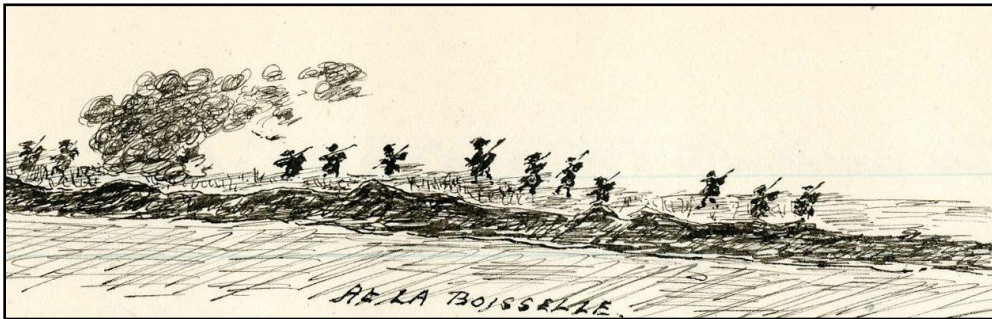


The Durham Light Infantry and The Somme 1916

by

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edited and amended in 2016

by

Peter Nelson and Steve Shannon

Part 2

**The Battles and Actions in which the
Sixteen Battalions of
The Durham Light Infantry
were involved.**



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Note: The drawing on the front page of British infantrymen attacking towards La Boisselle on 1 July 1916 is from Reverend James Birch's war diary. DCRO: D/DLI 7/63/2, p.149.



2.1: 1 - 13 July 1916. The Battle of Albert and the Capture of Contalmaison.

The official duration of the Battle of Albert was from 1 to 13 July. There were also a number of so called tactical incidents but the DLI was only involved in one - the capture of Contalmaison on 10 July ([Map 6.1](#)).

The initial assault on 1 July was one of the most significant days in the Battle of the Somme. It was the biggest assault the British Army had ever undertaken and it was against an enemy who had had all the time in the world to dig himself into a defence system which in the event withstood days of unremitting shelling - a factor completely misunderstood by the British at their cost.

It is not proposed to go over the events of this first day in any great detail, indeed it is not the purpose of this book to do so. However the day was highly significant for two DLI battalions, namely the 15th and 18th.

The southern half of the British assault met with some success but in the northern sector the story was very different with very high casualties and virtually no ground won. The Gommecourt sector in the far north was a diversion, where the aim was to pin down as much of the enemy's manpower and artillery as possible, so allowing the more southern sectors (British and French either side of the River Somme) to overrun the three German lines of defence and strike northwards. (These defence lines are shown on [Map 6.2](#).)

Three DLI battalions were actually involved on this first day, the 15th, 18th, and 22nd, but only the 15th Battalion in the 21st Division just north of Fricourt and the 18th Battalion in the 31st Division, in the north opposite Serre, were in action.

III Corps, 8th Division, Pioneers: 22nd Battalion DLI

The 22nd Battalion DLI was in reserve at Albert on 1 July. The plan was that the 8th Division would capture the fortified village of Ovillers and move on to Pozieres. As Pioneers, 22 DLI would then consolidate the ground won. However the 8th Division, positioned just north of Albert ([Map 6.1](#)), attacked Ovillers, but was forced to retire without achieving its objectives. Casualties (killed wounded and missing) amounted to over 5000 in the division. 22 DLI brought up stores and carried wounded back on 2 July and a party of 100 established a dump in the captured trenches near La Boisselle. It was here that 5 men were wounded.

On 2 July the division was relieved by the 19th Division, which had been in reserve west of Albert on 1 July. 22 DLI was relieved by the 5th South Wales Borderers, the Pioneer Battalion of the 19th Division, and it was not to return to the Somme until 14 October.

VIII Corps, 31st Division, 93rd Brigade: 18th Battalion DLI (Durham Pals)

The 31st Division was facing the Germans at Serre ([Map 6.3](#)) and was the most northernmost division planned for the assault. On its right was the 4th Division and beyond that the 29th Division. The remaining division in VIII Corps, the 48th, was in reserve, though two of its battalions were attached to the 4th Division.

In the 31st Division, the assault was to be spearheaded by the 15th and 16th West Yorkshires, plus the 18th Battalion DLI's 'D' Company, which had been attached to the 16th West Yorkshires (1st Bradford Pals) since 20 June. The 18th West Yorkshires was in support.

'D' Company was on the extreme right, in touch with the 2nd West Riding Regiment in the 4th Division. Left of 'D' Company was the 16th West Yorkshires and then came the 15th West Yorkshires. The 94th Brigade formed the left defensive flank, and the 92nd Brigade plus 18 DLI, less 'D' Company, were in reserve.



On 30 June, the troops moved up to their positions. 'D' Company were in South Monk Trench ([Map 6.3](#) inset) with part of 16th West Yorkshires and in front of them, in Leeds Trench and the front line, were the 15th West Yorkshires. The remainder of 18 DLI were in Maitland Trench.

The huge mine at Beaumont Hamel exploded at 7.20 a.m. on 1 July and the assault commenced at 7.30 a.m. The German artillery, realising that the offensive was about to begin, opened up a massive fire onto the front line trenches and within ten minutes the day was effectively lost. In that short space of time the two leading Yorkshire Battalions and 'D' Company. suffered heavily before they even left the trenches. As the battalion history dramatically states:

"A few of our men broke past our wire, fewer still crossed no-man's-land, and only a mere handful reached the German lines. Some of 'D' Company. struggled on and vanished into Pendant Copse and were never seen again, and a very few stumbled up the heights of Serre; these stout hearts now lie buried there".¹

Pendant Copse was a mile inside the German front. Only 10 men from 'D' Company survived. By 9.20 a.m. the remaining three companies of 18 DLI were ordered forward to Monk Trench to support the 18th West Yorkshires, but both 'A' and 'B' Companies lost heavily when they were caught by shell-fire between Maitland and Monk Trenches. Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Bowes of 18 DLI reported that Monk, Languard and Dunmow Trenches were still tenable and, as the commanding officers of the 16th and 18th West Yorkshire Regiments had been killed and the commanding officer of the 15th West Yorkshires badly wounded, he was ordered to reorganise the troops there. Preparations were made for the anticipated German counter-attack all afternoon and, in the evening, 'C' Company took over Leeds Trench which was now effectively the front line. Holding the front line continued the following day (2 July) - 'B' Company having relieved 'C' Company - and there was still much to do in dealing with the wounded and dead; wiring the front; and organising the remains of the 31st Division in defensive positions.

On 3 July 'C' Company suffered further casualties, when it drew fire from the Germans after British artillery opened up a barrage to cover an advance of the 48th and 29th Divisions attacking from the River Ancre north towards Serre.

On 4 July 18 DLI was relieved at night by the 8th Worcestershire Regiment and the next day the Durham Pals assembled at Louvencourt. 18 DLI then left the Somme sector and did not return until November when the Pals took part in the Battle of Ancre.

During the four days in action, three officers and 80 other ranks had been killed or subsequently died from their wounds. The battalion history gives losses (killed, wounded and missing) at 12 Officers and 60% of other ranks out of a total of 789 which had moved up to the front on 30 June.² *Durham Forces in the Field* gives 18 DLI's strength (including reinforcements) at Louvencourt as just 14 officers and 357 men.³

XV Corps, 21st Division, 64th Brigade: 15th Battalion DLI

On 30 June the move was made from Buire-sur-l'Ancre to the assembly trenches ([Map 6.4](#)). The 64th Brigade was on the left and the 63rd on the right. In the 64th, the 9th and 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry were to lead the assault with the 15th Battalion DLI and 1st East Yorkshire Regiment in support. When the German front line had been overrun and the sunken road between Fricourt and Contalmaison reached, the plan was for the support

¹ Lowe, W.D, *War History of the 18th (S) Battalion Durham Light Infantry* (London, 1920), p.38.

² Lowe, p.42.

³ *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.52.



battalions to move through and take Crucifix Trench, Shelter Wood and The Quadrangle, a redoubt some 1000 yards beyond Shelter Wood ([Map 6.5](#)).

The assault started at 7.30 a.m. on 1 July. 15 DLI was behind the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry and on the right of the two leading battalions. By 8.30 a.m. Crucifix Trench had been taken and the sunken road and Crucifix Trench were put into a state of defence. In the afternoon attempts were made to attack Shelter Wood and fighting patrols from 15 DLI got to within 40 yards of the wood. There was much exchange of fire. The Germans then shelled the positions they had lost, but an attack by 300 of the enemy, who had assembled in Birch Tree Wood, was repulsed. It was at this time that Lieutenant Colonel Fitzgerald, commanding 15 DLI, was hit in the thigh by a machine gun bullet.

In the evening of 1 July, the 62nd relieved the 64th Brigade, but this relief was not completed until dawn on 2 July. 15 DLI was then assembled in the original British front line.⁴

The 1st Lincolnshire Regiment, of the 62nd Brigade, suffered some losses as it reached the edge of Shelter Wood and Birch Tree Wood. Stubborn resistance by the Germans brought in the 12th Northumberland Fusiliers who had been in support. Birch Tree Wood was then captured but it was only by using the 13th Northumberland Fusiliers from reserve that the brigade was able to capture Shelter Wood.

The 21st Division was relieved by the 17th Division on the night of 3/4 July, when it was withdrawn to rest.

156 men of 15 DLI were killed or died of their wounds received on the first day of the Battle of the Somme.⁵ Two Military Crosses and nine Military Medals were won for bravery during this action.

III Corps, 23rd Division, 68th Brigade: 12th and 13th Battalions DLI

On the night of 3 July, the relief began of the 34th by the 23rd Division, with the 69th Brigade taking over the captured trenches. The 12th and 13th Battalions DLI, in the aptly numbered 68th Brigade, had with them the 10th and 11th Northumberland Fusiliers and all were involved in the lead up to the capture of Contalmaison on 11 July. By this time the fortified villages of Montauban, Mametz and Fricourt had been captured.

12 and 13 DLI had been in reserve in trenches along the railway embankment south of Albert until 4 July, when their Brigade moved to Becourt Wood. There was much congestion and 12 DLI bivouacked in the wood but 13 DLI returned to Albert.

On 4/5 July, the 23rd Division had been ordered to assist the left of XV Corps (17th Division) in an attack due to start at 12.45 a.m. to improve its own position in front of Contalmaison, and help the 19th Division on the other flank at the same time.

The 69th Brigade was involved in this action from 4 a.m. which included fierce fighting in Horseshoe Trench, which went on until 10 a.m. when most of the ground won was lost to a strong counter-attack. Soon after 6 p.m. an attack, launched over open ground by the 69th Brigade, cleared both Horseshoe Trench and Lincoln Redoubt at its western end. At night on 6 July, the 68th relieved the 69th Brigade and 12 DLI's companies were placed in Birch Tree Avenue, Horseshoe Trench and part of the Triangle. By now 13 DLI had returned to Becourt Wood and waited in reserve until the next day.

On 7 July, 12 DLI's position was taken over by the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers that was ordered to attack the German line, which ran eastwards from the west of Bailiff Wood to the outskirts of Contalmaison. There was only limited success, and there were heavy casualties. The 11th Northumberland Fusiliers retired within one and a half hours of starting

⁴ Miles states that the 63rd Brigade made the relief with the 8th Lincolnshire Regiment and 4th Middlesex Regiment taking over 15 DLI's position but this is clearly incorrect. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.48.

⁵ Miles lists seven officers killed or later died of their wounds and 440 casualties "in the ranks". *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.48.

the advance to Becourt Wood. In the meantime 12 DLI moved up in support, advancing under heavy fire, and gained the trench running back to the La Boisselle to Contalmaison road. 'A' Company joined up with the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers and went through Peake Wood reaching several dug-outs ([Map 6.6](#)). In the morning of 8 July, 'B', 'C', and 'D' Companies, consolidated their defences, after 'D' Company had occupied the strong point at the cross-roads, and by the afternoon had handed over their position to the 19th Division (which on 2 July had relieved the 21st Division) and returned to Becourt Wood, 'A' Company re-joining the other three companies next morning.

At 4 p.m. on 7 July, 13 DLI was ordered to take over the brigade line and by dawn on 8 July the Durhams occupied a line from Birch Tree Avenue, near Peake Wood, to the captured strong point. In the afternoon patrols found that a report that the Germans had evacuated Bailiff Wood, Quadrangle Trench and Contalmaison, was unfounded. By 4 p.m. 12 DLI's 'B', 'C' and 'D' Companies were also called up, with 'D' Company, under Captain Pearse, ordered to lead a fresh attack on Bailiff Wood and the road and trench beyond. 12 DLI was on the left of 13 DLI. 12 DLI's second effort brought success. The trench along the road to Contalmaison as far as the railway line was occupied and a block made. To the left, a platoon of 'C' Company reached the eastern edge of Bailiff Wood and on the left flank, to the north of the road from La Boisselle to Contalmaison, Lieutenant Price dug in with his platoon.

By a.m. 9 July, 13 DLI had dug in from the cross-roads on the left to a point 500 yards south. Two attempts were made to enter Bailiff Wood, but German machine-gun fire and friendly shell-fire made the position untenable.

