Written about late 1960ties.

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FOREWARD

While committing these memoirs to paper we have enjoyed reliving some of the experiences, and hope any reader may find some interest in them.

As for our 'Old Comrades', after over half a century many have 'Fallen Out', but to those that are still 'Keeping in Step', if, perhaps, not quite so sprightly as in the 'Old Days', we wish a very sincere 'Good Luck'.

G.W.J and H.E.F.

AS IT APPEARED TO US, 1914-1918,

BY

G.W.Jarvis, and H.E.Friend, M.M.

Chapter One

It was the morning of March 14th, 1915 when we, the 2nd London Division, (afterwards renamed the 47th Division) steamed into the docks at Southampton to await embarkation for France, and embodiment with the B.E.F.

The day that we had been training for since Aug 1914, had at last arrived and everyone was keyed up and excited.

In my case, as one of the medical staff, most of the day was spent tending to blistered feet etc, as many of the lads had loaded themselves with very heavy packs, trying to take what comforts they could into the unknown, and as ammunition had also been issued, adding considerably to the weight, it had been quite a tiring march from Hatfield to the entraining point at Harpenden,

Whilst waiting in the sheds at Southampton we were able during the day, to send off our last letters from this side, although not allowed to go outside the docks to post them, found there were a number of Boy Scouts very willing to help.

When dusk came, horses, limbers and men proceeded to embark on the 'Empress Queen', and by midnight we were heading out into the Solent, a very black night with only the flashes from a lighthouse visible.

There was little sleep for anyone that night with the tension so great, and the space so small, and so, by dawn, found that we were anchored in the port of Le Havre, with the weather overcast, much the same as in England, although I should have known better I felt a sense of disappointment, perhaps the poem I had learned at school had something to do with it "Through thy cornfields green, and sunny vines, Oh, pleasant land of France", we were to learn, the hard way, that the North of France, in March at least, was not a bit like that,

However wars don't stop for such things,and we were soon decanted on to the quay,formed up,and marched through Harfleur to climb that long,steep,hill,that so many soldiers were to moan about in the next few years.

The occasion was still early enough in the war to arouse some interest among the locals,and the route was lined with spectators including children running alongside,who made many requests for souvenirs,i,e,cap badges and buttons.

I believe we were the second Territorial Division to land in France,as a complete unit,the 46th Midland Division being the first,preceding us by a day or two.

The transport section was the first to experience trouble with their horses tending to edge over to the left of the road,as I don't think anyone had informed them of the Continental rules of the road.

On reaching the top of the hill,we were put into a bleak tented camp for the night,where we were packed pretty tight but,perhaps we kept warmer that way,as,during the night a very hard frost developed and the morning abhutions and shaving in ice cold water was not at all popular.

However we were soon parading and marching off down the hill to the railhead in Havre town,where we were confronted with trucks plainly marked,eight horses or forty men (in French of course),to which we were alloted,and so settled ourselves in the straw for the trip,little knowing that these trucks would be our home for the next 48 hours.

After a deal of 'Peep,peeping from the engine,and blowing of horns by the guard,we started off,only to stop every hundred yards or so,for no known reason.

Getting on the way again,we saw,at intervals,French soldiers guarding bridges etc,who all looked old,and were wearing the oldfashioned red trousers. We later learned that they were Territorials which caused some confusion,as the French people could'nt understand that we were also Territorials but of an average age of about nineteen years.

Continuing our journey,we jogged along at a speed of

about 5 to 10 miles per hour through country much like our own, but during one of the frequent stops we saw a group of French soldiers sitting around a big dixie, so, taking a chance on the train starting, I and one or two others paid them a visit, taking our messtins with us, to be very hospitably received and our messtins were filled, but what that coffee contains I will never know, all I can say is that I slept soundly for most of the journey, the lads generally occupied themselves playing cards, singing or writing, and for exercise running alongside the train.

Eventually we reached the end of the train journey at Arcques, all having survived with the exception of one horse that had passed out 'en route'.

Owing to the lack of information about the departure from England, (there had been so many rumours one did'nt know what to believe) consequently few had any money, although I was lucky in having twopence in my pocket, which at least secured some bread from a French housewife who was selling slices, cut from a round, flat loaf, by the roadside, and I look back now and wish I could enjoy a piece of bread as much as I did that one.

