REPORT ON OPERATIONS - 72nd BATTALION.
SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA - October 28th 1917, to
NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 2nd/3rd, 1917.

On October 28th the battalion moved from BRANDENBURG AREA
by train to XPRESS, and marched to POTZER AREA, there it out-
fitted, preparatory for action. At 4.45 p.m. it moved forward,
"a" Company into the Front Line, as shown on attached map, tak-
ing over from the 47th Battalion, Canadian Infantry, and three-
Companies into support, one near BOMMENED FARM and the other
two at ABRAHAM HEIGHTS.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth a reconnaissance of
HALLEN CORSE and DEER WOOD was carried out. The ground on this
line was found to be under water or so swampy that it was im-
possible. As a result it was found necessary to make a very
material change in the plans for the operation. The front over
which the battalion could advance until DEER WOOD was passed
was so narrow that it was decided to withdraw "b" Company
from the Operation and hold it in reserve. The four Vickers
Machine Guns and the Stokes Gun which were at the disposal of
the Battalion, together with four Lewis Guns of "a" Company
were placed about DILLI.16.18. to bring fire to bear on the
enemy defence in rear of HALLEN CORSE and the SOUTH WEST slopes
of GREAT PARCH. Instructions were given for the other three
Companies to go forward in artillery formation on a narrow
front, well clear of DEER WOOD and to the SOUTH-EAST, at which
point extended order formation was to be adopted. These for-
amations were adhered to.

Early in the evening of the 28th the whole battalion as-
sembled on the reverse slopes of the hill behind the front
line, which then ran through the NORTHERN portion of DILLI.16.18.
as shown red on attached map. Assembly lines for each Company
had been taped out during the AMER late afternoon. The Com-
panies assembled on these and dug themselves in by 10.00 p.m.
In the morning before ZERO hour the men cooked themselves a
hot meal of Bacon, beans and tea, with their "Tommy Crockets".

"A", "B" and "C" Companies jumped off at ZERO hour,
5.50 a.m. on October 29th. "a" Company had been told off to
clean up the area between the front line and DEER WOOD. Almost
immediately after "A", "B" and "C" Companies had passed over
this area a party of Four came out of an old trench at DILLI.55.20
which had not been occupied the previous night. Mo. 198279 Sgt G. A. Young and two other ranks of "a" Company imme-
diately went forward and captured all of them, one Officer and
teen other ranks, within five minutes of zero hour.

On arriving at DILSI.35.85 "a" Company swung to the
left, "b" Company swung half left, "c" Company went straight forward with its right flank on the main PASSCHENDAELE ROAD.

Owing to the fact that the whole battalion had been ob-
ligated to advance well clear of, and to the SOUTH EAST of DEER
WOOD, "a" Company had been left slightly behind the barrage.
It had been found impossible to change the latter, which had
been arranged on the understanding that the advance would be
made with the left flank not further to the EAST than a line
drawn from DILLI.16.18. to DILLI.7.4.9.
In rear of MALENE COTTAGE and on the SOUTH-WEST slopes of CREST FARM "A" Company encountered a large number of short lengths of trench and consolidated shell holes. By very clever manoeuvring a footing was gained on the high ground on the WEST of CREST FARM, the enemy being thereby outflanked and practically all resistance was quickly overcome. In this area at least fifty Huns were killed, twenty-five taken prisoner and four machine-guns captured. This Company then continued its advance and cleaned up the area NORTH of CREST FARM. In the trench line which ran from D.12.4 to 10.68 NORTH EASTERN, serious opposition was encountered; twenty Huns were killed and twelve additional prisoners taken and one machine-gun captured. Two Bosche machine-guns were used by this Company against the Enemy. The Company then consolidated the lines shown blue and marked "A" on attached map No. 478148 L/Cpl. S. Irwin and 120848 Pte. F. M. Gillis (killed) deserve special mention for proceedings in advance of our barrage and attacking and capturing a machine-gun which was bringing enfilade fire to bear on the Company. No. 460292 Sgt. E. J. Gentle (killed) though severely wounded, continued to lead his Section until killed on the NORTH side of CREST FARM. His example was most inspiring, and had much to do with the success of this Company. No. 101566 Pte. B. H. Richardson, a Stretcher Bearer, did splendid work in dressing the wounded under heavy shell fire, and was killed on the objective in the performance of his duty.