On 10 July, 12 DLI's 'B' Company was employed in support at the cross-roads sniping at the enemy and two counter-attacks were repulsed. In the afternoon, the new positions were taken over by the 69th Brigade that was going to deliver the actual attack on the village the following day. 'C' Company's platoon in Bailiff Wood supported the attack - the remainder of 12 DLI's 'C' Company having already withdrawn to Albert. 13 DLI's 'A' Company helped the 69th Brigade consolidate the captured ground.

Early on 11 July the relief of the 23rd Division's infantry was completed by the 1st Brigade, 1st Division. 13 DL, having being relieved by the 1st Cameron Highlanders, marched back to billets in Albert.

In 12 DLI Captain Pease was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Lieutenant Price the Military Cross. Lieutenant George Butterworth, 13 DLI, also received the Military Cross. 37 men of 12 DLI and 23 men of 13 DLI were killed or died from wounds.



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2.2: 14 - 17 July 1916. The Battle of Bazentin Ridge.

On 8 July General Rawlinson issued a preparatory order for an attack on 10 July, against the German 2nd position which ran from the right of the Fourth Army to the River Ancre. Preparations were begun immediately. The plan was to attack at dawn and, under cover of darkness, two divisions each from XIII and XV Corps (3rd and 9th and 7th and 21st respectively) would form up in no-man's-land about 500 yards from the enemy and then advance to the assault. An auxiliary attack on the left would be carried out by 1st and 34th Divisions of III Corps ([Map 6.7](#)).

General Haig did not approve of the plan and put forward an alternative. He did not think the staff and troops had experience and training for such a manoeuvre. In conference General Rawlinson reiterated that he and his divisional commanders were strongly in favour of the original plan. Haig remained unconvinced and decided upon his own, but amended, plan.

The bombardment began on 11 July. The supply of ammunition and progress with wire cutting proved to be problems, which resulted in the assault being delayed until 14 July. On 12 July, following a further appeal, Haig finally sanctioned Rawlinson's plan and at 5 p.m. that day the final order was sent out for an assault to begin at 3.25 a.m. on 14 July.

The first objective was the enemy's front and second trenches from the south-west corner of Delville Wood, through the centre of Longueval, the southern ends of Bazentin-le-Grand village and wood and the south face of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The second objective was a line embracing Delville Wood, the remainder of Longueval and Bazentin-le-Petit village and wood. On the left flank, III Corps (1st Division) was to secure Contalmaison Villa at the earliest possible moment.

So far only 12, 13, 15, 18, and 22 DLI had been in action on the Somme. The 22nd Battalion had left the Somme on 3 July and the 18th Battalion followed on 7 July. The 19th Battalion arrived on 15 July. Three DLI battalions, the 12th, 13th and 15th, were now involved in the Battle of Bazentin Ridge.

XV Corps, 21st Division, 64th Brigade: 15th Battalion DLI

On 9 July, 15 DLI, after having had a few days' rest, moved up and on 11 July the 21st Division took over the line. The 15th Battalion DLI arrived in Lonely Copse on 13 July and lost two officers killed by the same shell the following day. By now the 63rd Brigade, which had suffered so badly on 1 July, had been replaced by the 110th - a brigade of Leicestershire battalions and it was they, with the 1st East Yorkshire Regiment from the 64th Brigade, who represented the 21st Division in the attack on 14 July.

The assaulting troops were lined up 100 yards outside the northern edge of Mametz Wood and some 400 yards from the enemy. The assault started at 3.20 a.m. There was relatively little opposition and by 4 a.m. the second line was taken and touch made with the 1st Division on the left. Bazentin-le-Petit Wood was then also taken with little opposition except for the north-western corner where the Germans held out all day. At about 6 a.m., the 6th Leicestershire Regiment secured the northern part of Bazentin-le-Petit village, which they then handed over to the 2nd Irish Regiment and consolidated a line from the northern extremity of the village to the north-eastern corner of the wood.

In the evening, the 1st Division relieved troops of the 21st Division along the western edge of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood.

In the evening of 14 July, General Rawlinson issued instructions for the resumption of operations next morning. In brief, they were to exploit the success and complete the previous day's objectives ([Map 6.8](#)).

By the morning of 15 July, the Germans had brought up reinforcements. The 91st Brigade (7th Division), already in possession of part of High Wood attempted to clear the enemy



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from the remainder of the wood but without success and suffered many casualties. The 33rd Division (that had arrived on the scene the previous day) made fruitless attempts to carry the Switch Line in conjunction with an operation of III Corps. The 21st Division repulsed a small counter-attack in the morning.

On 16 July, orders were received by 15 DLI to take over part of the front in Bazentin-le-Petit Wood. The Durhams came under a bombardment of gas, tear, explosive and shrapnel shells but eventually completed the relief and took a position on the west and north-west portions of the wood. By dusk it was found possible to hold an outpost line from the junction of the light railway and the Pozieres road on the left, to Bazentin-le-Petit on the right.

The 21st Division (15 DLI included) handed over its positions in Bazentin-le-Petit village on the night of 17 July to the 33rd Division and by 7 a.m. next morning were bivouacked between Meaulte and Becordel. Losses had been 16 killed or died of wounds.

III Corps, 34th Division, 68th Brigade (attached): 12th and 13th Battalions DLI⁶

On the left of the attack, the plan was for the 1st Division (III Corps) to capture Contalmaison Villa "at the earliest opportunity". At 10.45 p.m. on 13 July, the 1st Black Watch seized Lower Wood and then the Villa at 3.45 a.m. the next morning. This more or less secured the left flank.

At 9 a.m. on 15 July, the 2nd Brigade (III Corps) attacked north-westward up the trenches of the German second position and gained about 400 yards of the front line and 200 yards of the support line. A further attempt by the 3rd Brigade eventually enabled the 1st to link up with the 34th Division.

It was the 112th Brigade (34th Division) that attacked Pozieres. There was fierce fighting and heavy casualties until the advance came to a halt some 300-400 yards south of Pozieres.

A fresh assault at 6 p.m. managed to gain some ground which was consolidated by the 112th Brigade with one battalion of the 111th. The line was half a mile in length and ran west-south-west from a point on the Bapaume road, 300 yards short of Pozieres.

On 16 July, the 3rd Brigade (1st Division) were ordered to make a frontal attack at midnight. The 1st Gloucestershire Regiment and 2nd Munster Fusiliers attacked north-eastwards, whilst the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers bombed in from the right. They advanced 300 yards and then withdrew at dawn. There were few casualties. Strong posts were established up the communication trenches which became known as Welsh Alley, Gloster Alley and Black Watch Alley, the last named running back to the Switch Line.

On 16 July, after the attack by the 112th Brigade on the village of Pozieres had failed, 12 DLI moved up to relieve the 10th Loyal Regiment. 13 DLI relieved the 6th Bedfordshire Regiment near Contalmaison Wood and sent up a digging party to help 12 DLI, which was preparing assembly trenches for the impending attack. Work continued the next day (17 July) and at 8 p.m. 12 DLI advanced on the enemy trenches, which crossed the road to Contalmaison south of Pozieres and which extended to the Bapaume road (Pozieres Trench). 13 DLI was to occupy the line vacated by 12 DLI ([Map 6.8](#)).

12 DLI advanced under considerable machine-gun fire and against wire which had not been cut. Eventually the Durham had to retire, bringing most of their wounded with them. 51 officers and other ranks were killed or died of wounds.

13 DLI and the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers relieved three companies of 12 DLI and took over the trenches astride the Contalmaison-Pozieres road. The Germans shelled this position and there were many casualties. By this time (18 July) 12 DLI were back in Albert.

On 19 July the line was readjusted to join with the 1st Division and in the evening the 2nd Australian Division (1st Anzac Corps of the Reserve Army) arrived to take over from the

⁶ The 68th Brigade was attached to the 34th Division on 15 July 1916. It had been resting at Albert.

34th Division. 13 DLI then withdrew to Albert. During this action 12 men of the battalion had been killed or died of wounds.

2.3: 14 July – 3 September 1916. The Battle of Delville Wood.

There were almost continuous actions in and around Delville Wood from 15 July until 3 September - these being the official dates of the battle. Indeed the action against Longueval and Delville Wood started on 14 July but officially came within the dates of the Battle of Bazentin Ridge. As can be seen from [Map 6.9](#), the general assault started on 14 July resulted firstly in the 9th Division capturing most of Longueval and the edge of Delville Wood.

XIII Corps, 9th Division, 26th Brigade: 19th Battalion DLI (attached)

On 15 July, the 27th Brigade and the 1st South African Regiment (9th Division) were ordered to complete the capture of Longueval and the South African Brigade (also 9th Division) to capture Delville Wood.

The attacks by the 12th Royal Scots on Longueval at 8 a.m. and at 7.30 p.m. were unsuccessful.

The South African Brigade were ordered to take Delville Wood "at all costs". Fierce fighting and successive counter-attacks failed to stop the capture of all the wood, bar the north-west corner.

On 16 July, there was a further attack on the north-western corner of Delville Wood and the northern part of Longueval. Again success eluded the attackers and a further attempt was therefore planned for 17 July and orders were received that the objectives must be secured by dawn. The attack was launched at 2 a.m. by the same 27th Brigade and the South Africans.

By noon the operation had failed with heavy loss of life and it was then decided that the next attack would be made from the west by the 3rd Division before dawn on 18 July.

Troops from the 76th Brigade established a line along Duke Street and along the north-west side of Delville Wood, but the South Africans on the north edge of the wood came under an intense barrage and suffered heavily. In the afternoon, the Germans then advanced from the east, north of the Ginchy road, but were repulsed. Others attacked from the north and eventually reached the south of the wood, and from the north and north-west to reach the south of Longueval. The 5th Gordon Highlanders managed to retrieve the situation somewhat and after fierce fighting regained the line of Clarges Street.

The 19th Battalion DLI (Bantams) had not been involved in the Battle of Albert, but moved up to trenches behind Montauban on 15 July. The Bantams were then placed at the disposal of the 26th Brigade and moved forward from Montauban to reach Longueval in the late evening of 18 July, enduring heavy German shelling on the way. The proposed attack for that day was cancelled because of the unfamiliarity of the ground especially at night and the weariness of the 26th Brigade. 19 DLI stayed at Longueval all next day (19 July) and helped to consolidate what ground had been won and to escort prisoners. There was continuous shell-fire which resulted in many casualties.

On 18 July, the 18th Division, on the eastern edge of Trones Wood, was relieved by the 35th Division, and on 20 July the 3rd completed the relief of the 9th Division - 19 DLI being relieved by a battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The battalion bivouacked in Caftet Wood near Carnoy.

On 22 July, a party of 300 men from 19 DLI dug a communication trench from Trones Wood to Waterlot Farm but on 24 July the whole battalion was moved up to dig reserve trenches



south-west of Longueval. The Bantams again encountered heavy shelling for two days before returning to Caftet Wood and then to Montauban.

On 26 July, General Rawlinson decided to counter a possible German attack through Delville Wood and Longueval. A combined attack by XIII and XV Corps to clear the village and wood from the south, was fixed for 7.10 a.m. on 27 July. Rawlinson also agreed with the French that on 30 July an Allied attack would be launched on the whole front from the Somme river to Maurepas, Falfemont Farm and Guillemont.

Delville Wood and Longueval were bombarded from 6.10 a.m. to 7.10 a.m. on 27 July with every gun available brought to bear, which created chaos and destruction. By 9 a.m. the final objective of the 99th Brigade (2nd Division) had been reached - a line some 50 yards inside the northern edge of the wood.

The 15th and 95th Brigades (5th Division) managed to advance the line south-west from the north-western portion of the wood to Piccadilly, leaving the orchard in front of them in the enemy's hands. There was then a German counter-attack, which was more or less contained.

A day of enemy shelling followed on 28 July with another counter-attack, which was successfully repulsed.

In the Allied attack the 89th and 90th Brigades (30th Division), were to attack through the 35th Division. The 89th Brigade, which had the whole of the 106th Brigade (35th Division) in reserve, were to attack from the line Maltzhom Farm to Guillemont and their objective was Falfemont Farm and the German 2nd position north-west of it as far as the southern edge of Guillemont. During the night of 29 July, the enemy shelled the Trones Wood area and the assembly trenches. The attack at 4.45 a.m. on 30 July was not a success, despite great gallantry shown by the assaulting two brigades. That night the forward troops of the 30th and 35th Divisions were relieved by the 55th Division. 19 DLI marched back to Caftet Wood and then moved to Sand Pit Valley near Meaulte on 31 July.

19 DLI had not been heavily engaged in this fighting, but nevertheless their casualties amounted to three officers (Second Lieutenants Braidford, French and Millar) and 62 other ranks (including Company Sergeant Major Cunningham), killed or died of wounds.⁷

Generals Haig and Foch came to an agreement on 12 August for a general attack along the whole line from the Somme river, to High Wood and to take place on 18 August. Amongst other tasks, XV Corps had to finally clear the northern edge of Delville Wood.

XV Corps, 14th Division, 43rd Brigade: 10th Battalion DLI

On the night of 12 August, the 14th Division relieved the 17th Division. The 10th Battalion DLI had arrived at Pommiers Redoubt that day, and at night, as part of the 43rd Brigade, took over the front at Longueval, occupying trenches to the north of the village with the right of the line in Delville Wood. During this time eight men were killed, including Private Robert Anderson, who probably won his Military Medal that day. The horror of the past four weeks was still to be seen; defences had to be improved and communication trenches dug. All this had to be done under constant shelling and sniper fire, so that when the battalion was relieved on the night of 15 August, it had already lost a total of 13 soldiers killed or mortally wounded. Many others were wounded, including two officers, Second Lieutenants J.M. Jackson and Captain C.E. Pumphrey, who lost an arm.