There were a few flakes of snow in the air as we marched to the village where we were to spend the night, in barns.

On the march again the next morning, toward the battle areas and to another mudwalled barn in Blendiquess but we were pleased to see that it contained some hay, although the farmer, understandably, did not seem overjoyed to have a crowd of foreign soldiers dumped on him, but nevertheless we got along quite well.

During the night gun flashes were visible and so we realized we were not that far from the Line, whilst in this village those among us still possesing some money made their first acquaintance with citron, grenadine, and cafe au lait, the latter being served in small basins.

We were soon on the move again marching to Lapugnoy a few miles from Lillers but we were to realize that, despite

our previous six months marching experience, French stone sett roads was a vastly different thing, and the two marches from Arcques to Lapugnoy had produced some very raw feet, and bitter remarks from the troops.

At LApugnoy, some I5 miles from the battle areas, where we were to remain for 3 to 4 weeks, I was billeted, with three others of the medical staff, in a bare room of a cottage, near the railway, it was quite comfortable, and we took turns on duty at the aid post nearby.

The Battalion was now located in the training area of the First Army, commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig, where new units were given intensive instruction in the techiques of trench warfare.

That our future would be fully occupied with hard work and the serious side of warfare, we had little doubt, but at least we would be here for a few weeks, and not subject to the constant movement and rumour that had been our lot since the turn of the year.

No sooner had we settled in than officers were off visiting sections of the trenches at Festubert to gain first hand information and experience of trench warfare, meanwhile we were kept occupied on digging trench systems on which could be practised the various methods seen, including defences, erecting barbed wire entanglements, and patrolling at night, etc.

It was all hard work, but there was great enthusiasm to learn transmitted to us by all the officers from the C.O.(Col. W.G.Simpson), his 2nd in command, (Major Buxton Carr, monocled, and cheerfully accepting the troops singing of the song, 'The Galloping Major) and the Company O.C.s(Major Nadaud and Captains Gill, Milner and Parker) and Adjt, (Captain Maude of the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers).

The regular R.S.M (Osborne) had remained in England, due to age, so R.S.M.Barratt took over the role, but he also was getting on, so after a time in France he was commissioned as Q.M. and that brought R.S.M.Norris into the position, the Battalion was fortunate in having such a fine disciplinarian and

human type.

So everyone was busy and fit,and throughout this training period the only incident otherwise worth recalling was having to administer an anaesthetic whilst the M.O.used his skill and some force,in relieving Cpl,Corder's dislocated knee,damaged whilst boxing.

At this stage of the war,many of the arrangements for the welfare of the troops in providing comfort,nygiene and feeding were in dire need of organisation but,due either to shortage of troops or knowhow on the best ways of meeting the needs much discomfort had to be accepted.

Occasionally baths would be arranged that were primitive in the extreme,shallow vats at the local brewery were placed in the open (during March and April),filled with hot water to a depth of 3 inches,and when it was considered that each man had had time to soap himself,other troops were detailed to throw pailfuls of cold water over those bathing,bathing after this experience was not regarded as a necessity.

It was also in Lapugnay that a friend and I,walking out after duty,espied a French youth belabouring a dog,harnessed to a small but heavy cart,it so incensed us,that,despite the language difficulty,we nevertheless got the message across that the action was cruel and it was not long before he was seeking refuge in the nearest estaminet,with, I am sure,his dislike for the Germans taking second place,for a time at least.

About this time I was detailed to go,as orderly,with the M.O. (Captain Giblin) into Bethune,and whilst there the Germans started to shell the town,our first contact with shell fire,so we were gradually adding to our experiences of what the war was all about.

Towards the end of the training period we were inspected by the Ist Army Commander,General Sir Douglas Haig,but despite the fact that we had been standing on parade for four hours in a snowfall,his interest in the Battalion seemed very super-

ficial,it seemed that the Territorials had a lot to do to convince the 'powers that be' or their potential worth.

It was later learned that during our training period at Lapugnoy the Division had been held in readiness for use as necessary,to support the attack that had been raging at Neuve Chapelle ,fortunately it had not been called upon,for had we been rushed into action,lacking any actual trench experience ones chances of survival would have been small.

