From the latter place, on 19th, the C.O. and Company Commanders reconnoitred front-line trenches south of Arras, and when the month closed the Battalion, having already served a tour in the front line, was in reserve at Agny.

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#### **THE BATTLE OF LE TRANSLOY RIDGES: 1st —18th October**

In this Battle, which had for its object the exploitation of the successes gained at Morval and Flers-Courcelette, four Battalions of the Middlesex Regiment took part, though only one was actually engaged with the enemy, the remaining three being either in support or reserve. These four Battalions were the 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th of the 167th Brigade, 56th Division, the 11th of the 36th Brigade, 11th Division, and the 23rd of the 120th Brigade, 41st Division.

The 1/ 7th and 1/ 8th Battalions (in Brigade) had moved back to Méaulte on 27th September with anticipations of a rest in billets, as (so rumour said) the 56th Division was to be withdrawn from the Somme Battles. But two days later the Division was again ordered up to the front line, and on the 30th of the month the 36th Brigade held the Guillemont sector with 1st Londons on the right, 1/ 7th Middlesex on the left, 1/ 8th Middlesex in support in the Flers Line, and the 3rd Londons in support in Trônes Wood.

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[When the Battle opened on 1st October the 167th and 169th Brigades were ordered to establish a line of posts over the crest of the ridge along the divisional front. The 1/ 7th Middlesex, which then had "A" and "B" Companies in the front line with "C" and "D" in support, pushed forward an officer and 20 men from each Company under cover of a shrapnel barrage, and established four posts 700 yards in front; in the evening a fifth post was established to cover the exposed left flank of the Battalion, touch with the 20th Division on the left of the 56th not having been obtained. After darkness had fallen the posts were linked up by a trench and wired. These posts were not, however, established without loss, for seven other ranks were killed and 2/ Lieuts. Moxon and T. T. Harris and 13 other ranks wounded.

In order that the 1/ 7th might have a short rest before the general attack, which had been ordered to take place on 5th October, the Battalion was relieved by the 1/ 8th on the night of 3rd. The posts also were in due course relieved by the 1/ 8th. One of these posts —No. 6 —had been held by Lieut. F. Prockter and 17 other ranks, all Hornsey men, who on relief marched out to rejoin the Battalion. In the inky blackness of the night Lieut. Prockter lost his way and, after moving about apparently in a circle, walked into the German trenches. Although surrounded by the enemy, this little party refused to surrender and stiff hand-to-hand fighting took place, and it was not until every man had either been killed or wounded that the survivors gave themselves up. In this little affair Lieut. Prockter and 12 of his men were killed, and the remaining 5, all wounded, were taken prisoners. This was the first occasion in the war that men of the 1/ 7th Middlesex became prisoners in the hands of the enemy.

Abominable weather forced a postponement of the attack until the morning of 7th. Heavy rain had fallen, turning the trenches and the ground into masses of thick, sticky mud in which men stuck fast and had to be pulled out by their comrades. The attack, so far as weather conditions were concerned, was not going to be easy.

The 56th Division was on the extreme left of the British line, joining up (curiously enough) with the 56th French Division.

The objectives allotted to the Division were: (1) the capture and consolidation of the enemy trenches known as Hazy, Dewdrop Spectrum and part of Rainbow (i.e., the Green Line), (2) the establishment of a line on the forward slopes of the ridge from which Le Transloy trench system could be seen (i.e., the Brown Line). The 168th Brigade was to attack on the right and the 167th Brigade on the left.

Of the 167th Brigade the 1st Londons were to be on the right and the 1/ 7th Middlesex on the left, these two Battalions capturing both objectives. The attack was to be made in four waves: the first two waves attacking the first objective, the third wave the second objective, and the fourth wave in reserve.

Throughout the 5th October the 1/ 7th remained in Trônes Wood resting, but at 6 p.m. on the 6th moved up to assembly-positions, "C" and "D" Companies taking over the freshly-dug trenches linking up the posts, "A" Company in rear of "D," and "B" in reserve on the Sunken Road in rear of "C."

The Battalion's objective was Spectrum Trench and the formation of a line of posts beyond. "C" and "D" Companies had been allotted the first objective, "A" Company the second. By 11.30 p.m. the 1/ 7th were in their assembly positions ready for the attack next day, which had been fixed for 1.45 p.m. All ranks were in the best of spirits and were determined to avenge the loss of many gallant comrades who had been killed in the attack on Bouleaux Wood. The Battalion was weak in officers and five were lent from the 10th London Regiment.