At some considerable cost, XV Corps achieved some small success on 18 August. With 10 DLI in support, the 43rd Brigade's task had been to secure the northern part of ZZ Trench, Beer Trench as far as Ale Alley, Edge Trench and the sap which ran along Prince's Street in the wood. 10 DLI's 'C' Company was sent up to strengthen the line, as the attack on the

⁷ Miles gives total losses, including wounded, as twelve officers and 250 other ranks. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.61.



last German position had failed. One soldier was killed and many wounded. The battalion now had five days rest at Fricourt.

Meanwhile on 18 August, the 41st Brigade assaulted Orchard Trench and the southern end of the Wood Lane line. The former trench was captured with ease, but only a small part of Wood Lane was secured.

Generals Haig and Foch came to a fresh arrangement on 18 August. Amongst other things planned for 24 August, the 14th Division (XV Corps) would approach within assaulting distance of Ginchy and clear the northern edge of Delville Wood. On 26 or 27 August, XV and XIV Corps would capture the German 2nd position from the slope south-west of Falfemont Farm to Wedge Wood, the Wedge Wood-Ginchy road, and Ginchy itself.

On 24 August, the 14th Division attacked with the 42nd Brigade and the 8th King's Royal Rifle Corps (41st Brigade). They were charged with establishing a line from the junction of Beer Trench with Hop Alley to Wood Lane. The 8th KRRC, on the right, was checked with heavy loss in front of Ale Alley and this check brought the remaining battalions to a halt preventing the occupation of much of Beer Trench. Eventually the line established ran due south from the Flers road to the wood and then south-east along Edge Trench to Prince's Street. Early on 25 August, the 9th Rifle Brigade (42nd Brigade) cleared Edge Trench nearly as far as its junction with Ale Alley.

On 25 August, 10 DLI relieved a battalion of the 42nd Brigade. The Germans still held the eastern portion of Edge Trench and 10 DLI were positioned in Inner Trench from Cocoa Lane and in Devil's Trench ([Map 6.9](#)).

A surprise attack was fixed for 7.30 p.m. on 26 August. This was postponed, firstly to 5 a.m. the next morning and then to 5 p.m. the next day (28 August). The German position was attacked from the north: along New Trench to Edge Trench; from the west along Edge Trench; and from the East at the junction of Ale Alley and Edge Trench. The Germans were driven out of their position and as the Official History states: "At last Delville Wood was completely in British hands".⁸ Unfortunately this was short lived.⁹

A further attack by 10 DLI and 1st Welch Fusiliers (22nd Brigade), was ordered for the evening of 29 August to clear Ale Alley as far as Beer Trench.¹⁰ There was some confusion regarding the barrage and timing of the attack which went forward with great cost. Only 15 yards of trench were captured and in the process, nine men from the battalion were killed and others mortally wounded. 10 DLI was relieved on the night of 29 August and returned to Fricourt and then to Hornoy for rest. By 31 August, the whole of the 14th Division had been relieved by the 24th Division. Total casualties in 10 DLI were 51 killed and 14 died of wounds.

⁸ *Official History*, page not known.

⁹ Miles gives the date as being 27 August, but it is certainly 28 August, as 29 soldiers were killed on that day and none on the 27 August. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.68.

¹⁰ Again Miles has 27 August and the *Official History* 28 August. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.70.

2.4: 14 July - 7 August 1916. The Battle of Pozières Ridge.

III Corps, 23rd Division, 68th Brigade: 12th and 13th Battalions DLI

The 12th and 13th Battalions DLI took part in this long running battle during the end of July and first week of August. They had been resting at Franvillers after their action in the Battle of Bazentin.

The III Corps, on the extreme left, was the only corps in the Fourth Army to be involved in this battle, which was mainly a Reserve Army affair involving, in particular, the Australians of the 1st Anzac Corps. They were to the left of III Corps and attacked the village of Pozières from the south-west. On 23 July, Pozières Trench was taken quite easily but tougher opposition was met on the right at trenches known as OG 1 and OG 2, and initially only OG 1 Trench, up to the junction of Pozières Trench, was taken. The assault on the village itself was successful.

General Gough (commander of the Reserve Army) issued instructions at 7 p.m. on 23 July that the capture of the OG trenches south-east of the Bapaume road, would be made by an assault north-eastward after a bombardment by the Reserve Army's artillery, and that they would be assisted by III Corps. This Corp's immediate task was the capture of Munster Alley-Switch Line re-entrant ([Map 6.10](#)).

On 24 July, orders and preparations were made for the coming night assault and before dark the heavy guns of the Reserve Army and III Corps opened up on OG 1 and OG 2 trenches respectively.

At 2 a.m. on 25 July, the attack began but after bitter fighting, OG 1 Trench was only partially cleared and the Germans were still near the junction of Munster Alley and OG 2 Trench.

At the same time, the 3rd Brigade (1st Division) attacked the Munster Alley-Switch Line re-entrant but failed. They attacked again at 3 a.m. on 26 July and they reached the junction with Pozières trench where they found the Australians established.

At noon on 26 July, the 23rd Division relieved the 1st Division with the 68th taking over from the 3rd Brigade. The 1st Division left behind two companies of the 2nd Welch Regiment, who made two more attempts to progress up Munster Alley towards the Switch Line. They were only partially successful. At this time no troops had managed to get up Munster Alley past Point 41.

13 DLI (68th Brigade) took over the front line on the evening of 27 July and before morning on 28 July, 'A' Company and a company of 12 DLI gained ground by digging Butterworth Trench (named after Lieutenant George Butterworth who was in command of the party). This trench was 200 yards in length, parallel to the Switch Line and between Gloster Alley and Munster Alley. It formed a salient in the centre of the Munster Alley-Switch Line re-entrant. A bombing party from 13 DLI then pushed up Munster Alley, erected a barricade, and repulsed a German attack. The battalion was relieved that night and spent the next three days at Albert.

On 28 July, 12 DLI moved up to Becourt Wood and next day (29 July), under orders from the 70th Brigade, carried bombs up to the front under heavy fire. On 30 July, they were shelled in their bivouacs.

The two battalions now came alongside each other. On 2 August, 12 DLI took over the front line eastward of Munster Alley, where it dug and wired, and 13 DLI dug a sap out from Butterworth Trench and strengthened the bombing post in Munster Alley. 12 DLI continued its work of wiring and digging under continuous shelling for two days, before being withdrawing on 4 August to support trenches and moving out of the area altogether on 7 August. The 23rd Division made a fresh attempt to get forward in Munster Alley on the night of 4/5 August. 13 DLI had come back into the line on 4 August in readiness for an attack at the junction of Torr Trench with Munster Alley, entrusted to 'D' Company. Whilst 'D'



Company occupied New Trench; 'A' Company held Butterworth Trench; 'B' Company were at Point 41 and the barricade in Munster Alley; and 'C' Company were in Gloster Alley. The attack was to have been preceded by heavy artillery fire but this proved to be ineffective and the advance along Munster Alley by 'D' Company was met by close range machine-gun fire, although the Durhams gained some 60 yards. A block was made some 18 yards from a strong German barricade and defended against repeated counter-attacks. The assault over open ground against Torr Trench also failed. There were few survivors. Despite a further attempt by 'A' Company there was no real success and casualties were heavy.

13 DLI was called upon to make a further effort, and shortly after midnight 'A' Company was ordered to come round The Loop and form up for the attack. British shells were falling short which made this impossible. The bomb fight was still going on in Munster Alley, but little could be done except defend the block that had been made.

On 5 August, 13 DLI was relieved by the 8th West Yorkshire Regiment (69th Brigade) and moved back to Albert. The West Yorkshires bombed the Germans out of another 150 yards of Munster Alley, also securing the eastern part of Torr Trench. The 11th West Yorkshire Regiment then took over the attack, but by the morning of 8 August, the 15th Division had taken over from the 23rd Division.

The total casualties in the 23rd Division from 25 July to 7 August were 96 officers and 1547 other ranks. In 12 DLI, 15 other ranks had been killed or died from their wounds, including Company Sergeant Major John Fisher DCM. 13 DLI similarly lost 44 all ranks, including Captain Arthur Austin, Lieutenant Noel Target, Lieutenant George Butterworth, and Lieutenant Norman Thompson. Both battalions left the Somme for Armentieres on 11 August and did not return until 10 September.

During this battle, Private William Short, 8th Yorkshire Regiment (69th Brigade), was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. He was a bomber and had been twice wounded. He lay in a trench with a shattered leg, preparing bombs for his comrades to throw and, later, died of his wounds.



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2.5: 3 - 6 September 1916. The Battle of Guillemont

XIV Corps, 20th Division, Pioneers: 11th Battalion DLI

The 11th Battalion DLI was the sole DLI battalion engaged in this battle. So far, the Pioneers had only lost five men killed on the Somme. They had died on 2 and 10 August in the Colincamps-Hebuterne sector, whilst helping to sort out the havoc created on 1 July.

Three companies of 11 DLI reached the front line on 23 August and began work on the assembly trenches, north of Guillemont railway station ([Map 6.11](#)). Despite almost continuous shelling and German counter-attacks, the Pioneers continued their work and by 28 August the assembly trenches were ready. Progress had also been made on other assembly trenches in front of Arrow Head Copse. On 30 August the preliminary British bombardment began, which drew the inevitable enemy reply with resulting casualties. So far, the battalion had lost three men killed and a further six had died of wounds. The whole of XIV Corp's operation was then cancelled by General Rawlinson because the 20th Division had not been able to complete its preparations and the 35th Division had suffered badly from the German shelling.

The new date for the attack on Guillemont, which had been entered three times but not held, was 3 September, and 11 DLI marched up to play its part in the capture. The battalion were in reserve behind Bernafay Wood, except for 'A' Company who were attached to the 59th Brigade on the right and assembled in Liverpool Trench south of Trones Wood, and 'D' Company who were in Dummy Trench behind the 6th Connaught Rangers (47th Brigade) on the left. The 59th Brigade were so weak in numbers that support was given by the 5th Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Regiment from the 60th Brigade and the 7th Somerset Light Infantry from the 61st Brigade. The 47th Brigade, 16th (Irish) Division was brought up to replace the 60th Brigade, itself weak in numbers.

At 12.10 p.m. the assault started and there was considerable success with two platoons of 'D' Company 11 DLI entering the village and within an hour the advance had passed through Guillemont and did not stop until the line of the Ginchy-Wedge Wood road was reached. Then under heavy hostile shelling the work of consolidation went on. 'D' Company helped the 6th Connaught Rangers to put North Street into a state of defence, and most of 'A' Company were employed on the ruins of the German strong point in the front of Arrow Head Copse. In the evening 'B' and 'C' Companies began work with the Sappers, carrying up wire and making communications trenches through the village.

Divisions to the left and right had made little progress and there was then some concern about consolidating the gains, protecting the 20th Division's flanks and meeting the expected German counter-attack. 'D' Company toiled all night on a defensive line towards Ginchy, and 'A' Company were detailed to consolidate the southern portion of Guillemont.

11 DLI were temporarily withdrawn at dawn on 4 September but then continued with their labours that same afternoon. 'B' and 'C' Companies were diverted to the Briqueterie, south of Bernafay Wood, and were brought forward later to Arrow Head Copse. They were intended to relieve troops of the 59th Brigade, but came under high explosive fire to such an extent that it took hours to reach their position. The total relief of the 59th Brigade was not completed until 5 September. A further nine men had been killed and seven more later died of their wounds.¹¹ Total casualties for the operation were, therefore, 25 killed or died of wounds.

Three Victoria Crosses were awarded for the capture of Guillemont:

Private Thomas Hughes, 6th Connaught Rangers, though wounded returned to the fray on the north side of Mount Street and single-handedly disposed of a German machine-gun detachment and, although again wounded, he brought in several prisoners.

¹¹ Miles gives the casualties for 3 to 5 September as six officers wounded or sick, and losses in the ranks as 87 - nearly all wounded! *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.74.

On the left flank of the 20th Division, Lieutenant John Holland, 7th Leinster Regiment (47th Brigade), put at the head of the battalion bombers, rushed forward through the British barrage and bombed surprised Germans in their dug-outs with great effect. Sergeant David Jones, 12th King's Royal Rifle Corps (61st Brigade), commanded a platoon which held a covering position well forward on the southern edge of Ginchy until relieved on 5 September, repelling several counter-attacks by fire.



2.6: 15 - 22 September 1916. The Battle of Flers-Courcelette.

This battle was seen as the opening of the second phase of the Somme Offensive. The Fourth Army objectives are described in the *Official History*:

“As his first objective (named the ‘Green Line’) General Rawlinson selected the Switch Line, together with its connecting defences which covered Martinpuich, his right flank to secure possession of the forward slopes of the high ground north-west of Combles. This represented an advance of 1000 yards or more on the front between the Quadrilateral and Delville Wood, and of about 600 yards elsewhere.

The second objective (called the ‘Brown Line’) included the German 3rd position in front of Flers (XV Corps) and a series of subsidiary defences between Flers and Martinpuich (III Corps), involving a further advance of 500-800 yards on the main front attack.