Our stay at Lapugnoy lasted until the I4th of April,when orders came for us to take our place in the Line,so,loading the Maltese cart with all the medical gear,we proceeded via Essars and the Rue de Bois to the Festubert front.

We had only gone a few miles when we began to pass rough wooden crosses on either side of the road,with inscriptions such as 'five German soldiers', 'three British soldiers' etc, ultimatly coming to the village of Richebourg St Vaast where the signs of war were very real as the church was badly knocked about,coffins exposed,and I remember seeing the wheel of a farm cart hanging in a tree,the result of a shell burst, light artillery guns,sited in the hedgerows were perodically firing and so the reality of war was gradually taking the place of conjecture and wonderment.

I remember remarking to the chap marching next to me that I wondered if I had done right to come on this trip.

We halted in a field and waited for dusk,then we were led off,by companies,in single file heading for the sector known as 'Dead cow farm'.As the ground in this area was marshy and waterlogged the trenches had to be revetted with wove sections of willow,and sandbags of earth built up to form breastworks 5 to 6 feet high,the disturbing factor about this sector was the absence of a parados to protect the occupants from shell back-blast,and we soon realised that this was a jo to keep us occupied,and very necessary.

My company spent the first few days with the South Wales Borderers to learn what we could of trench routine,they were fine old types,mainly reservists of the regular army and we

willing to help us to do things the easiest way,also adding to our knowledge many Hindustani words which they had acquired in their service abroad.

Duties were soon allotted and my first night was spent on guard,on the firestep,with instructions to keep a sharp look-out over 'No man's land' for enemy movements or patrols,but all I saw was plenty of rats that seemed quite at home.

No man's land was a ghostly place,shell holes, rusted barbed wire,and the debris of past fighting,all of which seemed to move,and cast shadows,when verey lights were fired by either side.

Well,here we were at last,but there was no need to get excited as we had a very long row to hoe,and it was a good thing we did'nt know just how long.

After my spell on guard I was allowed to crawl into whatever hole I could find,to sleep.

When we first went into the Line,we,of the medical staff were returned to our companies as stretcher bearers and since we also had to carry a rifle,plus medical haversack,stretcher etc,we were well loaded.

With the dawn came the order to 'stand to' until full light,then 'stand down' and thoughts of breakfast,but the food supply was very crude at this time and actually it became a case of 'catch-as-catch-can,frying a small piece of bacon in the messtin lid,and making tea on a small pile of wood chips, water was limited to a bottle a day and had to suffice for everything,i,e,washing,shaving and drinking.

During the day we were,for the most part,kept busy as sentries,or renewing S.A.A.supplies and cleaning up the trenches but it was not clever to show too much movement in the daytime as snipers were very active on this front for the slightest sign of movement above the parapet,and so it behove those moving about the trenches to keep their heads low for the reason that most of the trench repairs were left until dark,after the evening 'stand down'.

Whilst trenches,or barricades were normally dug to give

cover even to the tallest man it was inevitable that,due to shell fire or weather conditions the trench levels became uneven and often in moving along a trench heads were exposed to snipers and losses from this cause were not infrequent on this sector.

It may be of interest to explain that the Front Line was a continuous trench winding along unevenly,taking advantage of land contours,to give a clear field of fire,the Line itself became a series of bays about 12 feet long and traversed at either end,to avoid enfilade fire,and contain a shell burst thus limiting casualties,five or six men manned each bay under a Cpl,whose duty it was to post sentries.

Approach to the Front Line was through a communication trench that possibly stretched back for 2 or 3 miles to a road in dead ground,these trenches intersected the Front Line about every two to three hundred yards,thus making it better for the reinforcing troops to get up quickly,with reasonable cover,sentries during day or night had to keep a continuous watch over the parapet,which,until periscopes were developed was highly dangerous,particularly in daytime.

It was about this time too that we had our first issue of bread which worked out to about seventeen men to share one two pound loaf,so the popular practise was to draw lots until it was reduced to four,and the rest continued to chew the hard tack biscuits.

After the evening 'stand down'men from each company were detailed for ration fatigues or working parties,the former meant,in the first instance,going back some two or more miles to where the supplies were unloaded from the limbers and returning with them to company H.Q. for issue.

