

## TRENCH RAID

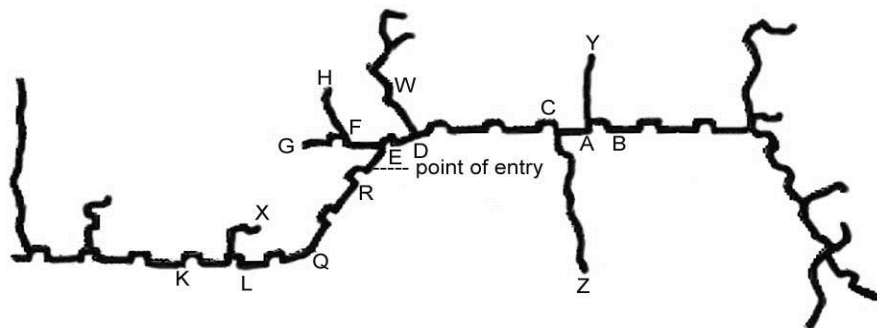
11th May 1916

Relieved 2nd Middlesex Regiment in the trenches during the morning. The enemy shelled 'C' Company between 3.50pm and 4.50pm with about 80 trench mortar shells doing a little damage to the trenches and wounding 2 men. One man was saved by his steel helmet. The enemy snipers and machine guns were more active than usual about 2.00am. Our own artillery silenced the enemy's trench mortar batteries.

During the previous night, the 2nd Middlesex had mounted a 'Probing Raid', the details of which are preserved in that battalion's War Diary. It is repeated below because it tells the story in detail from the planning stage through to its execution, which was compromised by bad luck, confusion and the preparedness of the Germans manning their front line. It is of particular interest in that it took place in the precise location where the 2nd Devons mounted their attack on 1st July 1916. No such detailed records of raids from this period exist in the 2nd Devons War Diary but, as sister battalions in the 23rd Brigade, the story of one mirrors that of the other.

### THE PLAN:

Map of German trenches raided by 2/Middx. 11th May 1916



- 1 OBJECT: To take prisoners, capture machine guns, equipment, log books, paper records etc.
- 2 PLACE: Point of entry: X.9.a1/2. 51/2
- 3 FORMATIONS AND DUTIES:  
1st Party: To ensure opening in our wire is clear and to patrol No Mans Land between the point of entry and our line. To work up the road as near as possible to the enemy wire, without being seen and to lie down by the point of entry, and to send two men back to report the all clear to the tape party, these two men to

then return to patrol. (The road mentioned here marks the southern boundary of the 2nd Devons battalion frontage on 1st July 1916. It leads directly to Ovillers village, past the entrance to Ovillers Military Cemetery). The patrol then returns to our trenches and joins D Company to act as prisoner conductors. Should an enemy patrol be met with, our party will only advance sufficiently far to hold him, and will then send back the all clear message to the tape party. The enemy patrol cannot hold his ground when the artillery starts.

2nd Party: Tape layers. 1 NCO and 3 men to lay tape from the exit to the road and secure it by means of staples. When finished, join Lt. Spatz's point of entry party.

3rd Party: Raiders. 3 officers, 9 NCO and 54 men employed as follows:

