



The Battle of the Somme: July - Sept 1916

When the whistles blew at 7.30am on 1st July 1916, there were over 30 men from Buriton in and around the 15 mile British line. The first day was not as deadly for our men as it was for thousands of others, but by the time the battle officially ended in November, seven of these men had lost their lives, another had been taken prisoner and a number of others had been badly wounded.

Men in the 1st Hampshire Battalion were ready to go 'over the top' near Beaumont Hamel at 7.40am, immediately after the first wave and, 700 yards away, others in the 2nd Hampshire's were ready to go forward at noon. The huge Hawthorn Ridge mine, detonated at 7.20, was mid-way between the two battalions and all would have seen (and felt) it – with the explosion being heard in London.

Following others into battle, the 1st Hampshire's will have seen much of the devastation and Basil Treagus was perhaps amongst the first to be hit. Shot in the face, he survived and was to win a Distinguished Conduct Medal later in the war.

Alfred Cook was not so fortunate. A 34-year old married man from Weston, employed on the Seward's farm, he was seriously wounded, probably close to his own trenches. He died two days later in a casualty clearing station, leaving a widow,

Mabel, and a three year old son, Horace.

At noon the 2nd Hampshires were due to follow other Regiments but found too much chaos and congestion caused by dead and wounded. Plans were abandoned and, instead, the men held the line until July 10th.

Just to the south, across the River Ancre, Douglas Harfield was with the 1st Dorset's. They also found movement impossible due to the dead and wounded in the trenches. Douglas survived a morning of artillery and machine gun fire until the unit was able to withdraw.

With no decisive breakthrough on 1st July, the British offensive was subsequently conducted in phases, with more limited objectives: a "bite and hold" operation.

Providing assistance overhead was Captain Francis Cave, of Ditcham House, who had started his duties in No 4 Squadron on 4th July. The next day he wrote in his diary: "I don't really seem to bother much about the war, now that I am out here." Two days later: "I felt a terrific bump and found the end of my plane off. Everybody was very excited when we came down and wanted it photographed. In the afternoon I was able to go to Amiens where I bought several things and the hairdresser curled my moustache."

Back on the ground, a number of