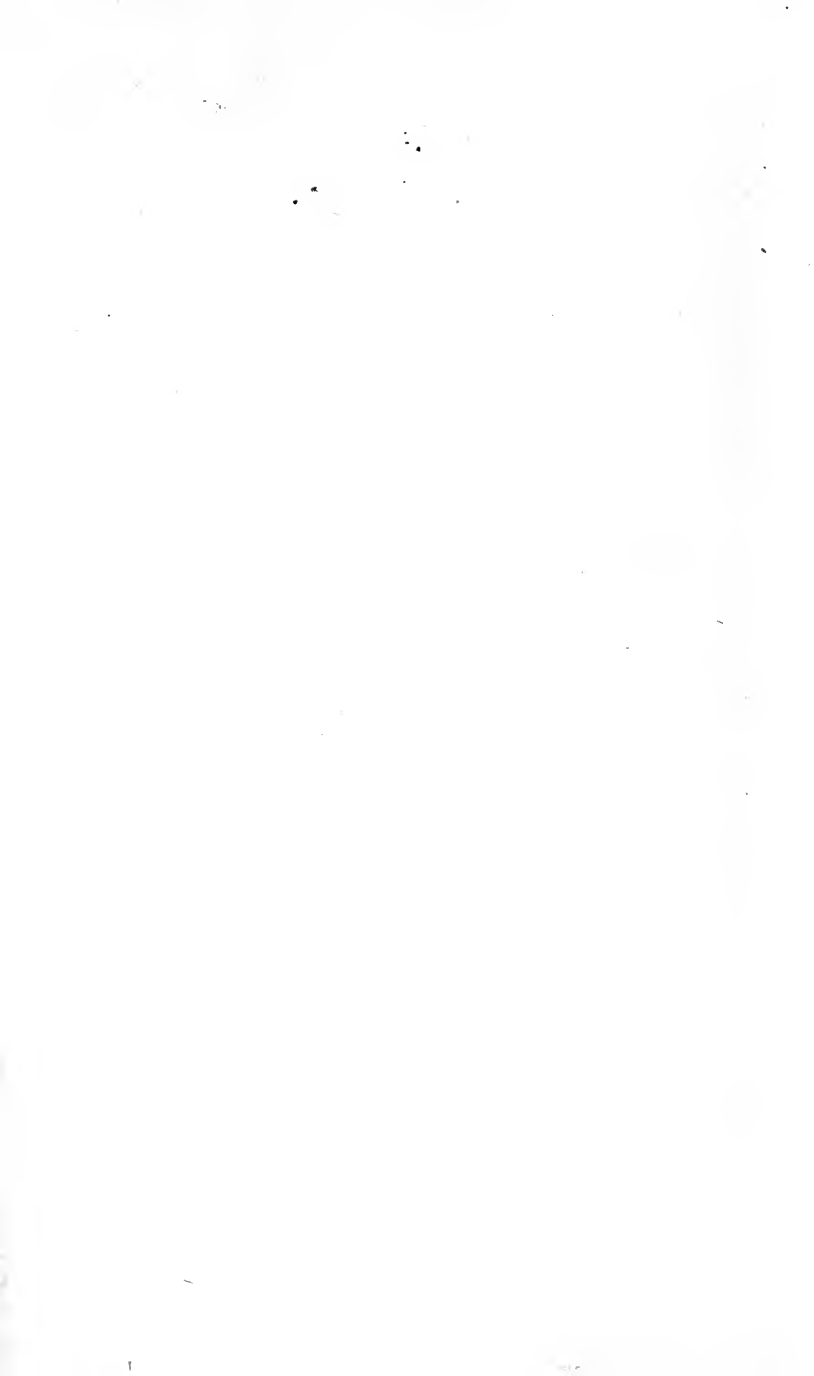


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SOLDIERS' STORIES  
OF THE WAR







[Frontispiece.

L BATTERY'S HEROIC STAND.

“Another battery of horse-gunners was dashing to the rescue” (p. 130).



# SOLDIERS' STORIES OF THE WAR

EDITED BY

WALTER WOOD

AUTHOR OF

"MEN OF THE NORTH SEA," "SURVIVORS' TALES OF GREAT EVENTS,"  
"NORTH SEA FISHERS AND FIGHTERS," ETC.

*WITH TWENTY FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY A. C. MICHAEL*

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## INTRODUCTION

ALL the stories in this volume are told by men who were seen personally, and who, with one or two exceptions—cases of soldiers who had returned to the front—read the typescripts of their narratives, so that accuracy should be secured. The narrators spoke while the impressions of fighting and hardships and things seen were still strong and clear; in several cases full notes had been made or diaries kept, and reference to these records was of great value in preparing the stories. When seeing an informant I specially asked that a true tale should be told, and I believe that no unreliable details were knowingly given.

I have been fortunate in getting a good deal of exclusive matter—the full record of the noble achievement of L Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, for example, has not been given anywhere in such detail as is presented here, and the same remark applies to the story of the three torpedoed cruisers.

During the earlier periods of the war British soldiers told me tales of barbarities and outrages committed by German troops which were so terrible that it was impossible to believe them, and I omitted many of these details from the finished stories; but I know now, from reading the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, presided over by Viscount Bryce, formerly British Ambassador at Washington,

that even the most dreadful of the statements did not do more than touch the fringe of the appalling truth.

Though much has been already published in the form of tales and letters from our soldiers at the front, yet I hope that this collection of stories will be accepted as a contribution from the British fighting man to the general history of the earlier stages of the war—those memorable preliminary operations which have made a deep and indelible impression on the British race throughout the world.

WALTER WOOD.

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# SOLDIERS' STORIES OF THE WAR

## CHAPTER I

### MONS AND THE GREAT RETREAT

[History does not give a more splendid story of courage and endurance than that which is afforded by the battle of Mons and the subsequent retreat. The British Expeditionary Force, straight from home, with no time for preparation, and only two days after a concentration by rail, was confronted by at least four times its number of the finest troops of Germany, and, after a four days' furious battle, remained unconquered and undismayed. What might have been annihilation of the British forces had become a throwing off of the weight of the enemy's pursuit, allowing a preparation for the driving back of the German hordes. At Mons the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders lost most of their officers, non-commissioned officers and men in killed, wounded and missing. This story is told by Private J. Parkinson, of the Gordons, who was invalided home at the finish of the Great Retreat.]

To be rushed from the routine of a soldier's life at home in time of peace into the thick of a fearful fight on the Continent is a strange and wonderful experience; yet it happened to me, and it was only one of many amazing experiences I went through between leaving Southampton in a transport and coming to a London hospital.

We landed at Boulogne, and went a long journey by train. At the end of it we found ourselves, on Saturday, August 22nd, billeted in a gentleman's big house and we looked forward to a comfortable night;

## 2 SOLDIERS' STORIES OF THE WAR

little dreaming that so soon after leaving England we should be in the thick of a tremendous fight.

It was strange to be in a foreign country, but there was no time to dwell on that, and the British soldier soon makes himself at home, wherever he is. Those of us who were not on duty went to sleep; but we had not been resting very long when we were called to arms. That was about half-past three o'clock on the Sunday morning, August 23rd.

There was no bugle sound, no fuss, no noise; we were just quietly roused up by the pickets, and as quietly we marched out of the château and went along a big, sunken road—the main road to Paris, I think. We started at once to make trenches alongside the road, using the entrenching-tool which every soldier carries; and we went on steadily with that work for several hours on that August Sunday morning—a perfect Sabbath, with a wonderful air of peace about it. The country looked beautiful and prosperous—how soon it was to be turned into a blazing, ruined landscape, with thousands of dead and wounded men lying on it!

It would be about nine o'clock when we heard heavy firing in a wood near us—there is plenty of wooded country about Mons—and we were told that the engineers were blowing up obstacles; so we went on entrenching, for although we knew that the Germans were not far away, we had no idea they were as close as they soon proved to be.

I am a first-class scout, and, with a corporal and three men, I was sent on picket some time before noon.

Just on the right of us was a farm, and the people who came out gave us some beer and eggs. We drank



[To face p. 2.

“ WE WERE HELPED BY THE GERMANS THROWING SEARCHLIGHTS ON US ” (p. 10).

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the beer and sucked the eggs, and uncommonly good they were, too, on that blazing hot August Sunday, when everything looked so pleasant and peaceful. You had it hot at home, I know; but I dare say we had it hotter, and we were in khaki, with a heavy kit to carry.

There was a big tree near us, and I made for it and climbed up, so that I could see better over the countryside. I was hanging on to a branch, and looking around, when all at once a bullet or two came, and we knew that the Germans had spotted us. I got down from that tree a vast deal quicker than I had got up into it, and we made ready to rush back to the trenches; but before scuttling we told the civilians to clear out at once, and they began to do so. The poor souls were taken aback, naturally, but they lost no time in obeying the warning, leaving all their worldly treasures—belongings which they were never to see again, for the German barbarians were soon to destroy them shamefully and mercilessly, and, worse than that, were to take the lives of innocent and inoffensive people who had not done them the slightest wrong in any way.

As soon as we had raised the alarm a whole section of Germans opened fire on the four of us, and as we could not do anything against them, being heavily outnumbered, we ran for it back to the trenches. Yes, we did run indeed, there is no mistake about that. Luckily for us we knew the way back; but if the Germans had been able to shoot for nuts with their rifles, not one of us would have been spared. We laughed as we ran, and one of the scouts, named Anderson, laughed so much that he could scarcely run, though there was nothing special to laugh at; but, as you

know, there are some odd chaps amongst Highlanders. They don't care a rap for anything.

It was soon reported that there were in front of us about 15,000 Germans, including some of the finest of the Kaiser's troops, amongst them the Imperial Guard, who have worked military miracles—at peace manœuvres. And to oppose that great body of men we had only the 8th Brigade, consisting of the Royal Scots, the Royal Irish, the Middlesex—the old “Die-Hards”—and the Gordon Highlanders, of which I was in B Company.

The Royal Scots were on our right, and the Royal Irish and the Middlesex on our left. We had Royal Field Artillery, too, and never did British gunners do more splendid work and cover themselves with greater glory than in the battle of Mons.

The Royal Irish were getting their dinners when the Germans opened fire on them with their machine-guns, doing some dreadful damage straight off, for they seemed to have the range, and there was no time for the Royal Irish to get under cover.

That, I think, was really the beginning of the battle; but I had better try and give you an idea of the battle-field, so that you can understand what actually took place.

Mons itself is a fair-sized manufacturing town, with plenty of coal-mines about, and we were in a pleasant village near it, the main road to Paris cutting through the village. From our trenches we could see across the country, towards the mines and other villages, and we had a clear rifle-range of well over a mile, because a lot of obstruction in the shape of hedges, foliage and corn had been cut away.

To our rear, on each side of us, was a forest, and



between the two forests were our splendid gunners, who were to do such awful mischief in the German hosts. The "Die-Hards" were in a sort of garden, and I saw only too clearly what happened to them when the fight was in full swing.

It was just before noon when the most fearful part of the battle started, and that was the artillery duel. Our own guns were making a terrible commotion near us; but the din was a very comforting sound, because it meant something very bad for the German gunners, who were making havoc in our brigade.

I saw the awful effects of the German shrapnel amongst the men of the Middlesex in that fair Belgian garden on what should have been a peaceful Sunday afternoon. The Middlesex were practically blown to pieces, and the fearful way in which they suffered was shown later, when the casualty lists were published, and it was seen that most of them were either killed, wounded or missing.

Then the Gordons' turn came. The Germans had got our position, and they opened fire on us; but we were lucky—perhaps the German batteries were too far away to be really effective. At any rate, they did not harm us much.

The battle had opened swiftly, and it continued with amazing speed and fury, for both sides soon settled into their stride—and you know, of course, that the Germans were on the promenade to Paris and were going to mop the British Army up. It took a lot of mopping!

Our own field-gunners were doing magnificently, and the Germans were first-rate hands at the deadly game. If they had been anything like as accurate with the rifle as they were with the artillery I think that very

few British soldiers would have been left to tell the tale of Mons. But with the rifle they were no good.

The Germans came out of their trenches in big heaps in close formation, because their game was to rush us by sheer weight of numbers; but we just shot them down. Yet as soon as we shot them down others came out, literally like bees. No wonder the poor chaps are called by their officers "cannon-fodder"! British officers don't talk of their men in that brutal way; and the British officer always leads—shows the way; but the German officer seems to follow his men, and to shove and shoot them along.

It was marvellous to watch the Germans come on in their legions, and melt away under our artillery and rifle fire. We simply took deliberate aim at the masses of figures, grey clad, with their helmets covered with grey cloth; but it seemed as if not even our absolutely destructive fire would stop them. On they came, still on, the living actually sheltering behind the dead. But it was no use. We kept them off, and they kept themselves off, too, for it was perfectly clear that they had a horror of the bayonet, and would not come near it.

The nearest the Germans got to us, as far as I can tell—that is, to the Gordons—was about 300 yards; but that was near enough, seeing that they outnumbered us by four to one, and were amongst the finest troops of Germany. Some of the enemy's cavalry—I suppose the much-talked-of Uhlans—came into the sunken road in front of us, hoping to do business; but our machine-guns got on them, and we had a go at them with our rifles, with the result that the Uhlans made a cut for it and most of them got away. Even so, there were plenty of riderless horses galloping madly about.

Our officers had told us to carry on—and carry on we did, then and later.

What was I feeling like? Well, of course, at the start I was in a bit of a funk and it wasn't pleasant; but I can honestly say that the feeling soon vanished, as I'm certain it did from all of us, and we settled down to good hard pounding, all the time seeing who could pound the hardest and last longest. And I can assure you that, in spite of everything, men kept laughing, and they kept their spirits up.

You see, we had such splendid officers, and there is always such a fine feeling between officers and men in Highland regiments. Our colonel, a Gordon by name and commanding the Gordons, was a real gallant Gordon, who won his Victoria Cross in the South African War—a regular warrior and a veteran; amongst other things he was in at the storming of Dargai, and he had more experience of actual fighting, I should think, than all the Germans in front of us put together.

Another brave officer was Major Simpson, my company officer, a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order, which is the next best thing to the V.C. Major Simpson and a private went to fetch some ammunition. To do that they had to leave shelter and rush along in a literal hail of fire—shrapnel and bullets. It seemed as if no living thing could exist, and they were watched with intense anxiety. Shells were bursting all around us—some in the air and others on the ground, though there were German shells that did not burst at all.

Suddenly, with a fearful shattering sound, a shell burst just beside the major and the private, and for the moment it looked as if they had been destroyed. Some Gordons rushed towards them, and picked them up and put them on a horse. It was seen that they

were badly hurt, but even so, and at a time like that, the major actually laughed, and I am sure he did it to keep our spirits up. He was taken away to hospital, and was laughing still when he said—

“It’s all right, lads! There’s nothing much the matter with me! Carry on!”

Oh, yes! There were some fine cool things done on that great Sunday when the Germans were like bees in front of us in the turnip-fields at Mons, and we were settling down into our stride.

And the N.C.O.’s were splendid, too.

Our section sergeant, Spence, when the firing was fiercest, popped up to take a shot, which is always a risky thing to do, because a bullet is so much swifter than a man’s movements. The sergeant fired, and the instant he had done so he fell back into the trench, saying, “I believe they’ve got me now!” But they hadn’t. He was taken to hospital, and it was found that a bullet had come and so cleanly grazed his head—on the left side, like this—that the hair was cut away in a little path, just like a big parting, as if it had been shaved. It was touch and go with death, the closest thing you could possibly see; but, luckily, the sergeant was all right, and he made no commotion about his narrow shave.

There was a gallant young officer and brave gentleman of the Gordons—Lieutenant Richmond—who had been doing his duty nobly throughout that Sunday afternoon.

Dusk was falling, and Lieutenant Richmond made his way out of the trench and over the open ground, crawling, to try and learn something about the Germans. He was crawling back—that is the only way in such a merciless fire—and was only about three

yards from the trench when he rose up and was going to make a final dash for it. Just as he rose, a bullet struck him in the back and came out through his heart—and killed him straight away. He was in my trench, and I saw this happen quite clearly. It was such sights as that which made the Gordons all the more resolved to carry on and mow the Germans down as hard as they could—the Germans who seemed to be for ever rushing at us from the turnip-fields in front and never getting any nearer than their own barriers of dead.

I never thought it possible that such a hell of fire could be known as that which we endured and made at Mons. There was the ceaseless crackle of the rifles on both sides, with the everlasting explosions of the guns and the frightful bursting of the shells. They were particularly horrible when they burst on the cobbled road close by—as hundreds did—so near to us that it seemed as if we were certain to be shattered to pieces by the fragments of shrapnel which did so much mischief and killed so many men and horses, to say nothing of the gaping wounds they inflicted on the troops and the poor dumb beasts.

But you can best understand what the German artillery fire was like when I tell you that all the telegraph-poles were shattered, the very wires were torn away, and trees were smashed and blown to pieces. It seemed miraculous that any human being could live in such a storm of metal fragments and bullets.

From before noon until dusk, and that was a good eight hours, the battle of Mons had been truly awful; but we had held our own, and as the evening came I realised what a fearful thing a modern battle is—especially such a fight as this, brought on in a peaceful

and beautiful country whose people had done no wrong.

All the villages in front of us were burning, either set on fire deliberately by the Germans, or by shells; but there was no halting in the fight, and when we could no longer see the enemy because it was dark we blazed away at the flashes of their rifles—thousands of spurts of flame; and the field-gunners crashed at the straight lines of fire which could be seen when the German artillerymen discharged their guns. We were helped, too, in a way that many of us never expected to be, and that was by the Germans throwing search-lights on us. These long, ghastly beams shone on us and gave a weird and terrible appearance to the fighters in the trenches, and more so to the outstretched forms of soldiers who had fought for the last time.

It was a dreadful yet fascinating sight, and one which I shall never forget; nor shall I ever forget the extraordinary fact that, in spite of the annihilating hail of missiles and the deafening din of battle, some of our fellows in the trenches went to sleep, and seemed to sleep as peacefully and soundly as if they were in feather beds. They went to sleep quite cheerfully, too. I should say that half our chaps were having a doze in this way and taking no notice of the fight and the screech and roar of shells and guns.

Sunday night—and such a night! The sky red with burning villages, the air rent with awful noises of guns and rifles, men and horses—a terrible commotion from the devilish fight that was going on. The villagers had left; they had fled on getting our warning, but they were not too far away to see the utter ruin of their homes.

I do not want to say too much about the villagers—

it is too sad and makes one too savage; but I will tell of one incident I saw. An old man was running away, to try and get out of danger, when he was hit in the stomach. I saw him fall, and I know that he bled to death. Think of that—an absolutely innocent and inoffensive old man who had done nothing whatever to harm the brigands who were over-running Belgium!

Just about midnight we got the order to retire. We joined the survivors of the 8th Brigade and began a march which lasted nearly all night. We were weary and worn, but as right in spirit as ever, and didn't want to retire. There was no help for it, however, and the Great Retreat began. Everything that the Red Cross men could do had been done for the wounded; but there were some who had to be left, as well as the dead.

It was fearfully hot, and we were thankful indeed when we were able to lie down in a field and get about two hours' sleep—the sleep that you might suppose a log has.

When we awoke it was not to music of birds, but of shrapnel; for the Germans were following us and began to fire on us as soon as we started to retire again. Hour after hour we went on, feeling pretty bad at having to retreat; but a bit cheered when, at about two o'clock on the Monday afternoon, we began to dig trenches again. We had the field-gunners behind us once more, and joyous music it was to hear their shells screaming over our heads.

It was about dinner-time on the Monday when we had one of the most thrilling experiences of the whole fight—one of the extraordinary incidents that have become part and parcel of a modern battle, although only a very few years ago they were looked upon as

mad fancies or wild dreams. We were marching along a road when we sighted a German aeroplane—a bird-like-looking thing in the sky. It was keeping watch on us, and signalling our position to the main German body. It gave the position, and the Germans promptly gave us some shells. The thing was most dangerous and unpleasant; but the German airman was not to have it all his own way.

Two of our own aeroplanes spotted him and went for him, just like immense birds—the whole business might have been carried out by living creatures of the air—and there was as fine a fight in the air as you could hope to see on land—firing and swift manœuvring with the object of killing and destroying, and both sides showing amazing pluck and skill. It was an uncommonly exciting spectacle, and it became all the more thrilling when we opened fire with our rifles.

I blazed away as hard as I could, but an aeroplane on the wing is not an easy thing to hit. Whether I struck the machine or not I can't say, but it came down in the road just where my company was. As far as I know the aeroplane was not struck—the chap that was in it planed down. He was determined not to be caught cheaply, for as soon as he landed he fired his petrol tank to destroy his machine, and then ran for it. He went off at a hard lick, but some of our cavalry rushed after him and caught him, and it was found that he was not hurt.

Just on our right was a railway, with a big cutting, and we were ordered to retire down into it; so into the cutting we got and along the line we went, retreating all that day by the railway and the roads, our gunners giving the Germans socks throughout that hard rear-guard action.



On the Tuesday we were still retreating, and a miserable day it was, with a deluge of rain that soaked us to the skin. We reached a village and slept in barns, and a good sleep we got, without the trouble of undressing or drying our clothes or taking our boots off.

Early on the Wednesday morning the pickets quietly roused and warned us again, and we went out in front of the village and entrenched.

There was a big lot of coal-mines in front of us, about a mile away, with the refuse-heaps that are common to mines. Behind one of these great mounds a battery of German artillery had got into position, and one of the finest things you could have seen was the way in which our own grand gunners got on the Germans. They seemed to have found the range of the enemy exactly, and that was a good job for us, because the German shells were dropping just between us and our own artillery, and we expected to have them bang on us. But our guns silenced our opponents, and, what was more, scattered a lot of German infantry, about 1,500 yards away, who were making for us.

We got straight into our trenches, and in this respect we were lucky, because we went into one that the Engineers had made, while most of the other companies had to dig their own.

Our trench was in a cornfield. The corn had been cut down, and we spread it and other stuff in front of the trenches, on top of the earth, to make us invisible. From that queer hiding-place we resumed our blazing away at the pursuing Germans.

When Wednesday came we were at Cambrai, where hell itself seemed to be let loose again; for first thing in the morning we heard heavy artillery fire on all

sides of us, and it was clear that a fearful battle was going on. We were utterly worn and weary, but were cheered by looking forward to a good dinner. We knew that the food was in the field cookers, in preparation for serving out to the men. But the dinner never came, and it was not until next day that we heard the reason why—then we learned that a German shell had blown the field cookers to smithereens.

Now all this time, from the moment the battle opened at Mons till we were blazing away again at the Germans at Cambrai we were waiting for the French to come—waiting and longing, for we were utterly outnumbered and completely exhausted; but we never had a glimpse of a Frenchman, and we know now, of course, that the French themselves were so hard pressed that they could not spare any help at all for the British.

At about half-past four in the afternoon we resumed the retreat, for a major of artillery had galloped up and shouted "Retire!" B Company retired across the level ground behind us. This was a good bit off a sunken road that we wanted to get back to, because it would give us comparative safety. Eventually we reached it, and were thankful to find that we were pretty secure, though shells were still bursting all around and over us.

From that time we never saw any more of the rest of the regiment, and I lost sight of our gallant colonel. He became numbered with the missing.<sup>1</sup> There were only about 175 of my own company and parts of other companies who had got away and joined us.

A terrible time it was at Cambrai, and one that I

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Gordon was twice reported killed; but it was definitely ascertained, later, that he was a prisoner of war.

sha'n't forget in a hurry. The last I clearly remember of the place is that several men were killed near me; but by that time killing had become a matter of course. The Red Cross men did noble work, but they could not cover all the cases. I am sorry to say it, but it is true that the Germans deliberately fired on the hospitals at Mons and also at Cambrai. It sounds incredible, but there were many things done in Belgium by the Germans that you could not have believed unless you had seen them.

Well, from that dreadful carnage at Cambrai we went on retreating, and we never really rested until the Sunday, seven days after the battle started, when we reached Senlis, about forty miles from Paris. We had then marched between 130 and 140 miles, and had made one of the longest, hardest, swiftest and most successful retreats in history—I say successful, because Sir John French and his generals had got us out of what looked like a death-trap. We were cursing all the time we were retreating—cursing because we had to retire, though we knew that there was no help for it.

A wonderful change came with the Wednesday, because we did no more fighting. We forged ahead, blowing up bridges and doing all we could to stop the Germans.

We had a splendid time going through France, as we had had in going through Belgium, and when we reached Paris there was nothing the French people thought too good for us. We were taken across Paris in char-a-bancs, and flowers, cigarettes and five-franc pieces were thrown at us. A lot of Americans spoke to us, and were very kind. They were particularly anxious to know how we were getting on, and what we had gone through. It was very pleasant to hear

our own language, as most of us did not understand a word of French.

We trained to Rouen, but had not the slightest idea that we were going to England—we thought we were being sent to hospital at Havre; but at that port we were put into motors and driven down to the quay and shoved on board a transport and brought at last to London.

I am not wounded. I was struck on the leg by a bullet, but it did not really hurt me. I was utterly worn out and exhausted, however, and rheumatism set in and crippled me, so I was sent to hospital; and here I am. But I'm almost fit and well now, and all I want to do is to fall in again before the fighting's done.



[To face p. 16.

“ SOME OF OUR CAVALRY CAUGHT HIM ” (p. 12).

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## CHAPTER II

### GERMAN ATROCITIES

[The war was begun by Germany in a spirit of ruthlessness which was to spare neither man, woman nor child, and was to leave innocent people "only their eyes to weep with." The neutrality of Belgium was outraged and German hosts poured into that country. In repelling them an immortal part was played by the British Expeditionary Force, which fought against enormous odds. This story of the earlier days of the war is told from the narrative of Driver George William Blow, Royal Field Artillery, who was invalided home after having two of his ribs broken and five horses killed under him.]

It was a blazing hot Sunday, and the place was Mons. We had got into camp about one on the Saturday afternoon, and had billeted till four on the Sunday morning, when we were ordered to harness up and prepare for action, but we did not receive actual fighting orders until noon; then we had to march into a place in the neighbourhood, and as soon as we reached it German shells burst over us.

That was the beginning of a long and terrible battle. We went straight into it, without any warning; but the Germans were ready, and knew what to expect, because they had been waiting for us for forty-eight hours.

It was field artillery we were up against. The Germans at that time had not got the big siege guns,

which we called Black Marias, Jack Johnsons and Coal Boxes. I will tell you about them later.

We, the drivers, took the guns up into action, then we retired under cover with the horses. While we were retiring the bullets from the German shells were dropping all around us, and farther away our men at the guns and the other troops were carrying on that desperate fight against immense odds which will be always known as the battle of Mons. From start to finish we were heavily outnumbered, but we knocked them out.

We were soon hard at it, pounding away, while our infantry were simply mowing the Germans down. We had some terrible fire to put up with, and at the end of about four hours we were forced to retire from the position. At that time we were the only battery left in action out of the whole of our brigade.

An officer was sent to reconnoitre, to see where we could retire to, and he picked out a little valley, a sort of rain-wash, and the battery thundered into it. This was a hard place to tackle, and all our attention was needed to keep the horses from falling down, because the ground was so rough and steep.

So far we had not seen any of the German infantry at close quarters, but as soon as we had got into the level of the valley we ran into a lot of them, and saw that we were ambushed. In this ambush I had one of the experiences that were so common in the retreat, but I was lucky enough to come out of it safely. Many gallant deeds were done there which will never be officially known—for instance, when we were going through the valley and were being heavily fired on, and it seemed as if there was no chance for us, Corporal Holiday ran the



gauntlet twice to warn us that the enemy had us in ambush.

We made a desperate effort to get out of the valley, but before we could get clear many horses were shot down, amongst them being the one I was riding. I did the only thing I could do—I lay there amongst the dead horses. I had had a narrow shave, for my cap had been shot off by a piece of shell.

The first gun and two waggons had got through, and our corporal could have got safely out, but he wasn't built that way, and wasn't thinking about himself.

He shouted, "Well, boys, your horses are down, and the best thing you can do is to run for it."

I scrambled up and dashed through some brambles—they nearly scratched me to pieces. Just as I and one or two more men got out five Germans potted at us. I had no weapon—nothing except my whip—if we had had arms we could have settled a lot of Germans that day—so I had to make a dash for cover. But the corporal, with his rifle, did splendidly, for he picked off three of the Germans, and the other two bolted.

If it had not been for the corporal I should not have been here to tell the tale; I should either have been killed or made a prisoner. Had it not been for him, in fact, they would have wiped the lot of us completely out.

We were in that deadly ambush for about five hours—from five till ten—no gunners with us, only drivers. It was night and dark, but the darkness was made terrible by the glare of the villages which the Germans had set fire to.

There we were, ambushed and imprisoned in the valley, unable to move either backward or forward, because the roadway was choked up with dead horses.

At last our major went away some distance, and inquired of a woman in a house which would be the best way for us to get out of the valley. While he was talking with her the house was surrounded by Germans, and it seemed certain that he would be discovered; but in the darkness they could not make him clearly out, and he was clever enough to shout to them in their own language. It was a critical and dangerous time, but the major scored. He baffled the Germans, and got himself out of the house, and us out of the ambush in the valley. It was a splendid performance and I believe the major was recommended for the D.S.O. on account of it.

We were thankful when we were clear of the valley, but about two miles farther on we ran into some more Germans; there were Germans everywhere, they swarmed over the whole countryside, day and night, and, as I have told you, they heavily outnumbered us all the time and at every turn. But by this time we were better able to meet them, for we had plenty of infantry with us—Gordons, and Wiltshire and Sussex men—who were joining in the retreat.

That retirement was a terrible business. Our infantry had been fighting in the trenches and in the open, and they were fighting all the time they were retiring. The Germans gave them no rest, and, like the barbarians some of them are, they showed no mercy to our wounded, as we discovered when we got back to Mons again, as we did in time. We saw

lots of our wounded who had been killed by the butts of the Prussian bullies' rifles. They had the finest troops of Prussia at Mons, and I suppose the braggarts wanted to get some of their own back for having been so badly mauled by Sir John French's "contemptible little army."

In the earlier hours of the battle, during that awful Sunday at Mons and in the neighbourhood, the British had suffered heavily. Twelve men of my own battery and a dozen of the horses had been killed, and a waggon limber had been blown to pieces. Mind you, I am talking only of our own battery and our own brigade, and dealing with only a very small part of the battle. No man who shared in it can do more. Our brigade consisted of three batteries of six guns each.

It had been a day of ceaseless fighting and terrific strain on men and horses, and we were utterly done up when we got into camp at about one on the Monday morning. We hoped we might rest a bit, but we had to harness up at two, and shift off at three, because the Germans were preparing to shell the village we were in.

There was a hospital in the village, and by that time a good many of our wounded were in it. The Germans could see plainly enough that it was a hospital, and knew that it must be filled with wounded, but they deliberately shelled it and set fire to it. Our captain and my sergeant were in the hospital when the Germans fired it, but I don't know whether they got away or were left in the burning building.

By the time we were on the move again it was full daylight. We dropped into action again three

or four times, but were forced to resume our retirement, harassed all the time by the Germans.

During the retirement we had several shots at German aeroplanes, which were flying about spying out our positions and signalling them to their own people; but field-guns are not much use against aircraft, because the muzzles cannot be elevated sufficiently high. You need howitzers for the work, because they are specially made for high-angle fire and can throw their shots right over aeroplanes.

We were retiring from the Monday till the Wednesday; then we got the order to drop into action again. That was at eight o'clock in the morning, and by that time we were at Cambrai, a good distance from Mons, as you can see from the map.

Mons was bad, but Cambrai was far worse. We had been retreating all the time, day and night, fighting a heavy rearguard action, so that men and horses were utterly worn out. Again the artillery did splendid work, and had to pay for it. The 6th Battery had lost two guns and a waggon at Mons, because the horses were killed, and they also had another gun put out of action. They lost a further gun at Cambrai, and the battery was almost completely cut up, but for their loss we in the 23rd Battery were able to make up in a way.

Our own guns were concealed so cleverly that the Germans could not find them anyhow. The nearest they could get to us was about fifty yards in front or fifty yards behind, and in dropping shells fifty yards make a lot of difference, as the Germans found to their cost. Our concealed battery did heavy execution amongst them, and they deserved all they got.

When I was clear of the valley I got two fresh horses; but at Cambrai, on the Wednesday, they were both killed. A shell burst and took off the head of the riding horse, and bullets killed the off horse, so I was dismounted again; and not a few of my chums were in the same unfortunate position.

Cambrai was the last battle we had before we turned the tables on the Germans, and began to drive them back at the Marne, where a tremendous fight went on for many days. Altogether we had been retiring pretty well a week, and we rejoiced when the advance began.

The advance made new men of us, especially when we saw what the Germans had done. There were plenty of wrecks of our convoys on the roads, where the enemy had got at them. That sort of thing was all right, of course, and came in fairly enough in warfare; but it made our blood boil to see the wanton damage that these so-called civilised soldiers had committed on a people who had done no greater crime than defend their hearths and families.

You ask about German cruelties and barbarities. Well, I will tell you something about what I saw myself, and people can form their own opinion as to what generally happened.

When the British troops retired from Mons the villages and the country were untouched. No words can tell how kind the Belgians and the French were to us, and I am glad to say that they were no worse for our passage through their towns and villages and farms. They gave us food and wine, and helped our sick and wounded, and wherever they were they did all they could for us.

Villages and towns and farms were peaceful and prosperous when we passed through them first; but they were terribly changed when we returned and went through them a second time, after the Germans had been at their foul work. Sword, rifle, artillery and fire had done their dreadful mischief, and deeds had been committed which filled us with horror. I will mention two or three things by way of illustration, and these are only instances of hosts of cases.

On the first day of the advance we were passing through a small village. I saw a little child which seemed to be propped up against a window. There were some infantry passing at the same time as ourselves—Gordons, I think they were—and one of the officers went into the cottage and took the little creature from the window. He found that it was dead. The Germans had killed it.

The officer had a look over the house, and in the next room he found the mother. She was dead also, and mutilated in a most ferocious way.

The interior of the cottage was in a state of absolute wreckage. The barbarians had not spared anything. They had destroyed the furniture, thrown everything about, and done their best to ruin inoffensive people whose country they had laid waste, and who had not done them the slightest wrong. When our men saw that, they went almost mad.

I will give you another instance. We passed through a village about two hours after some of the braggart Uhlans had visited it, and we saw how courageous they can be when they have only old men and women and children to deal with. They sing a different song when the British cavalry are after them. There was a farmhouse which had been

the home of two old people, a farmer and his wife. I believe the poor old couple looked after the farm themselves.

We found the old lady at the farm all alone, and I saw her. A pitiful spectacle she was, and well she might be, for the Uhlans had come and taken her poor old husband out into a field and shot him, and left his dead body there. They had robbed the house of everything—all the money and every bit of food—and had left the old lady almost demented.

When our own troops came up they gave the poor old soul—she was sitting outside the house, crying—the bully beef and biscuits which had been served out to them that very morning, and which they themselves needed badly.

We heard of several cases like that from the people of the country as we returned through it, and cases of these German bullies holding revolvers to women's heads and forcing the frightened creatures to give them their rings and jewellery and everything they could lay their hands on. This was the sort of thing we saw, or heard at first hand, and it made us all the more thankful that we were driving the Germans back and getting level with them.

We fell into action that morning about seven o'clock. We had to make our way straight across country, regardless of fields or roads; and all the time the Germans shelled us. It didn't matter where we were, the shells fell beyond us; but the enemy weren't clever enough to find our twelve batteries, which were in action, and which properly "gave them socks."

We held that village till about eight o'clock, then we started on the advance again, driving the Germans

back; and when once they start going they travel very quickly—when the enemy is after them.

That was the last battle we had before we got to the river Marne. So far, we had had a lot to do with the German field-guns; now we were to make the acquaintance of the bigger chaps I have referred to—Black Marias, Coal Boxes and Jack Johnsons, as I have said we called them, because they fired a big shell, a 90-pounder, which burst and made a thick cloud of filthy, greasy smoke which was enough to poison you if it got at you. I believe that the fumes of some of the German shells will actually kill you if you get them properly into your system.

The Battle of the Marne was a long and big affair, lasting about three weeks, and the Black Marias did a good deal of mischief. On the Sunday, as our ambulance waggons retired, the Germans shelled them with these siege guns, and blew them to pieces. At the finish there was not an ambulance waggon available. Yes, that is what they did, and it was done deliberately, because any soldier can tell an ambulance waggon when he sees it.

The Germans stuck at nothing to gain their ends; no trick is too dirty for them to play. One particularly vile one was the using of ambulance waggons for the purpose of carrying machine-guns. Our troops did not dream of firing at ambulance waggons; but when we saw that this wicked use was being made of them—and we did see it, for they came quite close to us—we gave the Germans in them what for.

The Germans tried three or four times to break through our lines, but our Tommies were too good for them, and sent them back a great deal faster than they had come on. They swept them away with rifle



fire, and the Germans never had a chance when our men could get fairly in with the bayonet.

During that long month of fighting we were in a good many places in France and Belgium. At one time we were actually on the field of Waterloo, and could see in the distance the monument put up in memory of the battle. I dare say the Germans fancied they were going to do a lot with us at Waterloo; but it all ended in fancy, and we kept on the driving game with them till they were altogether forced back.

When we could get at them we could beat them, though they were sometimes about ten to one, and in one little affair I saw twenty of our "Jocks"—Gordons, I think they were—scatter something like two hundred Germans. The Jocks badly wanted to get at the Germans with the steel, but the Germans just as badly didn't want to be bayoneted, and those who weren't shot scuttled.

The fighting was not the only hard part of the Battle of the Marne. For nearly three weeks we never had a dry shirt on owing to the wet weather, and we never had our boots off; we hadn't time for it, and we were kept too well at it. The poor horses were fearfully knocked up. They were like us—never had a chance to rest—and were three or four days without food.

Once, during the retirement, we had only two hours' rest in four days; but we daren't stop. Sometimes we were on foot, sometimes in the saddle, and the Germans were after us in motor-lorries, full of troops.

But however badly they handled us, I think it was nothing to the way in which we mangled them when our artillery got really to work, and especially when

it came to "gun fire"—that is, rapid firing, each gun firing as soon as it is loaded. This means that you take no time between rounds; you simply blaze away, and the guns become quite hot. In one particular position every sub-section fired 150 rounds, so that, taking a whole battery, I should think they pretty well fired a thousand rounds in a day.

It was on the Marne that my fifth horse was killed under me. A shell struck him, and before I could clear myself I fell over into a ditch, the horse on top of me, shot and shell flying all around as I went over. Two of my ribs were broken, and I was put out of action. I was picked up and carried down to the camp. I was in hospital there for three days before I was sent to London.

I had a complete Uhlan's uniform with me, and wanted to bring it home, but this bit of the saddle is all I have left. The Uhlan's saddle is a wonderful thing, weighing 78 lb., compared with 12 lb. for the British saddle. Here is the piece; you can see that it is filled in with lead—why, I don't know. And here is the torn khaki jacket I was wearing when my fifth horse was killed under me at the Marne—and this part is sodden with his blood.

I had a round month of fighting, retreating, advancing, and fighting again, and apart from the broken ribs I was utterly done up; but I am pretty well again now. I am just off to see the doctor; the day after to-morrow I am to get married, the next day I rejoin, and after that—well, who can tell?

## CHAPTER III

### “ GREENJACKETS ” IN THE FIRING LINE

[The King's Royal Rifle Corps, the famous old 60th Rifles, the “ Greenjackets,” have had a large share in the war and have added to their glorious distinctions. Many of the officers of this regiment have given their lives for their country, amongst them being Prince Maurice of Battenberg. Some details of the Prince's service in the war before he was killed in action are given in this story by Rifleman Brice, of the 60th, who was wounded at the Battle of the Aisne and invalided home.]

WHEN we first landed in France we were welcomed and cheered by crowds of French people who decked us with flowers and couldn't do too much for us, and they kept that kindness up all the time I was over there until I was sent home with a lot more wounded. Throwing flowers at us was a great deal pleasanter than the shells and bullets which were shot at us a few days later, when we were in the thick of trench-digging and fighting. It's astonishing how soon you settle down to a state of things that you've never been used to and how extraordinarily war alters life and people.

The Greenjackets are very proud of themselves, especially in time of peace, and have many little ways of their own; but a war like this makes all soldiers chums and equals and even the officers are practically just like the men. Our own colonel did his share in the trench-digging, and a royal officer like Prince

Maurice of Battenberg, who is now resting in a soldier's grave, was living the same life as the rest of us. Many an act of kindness did the Prince show to his riflemen, and many a fierce fight he shared in before he was killed in battle; many a word of cheer did he utter to men who were almost exhausted and nearly dying of thirst, and I have seen him go and buy fresh bread, when it could be got, and give it to us as a treat—and a glorious treat it was!

One of the first things we had to do after the retirement from Mons was to bury German dead, and you will get some idea of the awful losses they suffered, even at the beginning of the war, when I tell you that in one place alone we were about eight hours in doing this unpleasant task.

We got used to digging ourselves in and being shelled out, and to guarding towns and villages while the panic-stricken inhabitants escaped to safety. It was a pitiful sight to see people turned out of their houses, taking their belongings, when they could, in carts, perambulators, wheelbarrows and every available conveyance. They always kept as close to us as they could keep, and our fellows used to collect money amongst themselves for the poor souls and give them all the food they could spare—and they were very grateful if we gave them only a biscuit.

It was terrible work on our way to the Aisne; but the hardships were lightened for us in many little ways that counted a lot. Some of our officers would carry two rifles, when men became too weary to carry their own; the colonel would jump off his horse and give an exhausted man a lift in the saddle, and he would take apples from his pockets and pass them along the ranks to the men. These acts of kindness helped us

all enormously. And we were helped on the way by smoking—what a joy it was to get a fag, especially when cigarettes ran so short that one would go round a dozen times, passed from man to man, and a chap was sorely tempted to take a pull that was almost enough to fill him with smoke. When we hadn't a scrap of tobacco of any sort we would roll a fag of dried tea-leaves which had been used for making tea—and that was better than nothing.

It was fighting all the way to the Aisne, heavy rear-guard actions most of the time, though in a lesser war many of these affairs would have been reckoned proper battles. One night, at about ten o'clock, after a hard march, we had reached a town, and had thankfully gone into our billets—houses, barns, any sort of place that came handy, and we were expecting a peaceful time; but we were no sooner settling down than we got the alarm to dress and fall in. Getting dressed was the work of seconds only, because undressing was merely a case of putting the pack and equipment and rifle down and resting on the flags or earth, or, if we were lucky, hay or straw; and so, when the alarm was given, we very soon fell in, and with fixed bayonets we rushed for a bridge across the river that we had been ordered to take.

At the point of the bayonet the bridge was carried with a splendid rush, then we had to hold it while our transport and ammunition column got out of the town, and there we were till seven o'clock next morning. The main body of the troops retired and left us as a rearguard; but they had not gone from the town more than ten minutes when we saw the Germans coming towards the bridge in swarms. There was no

help for it—we had to get away from the bridge which we had held throughout the night.

We began to retire in good order, fighting desperately, and our men falling killed and wounded. Yard by yard we fell back from the bridge, firing as furiously as we could at the German masses, and for half a mile we kept up an unequal rearguard struggle. It seemed that we should be hopelessly outnumbered and that there was little hope; then we saw two divisions of the French advancing, and knew that we should pull through. The French came on and gave us help, and, covering our retirement, enabled us to get away from the bridge.

It was in one of the charges on a bridge which was held by the Germans, just before we got to the Aisne, that Prince Maurice distinguished himself. He was very daring and was always one of the first in the fighting, no matter where or what it was. I was not actually in the charge, being in the supports behind; but I saw the charge made, and a grand sight it was to watch our fellows rush forward with the steel and take the bridge. At another time the Prince was in action with a German rearguard and narrowly escaped death. I was in this affair, and saw a German shell burst about a yard away. It plugged into the ground and made a fine commotion and scattered earth and fragments around us; but a chum and myself laughed as we dodged it, and that was the way we got into of taking these explosions when we became used to the war. You could not help laughing, even if you were a bit nervous. During this fight Prince Maurice was shot through the cap, so that he had a shave for his life, but he made light of his escape, and was very proud of the hole in the cap, which he showed to

us when he talked with us, as he often did, before he fell.

There were so many incidents of coolness and disregard of wounds that it is not easy to recollect them all; but I call to mind that our adjutant, Lieutenant Woods, was shot in a little affair with the Germans. A sergeant had taken a maxim gun to put in position at a certain spot; but he had gone the wrong way and the adjutant went after him to put things right. He was too late, however, for the sergeant was spotted by the Germans and was killed. The adjutant himself was struck, but managed to get away, and he came back laughing and saying, "Oh! damn those Germans! They've shot me in the leg!" But in spite of the wound he would not lie up or let anybody do anything for him—he bound up the wound himself and carried on.

I saw another case, later, which illustrates the coolness of the British officer and his determination not to leave the fight till he is forced to do so. I was by that time wounded and in a temporary hospital, and the artillery were keeping up one of the endless duels. The officer had been struck, and he came into the hospital, and I saw that his hand had been partially blown off; but instead of caving in, as he might well have done, he had the hand bound up and put it in a sling, then he went back to his battery just outside the windows and kept on pounding away at the Germans.

We had plenty of excitement with the German aeroplanes, and often potted at them, but I did not see any of the machines brought down. I remember one day when an aeroplane was trying to locate our position—we were retiring through a French village—and a

brigade started firing at it. Just when the aeroplane appeared, the little boys and girls of the village were giving us delicious plums, which they were getting from the trees. We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves, and the youngsters liked it too, when the aeroplane swooped along and we instantly started firing at it. So many rifles going made a tremendous rattle, and the poor little boys and girls were terrified and ran off screaming, and scattered in all directions. We shouted to them and tried to bring them back, but they didn't come, and disappeared in all sorts of hiding-places. The aeroplane got away, I believe, but at any rate it did no mischief at that particular spot. The French civilian folk got used to running off and hiding. In another village we passed through we came to a large house and found that three young ladies and their parents had been forced into the cellar and locked there by the Germans. When we entered the house, the prisoners were starving, and were thankful for anything that we gave them; but they would not take any money from us. The young ladies spoke English quite nicely.

We got quite used to aeroplanes—our own, the Germans, and the French, and saw several thrilling fights in the air. Once we saw a French aeroplane furiously fired on by the Germans—a regular cannonade it was; but the shells and bullets never got at it, and the aeroplane escaped. It was wonderful to see the way the machine shot down, as if nothing could prevent it from smashing on the ground, then to watch it suddenly turn upward and soar away as safely and swiftly as a bird. The airman's idea seemed to be to dodge the fire, and he darted about in such a bewildering fashion that no gunner or rifleman could hope to



do anything with him. We were all greatly excited by this thrilling performance in the air, and glad when we knew that the plucky Frenchman had been swift enough to dodge the shells and bullets.

We had had some very trying work to do, and now we were going to get our reward for it. Some of the hardest of the work was that about which people hear nothing, and perhaps never even think—on sentry at night, for instance, about the most nerve-racking job you can imagine. We were always double sentry, and stood for two hours about five yards from each other, like statues, never moving. I always felt funky at this sort of work at the start—you can imagine such a lot in the dark and the strain is so heavy. At the slightest sound the rifle would be presented, and the word " Halt ! " ring out—just that word and nothing more, and if there wasn't an instant satisfactory reply it was a bad look-out for the other party. The Germans were very cunning at getting up to some of the British outposts and sentries, and as so many of them speak English very well, they were dangerous customers to tackle, and this added to the heavy strain of sentry work at night.