I happened to be detailed for a working party,which involved walking in single file back to Welsh H.Q. where we drew picks and shovels etc,returning to climb over the trench and set about repairing the barbed wire in front.

As a stretcher bearer,I worked away with the others,in the mud for some time,until it was realised by the officer in charge that hands smothered in mud would not be ideal for

dressing wounds,and I was instructed to lay off working,although I found the time seemed much longer,at intervals star shells or verey lights,call them which you like,were fired by both sides,and the temptation to dive for any cover available was very strong,but the orders were to stand perfectly still and not to attract rifle fire.

The working party went off without incident and after four or five hours we returned the tools,and found what shelter we could for the remainder of the night,in the support line.

At this time the nights were extremely noisy from the amount of rifle fire indulged in by both sides.There was one German machine gunner in front of us that could almost play a tune on his gun,and he raised many a smile when he burst forth with his 'Pom-tidy-om-pom,Pom-pom,I think most of us visualized him as an ex-waiter in England.

Offensive action at this time was very much limited to sniping by sharpshooters,and fire from fixed rifles,placed at intervals along the trench parapet,they were operated by sentries pulling a string,and reloading when necessary,the object being to wear a hole through the enemys barricade and hit the occupants,some rifles were trained to hit the top line of sandbags in the hope that the bullets would be deflected down into the trench,the enemy practiced the same method with some success.

During the daytime dummy heads on poles were raised above the parapet to draw fire,but more often than not the enemy replied with shell fire,which quickly brought an end to this innovation.

Some attempts were made to hurl home-made bombs,by rubber bands,catapult fashion but the experiment was very primitive and proved too dangerous.

During the night all troops had to remain in their correct bays,and if not detailed for other work,or as sentry, could rest on the firestep,officers performed normal duties of visiting each bay of their platoon or company area,fir-

verey lights to observe any movements,or calling on the trench occupants to fire a burst with the object of nitting enemy patrols,working parties,reliefs,or anyone between the lines.

According to the terrain,the distance between our lines and the enemy could vary from 50 to 500 yards,so patrols of two or three men were sent out to intercept the enemy,intent on the same mission,and to observe any particular work being carried out,such as sapping etc.

The weather was now extremely cold and many of the troops wore balaclava helmets,fires were a great comfort,which confronted us with yet another problem,in finding fuel,any old tin we could find was punched full of holes,and,as there were some smashed up houses along the road that ran at the back of our trenches,some six of us offered to go over and get some firewood,reaching our target and doing well in salvaging a good pile,someone unfortunately pulled on a piece of timber and dislodged a lot of tiles which made a loud clatter,Fritz was not asleep,and we spent the next few minutes hugging the ground whilst machine gun bullets flew around,nowever,he gave up after a while,and we lost no time in getting back with our loot.

It was not very long before orders were given for fires to be restricted as the smoke and glare invitied shelling.

In these early days dugouts were almost unheard of and anyone who was the proud owner of a sheet of galvanized iron under which to crouch,was considered to have solved the housing problem,in some cases narrow holes were dug in the back of the trench into which we would crawl,unmindful of the fact that a shell landing near would cause a collapse and bury one.

The names that stand out in this area,where the Line crossed the Rue du Bois are Windy Corner,Dead Cow Farm,the Orchard,Indian Village and Chocolate Menier Corner,which will, no doubt,recall memories to anyone who served there.

After being relieved we went back to the village of Richebourg where we found what cover we could in the cellars of

the ruins,and outhouses,that offered some shelter from the rain,shells came over at intervals,although we did'nt bother too much as we were still too green to realise the damage they could do.

Our first fatal casuality occured at this time when a stretcher bearer attending a working party was hit by a random bullet.It was here too that we first heard the Germans nicknamed as 'Jerries'by the 'Old Sweats',I have read somewhere that the name was given to them because of the shape of their helmets but 'tin hats' had not come into fashion at that time,and no doubt it was just slang for German.

The Indian Division was on our left and one night,having taken the wrong turning in our trenches,I suddenly came upon a Gurkha curled up on the firestep,I don't know which of us jumped the higher,probaly myself,they were tough little men but the thing they could not master was the weather,which I am afraid,claimed many of them as victims.These were the Lahore Division,who,whilst filling an urgent need for troops were subsequently transferred to the warmer climate of Egypt.