The third objective (‘Blue Line’), 900-1200 yards beyond the second, comprised the German 3rd. position and back position covering Morval and Lesboeuifs (XIV Corps), and the village of Flers (XV Corps); it extended so far westward that an advance of some 350 yards by the III Corps would begin to envelop Martinpuich and threaten the German gun positions south of Le Sars.

The fourth objective (‘Red Line’), 1400-1900 yards beyond the ‘Blue Line’, included Morval and Lesboeuifs (XIV Corps), together with Gueudecourt and its defences (XV Corps); the XV Corps was to form a flank facing north-westward between Gueudecourt and the German 3rd position beyond Flers. When these two corps arrived on the ‘Red Line’ they would have broken through the principal defences on a frontage of nearly three and a half.”¹²

The III Corps on the left of the Fourth Army front would link up with General Gough’s Reserve Army - in particular the 2nd Canadian Division.

A preliminary bombardment started at 6 a.m. on 12 September and continued until zero hour (6.20 a.m.) on 15 September.

[Map 6.12](#) highlights the areas of involvement for the Durhams, i.e. 50th Division west of High Wood; 41st Division north-west of Delville Wood; 14th Division between Ginchy and Longueval; and 6th Division east of Guillemont. The 20th and 23rd Divisions were also to take part, relieving the Guards and 15th Divisions respectively, so that in all thirteen DLI battalions were involved in the fighting.

III Corps, 50th Division, 150th Brigade: 5th Battalion DLI; 151st Brigade: 6th, 8th, 9th Battalions DLI; & Pioneers, 7th Battalion DLI

The 50th Division, recently arrived in the Somme area, embraced all the DLI’s Territorial battalions: 7 DLI was the Divisional Pioneer Battalion and saw little action (three killed); 5 DLI was in the 150th Brigade; and 6th, 8th and 9th DLI were in the 151st Brigade. The 149th Brigade (four battalions of Northumberland Fusiliers) were the third brigade in the division.

On 15 September, the 50th Division held the position south of the High Wood ridge south-east of Martinpuich ([Map 6.15](#)). The 149th and 150th Brigades were in the front line and the 151st Brigade in reserve. The plan of attack was firstly Hook Trench and The Tangle North, then a line running along the eastern side of Starfish Trench then south of The Crescent along Martin Trench, to Martinpuich. The final objective was Prue Trench running from Martin Alley to Prue Copse. The 15th Division was to halt on the near edge of Martinpuich,

¹² *Official History*, page not known.

but if all went well would secure the village to enable the converging Canadian and 50th Divisions to meet at the Mill north of the Eaucourt l'Abbaye road and continue the advance. The 50th Division was to have the use of an entirely new weapon - the tank. Two were allotted to the division and had moved into position on the evening of 14 September.

At 6.20 a.m. on 15 September, the 149th and 150th Brigades started their advance - the 149th on the right and the 150th on the left of Crescent Alley. The 149th entered Hook Trench about 7 a.m., but came under enfiladed fire from High Wood as they attempted to advance to the second objective. The 47th Division had not been able to take the wood and it was not until about noon and after the 149th Brigade had assisted the 47th Division, that High Wood was finally cleared.

The 150th Brigade, with the aid of the two tanks, and with 5 DLI in support (one company to each battalion and one in reserve), took Hook Trench without difficulty by about 7.30 a.m. Most of the second objective had been captured by 8 a.m. and by 10 a.m. the third objective was reported to have been gained, but success was not so complete. Enfilade fire from Martinpuich caused many casualties as the 4th East Yorkshire Regiment crossed the ridge, and it was obliged to withdraw to Martin Trench which it had captured earlier. Further to the left, the Starfish Line was held near its junction with Martin Alley, by the 4th Yorkshire Regiment. 5 DLI's companies moved up behind the 150th Brigade's battalions. There were very few casualties until the Durham's final advance across open ground in full view of the enemy. They came under intense fire from both flanks and suffered heavy casualties with (36 killed and others later dying of wounds).

Because of the check at High Wood, Starfish Line now became the main position to be consolidated and little further progress was expected, towards the 50th Division's final objective. Indeed because of other setbacks along the front, the Fourth Army expected little progress towards its third and fourth objectives.

By 5 p.m., the entire village of Martinpuich was finally captured by the 15th Division, partly due to the 150th Brigade commanding the rising ground overlooking the village.

Earlier, at 6.20 a.m., the 151st Brigade had moved up from Shelter Wood to an old German trench at the south-west corner of Mametz Wood. About noon, it made a further move towards Bazentin-le-Petit and, at 5 p.m., the brigade received orders to move up immediately, and marched to the quarry at Bazentin-le-Petit.

At 9.25 a.m., 8 DLI was placed at the disposal of the 150th Brigade and two companies came under the orders of 5 DLI. At 12.50 p.m., 9 DLI was attached to the 149th Brigade to reinforce the proposed attack on Starfish Line. During the afternoon, however, because of very heavy German shellfire, the 149th Brigade found it more and more difficult to maintain its forward position and by 3.30 p.m. was back in Hook Trench with about 100 men in the sunken road south of The Bow. 9 DLI had not yet been engaged.

An appraisal of the events so far resulted in General Rawlinson issuing new orders that included the 47th and 50th Divisions to renew the attack on the third objective, namely Prue Trench from Prue Copse to Martin Alley.

At 5.45 p.m., the 150th Brigade was ordered to occupy the part of Prue Trench west of Crescent Alley and link up with the 15th Division in Martinpuich. The 151st Brigade was ordered to attack Prue Trench east of The Crescent from Eye and Clark's Trenches. 9 DLI was on the right, 6 DLI in the centre, and the 5th Border Regiment on the left. After three postponements and after some difficulty in locating their supposed position, they got into Clark's Trench at 9.15 p.m. and immediately Second Lieutenant Annett, commanding 'Y' Company, was killed. At 9.40 p.m. and without the 5th Border Regiment, which could not be located, 6 and 9 DLI advanced through Hook Trench and down the slope towards Starfish and Prue Trenches. The Durhams met some accurate machine-gun fire and took heavy casualties, including Lieutenant Colonel Roland Bradford MC, commanding 9 DLI, who was wounded. When they continued their advance, they were checked by machine-gun fire and they had to take cover in ditches. Small parties of both battalions entered Prue Trench



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but were killed and others who had established themselves in the Starfish Line were driven out. Eventually the Durhams dug themselves in behind the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers of the 149th Brigade that was holding the sunken road south of The Bow. At 11 p.m., contact was regained with the 5th Border Regiment

In the early hours of the morning of 16 September there was some reorganisation of the line. At 8 a.m., 8 DLI again came under the orders of its own brigade.

Orders were received by the 50th Division to continue the attack on Prue Trench and extend north of Martinpuich. The 151st Brigade was to attack Prue Trench east of Crescent Alley at 9.15 a.m. but the orders never reached 6 DLI and according to the battalion's history "things were fairly quiet during the day". Yet they lost one officer and 21 other ranks killed. However in the 151st Brigade, the 5th Border Regiment and 9 DLI did attack but were overwhelmed.

At the same time, the 150th Brigade (5 DLI assisted by a company of 4th East Yorkshires) was ordered to attack Prue and Starfish Trenches west of Crescent Alley.¹³ But again there was confusion and only three companies of 5 DLI actually carried out the attack. They advanced from Martin Trench in three waves. They came under enfilade fire from machine-guns and then lost their direction. Attempts were made to bomb along Prue Trench from Martin Alley, but little ground was made. The attack was therefore only partially successful, capturing the western end of Prue Trench but leaving the Germans in command of the rest of the Prue Trench, the Starfish Line, and the strong point called The Crescent.

During the night, the 151st Brigade relieved the 149th Brigade. In 8 DLI, 'A' and 'B' Companies moved into Clark's and Eye Trenches; 'A' Company came under the orders of 6 DLI, and 'B' Company came under 9 DLI.

The Crescent was preventing further advance and six bombing squads under Lieutenant Perrot were organised to attack it at 4.30 p.m. on 7 September.¹⁴ The attackers bombed their way from the south up Crescent Alley. The first attack was abandoned about at 5.30 p.m., and at 8.30 p.m. a second attack (four squads from 8 DLI and two from the 5th Border Regiment) also met with a heavy barrage and they were badly cut up. This barrage had been timed to precede a German attack on the 150th Brigade.

In the meantime, about 5.30 p.m., 5 DLI also sent bombing parties to The Crescent. They were to be assisted by 4th and 5th Yorkshire Regiment's bombers, but they did not arrive in time and 5 DLI's bombers carried out the attack themselves. They bombed eastward along Prue and Starfish Trenches. These trenches as far as The Crescent were captured and consolidated, but the attack on The Crescent itself was repulsed.¹⁵

In preparation for a new general attack General Rawlinson, amongst other orders, required the 50th Division to capture Prue Trench and to seize Martinpuich Mill and the trenches north-east of it. Zero hour was fixed for 5.50 a.m. 18 September.

At 2 a.m. on 18 September, 8 DLI's Headquarters, 'C', and 'D' Companies moved forward into Eye, Hook and Swansea Trenches ('A' and 'B' were already there) and were ordered to attack Prue Trench on the right of The Crescent. 70 soldiers from 9 DLI were attached to 'A' Company, and 50 from 6 DLI were attached to 'B' Company. Also in the plan of attack was the 5th Border Regiment. Zero hour of 5.30 a.m. was changed to 7.35 a.m., but 'B' Company, now attached to the 6 DLI did not receive this revised order and attacked at 5.30 a.m. without any support. In pouring rain, they came under intense fire and suffered many casualties, including Company Sergeant Major Black MM and Sergeant Rutter DCM, who were killed. Similarly, 8 DLI's bombers' attack on The Crescent failed through lack of support. The attack for 7.35 a.m. was cancelled.

¹³ 9 a.m. according to the battalion's history. Raimes, *Fifth Battalion*, p.57.

¹⁴ 8 DLI's history notes six squads, whilst 6 DLI's history lists only two commanded by Second Lieutenant Aubin, Brigade Bombing Officer. Veitch, *8th Battalion*, p. 93; Moses, *Faithful Sixth*, p.71.

¹⁵ The *Official History* has these two assaults taking place on 18 September 1916. *Official History*, p.357.



An attack was planned on Starfish Line by 100 men from both 6 and 9 DLI. It had been reported that the Germans were evacuating the Line, but this was not the case. It was strongly held and they were met by heavy machine gun fire. 6 DLI lost Second Lieutenant Charlton and four other ranks killed. 9 DLI had two other ranks killed.

The 18 September was uneventful but unpleasant for 5 DLI, who were continually shelled. During the morning, 8 DLI's 'A' and 'D' Companies relieved 6 and 9 DLI respectively. 6 DLI moved back to Sixth Avenue East for two days. The whole of 8 DLI was now in the front line and the battalion continued to hold this entire front of the 50th Division throughout 19 and 20 September.

At 10 a.m. on 19 September, the 23rd now relieved the 15th Division, with the 69th taking over from the 150th Brigade in Starfish and Prue Trenches, west of Crescent Alley, and 5 DLI went into divisional reserve in old German trenches near Bazentin-le-Grand.¹⁶

On the evening of 19 September, it was again decided that 8 DLI should attempt to capture The Crescent with bombers. If successful, then to bomb along Prue Trench or Starfish Trench. Incessant rain put zero hour back to 1 a.m. on 20 September but even then, the rain and thick mud made it impossible to reach The Crescent.

Early on 20 September, the 1st relieved the 47th Division and that night the 151st Brigade was relieved by the 149th Brigade, including 8 DLI, relieved by the 7th Northumberland Fusiliers. 6 DLI in Sixth Avenue East, moved further back to Mametz Wood. 8 DLI moved back to Mill Road near Bazentin-le-Petit and on 22 September to its old quarters in The Quadrangle.

On 21 September, the 1st Division forced its way westward along Starfish Line until it was over the spur running north-north-east from High Wood, so rendering the remainder of Starfish Line untenable by the enemy. At night, the 149th Brigade discovered that the Germans had withdrawn; the battalions holding the front advanced; and by 11.30 p.m. had secured possession of both Starfish and Prue, as well as the much fought for Crescent.

In this fighting, the DLI's Territorial battalions in the 50th Division lost 282 soldiers killed or died of wounds.¹⁷

Little is known of the movements of 7 DLI. Undoubtedly these Pioneers were worked all hours digging trenches and repairing roads. They were probably also used as stretcher bearers. Their casualties were mercifully and relatively low; four killed and seven died of wounds.

III Corps, 23rd Division, 68th Brigade: 12th and 13th Battalions DLI

The 23rd Division, including 12 and 13 DLI arrived at Becourt Wood on 15 September. 13 DLI was lent to the 47th Division which was attacking the German positions east of High Wood. These Durhams provided carrying and working parties by day and night for the 140th and 141st Brigades which were in the front line. On 17 September, a party from 13 DLI, under Second Lieutenant Beart, was carrying bombs to the 6th London Regiment (140th Brigade), when they came under a hostile barrage. Two men were killed and many others wounded. Whilst collecting the survivors together, Second Lieutenant Beart was mortally wounded. With considerable difficulty, Sergeant Craddock DCM and Sergeant Fittes managed to get the party back to safety. Both received the Military Medal.