Just before "Zero" on 7th a creeping barrage of shrapnel was placed on the enemy's trenches which were some 400 yards from the Middlesex men. On the barrage lifting the advance began. "D" Company, on the right, went forward under Lieut. Groser; "C," on the left, was under 2/ Lieut. Moss; "A," in support, was commanded by 2/ Lieut. Williams; "B" was under Lieut. G. A. King.

The Companies advanced with great steadiness and, indeed, they might have been moving forward on parade, so well did they keep their formation. A Staff Officer, who saw the 1/ 7th go forward, was so impressed that he wrote a special report on this advance.

The fight was sharp but decisive. Hornsey and Tottenham, on reaching the German front line, carried it almost at once. Some of the men jumped into the trenches and, with bomb and bayonet, fought the enemy and overpowered him. Other men remained on the parapet shooting down on the enemy whenever a target offered itself. The arrival, a few minutes later, of the Hampstead and Highgate men completed the discomfiture of the enemy and the line was cleared and consolidated. Heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy: 77 unwounded Germans, including 4 officers, were sent back as prisoners, as well as many who were wounded. Numbers of the enemy were killed.

It had been intended that the Hampstead and Highgate should pass through the line and establish a line of posts beyond, but this was found to be impossible. At 8.30 p.m. a strong counter-attack was made against the right of the 168th Brigade, most of the latter being driven back to its original position, leaving the 1/ 7th Middlesex almost isolated in the German lines.

This attack was the most brilliant hitherto carried out by the 1/ 7th, but, alas! the cost was heavy. Lieut. A. G. Groser (O.C., "D" Company), 2/ Lieut. H. A. Moss (O.C., "C" Company) and 2/ Lieuts. W. B. Hawke and E. D. Binns were killed. The wounded included 2/ Lieuts. V. S. M. Williams and H. R. Hewlett. Of the 5 officers lent by the 10th Londons, 2 were killed and 2 wounded. The total losses of the Battalion were 63 killed (including 7 officers), 130 wounded (including three officers); the 1/ 7th had gone into action 450 strong. Major L. R. King, who was in command during the operation, was severely injured by the burst of a H.E. shell, but "carried on" for four days.

No further attacks were made by the 1/ 7th in this Battle, though on the 8th the 3rd Londons made an unsuccessful attempt to capture the remainder of Spectrum Trench. During the bombardment which preceded this attack the 1/ 7th lost some 30 men from the fire of their own guns, for the Battalion was holding a portion of the German line that was being shelled, but the Middlesex men hung on grimly until relieved, when they marched back to the Flers line, and on the 9th moved back to the Citadel. On this day 2/ Lieut. T. J. Webster was killed by a bullet from a hostile aeroplane.

The 1/ 8th Middlesex, although in support of 1/ 7th and 1st London Regiment, did not attack the enemy, and when the former was relieved in the front line both Battalions moved back, first to reserve positions and then to the Citadel, as the whole of the 56th Division had been withdrawn

from the line on 9th October and, so far as the Somme Battles of 1916 were concerned, the Division was not again engaged in them. The Division moved to the Flesselles area, 8 miles from Amiens.

The 12th and 41st Divisions (of XVth Corps), the former on the right and the latter on the left, were on the left of the 56th Division in the attack which took place on 7th October.]

Of the 12th Division the 37th Brigade, right, and 36th Brigade, left, attacked Bayonet Trench, which ran from the Factory Corner —Ligny Thillois road to just north-east of Gueudecourt. The 11th Middlesex (Lieut.-Colonel L. L. Pargiter) were, however, in reserve during the attack of the 36th Brigade, moving up at 5.30a.m. to support trenches, and at 9 p.m. relieving troops in the front line, who had been engaged during the day. For several days the Battalion had to endure heavy shelling, during which wounded were collected, trenches dug or repaired, and much work carried out. Both on 8th and 9th casualties were heavy, 10 other ranks killed and 48 wounded on the former date, and 2 killed and 30 wounded on the latter. Relief came on 10th and the Battalion moved back to camp in Bernafay Wood. On 19th the Battalion moved to Fricourt Camp, on 21st to Buire, and by the end of the month was back again in Agny.



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