"B" Company, after rounding DEKU WOOD, advanced straight NORTH to CREST FARM. This Company overcame all opposition and established itself on the crest of the FARM, killing at least forty Huns, took thirty prisoners, and captured three machine-guns. One of the outstanding features of the whole operation was the work of 478148 L/Cpl. S. Irwin. This non-commissioned officer was in charge of a Lewis Gun Crew. He discovered three Hun machine guns in position on the crest which had not yet opened fire, but which were all trained on "A" Company, ready to enfilade them. He worked in behind them, fired his Lewis Gun from the shoulder, killed every member of the crew which operated them, and captured the three guns single-handed. One of the latter was immediately trained on the Enemy. This Company then moved forward and consolidated, with front line and supports as shown blue and marked "B" on attached map. Lieut. R. J. Gillies (killed) of this Company, deserves special mention for his great gallantry and splendid handling of the situation.

Three platoons of "G" Company, after passing DEKU WOOD, moved straight forward, with RIGHT flank on PASSENDENEAU ROAD. The fourth platoon went well forward on the RIGHT, then swung to the LEFT, and very materially assisted in the storming of CREST FARM. The remaining three platoons encountered heavy opposition, but gained all the high ground to the NORTH WEST of the PASSENDENEAU ROAD; two platoons then swung to the LEFT in front of CREST FARM, which left it surrounded, with the result that no Hunns escaped therefrom. A considerable number of Huns on the right flank threw down their arms and made good their escape through PASSENDENEAU. The Company then consolidated as shown blue on the attached map and marked "G". Four machine guns were captured by this Company, many despatches were killed, and about thirty prisoners taken. Patrols were sent forward; these passed through our standing barrage and entered PASSENDENEAU VILLAGE and were well NORTH of the CHURCH at 4.54. 

The Huns ran in all directions and it is a certainty that they were completely demoralised and practically
evacuated the village of PASSCHENDAELE. It was found impossible to hold the village owing to our standing barrage and the position was withdrawn almost immediately. It reported having seen Hun both entering and running from dugouts or cellars in PASSCHEN-
DALE. By 9.30 a.m. consolidation of the lines shown on attacked map was practically complete, touch with the RIGHT Battalion was established immediately, and with the LEFT after a comparatively short time.

A good deal of the success gained apparently is due to the fact that the men were on the line practically simultaneously with the lifting of the barrage, and the enemy was overcome before he could bring his rifles and machine-guns into action. This is confirmed by statements of the Boche Machine Gun Officer who was captured in the area. He also stated that there were twenty-four machine-guns in the area attacked by the Battalion, twelve of which were masses on GREAT PARK. He and other prisoners stated that they had been told that the position was impossibly to attack owing to the marsh and the water in front of it.

No counter-attacks developed during the day. At 3.30 a.m. on the morning of the 31st instant a counter-attack was attempted on the centre of our line. The party attacking was about one Company strength, and reached a position about seventy-five yards in front of our line, along the yellow line shown on attacked map. Here it was held up by our rifle and machine-gun fire. Desultory rifle, machine-gun, and rifle grenade fire was kept up between that time and daylight, the Huns returning the fire. At daylight it was found that the Huns had taken cover in shellholes, while others were lying in the open. Heavy fire was opened on them, and a few of them, not more than ten in number, including two officers, escaped; while the remainder, thirty in number, were taken prisoners. No further counter-attacks were attempted on our front.

During the 31st the Boche Line was found to run as shown on the attacked map. A Boche machine-gun and several dugouts were located at D.S.O.3.4. and strong posts paralleling our left flank and running in a NORTH BAYRUT direction. Sniping and machine-gun fire on the part of the Boche was particularly active in the vicinity of WOOLSEY. It was also active from D.S.O.4.6.6. Steady rifle fire was kept up on these points, and the two Vickers Guns which had been established on GREAT PARK at D.S. O. S.S. did night firing on the machine-gun and dugouts in the vicinity of D.S.O.4.4. These targets were also given the artillery and the following morning several stretcher parties were seen around D.S.O.3.0.