- a) Ammonal Torpedo Company. 1 NCO and 4 men to carry one 20 foot Ammonal Torpedo to blow up the enemy wire, and as soon as the torpedo has exploded to rush the enemy wire. If it is found necessary to use the subsidiary 6 foot torpedo, this should be exploded in the wire. Cut away all loose wire and call the all clear to the Raiding party in the rear and make way for them to pass through. Ensure that there is a clear opening for the raiders to come back through, and finally to work under the orders of Lt. Spatz as runners to signal the retire. If the 6 foot torpedo is not used on the wire, Lt. Spatz must decide at what point it is to be exploded, but it must be destroyed by explosion before they return.
- b) Lt. Benson, 1 NCO, 2 Bayonet men, 3 Bombers and 2 Carriers will work their way down the front line trench to the right to point A, to break down all opposition they encounter, and to kill all enemy. There will not be time for taking prisoners and so all enemy must be killed. At point C, Merriot and Barker will work up the sap to point Z, clear it and collect anything they can find. At point A Lt. Benson and the remainder of his party are to work up to Y, and collect all they can find.
- c) 1 NCO, 2 Bayonet men, 2 Bombers and 2 Carriers to follow immediately to the rear of Lt. Benson's party, to pass back any prisoners to the party in the rear to deal with, and to push through to point B where they will block the front line trench, using bombs. This party will not retire until one of Lt. Benson's party reports "All Clear".
- d) 1 NCO, 2 Bayonet men, 2 Bombers and 2 Carriers, to follow immediately the rear of party (c), pass back prisoners for the party in rear to deal with. On arrival at point D, work up to point W and block. Any prisoners found between D and W will be dealt with by this party. The party, on signal for retirement, will return to point D and hold the communication

trench until Lt. Benson's party comes back and holds it from them.

- e) 1 NCO and 3 men to follow up immediately in the rear of (d) to point E, thence to point F, where Corporals Maudry and Henwood work to G, and Bedwell and Herrington work to H. Prisoners found between points E and G, and E and H, are to be dealt with by this party.
- f) 1 NCO and 8 men to enter the trench to the rear of this party, to collect prisoners between point A and point of entry, and to pass back to Lt. Spatz. Call into all dugouts "ALLE AUS!" If they don't come out, give them 2 bombs and then send one man inside to see what remains. Corporal Cooper's special duty is to look for machine guns and to pass them back to Lt. Spatz.
- g) Lt. G. Smith, 1 NCO, 2 Bayonet men, 3 Bombers and 2 Carriers to work their way down the front line trench to point K, to break down and kill all opposition, and to leave prisoners for parties in the rear to deal with. At point L, Marshall and Burgess will work to point X, deal with anything between L and X and rejoin Lt. Smith. Remainder to work to K and block.
- h) 1 NCO and 7 men to enter in rear of party (g) to collect prisoners etc between point of entry and point L and pass back to Lt. Spatz. Call into all dugouts "ALLE AUS!" If they don't come out, give them 2 bombs and then send one man inside to see what remains. Private Rook's special duty is to look out for machine gun emplacements, dismantle the guns and pass them back to Lt. Spatz.
- i) Point of Entry Party. Lt. Spatz, 1 NCO and 6 men to stay outside trench at point of entry and place 2 ladders in trench for return of raiders. Conduct prisoners back to our line, hand them over to the party and then return to the German trenches. As soon as the signal is given, Lt. Spatz and 1 man will remain at the point of entry, remainder will get home as soon as possible. Lt. Spatz will stay until all Lt. Smith's and Lt. Benson's parties are all clear. Commanders of all parties have orders to report to Commander of point of entry party when all their men are out of the German trench.

#### 4 PLANNED SEQUENCE OF EVENTS:

Afternoon of the day of the raid. All stores to be collected at HENENCOURT WOOD, and to be inspected by Officer Commanding Raiding Party.

5 Minutes before Zero: Regimental Transport to call at HENENCOURT WOOD for stores that must be taken to DONNET POST in wagons. To be loaded under supervision of raiding officers and Captain Meeke. Captain

Meeke with fatigue party to accompany wagons to CRUCIFIX CORNER, unload and bring all stores to DONNET POST, where he will receive instructions from Officer Commanding battalion.

3 hours before Zero: Raiding officers to inspect their men and march to the main road by 8th Division HQ.

2¼ hours before Zero: 3 motor lorries to transport raiding party to CRUCIFIX CORNER.

60 minutes before Zero: Lt. Smith to report all raiders present to battalion CO at DONNET POST. An officer will guide the party to their assembly point. At a point nearby, the stores will be brought down under the supervision of Captain Meeke, who will hand it out to the raiding party as they file past.

30 minutes before Zero: All to be ready at assembly point.

24 minutes before Zero: Patrol to go out and send back report.

15 minutes before Zero: Tape layers to commence laying guide tapes to road.