Now I come to the Battle of the Aisne. I had three days and nights of it before I was bowled out.

A strange thing happened on the first day of the battle, and that was the appearance of a little black dog. I don't know where he came from, or why he joined us, but he followed the battalion all the rest of the time I was with it, and not only that, but he went into action, so he became quite one of us.

Once, in the darkness, we walked into a German outpost. We found it pretty hard going just about there, for the German dead were so thick that we had

to walk over them. That march in the night was a wonderful and solemn thing. Three columns of us were going in different directions, yet moving so quietly that you could scarcely hear a sound. All around us, in that Valley of the Aisne, were burning buildings and haystacks, making a terrible illumination, and showing too well what war means when it is carried on by a nation like the Germans, for this burning and destroying was their doing.

Silently, without any talking, we went on, and then we fell into the outpost. I heard the stillness of the night broken by the sharp sound of voices, a sound which was instantly followed by shots, and the furious barking of our little dog, which up to that point had been perfectly quiet. The shots were fired by Captain Woollen, who killed two of the Germans, and one of our men shot a third. We left them where they fell and retired as quickly as we could; but we had done what we started out to do, and that was to find the position of the enemy.

While advancing again we caught a column of Germans. Our brigade-major saw them and came tearing back and told us that they were about fourteen hundred yards to the left of us. Within ten minutes we had a firing line made and our artillery was in position as well. It was a grand sight to see our fellows running into the firing line smoking cigarettes, as cool as if they were doing a bit of skirmishing on training.

We gave the Germans about three hours' hot firing, then a company went round to take the prisoners. The white flag had been shown, but we had not been allowed to take any notice of that until we were sure of our men, because the Germans had so often made a

wrong use of the signal of surrender. When the company got round to the Germans it was found that they had already thrown down their rifles. Our brigade took about 500 prisoners, and the rest we handed over to the 1st Division. The Germans had about a mile and a half of convoy, which got away; but the French captured it in the evening, and so made a very nice little complete victory of the affair.

At that time, early in the war, the Germans thought they were going to have it all their own way, and they considered that any trick, white flag or otherwise, was good enough. So certain were they about victory that in one village we passed through we saw written on a wall, in English, evidently by a German, “ We will do the tango in Paris on the 13th.” We laughed a good deal when we read that boast, and well we might, for it was on the 13th that we saw the writing on the wall, and the Germans by that time were getting driven a long way back from the French capital.

On the Monday morning we went out as flank guard on the Aisne, and were going along behind some hills when our captain spotted swarms of Germans coming up over a ridge about twelve hundred yards away. He ordered two platoons to go out and line the ridge, and for the ridge we went. When we reached it, our captain told us that not a man was to show his head over the ridge until he gave the word to fire.

The Germans came on, getting nearer and nearer, in dense masses, and it was the hardest thing in the world not to let fly at them. They advanced till they were about seven hundred yards away, then we showed them what British rifles could do. We simply went for them, and our rifles got so hot that we could

scarcely hold them. Despite that awful hail of bullets the Germans came on, and hurled themselves against us till they were not more than a hundred yards away; then we wanted to charge them, and begged to be let loose with the bayonet, but our captain told us that there were not enough of us to do it. So we retired to our own battalion, the whole of which had the joy of going for them. But the Germans didn't wait for us. They don't like the British steel, and when we had pushed them right back, without actually getting at them, they cleared off.

This was the kind of thing that went on in the Valley of the Aisne. It was work in the open and work in the trenches, on top of the incessant fighting we had had. On the third day, at night, we had just come out of the trenches, having been relieved by another company. We were in good spirits, for we had been sent to a barn, where we were to spend the night. That was a splendid bit of luck, because it meant that we were to get a nice rest and have a good time. The barn had hay in it, and we simply packed the place. It was on a farm, and during the day we had seen the farmer and his wife. There was a village near, with a church and houses, and it had proved a fine target for the Germans, who constantly shelled the place. We had got quite into the way of watching the shells burst about fifty yards in front of us, and it really was a grand sight to sit and gaze at them. We sometimes did this when we were so heavily bombarded that we could do nothing with the rifle or bayonet. Little did we know what was in store for us at the barn from shells.

The night passed and the morning came. We breakfasted and made ready to march; but were



[To face p. 38.

“THE GERMANS CAME ON AND HURLED THEMSELVES AGAINST US.”

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ordered to hold back a bit, and so we put aside our packs and rifles and had a sing-song to pass the time. It was one of the most surprising concerts ever held, I daresay, because all the time about three German batteries were shelling us, and occasionally a shell burst very near us and made an awful commotion. We were still packed in the barn, quite cheerful, when the sergeant who was in charge of us, and was acting as sergeant-major, told us to fall in.

He had hardly spoken the words when the very building seemed to collapse, the wall was blown in, the roof fell, timbers crashed down and the barn was filled with a horrible smoke and dust, and there were deafening and awful cries—screams and groans where a few moments earlier there had been the sound of merriment, for a German shell had crashed through the wall and exploded in the very thick of us.

I was lying down in the barn, with my pack on, when this thing happened. I sprang to my feet and dashed to the door and rushed into the open air, but as soon as I had left the building a second shell came and burst and I was knocked down. I tried to rise, but my leg was numb, and so I had to wait till the stretcher-bearers came and took me to a big white house about three hundred yards away, which had been turned into a hospital, and there I was put with the rest of the wounded. For about ten minutes I had to wait outside, and there I was struck by a piece of spent shell, but not much hurt. When we were carried off in the stretchers we were kept near the bank of the road, to avoid as much as possible the German fire.

At the hospital it was found that I had been wounded in the leg; but I did not care so much about

myself, I wanted to know what had happened in the barn. I soon learned the dreadful truth—the shells had killed eleven of the men and wounded thirty-two, some of whom died afterwards.

Prince Maurice was close at hand when this happened, and at night he attended the burial of the poor fellows near the barn. About an hour after the men were killed he came into the house to see us. “How are you getting on?” he asked me. “I am so sorry such a dreadful thing has happened.” And he looked it, too.

I was in the hospital three days before being sent home. All that time there were villagers in the cellars of the hospital, terrified people who were hiding from the German fire, and were fed from our transport.

A lot was crowded into that retirement from Mons and the advance to the Aisne. We had kept our spirits up and had not been downhearted, and when the great day came which brought the order to advance and fight the enemy, we positively shouted and sang. And this was not just swank; it was a real expression of our feelings, for we wanted to do our bit for the Empire.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE STRUGGLE ON THE AISNE

[The Battle of the Aisne began on Sunday, September 13th, 1914, when the Allies crossed the river. The Germans made furious efforts to hack their way through to Paris, but after a struggle lasting three weeks they were driven back with enormous losses. The British losses were: 561 officers and 12,980 men in killed, wounded and missing. The beginning of this tremendous conflict is told by Private Herbert Page, of the Coldstream Guards, who was wounded and had a wonderful escape from instant death on the battlefield.]

THERE was fierce fighting all day on Sunday, September 13th, when the Battle of the Aisne began; but the Coldstreamers were not in it till the Monday. We had had a lot of heavy fighting, though, since the beginning of the business at Mons, and we had had a fine fight at Landrecies—a fight which has been specially mentioned in despatches. At the end of it all the men in my company—Number 2—had their names taken, but I don't know why. Anyway, it was a grand affair, and no doubt some day the real full story of it will be told and everybody will know what the Coldstreamers did there. Landrecies is particularly an affair of the 3rd Coldstreamers.

We had had a very hard time, fighting and marching and sleeping in the open during the cold nights and in thick mud or in trenches that were deep in water; but with it all we kept very cheerful, especially when

we knew that we had brought the Germans up with a jerk and were beginning to roll them back.

The Coldstreamers were in the open all day on the Sunday, right on the side of the artillery, behind a big hill, and were very comfortable. The artillery on both sides were hard at it, but the Germans could not get our range and no shells came near us. It was harvest time, and we were lying down on sheaves of wheat, and making ourselves as cosy as we could. That was not altogether easy to do, because it was raining during the best part of the day and everything was rather depressing and very wet. But we put our oilsheets on the ground, our greatcoats over the oilsheets, and straw on the top of ourselves, so that we were really pretty snug, taken altogether. The straw, I fancy, was put there not so much to give us comfort as to hide us from the view of the chaps who were always flying about in the German aeroplanes, trying to spot us and make our positions known to their own gunners.

Our own aeroplanes and the Germans' were very busy during that Sunday, and shells were flying about them on both sides, but I don't think they were doing much mischief. We ourselves were doing very nicely indeed. Our transport came up and issued new biscuits, and we got a pot of jam each—and delicious they were, too. We enjoyed them immensely, and didn't care a rap about the German shells. Our transport was splendid, and we always had something to go on with. There was no fixed time for any meal, there couldn't be, for we used to march about fifty minutes and take ten minutes' halt. If we were on a long day's march we would get an hour or two at dinner-time, usually from one o'clock. It was a

funny country we were in, hot in the daytime and cold at night; but we soon got used to that. We were helped enormously by the kindness of the French, and we got on very well with the people and had not much difficulty in making ourselves understood, especially as we picked up a few words of the language—and we could always make signs. When we wanted a drink we would hold out our water-bottles and say “loo,” and they laughed and rushed off and filled our bottles with water.

On the way to the Valley of the Aisne we passed through towns and villages where the Germans had been and we saw what outrages they had committed on both people and property. They had recklessly destroyed everything. They had thrown poor people's property out of the windows into the streets and pulled their bedding into the roads to lie on themselves. The Germans acted like barbarians wherever they went—I saw one poor child who was riddled with bullets. We ourselves had strict orders against looting of any sort, but we did not dream of touching other people's property. Whenever we came to a town or village we warned the people to get away, as the Germans were coming, and they went. It was always pleasant to hear them say—as they did to our officers, who spoke to them in French—that they felt safe when the English were there.

The river Aisne runs through lovely country, which looks a bit of a wreck now, because we had to rush across the open and trample down the wheat to get at the Germans. The country's crops were spoiled, but the damage we did was trifling compared with the devastation that the Germans caused.

Throughout that Sunday when the Battle of the

Aisne opened we had no casualties, and the day passed pretty well. At night we slept in a barn, which was better than the wet fields. There were no rats, but plenty of rabbits, for the people of the farm seemed to breed them and to have left the hutches open. That night in the barn gave me the best rest I had had since Mons, as I was not even on guard. We had a good breakfast in the barn, tea, bully beef and biscuits, and marched off soon after six in the morning, which was very wet and cold. We marched about four miles, until we came to the Aisne, to a bridge that had been blown up and so shattered that there was only a broken girder left. The rest of the bridge was in the river, which was very deep in the middle, after the heavy rains.

We were now properly in the thick of the battle and a fierce business it was, because the Germans had the range of us and were dropping shells as fast as they could fire. Some of the Guards were got across by boats, but we had to wait our turn to cross over a pontoon bridge which the Engineers had put up, in spite of the heavy fire.

We felt the German artillery fire at this place, near the village of Vendresse, but we could not see them. We watched the Loyal North Lancashires cross the pontoon bridge and saw them march away on the other side of the river, which was well wooded, then we heard them firing hard and knew that they were in action with the Germans. We were not long in following the North Lancashires and over the pontoon bridge we went, going very quietly, as we had been told to make as little noise as possible. In about an hour we were properly in the business ourselves.

After crossing the river we began to feel that at last

we were really at the Germans. We made the best of the shelter that the wood gave us, and from behind trees and from the sodden ground we kept up a destructive fire on the enemy, getting nearer to him all the time. Things were growing very hot and the whole countryside rang with the crashing of the guns and the everlasting rattle of the rifles and machine-guns. We were expecting more of our men to cross the river and reinforce us, but the German guns had got the range of the pontoons and no more of our men could cross, so that for the time being we were cut off and had to do as best we could with one of the very strong rear-guards of the enemy.

When we had put some good firing in from the wood we left the shelter of the trees and got into the open country, and then we were met by a shell fire which did a great deal of mischief amongst us. These shells were the big chaps that we called Jack Johnsons, and one came and struck an officer of the North Lancashires who was standing on the right of his line. I was not far from him, being on the left of our own line. The shell shattered both his legs and he fell to the ground. I hurried up, and the first thing the officer asked for was a smoke. We propped him up against a haycock and a chap who had some French tobacco made a fag and gave it to the officer—nobody had a cigarette ready made. He smoked half of it and died. By that time the stretcher-bearers had come up and were taking him away. Before he left for the rear I gently pulled his cap over his face. This affair filled the men around with grief, but it put more heart into us to go on fighting the Germans.

Our artillery now began to fire rapidly and the Germans started to retire. There was a big bunch

of them, and they made for the hill as fast as they could go, meaning to scuttle down the other side and get away. But our gunners were too sharp for them, and they were properly roused up by that time. They came up in splendid style—the 117th Field Battery, I think they were—and just as the Germans reached the top of the hill in a solid body our gunners dropped three shells straight into them, and three parts of the flying Germans stopped on the top of the hill—dead.

I could not say how many Germans there were against us at this place, but I know that they came on in swarms, and they went down as fast as we could fire. But their going down seemed to make no difference to their numbers. They were only a few hundred yards away, and we could see them quite plainly. They were running all over the place, like a lot of mad sheep, they were so excited. And they were blowing trumpets, like our cavalry trumpets, and beating drums and shouting “Hoch! Hoch!” as hard as they could shout.

They kept blowing their charge and banging their drums till they were about 300 yards away, and shouting their “Hochs!” They shouted other words as well, but I don't know what they were.

When our chaps heard the trumpets and drums going and the German cheers they answered with a good old British “Hooray!” and a lot of them laughed and shouted, “Here comes the Kaiser's rag-time band! We'll give you ‘Hoch!’ when you get a bit nearer!” And I think we did. At any rate we kept on firing at them all the time they were advancing; but they swept ahead in such big numbers that we were forced to retire into the wood.

As soon as we got into the wood we came under very heavy machine-gun fire from the Germans, and the bullets rained about us, driving into the earth and into the trees and whizzing all around us everywhere. The German shells were smashing after us, too, but were not doing much damage at that point.

It was now that I lost a very old chum of mine, a fine chap from Newcastle named Layden, a private. He was in the thick of the machine-gun fire, a few paces from me, when he suddenly cried out and I knew that he was hit. The first thing he said was, "Give me a cigarette. I know I shan't go on much longer." When we asked him what the matter was he said he was hurt. "Are you wounded?" he was asked. "Yes, I'm hit in the stomach," he answered—and he was, by about seventeen bullets.

The call went round for a cigarette, but nobody had one—lots of cigarettes were sent out to the soldiers that never reached them—but poor Layden was soon beyond the need of fags. He was delirious when our stretcher-bearers came and took him to a barn which had been turned into a temporary hospital. He lingered there for some time; but the last I saw of him was on the field. I missed him badly, because we had been good chums, and whatever we got we used to give each other half of it.

For about five hours, until two o'clock in the afternoon, that part of the battle went on, and all the time we were holding the Germans back; then we were reinforced by the remainder of our troops, who came across the pontoon bridge to our assistance.

The Germans now seemed to think that they had had enough of it and they held up white flags, and we left the shelter of the wood and went out to capture

them. I should think that there were about three hundred of the Germans at that point who pretended to surrender by holding up the white flag; but as soon as we were up with them their people behind fired at us—a treacherous trick they practised very often. In spite of it all we managed to get the best part of the prisoners safe and drove them in before us to our own lines. When they really surrendered, and did not play the white flag game, we used to go up and take all their rifles, bayonets and ammunition, and throw them away out of their reach, so that they could not make a sudden dash for them and turn on us. When we had chased a few prisoners and had seen what the Germans meant by the white flag signal, we were told to take no notice of it, but to keep on shooting till they put their hands up.

A lot of the prisoners spoke English and said how glad they were to be captured and have no more fighting to do. Some said they loved England too much to want to fight against us, and a German said, "Long live King George, and blow the Kaiser!" But I don't know how many of them meant what they said—you can't depend on Germans.

We had plenty of talks with the German prisoners who could speak English. Some of them who had lived in England spoke our language quite well, and it was very interesting to hear what they had to say about us and the French and the Belgians. They couldn't stand the British cavalry, and one man said, "We don't like those Englishmen on the grey horses at all," meaning the Scots Greys. Several of the prisoners said they didn't mind so much fighting the French, because the French infantry fired too high, nor the Russians, because they fired too low; "but,"



they said, "every time the Englishman pulls the trigger he means death." That was a very nice compliment to us, and there was a great deal of truth in what was said about the British rifle fire. I can assure you that when we settled down to the work we often enough plugged into the Germans just as if we were on manœuvres.

At the very first—and I'm not ashamed to say it—I shook like a leaf and fired anyhow and pretty well anywhere; but when that first awful nervousness had passed—not to return—we went at it ding-dong all the time and fired as steadily as if we were on the ranges. The men were amazingly cool at the business—and as for the officers, well, they didn't seem to care a rap for bullets or shells or anything else, and walked about and gave orders as if there were no such things in the world as German soldiers.

Most of the poor beggars we took were ravenous for want of food, and those who could speak English said they had been practically without food for days, and we saw that they had had to make shift with the oats that the horses were fed with. This starvation arose from the fact that a few days earlier we had captured the German transport and left them pretty short of food.

That rush after the Germans and bagging them was exciting work. It was successful and everything seemed to be going very well. But there was a nasty surprise in store for me and one which very nearly ended my career as a fighting man. I had really a miraculous escape.

I had charge of about four prisoners, and kept them well in front of me, so that they could not rush me. I kept them covered with my rifle all the time, and

as I had ten rounds in my magazine I knew that they wouldn't have a ghost of a chance if they tried any German tricks on me—I could easily have finished the lot before they could have got at me.

As I was driving the prisoners I felt as if some one had come up and punched me on the ear. I did not know whether I had been actually hit by somebody or shot, but I turned my head and at once fell to the ground. I was swiftly up again on my feet and scrambled about. I knew that I was hurt, but the thing I mostly cared about just then was my bag of prisoners, so I handed them over to another man, and he took them in. I then found that I had been shot in the neck by a bullet. It had gone in at the collar of the jacket, at the back of the neck—here's the hole it made—and through the neck and out here, where the scar is, just under the jaw. A narrow shave? Yes, that's what the doctor said—it had just missed the jugular vein. The shot bowled me out, but it was a poor performance by the German who fired, because he could not have been more than three hundred yards away, and being six foot one I made a big target at that short distance. Anyway, he missed me and I was told to go to a barn not far away which had been turned into a hospital, bed mattresses having been placed on the floor. Here my kit was taken off me and I was looked after at once, my kit being given to a North Lancashire man who had lost his own and had been without one for three days. He had been in a small battle and had had to take his choice between dropping his kit and being caught; so he got rid of his kit and was able to escape. When he left the barn he went into the firing line, but he only lasted about ten minutes there. I had seen him leave



[To face p. 50.]

“ FROM BEHIND TREES WE KEPT UP A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE ON  
THE ENEMY ” (p. 45).



and I saw him brought back by the stretcher-bearers. As soon as he was inside the barn he asked where I was, and he was told and was laid down close to me. "Look here, old chap," he said pleasantly, "if you'd only been ten minutes later I shouldn't have been here, because I shouldn't have got your kit and gone into the firing line and got hit."

Perhaps he was right. He might have escaped; but as it was he had been shot through both legs.

I didn't like being in the barn and out of the fighting. It was better to be in the firing line, with all its excitement and the knowledge that you were doing your bit to help things along and drive the Germans back to the best place for them, and that's Germany; but our officers, who never lost a chance of cheering and helping us, came in when they could to see how we were getting on. During the afternoon my company officer, Captain Brocklehurst, and the adjutant, came in to see how things were going. Captain Brocklehurst saw me and said, "There are not many of the company left; but we're doing wonderfully well. We've killed a good many of the Germans and taken about five hundred prisoners." That was good news, very good, but it was even better when the captain added, "And we're pushing them back all the time."

The guns were booming and the rifles were crackling all around us while we were lying in the barn, and wounded men were being constantly brought in, keeping the doctors and the ambulance men terribly busy—and you can imagine what it must have meant for the Germans if it was like that for us; because we fought in open order, so that we were not easy to hit, whereas the Germans were in their solid formation,

which meant that they could not advance against the British fire without being mown down.

I was in the barn, which was crowded with wounded, till about one o'clock in the morning, then we were taken in Red Cross vans to another hospital about three miles away, and as we left the French people showed us all the kindness they could, giving us water, milk and food, in fact all they had. We crossed the pontoon bridge and were put into another barn which had been turned into a hospital, and we stayed there for the night. We left that place in the morning for La Fère, about twenty miles away. There were a great many motor waggons being used as ambulances, and they were all needed, because of the crowds of wounded. All of us who could walk had to do so, as all the vans and lorries were wanted for the bad cases. I could manage to walk for about a mile at a stretch, but I could not use my arms. When I had done a mile, I rested, then went on again, and so I got to the end of the journey, with a lot more who were just about able to do the same. We didn't grumble, because we were thankful to be able to walk at all and not to be so badly wounded that we could not shift for ourselves. When we got to La Fère the hospital was so full that we were put straight into a hospital train, and I was in it for two days and nights, stopping at stations for brief halts. Again the French people were kindness itself and pressed food and drink on us. We got to Nantes, where my wound was dressed and we had supper, and then I had what seemed like a taste of heaven, for I was put into a proper bed. Yes, after sleeping for so many nights on the ground, anyhow and anywhere, often enough in mud and water, it was like getting into heaven itself to get into

a bed. On the Saturday they put us on board a ship and took us round to Liverpool, a four days' journey on the sea. First we went to Fazackerley, and then I was lucky enough to be sent on to Knowsley Hall, where Lady Derby, who has a son in France with the Grenadiers, had turned the state dining-room into a hospital ward. There were sixteen Guardsmen in the ward, with four trained nurses to look after us. Wasn't that a contrast to the barns and flooded trenches! Now I'm back in London, feeling almost fit again, and soon I shall have to report myself.

I have only told you about the little bit I saw myself of the tremendous Battle of the Aisne. Considering the length of it and the fearful nature of the firing, it sometimes strikes me as a very strange thing that I should be alive at all; but stranger still that some men went through it all, right away from the beginning at Mons, and escaped without a scratch.

## CHAPTER

### “ THE MOST CRITICAL DAY OF ALL ”

[In the first four months of the war nineteen Victoria Crosses were gazetted for valour in the field, and of these no fewer than five were awarded for the sanguinary fighting at Le Cateau on August 26th, 1914. In his despatch dealing with the retreat from Mons Sir John French described the 26th as “ the most critical day of all.” It was during this crisis of the battle that Corporal Frederick William Holmes, of the 2nd Battalion The King’s Own (Yorkshire Light Infantry), “ carried a wounded man out of the trenches under heavy fire and later assisted to drive a gun out of action by taking the place of a driver who had been wounded.” Corporal Holmes has not only won the Victoria Cross, but he has been also awarded the Médaille Militaire of the Legion of Honour of France. His story gives further proof of the wondrous courage and endurance of the gallant British Army in Belgium and in France.]

FOR seven years I was with the colours in the old 51st, which is now the Yorkshire Light Infantry, then I was drafted to the Reserve; but I was called back only a fortnight later, when the war broke out.

The regimental dépôt is at Pontefract, in South Yorkshire, which some unkind people say is the last place that God started and never finished, and in August, having become a soldier again, after marrying and settling down to civil life in Dublin, I found myself in a region which was almost like the South Yorkshire coalfields. There were the same pit-heads and shale-heaps, so that you could almost think you were in England again—but how different from



England’s calmness and security ! It was around these pit-heads and shale-heaps that some of the fiercest fighting of the earlier days of the war took place.

We had left Dublin and reached Havre at midnight ; we had been to the fortified town of Landrecies, where the Coldstreamers were to do such glorious things, and had got to Maroilles, where Sir Douglas Haig and the 1st Division became heavily engaged. We were at Maroilles, in billets, from the 18th to the 21st. Billets meant almost anything, and we lived and slept in all sorts of places as well as the trenches—but being in the open in summer was no hardship. The fields had been harvested and we often slept on the stacks of corn.

The people were really most kind ; they gave us every mortal thing as we marched, beer, wine, cigarettes and anything else there was.

At five o’clock on the Saturday afternoon we were billeted in a brewery, where we stayed till Sunday noon, when, as we were having dinner, shells were bursting and beginning things for us. We were ordered to take up a position about two miles from Mons, and on that famous Sunday we went into action near a railway embankment.

People by this time know all about Mons, so I will only say that after that hard business we retired towards Le Cateau, after fighting all day on the 24th and all the following night. After that we took up a position on outpost and stayed on outpost all night, then, at about two in the morning, we dropped into some trenches that we had previously occupied.

I know what Mons was and I went through the battles of the Marne and the Aisne ; but nothing I

had seen could be compared for fury and horror with the stand of the 5th Division on the 26th. It was essentially a fight by the 5th, because that was the only division employed at Le Cateau. The division was composed of three brigades, the 12th, 13th and 14th. My battalion, the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, was in the 13th, the other battalions with us being the West Riding, the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the West Kent.

There were some coal-pit hills in front of us and the Germans advanced over them in thousands. That was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and the firing began in real earnest again.

The Germans by this time were full of furious hope and reckless courage, because they believed that they had got us on the run and that it was merely a question of hours before we were wiped out of their way. Their blood was properly up, and so was ours, and I think we were a great deal hotter than they were, though we were heavily outnumbered. We hadn't the same opinion of German soldiers that the Germans had, and as they rushed on towards us we opened a fire from the trenches that simply destroyed them.

Some brave deeds were done and some awful sights were seen on the top of the coal-pits. A company of Germans were on one of the tops and an officer and about a dozen men of the "Koylis" went round one side of the pit and tried to get at them. Just as they reached the back of the pit the German artillery opened fire on the lot, Germans and all—that was one of their tricks. They would rather sacrifice some of their own men themselves than let any of ours escape—and they lost many in settling their account with the handful of Englishmen

who had rushed behind the pit at a whole company of Germans.

Hereabouts, at the pits, the machine-gun fire on both sides was particularly deadly. Lieutenant Pepys, who was in charge of the machine-gun of our section, was killed by shots from German machine-guns, and when we went away we picked him up and carried him with us on the machine-gun limber until we buried him outside a little village in a colliery district.

He was a very nice gentleman and the first officer to go down. When he fell Lieutenant N. B. Dennison, the brigade machine-gun officer, took charge. He volunteered to take over the gun, and was either killed or wounded. Then Lieutenant Unett, the well-known gentleman jockey, crawled on his stomach to the first line of the trenches, with some men, dragging a machine-gun behind them. They got this gun into the very front of the line of the trenches, then opened fire on the Germans with disastrous effect. Lieutenant Unett was wounded and lay in the open all the time.

This gallant deed was done between twelve noon and one o'clock, and I was one of the few men who saw it. I am glad to be able to pay my humble tribute to it.

There was a battery of the Royal Field Artillery on our left rear, about 800 yards behind the front line of trenches. Our gunners had such excellent range on the Germans that the German gunners were finding them with high explosive shell. It was mostly those shells that were dropping on them till they got the range and killed the gunners. There were only about five who were not either killed or wounded.

The officer was wounded; but in spite of that he carried a wounded man round the bottom of the hill, then went back and fetched another man and repeated the journey until he had taken every one of the five away. After that he returned, picked up a spade and smashed the sights of the gun and made it useless. We heard some time afterwards that he had been killed.

This brave deed was witnessed by most of us who were in the front line of trenches.

When the German guns were got into position in front of us and the Germans tried their hardest to blow us out of our trenches, they searched for our artillery and, failing to discover it, they grew more determined than ever to rout us out of the place from which we were doing deadly damage.

In spite of the heavy losses around us we held on, and all the more stubbornly because we expected every moment that the French would come up and reinforce us. The French were due about four o'clock, but owing to some accident they did not arrive, and it seemed as if nothing could save us.

There was a falling off in our artillery fire, and it was clear that one of our batteries had been put out of action. And no wonder, for the German guns were simply raining shells upon us. The Germans at that time were sticking to the dense formations which had been their practice since the war began—and they hurled themselves forward in clouds towards the 37th Field Battery.

So furiously did they rush, so vast were their numbers, and so certain were they that they had the guns as good as captured, that they actually got within a hundred yards of the battery.

It was at this terrible crisis that Captain Douglas Reynolds and volunteers rushed up with two teams and limbered up two guns, and in spite of all the German batteries and rifles did one gun was saved. This was a wonderful escape, in view of the nearness of the German infantry and their numbers, and for their share in the desperate affair the captain and two of the drivers—Drane and Luke—who had volunteered, got the Victoria Cross.

In a way we had got used to retiring, and we were not at the end of it even now, by a good deal, for on our left the Borderers were withdrawing and on our right the Manchesters were being forced right back; fighting magnificently and leaving the ground littered with their dead and wounded.

The Yorkshire Light Infantry were left in the centre of the very front line of the trenches, where we were heavily pressed. We made every mortal effort to hold our ground, and C Company was ordered up from the second line to reinforce us in the first.

Imagine what it meant for a company of infantry to get from one trench to another at a time like that, to leave shelter, to rush across a space of open ground that was literally riddled with shrapnel and rifle bullets, and in the daytime, too, with the Germans in overwhelming force at point-blank range.

But the order had been given, and C Company obeyed. The men sprang from their trench, they rushed across a fire-swept zone—and the handful of them who were not shot down made a final dash and simply tumbled into our trench and strengthened us. They had just about lost their first wind, but were soon hard at it again with the rifle and did

murderous work, if only to get something back on account of the comrades who had fallen.

It was a help, a big help, to have C Company with us in the front trench; but even with this reinforcement we could do nothing, and after we had made a hot stand the order came to retire. That was about half-past four in the afternoon.

Things had been bad before; they were almost hopeless now, for to retire meant to show ourselves in the open and become targets for the German infantry; but our sole chance of salvation was to hurry away—there was no thought of surrender.

When the order was given there was only one thing to do—jump out of the trenches and make a rush, and we did both; but as soon as we were seen a storm of bullets struck down most of the men.

At such a time it is every man for himself, and it is hardly possible to think of anything except your own skin. All I wanted to do was to obey orders and get out of the trench and away from it.

I had rushed about half-a-dozen yards when I felt a curious tug at my boot. I looked to see what was the matter and found that my foot had been clutched by a poor chap who was wounded and was lying on the ground unable to move.

“For God’s sake, save me!” he cried, and before I knew what was happening I had got hold of him and slung him across my back. I can’t pretend to tell you details of how it was all done, because I don’t clearly remember. There was no time to think of much besides the bullets and the fastest way of getting out of their reach. Rain was falling, not heavily, but it was drizzling, and this made the ground greasy and pretty hard going.

I had not gone far before the poor chap complained that my equipment hurt him and begged me to get it out of his way. The only thing to be done was to drop the equipment altogether, so I halted and somehow got the pack and the rest of it off, and I let my rifle go, too, for the weight of the lot, with the weight of a man, was more than I could tackle.

I picked my man up again, and had struggled on for twenty or thirty yards when I had to stop for a rest.

Just then I saw the major of the company, who said, “ What’s the matter with him ? ”

I could not speak, so I pointed to the man’s knees, which were shot with shrapnel; then the major answered, “ All right ! Take him as far as you can, and I hope you’ll get him safely out of it.”

I picked him up again and off I went, making straight over the hill at the back of the position we had taken, so that he should be safe from the German fire. The point I wanted to reach was about a mile away, and it was a dreadful journey; but I managed to do it, and when I had got there, after many rests, I started to carry my man to the nearest village, which was some distance off.

I got to the village, but the German heavy shells were dropping so fast that I could not stay there, and they told me to carry him into the next village. I was pretty well worn out by this time, but I started again, and at last with a thankful heart I reached the village and got the man into a house where wounded men were being put.

How far did I carry him ?

Well, it was calculated that the distance was three miles; but I never felt the weight. Yes, he was

quite conscious and kept on moaning and saying, "Oh!" and telling me that if ever he got out of it he would remember me; but I said that he mustn't talk such nonsense—for I wanted him to stop thanking me and to keep his spirits up.

I don't know how long I was in getting him over the ground, for I had no idea of time.

Having put my man in safety I left the house and began to go back to the position, expecting to find some of the regiments to rejoin, but when I reached the firing line there were no regiments left. They had been forced to retire, and the ground was covered with the dead and wounded, as it was impossible to bring all the wounded away.

There was a road at this particular point, and on reaching the top of it I saw the Germans advancing, about 500 yards away. Between them and myself there was a field-gun, with the horses hooked in, ready to move off; but I saw that there was only a wounded trumpeter with it.

I rushed up to him and shouted, "What's wrong?"

"I'm hurt," he said. "The gun has to be got away; but there's nobody left to take it."

I looked all around, and saw that there were no English gunners left—there were only the Germans swarming up, 500 yards away and badly wanting to get at the gun.

There was not a second to lose. "Come on," I said, and with that I hoisted the trumpeter into the saddle of the near wheel horse, and clambering myself into the saddle of the lead horse we got the gun going and made a dash up the hill.

There was only the one road, and this was so littered up and fenced about with wire entangle-





[To face p. 62.]

“ I HOISTED THE TRUMPETER INTO THE SADDLE.”



ments that we could not hope to escape by it. Our only chance was by dashing at the hill, and this we did—and a terrible business it was, because we were forced to gallop the gun over the dead bodies of our own men—mostly artillerymen, they were. Many of the poor chaps had crawled away from their battery and had died on the hillside or on the road.

We carried on over the hill, and when the Germans saw what we were doing they rained shells and bullets on us. One or two of the horses were hit, and a bullet knocked my cap off and took a piece of skin from my head—just here. But that didn’t hurt me much, nor did another bullet which went through my coat. We carried on, and got over the hill, just driving straight ahead, for we couldn’t steer, not even to avoid the dead.

I daresay the bullet that carried off my cap stunned me a bit, at any rate I didn’t remember very much after that, for the time being; all I know is that we galloped madly along, and dashed through two or three villages. There was no one in the first village; but in the second I saw an old lady sitting outside a house, with two buckets of water, from which soldiers were drinking. She was rocking to and fro, with her head between her hands, a pitiful sight. Shells were dropping all around and the place was a wreck.

I carried on at full stretch for about ten miles, tearing along to get to the rear of the column. I don’t remember that I ever looked back; but I took it that the trumpeter was still in the saddle of the wheel horse.

At last I caught up with the column; then I looked round for the trumpeter, but he was not there, and

I did not know what had become of him. That was the first I knew of the fact that I had been driving the gun by myself.

Willy-nilly I had become a sort of artilleryman, and from that time until the 28th I attached myself to the guns; but on that day I rejoined what was left of my old regiment.

I had been in charge of twelve men, but when I inquired about them I found that only three were left—nine had been either killed or wounded, and the rest of the battalion had suffered in proportion. That gives some idea of the desperate nature of the fighting and the way in which the little British army suffered during the first three days after Mons.

The officer who had seen me carrying the man off did not see me go back, but a sergeant who knew me noticed me passing through the village with the gun and he was the first man of my battalion that I saw. This was Sergeant Marchant, who, for his gallantry in helping another sergeant, who was wounded, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. In that fine affair he was helped by Company-Sergeant-Major Bolton, and both of them were mentioned in despatches.

Of course I never thought of saying anything about what I had done; but I was sent for and asked if it was true, and I said I had got the man away and helped to take the gun off, and this was confirmed by the major who had seen me carrying the man.

For the day's work at Le Cateau two Victoria Crosses were given to my regiment—one to Major C. A. L. Yate, "Cal," he was called, because of his initials, and one to myself.

Major Yate was a very fine officer. He joined us

and took command of B Company just before we went out to the war. On this day he was in the trenches, on our left rear, not very far from where I was. When we went into action he had 220 men, but they caught so much of the hot fire which was meant for the battery behind that he lost all his men except nineteen when he was surrounded and captured. The day before this happened the major declared that if it came to a pinch and they were surrounded he would not surrender—and he did not surrender now. Reckless of the odds against him he headed his nineteen men in a charge against the Germans—and when that charge was over only three of the company could be formed up. All the rest of B Company were either killed or wounded or taken prisoners, though very few prisoners were taken. The major was one of them; but he was so badly wounded that he lived only a very short time, and died as a prisoner of war. His is one of the cases in which the Cross is given although the winner of it is dead. Major Yate was an absolute gentleman and a great favourite with us all. He had had a lot of experience in the Far East and at home, and I am sure that if he had lived he would have become a general. He was always in front, and his constant cry was “ Follow me ! ”

From Le Cateau we got to the Valley of the Aisne and were in trenches for ten days. At midnight on September 24th we advanced two miles beyond the river, which we had crossed by pontoons because all the other bridges had been blown up.

We reached a little village and stayed there in shelters underneath the houses, where all the inhabitants slept. We stayed in one of these cellars

and went on outpost at four in the morning and came off at four next morning, then went on again at four a.m.

We were only 250 yards from the Germans, who were in a small wood outside the village, opposite the houses. They had snipers out and were sniping at us all the time. We barricaded the windows of the houses and knocked bricks out of the walls to make loopholes, and through these loopholes we sniped the Germans, and they did their level best to pick us off too. Every time your head was shown a dozen bullets came, and you could not see where they came from. Two or three of our men were killed by snipers; but there was no real chance of getting to grips, for there was barbed wire everywhere, and nothing could be done till this was cut. Night was the only time when the wire could be cut—and night work was both eerie and nerve-racking.

We had "listeners" to listen for any movement by the enemy. A sentry in peace times means a man who walks up and down, smartly dressed, but in war time, at night, he is a listener, and in the daytime he is a "watcher"—he can see in the daytime and hear at night. That is one of the little things which show how greatly war changes the customs of peace.

It was outside Bethune, when we were in reserve to the rest of the brigade, that I was wounded. We had got well into October and we were behind trenches, with French infantry on our right. At night we advanced, on a level with the firing line, and in the darkness we dug trenches. We were then next to the King's Own Scottish Borderers. We finished the trenches before the early hours of the morning and stuck in them till five in the afternoon, when we

heard some shouts, and on looking over we saw that the Germans were making a charge.

We opened rapid fire and the Germans answered very smartly, having dropped down. But they were not down long, for up they sprang and with further shouts on they came and got within three hundred yards of us. Then we were ordered to fix bayonets and be ready to charge at any moment; but before we started charging we rushed into another line of trenches in front of us, and there we mixed with the Borderers.

This fight in the night was a thrilling affair, the chief guide on each side being the flashes of the rifles, and these were incessant. The Germans were firing rapidly at anything they could see; but there was little to see except the tiny forks of flame. They must have heard us, however, and that, of course, would help them. One strange thing happened when we reached the trench, and that was that we had to wake up some of the men. In spite of the fighting they were sleeping—but war turns everything upside down, and the British soldier reaches a point when it takes a lot to disturb him.

Suddenly, at this crisis, I felt as if my leg had been struck by something that vibrated, like a spring-board, and I dropped down. I was dizzy, but did not think I was hit, and I supposed that if I stayed down for a few minutes I should be all right and able to go on. So I sat down, but quickly found that I could not move, and on feeling my leg I discovered that it was wet and warm, and I knew what that meant, so I took off my equipment and put it down and began to crawl back to the trench I had left when we charged.

I crawled across a mangel-wurzel field to a house of some sort, then I must have become unconscious, for the next thing I knew was that I was being carried along on a stretcher.

It was only yesterday that a friend in my battalion wrote to tell me that we were crawling pretty close together through the mangel-wurzel field. He was shot in the arm and stopped two of the Borderers' stretcher-bearers just in time to have me put on a stretcher.

I had a natural walking-stick which I had cut from a vine, and of which I was very fond. I had fastened it to my rifle and was so proud of it that I said I would carry it through the war, if I could. My friend must have known how I prized the vine-stick, for when he was sent home he brought it with him, and it's waiting for me when I leave hospital.

I also had a letter from my company officer a few days ago. He says he missed me that night, but he could not make out what had happened. He heard that a complete set of equipment had been found, and on learning that I was wounded he assumed that it was mine, and that I had been carried away and left it. He told me that on the very night I was wounded they were relieved by the French infantry, and that he himself was hit ten days afterwards. It was the day before I was wounded that I heard that I was recommended for the French Military Medal, and that was as big a surprise to me as the news that I had been given the Victoria Cross.

That equipment of mine had a tragic history. During the first day of the Aisne I was without equipment and set to work to get some. A bugler of my battalion had been killed by shrapnel and I



was told by my officer to go and get his equipment. "Treat him gently, poor chap," said the officer, and you may be sure I did. I helped myself, and thinking that the poor lad's mother might like a memento I brought away his "iron-rations" tin. This is riddled with bullet-holes, just as the bugler was.

There is one thing more that I would like to say, and it is about my birthday, which falls on September 7th. As I had left the colours and gone into the Reserve I thought I could look forward to a fine celebration of the anniversary. And there *was* a fine celebration, too, for on September 7th our retiring before the Germans ended and we started to advance and drive them back.

Could any British soldier want a finer birthday celebration than that?

## CHAPTER VI

### BRITISH FIGHTERS IN FRENCH FORTS

[We very slowly learned something of the many extraordinary features of this amazing war. Nothing is too astonishing or stupendous to happen in connection with the fight to crush the militarism of Prussia. Through this story by Private J. Boyers, of the Durham Light Infantry—the old 68th Foot, long known by reason of its devotion on many a bloody field like Salamanca and Inkerman as the “Faithful Durhams”—we get to know something of the British and French fighting side by side in the forts at Lille, one of the strongest of the famous fortresses of France. Lille is a great manufacturing town, the Manchester of France, and early in October 1914, and later, it was the scene of much desperate fighting between the Allied Armies and the Germans.]

I WENT from England with the first party in the Expeditionary Force, and after landing on the other side of the Channel, we had a march of fifty miles to Mons, where I had my first battle.

I was in the great retirement—but I suppose you have heard enough about that and Mons already, so I will leave it. After that beginning, I took part in the Battle of the Marne and the Battle of the Aisne, and later on I was shot in the thigh and bowled out.

I am only a young soldier—I am a native of Sunderland, and was born in 1891—and I have only been in the army a few months—in the old 68th, the “Faithful Durhams,” so I think I have seen a fair lot of the big war and have got to know what it means.

The Durhams have done splendidly and suffered terribly, and many a chum of mine is sleeping with thousands more British soldiers on the battlefields of France and Belgium. A great many have been wounded, and of course there are a number of missing, mostly men, I dare say, who are prisoners of war.

I had been at sea before joining the army, and thought I knew something about roughing it; but even the North Sea in bad weather was nothing compared with the hardships of the retirement from Mons, and the living and sleeping in the trenches when the ground was sodden and deep in water.

Sometimes we were very short of food, and once for several days on end we were almost starving, because the supplies could not get up to us, and we had been forced to throw away a lot of our packs and things.

A good many of us had to carry a seven-pound tin of bully beef in addition to our heavy packs and a great many rounds of ammunition. In the fearfully hot weather we could not carry all this weight, and the tins of beef had to go. We should have been thankful for them later on, when we ran short and some of the beef we had with us had gone bad through the tins getting punctured, which happened in all sorts of strange ways, including bullet-holes and bayonet pricks. But these were things that couldn't be helped, and in spite of them all we kept very cheerful, and often enough, both on the march and in the trenches and French forts, when we got to them, we sang and joked and whistled as if there was no such thing going on as war.

Our officers shared everything with us, and suffered just as we did, though often worse, so that whenever we got a bit downhearted, their example cheered us

up and put us right. I don't think there's a man who's fought in this great war who won't say the same thing about his officers.

We had so much fierce fighting when the work really began, and saw so many strange and dreadful things, that it is not easy to say what stands out most clearly in our minds in such a business, but one of the things I do remember, and shall never forget, is the week or so we spent in one of the big French forts at Lille, fighting side by side with French soldiers. I will tell you about that later, but we did a lot before we got to Lille.

When we were on the march we had a great deal of exciting work to do in hunting Germans. Small bodies of them were everywhere, apart from the immense numbers of spies who were in the Lille district and elsewhere.

The French bagged a lot of spies and gave them short shrift. They hid in all sorts of queer places—some of them got into the tall mill chimneys—but they were routed out and shot.

We found a fair lot of Germans in houses and farms when we were on the march. We examined these places thoroughly. When we arrived at farmhouses and suchlike places, a non-commissioned officer, with a small party of men would make inquiries, often with the help of French cavalymen who were with us and could speak English, and we always found that threats of fearful punishment to the womenfolk had been made by the Germans if they told us that any Germans had been seen about. But the women told us readily enough, especially when there happened to be any Germans in hiding—those who were too drunk to get away and had been left behind. It didn't take long

to make these fellows prisoners, and they rubbed their eyes a lot when they got sober and found that the British had bagged them—though I fancy that most of them were glad to be caught and out of the fighting.

We saw some dreadful sights in these farms and houses that we entered, and it was no uncommon thing for us to bury the women who had been done to death by these invaders who were worse than heathens. We had to carry out this sad work at night, to escape the German fire, for no matter what we were doing they went for us with rifles and machine-guns and anything else that came handy.

Time after time on the march we saw proof of the terrible way in which the French and Germans fought, and saw how bravely the French had defended their country and how freely they had given their lives to get something like even with the enemy.

The Frenchmen were naturally even more upset than the British soldiers were at many of the sights that met us, and in the streets along which we marched we often saw dead bodies of Frenchmen and Germans lying close together, where they had fallen after a desperate fight on the pavements or in the roadway. They had met and fought to the death, and it looked as if no quarter had been given. And with all this there had been a perfectly savage destruction of everything that the Germans could lay their hands on.

The Germans had thieved and killed wherever they had gone, led on in the work by their officers, and little supposing, I fancy, that the day of reckoning had come for them and that their brutal game was being spoiled. There is no doubt that they had been taught that they were going to have a walk over in France and were going to have a good time in Paris; but

some of them were poor enough specimens when we caught them or they surrendered.

After the terrific battles of the Marne and the Aisne we were transferred rather quickly to La Bassée, which is not far from Lille, and then we had to take a share in defending Lille, in one of the big forts just outside the town.

The Germans had got up into that part of the country in very strong force, and they were making furious efforts to smash the forts and get hold of Lille, which had become a most important place for them.

Lille is a large manufacturing town and was very strongly defended by forts and in other ways. These big forts, about half-a-dozen in number, form a ring round the town and command all the countryside, or rather did, for they have been pretty badly hammered by this time; while the town itself is protected in other ways. Lille was also one of the big centres for French troops, but owing to the heavy drain caused by the immense numbers of Germans that had to be dealt with at the Aisne there were not a great many first-rate troops left, and a good deal of the defence had to fall on the territorials.

The particular fort where I had my strangest experiences was about a mile from Lille, and from the outside it looked like a low hill-top, so much so that when we were getting near it the fort seemed like a little round hill rising from the plain.

The fort was built of immense blocks of stone, and, as far as one could tell, great quantities of steel, so that its strength must have been enormous.

It was a romantic sort of business to get into the fort, because, first of all, we had to pass the sentries,

then some huge stone sliding doors were opened, by a lever, I suppose, in the same way as the midway doors of a District Railway carriage open and shut. They were very big and heavy doors, yet they opened and shut quite easily, and when they were closed you could hardly see a crack between them.