The expenditure of S.A.A. during the day of the attack was very high indeed. I would estimate it at 50,000 rounds, including that used by the four Vickers machine guns attached to the Battalion. One of the Companies would average about seventy rounds per man, the other two at least fifty. Few bombs and rifle grenades were used, but some shelled and dugouts were effectively bombed.
For the first time in our experience telephone wire was of little value, except from the Battalion O.P. to Headquarters. This was, however, of the greatest possible value, as every moment forward was watched and Battalion Headquarters informed of the progress throughout the action. No.19565 L/Cpl A. H. Canning, of the Battalion Scouts, deserves special mention in this connection. Though wounded within three minutes of Zero hour, he stayed at his Post until he had given detailed reports of the progress of the action. He then returned to Battalion Headquarters, but was unfortunately killed on the way to the Regimental Aid Post. The Lucas Daylight Lamp was of great value, and several important messages were received through it. From its position on GREST FARM communication was maintained through it to both Battalion and Brigade Headquarters. The main means of communication was through runners.

The work of the Machine Gunners attached to the 4th Canadian Machine Gun Battalion is deserving of the highest praise. It is considered that the barrage of the Vickers, Stokes and Lewis Guns on the area on our left flank during and after the artillery barrage lifted, while ‘A’ Company was rounding DEMOLITION WOOD, was of inestimable value. As soon as it was no longer possible to fire on this area, Lieut. E. C. Montagnon moved two Vickers Guns Forward and placed them in a very commanding position on GREST FARM, from which not only the front of our own Battalion could be enfiladed, but also that of the right and left Battalions. These latter were in position by 5, 30 a.m.:

The Artillery and machine-gun barrage was splendid, but subsequently much trouble was experienced and may casualties caused by short shooting by our Artillery. I am of the opinion that a good deal of this might be attributed to the fact that no Forward Observing Officer directed the fire of the guns in company with an Infantry Officer in the area after the new position was occupied.

A feature of the Enemy's shelling was the heavy fire on all dead ground and re-entrants.

One of the outstanding features lay in the fact that almost immediately after the advance had been completed numerous Hun 'planes were over the new lines and directed the Hun artillery fire, which was extremely heavy during consolidation, two and a half hours after Zero. No flares were lighted, as the contact 'plane did not cross our line. This activity on the part of the enemy continued throughout the tour, and on many occasions he fired on our men with machine-guns from a low altitude.

Clearing of the wounded was accomplished with great expedition. Much credit is due the Company of the 35th Battalion which was attached; both Officers and men were full of enthusiasm and continually asked for new tasks to perform. The Dressing Station facilities were bad, and many slightly wounded were killed or more severely wounded on the way out.

The work of the Battalion Transport Section, and both Brigade and Battalion Tump Line Parties is deserving of special mention. No. 18068 Sgt J. Ganes, 11612 Cpl J.H.N. Davidson, and 189946 Pte A. J. Ingrouille of the Battalion Transport Section; Lieut R. A. Orme and 101340 Cpl C. E. Bell of the Brigade Tump Line party; and Lieut E. R. Clark, 118300 Sgt D. Anderson, 867565 L/Cpl T. Stokes, and 189064 Pte W. F. Kibbly, of the Battalion Tump Line party, all did work of the highest order.
The reports received from all Companies were most accurate and excellent in every sense of the word. Those furnished by Major S. B. Birds, M. C., O. C., 2nd Company deserve special mention.

I would suggest that in future operations some distinguishing marks for Companies be used. In all operations up to date we have used these, and it is generally considered that it would have been an advantage had we had the same marks on this occasion.

Tapes were strung out by the assaulting troops as they went forward. These were found to be of great value to Runners and carrying parties, as well as the tapes to the assembly position. They were renewed from time to time.

The total number of machine-guns captured by us was twelve.

I would estimate that 150 of the Boche were killed during the action, at least fifty more during the counter-attack the following morning, and 4 Officers and 150 Other Ranks taken prisoner. No receipts were obtained for the latter, which probably accounts for the fact that there is some doubt as to the number of prisoners taken. Practically all of our prisoners were used for carrying wounded, and one party, after having been sent back, was sending a support trench in the area of a neighboring Battalion. Many others were killed by enemy shell-fire on the way to the rear.

Our casualties were

- KILLED - 80
- WOUNDED - 220
- MISSING - 8.

Lieut. Colonel,
O. C., 72nd Battalion, Canadian Infantry.