Rain fell steadily throughout 19 September when 13 DLI were called upon to help the 140th Brigade regain the junction of the Flers Line with the communication trench called Drop Alley ([Map 6.15](#)). This task fell to 'B' Company under Captain D.H. Clark MC. The position

¹⁶ 5 DLI's history states that the battalion's relief by 9th Yorkshire Regiment was carried out without casualties although *Soldiers Died* shows that three other ranks were killed that day. Raimes, *Fifth Battalion*, p.60.

¹⁷ In a letter to Lord Northbourne, Honorary Colonel of 9 DLI, Roland Bradford wrote that they had lost 70 officers and men killed and 400 wounded. REF?

was rather less than a mile north-east of High Wood and after the usual preliminary bombardment, two bombing raids were made - one up Drop Alley and the other up Flers Line. Second Lieutenant Hudspeth led the advance up Drop Alley and advanced some 70 yards before he had to fall back in the face of a strong German counter-attack. The other party under Second Lieutenant Mitchell won 130 yards of Flers Trench. A barricade was erected, which was twice demolished by British fire, so was then built some 20 yards further back. Relief came six hours later and on the morning of 20 September, 'B' Company rejoined the battalion, now back in Becourt Wood. Eight soldiers had been killed and two later died of wounds.¹⁸

On 18 September, the 23rd relieved the 15th Division and 12 DLI (still with the 68th Brigade) took over Gourlay Trench, beyond Contalmaison. On 21 September they were heavily shelled and Second Lieutenant C. Armstrong was killed.

On 22 September, 13 DLI was photographed before they moved up through a heavy barrage to the front line losing another seven men in the process. 12 DLI moved up to support positions.

During this fighting, 22 officers and other ranks of the 12th and 13th Battalions DLI were killed or died of their wounds.

XV Corps, 14th Division, 43rd Brigade: 10th Battalion DLI

On 15 September, the 14th Division was in position south-east of Delville Wood. Its first two objectives lay on the slopes of the ridge south-east of Flers (41st Brigade); the third objective lay along Bull's Road, which ran across the lower ground beyond and the final objective was Gueudecourt (both 42nd Brigade objectives). The 43rd Brigade was in reserve.¹⁹

The advance started at 6.20 a.m., and by 7 a.m. the first objective (Switch Line) had been captured. At 6.30 a.m. the rear battalions of the 41st Brigade began their advance but came under opposition which delayed their arrival at Switch Trench. The attack on the second objective (Gap Trench) was delayed by 40 minutes, but came under little opposition.

The 42nd Brigade marched up from the rear slopes of Caterpillar Valley and just before 9 a.m. passed over Gap Trench to attack the third objective. After being held up at Bull's Road, the brigade advanced to the Gueudecourt-Ginchy road.

At 11.20 a.m. an unsuccessful attempt was made to attack the Gird Line and an appeal for reinforcements brought up the 43rd Brigade, including the 10th Battalion DLI.

Even before the assault began, the battalion had lost some men, including Lieutenant Barkas and Company Sergeant Major Cooper DCM through enemy shelling their position east of the Flers-Ginchy road.²⁰

New orders required the capture of the objectives of 15 September to be completed. The relief of the front line by the 43rd Brigade was completed at 6 a.m. on 16 September, with 10 DLI on the left and in touch with the 41st Division and the 6th Somerset Light Infantry on the right, joining up with the Guards Division.

The British bombardment did not seem to have been very effective and the creeping barrage was weak and started too far in front of the infantry. Once 10 DLI started to advance, the Durhams came under heavy machine-gun fire and they were compelled to halt after only some 400 yards. Attempts to reinforce the front battalions by the 6th Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 6th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry only increased the toll

¹⁸ Miles gives total casualties as 30, including Second Lieutenant Hudspeth missing. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.90.

¹⁹ The *Official History's* map shows 43rd Brigade in the front line on the morning of 15 September. *Official History*, page not known.

²⁰ Miles has the Flers-Longueval road, and states that eight men were killed on 15 September by one shell whilst moving through Delville Wood. Records, however, show that only Barkas and Cooper were killed on 15 September. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.79.

of casualties. Serious losses had been suffered by 10 DLI and survivors had to seek cover in shell holes. A second attempt was made to advance in the evening (6.55 p.m.) with Lieutenant Colonel Morant, two officers and 100 men. The bombardment was still not effective enough and they got no further than the first assault. They were joined by some of the morning's survivors but with German machine-guns as active as before and with no support and unprotected flanks, they had no option but to return to Bull's Road. The front line at night showed little advance on that of the morning.

The following day (17 September) the 14th Division handed over to the 21st Division (less the 64th Brigade which was attached to the 41st Division) and returned to Pommiers Redoubt.

From 10 DLI, six officers and 153 other ranks had been killed or died of their wounds.²¹

XV Corps, 41st Division, 64th Brigade: 15th Battalion DLI (attached): 123rd Brigade, 20th Battalion DLI

The 64th Brigade, including the 15th Battalion DLI was attached to the 41st Division which also included the 20th Battalion DLI. These two DLI battalions found themselves fighting alongside each other in an area east of Flers ([Map 6.13](#)).

During 15 September - notable for the use of tanks for the first time - the 41st Division (excluding the 123rd Brigade) broke the German line and entered Flers. Following the advance, 20 DLI came up through a heavy enemy barrage and, by the evening, occupied the old front line trenches astride the Flers-Longueval road just south-west of Flers, at a cost of seven men killed.

15 DLI lost men whilst moving up from Pommiers Redoubt. At 2 a.m. on 16 September, the 64th Brigade started for the line but it was not until 5.30 a.m. that it was deployed just behind Flers Trench in shell holes. At 8.45 a.m., 15 DLI advanced and, under severe fire, reached the Bull's Road and re-organised its line. Then, with the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry on their left, the Durhams continued their advance to within 70 yards of the Gird Line, but at considerable cost. Orders for another attack were issued but there was no chance of success and it was never made. At dusk the order to withdraw was given and 15 DLI moved to Flea Trench and then, at dawn on 17 September, down to the sunken part of the Ginchy Road. 20 DLI then arrived, so 15 DLI moved out of the way to a position south of Flers and, that evening, withdrew to Pommiers Redoubt.

On 16 September, whilst 15 DLI were so heavily engaged in bloody action, 20 DLI were called. They had to negotiate a heavy barrage on the south side of Flers and as they arrived at the forward position there was much confusion because of the number of other battalions involved. By noon, however, 'C' Company. was established in Box and Cox Trenches north of Flers. The rest of the battalion occupied part of sunken road leading to Ginchy. 20 DLI's task was one of consolidation under intense artillery fire, which lasted throughout the rest of 16 September and the whole of 17 September. The 41st Division was relieved by the 55th Division and 20 DLI marched back to Montauban in pitch darkness, pouring rain and shell-fire.

The losses to the two battalions had been very serious. Between the 15 and 18 September, 15 DLI lost eight officers and 140 other ranks, and 20 DLI lost 36 men – all killed or later died of wounds.²²

XIV Corps, 6th Division, 18th Brigade: 2nd and 14th Battalions DLI

The 6th Division took up a position east of Guillemont and was confronted by the Quadrilateral (a four-sided system of trenches, 350 by 150 yards half a mile north of Leuze

²¹ Miles has 396 killed wounded or missing. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.82.

²² Miles has 19 officers and 419 other ranks in 15 DLI, and seven officers and 103 other ranks in 20 DLI - a total of 548 casualties, killed, wounded or missing. *Durham Forces in the Field*, pp.84, 88.

Wood) that barred the division's way to its first objective. Help was expected from the 56th Division on their right, as they progressed through and north of Bouleaux Wood. On 15 September, a hurried and unsuccessful attack was made by the 16th Brigade on the Quadrilateral ([Map 6.14](#)). Three tanks were attached to the 6th Division and they had the Quadrilateral as their first objective, though only one actually took part in the assault. The artillery preparation had been largely ineffective. The 71st Brigade on the left had more success against Straight Trench and the 9th Norfolk Regiment and 1st Leicestershire Regiment continued their advance until stopped by uncut wire and heavy machine-gun fire. At 8.20 a.m., the other two battalions of the brigade (9th Suffolk Regiment and 2nd Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment) followed only to be met with the same fate. Straight Trench and the Quadrilateral were now subjected to another bombardment by heavy artillery (which also proved ineffective) prior to a second attack by the 18th Brigade at 7.30 p.m. The 2nd Battalion DLI moved two companies to the Triangle in readiness to bomb down Straight Trench.²³ The 11th Essex Regiment came under fire from Bouleaux Wood in their right rear and had to retire and 2 DLI bombed down some 100 yards but could do no more.²⁴ 14 DLI were sent forward from Guillemont to consolidate a position where the railway crossed the Ginchy-Leuze Wood road. Here these Durhams found the trenches full of dead and wounded from the Norfolk and Suffolk Regiments. 14 DLI worked hard until dawn getting the wounded away and sending patrols to establish touch with the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment on the left, and the Shropshire Light Infantry on the right.

On 16 September, the 56th and 6th Divisions had merely to protect the right flank of the attack with artillery fire. On 17 September, orders were given for the original objectives to be captured the next day but the main operations were then postponed until 21 September, leaving XIV Corps to secure the Quadrilateral and its original third objective.

On 18 September following a wet night, it rained nearly all day. The attack by the 6th Division, however, was a complete success and it established a new line 500 yards beyond. The attack started at 5.50 a.m. with the 1st Shropshire Light Infantry advancing north-eastwards from the Ginchy road. With their left on the railway track, the Shropshires swept into the Quadrilateral. There they were joined by 14 DLI (with its right flank on the railway), and, after a sharp fight, they proceeded to clear out the dug-outs in the sunken road beyond ([Map 6.17](#)). The 1st West Yorkshire Regiment launched a frontal attack on Straight Trench and the battalion's bombers fought their way down from the north to join 14 DLI. These two battalions then pushed forward to a line which overlooked Morval and Lesboeufs and dug in. Here they were relieved and, on 19 September, 14 DLI found itself back in Meaulte. In this fighting, the 2nd Battalion lost 45 and the 14th Battalion 78 killed or died of wounds.

XIV Corps, 20th Division Pioneers: 11th Battalion DLI

In pouring rain, the 20th Division took over from the Guards Division on 16 September, 11 DLI taking over from the Guards Pioneers in Bernafay Wood. The Durhams spent two nights on the assembly trenches west of Lesboeufs preparing for the main action planned for the 21 September but postponed until 25 September (Battle of Morval). On the morning of 21 September, the 20th Division was itself relieved by the Guards Division. The battalion lost three men killed and three more died of wounds whilst preparing the assembly trenches.²⁵

²³ Miles calls this trench 'Low Road'. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.74.

²⁴ Ward states that the 11th Essex Regiment lost direction in the dark and 2 DLI bombed down a trench only to discover that it did not lead to the Quadrilateral. Ward, *Faithful*, p.370.

²⁵ "The Eleventh had lost less than 30 Men which speaks volumes for the skill and discipline with which their dangerous tasks had been performed". *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.79.



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2.7: 25 - 28 September 1916. The Battle of Morval.

The 6th Division (2 & 14 DLI), 21st Division (15 DLI), 23rd Division (12 & 13 DLI), and 50th Division (5, 6, 7, 8 & 9 DLI) were involved in the Battle of Morval, together with other divisions without a DLI battalion within their command.

"The final objective of the Fourth Army's renewed offensive, in co-operation with the French on its right, were those which had not been secured during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, that is, on the main front of attack, the villages of Morval and Lesboeuks for the XIV Corps, and Gueudecourt for the XV Corps. This was to be accomplished in three principal stages. First, advance to the third objective of 15 September and the Gird Trenches south of Gueudecourt. Second, advance to the sunken Combles-Gueudecourt road west of Morval and Lesboeuks, with the line prolonged over the spur south-east of Gueudecourt and through the centre of that village. Third, advance to the far side of Morval, Lesboeuks and Gueudecourt."²⁶

XIV Corps, 6th Division, 18th Brigade: 2nd and 14th Battalions DLI

The two DLI battalions were in a position just south of the Ginchy-Lesboeuks Road. 14 DLI had spent the night of 22 September in reserve between Trones Wood and Bernafay Wood. On the evening of 23 September, the battalion moved up to the position just described and relieved 2 DLI. The Germans were in Cow Trench on the left beyond the road. There was hostile fire all night and in the mist at 6 a.m. on 24 September the Germans attacked under a fierce bombardment. They did not reach 14 DLI, and the 16th Brigade (also in the 6th Division), though penetrated, was soon restored. British gunfire prevented further enemy attacks, but some shells fell short, causing casualties including Captain Oswald Herd, who was killed. That night 14 DLI was relieved by 2 DLI. Six soldiers besides Captain Herd had been killed that day.²⁷ This action and the attack by 12 DLI against Twenty-Sixth Avenue (see later) were two of the few encounters which took place during the two days prior to the attack. On 25 September, both DLI battalions took part in the general attack along the whole line from the Somme River to Martinpuich in which Morval, Lesboeuks and Gueudecourt were to be taken.

At 12.35 p.m. the assault began. Assisted by admirable artillery, the battalions of XIV Corps (including 2 DLI) advanced steadily with no delay and few serious setbacks, to reach their final objective.

Punctually at 1.35 p.m., the main advance was resumed by the 5th, 6th, and Guards Divisions. In the 6th Division, 2 DLI and 11th Essex Regiment captured their portion of the sunken road sustaining few casualties, and an hour later the final advance on Lesboeuks and Morval began. On the 6th Division's front, the 16th Brigade went as far as east of the Lesboeuks-Morval road and on their left the 18th Brigade went on to clear the southern part of Lesboeuks.