Past this gloomy entrance was a narrow walled slope which led into darkness. We went down the slope into what looked like an archway and then we got into proper blackness. It was some time before you could get used to such darkness, but at last I saw that we had reached a large vault; but I can't pretend to give details, because I never had a chance of properly making them out, and we were more concerned about the Germans than we were about the fort.

Of course it can be easily understood that owing to the presence of great quantities of ammunition and inflammable stores, only the dimmest lighting was possible—in fact, there was practically no lighting at all except by little portable electric lamps, and as for smoking, that was absolutely off.

The instant we reached the fort we were told that smoking was most strictly forbidden, and that disobedience was punishable by death. The French soldier is as fond as the British Tommy of his smoke, but it is a remarkable thing that in the darkness of the fort we didn't feel the want of smoking, which isn't much of a catch in the pitch darkness. As a matter of fact I had no wish to smoke when we were in the fort, so I was never tempted to run the risk of being shot.

Cooking, like smoking, was out of the question, for you can no more smoke with safety in a magazine like that than you can in a coal-mine—a spark is enough

to do tremendous mischief, let alone a fire; so our rations had to be brought to us by the Army Service Corps, though they, with their carts, were a long way off.

The A.S.C. chaps were splendid all through, and the men in the fighting line owe a lot to them.

In this black dungeon, with such cunning Germans about, a sentry's challenge was a good deal more than a formality; but it nearly became one when the welcome commissariat man arrived. But for his coming we should have had to fall back on our emergency rations. These were good, of their kind, but they can't compare with the best efforts of the A.S.C.

But I'm getting off the track a bit. In the side of the vault, or cavern, there was a low, shallow dug-out which was meant to hold a rifleman lying at full stretch. This was something like a small cubicle in size and shape, and to enter it in the darkness was a proper problem. After a try or two, however, you got into the way of stumbling comfortably into it. By crouching and creeping, and using your hands and knees, you could secure a position from which it was fairly easy to draw yourself up into the dug-out. I dwell on this because I think it is important, seeing that four of us took two-hour watches throughout the twenty-four hours, so that getting to and from such a dug-out becomes an event in your daily life.

At one end of the dug-out was a loophole for a rifle or a maxim-gun, and here we patiently waited for those pests, the snipers. These German potters gave us no rest; but many a German who thought he was well hidden got the finishing touch from one of our loopholes.

This was thrilling fighting, especially when things



became hot, and we manned all the loopholes in the fort, to the number of four, and at a pinch we could use two maxims at each. There were fourteen of us in the fort altogether, four officers and ten men. The orders, being in French, sounded very strange at first, but to my surprise, I soon fell into the way of understanding what was said around me, certainly so far as ordinary little things were concerned. I shall never forget the French for water so long as I remember the thirst I had in the black depths of the fort.

The life in the fort was one of the strangest parts of the whole of the fighting. It was queer enough to be in France, fighting with the French, but a good deal queerer to be living in one of the big famous French forts which the Germans were trying to pound to bits with their enormous siege guns. But we soon settled down and got fairly well used to the sound of the fort's guns and the row of the German artillery and the crashing of the shells around us.

We were told off into parties in the fort, each party being commanded by a non-commissioned officer, who used to light the way for us with an electric lamp that he carried in front of him, hung round his neck.

We ate and drank and slept with the French gunners, and taken altogether we were very comfortable, and were spared something of the awful noise of the firing, for when the guns of the forts were fired the noise was worse [than thunderbolts, and everything about was shaken in the most extraordinary manner.

The Germans were mad to get at us and they shot tons and tons of shells at us, and time after time made efforts to storm the forts and Lille itself. In these attempts they lost immense numbers of men, and when we got outside of the fort we saw the dead bodies

of the Germans lying about in thousands—so thick on the ground were they that we had to clamber over them as best we could.

Our own fort was pretty lucky, but the next one to us was very badly damaged, huge holes being made where the monster shells got home, and most of the defenders of the fort being wiped out. The German big guns certainly did a vast amount of mischief against forts—so the Germans will know what to expect when our own big guns get to work on forts in Germany.

It was soon clear that it would not be possible to hold on at Lille for long, because we were so hopelessly outnumbered. The fight went on, day and night, for a full week, and the Germans bombarded everything.

On Sunday, October 4th, there was some desperate fighting in the streets of the town and the outskirts. German troops were rushed up in armoured trains and motors, but when it came to hand-to-hand fighting they were not much good, and on the Monday they were driven away with heavy loss.

We had a few goes at them with the bayonet, and that charging was very hard work. It had to be done in short rushes of about a hundred yards, but we could not get near enough to them to give the bayonet a fair chance. In that respect it was the same old story—the Germans would not face the steel. In anything like equal numbers they can't stand up against a charge. They would mostly run for it, firing at us over their shoulders as they bolted, but not doing a great deal of mischief that way. When they could run no more and saw that the game was up, they would throw away their rifles and surrender, and we then brought them in.

Before the fighting began, and while it was going on, a good many of the inhabitants got into a panic and fled to Boulogne and Calais; but the French troops held out gamely, and on the Tuesday a fearful lot of execution was done amongst the masses of Germans by the French artillery fire. Neither the German guns nor the infantry could make a stand against this onslaught, and at this time the German losses were particularly heavy, hundreds of men falling together. At the end of that part of the battle the Germans for the time being were completely routed, and they were driven back a good dozen miles.

The Durhams suffered greatly in the fighting, and the good old West Yorkshires, who had seen a lot of hard work with us, had been badly cut up too. Some splendid help was given by the little Gurkhas, who had joined the British; but unfortunately I was not able to see much of what they did, because soon after they appeared with their famous knives I got my wound.

Some of the most exciting and dangerous work was done at night, when we tried to get at the Germans with the bayonet and rout them out of their trenches and positions. We had to do everything so quietly—creep out of the forts, creep along the ground, and creep up to the enemy as near as we could get, and sometimes that was not very close, because of such things as barbed wire entanglements.

These entanglements were particularly horrible, because they were so hard to overcome and tore the flesh and clothing. At first we had a pretty good way of destroying them, and that was by putting the muzzles of our rifles on the wire and blowing it away; but there were two serious drawbacks to that trick—

one was that it was a waste of ammunition, and the other was that the noise of the firing gave us away, and let the Germans loose on us with guns and rifles.

We soon got too canny to go on with that practice, and just before I was wounded and sent home a very ingenious arrangement had been fixed to the muzzle of the rifle for wire-cutting—a pair of shears which you could work with a swivel from near the trigger, so that instead of putting the muzzle of the rifle against the wire, you could cut it by using the pliers.

It was in one of these night affairs that I was nearly finished as a soldier. I was ordered to join a reconnoitring party. We got clear of the fort, and made our way over the country for about a mile. We were then in a field which had been harvested and harrowed, so that it was pretty hard ground to go over. In spite of it all we were getting on very nicely when the Germans got wind of our movements and opened a terrible fire with rifles and maxims.

We lost a lot of men, and where a man fell there he had to lie, dead or living.

Suddenly I fell plump on the ground, and found that I could not get up again, though I did my best to keep up with my chums. Then I felt an awful pain in my thigh and knew that I was hurt, but I must have been struck five minutes before I fell, by a bullet from a German rifle. It had gone clean through my right thigh. They told me afterwards that I had had a very narrow shave indeed; but a miss is as good as a mile.

I knew there was nothing for it but pluck and patience, so I made the best of things, and waited till the day broke and brought the battalion stretcher-



[To face p. 80.

“ WE FOUND A FAIR LOT OF GERMANS IN HOUSES AND FARMS ” (p. 72).

1900  
1901  
1902

bearers, who always came out just about dawn to collect the wounded.

I was lying on the ground, in a sort of ditch, for six hours before I was picked up by the stretcher-bearers and carried to a stable which was being used as a temporary hospital.

The Germans fired on the wounded as they were being carried off in the grey light, but they didn't hit me again.

I lay in the stable for about eight hours, waiting for the ambulance, which took me to the railhead, and then I was put in a train and taken to Rouen—and that travelling was simply awful, because the French trains jolt like traction-engines.

All the same, I had a pleasant voyage to Southampton, and hoped that I might be sent to a hospital near home, but I was too ill to go a long journey to the north, so I was taken to Woolwich, and afterwards sent here, to the Royal Hospital at Richmond, where everybody is kindness itself, and can't do enough for you, it seems.

I've had a month in bed, so far, but I'm hoping to be out of it soon and hobbling about.

## CHAPTER VII

### GERMAN TREACHERY AND HATRED

[“Die hard, my men, die hard!” shouted the heroic Colonel Inglis, when, at Albuhera, in the Peninsular War, his regiment, the 57th Foot, were furiously engaged with the enemy. And the regiment obeyed, for when the bloody fight was ended twenty-two out of twenty-five officers had been killed or wounded, 425 of 570 rank and file had fallen and thirty bullets had riddled the King’s Colour. The 57th is now the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment, but the regiment is still best known by its gallant nickname of the “Die-Hards.” It has suffered exceptional losses in this war, and the story of some of its doings is told by Corporal W. Bratby, who relates a tale which he has described as a brother’s revenge.]

THE old “Die-Hards” went into action at Mons nearly a thousand strong; but when, after Mons had been left behind, a roaring furnace, the roll was called, not more than 270 of us were left. D Company came out a shattered remnant—only thirty-six men, and no officers. When what was left of us marched away, other regiments were shouting, “Three cheers for the Die-Hards!” And three rousing cheers they gave; but I had no heart for them, because I had left my younger brother Jack, a “Die-Hard” like myself. They told me that he had been killed by a bursting shell while doing his duty with the machine-gun section.

I did not say much. I asked the adjutant if any of the machine-gun section had returned, and he answered sadly, “No, they’ve all gone.”



Jack and I were brothers and had been good old chums all our lives—I had taught him a bit of boxing and he was most promising with the gloves, and we had a widowed mother to keep; so I really felt as if something had gone snap in my head and that all I cared for was to get my revenge from the Germans. The last words I heard him say were, "Well, Bill, I'm going right into the firing line," and I remember laughing and saying, "Yes, Jack, but you're not the only one who's going to do that."

Jack laughed too and said, "All right, Bill, I'll see you in the firing line," and with that he went and I saw no more of him.

I had been in the regiment five years and nine months when the war broke out and Jack had served more than two years. I had become a corporal and he was a lance-corporal.

The days in the beginning were swelteringly hot; but the "Die-Hards," being typical Cockneys, made the best of them. Our Brigade consisted of ourselves (the 4th Middlesex), the 2nd Royal Scots, the 1st Gordon Highlanders and the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles. We began operations with trench digging, one particular trench, the machine-gun trench, being allotted to B Company. I helped to superintend the construction of the trenches, and I was proud of the work when I saw what was done from them when the Germans showed themselves.

Our machine-gun caused enormous havoc amongst the German ranks, and I am sure that my brother did his part in settling a lot of them, for he was keen on his work and full of go. The Royal Irish at this stage were doing splendidly—they were not more than 350 yards from the enemy, separated from them

by a railway—and they were lucky enough to fetch one gun out of action again, but the enormously superior numbers of the Germans told and the famous retreat began. The machine-gunners had suffered very heavily and it was hard to learn anything definite about the position in the trenches.

Officers and men were falling everywhere on both sides, and I saw a reconnoitring patrol of Uhlans bowled over in trying to avoid some of the 4th Royal Fusiliers. An officer and seven men of the Uhlans were killed in that little affair without getting in a shot in return. It was not much, but it was something cheering after what we had gone through at Mons. We looked upon it as a bit of sport, and after that we went into châteaux, cafés and other places, and discussed affairs in a proper Tommy-like spirit. It is very strange, but if it had not been for the language I could have thought at times that I was back in Kilburn or in London, on strike duty again, as I was at the time of the railway trouble three years ago.

We were fighting a rearguard action for three days right off the reel, and doing that wonderful march to which "Kitchener's test" or anything like it was a mere nothing. Owing to the heat, we discarded overcoats, kits and in some cases rifles and equipment. Our transport was blown to pieces three days after Mons, which to the 8th Brigade is known as *the* Wednesday.

But lost kit and shattered transport mattered little to most of us, and certainly had slight significance for me, because the only thing I had in mind was this determination to get revenge. I am not exaggerating in the least, I am merely putting down on record the state of my feelings and wishing to make

you understand how remarkable a change had come over me, an alteration such as is brought about, I take it, by war, and war alone. Perhaps, too, the excessive stress and strain of those early days of the war had something to do with my condition; but whatever the cause, there it was. Danger itself meant nothing, and I, like the rest of us, took the ordinary fighting and the incessant and truly horrible shell fire as a matter of course, a part of the day's work. I bided my time, and it came.

We had crossed the Aisne, a dangerous unit still, in spite of our losses, for we had received reinforcements from the base; but just before crossing the river we sat down on the road, waiting for a favourable opportunity to cross by a pontoon bridge which the Engineers were building. That pontoon replaced a bridge which had been blown up.

On the word "Rise" we fell in, and in doing so a man had the misfortune to shoot himself through the hand.

The colonel came up at once and ordered the injured man to go back to the hospital in a village about a mile and a half up the road, in rear of the bridge. I was told off to take him, and we went to a house that had been turned into a hospital, the people in it being typically French. There were some sad cases there, amongst them one of our own fellows who had been severely wounded and a trooper of the 4th Hussars who was the only survivor of a reconnoitring party. He had been shot while going through the village that morning. Just at that time we had had many losses of small bodies—in one case a sergeant and five men had been blown to pieces.

After I had got the wounded man into the hospital

I asked the "monsieur" in charge of the house for some tea, which he very willingly produced—it had no milk in it, of course, but by that time I had almost forgotten that milk existed.

At this time the village was being shelled, but that did not affect the enjoyment of my tea-drinking, and after that refreshing draught and a chunk of "bully" and some biscuit crumbs which I found in the corner of a none-too-clean haversack, I "packed down" for the night.

At about four o'clock next morning I awoke and went back to the bridge, which my battalion had crossed on the previous day, the "Die-hards" being the first to have the honour to cross. By this time we had got past the sweltering stage of things and had become accustomed to soaking weather, and on this particular morning I was thoroughly cold and wet and generally "fed up" with things; but I still glowed with the longing to get level with the Germans.

You must bear in mind that regiments had been broken up and scattered in the most astonishing manner and had become mixed up with other regiments, and I had lost my own and had to set to work to find it.

I got over the bridge and reached some artillery.

"Have you seen anything of the Middlesex?" I asked.

"Yes," the gunners answered, "they've just gone into action on the brow of the hill."

I made my way towards the top of a neighbouring hill and found that my battalion had taken up a position there, but I had to wander about aimlessly, and I did so till I came across one or two men who were separated from the battalion. They directed

me to the actual position, which was on the ridge of the hill, and to the ridge I went and found that it was lined with remnants of the brigade.

I tried to find my own company, but could not do so, as it had been surprised in the night; so I attached myself to another and lay down with the corporal on the sodden ground.

Wet through, cold, hungry and physically miserable, but still tough in spirit, we lay there, wishing that all sorts of impossible things would happen.

The corporal showed me where he had hit a German scout. We watched the poor devil rolling about—then we finished him off.

In addition to the wet there was a fog, and under cover of this the Germans crept up and were on us almost before we knew of their presence.

The alarm was first given by a man near us who was suffering from ague or some such ailment and had been moaning and groaning a good deal.

Suddenly he cried, "Here they are, corporal! Fire at 'em!"

My loaded rifle was lying just in front of me. I snatched it up, and as I did so the Germans jumped out of the mist on to us, with loud shouts. I brought the first German down and my chum dropped one; and we managed to fetch the officer down. He was carrying a revolver and a stick, like most German officers, so that you had no difficulty in distinguishing them.

When the alarm was given I gave a quick look over a small hump in the ground and then we were rushed; but I hated the idea of retiring, and kept on shouting, "Crawl back! Crawl back!"

Machine-guns and rifles were rattling and men were

shouting and cursing. In the midst of it all I was sane enough to hang on to my fire till I got a good chance—and I did not wait for nothing.

Up came two Germans with a stretcher. They advanced till they were not more than twenty-five yards away, for I could see their faces quite clearly; then I took aim, and down went one of the pair and “bang” off the stretcher fell a maxim. The second German seemed to hesitate, but before he could pull himself together he had gone down too. I began to feel satisfied.

By this time the order to retire had been given and I kept on shouting, “Keep down! Crawl back!” and the lads crawled and jumped with curious laughs and curses.

In that excited retirement the man who was with me was shot in the chest. I halted for a little while to see what had really happened to him, and finding that he was killed I took his waterproof sheet and left him. I hurried on until I was in a valley, well away from the ridge; then an officer managed to get us together and lead us into a wood.

As we got into the wood I spotted a quarry. I said to the officer, “Is it best to go down here, sir?”

“I’ll have a look—yes,” he answered.

We went into the quarry, where there were Royal Scots, Middlesex, Gordons and Royal Irish.

The officer was afraid that we might be rushed, in which case we should be cut up, so he put a man out on scout. We were not rushed, however, and when the firing ceased we filed out and lined the ridge again, and there we lay, expecting the Germans to come back, but for the time being we saw no more of them.

By some means one of the Irishmen had got drunk and wanted to fight the Germans "on his own." He was shouting for them to come on and was wandering about. Soon afterwards he was found lying on the top of the hill, having been shot in the thigh. He was carried out of action and I have never heard of him since.

After that affair of the hill-crest we had a lot of trench work, and very harassing it was. For five days we stayed in trenches, so near to the enemy that it was death to show your head.

Trench fighting is one of the most terrible features of the war, for not only is there the constant peril of instant death, which, of course, every soldier gets accustomed to, but there is also the extreme discomfort and danger of illness arising from insanitary surroundings. Often enough, too, when a new trench was being dug we would find that we were working on ground that had been previously occupied, and the spades brought up many a ghastly reminder of an earlier fight.

Sometimes in this wonderful warfare we were so very close to the Germans that when we sang hymns—and many a hymn that a soldier has sung at his mother's knee has gone up from the trenches from many a brave lad who has given his life for his country—the Germans would harmonise with them. It was strange to hear these men singing like that and to bear in mind that they were the soldiers who had done such monstrous things as we saw during the retreat, when they thought that certain victory was theirs. Time after time, with my own eyes, I saw evidence of the brutal outrages of the German troops, especially on women and children, yet it seems hard to convince

some of the people at home that these things have been done.

At one time in the trenches, for a whole week, we were so situated that we dare not even speak for fear of revealing our position—we were subjected to an enfilade fire and did not dare to speak or light a fire, which meant that we had no hot food for a week, and we could not even smoke, which was the biggest hardship of all for a lot of the lads. We were thankful when we were relieved; but were sorry indeed to find how dearly the newcomers paid for their experience. We had been cramped and uncomfortable, but pretty safe, and the Germans had not been able to get at us to do us any real mischief, but our reliefs walked about as unconcernedly as if they were on furlough, with the result that on the very first night they went into action they lost a hundred men.

The system of trenches grew into a sort of enormous gridiron, and if you walked about—which you could only attempt to do at night—you were almost certain to drop into a trench or a hole of some sort. This made getting about a very exciting job, and it added enormously to the intense strain of fighting in the trenches, a strain which was hardest to bear in the night-time, when we were constantly expecting attacks and when the Germans adopted all kinds of devices to get at us.

The Germans are what we call dirty fighters, and they will take advantage of anything to try and score over you. They have no respect for anything and made a particular point in many of the places they overran of desecrating the churches. They never hesitated to turn a place of worship into a scene for an orgy, and I remember going into one church after



the Germans had occupied it and being shocked at their conduct. In this particular place they had been able to lay hands on a good deal of champagne and they had drunk to excess, turning the church into a drinking-place, so that when we reached it there was an indescribable scene—filthy straw on the floor, empty champagne bottles littered everywhere, and the whole building degraded and desecrated.

The Germans had got a French uniform and stuffed it with straw and propped it up to resemble a man, and on the uniform they had stuck a piece of paper with some writing on it in German. I do not know what the writing was, but I took it to be some insult to the brave men who were defending their country and preventing the Germans from getting anywhere near Paris. I could tell you much more and many things of the Germans' dirty fighting, and of things that were far worse than such an incident as turning a church into a drinking-place; but perhaps enough has been said on that point of late.

But that dirty fighting does not mean that the Germans do not fight bravely—far from it; they are hard cases, especially when they are in overwhelming numbers, which is the form of fighting that they like best of all. They are great believers in weight and hurling masses of men at a given point, and they are absolutely mad at times when their opponents are the English.

I will tell you of a case which illustrates this particular hatred. One night we were attacked by the Germans, though there was but little hope of them doing anything serious, in view of the fact that we were in trenches and that there were the barbed wire entanglements everywhere. There had been no sign

of an attack, but in the middle of the night a furious assault was made upon us and a young German by some extraordinary means managed to get through the entanglements. An officer of the Buffs was near us, and in some way which I cannot explain the German managed to reach him. With a fierce cry he sprang directly at the officer, put an arm round his neck, and with the revolver which he held in the other hand shot him.

It was the work of a moment; but it succeeded—so did our bayonet attack on the German, for almost as soon as his shot had rung out in the night a dozen bayonets had pierced him. He died very quickly, but not before he had managed to show how intensely he hated all the English. He was a fine young fellow, not more than seventeen or eighteen years old, and it was impossible not to admire the courage and cleverness he had shown in getting through the awful barbed wire entanglements and hurling himself upon us in the trenches in the middle of the night. The point that puzzles me even now, when I recall the incident, is how the young German managed to make such a clean jump for the officer. I daresay there was something more than luck in it.

At this time we were with the Buffs, who told us that they were being badly troubled by snipers. I was in a trench with Lieutenant Cole, who was afterwards killed, and he said to me, "Corporal, the snipers are worrying our people, but it's very difficult to locate them. Try and see what you can make out of it."

It was very difficult, but I set to work to try and make something out. Before long, with the help of the glasses, I concluded that the sniping came from

a wood not far away, and I told the officer that I thought they were in a tree there. The consequence was that a platoon loaded up, went round, concentrated their fire on this particular spot and brought down two German roosters from a tree. We were glad to be rid of the pests, and they ought to have been satisfied, for they had had a very good innings.

I have been telling about the determination I had to be revenged for my brother's death. That was my great object, and I kept it in mind before anything else—and I think I carried it out. Apart from any motive, it is the British soldier's duty to do everything he can to settle the enemy, especially the Germans, and I am glad that I did my bit in this respect.

Now listen to what has really happened. After all that fighting and suffering with the grand old "Die-Hards" I got my own turn, after many wonderful escapes. A shell burst near me and the fragments peppered me on the, right hand here and about this side of the body, and bowled me out for the time being. I was sent home, and here I am in London again, getting well and expecting the call to come at any time to go back to the front. When it comes I shall be ready to obey.

Look at this postcard. It is written, as you see, by a British soldier who is a prisoner of war in Germany, and it tells the glad news that my brother, who, I was told, was killed months ago by a bursting shell, is not dead, but is alive and well, although he is a prisoner of war.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

[The winter of the war was marked by an abnormal rainfall and storms of uncommon severity: also by the extraordinary development of trench warfare. The rain and storms, the frost and snow, made it impossible to carry out the greater operations of campaigning, with the result that both sides dug themselves in and fought from rival trenches which in many cases were separated by only a few yards. This story deals with life in the trenches, at La Bassée, and it gives a wonderful understanding of the privations that have been uncomplainingly borne by British soldiers. The teller is Private G. Townsend, 2nd Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, who has had more than six years' service with the colours. These long-service men have compelled the attention of even the Germans who despised the "contemptible little army," for they have admitted that the seasoned British private soldier is the equal of a German non-commissioned officer.]

WHEN the rebellion broke out in South Africa we—the old "Lily Whites"—were the only imperial regiment kept in that country. We were sitting still and stiff for twenty days, till General Botha got his own troops ready. During that time we were guarding Cape Town, and it took us all we knew to hold in, because the big war was on, and we were about seven thousand miles away from the seat of it. We had to wait till General Botha was ready, and that was not for more than a month after the British and the Germans met in Belgium.

We were eager to get away from South Africa,

and at last we sailed—but what a slow voyage it was! Almost a record, I should think. We were thirty-two days getting to Southampton; but that was because we had halts on the way and were convoyed by some of the British warships which have worked such marvels in this war. We had with us a noble cruiser which on a later day, though we thought her slow, knocked more speed out of herself than the builders ever dreamed of, and that was when she helped to sink the German warships off the Falkland Islands.

By the time we reached the south of England some big things had happened, and we were keener than ever to get to the front. We had not long to wait. We landed, and in less than a week we left England and crossed over to France, where we went into billets for four days, to settle down. From the billets we marched nearly seven miles and went into trenches. For three full months, in the worst time of a very bad year, I ate and drank, and slept and fought, in trenches, with intervals in billets, sometimes up to the hips in water and often enough sleeping on a thick couch of mud. I cannot go into too much detail, but I can say that our officers always tried to go one better than the Germans, for the sake of the men—and for the most part they succeeded. We have picked up a lot from the Germans in this trench game. They have a main trench and about four trenches behind that, the first of the four being about twenty yards away; so that if you knock them out of one you knock them into another.

That march to the trenches was a thing that can never be forgotten. It was very dark and raining heavily, so that we were thoroughly soaked; but

we had no time to think of that, for we were bound for the firing line, we were going to fight for the first time, and we wondered who amongst us would be absent when the next roll was called. The trench to which we were bound was in its little way famous. It had been the scene of some terrible fighting. The Indian troops were holding it, but they had been driven out by the Germans, who took possession and thought they were going to hold it; but the Connaught Rangers made a desperate charge, routed the Germans with the bayonet and retook the trenches. The Connaughts won, but at a very heavy cost, and about 150 of the brave fellows fell and were buried near the little bit of sodden, muddy ground on which they had fought. It was to relieve the Connaughts that we went into the trenches on La Bassée Road that stormy night.

It was not a very cheerful beginning, and as much unlike going into action as anything you can imagine. But we felt queer, this being our first taste of fighting, as we slipped into the trenches with our rifles loaded and prepared to fire in the wild night at an enemy we could not see. As soon as we went into the trenches we were ankle-deep in mud, and we were in mud, day and night, for seventy-two hours without a break. That was the beginning of three solid months of a sort of animal life in trenches and dug-outs, with occasional breaks for the change and rest in billets without which it would not be possible to live.

In a storm-swept trench—a barricade trench we called it—pointing my rifle at an enemy I could not see, I fired my first shot in battle. My section of thirteen men was in the trench which was nearest

to the Germans, and that meant that we were separated from them by only a very few dozen yards. An officer of the Connaughts had given a descriptive object to fire at, and this was a small white outhouse which could be dimly made out in the darkness. The outhouse had the German trenches just in front of it, and we made a target of the building in the hope of potting the men in the trenches.

The order came, one man up and one man down, which meant that a man who was firing was standing for two hours and the man who was down was sitting or otherwise resting, or observing, as we call it.

Throughout that long night we kept up fire from the trenches, all anxious for the day to break, so that we could see what sort of a place we were in and what we were doing; but when the melancholy morning broke there was nothing to see in front of us except the portholes of the German trenches.

We had got through the first night of battle safely and had given the Germans good-morning with what we came to call the "awaking fire," though it sent many a man to sleep for the last time—and we were settling down to make some tea. That was shortly after midday of our first day in the trenches. I was working "partners" with my left-hand man, Private Smith, who said, "I'll just have a look to see what's going on."

He popped his head over the top of the trench and almost instantly he fell into my arms, for he had been shot—there must have been a sniper waiting for him—and had received what proved to be a most extraordinary wound. A bullet had struck him on the side of the head, just below the ear, and gone clean

through and out at the other side, leaving a hole on each side.

"I'm hit!" said Smith, as he fell—that was all.

I was badly upset, as this was the first man I had seen shot, and being my special chum it came home to me; but I didn't let that prevent me from doing my best for him. Smith was quite conscious, and a plucky chap, and he knew that there was nothing for it but to see it through till night came. We bandaged him up as best we could and he had to lie there, in the mud and water and misery, till it was dark, then he was able to walk away from the trench to the nearest first-aid station, where the doctor complimented him on his courage and told him what an extraordinary case it was and what a miraculous escape he had had. Later on Smith was invalided home.

During the whole of that first spell in trenches we had no water to drink except what we fetched from a natural trench half-a-mile away. Men volunteered for this duty, which was very dangerous, as it meant hurrying over open ground, and the man who was fetching the water was under fire all the time, both going and coming, if the Germans saw him. This job was usually carried out a little before daybreak, when there was just light enough for the man to see, and not enough for the Germans to spot him; and a chap was always thankful when he was safely back in the trench and under cover.

At the end of the seventy-two hours we left the trenches. We came out at ten o'clock at night, expecting to be out for three days. We marched to an old barn which had been pretty well blown to pieces by shells, and into it we went; but it was no



better than the trenches. The rain poured on to us through the shattered roof and it was bitterly cold, so that I could not sleep. We had everything on, so as to be ready for a call instantly, and without so much as a blanket I was thoroughly miserable. Instead of having three days off we were ordered to go into a fresh lot of trenches, and next afternoon we marched into them and there we stayed for six weeks, coming out seven or eight times. In these trenches we were in dug-outs, so that we got a change from standing sometimes hip-deep in mud and water by getting into the dug-out and resting there. A dug-out was simply a hole made in the side of the trench, high enough to be fairly dry and comfortable.

During the whole of these six weeks it meant practically death to show yourself, and so merciless was the fire that for the whole of the time a dead German soldier was lying on the ground about a hundred yards away from us. He was there when we went and was still there when we left. We could not send out a party to bury him and the Germans themselves never troubled about the poor beggar. One day a chum of mine, named Tobin, was on the look-out when his rifle suddenly cracked, and he turned round and said, "I've hit one." And so he had, for he had knocked a German over not far away and no doubt killed him.

What with the weather and the mud and the constant firing we had a very bad time. Each night we had four hours' digging, which was excessively hard work, and if we were not digging we were fetching rations in for the company. These rations had to be fetched at night from carts three-quarters of a

mile away, which was the nearest the drivers dare bring them. These expeditions were always interesting, because we never knew what we were going to get—sometimes it would be a fifty-pound tin of biscuits and sometimes a bag of letters or a lot of cigarettes, but whatever it was we took it to our dug-outs, just as animals take food to their holes, and the things were issued next morning.

One way and another we had between fifty and sixty men wounded in our own particular trenches, mostly by rifle fire, though occasionally a shell would burst near us and do a lot of mischief; and what was happening in our own trenches was taking place all around La Bassée. We should have suffered much more heavily if we had not been provided with periscopes, which have saved many a precious life and limb.

We paid very little attention to the German shell fire, and as for the "Jack Johnsons" we took them as much as a matter of course as we took our breakfast. Some of the German artillery fire actually amused us, and this was when they got their mortars to work. We could see the shot coming and often enough could dodge it, though frequently the great fat thing would drive into the ground and smother us with mud. For some of the German artillery fire we were really very thankful, because in their rage they were smashing up some farm buildings not far away from us. The cause of our gratitude was that this shelling saved us the trouble of cutting down and chopping firewood for warmth and cooking in the trenches. When night came we simply went to the farmhouse, and the firewood, in the shape of shattered doors and beams and furniture, was waiting

for us. The farm people had left, so we were able to help ourselves to chickens, which we did, and a glorious change they were on the everlasting bully beef. A chicken doesn't go very far with hungry soldiers, and on one occasion we had a chicken apiece, and remarkably good they were too, roasted in the trenches. Another great time was when we caught a little pig at the farm and killed it and took it to the trenches, where we cooked it.

When we had finished with the second lot of trenches we went into a third set, and I was there till I was wounded and sent home. These trenches were only about a hundred and twenty yards from the second lot, so that the whole of the three months I spent in trenches was passed in a very little area of ground, an experience which is so totally different from that of so many of our soldiers who were out at the war at the very beginning, and covered such great distances in marching from place to place and battle to battle. These chaps were lucky, because they got the change of scene and the excitement of big fighting, but the only change we had was in going out of one trench into another.

It was now the middle of December and bitter weather, but we were cheered up by the thought of Christmas, and found that things were getting much more lively than they had been. One night a splendid act was performed by Lieutenant Seckham, one of our platoon officers, and two of our privates, Cunningham and Harris.

An officer of the Royal Engineers had gone out to fix up some barbed wire entanglements in front of our trenches. The Germans were firing heavily at the time, and they must have either seen or heard

the officer at work. They went for him and struck him down and there he lay in the open. To leave the trenches was a most perilous thing to do, but Mr. Seckham and the two men got out and on to the open ground, and bit by bit they made their way to the Engineer officer, got hold of him, and under a furious fire brought him right along and into our trench, and we gave a cheer which rang out in the night above the firing and told the Germans that their frantic efforts had failed. Mr. Seckham was a splendid officer in every way and we were greatly grieved when, not long afterwards, he was killed. Another of our fine young platoon officers, Lieutenant Townsend, has been killed since I came home.

We were so near the Germans at times that we could throw things at them and they could hurl things at us, and we both did, the things being little bombs, after the style of the old hand-grenade. We got up a bomb-throwing class and hurled our bombs; but it was not possible to throw them very far—only twenty-five yards or so. The West Yorkshires, who were near us, got a great many of these missiles thrown at them, but they did not all explode. One day a sergeant of ours—Jarvis—was out getting wood when he saw one of them lying on the ground. He picked it up and looked at it, then threw it down and instantly it exploded, and he had no fewer than forty-three wounds, mostly cuts, caused by the flying fragments, so that the bomb made a proper mess of him.

Our own bombs were made of ordinary pound jam tins, filled with explosive and so on, like a little shell, which, as the case of the sergeant showed, was not anything like as sweet a thing to get as jam. The

THE  
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[To face p. 102.]

“ WE WERE SO NEAR THE GERMANS THAT THEY COULD HURL  
BOMBS AT US.”

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Germans were very fond of flinging these hand-bombs and seemed to have a great idea of their value in attacks and defence.

Christmas Eve was with us, Christmas Day was soon to dawn—and what a strange and terrible Christmas it was to be!

On Christmas Eve itself we plainly heard the Germans shouting.

“A merry Christmas to you!” they said, and there was no mistaking the German voices that came to us in our trenches out of the darkness.

“A merry Christmas to you!”

Again the Germans greeted us, though we could not see them, and there was something pathetic in the words, which were shouted in a lull in the fighting. Some of our men answered the wish, but I did not—I had no heart to do so, when I knew that the message meant so little.

It may have been a matter of sentiment, because this was the time of peace on earth and goodwill towards men, or it may not; but at any rate the order came that if the Germans did not fire we were not to fire. But Christmas or no Christmas, and in spite of their greetings, the Germans went on firing, and we were forced to do the same, so throughout the night of Christmas Eve we had our rifles going and did not stop till it was daylight.

But the rifle fire was not the only sound of warfare that was heard—there was the sharp booming of artillery. The field batteries were hard at it and we knew they must be doing fearful mischief amongst the Germans. The night became truly awful; but how dreadful we did not know till Christmas Day itself, then, the firing having ceased, we saw that

the ground in front of us, not very far away, was littered with the German dead.

A Merry Christmas !

The very men who had sent the greeting to us were lying dead within our sight, for the Germans had started to change their position and the British shells had shattered them. Something like two hundred and fifty of the Germans were lying dead upon the field, and sorry indeed must the dawn of Christmas Day have been to those who were left.

Peace on earth ! There *was* peace of a sort, for as we looked on the German dead from our trenches we saw two Germans appear in full view, holding up their hands, to show us that they were unarmed.

You can imagine what a solemn spectacle that was—what a Christmas Day it was which dawned upon us in the trenches. We knew instinctively what was wanted—the ground was littered with the German dead and the Germans wanted an armistice so that they could bury them.

One of our officers went out and talked with the two Germans who were holding up their hands—covered by British rifles. He soon learned what they wanted, and the armistice was granted.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of Christmas Day when the Germans set to work to bury their dead, and as they did so we left our trenches and stood on the open ground and watched them. We saw them perfectly clearly, because the main German trench was not more than 120 yards away, and the burial took place a few yards behind this.

I have seen a photograph of British and German



soldiers fraternising on Christmas Day; but there was nothing of this sort with us. The only incident I witnessed was a British officer shaking hands with a German officer. That was all. I did not shake hands with them—and I had not the least wish to do so, though I bore them no ill-will on that sad Christmas Day.

I was thankful when Christmas was over and we had settled down to ordinary routine work, killing and being killed, for it is astonishing how soon you get accustomed to the business of firing on and being fired at.

The trenches had got from bad to worse. When I first went into them there was eighteen inches of water and five inches of mud; but now it was a matter of standing almost up to the waist in water. They became so bad that instead of using the communication trenches, which you might almost call tunnels, it was decided that we should cross the open country to get to our fighting-place, the main trench—indeed, we had no option, because the communication trench was almost impassable.

On a mid-January night, and very bad at that, we began the journey to the trenches. If there had been just ordinary honest darkness we should have been all right and quite satisfied; but though there was darkness enough there was plenty of light—the uncanny brightness which came from the star-shells.

Star-shells were going up all along the line and bursting. They are a sort of firework, giving a brilliant light, and as they exploded they showed us up almost as clearly as if we had been in daylight.

We had only a very short distance to go, but the

star-lights made the journey to the trenches a desperate undertaking.

In single file, a little bunch of ten of us, crouching down, holding our loaded rifles and carrying all we possessed—we went along, losing no time.

From the stealthy way in which we started on our little trip you might have thought that we were burglars or villains bent on some fearsome job, instead of ordinary British soldiers getting back to their trenches.

We went with caution, and had not covered more than ten yards when what I take to be machine-gun fire was opened on us.

All at once, without the slightest warning, a real hail of bullets struck us, and of the ten men of us who were advancing in single file three were killed and four were wounded. The three who were shot down in the ghastly glare of the star-shells were ahead of me.

When that happened we were ordered to keep well apart and open out, but there was not much chance for those of us who were left; at any rate, no sooner had we obeyed and were making a little headway than I was struck myself on the head.

For half-an-hour or so I was unconscious; then I recovered and picked myself up and found that I was all alone. I crawled a few yards to a trench and got into it; but finding it full of water I thought I might as well be killed as drowned, so I got out, and not caring in the least for the German bullets or the star-shells, I made my way as best I could to the nearest dressing-station, and received attention. After that I found myself in a motor-car, and later at a clearing-station and on the boat for home.

You can see the scar of the wound here; but I don't bother about that. I suffer terribly from sleeplessness—and too often I see again the German soldiers who had wished us a merry Christmas—and were buried at the back of their trenches on the gloomy afternoon of Christmas Day.

## CHAPTER IX

### SAPPING AND MINING : THE "LUCKY COMPANY"

[In blowing up bridges, repairing the ravages of the enemy, in throwing pontoons over rivers, and in countless other ways, the Royal Engineers have contributed largely to the success of the British operations in the war. These splendid men, known a century ago as the Royal Sappers and Miners, have not only worked with the greatest energy since the war began, but they have also seen some hard fighting. This story of Sapper William Bell, 23rd Field Company, Royal Engineers, gives a picture of the many-sided operations of the magnificent corps whose mottoes are "Everywhere" and "Where right and glory lead."]

SHEER hard work was the order of the day for our chaps from the time I landed in France from an old Irish cattle-boat till the day when I was packed off back to England suffering from rheumatic fever.

We worked excessively hard, and so did everybody else. Wherever there was an obstacle it had to go, and the infantry themselves time after time slaved away at digging and clearing, all of which was over and above the strain of the fighting and tremendous marching. It was a rare sight to see the Guards sweeping down the corn with their bayonets—sickles that reaped many a grim harvest then and later.

It was during the early stage of the war that bridges were blown up in wholesale fashion to check the German advance, and the work being particularly

dangerous we had some very narrow escapes. A very near thing happened at Soissons.

We had been ordered to blow up a bridge, and during the day we charged it with guncotton, and were waiting to set the fuse until the last of our troops had crossed over. That was a long business, and exciting enough for anybody, because for hours the men of a whole division were passing, and all the time that great passing body of men, horses, guns, waggons and so on, was under a heavy artillery fire from the Germans.

At last the bridge was clear—it had served its purpose; the division was on the other side of the river, and all that remained to be done was to blow up the bridge. Three sections of our company retired, and the remaining section was left behind to attend to the fuse.

Very soon we heard a terrific report, and the same awful thought occurred to many of us—that there had been a premature explosion and that the section was lost. One of my chums, judging by the time of the fuse, said it was certain that the section was blown up, and indeed it was actually reported that an officer and a dozen men had been killed.

But, to our intense relief, we learned that the report was wrong; but we heard also how narrowly our fellows had escaped, and how much they owed to the presence of mind and coolness of the officer. It seems that as soon as the fuse was fired the lieutenant instinctively suspected that something was wrong, and instantly ordered the men to lie flat, with the result that they were uninjured by the tremendous upheaval of masonry, though they were a bit shaken when they caught us up on the road later. This incident gives a good idea of the sort of work and the danger that the Royal Engineers were constantly experiencing in

the earlier stages of the war, so that one can easily understand what is happening now in the bitter winter-time.

An Engineer, like the referee in a football match, sees a lot of the game, and it was near a French village that we had a fine view of a famous affair.

We had been sent to the spot on special duty, and were resting on the crest of a hill, watching the effects of the enemy's field-guns.

Suddenly in the distance we saw figures moving. At first we could not clearly make them out, but presently we saw that they were Algerian troops, and that there seemed to be hosts of them. They swarmed on swiftly, and took up a position in some trenches near us.

The Algerians, like our Indian troops, hate trench fighting, and long to come to grips with the enemy. We knew this well enough, but we realised the peril of leaving cover and advancing towards an enemy who was very close, and who was sweeping the ground with an uncommonly deadly fire.

Putting all fear aside, remembering only their intense desire to come to grips, giving no thought to what must happen to them, the Algerians with enthusiastic shouts sprang from the trenches and bounded, like the sons of the desert they are, across the shell-swept zone that separated them from the annihilating gunfire of the enemy.

What happened was truly terrible. The Algerians were literally mowed down, as they charged across the deadly zone, and for a piece of sheer recklessness I consider that this attack was as good—or as bad—as the charge of the Light Brigade.

The Algerians were cut to pieces in the mad attempt to reach the German batteries, and the handful of

survivors were forced to retire. To their everlasting credit be it said that, in withdrawing under that terrible fire, they did their best to bring their wounded men away. They picked up as many of the fallen as they could and slung them across the shoulder, as the best way of carrying them out of danger.

I shall never forget the scene that met my eyes when we returned to the village. Women were weeping and wringing their hands as the survivors carried their wounded through the streets—for the French are deeply attached to their Colonial troops—and the men of the place were nearly as bad; even some of our chaps, who are not too easily moved, were upset.

While in this locality we had a very warm time of it, for we were continuously under artillery fire. We were in a remarkably good position for seeing the battle, some of our batteries being on our right, some on our left, and the German guns in front. It was really hot work, and when we were not hard at it carrying out our own duties, we took cover on the other side of a hill near the road; but some of our men got rather tired of cover, and found the position irksome; but if you so much as showed yourself you were practically done for. One day our trumpeter exposed himself, just for a moment; but it was enough. He was instantly struck and badly wounded.

At another time we were in our sleeping-quarters in a school-house, and had an escape that was truly miraculous. We had settled down and were feeling pretty comfortable, when the Germans suddenly started shelling us; suddenly, too, with a terrific crash, a shell dropped and burst in the very midst of us.

Theoretically, the lot of us in that school-house ought to have been wiped out by this particular shell,

but the extraordinary fact is that though every one was badly shaken up, only one of our men was wounded—all the rest of us escaped. Luckily we had the hospital men at hand, and the poor chap who had been knocked over was taken away at once to the doctors.

We had had a very hard, hot time, and were glad when the French came and relieved us, and gave our division a bit of rest and change. The Germans in that particular part were thoroughly beaten, and a batch of 500 who were covering the retreat were captured by the French.

They had started for Paris, and were very near it when they were bagged. I dare say they got to Paris all right. So did we, for we entrained for the city, but stayed there less than an hour. I had a chance of seeing something of the thorough way in which Paris had been prepared for defence, and on my way to Ypres I noticed how extensively the bridges that were likely to be of any use to the Germans had been destroyed. The loss in bridges alone in this great war has been stupendous.

When we entered Ypres it was a beautiful old cathedral city; now it is a shapeless mass of ruins, a melancholy centre of the longest and deadliest battle that has ever been fought in the history of the world. We had a rousing reception from the British troops who were already in the city, and a specially warm greeting from our own R.E. men, who gave me a huge quantity of pipes, tobacco and cigarettes from home, to divide amongst our company.

We were soon in the thick of the fiercest and most eventful part of the fighting. We were put to work digging trenches for the infantry and fixing up wire entanglements. The wire was in coils half a mile



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[To face p. 112.]

“WE HAD A VERY WARM TIME OF IT” (p. 111).

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long, and what with that and the barbs and the weight, the carrying and dragging and fixing was a truly fearsome job.

And not only that, but it was extremely dangerous, because we were constantly under fire—sometimes we were fixing up wire within a few hundred yards of the German lines. Before getting to Ypres we had covering parties of infantry to protect us from snipers and sudden attacks; but at Ypres this protection was rarely given, because of the very heavy pressure on the firing line. We were ceaselessly sniped; but on the whole our casualties were remarkably few—but we were always known as the “Lucky Company.”

In addition to doing this hard and dangerous work, we were roughing it with a vengeance. Our sleeping-quarters were dug-outs in a wood, and were lined with straw, when we could get it. The enemy always make a special point of “searching” woods with shells, and we were so situated that we were pestered day and night by the German gunners, who were hoping to draw our artillery fire and so locate our own batteries. Anything like rest was utterly out of the question owing to these artillery duels, which were the bane of our life.

Silence was essential for our work, and we used muffled mauls—our big wooden mallets.

One moonlight night we were going to our usual duties when a shell flew past, exploding with terrific force within ten paces of us. We took it to be one of the Germans' random shots, but after going a short distance we had more shells bursting about us, and bullets whizzing, telling us that the enemy's snipers were at it again. Once more we justified our nickname of the “Lucky Company,” for we had

only one man hit—a fine chap, whose fighting qualities were well known to us, so we grinned when he said to me, after being struck on the shoulder, “ I should like to have a look at that German, Bill ! ”

In the moonlight we offered a first-rate target to the hidden German snipers, and they certainly ought to have done more with us than just hit one man ; but compared with British soldiers, the Germans, with rare exceptions, are only “ third-class ” shots. I have mentioned this little affair chiefly by way of showing the constant danger to which field engineers are exposed.

The Germans at that time had their eyes on us properly, and the very next day they did their level best to make up for their sorry performance in the moonlight.

We had been told off to dig trenches for the infantry on our left, and we started out on the job. Rain had been falling heavily, the ground was like a quagmire, and we had to struggle through marshy ground and ploughed fields.

This was bad enough in all conscience, but to help to fill the cup of our misery the German snipers got at us, and gave us what was really a constant hail of bullets. We floundered on, doing our dead best to reach a certain wood. After floundering for some time, we were ordered to halt. By that time we had reached the wood, and the fire was truly awful.

