

The Grimsby Chums and the First Day of the Battle of the Somme

The 10th (Service) Battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment was first raised in 1914 as one of Kitchener's Pals Battalions. The foundations of the battalion were laid when the headmaster of Wintringham School in Grimsby decided to raise a 250-strong company of former pupils, who styled themselves as the "Chums". After a period of training, the Chums offered their services to the 5th Battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment, which had traditionally recruited in the Grimsby area. However, as the 5th Battalion was already at full strength, the Mayor of Grimsby, John Tate, requested permission to form a new army unit in the town, which was duly granted.

By the end of October the new 10th Battalion had reached a strength of about 1,000 men and the next requirement was for a permanent camp to carry out further training. John Tate approached the Earl of Yarborough for permission to establish a camp in the grounds of his country estate, Brocklesby Park, which lies about 10 miles outside Grimsby. The earl agreed to the scheme and the next few months were spent in training and building up the men's fitness. The Chums' farewell parade took them from Cleethorpes to People's Park in Grimsby, where a short dedication service was held.

The Grimsby Chums joined the 101st Brigade of the 34th Division, a unit that also included two battalions of the Edinburgh City Pals. The division moved to France in January 1916 and was posted to the Somme sector of the Western Front.

In June 1916 the battalion began to prepare for the forthcoming offensive and the great bombardment of the German lines began on the 24th of that month. One of officers of the 10th Battalion, 2nd Lieutenant Roland Ingle, was fully aware that there would be high casualties, but from an entry in his diary he appears to have been remarkably unmoved by the prospect of death: "...the men who are going to be knocked out on the push – there must be many – should not be looked on with pity: because going forward with resolution puts a man in a mood to despise consequences....and a man who is used to sport, takes things – even in the great chance of life and death – as part of the game."

On 1st July 1916, the opening day of the Somme offensive, the Grimsby Chums were in the first wave of soldiers that attacked the fortified village of La Boisselle. Two minutes before Zero Hour a massive mine, containing 24 tons of ammonal explosive, was detonated beneath the German frontline and at 7.30am the Grimsby Chums advanced towards the huge crater that had been created by the explosion.

Unfortunately, although the mine had done a significant amount of damage, the Germans quickly manned their frontline positions and the advancing soldiers of the 10th Battalion were subjected to a hail of machine gun, rifle and mortar fire. Private Harry Baumber recalled: "I noticed men falling thick and fast about me and all the time the tremendous chatter of machine guns. It was akin to striding into a hailstorm. Jerry had not been obliterated, his wire had not been destroyed and we had been called upon to walk 800 yards across No Man's Land into Hell."

Some men did manage to reach the lip of the crater, but many were killed, wounded or pinned down by fire. Those soldiers who did get to the crater discovered that it was "still as hot as an oven" from the explosion and they were soon subjected to heavy machine gun fire that halted their progress.

The only officer who managed to get beyond the German frontline was 2nd Lieutenant Harold Hendin, who led five of his men as far as the reserve trenches. Hendin decided to make a stand and, reinforced by some stragglers who joined his isolated group, he held off a series of German counter-attacks before finally being forced to retire. Of the 1,000 Grimsby Chums who took part in the attack on 1st July 1916, 502 became casualties: 15 officers and 487 men. Only two of the officers came back unwounded and only about hundred men from the ranks.



**A group of Grimsby Chums in their civilian clothes, February 1915.
Document reference: REGI.**



Grimsby Chums enjoying a coffee, February 1915. Document reference: REGI.



The farewell parade of the Grimsby Chums, 19th May 1915. Document reference: REGI.



Soldiers from the 10th Battalion of the Lincolnshire Regiment in camp, September 1915. Document reference: REGI.