14 DLI's 'A' and 'D' Companies were to assist the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment (18th Brigade) in the capture Lesboeuks, however they were not needed and instead the whole battalion sat in reserve positions all day under heavy bombardment, losing a further four killed, including Second Lieutenant Thomas Robinson.²⁸ On the evening of 26 September, 14 DLI relieved the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment on the ground that had been won and just east of the ruins of Lesboeuks. The battalion remained there until the morning of 29 September when it, in turn, was relieved. The Durhams had suffered from continuous

²⁶ *Official History*, page not known.

²⁷ Miles lists only one killed and ten wounded. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.77.

²⁸ This account regarding 14 DLI is at variance with Ward's account. See *Faithful* p.373.



shelling losing a further 13 killed: Second Lieutenant Theodore Cox and 12 private soldiers. A further seven men died from their wounds received during this action. In the evening, 14 DLI arrived back at Meaulte and then went on to Ville-sur-Ancre.

XV Corps, 21st Division, 64th Brigade: 15th Battalion DLI

The 21st Division was on the left of the Guards Division and had taken over from the 14th Division front, where the Gird Trenches and Gueudecourt were still in German hands ([Map 6.17](#)). The 64th Brigade had relieved the 62nd before dawn on 23 September and 15 DLI (now back in the 21st Division) occupied the left of the line. On the night of 24 September, 15 DLI was itself relieved by troops of the 110th Brigade and was in reserve during the attack on the afternoon of 25 September. The assault failed and 15 DLI relieved the 1st Lincolnshire Regiment that night. Other units of the 64th Brigade were also withdrawn and replaced by fresh battalions. The attack was resumed next day. Point 45 ([Map 6.17](#)) was in British hands and Point 91 on the right was held by bombers of the Guards. At 7.15 a.m. on 26 September, a tank came down the enemy line followed by bombers of the 7th Leicestershire Regiment. Advancing over the open ground at about 9 a.m., 15 DLI occupied Gird Trench and pushed forward patrols. Before midday Gird Support was reached and by afternoon the Durhams were east of Gueudecourt, with the 10th KOYLI on their left and the Leicesters through and beyond the village, where the tank had continued to render good service until it ran out of petrol. In the evening, the 64th Brigade was relieved and 15 DLI spent the night back on the Gueudecourt-Lesboeuifs road. Between 23 and 28 September, two officers and eleven other ranks were killed or died of their wounds.

III Corps, 23rd Division, 68th Brigade: 12th and 13th Battalions DLI

The 23rd Division had relieved the 15th Division after the capture of Martinpuich and on 22 September the 68th Brigade moved up with 12 DLI in the front line and 13 DLI in a support position. The front line trench taken over, extended to the Bapaume road on the left. Prue Trench on the right ran eastward from the north side of Martinpuich and on this flank, touch was made with the 50th Division. To the north of Martinpuich, a sunken road, mill and other trenches were in British hands, forming a salient which reached out to Twenty-Sixth Avenue ([Map 6.16](#)). The enemy were in this trench in unknown numbers. There were casualties on 23 September from shelling and, from a reconnaissance that night, it was established that the enemy was in force in Twenty-Sixth Avenue Trench. An order was given to capture the trench and at 8 a.m. on 24 September two platoons and a bombing party of 12 DLI advanced under cover of mist. Despite this, they were met by rifle and machine-gun fire and were forced to retire. Second Lieutenant Johnson Bollom and 20 other ranks were killed, or later died of their wounds, including Private William Peat MM. That same day 13 DLI's 'D' Company relieved a company of the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers in the northern outskirts of Martinpuich.

At 5 a.m. on 25 September, 12 DLI were relieved, but they had to return to the line that same day, because of the heavy losses sustained by the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers. They were also attempting to take the western portion of Twenty-Sixth Avenue Trench with the help of two tanks. One got stuck and the other drew a heavy barrage down upon the Fusiliers. All of 13 DLI were also in the line. British guns now concentrated on Twenty-Sixth Avenue and a patrol sent out on 26 September found the trench deserted. On the night of 26/27 September, 12 and 13 DLI were relieved by the 70th Brigade.

Orders to occupy Twenty-Sixth Avenue were cancelled on 26 October as the Canadians on the left were not advancing. Finally on 28 September, 23rd Division occupied the whole of Twenty-Sixth Avenue without fighting, south-west of Spence Trench and swung forward its left in touch with the Canadians at the Bapaume Road

Total casualties (killed or died of wounds) came to 21 in 12 DLI and 10 in 13 DLI.



III Corps, 50th Division, 150th and 151st Brigades: 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th Battalions DLI; and Divisional Pioneers, 7th Battalion DLI

The objective was to capture the trench system known as the Flers Line ([Map 6.18](#)). Before then, however, it was necessary to capture a strongly held new trench that had recently been dug called Flers Switch. An attack was planned for the night of 26/27 September by the 1st and 50th Divisions. For the 50th Division (on the left), the 150th Brigade was to lead the attack, with the 149th and 151st Brigades in support and reserve respectively. 5 DLI planned to make a bombing attack up Crescent Alley with the 5th Yorkshire Regiment and 4th East Yorkshire Regiment advancing across the open.

The position reached by 5 DLI on 26 September is shown on [Map 6.18](#). A jumping off trench was to be dug (marked A-A-A-A on [Map 6.18](#)), though this was delayed because 6 DLI were unsure of its precise proposed location.

The attack was timed for 11 p.m. 5 DLI was headed by a strong party of bombers with a Lewis gun team. 'A', 'C' and 'D' Companies followed, and 'B' Company was in reserve. They moved off at 9 p.m. and went up Crescent Alley. British shelling preceded the attack, whilst the 4th Yorkshire Regiment struggled to get into its assembly positions.

At 11 p.m. the advance began with 5 DLI moving up Crescent Alley as far as the eastern end of Spence Trench, before the battalion met any opposition. Confusion then occurred, as soldiers from the 5th Yorkshire Regiment had lost their direction and jumped into Spence Trench, thinking it was their objective (Flers Switch). It became impossible to sort the two battalions out, so the bombers and Lewis gunners went forward with a mixed crowd of Durham and Yorkshire men in support. Some 300 yards of Spence Trench and Crescent Alley was captured and blocked. The 5th Yorkshires then withdrew. The operation was considered a failure for the 50th and 1st Divisions, except for the success in Crescent Alley. At dawn on 27 September, there was no sign of the enemy in Flers Switch, so a fighting patrol under Lieutenant Green, 5 DLI, was sent up Crescent Alley and along Flers switch, and by 1 p.m. had captured nearly 400 yards of the trench, which had formed the objective for the previous night's attack. The 1st Division attacked again and this time was successful in securing most of its portion of Flers Switch.

Orders then came to extend the left along Spence Trench and make contact with the 23rd Division, and also to send patrols out in the direction of Flers Trench. The former task was given to Lieutenant Green and he and his men worked their way right along Spence Trench and up Twenty-Sixth Avenue towards the Flers Line. They found Flers Trench empty at the point where it joined Twenty-Sixth Avenue, so they moved along it towards Eaucourt l'Abbaye until they reached the road. Beyond this point the Germans were holding the trench. But when 'D' Company were sent to occupy the empty part of Flers Trench, these Durhams found that the Germans had returned, so they made a block some 300 yards back down Twenty-Sixth Avenue.



2.8: 1 - 18 October 1916. The Battle of Le Transloy Ridges.

The III Corps (23rd and 50th Divisions), XIV Corps (6th and 20th Divisions) and XV Corps (41st Division) were credited as being in action during this battle ([Map 6.19](#)). The first task however was to straighten the line on the left of the front, by the capture of Eaucourt l'Abbaye and the Flers Line as far as Le Sars ([Map 6.20](#)). This preliminary action was entrusted to III Corps and ran from 29 September to 4 October - virtually a continuation of the action by III Corps described above under the Battle of Morval (25-28 September). At the same time, the New Zealanders in XV Corps would pivot their left on their Gird Line position.

The Battle of Le Transloy Ridges took place between 7 and 18 October (although fighting took place for a further two days in front of III Corps). The Fourth Army objectives were on the right, to secure a low ridge which ran north-westward towards Thillooy and afforded good observation over Le Transloy and Beaulencourt; in the centre, to advance the line to a position overlooking the ravine west of Ligny; and on the left, to prolong the line beyond Le Sars to include the Butte de Warlencourt.

The movements of no less than eleven DLI Battalions need to be followed, i.e. 2nd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, and 20th Battalions DLI.

III Corps, 50th Division, 150th and 151st Brigades: 5th, 6th, 8th, 9th Battalions DLI; and Divisional Pioneers, 7th Battalion DLI

On 1 October there was an attack on the Flers Line by III Corps. The 50th Division was in the centre with the 47th and 23rd Divisions on the right and left respectively. The 150th Brigade, in reserve at Bazentin-le-Grand, moved up, but was not required that day and moved back to Mametz Wood. The 149th Brigade was in support and the 151st Brigade, with the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers attached from 149th Brigade, led the attack for the 50th Division. 8 DLI was at the centre of the attack with the 5th Border Regiment, but organised into a composite battalion. 6 DLI was on the right and the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers on the left. The 5th Border Regiment, as part of the leading composite battalion in the centre, was to assemble in North Durham Street ([Map 6.20](#)) and form the first two waves of attack. 8 DLI was to assemble in South Durham Street and form the third and fourth waves. Soon after 4 a.m., 8 DLI moved up to its assembly position, but South Durham Street had not been completed, so 'B' Company and half of 'C' Company had to remain in Twenty-Sixth Avenue. 'A' Company and Headquarters remained in Crescent Alley. Such was the position at 7 a.m., when the British bombardment started. The Germans eventually replied by 9 a.m. and the assembly trenches, Spencer Trench and Crescent Alley, were shelled causing casualties. At 3.10 p.m., the companies deployed into the open under cover of an artillery barrage and, five minutes later, advanced to the enemy trenches practically without loss, although there were some casualties in 6 DLI from shells falling short. This was a rolling barrage, which began 50 yards in front of the German trenches, and as it moved forward, so followed the British battalions some 50 yards behind. However, the wire had been badly cut by the barrage and hence troops had to close up to pass through the gaps, so that men from both battalions got mixed up. By 3.30 p.m., both the Flers Trench and Flers Support, in front of the 8th DLI/5th Border Regiment composite battalion and 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, were captured. Contact by 8 DLI with the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers on the left was quickly made, but not on the right with 6 DLI, which had great difficulty getting over, especially the two companies on the right. Major G.E. Wilkinson, in command, was wounded before the advance even took place. He later wrote:



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"On the morning of the 1st October, owing to the fact that our trenches were only three feet deep, we suffered considerable casualties through sniping and shell-fire. About three-quarters of an hour before the time of the attack I was going round to see everything was in order, as, owing to the transport being three or four miles behind I had great difficulty in getting up ammunition and rations, and while I was discussing details with a sergeant the man next to me was shot through the neck. As the men huddled together, I got out of the trench to pass the wounded man, and while I was looking at the lie of the land from the top of the trench, the same sniper who had hit the man next to me hit me and smashed my arm, thus making it necessary for me to go back before the attack".²⁹

The 47th Division had suffered heavy casualties. The left battalion (17th London Regiment) of the 141st Brigade had been checked by uncut wire and machine-gun fire. The Germans counter-attacked south-eastward down Flers trench and so the Londoners lost touch with the 50th Division (6 DLI). A dangerous situation developed. With Major Wilkinson wounded, both 6 and 9 DLI (the latter had come up from their support position) now came under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bradford MC and under his brilliant leadership the two battalions continued the attack on the right. They were reinforced by bombing parties from 8 DLI and, by about 11.30 p.m., were eventually successful in taking their first objective (Flers Trench).³⁰ 9 DLI's 'A' Company then came up (it had been in reserve), advanced and took the second objective (Flers Support).

Meanwhile, a block had been established about 150 yards down the communication trench leading to The Tangle, where a patrol of the 5th Border Regiment had located a German listening post. But as the early setback of 6 and 9 DLI had left the right flank "in the air", the block was withdrawn to about 15 yards in front of the second objective, Flers Support.

The 5th Northumberland Fusiliers now entered Le Sars and found positions held by snipers. At dusk and during the night, 6 and 9 DLI repulsed two German counter-attacks.

The 23rd Division (70th Brigade) on the left managed to secure Flers Trench and link up with the 151st Brigade on their right and the Canadians on their left, but they were unable to enter Le Sars. The 23rd Division, at this stage, had not involved 12 or 13 DLI.

By dawn on 2 October, the 50th Division had completed its task thanks to the energetic action of Roland Bradford, who with 6 and 9 DLI, had driven the Germans from Flers Support. He barricaded his right flank, where the 17th London Regiment had failed to get forward, against the persistent assaults of the enemy, by organised bombings and Stokes-mortar fire.

The continuation of Twenty-Sixth Avenue, which had not yet been dug right through to the captured Flers Line trenches, came under heavy shelling. Consolidation of this position was difficult, but it continued all day until the evening when the relief of 8 DLI started. It was not until 9.30 a.m. on 3 October, however, that it was completed. Companies were assembled in Tyne and Boast Trenches and at 3 p.m., were relieved by 13 DLI and returned to Becourt Wood. 6 DLI was relieved by the 7th Northumberland Fusiliers by dawn on 4 October and also returned to Becourt Wood. Later that day, the whole of the 50th Division having been relieved, moved to Henencourt Wood, west of Albert. 9 DLI arrived on 6 October.