Behind our tool-carts we usually fasten a big biscuit-tin, which is a big metal case, and as the sniping became particularly furious, four of our men bolted for shelter behind the biscuit-tin. I don't know what it is in the British soldier that makes him see the humour of even a fatal situation, but it happened

that the rest of us were so tickled at the sight of our comrades scuttling that we burst out laughing.

But we didn't laugh long, for shells as well as bullets came, and we saw that the Germans were concentrating their fire upon us. They were going for all they were worth at the wood, and our only chance of safety lay in securing cover. We made a dash for the trees, and I sheltered behind one.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. A shell came and literally chopped down the tree. The shell spared my life, but the tumbling tree nearly got me. Luckily I skipped aside, and just escaped from being crushed to death by the crashing timber.

The firing was kept up for a long time after that, but we went on with our work and finished it, and then we were ordered to occupy the trenches we had just dug. We were glad to get into them, and it was pleasant music to listen to our own infantry, who had come into action, and were settling the accounts of some of the German snipers.

Later on we were told to get to a farmhouse, and we did, and held it for some hours, suffering greatly from thirst and hunger, in consequence of having missed our meals since the early morning. Some of our tool-carts had been taken back by the infantry, and this was a far more perilous task than some people might think, for the carts are usually filled with detonators, containing high explosives like gun-cotton, and an exploding shell hitting a cart would cause devastation.

The farmhouse was ranked as a "safe place," and we reckoned that we were lucky to get inside it; but it proved anything but lucky, and I grieve to say that it was here that my particular chum, an

old schoolmate, met his death. We had scarcely reached the "safe place" when the cursed shells began to burst again, and I said to myself that we were bound to get some souvenirs. And we did.

My comrades had brought their tea to a hut, and I went there to get my canteen to take to the cook-house. No sooner had I left the hut than I heard a fearful explosion. One gets used to these awful noises, and I took no notice of it at the time; but shortly afterwards I was told that my chum had been hit, and I rushed back to the hut. Terrible was the sight that met me. Eight of our men were lying wounded, amongst them my friend. With a heavy heart I picked him up, and he died in my arms soon afterwards. Two other men died before their injuries could be attended to—and this single shell also killed two officers' chargers.

It was soon after this that I went through what was perhaps my most thrilling experience. Again it was night, and we were engaged in our usual work, when suddenly we heard the sound of heavy rifle fire. Throwing down our tools, we grabbed our rifles. We had not the slightest idea of what was happening, but looking cautiously over the parapet of the trench which we were working on, we could dimly see dark figures in front, and took them to be Germans.

We were ordered to fire, the word being passed from man to man to take careful aim; but owing to the darkness this was not an easy thing to do. We fired, and instantly we were greeted with terrific shouting, and we knew that the Germans were charging. Not an instant was lost. With fixed bayonets, out from the trench we jumped, the infantry on our right and left doing the same.

Carrying out a bayonet charge is an experience I shall never forget. One loses all sense of fear, and thinks of nothing but going for and settling the enemy. For my own part I distinctly recollect plunging my bayonet into a big, heavy German, and almost instantly afterwards clubbing another with the butt of my rifle. It was only a short fight, but a very fierce one. The Germans gave way, leaving their dead and wounded behind them.

When the charge was over we went back to our trenches, taking our wounded with us. Our company's casualties numbered about a dozen, the majority of the men suffering from more or less serious wounds; but we were pretty well satisfied, and felt that we had earned our sleep that night.

The next day I had another close shave, a shell bursting very near me and killing twelve horses belonging to the 15th Hussars, who were on patrol duty.

After seven weeks of this famous and awful fighting at Ypres, I was taken ill with rheumatic fever—and no wonder, after such work, and sleeping in such places as we were forced to occupy. After a spell in the hospital at Ypres, I was moved on from place to place, till I made the final stage of the journey to England.

A remarkable thing happened during one of the heavy bombardments that we endured. A shell came and fell plump in the midst of us, and it really seemed as if we were all doomed. But the shell did not explode, and on examining the cap, it was found to bear the number "23." That, you will remember, is the number of my own company, so you can understand that we felt more justified than ever in calling ourselves the "Lucky Company."

## CHAPTER X

### L BATTERY'S HEROIC STAND

[Not one of the almost numberless valiant deeds of the war has proved more thrilling and splendid than the exploit of L Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, at Nery, near Compiègne, on September 1st, 1914. After greatly distinguishing itself at Mons, the battery helped to cover the retreat of the Allies, and fought a heavy rearguard action. On the last day of the retirement the battery unexpectedly came into action at very close range with an overwhelmingly superior German force. So destructive was the fire which was brought to bear on the battery that only one British gun was left in action, and this was served, until all the ammunition was expended, by Battery-Sergeant-Major Dorrell, Sergeant Nelson, Gunner H. Darbyshire and Driver Osborne, all the rest of the officers and men of the battery having been killed or wounded. At the close of the artillery duel the Queen's Bays and I Battery came to the rescue, and the shattered remnant of L Battery came triumphant out of the tremendous fray. This story is told by Gunner Darbyshire, who, with Driver Osborne, was awarded the great distinction of the Médaille Militaire of France, while the sergeant-major and Sergeant Nelson for their gallantry were promoted to second-lieutenants, and awarded the Victoria Cross.]

As soon as we got into touch with the Germans—and that was at Mons—they never left us alone. We had a hot time with them, but we gave them a hotter. Mons was a terrible experience, especially to men going straight into action for the first time, and so furious was the artillery duel that at its height some of the British and German shells actually struck each other in the air. In less than an hour we fired nearly six



hundred rounds—the full number carried by a battery of six guns. But I must not talk of Mons; I will get to the neighbourhood of Compiègne, and tell of the fight that was sprung on the battery and left only three survivors.

All through the retreat we had been fighting heavily, and throughout the day on August 31st we fought till four o'clock in the afternoon; then we were ordered to retire to Compiègne. It was a long march, and when we got to Nery, near Compiègne, early in the evening, both horses and men were utterly exhausted and very hungry. As soon as we got in we gave the horses some food—with the mounted man the horse always comes first—and made ourselves as comfortable as possible.

Outposts were put out by the officers, and the cavalry who were with us, the 2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays), were in a small field on the side of a road which was opposite to us. That road was really a deep cutting, and I want you to bear it in mind, because it largely proved the salvation of the few survivors of the battery at the end of the fight. For the rest, the country was just of the sort you can see in many places in England—peaceful, fertile and prosperous, with farms dotted about, but nobody left on them, for the warning had been given that the German hordes were marching, and the people had fled in terror.

Having made all our dispositions, we went to sleep, and rested till half-past three in the morning, when we were roused and told to get ready to march at a moment's notice.

The darkness seemed to hang about more than usual, and the morning was very misty; but we did not

pay much attention to that, and we breakfasted and fed the horses. We expected to be off again, but the battery was ordered to stand fast until further notice.

In war-time never a moment is wasted, and Sergeant-Major Dorrell thought that this would be a good opportunity to water the horses, so he ordered the right half-battery to water, and the horses were taken behind a sugar factory which was a little distance away. The horses were watered and brought back and hooked into the guns and waggon; then the left half-battery went to water.

Everything was perfectly quiet. Day had broken, and the landscape was hidden in the grey veil of the early morning. All was well, it seemed, and we were now expecting to move off. A ridge about 600 yards away was, we supposed, occupied by French cavalry, and a general and orderly retreat was going on in our rear. Then, without the slightest warning, a "ranging" shot was dropped into the battery, and we knew instantly that the Germans were on us and had fired this trial shot to get the range of us.

Immediately after this round was fired the whole place was alive with shrapnel and maxim bullets, and it was clear that the battery was almost surrounded by German artillery and infantry. As a matter of fact, the French cavalry had left their position on the ridge before daybreak, and a strong German force, with ten guns and two maxims, had advanced under cover of the mist and occupied the position, which was an uncommonly good one for artillery.

We were taken completely by surprise, and at first could do nothing, for the "ranging" shot was followed

by an absolute hail of shrapnel, which almost blew the battery to pieces.

The very beginning of the German fire made havoc amongst the battery and the Bays, and the losses amongst the horses were particularly severe and crippling. But we soon pulled ourselves together, with a fierce determination to save the battery, and to do our best to give the Germans a vast deal more than they were giving us.

“ Who'll volunteer to get the guns into action ? ” shouted Captain Bradbury.

Every man who could stand and fight said “ Me ! ” and there was an instant rush for the guns. Owing to heavy losses in our battery, I had become limber gunner, and it was part of my special duty to see to the ammunition in the limbers. But special duties at a time like that don't count for much ; the chief thing is to keep the guns going, and it was now a case of every one, officer and man, striving his best to save the battery. The officers, while they lived and could keep up at all, were noble, and worked exactly like the men. From start to finish of that fatal fight they set a glorious example.

We rushed to the guns, I say, and with the horses, when they were living and unhurt, and man-handling when the poor beasts were killed or maimed, we made shift to bring as heavy a fire as we could raise against the Germans. The advantage was clearly and undoubtedly with them—they were in position, they had our range, and they had far more guns and men, while we had half our horses watering by the sugar mill and shells were thick in the air and ploughing up the earth before we could get a single gun into action.

Let me stop for a minute to explain what actually happened to the guns, so that you can understand the odds against us as we fought. The guns, as you have seen, were ready for marching, not for fighting, which we were not expecting; half the horses were away, many at the guns were killed or wounded, and officers and men had suffered fearfully in the course literally of a few seconds after the "ranging" shot plumped into us.

The first gun came to grief through the terrified horses bolting and overturning it on the steep bank of the road in front of us; the second gun had the spokes of a wheel blown out by one of the very first of the German shells, the third was disabled by a direct hit with a shell which killed the detachment; the fourth was left standing, though the wheels got knocked about and several holes were made in the limber, and all the horses were shot down. The fifth gun was brought into action, but was silenced by the detachment being killed, and the sixth gun, our own, remained the whole time, though the side of the limber was blown away, the wheels were severely damaged, holes were blown in the shield, and the buffer was badly peppered by shrapnel bullets. The gun was a wreck, but, like many another wreck, it held gallantly on until the storm was over—and it was saved at last.

In a shell fire that was incessant and terrific, accompanied by the hail of bullets from the maxims, we got to work.

We had had some truly tremendous cannonading at Mons; but this was infinitely worse, for the very life of the battery was in peril, and it was a point-blank battle, just rapid, ding-dong kill-fire, our own

shells and the Germans' bursting in a fraction of time after leaving the muzzles of the guns.

As soon as we were fairly in action, the Germans gave us a fiercer fire than ever, and it is only just to them to say that their practice was magnificent; but I think we got the pull of them, crippled and shattered though we were—nay, I know we did, for when the bloody business was all over, we counted far more of the German dead than all our battery had numbered at the start.

The thirteen-pounders of the Royal Horse Artillery can be fired at the rate of fifteen rounds a minute, and though we were not perhaps doing that, because we were short-handed and the limbers were about thirty yards away, still we were making splendid practice, and it was telling heavily on the Germans.

As the mist melted away we could at that short distance see them plainly—and they made a target which we took care not to miss. We went for the German guns and fighting men, and the Germans did all they knew to smash us—but they didn't know enough, and failed.

As soon as we got number six gun into action I jumped into the seat and began firing, but so awful was the concussion of our own explosions and the bursting German shells that I could not bear it for long. I kept it up for about twenty minutes, then my nose and ears were bleeding because of the concussion, and I could not fire any more, so I left the seat and got a change by fetching ammunition.

And now there happened one of those things which, though they seem marvellous, are always taking place in time of war, and especially such a war as this, when life is lost at every turn. Immediately after I

left the seat, Lieutenant Campbell, who had been helping with the ammunition, took it, and kept the firing up without the loss of a second of time; but he had not fired more than a couple of rounds when a shell burst under the shield. The explosion was awful, and the brave young officer was hurled about six yards away from the very seat in which I had been sitting a few seconds earlier. There is no human hope against such injuries, and Mr. Campbell lived for only a few minutes.

Another officer who fell quickly while doing dangerous work was Lieutenant Mundy, my section officer. He was finding the range and reporting the effects of our shells. To do that he had left the protection of the shield and was sitting on the ground alongside the gun wheel. This was a perilous position, being completely exposed to the shells which were bursting all around. Mr. Mundy was killed by an exploding shell which also wounded me. A piece of the shell caught me just behind the shoulder-blade. I felt it go into my back, but did not take much notice of it at the time, and went on serving the gun. Mr. Mundy had taken the place of Mr. Marsden, the left-section officer. The latter had gone out from home with us; but he had been badly wounded at Mons, where a shrapnel bullet went through the roof of his mouth and came out of his neck. In spite of that dreadful injury, however, he stuck bravely to his section.

I am getting on a bit too fast, perhaps, so I will return to the time when I had to leave the seat of the gun owing to the way in which the concussion had affected me. When I felt a little better I began to help Driver Osborne to fetch ammunition from

the waggons. I had just managed to get back to the gun with an armful of ammunition, when a lyddite shell exploded behind me, threw me to the ground, and partly stunned me.

I was on the ground for what seemed to be about five minutes and thought I was gone; but when I came round I got up and found that I was uninjured. On looking round, however, I saw that Captain Bradbury, who had played a splendid part in getting the guns into action, had been knocked down by the same shell that floored me. I had been thrown on my face, Captain Bradbury had been knocked down backwards, and he was about two yards away from me. When I came to my senses I went up to him and saw that he was mortally wounded. He expired a few minutes afterwards. Though the captain knew that death was very near, he thought of his men to the last, and repeatedly begged to be carried away, so that they should not be upset by seeing him or hearing the cries which he could not restrain. Two of the men who were wounded, and were lying in the shelter of a neighbouring haystack, crawled up and managed to take the captain back with them; but he died almost as soon as the haystack was reached.

By this time our little camp was an utter wreck. Horses and men were lying everywhere, some of the horses absolutely blown to pieces; waggons and guns were turned upside down, and all around was the ruin caused by the German shells. The camp was littered with fragments of shell and our own cartridge-cases, while the ground looked as if it had been ploughed and harrowed anyhow. Nearly all the officers and men had been either killed or wounded.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Germans

literally rained shrapnel and bullets on us. A German shell is filled with about three hundred bullets, so that with two or three shells bursting you get as big a cloud of bullets as you would receive from a battalion of infantry.

The Germans had ten of their guns and two machine-guns going, and it is simply marvellous that every man and horse in our battery was not destroyed. Bear in mind, too, that the German artillery was not all field-guns—they had big guns with them, and they fired into us with the simple object of wiping us out. That is quite all right, of course; but they never gave a thought to our wounded—they went for them just as mercilessly as they bombarded the rest.

There was a little farmhouse in our camp, an ordinary French farm building with a few round haystacks near it. When the fight began, we thought of using this building as a hospital; but it was so clear that the place was an absolute death-trap that we gave up that idea very quickly, and got our wounded under the shelter of one of the haystacks, where they were pretty safe so long as the stack did not catch fire, because a good thick stack will resist even direct artillery fire in a wonderful manner. But the Germans got their guns on this particular stack, and it was a very bad look-out for our poor, helpless fellows, many of whom had been badly mangled.

As for the farmhouse it was blown to pieces, as I saw afterwards when I visited it, and not a soul could have lived in the place. Walls, windows, roof, ceilings—all were smashed, and the furniture was in fragments. A building like that was a fair target; but the haystack was different, and the Germans did a thing that no British gunners would have done. At



that short distance they could see perfectly clearly what was happening—they could see that as our wounded fell we got hold of them and dragged them out of the deadly hail to the shelter of the stack, about a score of yards away, to comparative safety. Noticing this, one of the German officers immediately concentrated a heavy shell fire on the heap of wounded—thirty or forty helpless men—in an attempt to set fire to the stack. That was a deliberate effort to destroy wounded men. We saw that, and the sight helped us to put more strength into our determination to smash the German guns.

The Germans were mad to wipe us out, and I know that for my own part I would not have fallen into their clutches alive. My mind was quite made up on that point, for I had seen many a British soldier who had fallen on the roadside, dead beat, and gone to sleep—and slept for the last time when the Germans came up. On a previous occasion we passed through one place where there had been a fight—it must have been in the darkness—and the wounded had been put in a cemetery, the idea being that the Germans would not touch a cemetery. That idea proved to be wrong. One of the German aeroplanes that were constantly hovering over the battery had given some German batteries our position, but we got away, and the German gunners, enraged at our escape, instantly dropped shells into the cemetery, to wipe the wounded out. If they would do that they would not hesitate to fire deliberately on our wounded under the haystack—and they did not hesitate.

It was not many minutes after the fight began in the mist when only number six gun was left in the battery, and four of us survived to serve it—the

sergeant-major, who had taken command; Sergeant Nelson, myself, and Driver Osborne, and we fired as fast as we could in a noise that was now more terrible than ever and in a little camp that was utter wreckage. There was the ceaseless din of screaming, bursting shells, the cries of the wounded, for whom we could do something, but not much, and the cries of the poor horses, for which we could do nothing. The noise they made was like the grizzling of a child that is not well—a very pitiful sound, but, of course, on a much bigger scale; and that sound of suffering went up from everywhere around us, because everywhere there were wounded horses.

It was not long before we managed to silence several German guns. But very soon Sergeant Nelson was severely wounded by a bursting shell, and that left only three of us.

The Bays' horses, like our own, had been either killed or wounded or had bolted, but the men had managed to get down on the right of us and take cover under the steep bank of the road, and from that position, which was really a natural trench, they fired destructively on the Germans.

British cavalry, dismounted, have done some glorious work in this great war, but they have done nothing finer, I think, than their work near Compiègne on that September morning. And of all the splendid work there was none more splendid than the performance of a lance-corporal, who actually planted a maxim on his own knees and rattled into the Germans with it. There was plenty of kick in the job, but he held on gamely, and he must have done heavy execution with his six hundred bullets a minute.

This rifle and maxim fire of the Bays had a wonderful



[To face p. 128.]

“ PLANTED A MAXIM ON HIS OWN KNEES AND RATTLED INTO  
THE GERMANS.”

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
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effect in silencing the German fire, and it helped us greatly when we came to the last stage of the duel.

I don't know how many of the Bays there were, but it was impossible for them to charge, even if they had had their horses, owing to the fact that the road in front of us was a deep cutting. If the cutting had not been there the Uhlans, who alone considerably outnumbered us, would have swept down on us and there would not have been anyone left in L Battery at any rate.

By the time we had practically silenced the German guns the three of us who were surviving were utterly exhausted. Osborne, who was kneeling beside a waggon wheel, had a narrow escape from being killed. A shell burst between the wheel and the waggon body, tore the wheel off, and sent the spokes flying all over the place. One of the spokes caught Osborne just over the ribs and knocked him over, backwards.

I looked round on hearing the explosion of the shell, and said, "I think Osborne's gone this time," but we were thankful to find that he was only knocked over. One of his ribs was fractured, but we did not know of this till afterwards.

Meanwhile, the men who had gone to water the horses of the left-half battery had heard the firing, and had tried hard to get back to help us; but they were met on the road by an officer, who said that the battery was practically annihilated, and it would be useless for them to return. The Germans had seen them watering the horses, and had begun to shell the sugar factory. This caused the remaining horses of the battery to gallop away, and a lot of them were killed as they galloped, though a good many got away and were afterwards found in the neighbouring

town of Compiègne, wandering about. As for the men, they "mooched" in any direction as stragglers, and eventually we came up with them.

The three of us had served the gun and kept it in action till it was almost too hot to work, and we were nearly worn out; but we went on firing, and with a good heart, for we knew that the Germans had been badly pounded, that the Bays had them in a grip, and that another battery of horse-gunners was dashing to the rescue. On they came, in glorious style—there is no finer sight than that of a horse battery galloping into action.

Two or three miles away from us I Battery had heard the heavy firing, and knew that something must be happening to us. Round they turned, and on they dashed, taking everything before them and stopping for nothing till they reached a ridge about 2000 yards away; then they unlimbered and got into action, and never was there grander music heard than that which greeted the three of us who were left in L Battery when the saving shells of "I" screamed over us and put the finish to the German rout.

In a speech made to I Battery Sir John French said—

"No branch of the Service has done better work in this campaign than the Royal Horse Artillery. It is impossible to pick out one occasion more than another during this campaign on which I Battery has specially distinguished itself, because the battery has always done brilliant work. Your general tells me that you were in action continuously for ten days. . . ."

We had been pretty well hammered out of existence,

but we had a kick left in us, and we gave it, and what with this and the Bays and the bashing by the fresh battery, the Germans soon had enough of it, and for the time being they made no further effort to molest us.

At last the fight was finished. We had—thank God!—saved the guns, and the Germans, despite their frantic efforts, had made no progress, and had only a heap of dead and wounded and a lot of battered guns to show for their attempt to smash us in the morning mist. We had kept them off day after day, and we kept them off again. We had been badly punished, but we had mauled them terribly in the fight, which lasted about an hour.

Three of our guns had been disabled, two waggons blown up, and many wheels blown off the waggons.

Some strange things had happened between Mons and Compiègne, and now that the duel had ended we had a chance of recollecting them and counting up the cost to us. Corporal Wheeler Carnham was knocked down while trying to stop a runaway ammunition waggon, and one of the wheels went over his legs. He managed to get on his feet again, but he had no sooner done so than he was struck on the legs by a piece of shell. At Compiègne two gunners were blown to pieces and could not be identified. Driver Laws had both legs broken by a waggon which turned over at Mons, and afterwards the waggon was blown up, and he went with it. Shoeing-Smith Heath was standing alongside me at Compiègne when the firing began. I told him to keep his head down, but he didn't do so—and lost it. The farrier was badly wounded, and the quartermaster-sergeant was knocked down and run over by an ammunition

waggon. Gunner Huddle, a signaller, was looking through his glasses to try to find out where the shells were coming from, when he was struck on the head by a piece of bursting shell.

Our commanding officer, Major the Hon. W. D. Selater-Booth, was standing behind the battery, dismounted, as we all were, observing the fall of the shells, when he was hit by a splinter from a bursting shell and severely wounded. He was removed, and we did not see him again until we were on the way to the base. As far as I remember, he was taken off by one of the cavalry officers from the Bays.

Lieutenant Giffard, our right section officer, was injured early in the fight by a shell which shattered his left knee, and he was taken and placed with the rest of the wounded behind the haystack, where in a very short time they were literally piled up. As soon as the officers and men fell we did the best we could for them; but all we could do was just simply to drag them out of the danger of the bursting shells. Luckily, this particular haystack escaped fairly well, but very soon after the fight began nearly every haystack in the camp was blazing fiercely, set on fire by the German shells.

The first thing to be done after the fight was to bury our dead and collect our wounded, and in this sorrowful task we were helped by the Middlesex Regiment—the old “Die-Hards”—who have done so splendidly and suffered so heavily in this war. They, like I Battery, had come up, and we were very glad to see them. Some of our gallant wounded were beyond help, because of the shrapnel fire.

We buried our dead on the field where they had fallen, amidst the ruins of the battery they had fought



to save, and with the fire and smoke still rising from the ruined buildings and the burning haystacks.

Another thing we did was to go round and shoot the poor horses that were hopelessly hurt—and a sorry task it was. One waggon we went to had five horses killed—only one horse was left out of the six which had been hooked in to march away in the mist of the morning; so we shot him and put him out of his misery. We had to shoot about twenty horses; but the rest were already dead, mostly blown to pieces and scattered over the field—a dreadful sight.

When we had buried the dead, collected our wounded, and destroyed our helpless horses, the guns of our battery were limbered up on to sound waggon limbers, and a pair of horses were borrowed from each sub-section of I Battery to take them away. Everything else was left behind—waggons, accoutrements, clothing, caps, and so on, and the battery was taken to a little village about four miles from Compiègne, where we tried to snatch a bit of rest; but we had no chance of getting it, owing to the harassing pursuit of big bodies of Uhlans.

From that time, until we reached the base, we wandered about as best we could, and managed to live on what we could get, which was not much. We were in a pretty sorry state, most of us without caps or jackets, and we obtained food from other units that we passed on the road.

We were marching, dismounted, day and night, till we reached the rail-head, where I was transferred to the base and sent home. The sergeant-major and Osborne came home at the same time, and the sergeant-major is now a commissioned officer. So is Sergeant Nelson.

After such a furious fight and all the hardships and sufferings of Mons and the retreat, it seems strange and unreal to be back in peaceful London. I don't know what will happen to me, of course, but whatever comes I earnestly hope that some day I shall be able to go back to the little camp where we fought in the morning mist in such a deadly hail of shell, and look at the resting-places of the brave officers and men who gave their lives to save the battery they loved so well.

## CHAPTER XI

### SIXTEEN WEEKS OF FIGHTING

[Indomitable cheerfulness and consistent courage are two of the outstanding features of the conduct of the British soldier in the war, and these qualities are finely shown in this story of some of the doings of the 1st Battalion Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, which has greatly distinguished itself and suffered heavily. Private Montgomery is a member of a fighting family, for he has a brother in the Royal Navy, two brothers in the Rifle Brigade, one in the Army Service Corps, and one in the Royal Army Medical Corps, so that there are six brothers serving their country in this time of urgent need.]

I DON'T know whether you have seen the picture of the retreat from Moscow, showing everybody going along in a drove, this, that, and the other way. You know it? Well, that wasn't a patch on some parts of the great retirement on Paris; but there was this enormous difference, that the retreat from Moscow was just that and nothing more, while our retirement was simply the beginning of what was to be a splendid victory.

It led up to the present tremendous fighting and this terrific trench work; and let me say that it is impossible for anybody who has not taken part in that trench warfare to realise what it means. Words and pictures will enable you to understand the life to some extent, but only by sharing in it will you fully realise its awful meaning.

But I'm not grumbling—I'm only stating a fact.

Trench life is hard and dismal work, especially in a winter like this; but everything that it has been possible to do for the British soldier by the folk at home has been done.

Look at this—one of the new skin coats that have been served out to us. This is the way we wear it—yes, it certainly does smell, but it's goat-skin, and might have done with a bit more curing—and I can tell you that it takes a lot of even the wet and wind of the Low Countries to get through the fur and skin. These coats are splendid, and a perfect god-send.

I won't attempt to tell you about things exactly as they happened; I'll talk of them just as they come into my mind, so that you can understand what the Royal West Kents have done.

I can speak, I hope, as a fully-trained soldier, for I served eight years with the colours and two years in the Reserve before I was called up, and I did seven years abroad, in China, Singapore, and India; so I had got into the way of observing things that interest a soldier.

Well, one of my first and worst experiences was when at about ten-thirty at night the order for a general retirement was given, but through some mistake that order did not reach a sergeant and fourteen of the West Kents, of whom I was one, and it was not until just before four o'clock in the morning that we got the word, and began to try and pull ourselves out of it.

The Germans were then not more than eighty yards away from us, and our position was desperate. To make matters worse, the bridge by which we had to get across a neighbouring canal had been

blown up, but as it happened the detonator on the overhead part of the bridge had not exploded, so that there was still a sort of communication across the water.

The bridge was full of wire entanglements and broken chains—a mass of metal wreckage—and the only way of crossing was to scramble along the ruins and crawl along what had been the iron parapet, which was only eight or nine inches wide. You will best understand what I mean if you imagine one of the iron bridges over the Thames destroyed, and that the principal thing left is the flat-topped iron side which you often see.

Under a terrible fire we made for the parapet and got on to it as best we could. I was the last man but one to get on to it. Just in front of me was Lance-corporal Gibson, and just behind me was Private Bailey.

With the Germans so near, so many of them, and keeping up such a heavy fire on us, you can imagine what it meant to crawl along a twisted parapet like that. The marvel is that a single one of us escaped, but a few of us did, which was no credit to the German marksmanship.

The bullets whizzed and whistled around us and very soon both the man in front of me and the man behind were struck.

The corporal was knocked straight over and disappeared. Bailey was shot through the instep, but he managed to hold on to the parapet, and to make a very singular request.

“Mont,” he said, “come and take my boot off!”

I turned round and saw what had happened to him; but, of course, it wasn't possible to do what he

asked, when it needed every bit of one's strength and skill to hang on to the parapet and keep crawling, so I cried back, "Never mind about taking your boot off—come on!"

It was no use saying anything; poor chap, he would insist on having his boot off, so I said, "For Heaven's sake get along, or we shall all get knocked over!" And with that I started to crawl again, and to get ahead as best I could.

The corporal, as I have said, had gone; he had been hit right between the shoulder-blades, and I just saw him roll over into the horrible barbed-wire entanglements.

What exactly happened to poor Bailey I don't know. I hadn't a chance of looking back, but I heard afterwards that both he and the corporal were found lying there, dead, with their faces spattered with blood.

At last, after what seemed like a miraculous escape, I got clear of the parapet, with a few more, and landed safely on the other side of the canal, looking for the West Kents; but it had been impossible to re-form any battalion, and regiments were walking about like flocks of sheep. Efforts were being made to re-form our own men, but at that time there was no chance of doing so.

It was the sight of these disorganised and wandering soldiers that brought to my mind the picture of the retreat from Moscow.

It was not until we reached Le Cateau that the handful of us rejoined the regiment, and so far as fighting went we merely changed from bad to worse.

At Le Cateau the West Kents held the second line of trenches, and the Yorkshire Light Infantry were in the first line, so that we were supporting

them. We had the 121st and 122nd Batteries of the Royal Field Artillery in front of us—and no troops could wish for better gunners than the British.

We got into the trenches at about four-thirty on the morning of the 26th, and remained in them for something like twelve hours, and during that time we took part in what was probably the fiercest battle that had ever been fought up to that time, though there was worse to follow in the Ypres region. We were rather unlucky, as it happened, because we were forced to lie in the trenches and watch the other regiments and our artillery shelling the enemy without our being able to fire a shot, for we were so placed that we could not do anything effective against the enemy just then.

The Yorkshire Light Infantry retired, and then came the order for the West Kents to go. It was an order that needed the greatest care and courage to carry out, but it had been given, and, of course, the West Kents always do just what they are told to do. We did so now, with the result, I am proud to say, that we carried out Colonel Martyn's command to the letter.

“Don't get excited in any way,” he said. “Just go off as if you were on battalion parade.”

And we did, and the colonel showed us how to do it, for he walked off just as he might have walked off the barrack square, though all the time we were under heavy shell fire and our men were falling. We lost a fair number, but not many, considering the nature of the fire upon us.

We got as far as St. Quentin, which is a big town, trying to find out where our regiment had gone; but we got cold comfort, for a man came up and

said: "It's no good going in there. The town's surrounded. The best thing you can do is to put down your arms and surrender."

We didn't relish the surrender suggestion, and we started to make inquiries. A sergeant who spoke French went up to a gendarme who was at the side of the railway station, and asked him if it was true that the town was surrounded.

The gendarme replied that he didn't know, but he believed the statement was true; anyway he advised us to remain where we were.

Not satisfied with that, about half a dozen of us went up to a French cavalry officer and put the question to him.

The cavalry officer, like the gendarme, said he didn't know, but told us that the best thing we could do was to go on to a place, which he named, about eight miles away, and off we went; but before we reached it we came across a cavalry division, and learned that it was not safe to go farther. Again we were advised to remain where we were, and we did for the time being.

It was not until later that we discovered what a narrow escape we had had, for three German cavalry divisions had been ordered to pursue the retiring troops hereabouts, but through a blunder the order had miscarried and the Uhlans did not follow us.

In such a serious business as this we had, of course, lost heavily, and we continued to lose. Major Buckle, D.S.O., one of the bravest men that ever stepped in a pair of shoes in the British Army, lost his life in attempting to distribute the West Kents. That is merely one of many instances of officers and men who were killed under fire.



Sometimes men were lost in the most extraordinary manner, especially owing to shell fire. At one time about six big shells burst, and in the wreckage caused by one of the explosions ten men were buried.

Men volunteered to go and try to dig these poor fellows out, but as fast as the volunteers got to work they, too, were shelled and buried, so that in the end about thirty men were buried—buried alive. It was useless to attempt to continue such a forlorn hope, and it was impossible to dig the men out, so they had to be left. It was hard to do this, but there was nothing else for it.

Bodies of men were lost, too, as prisoners, when overpowering numbers of Germans had to be met, or when the Germans rushed unarmed men and left them no alternative to capture. A doctor and twenty-five men of the West Kents who were acting as stretcher-bearers were taken. Very splendid work is done by the stretcher-bearers, who go to the trenches every night to collect the wounded, and bring them in to the hospitals. All sorts of buildings and places are used as hospitals, and in this case it was the cellar of a house in a village that was utilised. The men were not armed, as they were acting as members of the Royal Army Medical Corps, to render first aid.

Just about midnight the Germans broke through the line and surrounded the village, and rushed in and captured the stretcher-bearers, and took them off, no doubt thinking they had gallantly won a very fine prize.

I remember this particular occasion well, because on the following morning we were reinforced by some of the native Bhopal Infantry, from India, and that took me back to the time I spent in that country. Little did I think in those days, when we were asso-

ciated so much with the troops of the Indian Army, that the day would come when, in the heart of winter, we and the Indians would be fighting side by side in the awful Low Countries.

I got used to the heat of the day and the cold of the night in India, but it wasn't easy to become accustomed to the sweltering heat of the earlier days of the war, or the bitter cold of the winter.

One day, not long before I came home, we had six miles to do, after a very heavy fall of snow. We ploughed through the snow in the daytime, and at night we travelled in the transport, but what with the snow by day and the bitter freezing by night, we were fourteen hours covering that short distance—which works out at something under half a mile an hour. And that was the roundabout way we had to go to get at some enemy trenches which were only about fifty yards away from us. But, in spite of this terrific weather, we had only one or two cases of frost-bite.

A change on trench work and actual fighting came with my being told off as an ammunition carrier. There are two ammunition carriers to each company, and our duty was to keep the firing line well supplied with ammunition. This we fetched from the pack-mules, which were some distance away, and we took it to the men in the firing line in bandoliers, which we filled from the boxes carried by the mules. It was lively work, especially when the mules turned awkward and the firing was hot; but we got through it all right—Lance-Corporal Tweedale and myself.

One night, when the shell and rifle fire was very heavy, we went up to the firing line with ammunition, which was badly wanted, and we had such a hot

time of it that the officer in charge advised us to remain for a couple of hours, till the firing slackened or ceased; but we had a feeling that it would be more comfortable in the rear, and as the matter rested with us we started off to get back.

This was one of the most uncomfortable bits of journeying I ever undertook, for in order to shelter from the fire of the Germans, which threatened every second to kill us, we had to crawl along a ditch for fully three-quarters of a mile. We crawled along in the darkness, with the bullets whizzing and shells bursting; but we lay low, and at last got out of it and landed back at the rear, which was certainly more agreeable than being in the very thick of the firing line.

I am proud to be one of the Royal West Kents, because they have done so well in this great war. "Give 'em a job and they'll do it," a general said of us, just after Le Cateau. One day another general said, "What regiment is that coming out of the trenches?" The answer was, "The Royal West Kent, sir," and the general promptly said, "For Heaven's sake give them a rest—they've earned it!" But we hadn't gone more than two hundred yards when a staff officer told us to get into position in a field and dig ourselves in—and we were the last out of action that day.

At another time, when we had been hard at it, a general said: "Come on, West Kents! In another half-hour you'll be in your billets." And we went on, for that sounded very cheerful; but, instead of going into billets, we had half-an-hour's rest for a drop of tea—then we went on outpost duty for the night, and woke in the morning in a big scrap.

I am mentioning these things just to show how

unexpectedly disappointments came at times; but we soon got into the way of taking these set-backs as part of the day's work.

When the winter advanced, the strain became uncommonly severe, but we were able to bear it owing to the first-rate system of relief we had—a relief which gave us as much change as possible on the confinement and hardship of the actual trenches.

Some very strange things happened in the trenches, and none were stranger than those cases of men being in them for long periods under heavy fire and escaping scot free, to be succeeded by others who lost their lives almost as soon as they got into their places.

There was one youngster—he could not have been more than seventeen or eighteen—who had been in France only about a fortnight. He was having his second day in the trenches, and, like a good many more who are new to the business, he was curious to see what was going on. This was particularly dangerous, as the Germans were only sixty yards away, and any seen movement on the part of our men brought instant fire.

The officer kept telling the youngster to keep down, and more than once he pulled him down; but the lad seemed fascinated by the port-hole of the trench—the loop-hole, it is generally called—and he looked through it again; once too often, for a German marksman must have spotted him. Anyway, a bullet came through the port-hole and struck the lad just under the eye, went through his brain, and killed him on the spot.

I will give you another curious instance, that of Sergeant Sharpe. It was his turn to be in reserve, but he had volunteered to go up to the trenches,

to look round. He had scarcely had time to put his feet in them before a shot came and struck him between the eyes, killing him instantly.

I specially remember the sad case of the inquisitive youngster, because it happened on the very day I was wounded, and that was December 16. I was in a trench, sitting over a coke fire in a biscuit tin, when a bullet struck me on the chin—here's the scar—then went to the back of the trench, where it struck a fellow on the head, without seriously hurting him, and came back to me, hitting me just over the right eye, but not doing any serious mischief. After that I was sent into hospital, and later on came home.

On the way back I came across two very singular cases. One was that of a man who had had his arm amputated only a fortnight previously, and he was not used to it. He used to turn round and say, "I keep putting up my hand to scratch the back of it—and the hand isn't there!"

I saw another poor fellow—quite a youngster—who was being carried on a stretcher to the train. Both his legs had been blown off by a shell. I was right alongside when he said, "For Heaven's sake cover up my feet—they're cold!" He lived for about half an hour after that, but never reached the train.

There is one thing I would like to say in finishing, and that is to thank our own flesh and blood for what they have done for us. I'm sure there never can have been a war in which so much has been done in the way of sending presents like cigarettes and tobacco; but I think that too much has been sent at one time, and that friends would do well to keep some of the good gifts back a bit. They will all be wanted later on.

## CHAPTER XII

### A DAISY-CHAIN OF BANDOLIERS

[In this story we become acquainted with a brilliant bit of work done by our brave little Gurkhas, fresh from India, and we learn of a splendid achievement under a deadly fire—the sort of act for which many of the Victoria Crosses awarded recently have been given. The teller of this story was, at the time of writing, home from the front. He is Private W. H. Cooperwaite, 2nd Battalion Durham Light Infantry, a fine type of the Northerners who have done so much and suffered so heavily in the war.]

I WAS wounded at Ypres—badly bruised in the back by a piece of a “Jack Johnson.” There is nothing strange in that, and people have got used to hearing of these German shells; but the main thing about this particular customer was that it was the only one that burst out of eighteen “Jack Johnsons” I counted at one time. If the other seventeen had blown up, I and a lot more of the Durhams would not have been left alive. That same shell killed two of my comrades.

We went into action very soon after leaving England. We had had plenty of tough marching, and on the way we grew accustomed to the terrible evidences of the Germans’ outrages.

In one place, going towards Coulommiers, we came across tracks of the German hosts. They had ravaged and destroyed wherever they had passed, and amongst

other sights our battalion saw were the bodies of two young girls who had been murdered. The men didn't say much when they set eyes on that, but they marched a good deal quicker, and so far from feeling any fear about meeting the Germans, the sole wish was to get at them.

After a four days' march we got to Coulommiers, where we came up with the French, who had been holding the Germans back and doing fine work. That was in the middle of September, when the Battle of the Aisne was in full swing. On the 19th we went into the trenches, and after a spell in them we were billeted in a house. We had settled down nicely and comfortably, when crash came a shell, and so tremendous was the mischief it did that we had only just time to make a rush and clear out before the house collapsed.

It just sort of fell down, as if it was tired out, and what had been our billet was a gaping ruin. That was the kind of damage which was being done in all directions, and it told with sorry effect on those who were not so lucky as we had been, and were buried in the smash. All the cellars were crowded with people who had taken refuge in them, and they lived in a state of terror and misery during these continuous bombardments by German guns.

After that lively bit of billeting we returned to the trenches, and on Sunday, the 20th, with the West Yorkshires on our right, we were in the very thick of heavy fighting. The artillery on both sides was firing furiously, and the rifles were constantly going. Our own fire from the trenches was doing very heavy mischief amongst the Germans, and they were losing men at such a rate that it was clear to

them that they would have to take some means of stopping it, or get so badly mauled that they could not keep the fight going.

Suddenly there was a curious lull in the fighting and we saw that a perfect horde of the Germans were marching up to the West Yorkshires, carrying a huge flag of truce.

It was a welcome sight, and we thought, "Here's a bit of pie for the Tykes—they must have been doing good." They had lost heavily, but it seemed from this signal of surrender that they were to be rewarded for their losses.

A large party of the West Yorkshires went out to meet the Germans with the flag, and I watched them go up until they were within fifty yards of the enemy. I never suspected that anything wrong would happen, nor did the West Yorkshires, for the surrender appeared to be a fair and aboveboard business.

When only that short distance separated the Germans and the West Yorkshires, the leading files of the surrender party fell apart like clockwork and there were revealed to us, behind the flag of truce, stretchers with machine-guns on them, and these guns were set to work at point-blank range on the West Yorkshires, who, utterly surprised and unprepared, were simply mown down, and suffered fearfully before they could pull themselves together.

Now, this dastardly thing was done in full view of us; we could see it all, and our blood just boiled. What we would have liked best of all was a bayonet charge; but the Germans were too far off for the steel, and it seemed as if they were going to have it all their own way.

They had given us a surprise, and a bad one;



but we had a worse in store for them—we also had machine-guns, and they were handy, and we got them to work on the dirty tricksters and fairly cut them up. The whole lot seemed to stagger as our bullets showered into them. That was one of the cowardly games the Germans often played at the beginning of the war; but it did not take the British long to get used to them, and very soon the time came when no risks were taken, and the stretcher dodge was played out.

That Sunday brought with it some heavy fighting, and some very sad losses. There was with us an officer whose family name is very particularly associated with the Durham Light Infantry, and that was Major Robb, as good and brave a gentleman as ever breathed.

After that proof of German treachery he received information that the Germans meant to attack us again; but Major Robb thought it would be better to turn things about, and let *us* do the attacking. I dare say he was burning to help to avenge the losses of the West Yorkshires, the poor fellows who were lying dead and wounded all around us.

To carry out an attack like that was a desperate undertaking, because the Germans were six hundred yards away, and the ground was all to their advantage. It rose towards them, and they were on the skyline, so that it became doubly difficult to reach them.

Well, the order was given to advance, and we got out of our trenches and covered most of the distance in good order. Bit by bit we made our way over the rising ground towards that skyline which was a blaze of fire, and from which there came shells and bullets constantly.

There could be no such thing, of course, as a dash, however swift, towards the skyline; we had to creep and crawl and make our way so as to give them as little to hit as possible; but it was terrible—too terrible.

We fell down under that deadly blast, and though I am not a particularly religious man, I'll own that I offered up a prayer, and the man on my left said something of the same sort too. Poor chap! He had scarcely got the words out of his mouth, when over he went, with a bullet in his neck, and there he lay, while those of us who were fit and well kept up and crept up.

At last we were near enough to the skyline to give the Germans rapid fire, and we rattled away as fast as we could load and shoot, till the rifles were hot with firing. After that rapid fire we crept up again, and it was then that I saw Major Robb lying down, facing us, and smoking a pipe—at least he had a pipe in his mouth, just as cool as usual. He sang out to my platoon officer, "How are you feeling, Twist?"

Lieutenant Twist answered, "Oh, I'm about done for." I looked at him and saw that he was wounded in the chest and arm. We had to go on, and we could not take him back just then.

The lieutenant had scarcely finished speaking when I saw Major Robb himself roll over on his side. A poor lad named Armstrong, with four more of our men, crept up to attend to the major, but a piece of shrapnel struck the lad on the head and killed him—and other men were falling all around me.

There was no help for it now—we had to get back to our trenches, if we could; that was our

only chance, as the Germans were hopelessly greater in number than we were. So we made our way back as best we could, and we took with us as many of the wounded as we could get hold of.

Time after time our men went back for the wounded; but, in spite of all we could do, some of the wounded had to be left where they had fallen.

We got back, the survivors of us, to the trenches, and we had hardly done so when we heard a shout. We looked up from the trenches, and saw Major Robb on the skyline, crawling a little way.

Instantly a whole lot of us volunteered to go and fetch the major in; but three were picked out—Lance-Corporal Rutherford, Private Warwick, and Private Nevison.

Out from the trenches the three men went; up the rising ground they crawled and crept; then, at the very skyline, Rutherford and Nevison were shot dead, and Warwick was left alone. But he was not left for long. Private Howson went to help him, and he actually got to the ridge and joined him, and the two managed to raise the major up; but as soon as that had been done the officer was shot in a vital part, and Warwick also was hit.

More help went out, and the major and Warwick were brought in; but I grieve to say that the poor major, who was loved by all of us, died soon after he reached the trenches.

That furious fight had cost the Durhams very dearly. When the roll was called we found that we had lost nearly 600 men, and that in my own company only one officer was left. This was Lieutenant Bradford, one of the bravest men I ever saw. At one time, when we had lost a young officer and a

man with a machine-gun, Lieutenant Bradford worked the gun himself. I am sorry to say that he was killed in another battle later on.

Now I am going to leave the Valley of the Aisne and get round to Flanders, where we found ourselves near Ypres, faced by a big force of Germans.

Again we were with our friends the West Yorkshires—they were on our right, and on our left we had the East Yorkshires, so that there were three North-country regiments together. Near Ypres we soon had to carry out a smart bit of work which, in a way, proved very pathetic. The Durhams were ordered to take a small village, and we went for it. We reached a farmhouse, and there we found about a score of women and children. Some of our men were sent into the house, but they could not make the women and children understand English. The poor souls were terrified; they had had to do with Germans, and as they were not familiar with our uniforms they thought we were Germans too—another lot of the breed from which they had suffered so much.

We fetched Captain Northey to explain things to the women, and as he entered the house a shell burst near him and took off part of one of his trouser-legs, but without hurting him. The captain took no notice of this little drawback, and into the house he went, and made the women understand that we were English troops; and I can assure you that when they realised that they simply went wild with joy, and hugged and kissed us.

We had gone out to learn, if we could, something about the enemy's strength, and we got to know that there were about 30,000 Germans in front of our brigade, and that they were entrenched.

The Sherwood Foresters, who were in reserve to us, were ordered to relieve us, and it was wonderful to see the way in which they came into the village we had taken, smoking cigarettes as if they were doing a sort of route-march, although they came right up against a hail of bullets, with the usual shells. In face of such tremendous odds they had to retire; but, like good soldiers, they prepared another lot of trenches near the village, and later on we went into them.

In such fighting as this war brings about there are many, many sad incidents, and one of the saddest I know of occurred at this particular village. There was a fine young soldier named Matthews, who came from West Hartlepool, I think it was. He was struck by shrapnel, and we saw that he was badly hurt. We did what we could for him, but it was clear that he was mortally wounded, and that he knew it. His last thought was for home and wife, and he said he would like his cap-badge to be sent to her, to be made into a brooch. I believe that a comrade, who was also a neighbour of his, undertook to do this for him.

It was my good fortune to see the little Gurkhas rout the enemy, who had attacked them, and to give the Germans a most unpleasant shock.

The Germans had been shelling the East Yorkshires, who were now on the right of the Durhams. The enemy had the range almost to an inch, and the effect of the shelling was terrible. Hour after hour this shelling was kept up pitilessly, and the German aeroplanes—"birds," we called them—swooped about and saw the havoc that was being done. This sort of thing went on till after dark,

and the Durhams wondered if any of the East Yorkshires were left.