14 minutes before Zero: Raiders to advance in single file along the tape to the road where they will lay down, half on one side, half on the other.

5 minutes before Zero: All ready for bombardment.

Zero - 0: Commence our bombardment on the designated point of entry to the German trench and 3 decoy positions. Trench mortars in our line to fire on German front line from point of entry to point D, artillery to drop a few rounds into the wire at the point of entry and some at point W.

Zero + 5 minutes: Cease fire from all guns and trench mortars. Raiders to advance along the road in fours.

Zero + 5¼ minutes: Our artillery to lay a barrage over and to the right and left of the point of entry. Decoy bombardments to resume. Trench mortars to remain silent.

Zero + 10 minutes: Commence entry to German trenches.

Zero + 25 minutes: Signal to retire to be given unless 10 prisoners have already passed by Lt. Spatz, in which case he will give the signal to retire when the 10th prisoner reaches his party.

- 5 TRENCH PARTY TO RECEIVE PRISONERS: To be formed by D Company, 2nd Middlesex. OC D Company will arrange to have them kept in a safe place while bombardment (enemy) continues, then send them to DONNET POST under escort. No questions are to be asked of the prisoners.
- 6 PRISONERS ACCOMPANYING RAIDING PARTY ON THEIR RETURN: To be escorted to DONNET POST by raiders. No questions to be asked.
- 7 RETURN ROUTE: Walteny Street - Longridge Street - Pendle Hill Street - Wenning Street - Lune Street to DONNET POST.
- 8 EVACUATION OF WOUNDED: Rivington Street - John O'Gaunt Street to aid post at DONNET POST.
- 9 CASUALTIES: Raiders will make every effort to bring back dead and wounded.
- 10 COMMUNICATION: There will be no communication between us and the Raiding Party after they leave our front line. Officer Commanding raiders will not send any communication by telephone. If the expected enemy bombardment permits, he will send a message \*verbally if possible\* by 2 runners to battalion CO - saying briefly what happened - but if there is any danger to the runners they must not be sent until the enemy bombardment ceases. All members of the Raiding Party will report to battalion CO at DONNET POST as soon as they can safely get there.
- 11 OTHER COMPANIES: B, C and D Companies will, as far as possible hold on to the front line, and be prepared for a counter-raid.
- 12 REMOVING TRACES: Officer Commanding D Company will make sure that the tapes are drawn in after the return of the raiders, and the gap in our wire is to be filled in if light conditions permit.

That was the plan, and it appears to be quite comprehensive, but as often happened in the Army, the best laid plans often fell apart like a 'two bob watch'. The essence of the 2nd Middlesex CO's report on the raid follows:

REPORT by Lt. Col. Edwin Sandys, Commanding Officer, 2nd Middlesex Regiment to HQ, 23rd Infantry Brigade.

1. 2nd Lieutenants Smith, Spatz and Benson and 71 NCOs and men of my Battalion made an effort on the night of the 10th/11th May 1916 to raid the German lines at about X.8.a.O.6 for the purpose of capturing prisoners etc.
2. I attach the following papers: A) Map of the German trench, B) Scheme of raid, C) My orders to OC z/S Trench Mortar Battery, D) My orders to 25/1 Trench Mortar Battery.
3. At 9.18pm, I received a letter from OC 25/1 TM Battery saying he would not be able to co-operate. I understood at the Divisional conference that all TM Batteries in my part of the line were to be at my disposal. OC 25/1 TM Battery took considerable trouble on the 10th May to get a Stokes Mortar installed and registered. I am extremely sorry that this TM Battery was not allowed to co-operate. The mortar had been registered on the front line trench, and had it been allowed to co-operate I believe we would not have encountered as much resistance as we did.
4. Up to 12.54am, all went smoothly. At this time the raiders should have reported to me at DONNET POST. They did not arrive until 1.40am, and on enquiry I found that the lorries had dropped them at the wrong place, some 1 mile from CRUCIFIX CORNER, and not to CRUCIFIX CORNER as orders had instructed. This meant a march of some 35 minutes, very valuable time wasted as will be seen later. I had taken considerable pains to work out times and distances, and had planned that the men should arrive fresh at CRUCIFIX CORNER and march straight up to the trenches without having to wait about in the trenches before the patrol went out.