Casualties had been heavy. Those killed or died of wounds numbered one officer and the other ranks in 5 DLI; two officers and 74 other ranks in 6 DLI; one officer and 19 other ranks in 7 DLI; five officers and 42 men in 8 DLI; and one officer and 21 other ranks in 9 DLI: a total of ten officers and 166 other ranks, to which has to be added those wounded or taken prisoner.

²⁹ Ref?

³⁰ The *Official History* suggests 9.30. not 11.30 p.m. *Official History*, page not known.

Lieutenant Colonel Roland Bradford MC received the Victoria Cross for his gallant conduct and capable handling on 1 October.

III Corps, 23rd Division, 68th Brigade: 12th and 13th Battalions DLI

The part played by 12 and 13 DLI was in the capture of Le Sars. The two battalions were in action from 5 to 8 October when they were relieved; rested at Becourt Wood; and then on 15 October entrained for the Ypres Salient.

On 3 October, the 68th relieved the 151st Brigade, with 12 DLI relieving the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and 13 DLI relieving 8 DLI. 12 and 13 DLI were in reserve and support trenches respectively before Le Sars ([Map 6.21](#)). For the next two days there was fighting on both flanks and much shelling. On 6 October, 12 DLI took over the right of the front line from the 10th Northumberland Fusiliers, and 13 DLI took over from the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers (the other two battalions in the 68th Brigade), but not until the Fusiliers had tried but failed to dislodge a nest of machine-guns at The Tangle.

On 7 October, the British attacked along the whole line from Lesboeuifs to Le Sars. The 23rd Division's plan was for 12 DLI to seize The Tangle and the sunken road east of Le Sars, while troops from the 69th Brigade carried the south-western part of the village. 13 DLI was then to clear the rest of the ruins and establish a line beyond. At 1.45 p.m., 12 DLI's 'A' and 'D' Companies lead the advance, escorted by a female tank armed with machine-guns. The taking of The Tangle proved to be easy, but the sunken road was a different proposition. The tank was destroyed by a shell as it turned along the south side of the road towards the village. 'A' Company were checked by machine-gun fire, but nearer Le Sars, 'C' and 'D' Companies entered the road and the surviving Germans surrendered. The position was put in a state of defence and 'B' Company came through and continued the advance until a chain of posts was established 400 yards in front protecting the right of the Division.

13 DLI had kept in touch with 12 DLI by means of a patrol but because of a heavy German barrage, news of the capture of The Tangle did not reach 13 DLI until nearly 2.30 p.m. By then news was received that the 9th Yorkshire Regiment (69th Brigade) required assistance, and 'C' Company followed by 'B' Company were sent to help them. 'C' Company, led by Captain H.F. Blake, moved straight to the cross-roads, and 'B' Company, led by Captain D.H. Clarke MC, bearing left, attacked the houses on the near side of the road to Bapaume. After some fierce fighting the Germans were finally cleared from the village and the Durhams appeared in open country beyond the village.

The captured area was fiercely shelled by the enemy, but by evening 'A' Company had established strong points and consolidated the sunken road. The rest of the battalion returned to the old trenches.

Attacks to the right and left had not gone so well and so it was necessary to strengthen the dispositions with the help of a company from the 11th Northumberland Fusiliers and four Vickers machine-guns. Sappers and carrying parties from the 15th Division helped to improve the defences.

The German bombardment continued all night and next day. On 8 October a patrol from 13 DLI was in touch with the enemy at a point on the Bapaume road well beyond Le Sars, but that evening the two battalions were relieved. Indeed the whole of the 23rd Division was relieved by the 15th Division between 8 and 11 October. Casualties had been heavy: in 12 DLI, two officers and 57 other ranks were killed or died of wounds, whilst 13 DLI had lost one officer and 30 other ranks.³¹

³¹ Miles states that 12 DLI lost two officers and 31 other ranks killed, with seven officers and 86 other ranks wounded; whilst 13 DLI lost one officer killed and two wounded, plus 57 casualties in the ranks. *Durham Forces in the Field*, pp.102, 103.



XV Corps, 41st Division, 123rd Brigade: 20th Battalion DLI

At dawn on 1 October, 20 DLI was in the line north-west of Gueudecourt. Three parties under Second Lieutenant R.M. Fulljames went forward to discover the strength of the enemy, and dug in under heavy shell and machine-gun fire. This was one of several minor operations carried out in preparation for the advance fixed for 5 October. These Durhams were relieved some hours later and the whole battalion withdrew to Pommiers redoubt having lost eight killed. Another 13 later died of their wounds.³² 20 DLI were in training until 7 October when they took part in the British attack along the whole line from Lesboeufts to Le Sars.

The assaulting troops of the Division (122nd and 124th Brigades) made little progress having come under intense machine-gun fire. 20 DLI moved forward in the evening to take over part of the front. A chaotic situation developed as the maps showing the position were not correct; the communication trench was crowded with returning wounded; the guides all lost their way and the battalion's Headquarters, having taken to the open, arrived before the companies. To add to the serious situation, the battalion to be relieved had nearly all left, leaving a large gap in the line. Luck had it that this gap was not discovered by the Germans and it was eventually plugged by troops on the flank and the arrival of 'A' and 'B' Companies. Just before dawn the rest of 20 DLI arrived.

During the night of 7/8 October trenches were dug and wiring laid. 'A' Company completed its task with a party of 19 under Second Lieutenant Brewer, but with the loss of all but one killed or wounded. On the following night (8/9 October) 'B' Company dug a trench to join up with the battalion on its left. The two companies were then relieved by 2nd Bedfordshire Regiment on 11 October and returned to Mametz Wood. The whole of the 41st Division was relieved by the 30th Division between 8 and 11 October. From 20 DLI, 13 other ranks had been killed and a further 17 died of their wounds.

XIV Corps, 20th Division, Pioneers: 11th Battalion DLI

On 1 October, the 20th Division held the front between Lesboeufts and Gueudecourt. Men from the 61st Brigade advanced for about 400 yards and dug a line of posts which it was the duty of the Pioneers to go forward and convert the line of posts into a continuous trench. In such fashion the front line of the division was advanced and assembly trenches dug for the general attack on 7 October.

On the day of the attack, the division captured portions of Rainbow, Misty and Cloudy Trenches, on the spur west of Le Transloy ([Map 6.22](#)). 11 DLI's 'C' Company then consolidated that part of Rainbow Trench that had been captured, and 'B' and 'D' Companies were employed in the construction of dug-outs. 'C' Company withdrew to Waterlot Farm in the early hours of 8 October and the other companies followed during the afternoon. On 9 October, the battalion moved back to billets at Meaulte and between 8 and 11 October the whole division had been relieved by the 6th Division. In the fighting, 11 DLI had lost 24 men killed or later died of their wounds.

On 8 October, the Fourth Army issued orders for a renewal of the attack to begin on 12 October in order to secure all the objectives of 7 October.

XIV Corps, 6th Division, 18th Brigade: 2nd and 14th Battalions DLI

14 DLI was in a similar position to 11 DLI, after the 6th Division relieved the 20th Division. 14 DLI came forward on 7 October and on 10 October the battalion came under heavy shell-fire in Trones Wood and four men were killed or died of their wounds.³³

³² Miles states that 20 DLI lost 30 men killed and wounded. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.99.

³³ Miles states that 14 DLI lost 17 killed or wounded. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.93.



On 11 October, 14 DLI moved into the assembly positions for the next attack, which was to complete the capture of Rainbow and Shine Trenches ([Map 6.23](#)). At 2.05 p.m. on 12 October the advance began. 14 DLI was unchecked by the barrage that came down, and 'A' and 'C' Companies entered Rainbow Trench and drove the enemy out with little loss, although Second Lieutenant Jackson Swindell was mortally wounded (he died on 14 October). At the sunken Beaulencourt road on the left, 14 DLI linked up with the 12th Division (Newfoundland Regiment attached) and before 3 p.m. the bombers had cleared out the dug-outs and joined hands with the left of the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment. Shine Trench was soon won by 14 DLI and Lieutenant Batty, bombing up a communication trench, captured a German officer, and was awarded a Military Cross.

North of the Le Transloy road, Zenith Trench was attacked by the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment (16th Brigade), but without success.

The 18th Brigade became hotly engaged for the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment found the task of carrying Mild Trench and the remaining portion of Cloudy Trench too much for it. Further progress was impossible because of the strength of the enemy. A defensive flank was formed under the direction of Lieutenant Newsome (who was awarded a bar to his MC). The Germans shelled their lost trenches persistently but, by dawn on 14 October, 14 DLI had been relieved in the front line by the 11th Essex Regiment. That night they carried rations to 2 DLI who had relieved the 1st West Yorkshire Regiment.

At 5.35 a.m., on 15 October, when 18th Brigade attacked again without success, Lieutenant Owles, Second Lieutenant Highmoor, and 60 men of 14 DLI were in support to the 11th Essex Regiment, and in the evening 14 DLI, now only 200 strong, relieved the Essex men in Rainbow and Shine Trenches. Just after midnight Rainbow Trench was heavily bombarded and during 16 October many of the British shells fell short among the Durhams in Shine Trench.

2 DLI had also joined the resumption of the attack from Needle Trench at the same time on 15 October, but were equally unsuccessful. The battalion lost five officers and 56 other ranks killed or died from wounds.³⁴

14 DLI were relieved during the night of 16/17 October and moved back to Montauban. Three officers and 45 other ranks had been killed or died from their wounds.

The 6th Division was finally moved out of the battle on 20 October, giving place to the 8th Division recently arrived from the Cambrian Sector. The Divisional Pioneers were 22 DLI.

³⁴ Ward gives 3 officers and 19 other ranks killed, five officers and 95 other ranks wounded and 28 missing. Ward, *Faithful*, p.375.

2.9: 23 October - 5 November 1916. Fourth Army Operations.

On 29 September, preparations were made for the operations planned for 12 October. In the Fourth Army these included the objectives of Le Transloy, Beaulencourt, the ridge beyond the Thilloy-Warlencourt valley and Loupart Wood. Bad weather prevented any chance of this date being met and the meagre success of the Fourth Army's attack of 18 October called for a revision of the programme. This revision called for the Fourth Army to make a preliminary attack towards Le Transloy on 23 October in co-operation with the French Army; on 25 October, to secure the spur north of Gueudecourt, the Butte de Warlencourt and the Warlencourt Line beyond; and on 26 October, the Fourth Army and French Sixth Army to attack Le Transloy ([Map 6.24](#)).

XIV Corps, 8th Division Pioneers: 22nd Battalion DLI

The 8th Division relieved the 6th Division on 20 October. It should be noted that the 8th Division, in III Corps during the Battle of Albert, had been transferred to XIV Corps on its return to the Somme from the Cambrian Sector.

On 20 October, 22 DLI's Headquarters and 'B' Company moved to Waterlot Farm (north-east of Guillemont) and, on 21 October, 'B' and 'D' Companies started to dig a communications trench which was then suspended in view of the attack on Zenith Trench planned for 23 October.

Each company was then given a different task. 'B' Company, under Captain A.H. Robson, reported to the 25th Brigade in the centre of the division and spent the night of 22 October digging assembly places behind the front line. Just before zero hour (2.30 p.m.) on 23 October an intense bombardment swept the assembly and support trenches causing many casualties and postponing the assault until 3.50 p.m. the following morning. Lieutenant Hartley followed the second assault wave with his platoon to dig a communication trench forward to Zenith Trench. The 25th Brigade only managed an advance of some 70 yards and no further attack was planned. 'B' Company then worked as stretcher-bearers and on the morning of 25 October returned to Waterlot Farm but went forward again that evening to help to consolidate that part of Zenith Trench which had been captured on the extreme right (23rd Brigade).³⁵

On the left, the 24th Brigade had some initial success in storming and consolidating Mild Trench. 22 DLI's 'D' Company under Captain Dawson, reached Bulford Trench, behind Rainbow Trench. On 23 October, at zero hour, one platoon went to Shine Trench and one to Mild Trench, where they started to dig towards a strong point constructed in the rear of the captured portion of Mild Trench, south of the Gueudecourt-Beaulencourt road. The remaining two platoons improved Bulford Trench. Mild Trench was next improved and then 'D' Company returned to Waterlot Farm (a five hour march!). Next day (25 October) 'D' Company helped to consolidate the captured part of Zenith Trench on the extreme right of the line

On 22 October, 'C' Company, under Captain W.H. Perkins, assembled in Spectrum Trench astride the Gueudecourt-Le Transloy road and on the right of the line. On 23 October, 'C' Company followed the second wave of infantry attacking Zenith Trench (23rd Brigade) and started to dig two communication trenches from the trench back to the old front line. Heavy shell-fire caused casualties. After a short rest at Waterlot Farm, the digging was completed on 25 October.

³⁵ Miles' account is at variance with the *Official History* in which no mention is made of the bombardment, but that the frontal attack by the 25th Brigade upon the northern part of Zenith Trench, met with no success and that after a night of rain a renewed attack was made the following day at 3.50 a.m. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.97.