There was a surprise in store for us at dawn next day when we awoke, for the East Yorkshires' trenches were full of Gurkhas, who had slipped in during the night. The Germans knew nothing of this. All they knew was that their shells had been pounding on the East Yorkshires for hours, and doubtless they had satisfied themselves that no troops on earth could stand such a gruelling.

The Germans came on pretty confidently, after dawn, to the position of the East Yorkshires—came on in a cloud. That was after we had repulsed an attack on ourselves, but not finally, owing to the vast numbers of the Germans. Perhaps they expected to find the trenches filled with English dead and wounded, and certainly to us it seemed as if the trenches must be in that condition, for the Gurkhas let the Germans come on without showing a sign of life.

The Germans gave enough warning—as they always do. Bugles sounded, and they rushed on, shouting and yelling; but still there was no sound from the trenches, no sign of life was seen. Even we, who had a fine view of the trenches, could see nothing. We were intensely interested, though we had plenty of hard work to do ourselves in firing at the enemy.

When the Germans got to within about forty yards of the trenches on our left, the little brown fellows, who had been lying so low, sprang up and simply poured over the tops of the trenches. That performance was one of the most extraordinary things seen in the war. The Gurkhas never even

attempted to fire; they just seemed to roll over the ground, gripping their long, curved knives.

We were too far off to see exactly what sort of expression came on the Germans' faces when the trenches, which were supposed to be choked with dead and wounded Britons, vomited these Indian warriors; but we saw the whole shouting, yelling line of Germans pull up sharp.

The Germans made a half-hearted effort to come on, then they wavered badly, and well they might, for by this time the little Gurkhas were on them with fury, and the blades flashed like lightning about the mass of startled Germans.

Stunned by the unexpectedness and swiftness of the Indian onslaught, terrified by the deadly wielding of the knives, the Germans made no real effort to withstand the rush from the trenches, and they broke and ran like rabbits, throwing down their rifles as they scuttled, with the Gurkhas leaping after them and doing fearful execution.

It was truly great, and as the victorious little warriors came back we gave them a cheer that was a real hurrah. We were as pleased as the Gurkhas were, and they showed their joy as they came back wiping their knives. They seemed all grin and knife as they returned, and we felt all the better for it, too, especially as we gave the broken, flying Germans a heavy peppering.

Only the Germans who were behind got away, or had a chance. Those in front, who had had to meet the Indians' swift, fierce spring, were done for as soon as the curved blades were whirling amongst them.

I had had a pretty good innings by this time, and had escaped serious injury, but I was very soon to

be bowled out. The Durhams were supporting the West Yorkshires, who had been badly cut up. We received word that the West Yorkshires had run short of ammunition, and that fresh supplies were urgently wanted. We advanced with supplies, and found that we had to cover about fifty yards of open ground. The Germans had got the exact range of this open ground, so that it was impossible to advance over it, except singly. The shell and rifle fire was particularly heavy, and it seemed as if nothing could live on that exposed stretch.

One by one we made a dash across that awful space towards the trenches where the Yorkshiremen were hungering for fresh ammunition, and each of us carried a full bandolier for the Tykes. A good many of our men fell, but a lot got through and took part in a very strange bit of work.

I got through myself, after being blown down by the force of a shell explosion near me—thank Heaven it was the force and not the shell itself that knocked me over for the moment! It was terrible going, for we soon found, after we began to make the journey, that we could not quite reach the Yorkshires' trenches.

There were some haystacks on the open ground, and we dodged behind them and dashed from one to the other, every dash meaning a shower of bullets from the Germans.

There was still the last fifty yards I have mentioned to be covered; but now it meant almost sure destruction to be seen, so we threw the bandoliers to the end man in the trenches, the man nearest to us; but a full bandolier is a heavy thing, and there was not much chance of taking aim. We were almost at our wits' end, but we tried another way. We made



a sort of daisy-chain of several bandoliers, and paid this out as best we could towards the trenches.

The nearest man in the trench—a plucky chap he was—slipped out and made a dart for the end of the chain. He just made a mad grab and got it. Then he dashed back to his trench, and it seemed as if the business was all over, and that the daisy-chain would be safely hauled in; but to the grief of all of us the chain broke when a few yards of it had been pulled in.

This was a dreadful disappointment, but still something had been done, some rounds of ammunition, at any rate, had been got into the trenches, and we were determined that the Tykes should have some more. We had to wait a bit, for as soon as the Yorkshireman had shot back to his trench, the ground that he had scuttled over was absolutely churned up by shells, and if he had been caught on it he would have been blown to rags. We lost no time in making other efforts, and at last the ammunition was safely delivered to the West Yorkshires in the trenches, and they did some rattling good business with it.

I have mentioned “Jack Johnsons,” and I want to speak of them again by way of finish. It was at Ypres that I was bowled out. These “J.J.’s” were falling heavily, but many of them were what you might call dumb—they didn’t speak. As I have said, I counted eighteen as they came, and out of the whole of that number only one exploded. But it was enough. I have already told you what happened to two of my comrades, and as for myself it settled me for the time being by badly bruising my spine and back.

And that’s the reason why I was invalided home.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DESPATCH-RIDING

[Particularly hard and responsible work has been done for the British Army by motor cycle despatch-riders. Many members of this fine branch of our fighting men abandoned very promising careers in civil life to go to the seat of war. Amongst them is Corporal Hedley G. Browne, Captain of the Norfolk Motor Cycle Club, who when war broke out volunteered for active service and became a motor cycle despatch-rider, attached to a signal company of the Royal Engineers. It is his story which is here retold. Of the work of the motor cycle despatch-riders Sir John French has spoken in terms of high praise, and when the King visited the front recently a number of the riders were specially brought to his Majesty's notice.]

I WAS in Ypres, billeted in a brewery, when that beautiful old city was still intact; I was there when the first German shell came and began the ruthless bombardment which has laid the city in ruins and added one more to the list of heavy debts which the Germans will have to pay when the war is over. The sooner that time comes the better, especially for those who have been at the front since the beginning, and have had to endure things which people at home cannot possibly realise. Five days ago I left the front for a flying visit home, and now I am on my way back. It has seemed a very short spell, and a big slice of the time has been eaten up in travelling. A nice batch of us came over together, and here we are assembling again, though it's a good hour before the boat-train starts.

We go to Boulogne, and then we shall get into motor lorries and be trundled off back to the fighting line. This is the kit we work and live in—even now my revolver is loaded in every chamber. No, so far, I haven't used it on a German; but it's shot a pig or two when we've wanted pork, and really there isn't much difference between the two. It is hard to believe that human beings committed some of the acts of which I saw so many during those four months at the front. The astounding thing is that the Germans don't realise that they have done anything wrong, and quite lately I was talking with some German prisoners who spoke English, who not only did not see this, but were also quite sure that the war will end in favour of Germany. By this time, however, they are changing their tune.

When I got to the front I was attached to a signal company, which consists of establishing communication between headquarters and three brigades, and that meant when we were on the march riding through about seven miles of troops, guns, waggons and hosts of other things. When in action we had to go quite up to the firing line, and very soon I hardly knew myself, as I got quite used to the bursting of shells and to the shocking condition of the killed and wounded. It was astonishing to see how soon men, who had been used to every comfort at home and who knew nothing of war in any shape or form, got accustomed to the hardships of campaigning and developed a callousness which is altogether foreign to their real nature.

One of the most amazing things about the war is the way in which it changes a man and makes him callous. I know that before I had anything to do with the Army I was so sensitive in some ways that the

mere thought of blood was almost enough to make me ill, yet now, after being for more than four months in the war, and having seen the havoc of the most terrific battles the world has ever known, I tear along the lonely roads and remain almost unmoved by the most dreadful sights. The dead pass unnoticed, and as for the wounded, you can do nothing, as a rule. You have your orders, and they must be obeyed without loss of time, because a motor despatch-rider is always on the rush.

I well remember the very first German I saw lying dead. He was an Uhlan, and was on the roadside. I was greatly distressed at the sight of him, there was something so sad about it all, but now there is no such sensation at the sight of even great numbers of the dead. A strange thing happened in connection with the Uhlan. I took his cap as a memento, and brought it home, with several other German caps and helmets, chunks of shell, clips of cartridges, and relics of altar-cloths; and now, for some cause which I can't quite fathom, the Uhlan's cap has turned a queer sort of yellow.

That strange callousness comes over one at the most unexpected times, and often enough a motor despatch-rider has to dash through a crowd of refugees and scatter them, though the very sight of the poor souls is heart-breaking. When Ypres was bombarded, the men, women and children thronged the roads, and all that was left to them in the world they carried in bundles on their backs; yet they had to be scattered like flocks of sheep when the motor despatch-riders rushed along. There was, however, one pleasing feature in the matter, and that was that these poor people knew that we were tearing along in their

interests as well as our own, and that we did not mean to hurt anybody—which was different, indeed, from the spirit of the enemy, whose policy was to spread terror and havoc wherever he could, and to destroy mercilessly. When I first went into Ypres it was a beautiful old city, very much like Norwich, but I saw the German guns smash the place and the shells set fire to glorious old structures like the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall. The two pieces of altar-cloth which I brought home were taken from the Cathedral while it was burning.

Though you soon get used to war, still there are always things coming along which are either particularly interesting or very thrilling. Perhaps the most exciting incident I can call to mind is the bringing down of a German aeroplane by a British brigade. That was on October 27th, when I was with the brigade. It was afternoon, and the aeroplane was flying fairly low, so that it was a good target for the rain of bullets which was directed on it. Even when flying low, an aeroplane is not easy to hit, because of its quick, dodging movements, but this machine was fairly got by the brigade. Suddenly there was an explosion in the aeroplane, flames shot out and the machine made a sickening, terrible somersault. I took it that a bullet or two had struck the petrol tank and blown the machine up—anyway, the airman was shot out and crashed to earth with fearful speed. You wanted to look away, but an awful fascination made you keep your eyes on what was happening. At first the man looked like a piece of paper coming down, then, almost before you could realise the tragedy that was taking place, the piece of paper took the form of a fellow-creature—then the end came. The man himself

smashed to earth about two hundred yards from the spot where I was watching, but the machine dropped some distance off. That was really one of the sights that no amount of war will accustom you to, and I shall never forget it as long as I live.

At first the weather was very hot, which made the work for the troops very hard. The machine I had soon struck work, and was left to be handed over to the Kaiser as a souvenir; and several other machines gave up the ghost in like manner. When a machine went wrong, it was left and a new one took its place—the list of casualties for motors of every sort is an amazingly heavy one; but casualties were inevitable, because in many places the roads that we had to take were perfect nightmares.

It was very hard going till we got used to it. During the first month at the front I had my boots off about three times—I am now wearing my fourth pair, which is an average of one a month—and we reckoned that we were lucky if we slept in a barn, with straw; if we couldn't manage that we turned in anywhere, in our greatcoats. When I say sleep, I mean lying down for an hour or two, as sometimes we did not billet till dark. Then we had some grub, anything we could get, and after that a message. Next day we were off, five times out of six, at 3.30 to four o'clock, and got long, hard days in.

Amongst the messages we had to carry there were none more urgent than those which were sent for reinforcements, the men upon whose coming the issue of a battle depended. It was tear and scurry all along, but somehow the message would get delivered all right and the reinforcements would hurry up and save the situation. Often enough a message would be de-

livered at midnight to a tired officer who was living in a dug-out, and I scarcely ever reached one of these warrens without being invited to take something of whatever was going—it might be a drink of hot coffee, with a biscuit, or a tot of rum, which was truly grateful after a bitter ride. That is the only thing in the way of alcoholic drink at the front, and very little of it. This is, for the British, a teetotal war; but for the Germans it has been the very reverse, and time after time we came across evidence of their drunken debauches.

The shell fire was so incessant that it was soon taken as part of the day's work. At first it was terrible, though one got used to it. My first experience of rifle fire did not come until I had been at the front for some weeks, and then I was surprised to find what a comparatively small thing it is compared with shells—it is not nearly so bad.

It was getting dark, and it was my duty to go down a lane where snipers were hidden in the trees. This was just the kind of lane you know in England, and you can easily picture what it meant. Imagine leaving your machine, as I did, in a tree-lined lane at home, and going down it, knowing that there were fellows up the trees who were on the watch to pot you, and you will realise what it meant; but you will have to picture also the sides of the lane being littered, as this was, with dead and wounded men. Well, I had to go down that lane, and I went—sometimes walking, sometimes running, with the bullets whizzing round and the shells bursting. But by good luck I escaped the bullets, though a piece of shell nearly nailed me—or would have got me if I had been with my machine. The fragment struck the cycle and I picked it up

and brought it home with the other things as a souvenir.

That escape was practically nothing. It was a detail, and came in the day's work; but I had a much more narrow shave a few days later. It was a Saturday and I had had a pretty hard time—amongst other things I had done a thirty-mile ride after one o'clock in the morning—the sort of ride that takes it out of you.

There was one of our orderlies with a horse near me and I was standing talking to him. We heard a shrapnel shell coming, and ducked our heads instinctively to dodge it—but the shell got at us. The horse was killed and the orderly was so badly hit that he died in less than an hour. He was buried in the afternoon, and very solemn the funeral was, with the guns booming all around. I was deeply shocked at the time, but war is war, and in a very short time the incident had passed out of my mind. Our fellows told me that I was one of the lucky ones that day.

That was the beginning of one of the most awful periods of the war, especially for the despatch-riders, for we were at it night and day. The roads were hopelessly bad, and as we were not allowed to carry any lamps at night the danger of rapid travel was greatly increased. We were, however, relieved to some extent by mounted men. The fighting was furious and incessant, and we were in the thick of a good deal of it. After a very hard spell I was quartered all day in a little stable, and it proved to be about the most dangerous place I had come across. On October 29th the Germans went for the stable with high explosives and the everlasting "scuttles." For some time these big shells came and burst in the locality, and two



houses within a score of yards of us were blown to pieces and enormous holes were driven in the ground.

From the stable we went to a house, and then we fairly got it. Four huge shells came, one after the other, and one came and ripped the roof just like paper. We were amazingly lucky, however, for the worst thing that happened was that a fellow was wounded in the leg. I was thankful when the order came to pack up and stand by, for there were in that little place about twenty of us from different regiments, and a single explosion would have put us all well beyond the power of carrying either despatches or anything else. For a while we could not understand why the enemy should so greatly favour us, but we soon learned that they were going for some French guns near us. So the firing went on, and when we went to sleep, as we did in spite of all, bullets ripped through the roof, coming in at one side of the building and going out at the other, and four more big shells paid us a most unwelcome visit.

I was thankful when we moved out of those unpleasant quarters and took up our abode in a large farmhouse about three hundred yards away. This was one of the very few buildings that had escaped the ravages of the German artillery fire. We made the move on the 30th, when the cannonade was very heavy, yet the only casualties were a pig and two horses. We were now much better protected from the Germans' fire, though the very house shook with the artillery duel and the noise grew deafening and almost maddening. I wrote home pretty often, and I remember that at this time I got behind a hedge to write a letter, and as I wrote bullets whizzed over my

head, fired by German snipers who were up some trees not very far away. They were going for our chaps in the trenches a mile away.

Mons had been bad, and there had been many harrowing sights on the retreat, but at the end of October and the beginning of November the climax of horror was reached. The Germans, mad to hack their way through to the coast, and perhaps realising that they would never do it, stuck at nothing. They were frantic, and I saw sights that would sicken any human being. No consideration weighed with them, they simply did their best to annihilate us—but they are trying still to do that and not succeeding.

We had left the farmhouse and gone into a large château, which served as headquarters, and here, on November 2nd, we had a ghastly experience. It is likely that the Germans knew the particular purpose to which the château had been devoted; at any rate they shelled it mercilessly, and no fewer than six staff officers were killed, while a considerable number were wounded. Again I was lucky, and came out of the adventure unscathed. On the following day, however, I was nearly caught. I had taken a message to headquarters and was putting my machine on a stand. To do this I had to leave a house, and go about fifty yards away, to the stand. I had scarcely left the building when two shells struck it fair and plump, and killed two motor cyclists and wounded three others. Like a flash I jumped into a ditch, and as I did so I heard the bits of burst shell falling all around me. When I got out of the ditch and went back along the main road I saw a huge hole which a shell had made. It was a thrilling enough escape, and shook me at the time, because I knew the two poor fellows who were

killed. That was the kind of thing we went through as we jogged along from day to day.

I am not, of course, giving a story of the war so much as trying to show what it means to be a motor cycle despatch-rider at the front. He is here, there and everywhere—and there is no speed limit. He is not in the actual firing line, yet he sees a great deal of what is going on. Sometimes he is very lucky, as I was myself one day, in being allowed to witness a fight that was taking place. I had taken a despatch to an officer, and perhaps conveyed some cheering news. Anyway, I had the chance to go to an eminence from which I could view the battle, and I went, and it was wonderful to see the waging of the contest over a vast tract of country—for in a war like this the ordinary fighter sees very little indeed of the battle. At this special point I had the rare chance of witnessing a fight as I suppose it is seen by the headquarters staff, and one of the strangest things about it was the little there was to be seen. There were puffs of smoke and tongues of flame—and the everlasting boom of guns; but not much more. Men are killed at long distances and out of sight in these days.

War is excessively wearing, and it was a blessed relief when a day came which was free from shells and bullets. That, indeed, was the calm after the storm. It came to us when we were snug in a farmyard about a mile away from a big town, with our motor-cars, cycles and horses so well under cover that the German aeroplanes did not find us out. Thankful indeed were we for the change, because the whole region where we were had been pitilessly bombarded, and there was nothing but devastation around us. Shells had done their work, and there was a special kind of bomb

which fired anything it touched that was inflammable. A great many petrol discs, about the size of a shilling, were discharged by the Germans, and these things, once alight, did amazing mischief. Villages were obliterated, and in the big town where we were billeted the engineers were forced to blow up the surrounding houses to prevent the entire place from being destroyed.

The glad time came when our Division was relieved for a time. We got a bit of rest, and I crossed the Channel and came home for a short spell. One of the last things I saw before I left the front was the Prince of Wales making a tour. At that time he was about fifteen miles from the firing line.

What was the most noticeable thing that struck me when I came back over the Channel? Well, that is not easy to say, but I know that I particularly noticed the darkness of the London streets.



[To face p. 168.

“THE MEN WERE TOLD TO LAY HANDS ON ANYTHING THAT WOULD FLOAT” (p. 172).

1875  
1876  
1877

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE THREE TORPEDOED CRUISERS

[Within a few minutes, on the morning of Tuesday, September 22nd, 1914, three large British cruisers, sister ships, foundered in the North Sea, after being torpedoed by German submarines, and nearly 1,500 officers and men perished. The ships were the *Aboukir*, *Cressy* and *Hogue*. Each was of 12,000 tons, with a speed of twenty-two knots, and each cost £750,000. The vessels were fine warships, but almost obsolete, and before the war it had been decided to sell them out of the Navy. The *Aboukir* was torpedoed, and while the *Hogue* and *Cressy* had closed, and were standing by to save the crew, they also were torpedoed. All three ships speedily sank. The boats were filled, and, later, destroyers and other vessels came up and rescued many of the survivors, amongst whom was C. C. Nurse, an able seaman of the *Hogue*, whose story is here retold. The casualties were very heavy; but, said the Admiralty, the lives lost were "as usefully, as necessarily, and as gloriously devoted to the requirements of his Majesty's service as if the loss had been incurred in a general action."<sup>23</sup>]

THE three cruisers, sister ships, were on patrol duty in the North Sea early on the morning of September 22nd. They were alone, protecting our own merchant ships and on the look-out for vessels that were mine-laying. The weather was nice, with a rather heavy swell on the water. There had been plenty of bad weather, and this was the first good day we had had for a week.

I had done my twelve years in the Navy and had been called up from the Royal Fleet Reserve. We had settled into our stride and had been in at the tail-end

of the scrap in the Heligoland Bight, where the *Hogue* got hold of the *Arethusa* and towed her away. At that time the *Arethusa* had been commissioned only about two days. We knew that she was just beginning her life; but we little thought that the *Hogue* was ending hers.

It was my watch below, and I was asleep in my hammock when the bugles sounded the *réveillé*, and we were shaken up and told that one of our ships was going down. We had turned in all standing, and lost no time in rushing on deck. Then I saw that the *Aboukir*, which was about six hundred yards away, was heeling over, and that we were steaming up to her assistance. At first we thought she had been mined; but we quickly learned that she had been torpedoed by German submarines. We were very soon alongside of her, and were doing everything we could to save the survivors. It was very clear that she was sinking, that a good many of the crew had been killed by the explosion, and that a lot of men, who were far below, in the engine-room and stokeholds, would have no chance of escaping.

We instantly started getting out the few boats that were left in our ship. There were only three, because we were cleared for action, and as it was war-time the great majority of them had been taken away. This has to be done so that there shall be as little woodwork as possible to be splintered by shells. With extraordinary speed some of the *Aboukir's* men had got to the *Hogue*, and some, who were badly hurt, had been taken to the sick-bay and were being attended to. The attack had come swiftly, and it was for us the worst of all attacks to guard against; but there was nothing like panic anywhere, and from the calm-



ness of things you might have thought that the three ships were carrying out some ordinary evolution.

I was standing on the starboard side of the after-shelter-deck of the *Hogue*, and could see a great deal of what was going on. With remarkable smartness and speed our two lifeboats were got away to the *Aboukir*, our men pulling splendidly on their life-saving errand. Our main derrick, too, was over the side and had got the launch out. The launch was a big rowing-boat, which would hold about a hundred men, and not a second had been lost in getting her afloat under the direction of Lieutenant-Commander Clive Phillipps-Wolley. He worked the derrick to get the launch out, though he was not in the best of health, and only a little while previously he had been ill in his bunk. He was near me on the after-bridge, which was above the shelter-deck, and I saw and heard him giving orders for the getting out of the launch. That was the last I knew about him. He was one of the lost.

The launch was afloat, and the men were ready to hurry up to the *Aboukir*; but before she could get away the very deck under my feet was blown up. There was a terrific explosion, and a huge column of wreckage rose. I was stunned for a moment by the force of the explosion. I thought we had been mined; but almost instantly there was a second explosion under me, and I knew that we had been torpedoed. The *Hogue* had been badly holed, and she began to heel over to starboard immediately.

It is only telling the plain truth to say that there was practically no confusion, and that every man was cool and going about his business as if no such thing as a calamity like this had happened. War is war,

and we were ready for all sorts of things—and the discipline of the British Navy always stands firm at a crisis.

There was naturally a good deal of noise, shouting of orders, and orderly rushing to and fro as men carried them out; but everything was done with wonderful coolness, and the splendid courage of the officers was reflected in the men. A noble example was set, and it was magnificently followed. The men waited until they got their orders, just as they did at any other time.

The captain was on the fore-bridge, and I heard him shouting; but as I was so far aft I could not clearly make out what he said. I know, however, that he was ordering every man to look after himself. The men were told to take their clothes off, and to lay hands on anything that would float. They promptly obeyed, and at the word of command a lot of them jumped overboard. There was then hope that we could all get to the *Cressy*, which was still uninjured, standing by and doing all she could to rescue the survivors of her two sister ships. Soon, however, she herself was torpedoed, and in a few moments it was perfectly clear that the three ships were going to the bottom of the sea.

All the cruisers shared the same fate, and were doomed. They were the only British ships at hand, and we did not expect the enemy, being Germans, to do anything for us. But everything that skill and resource could do was done by our own survivors without a moment's loss of time. In the sea there was an amazing collection of things that had been thrown overboard—tables, chairs, spars, oars, handspikes, targets and furniture from the officers' cabins,

such as chests of drawers. And everything that could float was badly wanted, because the sea was simply covered with men who were struggling for dear life, and knew that the fight would have to be a long and terrible one.

It takes a long time to talk of what happened, but, as a matter of fact, the whole dreadful business, so far as the loss of the ships was concerned, was over in a few minutes. As far as I can reckon, the *Hogue* herself was struck three times within a minute or so. The first torpedo came, followed almost immediately by a second in the same place, and by a third about a minute afterwards. The war-head of a torpedo holds a very big charge of gun-cotton, which, when it explodes against the side of a ship, drives an enormous hole through. An immense gap was driven in the *Hogue's* side, and there seems to be no doubt that the first torpedo struck her under the aft 9·2in. magazine. That fact would account for the fearful nature of the explosion.

As soon as the *Hogue* had been torpedoed, she began to settle by the stern; then she was quite awash aft, and began to turn turtle. Our ship sank stern first before she heeled over. There was a frightful turmoil as the four immense funnels broke away from their wire stays and went over the side, and the sea got into the stokeholds and sent up dense clouds of steam.

The Germans boast about the work having been done by one submarine, but that is nonsense. No single submarine could have done it, because she could not carry enough torpedoes. I am sure that there were at least half-a-dozen submarines in the attack; certainly when I was in the water I saw two rise.

They came up right amongst the men who were swimming and struggling, and it was a curious sensation when some of the men felt the torpedoes going through the water under their legs. I did not feel that, but I did feel the terrific shock of the explosion when the first torpedo struck the *Cressy*; it came through the water towards us with very great force.

We had a fearful time in the cold water. The struggle to keep afloat and alive, the coming up of the submarines, and the rushing through the water of the torpedoes—all that we had to put up with. Then we had something infinitely worse, for the *Cressy* spotted the submarines, and instantly opened a furious fire upon them. The chief gunner, Mr. Dougherty, saw one of them as soon as her periscope appeared, and he fired, and, I believe, hit the periscope; then he fired again—and again, getting three shots in from a four-pounder within a minute, and when he had done with her, the submarine had made her last dive—and serve her right! The Germans played a dirty game on us, and only a little while before we had done our best to save some of them in the Heligoland Bight, but never a German bore a hand to save the three cruisers' men from the water. Of course, a sailor expects to be hit anyhow and anywhere in a straight piece of fighting, but this torpedoing of rescue ships was rather cold-blooded, and I don't think British submarines would have done it.

There were some awful sights—but I don't want to dwell too much on them. Men had been torn and shattered by the explosions and falling things, and there was many a broken leg and broken arm. Great numbers of men had been badly hurt and scalded inside the ship. In the engine-rooms, the stokeholds,

and elsewhere, brave and splendid fellows who never left their posts had died like heroes. They never had a chance when the ships heeled over, for they were absolutely imprisoned.

When once I had reached the shelter-deck I never tried to go below again; but some of the men did, and they were almost instantly driven out by the force of the huge volumes of water which were rushing into the side through the gaping holes.

One man had an extraordinary escape. He had rushed below to get a hammock, and had laid hands on it when the ship heeled over. It seemed as if he must be drowned like a rat in a trap, and would have no chance, but the rush of water carried him along until he reached an entry-port—one of the steel doorways in the ship's sides—and then he was hurled out of the ship and into the sea, where he had, at any rate, a sporting chance, like the rest of us, of being saved.

I saw the three ships turn turtle, and a dreadful sight it was. The *Hogue* was the first to go—she was not afloat for more than seven minutes after she was struck; then the *Aboukir* went, but much more slowly—she kept afloat for rather more than half-an-hour; and the last to go was the *Cressy*. The *Cressy* heeled over very slowly and was quite a long time before she had completely turned turtle. When that happened the bottom of the ship, which was almost flat for most of its length, was where the deck had been. And on this big steel platform, which was nearly awash, the Captain was standing. I saw him quite clearly—I was not more than forty yards away—and I had seen men walking, running, crawling and climbing down the side of the ship as she heeled over.

They either fell or hurled themselves into the sea and swam for it; but the captain stuck to his post to the very last and went down with his ship. It was the old British Navy way of doing things, though probably he could have saved himself if he had taken his chance in the water.

One thing which proved very useful in the water, and was the means of saving a number of lives, was a target which had been cast adrift from the *Cressy*. Targets vary in size, and this was one of the smaller ones, known as Pattern Three, about twelve feet square. It was just the woodwork without the canvas, so it floated well, and a lot of the survivors had something substantial in the way of a raft to cling to. Many of them held on gamely till the end, when rescue came; but other poor chaps dropped off from sheer exhaustion, and were drowned.

It must be remembered that not a few of the men had had an experience which was so shattering that, perhaps, there has never been anything like it in naval warfare. They were first torpedoed in the *Aboukir*, then they were taken to the *Hogue* and torpedoed in her, and then removed to the *Cressy* and torpedoed for the third time. Finally they were cast into the sea to take their chance, and, in some cases, they had to float or swim in the water for hours until they were rescued. No wonder it became a question of endurance and holding on more than a matter of swimming.

The sea was covered with men who were either struggling for life or holding on to wreckage. The boats were packed, and well they might be, because no effort had been spared to get struggling men into them. The men who were in the best of health and good swimmers were helping those who could not

swim, and in this way many a man was saved who would have been lost.

When I was in the water I did not utter a word to anybody—it was not worth it, and you needed all your breath; but I never abandoned hope, even when I saw the last ship go down, because I knew that we should have assistance.

Wireless calls were made, and appeals for help were being sent out all the time, and when I looked around at all, it was in the hope of seeing some of our own ships tearing down to the rescue. My mind was easy on the point—I knew that the call must have been made, and it was merely a question of time for the response to come.

I was supported by a plank and clung to it with all my strength, though from time to time I endured agony from cramp. In spite of the torture I never let go. I gripped my plank, but I saw men near me forced to let go their hold of things they had seized, and they were drowned. In many cases cramp overcame them, and quite near to me were poor fellows who were so contracted with it that they were doubled up in the water, with their knees under their chins. I could see their drawn faces and knotted hands—and in several cases I saw that the grip which was on the floating objects was the grip of death. I floated past these poor chaps, and it was pitiful to see them. Thank God some of the struggling in the water did not last long, because many of the men had been badly burnt or scalded, or hit by heavy pieces of wreckage, and these soon fell away exhausted, and were drowned. Some, too, were dazed and lost their nerve as well as their strength, so that they could not keep up the fight for life. For long after the cruisers had sunk, carrying hundreds of men with them, the sea

for a great space was covered with floating bodies—dead sailors, as well as those who had managed to live.

Whenever a boat came up I tried to help a man into it; but it was not possible to do anything except with the aid of the boats. The two cutters acted splendidly, picking up all the men they could. Captain Nicholson, of the *Hogue*, was in charge of one of them, and he did some rousing rescue work.

There were some fine deeds of courage and unselfishness that sad morning in the North Sea. The launch and the cutter were packed, of course, and seeing this, and knowing that there were men in the water who were more badly wanting a place in the boat than he was, a Royal Fleet Reserve man, named Farmstone, sprang into the sea and swam for it, to make room for a man who was exhausted.

I was thankful indeed when I saw smoke on the horizon—black clouds which showed that some ships were steaming up as hard as they could lick. Very soon, some of our own destroyers—blessed and welcome sight—came into view, and as they did so, I believe, they potted at submarines which were slinking away, but I can't say with what result. The destroyers came up. The *Lucifer*, a small cruiser, came up too, and the work of rescue began as hard as it could be carried out, every officer and man working with a will. There were two or three other ships about, two Lowestoft trawlers—which did uncommonly good work—and two small Dutch steamers, one called the *Titan* and the other the *Flora*. The next thing that I clearly remember was that I had been hauled out of the bitter-cold water and lifted on board the *Flora*, and that she was soon packed with half-dead men like myself.



The *Flora* was a very small Dutch cargo boat, and with so many men on board she was crammed. It is impossible to say how some of the men got on board, and they could not explain themselves, they were so utterly exhausted. The Dutch could understand us, though words were hardly necessary, and they shared everything they had—clothes, food, drink and accommodation. They wrapped their bedding round us and gave us hot coffee. The stokehold was crowded with men who had gone down into it to get dry and warm. Some of the men were suffering dreadfully from burns, wounds and exhaustion, and one of them died on board the *Flora*. He was my next messmate, Green. He lived for only about an hour. I saw him in one of the seamen's bunks, and he was then in great agony. I think he had been struck very badly in the explosion. We took him away from the bunk, laid him on the fore-hatch and covered him with a tarpaulin, where he lay till about five o'clock in the afternoon, when we landed at Ymuiden. Poor Green was buried there with full honours, the British chaplain at Amsterdam conducting the service.

One very strange incident of the disaster was the way in which the ensign of the *Hogue* was saved. I don't know how it happened, but one of the stokers who had managed to escape got hold of the ensign when he was in the water, and hung on to it all the time he was in—two or three hours. He had the ensign with him when we were in Holland, and had his photograph taken with it in the background.

Another remarkable fact is that four brothers, who came from the Yorkshire coast, I think, were in the *Hogue*, and all of them were saved!

Talking of photographs, I was one of a group which

was taken at Ymuiden, when we were rigged out in the kit of Dutch bluejackets. There I am, in the back row. At that time I was wearing a beard and moustache, as there was neither much time nor inclination for shaving.

We had lost everything we had, and were almost naked, so we were very glad of the clothes that were given to us by the Dutch. These people were kindness itself to us, and did everything they could to make us comfortable and happy. I was taken to a small café and went to bed.

A Dutch soldier was in charge of us, but he had no fear of us doing any harm. Next evening they took us by train to a place in the north of Holland; then we had a sixteen miles' tramp along the level roads to a concentration camp where there were some Belgian prisoners, who gave us a cheer.

We marched those sixteen miles whistling and singing. Had we not been snatched from death?

We had to rough it, of course, but that came easy after such an experience as ours. There was only one blanket amongst thirteen men, and we had to sleep on straw, and eat with our fingers. We had plenty of food, though—rough, but very nice, and we were very glad of it, and thankful to get a drink of water.

Next morning, when we left the straw and solitary blanket, it was very raw and cheerless, and there was a heavy mist. The Belgian prisoners had a football, and we borrowed it and played a game, and got warm. We were covered with straw, and our clothes were filled with it when we woke, but we soon shook it clear when we got going with the ball. We enjoyed a basin of coffee and a big lump of brown bread which



[To face p. 180.]

“GOOD SWIMMERS WERE HELPING THOSE WHO COULD  
NOT SWIM” (p. 176).

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the Dutch cook gave us, then we got the time on by turning our tents out, and were quite in clover when the British Consul supplied us with knives, forks, spoons, towels, overcoats and boots.

We spent the first morning washing and drying our socks, and wondering what was going to be done with us. We kept on wondering, but soon knew that we were not going to be detained in Holland, but were to be sent home. On the Friday we had definite news that we were to go back to England, and on the Saturday morning we left, and did the sixteen miles' tramp again; but it was easier this time, because we were prepared for it. We stopped at a farm, and they gave us milk and food, cigars and cigarettes, and before entering a special train for Flushing, the Dutch gave us milk again, and cake, bread and apples.

From Flushing we came on to Sheerness, and then we went on leave—and here I am; but I go back in a day or two. I don't know what will happen, for owing to the explosion the sight of my left eye has practically gone. Besides that, I seem to have been completely shattered in nerves, though I reckoned that I was one of those men who have no nerves—I have been a steeple-jack since I left the Navy, and just before I was called up I was cleaning the face of Big Ben.

It is when I wake in the middle of the night, as I often do, that the whole fearful thing comes back with such awful vividness, and I see again the dreadful sights that it is better to forget.

Yes, the Germans got three good hauls in the cruisers; but I don't think they'll have another chance like it.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE RUNAWAY RAIDERS

[“ Practically the whole fast cruiser force of the German Navy, including some great ships vital to their fleet and utterly irreplaceable, has been risked for the passing pleasure of killing as many English people as possible, irrespective of sex, age or condition, in the limited time available. Whatever feats of arms the German Navy may hereafter perform, the stigma of the baby-killers of Scarborough will brand its officers and men while sailors sail the seas.” So wrote the First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. Winston S. Churchill) on December 20th, 1914, in reference to the German raid on Scarborough, Whitby, and the Hartlepoons on December 16th. In that cowardly bombardment of unprotected places, the Huns killed more than a hundred men, women, and children in the Hartlepoons alone, and altogether the casualties numbered more than six hundred. This story is based on the narrative of Sapper W. Hall, R.E., one of the few English soldiers who have been under an enemy’s fire on English soil. Sapper Hall was badly wounded.]

It is just a fortnight to-day since the German warships came up out of the mist, bombarded Hartlepool, wrecked many of the houses, killed a lot of defenceless women, children and men, and then tore away into the mist as hard as they could steam. Our own warships nearly got up with them, and if it had not been for the mist, never one of those vessels which were so valiant in bombarding helpless towns would have got back to Germany.

A great deal of confusion has been caused in

telling the story of the raids on the Hartlepoons, the two places being hopelessly mixed up. They are, as a matter of fact, quite separate towns, with separate mayors and corporations.

Hartlepool itself, where we now are, is on the coast, facing the sea; West Hartlepool is two miles inland. Both towns were bombarded, but it is hereabouts that most of the damage by shells was done, and many children and grown-up people killed. It was just over there, too, that eight Territorials were standing on the front, watching the firing, when a shell struck them and killed seven of the men and wounded the eighth.<sup>1</sup>

It was soon after eight o'clock in the morning when we rushed out of our billets into the streets, and, looking seaward, we saw warships firing.

In our billets we had heard the booming of guns, and supposing that it was our own warships practising or fighting, we had hurried out to see the fun. A few seconds was enough to tell us that there was no fun in it, but that this was a bombardment in deadly earnest by the enemy.

The German ships were easily visible from the shore, and did not seem to be very far away—about two miles. They were firing rapidly, and there was a deafening noise as the shells screamed and burst—the crashing of the explosions, the smashing of immense numbers of window-panes by the concussion,

<sup>1</sup> I saw the "eighth" man not far from the spot where he and his comrades were standing when the shell burst. He had been wounded by shell splinters on the head, which, when I saw him, was bandaged. The effect of the explosion, he said, was terrible. He declared that the German warships were flying the British white ensign, and that he could distinguish their flags quiet clearly.—W. W.

and the thudding of the shells and fragments against walls and buildings.

Coming so unexpectedly, the bombardment caused intense excitement and commotion, and men, women and children rushed into the streets to see what was happening—the worst thing they could do, because the splinters of shell, horrible jagged fragments, were flying all about and killing and maiming the people they struck. A number of little children who had rushed into the streets, as children will, were killed or wounded.

As soon as we realised what was happening, we rushed back and got our rifles and hurried into the street again, and did what we could; but rifles were absolutely useless against warships, and the incessant bursting of shells and the scattering of fragments and bullets made it most dangerous to be in the open.

Shells were striking and bursting everywhere, wrecking houses, ploughing into the ground, and battering the concrete front of the promenade.

The houses hereabouts, overlooking the sea, were big and easy targets for the Germans, who blazed away like madmen, though they must have been in terror all the time when they thought that their cannonading was sure to fetch British warships up. How thankful they must have felt for that protecting mist!

The Hartlepool Rovers' Football Ground is very near the sea and the lighthouse, and it came under heavy fire. One of our men, Sapper Liddle, was near the wall of the ground when a shell burst and mortally wounded him, injuring him terribly. It was not possible to get at him and bring him into hospital for a long time, but when he was brought here every-



thing that was humanly possible was done for him. He lingered for a few hours, then died.

Meanwhile, death and destruction were being dealt out all around us, and the land batteries were making such reply as they could to the Germans' heavy guns. This reply was a very plucky performance, for Hartlepool is not a fortified place in anything like the real meaning of the word, and our light guns were no match for the weapons of the German battle-cruisers.

As it happened, no damage was done to the guns; but fearful mischief was caused to buildings near us. A shell struck the Baptist Chapel fair and square on the front, and drove a hole in it big enough for the passage of a horse and cart; then it wrecked the inside and went out at the other end of the chapel, again making a huge hole.

House after house was struck and shattered, in some cases people being buried in the ruins. Some of the houses are very old, and pretty well collapsed when a shell struck them and burst.

While the bombardment was in progress we were doing our best, but that could not be much. There was not much cause for laughter, but I remember that a shell came and burst near us, and made us see the humour of a little incident. The explosion itself did no actual damage, but the concussion and force of it were so violent that a sapper was jerked up into the air and came down with a crash. He picked himself up and scuttled as hard as he could make for shelter.

The firing was so sudden and so fierce that it was begun and finished almost before it was possible to realise that it had taken place. Most of the men of

Hartlepool were at work when the bombardment started, and some of them were killed at their work, or as they were rushing home to see to their wives and children, while some were killed as they fled for safety.

The streets were crowded with fugitives during the bombardment, and it was owing to this that so many people were killed and wounded. The shells burst among them with awful results.

While the Germans were firing point-blank at the buildings facing the sea, and deliberately killing inoffensive people, they were also bombarding West Hartlepool, and doing their best to blow up the gas-works, destroy the big shipbuilding yards there, and set fire to the immense stacks of timber which are stored in the yards.

People were killed who were five or six miles from the guns of the warships, and in one street alone in West Hartlepool seven persons, mostly women, were killed. Several babies were killed in their homes, and little children were killed as they played in the streets.

A good deal has been said about the number of shells that were fired from the German warships, and some people had put down a pretty low total; but from what I saw, I should think that certainly five hundred shells of all sorts were fired by these valiant Germans, who knew that they were perfectly safe so far as the shore was concerned, and took mighty good care not to be caught by British ships of their own size and power; but that will surely come later, and the men of the North will get their own back.

I cannot say anything about the actual defences,

or what the military did; but the few troops who were here did their best, and a couple of destroyers bore a brave part in the affair.

A shell fell in the lines of the Royal Engineers, and several dropped in the lines of the 18th Service Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry.

It was very quickly known, as I have mentioned, that seven out of eight men of the Durhams, who were watching the firing—thinking, like everybody else, that it was some sort of battle practice, till they learned the real truth—had been killed by the explosion of a shell, and that the eighth man had been wounded; but there were several other cases of men being wounded which were not known about until later, because of the great difficulties of discovering the men amongst the ruins which the shell-fire had caused.

From the moment the bombardment began there was an awful commotion, and the noise grew until it was simply deafening. The whole town literally shook, and while the firing lasted there was a tremendous and continuous vibration—everything shivered and rattled. One shell struck the wall of the football ground, which faces the sea; not far away a hole was dug in the ground by one of the very first of the shells that were fired; the fine old church of St. Hilda was damaged, and the side of the rectory was simply peppered by a bursting shell.

In the particular place where I and my chums were, the shells were coming in a shower, and doing enormous mischief. We could see that plainly enough. But it was not until later, when the German warships had steamed away as hard as they could go, that we knew how great the damage had been,

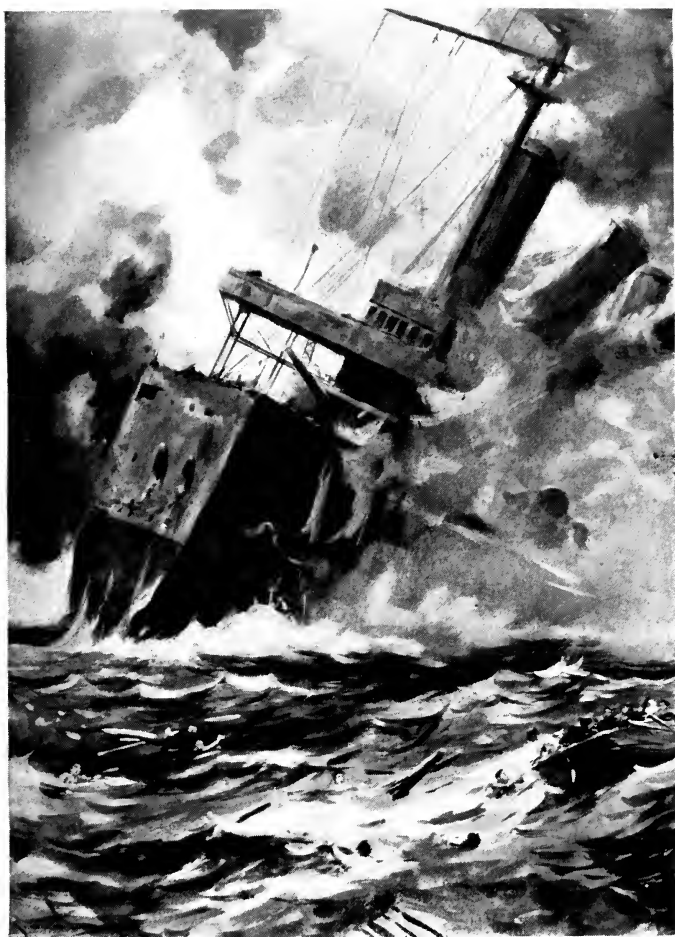
and how many lives had been lost and people wounded.

The German ships fired from one side to begin with, then they turned round and continued the bombardment from the other side, so they must have been ready loaded all round. The size of the shots varied from the 12-inch shells, perfect monsters, to the small ones which came so fast and did so much havoc. The fact that some of the huge shells were found unexploded after the bombardment proves that ships of great size took part in the raid.

Some time after the firing began I felt a blow on my thigh, and fell to the ground, helpless, though I did not know at the time what had happened. At last, when the firing—which continued for about forty minutes—ceased, stretcher-bearers and volunteer ambulance workers set about collecting the wounded, and I was picked up and brought to the hospital here.

It was then found that I had been struck on the thigh by part of the cap of a shell, and that I had sustained a compound fracture. The piece of metal was still sticking in me—you can see it later. It was taken out, and I was promptly and most kindly looked after, as were all our men who had been wounded and were brought in. Poor Liddle, as I have told you, was not discovered for some time; then he was found and brought here, and died late at night, in spite of all the efforts that were made to save him. He had a real soldier's funeral—just as had the rest of the soldiers who had been killed.

As soon as the bombardment was over the people set to work to collect the dead as well as save the wounded, and both were heavy tasks; but there



*[To face p. 188.*

“ THE ‘ HOGUE ’ BEGAN TO TURN TURTLE. THE FOUR IMMENSE  
FUNNELS BROKE AWAY ” (p. 173).

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were many willing hands. Even in half-an-hour a wonderful difference had been made in the streets, and those people who had been rushing towards the country for safety began to return. They brought in reports of losses which had been suffered in the outskirts through shells; but, as I have said, the worst cases of all were just about here.

One house was completely demolished, and the father, mother, and half-a-dozen children were killed, so that home and family were wiped out in an instant. One part of the Old Town is so utterly destroyed that it is called "Louvain," and if you look at the houses there you will find that they are just heaps of rubbish and ruins, with beds and furniture and so on, buried.

Shells had exploded in the streets, in houses, fields, at the gasworks, in shipyards—anywhere and everywhere—and one big thing stuck itself in a house and is kept as a relic. Another crashed through four railway waggons, and another shell, which travelled low on the ground, went through several sets of the steel metals on the railway, which shows the fearful penetrative power of the projectile.

If the Germans had had their way, no doubt this place would have been wiped out altogether. They made a dead set at the gasworks, but did not do a great deal of mischief there, though it meant that that night a lot of people had to burn candles instead of gas. And though more than a hundred people were killed, and the Germans fondly supposed that they had struck terror into the place, they had done nothing of the sort.

The residents were soon clearing up the ruins and settling down again as if nothing had happened.

The most pitiful of all the tasks was that of dealing with the dead and wounded children, and the remembrance of the sad sights will be the best of all inspirations for some of our fellows when the day comes on which they will get their own back from the Germans.