Whilst here I was ordered to hand in my rifle and return to the Battalion aid post as dresser,which had many advantages notably less parades,better feeding,as we were,more or less, a selfcontained section,with interesing work,and under an M.O (Captain Giblin)whom we all admired.

The aid post was fixed up in what was left of an old farmhouse on the Rue du Bois,a road that ran straight to the trenches,and along which all men,rations,and supplies had to pass but,as it was under enemy observation,became a most unhealthy spot as German machine gun bullets sang over it like angry wasps.

The Battalion was at this time working on a nine day shift system,three days in the Front Line and three in support then back to a nearby ruined village for a further three days rest,but as troops were required for working and carrying parties most nights,it was felt that more rest was obtained when functioning in the Front Line.

Whilst on one of these rests the M.O. ordered all of his staff to parade, with towels, immediately after the morning sick parade, and himself leading we started off on a crosscountry run, in a biting wind, but we soon warmed up and when we came to a shallow stream the order was, undress and get in, we drew the M.O.s attention to the fact that there were several French women and girls working in the fields nearby, but all he replied was, "English girls would watch just the same, but perhaps they would get behind a bush to do so", the dip over we ran back, most of us hoping it was not going to become a habit.

On May 9th 1915, the 1st Division attacked from our trenches in what was to be called the Aubers Ridge battle, our task was to give covering fire, but alas, it was a failure and I don't think anyone reached the enemy trenches, the troops being cut down by machine gun fire, of which weapons Fritz seemed to have an unlimited supply.

The Battalion suffered many casualties that day, and I hate to think of the numbers of the attacking force who were mown down, but I do remember that altogether over five hundred casualties passed through our aid post.

During this action everyone at the aid post worked all out, I recall having to assist in the removal of a badly shattered leg from an officer of the Black Watch, and among the other wounded was a soldier, again of the Black Watch, who was a wonderful example of the tattoists art, he was a complete picture gallery from neck to toe, with a full hunting scene covering his entire back with huntsmen and hounds in full cry.

When the wounded were dressed, and made as comfortable as possible, they were loaded into ambulances which then ran the gauntlet of the Rue du Bois and were taken to the Casualty Clearing Station.

This attack revealed our woeful lack of shells, and subsequently it became quite an event to hear our guns fire, naturally this serious lack of artillery support was our big

grumble,as our position was insecure,and obvious to the enemy.

Normality nowever subsequently ruled and the usual trench duty routines were resumed until we were relieved by another Brigade and moved back to the nearest village for a clean up and rest ,although the latter was not much in evidence owing to the constant demand for night working parties,to repair not only trenches,and the barbed wire defences,but also carrying parties to transport materials for the Front Line,these comprised corrugated iron,duck boards,and huge coils of barbed wire.

Rest periods from the trenches,whilst they had some disliked features in parades,drilling,kit inspections,and working parties,did have the advantages of enabling one to clean up, catch up on sleep and with the gradualy improving arrangements to have baths and a change of underwear,we were also,mostly free from enemy attentions.

Around the Loos and Lens areas we were sometimes permitted to use the miners shower baths ,a luxury indeed,they were not nowever regular enough,about once a month was the average and so we could not keep the lice under control,barns and trench dugouts were the source of the pests,and so they were accepted as a war condition to be endured.

The 'Tommy' developed a sense of humour about it all and it was not unusual to see a small crowd naked around a brazier singeing the seams of their clothing to obtain a few hours relief from the attentions of the lice, Vince Churchill,our famed writer of doggeral,parodies and ditties aptly wrote the following, Ye red-backed reptiles,Oh so tame,

Sure you have won your Flemish fame,
At my expense, At my expense.

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During May the Battalion moved to a new sector,a few miles South,to the Cuinchy area,where the trenches ran through a large brickfield,and the enemy trenches were only seperated from ours by about 15 yards of 'no man's land' and consequently not only were the brigkstacks favourable for snipe-

ers lairs,but that the short distance between the trenches made it ideal for bomb throwing.Casualties here naturally became heavier and so we were to realize the many and varied ways in which the war could be fought,sappers were also busy in this area developing their art in subterranean digging,to blow up sections of the trenches,or thwart the enemy's efforts in this direction.