'A' Company worked as stretcher-bearers in relief, day and night, until 25 October and the next day (26 October) started to dig a new communication trench. These Pioneers were joined in the evening by 'C' Company. Bad weather meant that the proposed attack on Le Transloy, planned for the 26 October, was finally postponed until 5 November. However, XIV Corps made fresh efforts to advance towards Le Transloy, but by this time the 4th and 8th Divisions had been relieved by the 33rd and 17th Divisions respectively.

In this fighting, 22 DLI had lost three officers (Captain A. Tait-Knight, and Second Lieutenants J. Cook and G. Fitzbrown), and 34 other ranks killed or died of wounds.³⁶

The 8th Division was to return to the line in front of Le Transloy on 7 November, and 22 DLI worked strenuously on repairing and digging new trenches, including a communication trench from Ginchy to the front line. Although the division was retired, the battalion worked on corduroy roads from Ginchy to Lesboeufs and Ginchy to Flers. It was not until 29 November that 22 DLI re-joined the 8th Division at Hornoy. Another 18 soldiers had been killed or died of wounds during these last three weeks.

On 30 October it was decided that the German salients north of Gueudecourt and north-east of Eaucourt l'Abbaye, together with the Butte de Warlencourt, should be the objectives of an independent operation whenever the weather permitted. First fixed for 2 November, the date was eventually altered to 5 November to coincide with the attacks of the XIV Corps and the French.

III Corps, 50th Division, 150th Brigade, 5th Battalion DLI; 151st Brigade, 6th, 8th, 9th Battalions DLI; 7th Battalion DLI (Divisional Pioneers).

The 5th Battalion DLI had been at Baizieux Wood for three weeks resting, reorganising and training when on 23 October it began a move back to the field of battle and marched for two days to Bazentin-le-Grand. The 151st Brigade had been at Henencourt Wood for the same reasons and on 23 October also moved forward, firstly to Becourt and two days later to a position at the south-west corner of Mametz Wood. They remained there for a week.

The front line was near the Gird Line and the Butte de Warlencourt ([Map 6.25](#)). This latter place was a prehistoric mound some 40 feet in height with commanding views of the Albert-Bapaume road, the ground towards High Wood, and the surrounding area. A large quarry provided the shelter for the German machine-gunners and infantry. Mud was another obstacle as it had been raining almost continuously during October. It was described as being different from the mud experienced elsewhere and clung like glue to boots. The depth and type of mud made movement difficult and tiring - not the sort of conditions to experience before a major battle.

An attack on the Gird Line was planned for 26 October, with the 5th Australian Division on the right, the 50th Division in the centre and 15th Division on the left. Tanks were to assist the infantry.

On the night of 24/25 October, the 50th Division took over the line from the 9th Division. The 149th Brigade was on the right and 150th Brigade on the left, but the 5 DLI remained in reserve at Bazentin-le-Grand. However weather conditions deteriorated still further and the attack was delayed, firstly to 28 October and then to 30 October. On the night of 28/29 October, battalion reliefs took place and 5 DLI relieved the 5th Yorkshire Regiment in Snag Trench, Abbaye Lane and the Flers Switch, and were fully prepared to take part in the attack now planned for 30 October.

Because of the conditions, the attack was again postponed for two days. No-man's-land, 300 yards wide on average, was a quagmire and with rain continuing, a further postponement to 3 November was ordered. During the night of 1/2 November the 5th

³⁶ Miles gives total casualties at 120. *Durham Forces in the Field*, p.98.



Yorkshire Regiment took over from 5 DLI, which went into Brigade reserve - two companies into Flers Line and two in Prue Trench. On 2 November an order now postponed the attack until 5 November and on 3 November the 151st Brigade, which had moved up from Mametz Wood, relieved the 150th Brigade which went into reserve. The 5th Battalion DLI moved back to Mametz Wood but was made ready to advance at ten minutes notice.

On 4 November the companies of the 151st Brigade moved out of the front line and support trenches ready for the attack. This was done to avoid the expected enemy retaliation to the British bombardment, planned to proceed the attack. The 6th Battalion was in the centre the 9th Battalion on its left and the 8th Battalion on its right.

The plan of attack had been significantly altered. The 2nd Australian Division was to attack as before on the right, but the 48th Division, on the left (it was to replace the 15th Division on 5 November), was to confine its co-operation to artillery assistance. No tanks were to be used. The 50th Division decided to use the 151st Brigade in a single brigade attack, with one company from each battalion in Maxwell Trench and the 5th Border Regiment in Brigade Reserve. The attack would be reinforced by putting two battalions of the 149th Brigade at the disposal of its commander, Brigadier General Cameron. The other battalions of the 149th Brigade were to be in support, with the 150th Brigade in reserve.

The objectives of the 151st Brigade was the capture of the Butte, the Quarry and the Gird front line on the left, and to capture and consolidate the Gird front line and support lines on the right. To 9 DLI fell the task of capturing the Butte itself. On Sunday 5 November, the British artillery barrage began preceding zero hour set for 9 a.m. Battalions had assembled in Snag Trench, Snag Support, Maxwell Trench and Tail Support ([Map 6.25](#)). At zero hour the advance began but the mud was so deep that many men were unable to get out of the trenches and even some were reported to have drowned. The barrage turned out to be less than efficient with shells falling short, causing casualties especially amongst the Australians and 8 DLI's 'C' Company. Also the Australian overhead machine-gun fire was actually striking the parapets of the 8th Battalion as well as their own. The Australians were unable to advance and were shot down as soon as they left their trench. The effect of this was to expose 8 DLI and the right of 6 DLI to heavy machine-gun enfilading fire. What was left of the waves of attackers across no-man's-land, got no nearer than a point 30 yards from Butte Trench and there was no option but to withdraw to Snag Trench - their starting point. As a consequence the attack on the immediate right turned out to be a failure.

The left of the 6th Battalion and 9 DLI on the Brigade's left met with some success as they overwhelmed the enemy without suffering heavy casualties. By 9.04 a.m. the German barrage came down. There were three barrages, one a few yards in advance of Maxwell Trench. Another was on Hexham Road where 9 DLI's battalion headquarters was situated in a dug-out at the entrance to Snag Trench, and the third was between Hexham Road and the Flers Line. By 10.30 a.m. 9 DLI had actually captured the Butte. The remaining companies of 6 DLI were in possession of part of Gird Trench. Lieutenant Colonel Bradford was by now (11.35 a.m.) in command of the 9th and the right wing of the 6th Battalion. Second Lieutenant G.W. Robson of the 6th Battalion was ordered to bring forward his raiding party and block Gird Trench to protect the right flank. British shelling was falling short, due to lack of information as to where the positions were, even knocking out a complete Lewis gun section.

At 12.30 p.m. Major Ebsworth, commanding 6 DLI, went into Maxwell Trench to fetch reinforcements and at 4.20 p.m. Sergeant Young returned with the survivors of the raiding party with the news that Second Lieutenant Robson had been killed. At 8 p.m. second Lieutenants K.B. Stuart and R.H.C. Wharrier with 150 men moved out of Maxwell Trench to reinforce 9 DLI. It is not known if they were reached 9 DLI, but Second Lieutenant Stuart was killed. Colonel Bradford stated that the 9 DLI's reserve company did in fact arrive in time to help in repulsing several German counter-attacks, but at 11 p.m. a concerted attack by battalions of Prussians overwhelmed the battalion. Many men were killed and captured



and only a handful managed to find their way back to Maxwell Trench. That night patrols searched for and brought in many wounded lying in no-man's-land.

The reason why the 9th Battalion DLI was not able to hold onto its ground was in the main due to the failure of the right attack and the lack of an attack on the left. Both flanks of the battalion were therefore exposed and the enemy was able to concentrate his counter-attack on a relatively short front.

Losses were heavy and although the 151st Trench Mortar Battery managed to save its guns during the counter-attack, machine-guns and their crews were captured, having moved forward to positions on the Bapaume road.

Unbelievably, orders were received at 8 a.m. on 6 November, that the attack must be carried out again. However, sanity prevailed and the order was cancelled later that day. During the night of 6/7 November, the 149th Brigade relieved the 151st Brigade - the 5th Battalion relieving the 6th Battalion - and it moved back to Mametz Wood. (A renewed attack by the 5th Border Regiment, which had been planned for 6 November, was postponed as a result of the developments on the left and the withdrawal from the Butte.)

6 DLI lost 5 officers and 92 other ranks killed or died from wounds; 7 DLI lost 4 officers and 24 other ranks; 8 DLI lost 5 officers and 115 other ranks; 9 DLI lost 3 officers and 96 other ranks. The total of 379 killed or died of wounds was a disaster with little or nothing to show for the effort.³⁷

In 5 DLI, 'C' and 'D' companies now occupied Snag and Maxwell Trenches, with 'A' in Flers Trench and 'B' in Abbey Trench. The shelling of Maxwell trench on 7 November killed six men including Lieutenant Guy Ashwin. On 8 November the shelling killed another 4 men, but on 9 November the battalion was relieved by the 5th Yorkshire Regiment and the Durhams went back into a support position in Flers Line and Flers Switch. On 10 November they had to supply a strong working party to dig a new trench near Maxwell trench and came under a very heavy barrage. Then, on 11 November, the 150th Brigade was relieved by the 149th Brigade and 5 DLI moved back to Bazentin-le-Grand. The battalion had lost 1 officer and 34 other ranks killed or died from wounds.

Colonel Bradford wrote that only 94 officers and men (including headquarters) were left in the 9th Battalion DLI after it had returned to camp in Mametz Wood. More significantly, he stated:

"The possession of the Butte by the Germans was not an asset to them. From our existing Trenches we were able to prevent them from using it as an observation point. The Butte itself would have been little use to us for purposes of observation. But the Butte de Warlencourt had become an obsession. Everybody wanted it. It loomed large in the minds of the soldiers in the forward area and they attributed many of their misfortunes to it. The newspaper correspondents talked about 'Miniature Gibraltar'. So it had to be taken. It seems that the attack was one of those tempting, and unfortunately at one period frequent, local operations which are so costly, and which are rarely worthwhile. But perhaps this is only the narrow view of the Regimental Officer".³⁸

³⁷ Ward gives the total losses (killed, wounded or missing) at 936. Within the other ranks' total is a figure of just 101 killed but 334 missing. Clearly, many of those missing (approximately 200) were subsequently assumed to have been killed. Ward, *Faithful*, p.377.

³⁸ Ref?

2.10: 13 - 18 November 1916. The Battle of the Ancre.

The 31st Division moved back to the Somme and came under the command of General Gough's Reserve Army (renamed the Fifth Army at the end of October), with 18 DLI, as part of the 93rd Brigade, arriving at Sailly-au-Bois on 21 October. A battle plan had been drawn up by General Gough anticipating an attack on 23 October, with the II Corps south of the Ancre and V Corps north of the river. The XIII Corps, of which the 31st Division was a part, was to give assistance in the north of the sector by extending the defensive flank of the 3rd Division ([Map 6.26](#)). Both the 19th and 51st Divisions of the XIII Corps were given over to the II and V Corps respectively. The 31st Division remained to hold the whole corp's front, extending some 1500 yards south from Hebuterne.

Before this battle, however, the Fifth Army was engaged in the Battle of the Ancre Heights which covered all the operations south of the river during the period 1 October to 11 November. It did not involve the 31st Division.

XIII Corps, 31st Division, 93rd Brigade, 18th Battalion DLI.

On 26 October, 18 DLI moved up to the front line south of Hebuterne and remained there for four days before retiring to Rossignol Farm and then returning to the front line on 7 November. This time the Durham Pals remained until 11 November when they retired to The Dell, west of Sailly-au-Bois, where they were in reserve to the 92nd Brigade. Trench raids had been carried out by the other Brigades (92nd and 94th) on 29, 31 October and 7 November ([Map 6.27](#)).

The 18th Battalion DLI found a party of 50 men for training to put up a smoke barrage with P [phosphorous] Bombs, whilst the remainder of the battalion carried stores, ammunition, rations and water up to the battle dumps.

Bad weather - mist and mud - caused the attack to be delayed several times to a final date of 13 November.

At 6.15 p.m. on 12 November the smoke party moved up to the line and at 5.45 a.m. on the 13 November the 92nd Brigade attacked the German line south-east of Hebuterne and reached the German support trenches. The brigade was then enfiladed from the heights of Serre and ordered to retire that evening. The 93rd had been in reserve to the 92nd Brigade. On 14 November 18 DLI's battalion headquarters and 'A' and 'B' companies moved into bivouacs west of Courcelles, whilst 'C' and 'D' companies returned to Rossignol Farm. On 19 November the two halves of the battalion met up at Sailly and moved up to the line just south of Gommecourt. There followed a long tour with much patrolling and trench repair work.

The Durham Pals, indeed the 93rd and 94th Brigades as a whole, had had little to do in this battle to the extent that there is no mention in *The Durham Forces in the Field*. As a consequence casualties were low. Just four soldiers were killed or died of wounds, although more may have died subsequent to 19 November. None however were killed during the official dates of the battle, i.e. 13-18 November. It was the 92nd Brigade that suffered, especially the 12th and 13th Battalions East Yorkshire Regiment. Together they lost 800 officers and men killed, wounded or made prisoner. Notable was the subsequent award of the Victoria Cross to Private Cunningham of the 12th East Yorkshires for repulsing two attacks single-handed.



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