From this time, until 1.54am when the patrol was due to start out, things had to be hurried to make up for lost time. The 20 foot torpedo had unfortunately broken and the last few men of the raiding party were still not in position when our bombardment started. An effort was made to repair the torpedo, while the bombardment was going on, but it was too badly damaged to be repaired, and finally it was decided to use the 6 foot torpedo.

The 20 foot torpedo was lying out in front of the men, and for a second or two after cessation of fire the men hesitated to go forwards as they knew they had to follow the torpedo, which they could see lying on the ground in front of them.

In the mean time Sergeant Croft had detonated the 6 foot torpedo in the German wire and was sitting in the wire, trying to cut his way through with wire cutters, while the enemy were shooting and throwing bombs at him. He was at once joined by the rest of the party, who worked most hard on the wire and did eventually

succeed in cutting a path through it. By this time, we had suffered very many casualties from small arms fire, and it was realised that entrance to the German trench was actually impossible.

As soon as the head of the party reached the German wire, they were met by enemy bombs and machine gun fire, not only from the front but also from the left and right. Bombs were also being thrown by Germans from the parados behind their front line.

Before an opening had been found through the wire, Lieutenants Smith and Benson, and 6 NCOs and men had managed to crawl over and through the German wire, and began to throw bombs left and right at the Germans gathered in the front line trench. Lt. Smith then shot the remainder with his revolver. Several men were wounded on trying to get through the wire, and 2 men were killed in the wire itself.

Lt. Smith, though wounded 3 times, continued to throw bombs into the German trench and only gave up trying after he received 11 more wounds, and was finally carried back through the wire by Sergeant Beland. Lt. Benson was wounded in 3 places, including a severe gunshot wound to the face, but continued fighting his way up the trench single handed, with bombs and rifle, until he had no bombs left and all his ammunition was exhausted. He stayed at his post in the trench and succeeded in killing a German officer with a trench club. He made certain that everyone had gone back before fighting his way back down the trench, using an enemy rifle and trench club. He stopped at the 2 men on the wire, assuring himself that they were dead, and decided it was not worth any more risk in trying to bring them back.

Lt. Spatz was only prevented from taking a more conspicuous part in front of the fray when he realised that things were not going well and therefore it was essential that someone remained in front of the wire, to control the men and make sure there was no panic among them. He carried out his duties with the utmost coolness, and in a short time after their arrival, he and other men were throwing bombs at the German line.

5. One wounded German was found in No Mans Land and brought back.
6. The officer on duty at the point of exit in our trenches, informs me that several of the men on their return to the line asked for more bombs, and wished to launch another raid on the line, as they had been forced to retire owing to lack of bombs and ammunition.
7. The broken 20 foot Ammonal torpedo which had been left in the road outside our wire was brought in under heavy fire by Sergeant Croft, and I cannot complement him highly enough for his bravery

and gallantry.

CASUALTIES: 2 officers wounded, 9 other ranks killed and 35 wounded.

On 1st July 1916, when the 2nd Middlesex attacked in Mash Valley on the immediate right of the 2nd Devons, they lost 22 officers and 601 men killed and wounded, which was approximately seventy-five percent of the battalion's strength. Among them were many of the men who took part in the raid on 11th May, described above, including Lieutenant Spatz, Captain Meeke and the gallant Sergeant Croft, all three being killed.

One can only feel compassion for their CO, Lt.Col. Edwin Thomas Falkiner Sandys. Before the attack on 1st July, he had reported to his superiors that the enemy defences the 2nd Middlesex faced were clearly too strong to be taken in the assault. His warning fell on deaf ears and on that tragic day he had to watch, helpless, while his fine battalion was destroyed. On 13th September 1916 in London, he committed suicide, a broken man.