It was not long before we learned that at about the same time as we were being shelled at Hartlepool, German warships had appeared off the entirely undefended places of Whitby and Scarborough. They call these old fishing ports fortified, but that is an absolute untruth, and they know it. But the Germans were out to kill and destroy, and they did both in a manner which showed that they had made calculations to a minute, and that their spies had been long at work.

At Scarborough the raiders did a lot of damage before they ran away. They had prepared one of their boasted surprises for us, and we got it; but that was nothing to the surprise we gave them on Christmas morning at Cuxhaven—a real fortified place—and nothing, I hope and believe, to the surprises that our Navy has in store for the German naval runaways.

You ask how long shall I be in hospital.

That is hard to tell; but I have been here two weeks already, and I suppose that I shall be here for at least six weeks longer.

I keep the piece of shell which struck me, in a bit of brown paper in the cupboard near the head of the bed. I cannot rise to get it myself, but if you will open the little door you will find it. It's the sort of thing which caused such havoc in the Hartlepoons when the German warships came and bombarded us.



## CHAPTER XVI

### CAMPAIGNING WITH THE HIGHLANDERS

[The Highland regiments have made a great impression upon the Germans since the war began, and the kilted troops have added to their laurels in the field. This story of fighting with the Highlanders is told by Private A. Veness, 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, who was wounded and invalided home.]

I HAVE served eight years in the Seaforth Highlanders. To begin with I was a bandsman, but when the war broke out and I was recalled to the colours, I became an ordinary private, and the only music that the Germans heard me play was the rattle of my rifle. When we landed in France and marched off to the front the girls seemed to have a special fancy for the kilted men—at any rate they crowded up and hugged and kissed those they could get hold of; so we went off in very good spirits, singing and whistling popular tunes, not forgetting the Marseillaise and “Tipperary.”

Being a strange country we saw a good many things that were new and very strange to us till we got used to them. One amusing incident happened as soon as we were in Belgium, and that was the sight of a big fat man being pulled in a little cart by two dogs. It was funny, but still it made us angry, for we rather looked upon it as cruelty to animals; so we shouted, “Lazy brute!” “Get out and give the dogs a ride!” and so on, and I daresay the man was

greatly surprised, though he didn't know what we were saying. In a little while we understood that dogs are extensively used for haulage purposes in Belgium and we ceased to take any special notice of them.

It was not long after landing before we were told to be ready for the Germans, but that proved a false alarm. We were, however, to get our baptism of fire in a dramatic fashion, and that baptism naturally dwells in my mind more vividly than many of the far bigger things which happened later in the war.

A terrific thunderstorm broke, and a party of us were ordered to billet in a barn. We climbed up into a loft and began to make ourselves comfortable and to make some tea. We had scarcely got the welcome tea to our lips when the hurried order came to clear out of the building, and into the thunderstorm we dashed. Then the German shells began to fly and burst, and in a few minutes the barn was struck and shattered, so that we had a very narrow escape.

It was at this stage that we had our first man killed. He was a chum of mine, a bandsman, named Dougal McKinnon. While we were having our tea Dougal was under cover in the trenches, in front of the barn, with his company. They were under shell fire, and he was killed by bursting shrapnel. He was buried close to the spot where he fell, and being the first of our men to be killed in action we felt it very deeply. Many times after that, when our chums were killed, we had to leave them, because we had no time to bury them.

We got on the move, and when night came it was awful to see the whole countryside lit up with the flames of burning buildings—farms and houses and

other places which had been set on fire by the Germans. There was a farm which was blazing furiously and I shall never forget it, for the good reason that in marching we managed to circle it three times before we could get properly on the march and go ahead.

We pushed on to Cambrai, where the cannonading was truly terrible. My company was in support of another company in advance. We lay behind a bank, sheltering, for a few hours. At the back of us was a British howitzer battery, in a bit of a wood, so that we were between two awful fires. It was indescribable—the deafening din, which never ceased or lessened while the duel raged, the excitement, the danger, and the nerve-strain; yet there was something fascinating in watching the firing and wondering what was going to happen.

It is wonderful to think of the working of the human mind at such a time, and strange to recall the odd things one does. In our own case, as we had to go on sheltering and watching, we amused ourselves by counting the number of shells that dropped within a certain area which was well under our observation. The area was, roughly speaking, about 200 yards square, and in three-quarters of an hour no fewer than seventy-six shells exploded over that particular spot. They were shrapnel and high explosive and never struck the ground—they burst in the air, and at one time I counted six shells bursting in the air together. That gives you some idea of the tremendous nature of the German shell fire. Luckily a great number of the shells did not explode at all, or few if any of us could have got away.

It is impossible to praise too highly the British artillery's work. To my own personal knowledge

there was one battery that day—I don't know which it was—which was under fire for at least seven hours continuously without shifting; and during the whole of that time they were replying to the German guns.

After that shattering experience we camped in a cornfield at night, and were settling down to sleep when we were ordered to move again. For hours, worn and weary though we were, we were on the march, and thankful we were when we halted in a village and got a box of biscuits from the French as a midday snack. We had been forced to part with most of our equipment and many of the great-coats were thrown away; but I felt that I should want mine and I stuck to it—and I am wearing it now. It has had plenty of rough usage—and here are the holes made by a piece of flying shrapnel.

I am proud to say that the general in command of our division congratulated the regiment on its splendid marching, and I think we did a fine thing, for in about twelve hours we covered about thirty-two miles—actual marching, with just a halt here and there. The Germans had done their best to trap us, but they had not succeeded, and we escaped, to turn the tables on them with a vengeance.

That night I had to report sick—there was something wrong with my ankles. I was unable to march, so I got a lift on a limber-waggon of the 88th Battery of the Royal Field Artillery. During the ride, which lasted all night, I went through some of the finest country I ever saw. It was particularly beautiful because of the time of the year, late autumn, and the clear light of the full moon. This moonlight ride on a limber will be always associated in

my memory with the grandest spectacle of its sort I saw during the war.

The battery was travelling along a switchback road, and I was wrapped up in the beautiful and peaceful scenery—it was hard to believe that this calm landscape was the scene of war and that the splendid British gunners I was with had been dealing death and destruction amongst the Germans so lately.

Not far away was a river, winding like a silver thread over the face of the country, and suddenly, from the river, there rose an immense mass of flame and smoke, followed quickly by a thunderous rumbling roar.

I knew at once that a bridge had been blown up. I cannot tell you who destroyed it—Germans or French; all I know is that I saw the sight and it was the most remarkable of its kind that I witnessed—and I saw four splendid bridges destroyed in this manner.

At one time we had crossed a fine bridge and as soon as we had done so a hole was dug and a mine was laid in the centre. Then our cyclist section was sent out to report what was going to happen and the bridge was blown up. In this case we were the last to cross before the explosion occurred.

At an early stage of the operations I was lucky enough to see a very fine fight in the air, a duel between a French airman and a German airman. I was able to follow the duel for miles. The men in the aeroplanes were firing revolvers at each other and we could hear the crack of the shots, though we could not see any definite results, because the duel got too far away. This was the first fight in the

air that I saw, and I watched it with extraordinary interest, especially as we all keenly hoped that the German would be brought down, because he had been flying over our lines and quickly directed shell fire on us owing to his signals. For fully twenty minutes I watched this air fight. It was wonderful to see the swiftness with which the machines dived and dodged. The Frenchman circled over the German in the most skilful and daring manner and time after time threatened his existence.

Another remarkable incident I witnessed at this time was the escape of a German cavalryman. He was an Uhlan, a scout, I take it, and quite alone. We were on the march and had been told that the German cavalry were in large numbers near us, and so that we should be ready for them we took up a position, with some Irish infantry to the left of us.

We were lying in position on a hill, and in front of us was three or four miles of good flat country, so that we should have had a fine view of cavalry in force. We watched and waited, but the threatened cavalry did not come—all we saw was this solitary Uhlan, a mere speck on the wide plain.

As soon as the Uhlan was seen the rifles rattled and it was expected that he would be potted; but he seemed to bear a charmed life. The Irish battalion gave him a particularly heavy fire—the Seaforths were too far off to reach him with the rifle; but the Uhlan galloped gaily on, and it was quite amusing to watch him. No doubt he thoroughly enjoyed himself—at any rate he galloped unscathed across two or three miles of open country, and got away.

It was not until we were within about eighteen

miles of Paris that the retirement ended and we began the offensive. We had had a very hard time, and were to have a few days' rest, but we never got it. Yet in spite of the hardships we had some very pleasant times, because of the beauty of the country and the season.

Joyful indeed was the day when we began to drive the Germans back, and it was the more joyful because the advance was almost as swift as our retirement had been.

On that wonderful advance we saw some horrible things—I will not dwell on German barbarities, though there were many proofs of them—including great numbers of horses which had been killed or wounded and left just where they had fallen. No attempt had been made to dispose of the decaying carcasses and many a poor brute had died a lingering death.

I was greatly struck by the Germans' cruelty to their horses, in leaving them like this; but that was one proof of the hurriedness of the enemy's retreat—the Germans who had got so near Paris and were then flung right away back from the city. I need hardly say that whenever a sign of movement was noticed in a horse a man was sent to put the poor thing out of its misery.

There was still plenty of hardship to put up with, but that did not matter so much when we were driving back the Germans.

I remember very well one day and night of uncommon wretchedness. It was raining heavily and continuously, and in the deluge I and three more men were sent on outpost—to observe and keep our eyes open, and so that we could do that to the best

advantage we took up a position on the top of a hayrick. A perfect hurricane was blowing, and the almost solid rain was fairly driven into us; but we stuck it through, and hung on to the top of the haystack till it was dark, then we thankfully got down and went into an open shed for shelter—a building that was just a protection for wheat-stacks.

I had had my turn of picketing and was lying down to get a snatch of sleep when I was ordered to go up a road about a mile and a half away, to find out whether our relief had come. So out into the darkness and the wind and rain I staggered and fought my way through what was the worst night for weather that I ever saw. On and on I and my comrades went, looking hard for our relief, but we never saw it, and we waited there till next morning, when we rejoined our brigade.

Those were times when there was little rest for the Seaforths, or anybody else.

The aeroplanes gave us little chance of rest, and at times they had an uncanny knack of finding us.

One day, after a long, hard march, we put into a wood for shelter. A French supply column was already in the wood and doubtless the Germans knew of or suspected this; at any rate a German aeroplane came over us, with the result that in a few minutes we were shelled out. We rested in another part of the wood till it was dark, then we were taken on to billets, but we had to make another move, because we were shelled out again. That was the sort of thing which came along as part of the day's work; and as part of the day's work we took it cheerfully.

When we got the Germans on the move we took



prisoners from time to time. I was on guard over a few prisoners, part of a crowd, when one of them came up to me and to my amazement I recognised him as a German who had worked in Soho Square and used often to go to the same place as myself for dinner—a little shop in Hanway Street, at the Oxford Street end of Tottenham Court Road. The prisoner recognised me at once and I recognised him. To show how ignorant the Germans were of the enemy they were fighting, I may tell you that this man said to me, “If we had known we were fighting the English, I would never have left London!”

Was it not strange that the two of us, who had so often met as friends for dinner in the little foreign shop, should meet again as enemies on the banks of the Marne?

I am now coming to a sorrowful personal incident—the loss of my chum, Lance-Corporal Lamont. We had been together from the beginning of the war and had shared everything there was, even to the waterproof sheet. He would carry the sheet one day and I would carry it the next, and whenever such a thing had to be done as fetching drinking-water, often a very dangerous task, we would share that too.

Throughout one awful night of ceaseless rain, which soaked us to the skin, the two of us were in the trenches—we had dug ourselves in, with just ordinary head cover. We lay there till next morning, when an officer came along my platoon and asked if we had any drinking-water.

We told him that we had not.

The officer said, “If you care to risk it, one of you can go and fetch some water.”

We decided to take the risk, which was great, because to get the water meant getting to a farmhouse just behind us, under a heavy fire.

My chum volunteered to go, and, taking the water-bottles, he left the trench and started to cross the open ground between us and the farmhouse. While he was doing this the order came for us to advance—and I never saw him again.

It was soon my turn to be put out of action. A pretty stiff fight was going on and the fire was so heavy that it was very dangerous to be in the open; but it was necessary for me and a few more men to cross a bit of open ground, and we made a start. We had not gone far when a shell came between me and another man who was at my side. The shell struck him fair on the arm and shattered it. He fell over on his side, and as he did so he said, "For Heaven's sake cut my equipment off!"

I took out my jack-knife and slit the equipment across the shoulders and let it drop away from him.

He crawled off and I was told afterwards that while he was trying to creep to shelter he was struck again and killed.

I crawled as best I could up to the firing line, but when I got there I found that there was no room in the trenches for me, so I had to lie in the open. I had not been there long before a fellow next to me asked me what time it was. I took out my watch and told him it was about eleven-fifteen—and the next thing I knew was that I felt as if someone had kicked me on the top of the head.

I turned round and said, "Tommy, I'm hit!" I became unconscious for some time, then, when I recovered, I said, "Tommy, is it safe to crawl away?"

“No,” said Tommy, “it’s risky. It’s a bit too hot!”

“Never mind,” I answered. “If I stay here much longer I shall collapse. I’m going to have a shot at it—here goes!”

I began to crawl away, but I must have taken the wrong direction, for I was soon under two fires. I was approaching the mouths of two or three of our own guns, which were in front of a farmhouse.

I soon found that this was a bit too warm for me, and so I turned and took what I supposed was the right direction. I had had enough of crawling, which was very slow work. I wanted to get out of it, and I made up my mind to rise and run. That does not sound very brave, but it was the better part of valour.

I started to run, as best I could; but I had hardly got going when a bullet struck me, as I supposed, and I collapsed alongside some of my own comrades.

Stretcher-bearers came up, in time, and I was carried to the field hospital. Then a curious discovery was made, which was, that a bullet had gone through four or five pleats of my kilt and had stuck in my leg, high up. This is the place where it struck and stuck and here’s the bullet, which the doctor easily pulled out with his fingers, for it had not penetrated deeply, owing, I think, to the resistance of the pleats of my kilt. Apart from this bullet wound I was struck by shrapnel four times, but I managed to keep going.

I left the field hospital the next day and joined an ambulance column which was shelled by the Germans as it went along. I escaped myself, but one of the waggon was completely wrecked.

Having recovered from my wound to a certain extent I went back to the regiment, but after a few days I had to be invalided home, and I have had a long and tedious spell in hospital.

There is one more incident I would like to mention by way of closing. We halted in a village in France where we saw some of the Turcos, one of whom was very noticeable because he was proudly wearing the greatcoat of a German officer which he had secured on the battlefield, after killing the officer.

While we halted, a batch of German prisoners was brought into the village, and they were put into a courtyard between two rows of cottages. No sooner had this been done than an old man rushed out, and if it had not been for the guard he would have hurled himself upon the prisoners and done his best to thrash them.

The act was so strange that I inquired the reason for the old man's fury. And the answer I received was, "He remembers 1870."



[To face p. 202.

“ A BULLET STRUCK HIM IN THE BACK AND KILLED HIM ” (p. 9).

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## CHAPTER XVII

### TRANSPORT DRIVING

[It was estimated that, early in the war, no fewer than 10,000 vehicle workers were serving with the colours—3000 taxicab drivers, 3000 tramway men, and 4000 motor-'bus drivers. These trained men went from London and the provinces, some being Reservists, and others joining various regiments; but a very large number went into the Transport Section, and did splendid work. From this story by Private James Roache, Mechanical Transport Section, Siege Artillery Brigade, we learn something of the heavy and perilous work that falls to the lot of the Transport Section, and can realise the enormous extent to which the Army depends upon its transport.]

I GOT into Ypres about seven days after the Germans had left the city, and I learned from a school-teacher who spoke English that they had commandeered a good many things, and had pillaged the jewellers' shops and other places of business.

At that time the Germans did not seem to have done any exceptional damage; but they made up for any neglect later on, when they acted like barbarians in bombarding and destroying the beautiful old city, and smashing its priceless ancient buildings into ruins. That is part of the system of savagery which they boast about as "culture."

We had been in Ypres about a week when the first German shell came. It was the beginning of a fearful havoc. That was about ten o'clock in the morning. The shell dropped plumb into the prison. There

were a good many civil prisoners in the gaol at the time, but I do not know what happened to them, and I cannot say whether any of the helpless creatures were killed or wounded.

At that time I was helping to supply the Siege Artillery Brigade, the guns of which—the famous 6 in. howitzers—were a mile or so out of the city. We had four cars, each carrying three tons of lyddite—twelve tons in all—standing in the Market Square, and exposed to the full artillery fire of the enemy.

It was a perilous position, for if a shell had struck that enormous amount of lyddite probably the whole city would have been wrecked, and the loss of life would have been appalling. We had to wait for several hours before we could move, because of the difficulty in communicating with the brigade; but when the order did at last arrive, we lost no time in getting to a safer place than the Market Square.

It was while we were standing under fire that I saw a mother and her child—a girl—struck by a fragment of a bursting shell. They were the first people to be wounded in Ypres.

The shell—a big brute—burst on the roof of a house, and the fragments scattered with terrific force all around. People were flying for their lives, or hiding, terror-stricken, in the cellars; and the woman and her daughter were struck as we watched them fly.

Some of us rushed up and found that one of the boots of the woman had been ripped open, and that the child had been struck on the face and badly cut.

I picked her up, and saw that she was unconscious; but I got at my field-dressing and did all I could for her, and was thankful to find that she soon came



back to her senses, though she was suffering terribly from shock and began to cry bitterly.

The mother also was dreadfully upset, but not seriously hurt. We lost no time in getting them into the underground part of a café near at hand, and there we had to leave them. I don't know what became of them, but I suppose they were taken away. I often wonder what has happened to the poor little soul and her mother, victims, like so many thousands more, of the German invaders. I am glad to know that with our field-dressings we were able to help a good many civilians who were wounded.

The four cars I have mentioned were big transport-lorries, made specially for the war, and very fine work can be done with them. But how different the work is from that which we used to do at home as motor-drivers!—and I had a fair experience of that before I joined the Transport Service. There was as much difference between the two as there is between this war and the South African War, in which I served in the Imperial Yeomanry.

These lorries carried immense quantities of ammunition, and so the Germans made a special point of going for them, in the hope of bringing about a destructive explosion; but, taken on the whole, they had very poor luck that way.

When the order came to us in the Market Square at Ypres to march, we left the city and travelled along the roads till it was dark; and after that we returned to the city, taking the stuff with us. No sooner were we back in Ypres than the Germans started shelling again, after having ceased fire for about four hours.

What we carried was wanted for the guns, but we

could not reach them, owing to the excessive danger from the German fire. It is a strange fact that as soon as any stuff was going through by transport the Germans started shelling it, which seems to show that they had word when transports were on the move. They shelled us constantly, and we got to take the thing as a very ordinary part of the day's work.

It was only when some uncommon explosion occurred that we were roused to take notice; and such an event took place one day when one of the very biggest of the German shells burst in the air not far away from me with a tremendous crash, and made an immense cloud of awful smoke and rubbish as the fragments struck the ground.

This explosion was so near and so unusual that I thought I would get hold of a souvenir of it. And so I did. I secured a piece of the base of the shell, and meant to bring it home as a trophy; but I had to leave it, for the weight of the fragment was 95 lb., and that's a trifle heavy even for a transport-driver. This was certainly one of the very biggest and most awful of the German shells of the immense number I saw explode.

There is, or was, a skittle-alley in Ypres, near the water-tower, and some of the Munsters were billeted there. I was near the place when some very heavy shelling was going on, and I saw one shell burst on the building with a terrific report. I knew at once that serious damage was done, and that there must have been a heavy loss of life, for I saw wounded and unwounded men rushing into the street from the ruined building. Some of the men were bandaging themselves as they rushed out. I knew that

there must be a shocking sight inside the building; so when the commanding officer said, "Would you like to go inside and look at it?" I replied that I would rather not. And I was glad afterwards, for I learned that six poor fellows had been killed. That was the sort of thing which was constantly happening to our fighting men, and it was bad enough; but it was infinitely worse when the victims were women and children, as they so often were, and it was the sight of these innocent sufferers which was the hardest of all to bear. Some of our youngsters were particularly upset.

There was a little trumpeter of the Royal Garrison Artillery, to which we were attached, and a fine youngster he was, about sixteen years old. We called him "Baggie." He used to stick it very well, but at times, when he saw women and children hurt, he gave way and cried. But that kind-heartedness did not prevent him from being always eager to come with us when we took the ammunition up to the guns in the firing line. "Baggie" never knew fear for himself, but he felt it badly when others were hit or hurt, and that took place day after day.

There was another little trumpeter of the Royal Engineers who got badly upset for the same reason. He was billeted in a timber-yard, and I saw a shell fall in the yard and burst and send the timber flying in all directions. It seemed as if tremendous mischief had been done, and that there must have been a heavy loss of life; but, as a matter of fact, only one man was injured on the head and face by splinters.

The trumpeter rushed out, and I went up and talked with him to cheer him up a bit.

“It’s no good!” he said. “I can’t stick it any longer! I try to be brave, but I have to give way!”

Then he broke down and fairly cried, and a very pitiful sight it was, for he was only a kiddie, fifteen or sixteen years old.

I was always troubled myself when I saw how these little chaps were upset; but they did not break down through anything like fear—they were not afraid, and were splendid when they were with the men—it was the suffering and the fearful sights they saw that bowled them out.

These trumpeters—mere lads—went through all the marching and fighting that led up to the fearful business at Ypres, and they came out of the business splendidly. Little “Baggie,” for example, was right through it from the Aisne, and was up and down with the Siege Artillery all the time. He was present when one of the lieutenants was killed, and when I last heard of him he was still on the move and well; and I sincerely hope that he is all right now, and will come safely home.

I mention these things about the youngsters particularly, because they struck me as being out of the common, and so you notice them more than the ordinary matters.

While speaking of the earlier days of the war, I might say that, after the Marne and the Aisne, when we were going back over ground that we knew and on which we fought, we saw some sickening slaughter scenes, and realised to the full what an awful thing a war like this is.

One very peculiar incident which comes into my mind was the finding of a dead Uhlan in a wood. He had evidently been badly wounded, and had made his

way into the wood for safety, but he had died there. When we found him he was sitting in a crouching position. On examining him, we found two post-cards which he had written. We could not read them, but, as far as we could tell, they were addressed to women of the same name, but living in different places. We buried the Uhlán in the wood, and handed the postcards to a German officer who had been made prisoner, and he gave us to understand that he would see that they were sent to their destinations when he got a chance to despatch them. That incident was only one of many similar sights we came across in our part of the business.

Transport work, as a rule, was very uncomfortable, because it was mostly done at night, when the roads were very dark, and we had to do as best we could without lights. Anything like an ammunition or supply column was a particular mark for the Germans, and whenever they got the chance they would do their best to find us out; and a favourite way of doing this was to fire a few shots in one place and a few in another, in the hope that we should be drawn and reveal our position. But we didn't give the show away quite so easily as that.

I had many opportunities of seeing the fine work which was done by our armoured trains, and I saw something of the performances of the aeroplanes. I witnessed several air fights, but there was not really a lot to see, because there was so much swift manœuvring. There was plenty of firing at the aircraft, but they are most difficult things to hit. One of the German aeroplanes dropped a bomb on Ypres. It fell on a doctor's house near the town station and exploded, but it did not do any great

amount of mischief. It broke the front door and shattered the windows and knocked the place about, but I fancy that it did not hurt or kill anybody.

What was the finest sight I saw while I was at the front? Well, I think the best thing I ever saw was the way some of our lancers scattered a far superior body of Uhlans and made them fly. That was on the retirement from Mons. It was a very bad time, and there were some fearful sights, for the roads leading from the town were crowded with fleeing women and children. In any case it was bad enough to get along the road, but it was infinitely worse to make our way along through the crowds of refugees with our motor-lorries, especially in view of what we carried. To make matters worse, we had got on the wrong road, and it was necessary to turn back. To do this we had to turn round, and, as there were eighty cars, I need not tell you what a business that meant, especially with the enemy harassing us, and I dare say fondly thinking that they had us in a proper grip. The Germans were quite close to us, and firing, and we were ordered to get down and defend the cars. The road at this point was very narrow, and it seemed as if we were trapped, though we were covered by cavalry.

The country thereabouts did not seem very favourable for cavalry work, but it was all right from the point of view of the Uhlans, who, from their horses, potted at us from the brow of the hill on which they stood. The weather was miserable, dull, and it was raining, and, altogether, it was not an exhilarating business. The Uhlans seemed to be having it all their own way; then the scene changed like magic, and that was when the gallant 9th Lancers appeared,

to our unspeakable joy. I can claim to understand something in a modest way about cavalry, as an old Imperial Yeoman, and I do know that there was no finer sight ever seen than the spectacle of those splendid fellows of the 9th, who, without any sound of trumpet or any noise, came up and charged the Uhlans. One body of Uhlans was on the brow, two more bodies were in a wood. But these two did not take any active part in the fighting; they seemed to wait till their comrades on the brow had paved the way with us, so that they could swoop down. But the Uhlans did not get a chance to swoop, though they were three to one against our lancers.

Jumping a ditch and galloping across the country, our cavalry were after the Uhlans like the wind. But the Uhlans never stopped to face the lance; they vanished over the brow of the hill, and the fellows who were watching and waiting in the wood vanished, too. They bolted, and must have been thankful to get out of it. All they knew, probably, was that our men came along a road in the wood till they got to a clear part, and that through that opening the 9th were on them like a flash, without firing a shot. They managed to get in amongst the first line of the Germans with the lance and empty some of the saddles, while they themselves had only one or two men bowled over.

I had a splendid view of this brilliant little affair—I should think there were not more than 120 of the 9th—and I shall never forget the way in which the lancers went for the enemy, nor the swiftness with which the boasted Uhlans scuttled off behind the brow. It was an uncommonly fine piece of work, and it saved our column.

The Uhlans had another shot at us two or three days later. They were at quite close range, not more than four or five hundred yards away, but we managed to keep them off and go about our business, which was to reach the Marne and the Aisne, and then start back. We had about a month on the Aisne without making much progress, though our troops were hard at it all the time.

I had got out of Ypres—thankful to go—and had gone towards another town. It was about midday, and we had halted. The hot weather had gone away, and the cold had come. I was walking up and down to keep myself warm. Shells were falling and bursting, as usual, but I did not pay much attention to them. At last one burst about fifty yards away, and a fragment struck me and knocked me round, after which I fell. At first I thought I had been struck by a stone or a brick which somebody had thrown, and it was not for some time that I realised that I had been wounded in the thigh by a piece of shell. I was sent to England in due course, and here I am, in a most comfortable hospital at the seaside, ready to leave for home in two or three days.

My own experience with regard to the wound is not uncommon. It is not easy to say how you have been hit, and I have known men who have been shot through the body and have been quite unable to say whether the bullet went in at the front or the back.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### BRITISH GUNNERS AS CAVE-DWELLERS

[Sir John French has repeatedly praised the splendid work of the Royal Artillery during the war and glowing tributes to the courage and resourcefulness of British gunners have been paid by the other branches of the Army. Many a critical battle has been turned into a success by the artillery, some of the batteries of which have particularly distinguished themselves. Amongst them is the 134th, of whose officers and men no fewer than five were mentioned in Sir John French's list, published on February 18th, of names of those whom he recommended for gallant and distinguished conduct in the field. This story of some of the work of our gunners is told by Corporal Ernest Henry Bean, of the 134th Field Battery, who was severely wounded and invalided home.]

You cannot exaggerate anything in this war. I am of a cheerful and hopeful disposition, but I never thought I should live through the awful business; yet here I am, cheerful still, though shot through both feet, and forced to hop when I want to get from place to place.

I have had some strange adventures during the last few months, and one of the oddest was in this good old Yarmouth. That was when the Germans came and bombed us. But I will tell you about the air raid later. Here are two eighteen-pounder shells, not from the front, but from practice-firing, and it was such shells as these that made havoc amongst the German troops, especially when we got to work on big bodies of them.

The war came upon us so suddenly that even now it seems amazing that I left peaceful England on a summer day and went straight into the very thick of things. There was no waiting, for I sailed from Southampton on the day after Mons was fought, and when we got into action it was at Le Cateau. We had had a short spell in a rest camp, then we had some hard marching. Throughout the whole of one night we kept at it, and soon after breakfast next morning we were in the thick of one of the most terrible artillery fights that has ever been known. For six mortal hours we were under an incessant shell-fire. The experience itself was enough to leave its mark for ever on your mind, but I shall always remember it because of what happened to our horses. They were not used to this awful business and they stampeded, galloping all over the place, and defying every effort of the drivers to control them. The horses bolted with the waggons and tore madly over the country, taking pretty nearly everything that came in their way. The drivers were on the horses, but they were powerless to control the frightened animals.

The battery itself was in action. I was with the teams—on an open road with half-a-dozen of them, and no protection whatever, for the road ran between open fields. We were a fine target for the Germans, and they saw it and began to shell us hell for leather. The fire was deadly and there is no wonder that the horses bolted.

What was to be done? What could be done except make a dash for shelter? I did my level best to get out of the open and seek shelter. But shelter seemed far away, there was nothing near at hand, but in

the distance I saw something that seemed hopeful, so I galloped towards it with my teams. We went furiously along, and as I got nearer to the object I could make out that it was a long brick wall which separated an orchard from the road.

For about a mile, under a constant and furious fire, I dashed on; then I got to the wall, and instantly I drew in as many of the bolting horses as I could lay hands on. It all happened so swiftly that it is not easy to tell how this was done; but I know that I was safely mounted on my own horse when the stampede began, and that I dashed at the bolting animals and grabbed as many as I could, and that I hurried them to the shelter of the wall, and I fancy that they were just about as glad of the protection as I was. The gallop was a mad affair, and very likely it would never have ended as it did if all the shells the Germans fired had burst; but some of them did not explode, though I did not know of this till later, when I picked some of them up from the ground.

While I was in the thick of this exciting business Farrier-Sergeant Scott was rushing about and securing other runaway teams, and he did so well and his work was considered so brilliant and important that the French gave him the decoration of the Legion of Honour.

For the best part of an hour I was under cover of the wall, doing the best I could with the horses, and it was a funny old job to keep them anything like quiet with such a heavy fire going on all the time; yet so complete was the protection that practically no damage was done, the worst that occurred being the shattering of a pair of wheels by a bursting shell.

By the end of the hour both myself and the horses

were pretty well settling down; then things calmed down a bit. The Germans appeared to be tired of pounding at us, and perhaps they thought that they had blown us to pieces. At any rate we began to get out of it, and we had no sooner started to do that than the firing instantly re-opened.

There was a village not far away and we made a dash for it; but we were forced to clear out, for the enemy's artillery set the little place on fire and all the stacks and buildings were in flames. There was a good deal of confusion and mixing up of all sorts of troops. I had lost touch with my own lot and was ordered by a captain to join another column for the night, and this I did. I joined the 2nd Brigade Ammunition Column and next day I was with my own battery again, thankful to have got safely through a very dangerous business.

Next day we picked up another position, and had no sooner done that than information came that immense bodies of Germans were on the move in our direction. The outlook was serious, because we were in the open and there was nothing for it except a fight to the death. The Germans were expected along a certain road and we made ready to fire at what is practically point-blank range, using Fuses 0 and 2, so that at 500 and 1000 yards the masses of the enemy would have had the shells bursting amongst them.

We had been through some tough times; but not in any situation which was as unpromising as this. We knew that we could make a long stand, and mow down the Germans as they swept along the open country; but we knew also that in the end vastly superior forces must tell against us; but we held

our ground and the stern order went round, "Each take charge of your own gun—and God help us!"

How long that awful strain lasted I cannot tell. It could not have been long, but it seemed an eternity. While it lasted the strain was almost unendurable; then it suddenly snapped, an immense relief came over us and even the bravest and most careless amongst us breathed more freely when we knew that the prospect of almost sure annihilation had passed, for the German hosts, instead of coming by the expected road, had gone another way.

With lighter hearts we limbered up, and day after day, night after night, for eleven days, we kept hard at it, marching and fighting, and whenever we got into action it was against very heavy odds. I was with my own special chum, Sergeant Charlie Harrison, and often enough, especially in the night-time, we would walk alongside our horses and talk as we dragged ourselves along—talk about anything that came into our minds, and all for the sake of keeping awake and not falling down exhausted on the road; yet in spite of everything we could do we would fall asleep. Sometimes we would continue walking while practically asleep—we wanted to save our horses as much as we could—and more than once, when I was riding, I went to sleep and fell out of the saddle. There was one good thing, however, about the shock—it acted as a very fine wakener-up. As for sleeping, when we got the chance of it, we could do that anywhere—in ploughed fields, deep in mud and water, and on the road itself.

All sorts of strange and unexpected things happened. While I was with the Ammunition Column the Engineers were putting all their smartness and skill

into the building of a pontoon, and the Germans were specially favouring them with "Coal Boxes." This was my introduction to these big brutes of shells, and it was not pleasant, especially as the column was not more than twenty-five yards from the spot where they were exploding with a terrific roar.

I was standing by my horse, feeling none too comfortable, when a big shell burst and made awful havoc near me. A piece of it came and struck me. I thought I was done for, then I looked around at myself, and found that the two bottom buttons of my greatcoat had been torn away, but that no further damage had been done. I was glad to have got off so easily, and just as pleased to find that the horses had escaped.

At this time we were wanting food pretty badly, so that every ration became precious. We were bivouacked when a file of infantrymen brought in a German prisoner. Of course we gave him a share of pretty well everything there was going, hot tea, bread, biscuits and bully beef, and he did himself well. The prisoner was not exactly the sort to arouse compassion, for he looked well fed and was dressed in a very smart uniform. An officer came up, saw the captive, and said, "Do you think this fellow looks as if he wanted anything?" Truth to tell, the fellow didn't, and as we did want things badly, he was sent somewhere else, and we were not sorry to see him go.

After being kept so constantly on the rack, we had a welcome and remarkable change—we became cave-dwellers. We spent five days and nights in some of the famous caves at Soissons, and had a thoroughly comfortable and happy time. We had a fine chance

of resting and enjoying ourselves, and we made the most of it.

Originally these caves were occupied by very primitive people; lately they were used as a French hospital, and the French made all sorts of interesting pictures and carvings on the outsides, by way of decoration, then the British took them over as billets. By nature the caverns were queer gloomy places, but a good deal had been done to make them habitable, such as fitting in doors and windows. There had been a lot of fighting near the caves, with the result that there were graves at the very entrances of some of these uncommon billets; but this had no effect on our spirits. We did not allow ourselves to be depressed. What is the use of that in wartime? The British soldier has the happy knack of making himself at home in all kinds of odd places, and so we did in our billets in the rocks and hillside. We called one of our caves the "Cave Theatre Royal," and another the "Cave Cinema," and many a cheerful performance and fine sing-song we had. The only light we had came from candles, but you can sing just as well by candle-light as you can by big electric lamps, and I don't suppose that ever since the caves were occupied they rang with more cheerful sounds than were heard when the British soldiers were joining in a chorus of the latest popular song from home.

Another great advantage of the caverns was that they gave splendid cover to our guns, and protection to ourselves, so that these five days and nights gave us a real rest and complete change, and we were very sorry when we left them and resumed the work of incessant fighting and marching. We were constantly at the guns, and by way of showing what a fearful

business the artillery duels became at times, I may tell you that from a single battery alone—that is, half-a-dozen guns—in one day and night we fired more than 4000 rounds.

It was a vast change from the comfort and safety of the caverns, where never a German shell reached us, to the open again, but we got our quiet times and little recreations still, and one of these intervals we devoted to football. We were at Messines, and so was a howitzer battery, and as we happened to be rather slack, we got up a match. I am keen on football, and things were going splendidly. I had scored two goals and we were leading 3-1, when the game came to a very sudden stop, for some German airmen had seen us running about and had swooped down towards us, with the result that the howitzer chaps were rushed into action and we followed without any loss of time. We took it quite as a matter of course to let the football go, and pound away at the Germans, who had so suddenly appeared. It was getting rather late, so we gave the enemy about fifty rounds by way of saying good-night. We always made a point of being civil in this direction; but our usual dose for good-night was about fifteen rounds.

Talking of football recalls sad memories. On Boxing Day, 1913, when I and an old chum were home on leave, I played in a football match, and at the end of the game a photograph was taken of the team. On last Boxing Day, if the roll of the team had been called, there would have been no answer in several cases—for death and wounds have claimed some of the eleven. Little did we think when we were being grouped for the picture that it was the last muster for us as a team.



We had got through the tail end of summer and were well into autumn, and soon the gloom of November was upon us, then came my change of luck and I was knocked out. It was November 2, and almost as soon as it was daylight we were in the thick of an uncommonly furious artillery duel, one of the very worst I have seen. The Germans seemed to be making a special effort that morning. They had got our position pretty accurately, and they fired so quickly and had the range so well that we were in a real hell of bursting shrapnel, indeed, the fragments were so numerous that it is little short of a miracle that we were not wiped out.

We had not been long in action when a shell burst on the limber-pole, smashed it in halves, penetrated through the wheel, blew the spokes of the wheel away and shot me some distance into the air. For a little while I had no clear idea of what had happened, then I found that three of us had been wounded. My right boot had been blown to shreds, and there was a hole right through the left boot. So much I saw at once—a mess of blood and earth and leather; but of the extent of my wounds I knew very little, nor did I trouble much about them at the time. The first thing I did was to get into the main pit by the side of the gun, the captain and one or two chums helping me, and there, though the pain of my wounds was terrible, I laughed and chatted as best I could, and I saw how the battery kept at it against big odds.

Number 1, Sergeant Barker, who was in charge of the gun, had been struck by a piece of shrapnel, which had fractured his leg; but though that was quite enough to knock him out of time, he never flinched or faltered. He held on to his gun, and went

on fighting pretty much as if nothing had happened. Number 2, Gunner Weedon, had been wounded through the thigh, a bad injury about three inches long being caused; but he, too, held gamely on.

I tried to crawl out of the pit; but could not do so, and I passed the time by trying to cheer my chums, just as they did their best to help me to keep my own spirits up.

The sergeant found time occasionally to turn round and ask how I was getting on.

"It's all right, old Bean," he shouted cheerily. "Keep quiet. We can manage without you." And he went on firing, while the officers continued to give orders and encourage the men.

I was getting very thirsty and craved for a drink; but I saw no prospect of getting either water or anything else at such a time.

The sergeant noticed my distress and gave me the sweetest drink I ever tasted, and that was a draught from his own canteen. He managed to stop firing for a few seconds while he did this—just long enough to sling his canteen round, let me take a pull, and sling it back. I learned afterwards that throughout the whole of that day, in that inferno of firing and bursting shells, the sergeant stuck to his gun and kept it at. For his courage and tenacity he has been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, and no man has ever more fully deserved it.

I was lying in the gun pit for about an hour, then a doctor came and my wounds were dressed, but there was no chance of getting away for the time being, so I had to wait till the firing ceased. At last a stretcher was brought, and I was carried into a barn which was at the rear of our battery. One of the bearers was



[To face p. 222.

“ WE WERE IN A REAL HELL OF BURSTING SHRAPNEL ” (p. 221).

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Sergeant E. Leet, the right-back in our battery team. He left the fight to bear a hand with me, and as soon as I was safely in the barn he returned to his post. He had no sooner done that than he too was struck down by a wound in the ankle and had to be invalided home.

When I was carried away the major and the sergeant-major said good-bye, and I rather think they expected that that was the last they would ever see of me. I certainly felt bad, and I daresay I looked it; but I was quite cheerful. I particularly felt it when I passed my chum, Charlie Harrison, because for more than six years we had kept together without a break. We shouted good-bye as we passed, and I did not know whether I should ever see him again.

When I reached the barn I wanted to get back to the battery, to be at my own gun again, to bear a hand once more in the fighting that was still going on and seemed as if it would never stop; but when I tried to stand up I collapsed, through pain and loss of blood. Soon after this I heard that Charlie Harrison too had been wounded. He was struck on the neck just after I was carried away from the gun pit and had shouted good-bye to him; but he bandaged himself and refused to leave the battery.

What became of him? Why, he got home from the front a day or two ago, and you've just seen him. There he is. And let me show you this shattered foot, to let you see how it is that I'm forced to hop when I want to get about.

And now to get back to the air raid on the East Coast, which to me and other soldiers from the front who saw it, was an extraordinary experience, though I fancy that we took it more or less as a matter of

course, because you so soon get used to that kind of thing.

I had scarcely settled down at home when one night there was a fearful commotion, caused by dull explosions. I was a bit taken aback, for I knew what the sounds meant, and thought that I had done with the Germans and fighting for a spell at any rate.

As soon as the sound of the explosions was heard, people rushed into the streets—the most dangerous thing they could do—to see what it all meant, and there were cries that the Germans had come.

So they had. They had come in a gas-bag or two, and were dropping bombs on the good old town, which was lighted as usual, though that was soon altered.

I hopped into the street—hopping is the only thing I can do at present—and there I found that there was intense excitement and that women in particular were badly scared. But really the thing did not upset me at all—it was mere child's play compared with what I had been through, so I made myself useful, and hopped away and bought some brandy, which suited some of the scared people very well—so well that there wasn't a drop left for myself.

The raid was soon over, and so was the scare, and I hopped back to the house. There have been several frantic alarms since then, and more than once I have been shaken out of my sleep and told that the Germans have come again; but all I have said has been that it will take something far worse than a German gas-bag raid to make me turn out of bed in the middle of the night.

## CHAPTER XIX

### WITH THE "FIGHTING FIFTH"

[One of the battalions which composed the 5th Division of the British Expeditionary Force was the 1st East Surrey Regiment. It was on the 5th Division that so much of the heavy fighting fell on the way to the Aisne, and in that heavy fighting the East Surreys suffered very severely. This story is told by Private W. G. Long, who rejoined his regiment from the Reserve. He has been wounded by shrapnel, and has permanently lost the use of his right arm.]

WHEN I went out with my old battalion, the Young Buffs, we were more than 1,300 strong. When I came back, after six weeks' fighting, we had lost more than half that number. This simple fact will show you what the East Surreys have done during the war, as part of the famous "Fighting Fifth" which has been so greatly praised by Sir John French.

I had got up to start my day's work after the August Bank Holiday; but that day's work was never done, for the postman brought the mobilisation papers, and off I went to Kingston, after kissing my wife and baby good-bye. Many a fine fellow who marched off with me is sleeping in or near a little forest which we called "Shrapnel Wood." That was near Missy, where we crossed the Aisne on rafts.

We lost our first man soon after we landed in France, and before we met the Germans. That was at Landrecies, where we went into French barracks, and were

told off into rooms which we called rabbit-hutches, because they were so small—no bigger than a little kitchen at home. We were crowded into these, and the only bed we had was a bit of straw on the floor. The nights were bitterly cold, but the days were hot enough to melt us; so we had a bathing parade, and had a fine old time in the canal till one of our men was missed.

I looked around, and saw that one of our fellows was having artificial respiration tried on him. He came round, and then he told us that another man had gone under the water. Then began a really first-class diving display, many of our chaps plunging into the canal to try to find the missing soldier.

At last one of the divers rose and shouted, "I've got him!" And, sure enough, he had brought a poor chap to the surface. Lots of strong arms were stretched out, and in a few seconds the rescued man was got on to the bank, and every effort was made to bring him back to life. But nothing could be done. The man was drowned, and we buried him. This little tragedy threw quite a gloom over us till we moved away.

I am going to tell of a few of the things that happened and affected me personally. They took place mostly when we were retiring, and some of them occurred in the early days, when we were forging along in fearfully bad weather. We were soaked to the skin, and at night did our best to get some sort of shelter by building up the stacks of corn that had been cut for drying, but it was no use. The rain came through so heavily that we gave the task up, and waited for daylight again. When the day came it brought another rain of shells and bullets with it.



The place got too warm for us, so we had to leave and retire again. We went on, getting as much shelter as we could; and then we had to halt, and here the sorry discovery was made that we had not a round of ammunition left. At this time there were advancing towards us some men in khaki, and our sergeant, thinking they were our own men, told us not to fire at them.

The order was not necessary, seeing that we had nothing to fire with. As soon as these men got level with us on our flank they opened fire, and then we knew that they were Germans, who had stripped some of our men, or had picked up British caps and greatcoats which had been thrown aside.

In this desperate position a man who belonged to the Cornwall Light Infantry was shot just below the left ear. He was knocked down, but got up, and kept saying, " Help me ! Help me ! "

I shouted to him to lie down and keep under cover, but he took no notice, and kept on calling for help. He came up to me, and when he was near enough I pulled him down and forced him to lie on the ground. All this time there was a very heavy fire. We were getting shots from the front and on our flanks, and there was nothing for it but to get away as best we could.

I could not bear the thought of leaving this Cornwall man where he was, so I took him up and began to carry him, but it was very slow going. It was all uphill, the ground was sodden with rain, and I had to force a way through a field of turnips, which were growing as high as my knees. It was bad enough to make one's own way through such a tangle as that; but I am young and strong, and I managed to make

progress, although I was hit five different times—not hurt, but struck, a shot, for instance, hitting my cap, another my water-bottle, and another the sleeve of my coat.

After going a long distance, as it seemed, and feeling utterly exhausted, I put my man down under what I thought was safe shelter. I wanted to give him a drink, but I could not do so, as the shot-hole in my water-bottle had let the water run to waste.

At last we reached a roadway, where we saw some more of our men, who had got there before us, and had commandeered a horseless cart and filled it with wounded men.

I got the wounded man into the cart, and then off we all went. It was as much as we could manage to get the cart along, for it was such a great big thing; but we worked it willingly, the officers taking their turn in the shafts.

We dragged the cart along the heavy roads, but it was such hard going that we saw that we should be forced to get a horse from somewhere; so we looked around at the first farm we came to—and a sorry place it was, with everything in confusion, and the animals about suffering terribly and starving—and there we found a horse of the largest size.

With great difficulty we got together bits of harness, string and rope, and tied the horse in the shafts with the ropes for traces, and when we had finished we did not know whether we had harnessed the horse or tied the cart on to it. Anyway, we got along very well after that.

The cart had amongst its wounded an infantry officer who had been saved by one of our fellows, though the officer belonged to another regiment. He had got

entangled in some barbed wire, and, as he had been wounded in the leg, he could not move either one way or the other. He was absolutely helpless, and under a heavy fire.

Our fellow went out and got to the helpless officer, and, by sticking at it and doing all he could, being himself pretty badly cut in the operation, he freed the officer from the entanglement, and carried him safely up to the cart. We were getting on very nicely with our little contrivance when we ran into the 2nd Dragoons, but we soon left them behind us, and found ourselves amongst some of our own transport. We joined up with it, adding another and a very strange waggon to the column, and on we went until we reached a large town and halted.

During the whole of this time I had been carrying a canteen which had belonged to a Frenchman. It was quite a big canteen, and I kept it filled with apples, of which we got an enormous number, and on which at times we had practically to live for two or three days together.

We had reached a stage of fighting when we had to make continuous short rushes against the Germans, under hails of shrapnel. In making these rushes it often happened that we sheltered behind a little sort of earthwork which we threw up. We just made a bit of head cover and lay behind that; but sometimes this head cover could not be made, and that was where I scored with my Frenchman's canteen.

During one of our rushes shrapnel burst right over my head, and one fellow said to me, "I wouldn't carry that thing, George, if I were you." But, having kept it for so long, I was not going to throw it away.

Away we went. I was carrying the canteen in

my left hand, and my rifle in the right; but I changed them over, and I had no sooner done that than crash came a shell, and, in bursting, a fragment hit the canteen, and took a great piece out of it. I should have been badly wounded myself, but I had filled the canteen with earth, and so it had protected me and acted as a first-rate cover. The man who was on my right received a nasty wound.

After this we had to advance over open country, where there was not so much as a blade of grass for cover. We went on till we reached a ditch, which was full of water. Some of us had to wade through it, but others, by going farther back, were able to cross a tiny footbridge—one of those narrow planks which only allow one man at a time to cross. The Germans had a machine-gun trained at this little bridge so we lost no time in getting off it. It was here that our captain was mortally wounded by a shot, and we had other casualties in crossing the bridge.

From this point we had to climb to the top of a hill, which was so steep that we had to dig our fixed bayonets into the ground to help us up. There was a wood at the top of the hill, and there we took shelter; but we had no sooner got amongst the trees than the shrapnel was on us again, causing many casualties.

There were many funny incidents at this place, and one I particularly remember was that there were three of us in a sort of heap, when a piece of shell dropped just alongside. There was not any great force in it, because before falling the piece had struck a tree; but, as it dropped, fellows started turning up the collars of their coats, and rolling themselves into balls—just as if things of that sort could make any

difference to a bursting shell ; but it is amusing to see what men will do at such a time as that.

From this wood we got into what seemed a wide roadway between two other woods, and here we were under a never-ending rain of bullets, which hit the trees, sending splinters all over us, cutting branches off and ploughing up the ground on every side. One of our officers said, " Keep your heads down, lads," and he had scarcely got the words out of his mouth when he was shot in the body and killed, and we had to leave him where he fell.

So heavy and continuous was the fire that we could not get on between these two woods, and we had to try another way ; so we started to go through a vineyard, but we were forced to lie down. We sheltered as best we could amongst the vines, with bullets coming and actually cutting off bunches of grapes. Like good British soldiers, we made the best of the business, for we were both hungry and thirsty, and we devoured a good many of the bunches that were knocked off by the German bullets.

After this we got into an orchard, but we did not remain there long, as the place was later on blown to smithereens. We hung on to the orchard till it was dark, then we advanced farther into the wood, and again got through into the open, and lay down to try and get some sleep ; but that was almost impossible, because it was raining and perishingly cold, and we had nothing at all for cover. Then, in whispers, we were ordered to get out as silently as we possibly could.

At first I could not understand the meaning of this secrecy, but it soon became known that we had been actually sleeping amongst the enemy, though we were

not aware of this until we were again on the move. We crept about like a lot of mice, till we reached a village, where we were to get some breakfast.

We were settling down, and making ourselves comfortable under a wall which gave us some cover. There were some men from another regiment with us, and we thought we were going to have a good time, for we had got hold of some biscuits and jam. Then over the wall came a shell, which exploded and wounded about seven men from the other regiment. We did not stop for any more breakfast, and some of the men who had had nothing to eat did not trouble to get anything, and they went without food for the rest of the day.

We went back to the wood, and there we soon again found the Germans, and plenty of them. We fired at them for all we were worth, after which we advanced a little, and came across so many dead that we had to jump over them every pace we took. One thing which particularly struck me then, and which I remember now, was the great size of some of these German soldiers. At a little distance they looked just like fallen logs.

After that our officer called us together to wait for reinforcements. I thought I would have a look around me, and while I was doing so I saw one German running off to our left, about fifteen yards away. I took aim and fired, and down he went. I got down on my knee and unloaded my rifle, when I saw another German going in the same direction. I was just getting ready to take aim again, but this time I did not fire—in fact, I did not even get to the aim, for I felt something hit my arm.

For the moment I thought that some chap behind

me had knocked me with his rifle or his foot. I turned round, but there was no one behind me, so I concluded that I had been hit. I stood up, and then my arm began to wobble, and the blood streamed out of my sleeve. Some one shouted, " You've got it, George." And I replied : " Yes ; in the arm somewhere, but where I don't know."

I did my best to get back again, and then a fellow came, and ripped the sleeve open and dressed my arm, and there was all my elbow joint laid open, and some of the bones broken. This chap wanted to take me back to the village, but I said I was all right, although in a sense I was helpless. We started going back, and we got to the first house, where we saw a poor old man and his daughter who had been there all through the fighting. The place was filled with wounded, and the two were doing their best for them.

I asked for a drink, for I was almost dying of thirst, and I got some whisky. While I was drinking it a shell burst in the middle of the road, and sent the mud and stones everywhere ; so I shifted my quarters, and went along to a big house which had been a fine place, but it had been pulled to pieces, and was now being used as a hospital. The place itself gave no protection, but we found a cellar and crowded into it, and there we watched the Germans blowing the temporary hospital to pieces.

The night came, and it was terrible to hear the poor chaps moaning with pain. I was in pain myself now, but my sufferings were a mere nothing compared with those of some of the men around me. It seemed as if the day would never break, but at last it came, and by that time some of the poor fellows who had been making such pitiful noises were no more. Some

time after that, however, I got away in a field ambulance.

When we were at Le Cateau many spies were caught. I saw several of them. They were young chaps, dressed up as women and as boys and girls, and it was not very easy to detect them. One was disguised as a woman, with rather a good figure. I saw this interesting female when she was captured by our artillery. The gunners had their suspicions aroused, with the result that they began to knock the lady about a bit, and her wig fell off. Then her figure proved to be not what it seemed, for the upper front part of it was composed of two carrier-pigeons! I did not see the end of that batch of spies, but a battery sergeant-major afterwards told me that they had been duly shot.

One of the most extraordinary things I saw was the conduct of a man who had had his right arm shot off from above the elbow. I was standing quite near him, and expected that he would fall and be helpless. Instead of doing that, he turned his head and looked at the place where the arm should have been. I suppose he must have been knocked off his balance by what had happened. At any rate, he gave a loud cry, and instantly started to run as fast as I ever saw a man go. Two or three members of the Royal Army Medical Corps at once gave chase, with the object of securing him and attending to him. The whole lot of them disappeared over some rising ground, and what happened to them I do not know.

I saw many fellows who had queer tales to tell of what had happened to them. One chap, a rifleman, who was in the ship coming home, was so nervous that the slightest noise made him almost jump out





[To face p. 234.

“ I TOOK HIM UP AND BEGAN TO CARRY HIM ” (p. 227).

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of his skin. And well it might, for his nerves had been shattered. A shell had buried itself in the ground just in front of him and exploded, blowing him fifteen feet into the air, and landing him in a bed of mud. He was so completely stunned that he lay there for about eight hours, scarcely moving, though he was not even scratched. He came round all right, but was a nervous wreck, and had to be invalided.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE VICTORY OF THE MARNE

[One of the most moving statements in the earlier official reports dealing with the war was that about the fighting at Mons and elsewhere, which cost us 6000 men, and no paragraph was more stirring than that relating to Landrecies, a quiet little French town on the Sambre. "In Landrecies alone," the report said, "a German infantry brigade advanced in the closest order into the narrow street, which they completely filled. Our machine-guns were brought to bear on this target from the end of the town. The head of the column was swept away, a frightful panic ensued, and it is estimated that no fewer than 800 to 900 dead and wounded Germans were lying in this street alone." The story of that furious combat and the subsequent operations on the Marne is told by Corporal G. Gilliam, of the Coldstream Guards. On September 6, in conjunction with the French, the British assumed the offensive, and, after a four days' desperate struggle, which is known as the Battle of the Marne, the Germans were driven back to Soissons, with enormous losses.]

It was early on the afternoon of August 26 when we entered Landrecies, which is a little garrison town, consisting mostly of a single street in which there are three cross-roads. We were billeted in the people's houses, and for the first time in three days we had a drop of tea and a bit of dinner in comfort, and to crown our satisfaction we were told we could lie down and rest, but we were to have our bayonets fixed and rifles by our sides and kits ready to put on.

We were soon down to it and sound asleep. It

was about eight o'clock when some of us woke, and after a smoke were off to sleep again, but not for long, for almost immediately we heard the sound of a motor-cycle, and knew that the rider was travelling at a terrific rate.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and the rider himself swept round the corner of the street. He never stopped nor slackened speed; he simply shouted one word as he vanished, and that was "Germans!" Only one word, but enough.

Rifles in hand, we rushed to the top of the street and lined the three cross-roads, lying down. Our officer, who was standing up behind us, said, "Lie still, men"; and we did—perfectly still, not a man moving. All at once, out of the darkness, an officer came and cried in English to our commander, "Surrender!"

"We don't surrender here!" our officer answered. "Take that!"—and instantly shot him through the head with his revolver.

Our officer's shot had scarcely died away when crash went a German artillery gun, and a lyddite shell burst right over us. This was our first experience of lyddite, and the fumes nearly choked us.

"Lie still, boys—don't move!" said our officer; and we lay low.

Just then, from the opposite direction, we heard the sound of horses and a waggon, in the distance, it seemed; but soon it was very near, and to our great joy there dashed up the street one of the guns of the 17th Field Battery. There was a shout of "Into action! Left wheel!" And in truly magnificent style that gun was almost instantly laid and ready for action.

Shells now came upon us rapidly, wounding several of our men; but our maxim gunners had got to work, and very soon enormous numbers of Germans were put beyond the power of doing any further mischief.

Many splendid things were done that night at Landrecies; but there was nothing finer than the work of our maxim-gunner Robson, who was on our left. Our machine-guns were by now at our end of the town, and they had a solid mass of Germans to go at. Robson was sitting on his stool, and as soon as the officer ordered "Fire!" his maxim hailed death. It literally was a hail of fire that met the packed Germans, and swept down the head of the column, so that the street was choked in an instant with the German dead. Those who lived behind pushed on in desperation—shoved on by the masses still further behind, the darkness being made light by the fire of the maxims and the enemy's rifles. Those behind, I say, pressed on, with fearful cries, but only to be mown down and shattered, so that the street became more than ever glutted with the dead and wounded. The Germans were thrown into frenzy, and if sheer weight of men could have driven the head of the column on to us not a British soldier could have lived that night at Landrecies.

Meanwhile, we had been ordered to hold our fire. There were only 600 of us opposed to an immense body of Germans; but the maxims were doing annihilating work, and the artillery had got into action.

When the gun of the 17th had got the order to fire we heard a gunner shout: "Watch me put that gun out of action!"—meaning a German gun

which had been brought up and laid against us. He fired, and the most marvellous thing happened, for the shell from it went right down the muzzle of the German weapon and shattered it to pieces.

Then we heard a shout, and before we could look round about 4000 German infantry were charging us, with horns blowing and drums beating—adding to the fearful din.

“Don’t shoot, boys,” shouted our officer, “till I give the word!”

On the living mass of Germans came. They rushed up to within 80 yards of us; then the order rang out: “Fire!”

Again the Germans got it—fifteen rounds to the minute from each rifle, for the front rank men had their loading done for them. As soon as a rifle was emptied it was handed to the rear and a fresh loaded rifle was handed back. In this way the rifles were kept from getting too hot, and an incessant fire was poured into the Germans.

In spite of this hail, a few Germans managed to break through their walls of dead and wounded. One of them, disguised as a French officer, and wanting us to think he had been a prisoner, but had just broken away from the Germans, rushed up to Robson and patted him on the shoulder and said: “Brave fellow!” And with that he whipped round his sword and killed our maxim gunner on the spot; but he himself was instantly shot down by our enraged fellows.

There was another case of treachery, this time, unhappily, from inside our ranks. Our guide, a man claiming to be a Frenchman, at about one o’clock in the morning, turned traitor, and went

and told the Germans how many there were of us, and by way of indicating our position he fired a haystack; but he had no sooner done that than two bullets settled him.

One of our corporals dashed away to put the fire out, but before he reached the haystack he was killed. It was at this time that Private Wyatt, of my company, rushed out—everything was done at a rush—and brought in a wounded officer. The colonel, who was on his horse, and saw what had happened, said: "Who is that brave man?" He was told, and afterwards Wyatt was taken before the general and recommended for a decoration.

Hour after hour, all through the time of darkness, and until daylight came, that terrible fight went on. For seven long hours a few hundred British Guards had kept at bay an enormous body of Germans—and at the end of the firing we had killed far more than the whole of our force numbered when the battle began. We had given them wholesale death from our machine-guns, our rifles, and our artillery, and they had faced it—they had been driven on to it. Now they were to have the bayonet.

We gave them two charges; but they didn't stop long, for as soon as they saw the cold steel on the ends of our rifles they were off like a shot, throwing down a lot of rifles and equipment. When this happened it was between five and six o'clock on the morning of the 27th, and we then got the order to retire.

We were told that we had lost 126 in killed and wounded. That was a heavy list, but not so big as we had expected, bearing in mind the furious nature of the fight. The marvel was that we had



not been wiped out, and we should certainly have been in a very serious state if it had not been for the 17th Field Battery. There is this to be said, too: if the Germans had broken through our lines it would have meant that, in all probability, the whole Second Division of our army would have been cut up.

We fell in and were soon on the march again, retiring, and we marched as fast as we could go till we halted at a rather large town about ten miles from Landrecies. Here we were in clover, in a way of speaking, because we sheltered in a clay-pit where the French had been making bricks, and we all sat down and waited for our tea of German shells.

They soon came and we were on the move again, and we were constantly at it, retiring and fighting, until we halted about thirty miles from Paris; then we were told that after retiring another dozen miles it would be our turn to advance.

Didn't we cheer? It was glorious to hear we were going to chase the Germans instead of their chasing us. At this time we had our first wash for a fortnight, and it was as good as having a thousand pounds given to us.

The fiercest fighting of the war has taken place on Sundays, and it was on a Sunday that the Battle of the Marne began. The Germans had had the biggest surprise of their lives on a Sunday, and that was at Mons. Though we had been kept on the go because they outnumbered us so hopelessly, we mauled them mercilessly on the retreat, teaching them many bitter lessons. When we got to the Marne and were able to tackle them on equal terms, they scarcely had a look in. The Germans had almost reached the forts of Paris, and, I daresay,

had their bands ready to play them into the city. Soon, however, they were hurrying back on their tracks a good deal faster than they had come. We heard the German bands playing a good many times, but every time we heard the music it was farther away from Paris.

We covered such big tracks of country, and saw so many great happenings, that it is the most difficult thing in the world to know where to start a story of the Marne; but I will come down to the time just before the battle, when we were still retiring, and had got used to marching twenty or twenty-five miles a day. We had left the Germans very sore for coming too close to us, and we had gone through a small town and entered a great wood.

While we were in the wood I had to fall out. Almost instantly I heard the sound of talking which wasn't English, and in the distance I saw six Germans coming after me as hard as they could. I thought it was all up with me, but I said "Come on, chum, let's clear!"—"chum" being my rifle, which I had placed on the ground. I snatched it up and sprang behind a tree, and felt fairly safe. It's wonderful what a feeling of security a good rifle and plenty of ammunition give you. I waited till the Germans got within a hundred yards of me; then with a good aim I fetched down two; but my position was becoming very critical, as the other four dodged from tree to tree, watching for a chance to pot me, and it looked very much as if they wouldn't have long to wait. I don't know what would have happened, but to my intense relief three men of the 17th Field Battery, which was passing, rushed up and shouted, "Don't move. We'll have 'em!"

By this time the four Germans were within about fifty yards, continually sniping at me—how I blessed them for being such bad shots!—and at last they came out into the open and made straight in my direction. But they only dashed about twenty yards, for my rescuers put “paid” to the four of them, and saved me from being made a prisoner and worse, far worse, for by that time we had seen proof enough of the monstrous things they did to men they captured—things you might expect from savages, but certainly not from soldiers of a nation that boasts so much of its civilisation.

The last day of our retirement was September 4, and on that day we never saw the enemy. We had crossed and recrossed the River Marne, and had blown up bridges as we retired; but the Germans threw their own bridges over the river with amazing speed, and kept up the pursuit. Sometimes they overdid their zeal, and were a trifle too quick for their own comfort.

We had blown up two bridges that crossed the Marne, one a railway bridge and the other a fine stone structure. I was one of the last of our men to cross the stone bridge before the engineers, who had made it ready for destruction. The bridge ran between two high banks, so that it was a considerable height above the water. When the explosion took place there was a tremendous shattering roar, almost like a salvo of Black Marias, then a crashing and grinding and thudding as the middle of the bridge was utterly wrecked, and fell into the river, leaving an immense gap between the banks. The work of months, costing thousands upon thousands of pounds, had been smashed in a few seconds.

I was looking back at the ruins when I saw a motor-car, with several Germans in it, tearing after us, meaning to cross the bridge as we had done. The car came on at a tremendous speed, and the Germans in it must have had eyes only for us and none for the road in front of them, for they rushed on right into the blank space, and before they knew what was happening, the car was in the river.

We had had battle after battle, each one in itself enough to make a long story. We had fought and marched in the fearful August heat, and had been thankful when we could lie down with a little heap of sand or a sheaf of corn as a pillow. At last we were so near Paris that the forts opened fire, and that was the beginning of what I'm sure will be the end of the Germans.

Now at last we were in touch with the French, and we got the Germans in a proper grip. The French got round the Germans and turned them towards Coulommiers, a town on the Marne; then the British took the job on and drove the Germans through the town. That part of the work fell largely on the Guards, and what we were doing was being done, of course, over an enormous stretch of country by other British and French troops.

We had got to the night of September 5 and were lying in trenches which we had dug along a canal bank about Coulommiers. We waited for the Germans to come, and they came in fine style. It was getting dark and we could make out three of their aeroplanes sweeping in the air like big birds. We had seen a good deal of the German aeroplanes by this time and knew what to expect. These were trying to find out our positions, so that they



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“ BEFORE THEY KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING THE CAR WAS  
IN THE RIVER.”



could signal to their gunners and give them the range.

Suddenly the aeroplanes dropped some balls of blue fire, and very pretty the fireworks looked; but we hadn't time to admire them, because the German artillery instantly opened fire on us with such fury that we felt the very ground shake as we lay in our trenches.

Under cover of their guns the Germans—the 32nd Infantry Brigade, I think it was—dashed up to the other side of the canal bank and blazed away at us; but we blazed harder at them. We gave them a fair hell of rifle fire and very soon they were forced to clear out, leaving the whole of the canal bank littered with their dead and wounded.

A fine little "tiffey" we had at the Marne was a rearguard action, in which there was one of those British cavalry and infantry charges that have shaken a lot of the Germans to pieces, especially the Uhlans, who are a pretty poor crowd in spite of all their boasting.

Our scouts had returned with the news that the Germans were entrenched about a mile and a half away, on the bank of the Marne. We got the order to extend the usual three paces, and our advance guard went out, while our main body lay down. Our advance guard had gone about 900 yards when the German infantry opened fire. We took it up, and there was a ceaseless rattle. We kept the Germans well employed, and our advance guard were pouring in a proper good peppering. But there was a little surprise in store for them. We had with us a couple of the magnificent British cavalry regiments—the Scots Greys and the 16th Lancers, and they swept

on till they got to a little wood, where they had the Germans on the left wing of their rearguard, fairly at their mercy. When they were ready for the charge the signal was given to our advance guard, and, with a perfect roar of cheering, the British cavalry and infantry hurled themselves on the Germans, a tremendous weight of horse and man. The Greys and the 16th fairly thundered over the earth, and the Guards rushed up in splendid style, though we had our heavy packs, and in such hot weather a big weight adds enormously to the terrific work of charging. But you don't think of heat or weight at such a time—you feel only the thrill and excitement of the battle and have the joy of knowing that you are settling the account of a suffering and outraged nation.

Cavalry and Guards got in amongst the Germans and fairly scattered them. I got one German in the back and another sideways, and all around me chums were doing the same, while the cavalry were cutting the Germans down everywhere. Limbs literally flew about as they were lopped off with the sword, and Germans in the open and in the trenches—for we routed them out—fell to the bayonet.

That was a fierce and bloody "tiffey," and there have been many like it. At the end of it we had settled that particular German rearguard and had a nice bag of prisoners. A lot of these prisoners were glad to be out of the business; most of the Germans we captured seemed to feel like that, and I remember hearing one of them—an officer—say, in good English, "Thank God I'm caught! Now I shall not starve any more!"

Talking of charges, I might tell you that there



is a great difference between the British and the German ways of doing it. The Germans make as much noise as possible—a perfect devil of a row, with drums thumping and trumpets sounding, and, of course, their banners flying. We carry no colours into action (we leave them at home), we have no drum-thumping and no bugles sounding—often enough the signal for a charge is just something like a hand wave or a word of command; but that answers all practical purposes and starts us on the business as quickly and full of fire as any amount of noise.

When we had got through our first rearguard action we thought we had driven the Germans to the other side of the Marne and got them fairly on the move back to Berlin; but to our surprise we were attacked by a strong force of their cavalry, who had been in ambush not a thousand yards away. The German horsemen came on us at a full gallop and swept on until they were about two hundred yards away. At this particular spot there were Guards, Worcesters, and Camerons, and it looked very much as if the Germans would dash up and do a lot of mischief.

The commander of the Worcesters shouted, “Fix bayonets! Make sure of your men.”

On came the German cavalry, with a roar and a rattle, until they were less than a hundred yards away; then we let go and the troopers tumbled out of their saddles like ninepins. The going was too hard for German cavalry, and as one of their officers shouted an order, they wheeled round and made off, rushing, as they supposed, for a safe place and a way out; but they galloped straight up to a spot where some French artillery were in position.

The Germans thundered on towards their fancied safety; then there were crashes from the French artillery, and shells went plump into the horsemen and practically annihilated them. Horses and men were shattered, and of those who escaped the French took about one hundred and fifty prisoners. It was a fine little performance, and helped us to fix in our memories the first meeting with the Frenchmen on the Marne.

The artillery fire on the Marne was awful in its destructiveness and earsplitting in its noise—sometimes the very air seemed to be solid matter that was broken into chunks and knocked about you; but we soon got used to it all, and laughed and smoked and joked in the trenches, where, at the back, we had dug-outs which we called rabbit-hutches. These were shelter-places, well covered at the top, and were most useful protections against shells. When the enemy's fire became too hot we would go into our rabbit-hutches.

About noon on the 6th we had re-formed and advanced to the bank of the river, and there we found that we were opposed to a large body of Germans and that they had howitzer batteries with them. These howitzers do deadly mischief, and the fumes from their lyddite shells are perfectly poisonous—they spread through a good big patch of air and suffocate the men. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the Germans began to pour into us a fearful fire, and we were enfiladed; but our trenches gave us some fine shelter, and the Germans did not have their own way for long, nor did they do much damage at that point. Here again the British had ready one more of the many surprises

that the Germans met with on the banks of the Marne. One of our batteries of short howitzers, four guns, went along the river bank and hid in some bushes on the right of the German howitzers, while a battery of our field artillery dashed up and took a commanding position which got the Germans between two fires. Then the command was given, "Ten rounds rapid fire!"

But ten rounds were not needed—only four were fired before the German battery was put to rest. But the crippling of the German howitzers did not seem to have much effect on the enemy at that point, for they rushed up more of the infantry, which, brought along by immense numbers of trains and motors, literally swarmed over the countryside.

At this time we renewed our acquaintance with some of the Germans who were known to us as the "drop-shots." I believe there is only one brigade of them in the German Army, and I will do them the justice to say that they are very good at the game. They kneel down, and putting the butt of the rifle on the thigh, fire in the air at an angle of about forty-five degrees. The bullet makes a big arc and drops right on top of you in such places as trenches. These "drop-shots" were about four hundred yards away, but they hadn't got just the right range of us and the bullets plugged into the wrong places.

The "drop-shots" tried their queer game on us for about half an hour, but finding that they could not damage us, they stopped, especially as we were beginning to shift them out of their positions. There was some furious rifle firing between the troops entrenched on both banks of the Marne, and often

enough the reddened water bore away many a dead soldier.

The fighting was always most fierce when the Germans were in masses and hurled their regiments against us in their attempt to hack their way through to Paris. Any street fighting that came about was sure to be terrific, and one of the most furious of the fights took place in the streets of Coulommiers, a town similar to Reading.

Coulommiers, of course, was almost entirely given up to troops, for the inhabitants had been warned by us to leave and get as far away from the Germans as they could go. Poor souls, they did not need much persuading, knowing what they did of German "culture," and, carrying with them only such few oddments as they could quickly collect, they fled, the roads leading to Paris being thick with them. During this fighting in Coulommiers there was such brilliant moonlight that you could see almost well enough to shoot a rabbit.

It was about eight o'clock at night when we got to Coulommiers. We were just going to stop to have some food when the Germans put two big shells into us, killing four of our men, and wounding fourteen. We jumped up, fixed bayonets, and rushed for the Germans; but we were brought up by some more shells, and for a couple of hours the guns were banging at us. Fortunately the shells had a bit too long a range, and instead of hitting us they went over the back of us.

We lay down until ten o'clock, when the order was given to prepare to charge. Up again we sprang—we were getting used to charging—and made another rush, running as hard as we could down the

street for a hundred yards, then lying flat in the roadway.

All this time the Germans were pouring in on us a fire which, if it had been accurate, would have swept us out of existence. But it was very poor stuff, and we were lucky enough to escape with the loss of a very few men. We were lying down for five minutes, then we were up and off again, dashing along the main street.

It was a rousing bit of work, and we gloried in it, especially when, from every doorway in the street, Germans dashed out and made a bolt for their lives. They had been firing at us from bedroom windows, and tore frantically downstairs and out of doorways when they saw that we were fairly on the job and after them.

That bolting gave us just the chance we wanted. We drove after the flying Germans as hard as we could go, and being big and powerful men, with plenty of weight in us, we literally picked some of them up on the bayonets. We rushed them through the town and out of it; then we came across a gang of Germans who were no good at all. They had looted all the wine-shops and soaked themselves with liquor. Many a German from Mons to the Marne was drunk when he died or was made a prisoner.

When we had dashed through Coulommiers we had to halt, because the Germans had four batteries of guns and a division of cavalry waiting for us. So we retired to the cross-roads in the middle of the town, and had to take up almost exactly the same position as we did at Landrecies, where the Coldstreamers wiped out a strong German force in the street. We waited at Coulommiers till our heavy

howitzer batteries were fetched up, then we lined the cross-roads, two howitzers were placed at the end of each street and we were in at the finish of the fight.

It was about midnight when the Germans started shelling us again, and the town blazed and boomed with the awful gunfire. We did not suffer much damage, but the houses were wrecked, and bricks and stones and pieces of timber were flying all about. A few of the bricks struck us, but we paid no heed to trifles like that. The Germans kept up the firing till about half-past two in the morning. Then, to our great surprise, they charged down the street.

“ Lie still, boys, and let them come ! ” our officers shouted.

We lay perfectly quiet, and let the Germans rush on till they were almost upon us; then the sharp order came : “ Ten rounds rapid fire ! ”

There was an absolute fusillade, and the ten rounds were fired in less than a minute, and simply struck the Germans down. Their dead and wounded were lying thick in the roadway and on the pavements when we sprang up and were after the survivors with the bayonet. This time we chased them up to the very muzzles of the guns, where we had a splendid bit of luck. The German gunners flew when they saw us, and we were on top of them and on top of the infantry. We dashed straight through the batteries, the enemy flying before the bayonet, and there, in the moonlight, which was almost as strong as daylight, I accounted for two of them with my own steel.

For fully three miles that furious chase was kept up, the Germans flying in all directions. It was a long and fierce fight in the moonlight, but at the end of it Coulommiers was ours, and six batteries of

German guns and a thousand prisoners were ours, too, to say nothing of the killed and wounded.

You might have thought that enough had been done, but we had scarcely settled down to have a little drop of something hot to drink—and we needed it badly—when the cry arose, “Come on, boys; let’s get after them again!” We emptied our canteens, which were full of hot coffee and rum, and were after the Germans again as hard as we could go. By daylight we had put the finish on them at Coulommiers. We were well pleased, too, with the fine haul of guns.

We had fought fiercely, and had not spared the Germans—no one could have any mercy on them who saw the proofs, as we had seen them, of their barbarities. When we advanced into Coulommiers we saw the bodies of two little girls who had been murdered and mutilated in a shocking manner. There were in that locality alone scores of such atrocities committed by the brutes who came from the land of “culture” and are being driven back to it.

I had a fair innings at the Marne, and saw a good deal of the beginning of the fight which started the Germans on the run. I had two days and nights of it; then I was bowled out by a piece of shell which struck me on the thigh and went off with a piece of flesh. I felt as if a brick had hit me, and when I saw the blood I thought it was all up with me. The doctor told me that this might easily have happened if the wound had been a little deeper. He was Lieutenant Huggin, of the Royal Army Medical Corps, a kind and brave gentleman, who was soon afterwards killed while doing his duty under fire. He was mentioned in despatches, with other officers who did so much. I remember one of them, a field officer of the

Coldstreamers, during a very hot fight standing with his hands in his pockets watching to see how things were going, and saying, "Men, this is beautiful! We shall soon be on the other side of the river."

And we soon were — though to cross the Marne meant that we had at one time to fight waist deep in its waters.

The Battle of the Marne was hard, long work, following a long and terrible retreat; but it was a glorious victory. We had many privations, but also many compensations, and we were always cheerful, and very often singing. "Tipperary" was an easy first.

We often saw Sir John French and General Joffre, and I can tell you that when our own great field-marshal appeared it was as good as a victory for us, for we fairly worship him. Sir John is a thorough gentleman, and the friend of every soldier. He used to come into the trenches with his hands in his pockets and take no more notice of the German shells and bullets which were bursting and flying about than if they were peas shot by little boys.

One morning Sir John came round the trenches, and said, as usual, "Is everything all right, men?"

"Well, sir," he was told, "we want a drop of water, please." And we did want it, badly, because the weather was so fearfully hot, and we were almost boiled in our uniforms and heavy kits.

"Certainly; I'll see to that at once," replied the field-marshal. He immediately turned round, called to some men of the transport who were at hand, and told them to bring us some water at once.

General Joffre, too, was a great favourite. He speaks English well. Once when he came into the





[To face p. 254.

“CAVALRY AND GUARDS GOT IN AMONGST THE GERMANS  
AND FAIRLY SCATTERED THEM” (p. 246).

1000 1000  
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trenches he asked if there was anything we should like. Well, we wanted some cigarettes badly, and told him so, and he promptly took a box of about a hundred from his pocket, and handed them round. They went almost as fast as the Germans.

I am now well enough to be back at the front, and I'm keen to get into the firing line again, and rush along in some more bayonet charges—for those are the swoops that roll the Germans up as much as anything we do.

I have been a Coldstreamer for more than a dozen years, and have always been proud of it; but I never felt prouder than I do now, after reading what our great chief has said about us in despatches.

We have sometimes been called feather-bed soldiers; but we're known as "Coldsteelers" now, and try to live up to the reputation of our motto—"Second to none."

## CHAPTER XXI

### AN ARMOURED CAR IN AMBUSH

[Sir John French, in one of his despatches, expressed his great admiration of the splendid work which has been done at the front by our Territorials—that work, indeed, by this time has become almost equal to the glorious achievements of our Regular troops. The first of our Territorials to go into action during the war were the Northumberland Hussars, and this story is told by Trooper Stanley Dodds, of that fine corps, who was serving as a despatch-rider and on being wounded was invalided home. He afterwards returned to the front. Trooper Dodds is one of the best-known motor cyclists in the North, and winner in the competition of the summer of 1914 promoted by the North-Eastern Automobile Association. This was decided in North Yorkshire, over difficult country.]

I FANCY there are people in England who imagine that the life of a despatch-rider is one long unbroken joy ride. They seem to think that he gets somewhere near the front, and spends all his days careering over beautifully kept military roads between headquarters and the firing line, and seeing and enjoying everything that goes on; but I can assure such people that in practice despatch-riding does not work out like that at all.

I am only a humble member of the fraternity, but I have had a fair share of despatch work, and I do know that I have not had a single joy ride since I took the business on, and I can vouch for the fact that beautifully kept roads do not exist anywhere

near the front, at any rate in Flanders. Even some of the so-called roads have never been roads—they were simply tracks to start with, and when military traffic had been going over them for some time they had lost all resemblance to roads, and you could scarcely tell the difference between them and the ordinary countryside.

The fact is that the life of a despatch-rider, though exciting enough to satisfy the cravings of any ordinary man, is largely an endless battle amongst bad roads, bullets and shell fire, want of sleep, and the hundred-and-one other things which often wreck the nerves; but the life is well worth living, all the same.

In work like this there is a good deal of nerve-racking riding and all sorts of difficult jobs have to be tackled. One of the worst I had to carry out while I was at the front was riding back to a patrol which was in our rear, and which had been lost sight of in the strain and turmoil of a rapid retirement.

The patrol had been left at a corner where there were some forked roads, and in order to reach them it was necessary to go through a village.

The Germans were everywhere and keenly on the look-out for a chance of sniping, so that there was plenty of excitement in the affair, especially as it was night and there was a darkness which was literally black.

This made the task doubly dangerous, for in addition to the ordinary risks of being shot there was the great danger of coming to serious grief on the road—a road which you could feel but scarcely see. I don't mind saying that when I started in the pitch darkness on this expedition I did not feel any too comfortable.

It is the custom at such times to ride without lights, because lights serve as targets, but in spite of this I was forced to light up, because it would have been utterly impossible to ride without some sort of guide.

After a good deal of trouble and a lot of risk I reached the village and then I had a most unpleasant shock, for a Belgian peasant told me that the Germans were actually occupying some of the houses.

That was a startling announcement, but the added danger forced me to set my wits to work to decide what it was best to do. At last I determined to make tracks down a side street.

I was riding very slowly and carefully when I was pulled up short with a sharp cry of "Halt" and I knew that a loaded rifle was covering me not far away.

I did halt—I didn't need to be told twice, not knowing what fate had in store for me; but thank heaven I quickly found that it was a British sentry who had spoken.

I rapidly told him what I was out to do, and I was very glad to have his help and advice.

The sentry told me that the patrol, like wise men, had acted on their own initiative and had fallen back on the village—and that was joyful news, because it meant that my work was practically done.

Being greatly relieved I could not resist the temptation to tell the sentry that I might have scooted past him and got clear, but my humour vanished when another British soldier from the darkness said grimly, "Yes, you might have got past *him*, but *I* should have put a bullet into you!"

I have not the slightest doubt that this smart fellow spoke the truth—anyway, if he had missed

me I should doubtless have been potted by a chum of his, because there were four sentries posted at short distances from this place. I could not see a sign of them, but of course they had my light as a target and they were as keen as mustard, knowing that the Germans were in the village.

There were a good many little thrilling experiences for all of us which came in as part of the day's work, and most of them were thoroughly enjoyable—a few in particular I would not have missed for worlds. One of these was a little jaunt with an armoured motor-car.

Incidentally, this experience showed me that we have learnt a good deal from the South African War. It is pretty common knowledge by this time that the Germans sprang something of a surprise on the world with their big guns; but our own armoured cars came on the Germans with even more stunning effect. It was the South African War which to a great extent gave us the most useful knowledge we now possess of armoured cars and armoured trains.

The armoured car is a development of the idea of the armoured train, with this enormous advantage, that you can get your car pretty nearly anywhere, while the train is limited in its operations to the lines on which it runs. Remarkably good motor-car work at the front has been done by Brigadier-General Seely and Commander Sampson. Some of these cars are extremely powerful and fast, with huge wheels, and in the hands of skilful drivers they can overcome almost any obstacle.

In order to meet the exceptional demands which a war like this makes upon them the cars have to be specially protected and strengthened. The body itself is protected with toughened steel, which has so much

resistance that bullets simply make no impression on it, and light guns can therefore be mounted behind the metal which can do enormous execution amongst bodies of the enemy's riflemen or troops who are not protected by anything but rifles. If you want excitement, therefore, you can get it to the full by being associated with these machines. Whenever they go out they simply look for trouble—and they can afford to do so, because they despise ordinary cavalry and infantry tactics. Their chief gain has been Uhlan patrols, which they have wiped out with the greatest ease.

Scouts bring in word of enemy patrols on the road; off swoop the cars straight to the spot, and the fun begins.

My own little job was not actually in an armoured car, but accompanying one. Very often, in the case of a retreat, the cars remain behind the main line, to do the work of wiping out as many of the enemy's advanced guards as they can get under fire, and an affair of this description took place during the retreat from Roulers.

I happened to be there, armed with my rifle, which I carry in preference to a revolver, because I have found it more useful.

I stayed behind to keep in touch with the armoured car. This was at a corner of one of the roads, and a prominent feature of the district was a brewery, the entrance to which commanded the approach by road.

Matters at that particular time were very lively and the car was swiftly run into the yard, where with astonishing skill and speed it was disguised as much as possible and then it was ready to give the Germans a surprise.



I left my machine round the corner, and made my way into one of the nearest of the houses. Rushing upstairs, I entered a bedroom and went to the window, where I took up a position with my rifle, and kept properly on the alert, for you never knew from which quarter a bullet would come and settle your account for ever.

There was every reason to believe that the enemy would come—and they did. They came along as if they were satisfied that nothing could happen to them—certainly the German body that was making its way along the road had no idea that a disguised motor-car was ready to give it a welcome as soon as it got within striking distance of the entrance to the brewery. Being Germans, doubtless their thoughts, when they saw the brewery, were more concentrated on beer than on the British troops in ambush.

On the Germans came, and one could not help feeling how awful it was that they should be advancing utterly unsuspectingly into a perfect death-trap.

From behind my bedroom window, rifle in hand, I watched them come up to their doom. They got nearer and nearer to the innocent-looking brewery entrance and to the houses and other places where the unseen rifles were covering them; then, just at the right moment, the maxims from the armoured car rattled and the rifles kept them company.

The German ranks were shattered and scattered instantly. It was a swift and destructive cannonade and the Germans went down in the fatal roadway just like ninepins. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that practically the whole of the enemy's advanced guard was wiped out in a few moments.

This little affair was as short as it was brilliant and decisive, and almost before there was time to realise fully what had happened the car was stripped of its disguise and was triumphantly driven out of the brewery yard and back to the British lines.

When I saw the car going I took it as a signal that I had better make tracks myself, so I hurried away from the bedroom, got clear of the house, jumped on to my machine, and lost no time in following it.

This fine performance, typical of a great number of such deeds done in the war by resourceful men of which nothing has been heard and perhaps never will be, strikes me as being a very good illustration of doing exactly those things which the enemy does not expect you to do. Personally, I have always made a point of putting this principle into practice. If the enemy is waiting for you to take the highroad, the obvious thing, it seems to me, is to take to the fields, especially as in bad weather, in a country like Flanders, there is very little difference between the fields and the roads.

There is one interesting point which I may mention, and it is that so far I have had no difficulty in finding petrol. Nearly all the Belgian farmers use gas-engines, and their stores are very useful for motor cycles. I need hardly say that I never saw any want of willingness on the part of Belgian farmers to help the fighters who are doing their best to get the country back for them.

At present I am not a bit useful as a fighting man, because when I was going into the trenches I heard the ping of a German bullet and found that blood was running down my arm.

When I was actually struck I felt only a numb

sensation, and did not for some time know what had happened; but later it was discovered that the bullet had struck me between the wrist and elbow of the right arm and had gone clean through, leaving a hole on each side of the arm.

Strange though it may seem, I felt little pain at any time, in spite of the fact that one of the bones of the arm was broken, and I am glad to say that this wound—and there have been an enormous number like it since the war began—is making a first-class recovery, and I shall soon be all right again.

A man does not go to war for fun, but there is a bright side to the grim business, as I found when I reached a Belgian hospital. I spent three very comfortable days there, and when I was sent off to England the nurse who was attending me very gravely made me a little present, which I as gravely accepted. She paid me three-halfpence! I did not know what it meant, but I concluded that I had received the Belgian's rate of daily pay as a soldier, and his keep. I was perfectly satisfied, and I hope my excellent nurse was the same.

## CHAPTER XXII

### EXPLOITS OF THE LONDON SCOTTISH

[“Eye-Witness,” in his descriptive account of November 4th, dealing with the first phase of the desperate fight for Ypres, said that a special feature of the battle was that it formed an epoch in the military history of the British Empire, and marked the first time that a complete unit of our Territorial Army has been thrown into the fight alongside its sister units of the Regulars. That unit was the 14th (County of London) Battalion London Regiment, better known as the London Scottish. Its ranks contained many prominent men who gave up everything at their country’s call and went to the front. Amongst them was Mr. J. E. Carr, Managing Director of Scremerston Colliery, Northumberland, a well-known breeder of Border Leicester sheep, a keen rider to hounds and a thoroughly good sportsman. Private Carr served with the London Scottish until he was wounded and invalided home and it is his story which is here retold.]

It is very difficult to keep within defined limits the varied experiences that are crowded into a few months at the front in a war which is waged on such a vast scale as the present conflict. Every day has its own fresh and particular excitements which are worth remembering, and one can scarcely pick out, off-hand, the most startling or interesting phases of the campaigning. However, the earliest impressions undoubtedly cling most tenaciously, and I have vivid recollections of the thrill I experienced when our transport swung to her moorings and the London Scottish disembarked on the other side of the Channel.

I should like to say here that the London Scottish have been the subject of a good deal of comment, mostly favourable, I am glad to know; but there has been undue exaltation. The blame for this certainly does not rest with the London Scottish, but in other perfectly well-meaning quarters.

I am proud indeed to belong to the London Scottish, because they are good boys to be amongst, so good that there was no reason whatever why people should have expressed surprise that the first Territorials to go into action did so well. I don't think there was any reason for astonishment, for the London Scottish had been a well-trained body of Volunteers before the Territorial system came into being. And if they pulled through, as they did, when the actual fighting began, do not let it be forgotten that they had some glorious examples to follow. On their left and on their right were some of the very finest soldiers in the world, and it was for the London Scottish to prove that they were worthy of fighting with these truly splendid fellows. Troops like the Coldstream Guards, the Scots Guards, the Black Watch and the Cameron Highlanders are men with whom it is indeed an honour to be associated.

Our landing on the Continent was an event which I shall remember all my life. It meant that we were many miles nearer to the band of heroes who had held the Germans up at Mons and had completely disarranged a whole plan of campaign. Whenever I meet a man who fought in that greatest of rear-guard actions I want to take off my hat to him.

It was not long after the war began that we found ourselves on the lines of communication and began

to feel that we were really bearing a hand in the things that mattered. This was in September, and the weather being good we found it no great hardship to guard railways, escort prisoners, run up ammunition for the fighting lines and do any odd job that came along. There was not a man amongst us who did not put his back into the business, realising that it was all a part of the tremendous game that was being played, monotonous and unexciting though the duties might be, and with every day that passed we got fitter and keener and better able to meet the heavy calls that came upon us later. We felt that we were really "in" and part of the great adventure. In various ways we did a good deal of wandering, and some of us went as far south as Nantes.

This was about harvest time, and we saw the old men of France and the women and the boys gathering in the sheaves. Later on we saw even the women ploughing, and very good work they did. One thing which particularly astonished us was their courage in working on the land quite close up to the fighting line. They were often well within shell fire, but they did not seem to be in the least disturbed. I suppose they thought that if their husbands and sons and brothers could fight for France at rifle and bayonet range they could go on working for their country in spite of a stray shell or two.

A few weeks later we moved up to the firing line, and then we had the opportunity of seeing how gloriously the Scottish Regular troops were doing their work and maintaining the splendid traditions of the Highland regiments.

People have become so used to amazing happenings in this war that it is not easy to realise that only a

very few months ago the mere sight of an aeroplane was a novelty, and it was a thrill indeed for us when, near Béthune, we had a splendid view of a fight in the air between British, French and German airmen. The German, in a machine which looked exactly like an enormous bird in the sky, came scouting over our lines, to find out what was going on. The mere sight of him was enough to fetch along a British 'plane and a Frenchman followed. This happened on a clear, peaceful Sunday morning, and it was truly wonderful to see how the three machines were manœuvred to get the top position and so spell doom to the lowest 'plane. By extraordinary daring and skill, and because his very life hung in the balance, the German managed to get away, in spite of the most desperate efforts of his opponents to bag him. But I don't think he would escape to-day, when the British and French airmen have so fully established their superiority over the German flyers and when it has been proved that the machines of the Allies are far better than any of the craft that the German airmen use.

One of our first experiences of real fighting came when we were ordered to charge at Messines. I do not care to say much about that charge, because I think too much has been said of it already; so I will not go beyond saying that it was hot and sanguinary work with the bayonet and that we lost many good fellows. I cannot help thinking that the London Scottish got too much praise for Messines, and they are the first to admit that; but this was due to the fact that correspondents and others spread themselves out on the charge and gave special attention to the matter because of the fact that up to that time

practically nothing had been heard of Territorials in action.

The praise that was given to the regiment had the effect of making us rather unpopular with the Regulars, and naturally enough, too, seeing that they had been constantly doing the same sort of work ever since the beginning of the war. It was pride enough for us to be in the same brigade as the Coldstreamers, the Scots Guards, the Black Watch and the Camerons, and to feel that we had done just what we were told to do. It was, of course, a source of great satisfaction to us afterwards to be congratulated by General Munro on what he was good enough to term our "steadiness as a battalion." Now that is all I am going to say about the charge of the London Scottish at Messines.

Speaking generally the fighting from November until the time I was wounded can be divided into two distinct parts, the actions around Ypres and the affairs at La Bassée. At Ypres about fifty men of our regiment were in the city during the siege, and a very exciting time we had. Shells were constantly bursting all around and no matter where the people were they did not seem to be able to keep clear of danger. Even the cellars, in which large numbers of men and women and children sought refuge, were at times blown in and there were some very distressing and unpleasant sights. Personally, I was uncommonly lucky, because I escaped being hurt.

I had the good fortune to sleep for two nights in the beautiful and famous Cloth Hall, of which the story is told that it was particularly spared by the German artillery because the Kaiser meant to enter it in state at the head of his victorious troops. But



when I was in it the shells came pounding on the walls and roof of the hall, doing grievous damage, though our own men had the good luck to escape. Not so lucky were some men of the Suffolk Regiment who followed us, for one afternoon a huge shell came through and burst and killed five of the Suffolks and wounded a number of other men of that fine regiment.

So much has been said of the enormous German shells which have become known as Jack Johnsons that people have almost ceased to be affected by their performances; but nothing that I have heard or read conveys any real idea of the extraordinarily destructive nature of these awful engines of war when they explode—and that, luckily, does not always happen. One afternoon, however, we counted no fewer than thirty of them which *did* explode, and the results were absolutely devastating.

When the Germans really set to work to bombard Ypres, the Cloth Hall and the splendid cathedral were soon practically destroyed; but one of the most noticeable things in connection with this destruction was that many sacred objects were undamaged whilst there was ruin all around them. Take the case of the crucifix of Ypres Cathedral—it is literally true that this was found entire and upright amongst such general ruin that it seemed as if only a miracle could have saved it. In several other places I saw crucifixes hanging uninjured on walls of houses although the structures themselves had been practically wrecked. On the other hand, while we were in the trenches I saw a little nickel crucifix with a bullet-hole right through it.

With the King's Royal Rifles on their right, and fired by their glorious example, the London Scottish

were in some furious fighting in the earlier days of November, and the coming of Christmas brought more hot work. On December 22nd we marched about twenty-six miles with the brigade, and the Coldstreamers, gallant as ever, went straight into action after their arrival. They did fine work that day, and paid for it accordingly. There followed a rest at Béthune and then we went into more trouble in the neighbourhood of Givenchy.

Very little of what may be called spectacular fighting was seen hereabouts; it was mostly trench work, and this was all the more difficult because the German trenches were so close to our own, and the real old-fashioned way of conducting a battle was out of the question. But all the same we got some variations, and one of these was a fight for a brick-field which was a good hot performance while it lasted.

At this period we made a change on the usual form of trench by lining our own trenches with bricks, which were handy for the purpose. These trenches were more comfortable than the general type, but they were more dangerous, because when a shell burst near us the bricks splintered, so that the flying bricks had to be added to the dangers and discomforts of the flying metal fragments.

One of the brick splinters struck my hand and poisoned it, and another unwelcome attention that was paid to me was a piece of shrapnel in the back of the neck; but these were really very minor details compared with the injuries that were received by other members of the London Scottish, and I am not for a moment complaining, nor can I, for when I came home my company had only twenty left out of 119. There had been the casualties in

the charge and in other affairs, and a number of men had been killed and wounded in the trenches.

At Givenchy we had to endure as best we could that most unpleasant engine of war which is called the trench mortar. This affects high-angle fire and plumps a shell into the trenches when the aim is good. One shell dropped into a trench of ours and exploded, killing one man and wounding five others—a round half-dozen fine fellows as toll to a single German shot.

There were the snipers, too, pests who are intensely disliked by the British soldier. These fellows find a lodging in what seems to be an impossible sort of place, often enough high up a tree, and being well supplied with food and ammunition they can go on potting for a long time without going down from their perch. It was always matter for rejoicing when one of these queer birds was winged.

I spent Christmas in the trenches, with the boys. It is odd to be talking about Christmas at this time of the year, but that season was an outstanding feature of the experiences of the London Scottish, just as the New Year was. Christmas Day was comparatively comfortable because there was a lull in the fighting. New Year's Day was unforgettable to those who saw it in and did their best to keep up the national custom.

I think that of all the strange incidents that have been recorded in connection with this war, and they have been many—and some of them have proved how soon soldiers become impervious to the most terrible happenings of campaigning—one of the strangest must have been the sight we saw on New Year's Eve.

When the New Year actually came in we fired three rounds rapid, and the pipes of the Black Watch rose on the night, while our own voices broke into "Auld lang syne." Wonderful and affecting it was to hear the pipes and the dear old tune and many of us were deeply moved.

The effect on the Germans was very curious. Apparently they judged from the sounds of the pipes and the roll of the song that the Scots were going to pay them a special visit with the bayonet, and by way of being ready for it and giving us a welcome, they sent up star-lights, and these, bursting in the air, gave a sinister illumination of the landscape and would have shown us up if we had had in mind the purpose of an assault on the German trenches. But we had no intention of letting the New Year in upon them in such an unfriendly manner, although later in the day we were of necessity hard at it again in the ordinary way of firing.

From day to day the London Scottish kept at it, doing their best, I hope; then, on January 25th a spell of uncommonly hard work came along. The Coldstreamers, who had held out gloriously and successfully against great odds, had to withdraw from their trenches owing to an overwhelming attack by the enemy. For the time being the Germans had scored and no doubt they were exulting in their best manner, but the London Scottish were sent up to reinforce the Coldstreamers—and proud they were to do it. Later in the afternoon the Black Watch, with the Sussex Regiment and the Royal Rifles, came up too, and the combination proved too much for the Germans, who, after a brilliant attack, were sent flying back to their own trenches.

I have heard that many old and young Germans have been taken prisoners at various parts of the immense battle-front of the Allies; but those that I saw pass through our lines were neither very old nor very young. Occasionally we observed signs that they required a good lot of leading, that is to say, "leading" from behind; but generally speaking they seemed to be the best men that Germany had and on the whole they were undoubtedly good fighters.

While talking of German prisoners I am reminded of a particularly ugly incident. When I was taken to the hospital I was with a number of German prisoners.

The hospital rule is that everything shall be taken away from the patient until the time comes for him to be discharged. Well, when one of these prisoners was searched I learned to my amazement, disgust and anger, that he carried with him a bomb which was powerful enough to blow up the whole place—but prompt steps were taken to prevent him from making any use of it. How on earth he had got so far from the lines with the deadly thing I cannot understand; but he had it with him all right.

We got a good deal of amusement and help from a new set of "Ten Commandments for Soldiers in the Field," which were duly but not officially published. I will quote one or two by way of showing their character and indicating that incorrigible British cheerfulness which the German, with all his "culture," cannot understand. Number Three ran: "Thou shalt not use profane language except under extraordinary circumstances, such as seeing thy comrade shot or getting petrol in thy tea." Number Four was worded: "Remember that the soldier's week consists of seven days. Six days shalt thou

labour and do all thy work, and on the seventh do all thy odd jobs!" "Honour thy King and country," was the Fifth. "Keep thy rifle oiled, and shoot straight, in order that thy days may be long upon the land the enemy giveth thee." Then we had, "Thou shalt not steal thy neighbour's kit," and "Thou shalt not kill—time!" By Number Nine it was enjoined, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy comrade, but preserve discreet silence on his outgoings and incomings." Last of all came Number Ten, full of a wonderful hope for the lowly: "Thou shalt not covet thy Sergeant's post, nor the Corporal's, nor the Staff-Major's, but do thy duty and by dint of perseverance rise to the high position of Field-Marshal."

(This is one of the first detailed stories to be told of some of the achievements of the London Scottish at the front, and its modest vein is in keeping with the general point of view of the members of this distinguished corps. It has been for others, not of the London Scottish, to tell us something of what the regiment really did at Messines and elsewhere in those early days of the Ypres fighting on which such vast issues depended. What happened at Messines was this: The regiment was in reserve when unexpectedly the order came to hurry up to the support of the hard-pressed Regular troops, who were being fiercely assailed by very much superior German forces. Crowding on to motor-buses the London Scottish were hurried along in the course of the afternoon and while some of them spent the night in deserted cottages others bivouacked in the streets, waiting for daylight.

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After much marching and wandering, the zone of fire was entered, and the fine battalion which not many weeks before had marched along London streets after being embodied made acquaintance with the German shells and got ready to show what the British Territorials could do with the rifle and the bayonet.

The regiment was amused and interested in the antics of a windmill the sails of which turned constantly and oddly, although there was no wind. It was not until later that the phenomenon was explained and that was when the windmill was visited and a German spy was caught in the act of signalling, by means of the sails, the position and movements of the British troops.

It was at Hollebecke and at Messines, between Ypres and Warneton, that the British lines were hard pressed owing to the determined attempts of the Germans to break through and hack their way to Calais, and it was here that the London Scottish went to support the Cavalry Brigade who were holding the trenches.

Forming up under the crest of a hill they advanced over the crest and found themselves right in the battle line. Hurrying down the slope, struggling over heavy ground which was made all the harder because of beet crops, the regiment went into a most destructive artillery and rifle and machine-gun fire.

Many a splendid fellow was shot down before he could use his own rifle, and others were wounded; but nothing could stop the advance. By short rushes, and taking cover, the men in time reached the trenches and had to encounter an overwhelming assault of Germans with the bayonet.

Now it was that a wonderful and splendid thing was done, for these Territorials, fresh from civil life, hurled themselves with the bayonet upon the finest troops of Germany. They were thrown back. Again they charged, only to be driven off once more; but the regiment was not to be denied or beaten and with a final furious rush the Germans were scattered and the day was won for the British. No wonder that Colonel J. H. Scott, late of the Gordon Highlanders and formerly adjutant of the London Scottish, wrote on hearing the glorious news: "Hurrah for the London Scottish! From my knowledge of them I knew they would do it!")



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE ROUT OF THE PRUSSIAN GUARD AT YPRES

[The official writers have told us of the almost superhuman efforts made by the Germans to break through to Calais so that they might, from that place, either raid or bombard England. For a whole month a little British army round Ypres held its ground against the repeated onslaughts of overwhelming German hosts. These actions were divided into two phases, the first lasting from October 20th to November 2nd, and the second from November 3rd to 17th. German infantry of the Line having failed to win success, the vaunted Prussian Guard was hurried up, and, encouraged by the presence of the braggart Most High War Lord himself, hurled itself in frenzy against the British troops, only to be thrown back and broken. This crushing of the crack corps of Prussia was a bitter blow to the Kaiser and the German people, who believed it to be invincible. In these unexampled contests the Glorious Seventh Infantry Division bore the brunt of battle, and the tale of the first phase is told by Private H. J. Polley, 2nd Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment. Lieutenant-General Sir H. S. Rawlinson, commanding the Division, said in an order: "You have been called to take a conspicuous part in one of the severest struggles of the war. . . . The Seventh Division has gained for itself a reputation for stubborn valour and endurance in defence." When the Glorious Seventh was withdrawn from the firing line only forty-four officers were left out of 400 who had sailed from England, and only 2,336 out of 12,000 men.]

ALL the world knows now how furiously the Germans tried to hack their way through to Calais, so that they could have their fling at the hated English. It is known too that they were held and hurled back.

I am going to tell you something of the way in which this was done, for I belong to the Bedford-

shire Regiment, the old 16th Foot, and the Bedfords were part of the Glorious Seventh Division, and did their share in keeping back the German forces, which included the Prussian Guards, the Kaiser's pet men. They had been rushed up to this position because it was thought that no troops could stand against them.

These idols of the German nation are picked men and brave fellows, and at that time had an absolute belief in their own invincibility; but events proved that they were no match for the British Guards and the rest of the British troops who fought them at Ypres, and practically wiped them out. I saw these Prussian Guards from Berlin mown down by our artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire, and I saw them lying dead in solid masses—walls of corpses.

The Kaiser had planned to enter Ypres as a conqueror, at the head of his Guards; but he hurried off a beaten man, leaving his slaughtered Guards in heaps.

Originally in the 1st Battalion of the Bedfords, I later went into the 2nd, and I was serving with the 2nd in South Africa when the European War broke out. It is an interesting fact that nearly all the battalions which formed the Seventh Division came from foreign service—India, Egypt, Africa and elsewhere—which meant that many of the men of the Seventh had seen active service and were veteran fighters. They had not learned their warfare at peace manœuvres in Germany. Our Division consisted of the 1st Grenadier Guards, the 2nd Scots Guards, the 2nd Border, 2nd Gordon Highlanders, 2nd Bedfordshire, 2nd Yorkshire, 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, 2nd Wiltshire, 2nd Royal West Surrey,

2nd Royal Warwickshire, 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 1st South Staffordshire, and the Northumberland Hussars; and we had a pom-pom detachment and horse, field and garrison artillery. We were under Major-General Sir T. Capper, D.S.O.

We had been sent to help the Naval Division at Antwerp, and early in October we landed at Zeebrugge—the only division to land at that port. But we were not there long, for we soon learned that we were too late, and that Antwerp had fallen. We were sorry, but there was no time for moping, and we were quickly on the move to the quaint old city of Bruges, where we were billeted for a night. Sir Harry Rawlinson had moved his headquarters from Bruges to Ostend, so next day we marched towards Ostend and took up outpost. Then we had a forced march back to Bruges, and from Bruges we started marching, but we did not know where we were going till we got to the city of Ypres.

So far we had not had any fighting. We had been marching and marching, first to one place, then to another, constantly expecting to come into action, and very nearly doing so, for the Germans were swarming all over the countryside. We had to be content with being on outpost and guarding bridges, and so on—hard and necessary work, we knew; but we wanted something more thrilling, something bigger—and we eventually got it.

There was practically only the Seventh Division available for anything that turned up. The Northumberland Hussars were able to give a very good account of themselves, and were, I believe, the first Yeomanry corps to go into action. The few Uhlans I saw while I was at the front had been

taken prisoners by these Hussars, who brought them in, lances and all. But there is very little to say about cavalry work; it was mostly a matter for the infantry, and, of course, the artillery—the wonderful British gunners who have punished the Germans so severely whenever they have met them.

While we were around Ypres, waiting for the Germans to come and break through, we heard a good deal, indirectly, of what was going to happen to us and to England. The Germans had all sorts of monster guns, and with these they were going to bombard England across the narrow Channel when they got to the French coast, and they were going to work all sorts of miracles with their airships and aeroplanes.

We soon heard, too, that the Kaiser himself was in the field; but the only effect of that information was to make us more keen to show what we could do. Truth to tell, we were far from being impressed by the presence of either the Kaiser or his vaunted Guards. We were in the best of spirits, and had a sublime belief in Sir John French and all his staff and our own officers.

It was on October 31st—which has been called *the* decisive day of the fight for Ypres, and which was certainly a most terrible day in every way—that the Seventh Division was ordered to attack the German position. The weather was very fine, clear and sunny, and our spirits were in keeping with it. We were thankful to be on the move, because we had had nearly three weeks in the trenches, and had been billeted in all sorts of queer places—above and below ground—under an everlasting shell fire, which became unendurable and was thoroughly nerve-destroying.

We knew what a desperate business the advance would be, because the Germans greatly outnumbered us, and they had planted vast numbers of guns. They had immense bodies of men in trenches, and in a large number of the houses and buildings which commanded the ground over which we had to advance they had placed machine-guns, with their villainous muzzles directed on us from bedroom windows and holes which had been knocked in walls.

From start to finish the advance was a terrible business—far more terrible than any words of mine can make you realise. The whole Division was on the move, stretching along a big tract of country; but of course no man could see much of what was happening, except in his own immediate locality. Neither had he much chance of thinking about anything or anybody except himself, and then only in a numbed sort of way, because of the appalling din of the artillery on both sides, the crash of the guns and the explosions of the shells, with the ceaseless rattle of the rifles and the machine-guns.

At the beginning, the regiments kept fairly well together, but very soon we were all mixed up, and you could not tell what regiment a man belonged to, unless he wore a kilt; then you knew that, at any rate, he wasn't a Bedford. Some of us had our packs and full equipment. Others were without packs, having been compelled to throw them away. But there was not a man who had let his rifle go: that is the last thing of all to be parted from; it is the soldier's very life. And every man had a big supply of ammunition, with plenty in reserve. The general himself took part in the advance, and what he did was done by every other officer present. There

was no difference between officer and man, and a thing to be specially noticed is the fact that the officers got hold of rifles and blazed away as hard as any man.

Never, during the whole of the war, had there been a more awful fire than that which we gave the Germans. Whenever we got the chance, we gave them what they call the "Englishman's mad minute"—that is, the dreadful fifteen rounds a minute rapid fire. We drove it into them and mowed them down. Many a soldier, when his own rifle was too hot to hold, threw it down and snatched the rifle of a dead or wounded comrade who had no further use for it, and with this fresh, cool weapon he continued the deadly work by which success could alone be won. I do not know what the German losses were, but I do know that I saw bodies lying around in solid masses, while we passed our own dead and wounded everywhere as we advanced. Where they fell they had to stay; it was impossible to do anything for them while the fighting continued.

The whole of the advance consisted of a series of what might be called ups and downs—a little rush, then a "bob down." At most, no one rush carried us more than fifty yards; then we dropped out of sight as best we could, to get a breather and prepare for another dash. It was pretty open country hereabouts, so that we were fully exposed to the German artillery and rifle fire, in addition to the hail from the machine-guns in the neighbouring buildings. Here and there we found little woods and clumps of trees and bits of rising ground and ditches and hedges—and you may take it from me that shelter of any sort was very welcome and freely used.

A remarkable feature of this striving to hide from

the enemy's fire was that it was almost impossible to escape from the shells and bullets for any appreciable time, for the simple reason that the Germans altered their range in the most wonderful manner. So surely as we got the shelter of a little wood or ditch, they seemed to have the distance almost instantly, and the range was so accurate that many a copse and ditch became a little graveyard in the course of that advance.

At one point as we went along I noticed a small ditch against a hedge. It was a dirty, uninviting ditch, deep in water; but it seemed to offer promising shelter, and so some officers and men made a rush for it, meaning to take cover. They had no sooner scrambled into the ditch and were thinking themselves comparatively safe than the Germans got the range of them with machine-guns, and nearly the whole lot were annihilated. In this case, as in others, the enemy had been marvellously quick with their weapons, and had swept the ditch with bullets. I don't know what happened to the fine fellows who had fallen. We had to leave them and continue the advance.

The forenoon passed, noon came, and the afternoon was with us; still the fighting went on, the guns on both sides crashing without cessation, and the machine-guns and the rifles rattling on without a break. The air was filled with screaming, bursting shells and whistling bullets, and the ground was ploughed and torn everywhere. It was horrible beyond expression, yet it fired the blood in us, so that the only thing that mattered was to put the finish to the work, get up to the Germans, and rout them out of their positions.

At last, after endless spells of lying down and jumping up, we got near enough to make it possible to charge, and the order went round to get ready. We now saw what big, fine fellows we had to tackle. Clearly now we could distinguish the Prussian Guards, and a thing that particularly struck me just then was that their bayonets looked very cruel. The Guards wore cloth-covered brass helmets, and through the cloth we could see the gleam of the brass in the sunshine.

The nearer we got, the more clearly we saw what splendid chaps they were, and what a desperate business it would be when we actually reached the long, snaky blades of steel—much longer than our own bayonets—with longer rifles, too, so that the Germans had the pull of us in every way. But all that counted as nothing, and there was not a man amongst us who was not hungering to be in amongst them.

The order to fix bayonets came quietly, and it was carried out without any fuss whatever, just as a part of the day's work. We were lying down when the order came, and as we lay we got round at our bayonets, drew them and fixed them, and I could hear the rattle of the fixing all along the line, just as I had heard it many times on parade or at manœuvres—the same sound, but with what a different purpose!

A few of the fellows did not fix their bayonets as we lay, but they managed to do it as we ran, when we had jumped up and started to rush along to put the finish to the fight. There was no bugle sound, we just got the word to charge, an order which was given to the whole of the Seventh Division.

When this last part of the advance arrived we



started halloaing and shouting, and the Division simply hurled itself against the Prussian Guard. By the time we were up with the enemy we were mad. I can't tell you much of what actually happened—and I don't think any man who took part in it could do so—but I do know that we rushed helter-skelter, and that when we got up to the famous Guards there were only two of my own section holding together—Lance-Corporal Perry and myself, and even we were parted immediately afterwards.

The next thing I clearly knew was that we were actually on the Prussians, and that there was some very fierce work going on. There was some terrific and deadly scrimmaging, and whatever the Prussian Guard did in the way of handling the steel, the Seventh Division did better.

It was every man for himself. I had rushed up with the rest, and the first thing I clearly knew was that a tremendous Prussian was making at me with his villainous bayonet. I made a lunge at him as hard and swift as I could, and he did the same to me. I thought I had him, but I just missed, and as I did so, I saw his own long, ugly blade driven out at the end of his rifle. Before I could do anything to parry the thrust, the tip of the bayonet had ripped across my right thigh, and I honestly thought that it was all up with me.

Then, when I reckoned that my account was paid, when I supposed that the huge Prussian had it all his own way, one of our chaps—I don't know who, I don't suppose I ever shall; but I bless him—rushed up, drove his bayonet into the Prussian and settled him. I am sure that if this had not been done I should have been killed by the Prussian; as it was,

I was able to get away without much inconvenience at the end of the bayonet fight.

This struggle lasted about half-an-hour, and fierce, hard work it was all the time. In the end we drove the Guards away and sent them flying—all except those who had fallen; the trench was full of the latter, and we took no prisoners. Then we were forced to retire ourselves, for the ample reason that we were not strong enough to hold the position that we had taken at such a heavy cost. The enemy did not know it then, though perhaps they found out later, that we had nicely deceived them in making them believe that we had reinforcements. But we had nothing of the sort; yet we had stormed and taken the position and driven its defenders away.

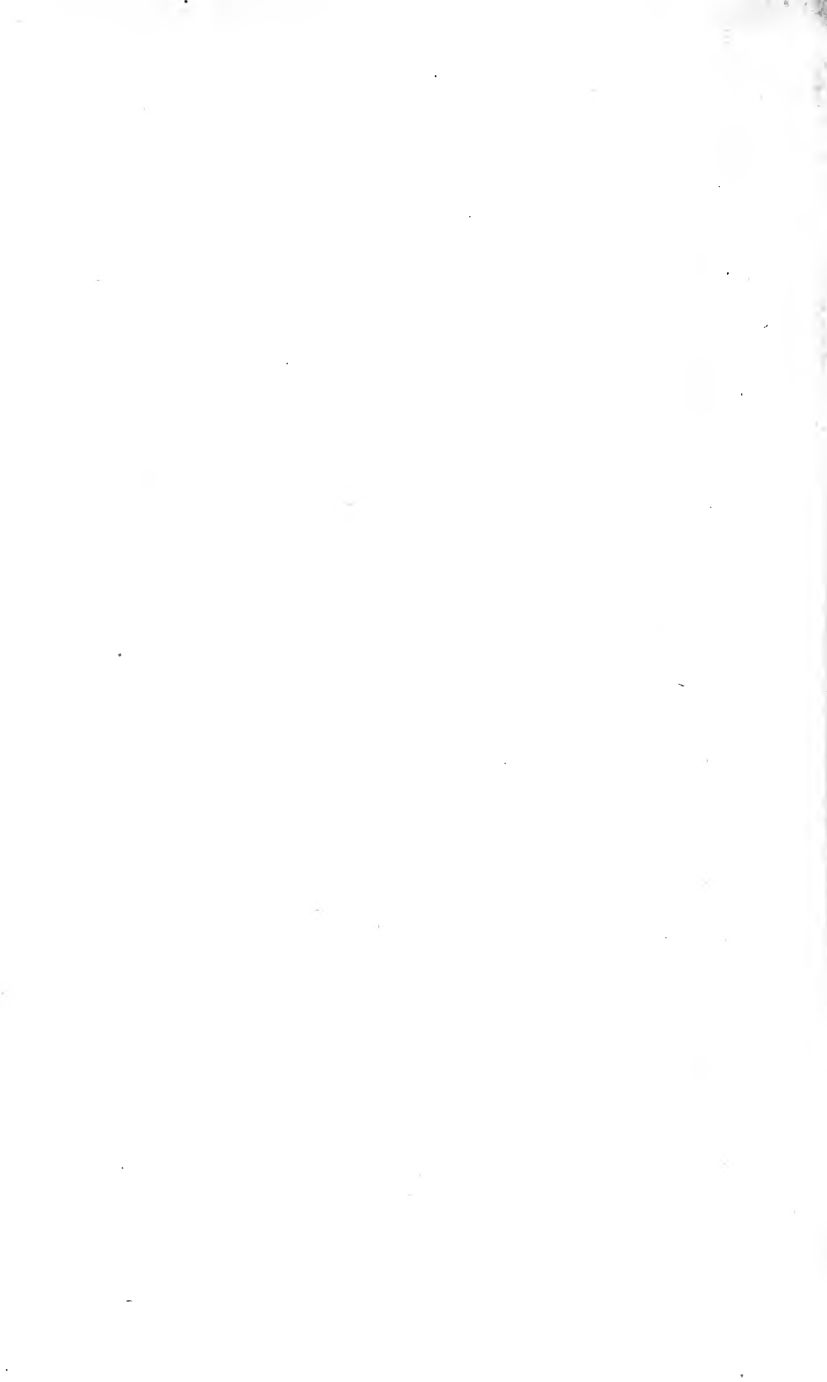
We were far too weak to hold the position, and so we retired over the ground that we had won, getting back a great deal faster than we had advanced. We had spent the best part of the day in advancing and reaching the enemy's position; and it seemed as if we must have covered a great tract of country, but as a matter of fact we had advanced less than a mile. It had taken us many hours to cover that short distance; but along the whole of the long line of the advance the ground was littered with the fallen—the officers and men who had gone down under such a storm of shells and bullets as had not been known since the war began.

Retiring, we took up a position behind a wood, and were thinking that we should get a bit of a rest, when a German aeroplane came flying over us, gave our hiding-place away, and brought upon us a fire that drove us out and sent us back to three lines of trenches which we had been occupying.



[To face p. 286.]

“ I MADE A LUNGE AT HIM, BUT JUST MISSED, AND I SAW HIS OWN LONG, UGLY BLADE DRIVEN OUT ” (p. 285).



By this time our ambulances were hard at work; but ambulance or no ambulance, the pitiless shelling went on, and I saw many instances of German brutality in this respect. The ambulance vehicles were crowded, and I saw one which had two wounded men standing on the back, because there was not room enough for them inside. Shells were bursting all around, and a piece struck one of the poor chaps and took part of his foot clean away. He instantly fell on to the road, and there he had to be left. I hope he got picked up by another ambulance, though I doubt it, for the shell-firing just then was heavy, and deliberately aimed at helpless ambulances by people who preach what they call culture!

We made the best of things during the evening and the night in the trenches. The next day things were reversed, for the Germans came on against us; but we kept up a furious fight, and simply mowed them down as they threw themselves upon us. We used to say, "Here comes another bunch of 'em!" and then we gave them the "mad minute." We had suffered heavily on the 31st, and we were to pay a big bill again on this 1st of November, amongst our casualties being two of our senior officers.

The battalion was in the peculiar position of having no colonel at the head of it, our commanding officer being Major J. M. Traill. I should like to say now, by way of showing how heavily the Bedfords suffered, that in one of Sir John French's despatches, published early in the year, seven officers were mentioned, and in the cases of six of them it had to be added that they had been killed in action. Major Traill and Major R. P. Stares were killed not far from

me on the day I am telling of—and within two hours of each other.

We were lying in trenches, and the majors were in front of us, walking about, and particularly warning us to be careful and not expose ourselves. Their first thought seemed to be for us, and their last for themselves.

Just at that time there was some uncommonly deadly sniping going on, and any figure that was seen even for a fraction of time was a certain target. The sniper himself was a specially chosen German, and he had as a companion and look-out a smart chap with field-glasses, to sweep the countryside and report to the sniper anything promising that he saw in the way of a target. Working in pairs like this, the snipers were able to pick off the two majors as they walked up and down directing and encouraging us. They were shot, and, as far as we could tell, killed instantly. We felt their loss very greatly.

Major Stares had very much endeared himself to his men, and he was a great favourite in South Africa before the war began. We were all eager to get to the front, of course, and were constantly talking about what we should do, and wondering what would happen when we met the Germans. The major was never tired of explaining what we ought to do in tight and dangerous corners, and asking us what *we* should do. I have known him stop us in the street to ask us these questions, so keen and anxious was he for our welfare.

The second day of the fighting passed and the third came. Still we held on, but it became clear that we were too hopelessly outnumbered to hope for complete success at the time, and so we were

forced to leave the trenches. Withdrawing again, we took up positions in farmhouses and woods and any other places that gave shelter. All the time there was a killing fire upon us, and it happened that entire bodies of men would be wiped out in a few moments. A party of the Warwicks got into a wood near us, and they had no sooner taken shelter than the German gunners got the range of them, shelled them, and killed nearly all of them.

There was not a regiment of the Glorious Seventh that had not suffered terribly in the advance during the three days' fateful fighting. The Bedfords had lost, all told, about 600, and it was a mere skeleton of the battalion that formed up when the roll was called. But there was one pleasant surprise for me, and that was meeting again with Lance-Corporal Perry. We had lost sight of each other in the hand-to-hand fighting with the Prussian Guard, and met again when we were reorganised at an old château; and very thankful we were to compare notes, especially as each of us thought that the other was a dead man. There were a good many cases of soldiers turning up who were supposed to be either killed or wounded, or, what is worse, missing. In the inevitable disorder and confusion of such a battle they had got separated from their own regiments and had joined others; but they turned up in due course in their right places.

I had become a member of the grenade company of the battalion, which was something like going back to the early days of the Army, when the grenadier companies of the regiments flung their little bombs at the enemy. So did we, and grim work it was, hurling home-made bombs, which had the power of doing a great amount of mischief.

I was with the grenade company, behind a brick wall close to the trenches, and was sitting with several others round a fire which we had made in a biscuit-tin. We were quite a merry party, and had the dixie going to make some tea. There was another dixie on, with two or three nice chickens that our fellows had got hold of—perhaps they had seen them wandering about homeless and adopted them.

Anyway, they found a good home in the stew-pot, and we were looking forward to a most cosy meal. As a sort of change from shelling by batteries in the ordinary way, we were being shelled from an armoured train, but were taking little notice of it, being busy with the tea and chickens.

The Germans were close enough to fling hand-bombs at us. They gave us lots of these little attentions, so that when I suddenly found myself blinded, and felt a sharp pain in my left hand, I thought they had made a lucky shot, or that something had exploded in the fire in the biscuit-tin.

For some time I did not know what had happened; then I was able to see, and on looking at my hand, I found it to be in a sorry mess, half the thumb and half a finger having been carried away.

I stayed and had some tea from the dixie, and my chums badly wanted me to wait for my share of the chickens; but I had no appetite for fowls just then. I made the best of things till darkness came, and under cover of it a couple of stretcher-bearers took me to the nearest dressing-station.

I suffered intensely, and lockjaw set in, but the splendid medical staff and the nursing saved me, and I was put into a horse ambulance and packed off home. And here I am.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE BRITISH VICTORY AT NEUVE CHAPELLE

[On the road from Béthune to Armentières, four miles to the north of La Bassée, is the little straggling frontier village of Neuve Chapelle, which first came into notice in October during the British advance to the north of La Bassée. At that time the village was held by the Germans, but on October 16th they were driven out by the British. As a result of the tremendous efforts of the Germans in trying to reach Calais we were not able to hold the village, which again was held by the enemy at the beginning of November. The British were driven back a short distance and for more than four months they remained near Neuve Chapelle; then, on March 10th they began an attack which ended in the village being retaken by us and held. The German Westphalian Army Corps in October and November had forced the British out of Neuve Chapelle, but in March these troops were routed and severely punished by part of Sir John French's "contemptible little army." What the battle meant and how it was fought is told by Sergeant Gilliam, 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards.]

THE battle of Neuve Chapelle began at half-past seven o'clock on the morning of March 10th, and ended at about half-past nine on the night of the 12th. Earlier on the morning of that famous day our battalion was ordered to stand to, as supports of the 1st Brigade. We were told to be ready to turn out at ten minutes' notice; and we *were* ready, for we were longing to have a settlement with the Germans, who had dug themselves in at Neuve Chapelle, and made themselves very comfortable and thought that no power on earth could drive them out. But we had a big

surprise in store for them, and we sprung it on them like a thunderbolt when our massed guns roared soon after sunrise on that early day in March. Whatever advantages the Germans might have had at the beginning of the war we had been getting the better of them, and we were certain that we were now much superior to the enemy in every way. We knew that the British Army was becoming too much for them, and we were anxious to prove it that morning, when the biggest bombardment the world has ever known began, and along a tremendous front there came into action hundreds of the largest and the smallest guns that we had out in France.

I am sure that every man who was in at the beginning of this war, from Mons to the Marne and the Aisne, as I was, till I was invalided home wounded, will agree with me that there had been nothing like the British artillery fire at Neuve Chapelle. It was truly fearful. Something like five miles away, nearly five hundred British guns were bombarding the village, the batteries being on a front four or five miles in extent, so that there was only a few yards space between each gun. The result was that an immense wall of fire was seen where the artillery was in position, while the village itself was a target on which shells rained and made havoc. Nothing could withstand that awful cannonading—houses and buildings of every sort were shattered, and often enough a single shell was sufficient to destroy an entire house. When we got into the place at the end of the battle it looked as if some tremendous earthquake had upheaved it and thrown it down in a mass of wreckage. It was almost impossible to tell where the streets had been, and so enormous was the power of some of the shells

that were fired and burst in the ground, that the very dead had been blown up from their resting-places in the churchyard, only to be re-buried by the falling walls around. The bombardment was bad enough for those who were out of it; for those who were in it the effect of the shell fire was paralysing. The Germans had had nothing like it, and more than one prisoner declared that it was not war, it was murder. We didn't quite see how they made that out; but it was near enough for the Germans, and we told them that we were only getting a bit of our own back for Mons. "And," we said, "this is only a taste of what's in store for you. It's nothing to what's coming!"

The roar of these massed guns was so deafening, and the noise of the exploding shells was so incessant, that we could not hear one another speak. The air was all of a quiver and you could see the heat in the atmosphere just as you see it when looking at the horizon in a tropical country, and as I saw it many times when we were in Egypt. The heat from the shells made the day for all the world like a hot summer day, and the fumes and flashes caused a strange mist that looked like rain, though the sun was shining.

The bombardment was grand and terrible beyond description; but there was one good thing about it, and that was that the Germans did not reply very often—they seemed numbed and stunned—and when they did, their fire was very slight and feeble, and so far as I could tell not one of their shells did any serious damage amongst the British forces.

For half-an-hour the British artillery bombarded the enemy's first line of trenches, and this fire to the Germans must have seemed as if hell had been let loose, because everything that was in the line of fire

was blown away or levelled to the ground—walls, trees, buildings, sandbags, even the barbed wire entanglements were carried away by shell splinters and shrapnel bullets, though unfortunately some of the entanglements escaped injury, and became death-traps for a number of our fine fellows who were hurling themselves upon the Germans.

Perhaps I should explain, so that my story is quite clear, that Neuve Chapelle, or what is left of it, stands on perfectly flat ground, with plenty of enclosed gardens and orchards and some wooded country near. The Germans had dug themselves into very complete trenches, and had built some strong breastworks near the highroad into which they had put a large number of machine-guns. In houses and elsewhere these weapons had been planted, and in some places they fairly bristled. Our object was to rout the Germans out of their trenches and houses and barricades, and in view of the deadly nature of machine-guns and rifles the work was bound to be long and heavy and costly. How desperate the assault was has been shown by the losses of some of our splendid line battalions.

When the bombardment of the first line of trenches was over, the way had been paved for the infantry, who were lying in their trenches, not far from the village. They were waiting eagerly for the order to advance, and when it came, they sprang out of their trenches with such shouts that you might have thought a lot of lunatics had been let loose. They dashed forward, and almost before it was possible to realise what had happened they were in the nearest German trench.

Then it was, even so soon after the battle had

opened, that we knew how destructive the fire of our guns had been, for when the trench was reached there was hardly a German left to tackle. Our shells had landed plump into the enemy, and the result was that the trench was full of dead and wounded Germans. The few survivors did not hesitate to explain that they felt as if they could shake hands with themselves and to marvel that any one of them had come out of such a fire alive.

Our men were full of joy at such an ending to their rush, full of satisfaction to feel that they were making such a fine score, then came one of those misunderstandings and mishaps which are part and parcel of a fight in which the artillery cannot always see what it is doing—our own poor fellows suddenly found themselves under the fire of our gunners, who had started bombarding the trench again under the impression that it was still held by the Germans.

Imagine, if you can, what it meant to be in a trench like that, at such a time—a long narrow pit which had been knocked about by shells and was crowded with *débris* and killed and wounded men, and then to be under our own shell-fire. With unerring aim the shells came into the trench, causing consternation, and yet a sort of grim humour. Above the cries of the wounded and the shouts of the men came the loud voices of the officers, saying, "What is our artillery thinking of? What are they doing?" And at the same time doing their dead best to get their men out of it and back to their own trenches.

The order was now given to retire to our old position, and at last the order was carried out, but still some of our men were puzzled to know what had taken place, and they shouted, "What's wrong?" "What's

happened? ” and so on, while there were many cries for help and water. It was soon seen that there had been a mistake, and the best was made of it, though that was not much consolation for poor chaps who had been badly mauled and knocked about by fire that was meant for the enemy.

Noon came round on that first day of the battle and the chief thing we knew was that what we thought was finished had not been done, and we had to start afresh; but there was no grumbling or whining. It was realised that there had been a mistake, and it was taken in the way of British soldiers. And we were well rewarded, for suddenly our artillery restarted. They knew by this time what had happened, and I think they must have felt pretty savage, judging from the nature of their fire. We could see the destructive effects of it from our trenches, and it was a wonderful yet awful sight to watch the Germans being blown out of their trenches into the air, some of the bodies being shot twenty or thirty feet high. I am not going to dwell on the havoc that was caused amongst men; but you can imagine how dismembered parts were scattered by such a continuous bursting of shells.

The bombardment stopped abruptly, and in the strange calm that followed it we went off again, in just the same high spirits as before. This time we were lucky; there was no mishap, things went well and right, and by half-past two we had the joy and pride of knowing that we had made ourselves masters of the first line of the German trenches.

This line was piled up with the German dead, and the first thing we did was to get to work to clear some of the bodies away, so as to make a bit of room for our-

selves to stand, keeping at the same time well under cover in case the enemy tried to get their own back; but they had been too badly shaken, and nothing of this sort took place. The Germans believed that Neuve Chapelle could not be taken, as it was so strongly fortified, and we now had a chance of seeing how much ground they had for their belief. A particularly strong defence was the barbed wire entanglements, which had been made uncommonly thick and complicated. This was the reason why even our destructive fire did not cut through the entanglements and why some of our infantry suffered so heavily. The Liverpool Regiment lost terribly, as so many of the officers and men were caught in the wires and had no chance of escaping from the fire which the Germans mercilessly directed upon them. The Liverpools were caught between the cross-fire of two German maxims as they tried to cut through the barbed wire, just in front of the German trenches. It was real heroism on the part of the Liverpools and it was a ghastly sight to see the brave fellows being cut down like flies.

In our captured trench, which was nothing more than a huge grave, we began, when we had made ourselves secure, to snatch a few mouthfuls of food; but we had no sooner started on this pleasant task than down came the order to prepare to advance.

“That’s right!” the men shouted. “The music’s started again! Let’s get at the German pigs!” Not very polite, perhaps, but in this war a good deal has been said on both sides about swine.

We sprang out of our trench and went full swing for the second trench—there were four trenches to storm and take before our object was accomplished.

Very soon we were in amongst the Germans in the second trench, and it was a fine sight to see them being put through the mill.

Just in front of us, amongst the enemy, the shells from our own guns were bursting—a wonderful instance of the accuracy of modern artillery fire—and it was fascinating to see the shells sweeping every inch of the ground, and marvellous that human beings could exist in such a deadly area. Every now and then in would go one of the German parapets, and the almost inevitable accompaniment was the blowing into the air of limbs and mangled bodies. These things were not a laughing matter, yet often enough, as we watched a shell burst and cause havoc we laughed outright—which shows how soon even the most dreadful of happenings are taken as matters of course.

Now came the order for us to assault and away the infantry went, right into the German trench, with such a rush and power that the enemy seemed to have no chance of standing up against the onslaught.

The men of the Leicestershire Regiment hurled themselves into the thick of the bloody fray, not once, nor twice, but five times in succession did they rush the Germans with the bayonet—and at the end of that tremendous onslaught they had not a single German prisoner! Never while a German lives who survived the charges of the Leicesters will he forget what happened in the trenches at Neuve Chapelle—and what the Leicesters did was done by the Irish Guards. No prisoners—and no man who has been through the war from the start will blame them, for he knows what the Germans have done to our own brave fellows, not in fair fight, but when they have



been lying helpless on the roadside, especially in the retreat from Mons.

The long and thrilling day was ending, darkness was falling, and we pulled ourselves together and prepared for a lively night. We fully expected a counter attack, but no—it seemed to be the other way about, for on our left we had our famous Gurkhas and Sikhs, and they were getting ready for work.

It was quite dark, about half-past nine, when suddenly there was a shout in the German trenches, and as it rose in the night a pair of our starlights burst, like bright, beautiful fireworks in the sky, and showed us what was happening. It was this—the Indians had moved swiftly and silently in the night, they had crept and crawled up to the German position, and before the enemy knew what was taking place the heavy curved knife, which is the Gurkha's pride, was at work, and that is a weapon against which the German soldier, especially when in the trenches, seems to have no chance whatever. It is almost impossible to get over your surprise at the way in which these brave little Indians cover the ground in attacking. They crawl out of their trenches at night, lie flat on their stomachs, with the rifle and the bayonet in the right hand, and wriggle over the ground like a snake and with amazing speed. Having reached the enemy's trenches they drop the rifle and bayonet and out come the knives—and woe betide the Germans that are within reach. The Gurkhas are born fighters, the love of battle is in their very blood, and they fight all the more readily and gladly because they believe that if they are slain they are sure to go to heaven. If a German makes a lunge at him, the Gurkha seizes the bayonet with the left hand and

gets to work with the knife. The plucky little chaps get their hands badly ripped with the German bayonets, and many came into Neuve Chapelle with half their left hands off.

The Germans hate the sight of these Indians, and those who could do so escaped from the trench. They lost no time in going—they fled, and no wonder, for they had suffered terribly, not only from the Indians, but also from the Black Watch, who had been at them with the bayonets. The Highlanders took a large number of prisoners; but the German dead were everywhere, and the trench was packed with them—indeed, all the trenches at the end of the battle were filled with Germans.

During the 10th and 11th we made such good progress that we had taken three of the four trenches; then came the worst day of all, the 12th, for on that we were ordered to take the fourth trench which the Germans held. This was on the outskirts of the village and was strongly fortified. There was a strong blockhouse at the back of the trench which added greatly to the security of the position.

We were up and ready early—at half-past six—and as soon as day had broken the guns began their dreadful booming, and very solemn they sounded in the cold grey light, which is always so cheerless. The guns cleared the way again and did some excellent work in smashing away the wire entanglements and blowing up German works; then came the order to charge.

I was not in at the actual taking of this last trench, but I was lucky in being close enough to be able to see what was going on, and what I saw was some of the most furious fighting in the whole of the battle.

The first charge was made with all the dash and courage of the infantry, who had already done so well. Our men rushed gallantly at the Germans; but so withering was the fire with which they were met and so hopeless seemed the obstacles that they were repulsed with heavy loss, and I know of nothing more heart-breaking to us who were watching than the sight of these soldiers being sacrificed and suffering as they did without, apparently, winning any success.

Again the artillery shelled the German position, then, across the ground which was littered with our dead and dying our brave fellows charged again. They sprang up from the shelter of their trenches, and with even greater fury than before threw themselves upon the enemy, only to be beaten back for the second time, by the cross fire of the machine-guns. In spite of all these losses and the awful odds against them our men kept their spirits up and vowed that they would still drive the enemy completely out of Neuve Chapelle, and get their own back for Mons and the rest of it, and so, while our artillery took up its tune again the men got a breather, and after a bombardment which lasted at least three-quarters of an hour there were shouts of "Now, boys, again! Let 'em have it!" And up the infantry sprang once more and dashed across the fatal ground. The men who were nearest to me were the 2nd Black Watch, and it did one's heart good to see the way the kilties swung towards the enemy's position. But it all seemed in vain, for at this point there was the block-house to be reckoned with. It was right in the centre and was a veritable little fortress which seemed a mass of flame and sent machine-gun and rifle bullets like hail. No troops could live or stand against such

a fusillade, and so our men had to fall back even once more to the protection of the trenches.

By this time the position and danger of the blockhouse were known, and our artillery got the range of it, and that having been done, the end was merely a matter of time. A battery of British guns was trained on the blockhouse and the fire was so accurate that the fourth shell went through the left corner and the building was riddled with shrapnel and put out of action.

It was about this time that our fellows spotted an observation-post on the church in the village. As you know, churches and houses are objects that the British always avoid firing upon if they can, though the Germans have wantonly destroyed large numbers of both. There was the observation-post, plainly to be seen, and as the Germans were directing their artillery fire from it and the post was a danger and a nuisance to us and hindered our progress, a special effort was made to wipe it out. And the effort succeeded, for the British gunners got on it a "Little Harry," a shell that puts to shame even the Jack Johnsons and the Black Marias of the enemy. "Little Harry" settled the observation-post swiftly and finally, and then the fourth and last charge for Neuve Chapelle was made.

And what a charge it was! It was magnificent. Every bit of strength and courage that was left seemed to be put into it, and while the infantry dashed on with the bayonet and put the finish to the stubborn German resistance in the trenches and got the enemy fairly on the run, the Gurkhas and the famous Sikhs and Bengal Lancers hurled themselves on the flying regiments and cut them down with lance and sword.



[To face p. 302.]

“THE INFANTRY DASHED ON WITH THE BAYONET.”



It was a wonderful swirl of fighting. This time the blockhouse was stormed by the 2nd Middlesex and the Royal Irish Rifles.

All at once the guns had finished, and with wild cheers the old "Die-Hards" and the Irishmen rushed to the German trench and would not be driven back. By about half-past three the blockhouse was taken, and then it was seen that it had been defended by no fewer than half-a-dozen machine-guns and two trench mortars, to say nothing of rifles. These weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition were captured and the Germans who had not been killed were found hiding under cover as best they could and they were thankful to surrender.

While this splendid piece of work was being finished our Indians on the left were doing heavy execution. The Bengal Lancers were driving the fleeing enemy straight through the village, if that could be called a village which was now an almost shapeless mass of burning and smoking ruins. And spies and snipers had to be searched for in the shattered buildings, while we had to leave the captured trenches for two reasons, because they were filled with dead, and at any moment we might be blown out of them by mines which the Germans had laid. So we had to set to work, even while the fight was being finished, to construct new trenches, and we worked hard on these so as to make ourselves secure in case of a counter attack.

It was not long before we saw the victorious Indian cavalry returning. At about six o'clock we heard the thud of horses' hoofs, and looking up from the new trenches that we were making we saw the Bengal Lancers coming back from their pursuit and rout of

the Germans. They had chased the enemy right through the village and into a big wood on the other side of Neuve Chapelle, and what they had done was shown by their reddened lances and the helmets and caps that were stuck on the steel. There were about six hundred of these fine horsemen and not one of them had less than two trophies on his lance, while I saw one of them with no fewer than eight skewered on, and he was smiling all over his dark handsome face. So were the rest of them—they were all delighted with the success that had crowned their work, and we cheered them mightily and laughed too, for somehow we couldn't help doing both.

Meanwhile we were being shelled from a spot which we could not locate for some time, then we learned that the firing came from a fort on the left of the village which was known as Port Arthur. We were in the direct line of fire from it, and our position became very uncomfortable. The Germans who were in Port Arthur were a plucky and stubborn lot, for they refused to surrender when they were asked to do so, and declared that they would not cave in either for British or French or Russians. That showed a fine and right spirit, but at last these chaps had to stop, because our gunners got two or three "Little Harrys" into Port Arthur, and it came tumbling down about the defenders' ears.

It was now dark, past nine o'clock, and it seemed that the enemy was a long time making up his mind to attack us; but at about twenty minutes past the hour they began firing with their artillery. The very first shell they sent came right into my two sections of trenches, and killed one man and wounded half-a-dozen of us, including myself. The poor fellow who was killed



had his head completely taken off his shoulders. I helped to bandage the other five before I troubled about myself. Then I looked around again and found that the Germans were well into the night attack; but they never got within fifty yards of our trenches.

What happened after that I am not able to tell you. I was sent to the field ambulance to have my wounds dressed, then I learned that I had got two shrapnel bullets in me, one in the left thigh and one on the other side, to keep it company.

In the ambulance train I went to B ethune, then on to Boulogne, then, on a Sunday afternoon—the 14th of March—I landed at an English Channel port and once again had experience of the care and kindness of friends and nurses in the hospitals at home.

For the second time I had been sent home wounded from the front. I was proud enough when I felt that I had tried to do my duty in the glorious rearguard fighting after Mons and in the battles of the Marne and Aisne; but I was prouder still to know that I had shared in the victory of Neuve Chapelle, in which we got our own back, with a lot of interest, from some of the finest troops of Germany

THE END

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