The first bombs that we used were home made efforts,composed of old jam tins filled with nuts,bolts and other scraps of metal that could be found,the explosive was added and then the tin was soldered up and fitted with a fuse,but I think it is fair to state that the bowler was in a far more dangerous position than the batsman.

After a few more tours of the Line,without anything of especial interest happening,we were withdrawn from the Cuinchy sector and marched to Gouay on the La Bassee canal,the weather was improving and warm,most of us quickly took the chance of having a dip in the canal,and as the trench dirt faded away the spirits of everyone revived.

The morning of May 25th was bright and warm and most of us not on duty were in the water,or washing our smalls,when, about noon,we were paraded and told that we were proceeding to Givenchy that evening to make an attack,to staighten out a sector of the Line,all was bustle and excitment,bayonets had to be sharpened,extra ammo: issued and the medical stores overhauled and packed,we were also issued with the first improvised protection against gas.

These were lengths of muslin,containing a pad of gauze or cotton-wool,to be tied over the mouth and nose,after being soaked in an antigas solution of ammonia,but where we were to find the solution was'nt very clear,the respirators were very primitive and we were thankful we wer'nt called to use them, but I suppose it was the best they could do on the spur of the moment,as gas had been used by the Germans,for the first time at Ypres,causing considerable casualties to Canadian troops.

We moved off along the banks of the La Bassee canal,then

crossing it,made for the village of Givenchy from where the communication trench,Queens Walk,started,arriving there we unloaded the medical kit which comprised two wicker panniers and various haversacks etc,with which,in addition to our own equipment,we started off to find the aid post.

The M.O.along with the other officers,had reviewed the ground the previous day,so knew the destination,which was the ruins of a brewery through which the Line ran and which had been selected for the aid post,but,when we were only a short distance away the enemy put a salvo of big shells into it,and we were quickly rendered homeless,but very thankful that he had not waited another five minutes.

After a bit of searching around we were unable to find any place suitable and had to join forces with another unit of the Division(The London Irish),in a cellar,where we opened shop and started business.

The attack,timed to start at 6.30 pm.led by A and B companies,was successful in that the objectives were taken, but holding them was a different matter,as we had,of course, on that small frontage,created a salient,and the enemy made the captured trenches very expensive to hold with enfilade fire from machine guns,and artillery but the Battalion held on to their gain,small though it was.

The tragedy of the attack was,in some part,due to the excessive numbers of troops used in the first waves,A company under the command of Captain Gill quickly entered the enemy trench and overcame the opposition but were unable to expand or move along the enemy lines,with the result that when 'B' company,under Captain Milner arrived they were unable to enter the trench,and had to lie behind it with little,or no cover and at the mercy of enemy snipers who took a heavy toll of them,Captain Gill and Lieut Garner Smith were quickly killed, as were many other splendid types.

Through the night all fought with tenacity to hold on to the trench against determined enemy efforts and were able to link up the section with the British line by the morning of

the 26th,on one section,where a German communication trench joined the captured front line a concerted effort was made by the enemy to recapture the position,but only by a heroic effort,led by L/cpl Keyworth,counter bombing the enemy for two hours,was the position held.For this action Keyworth was awarded the V.C.during the battle some 130 officers and men were killed and about 650 were wounded.

The Battalion was relieved on the night of the 26th and repaired to Virquin and at roll call only 250 paraded,the Battalion,six weeks earlier had arrived in France at full strength of 1,000 men,but it had come through its first great ordeal,suffering heavy losses but able to claim,with all other units of the B.E,F. as equally capable.

At the Battalion aid post the continued and exhausting work of tending the wounded was interrupted by enemy shelling which was quite heavy for those days and as I was working in what was left of the house above the aid post another shell burst against the wall,and I was knocked out with a crack on the head,and covered with bricks and mortar,although my companion was more unfortunate and lost his leg.I was dragged clear and taken below,where the M.O. dressed my wound and put the usual tally on a button to denote that I was for hospital.

On recovering my senses and seeing this,I assured the doctor I was alright and would rather not go to hospital,don't get me wrong,I am no hero,but I had heard of cases where a chap had gone to hospital for a few days and subsequently been sent to some other unit,and this is what I feared,the M.O. was kind enough to let me stay,and after a short rest I returned to duty.

My first experience on returning to duty was to help a stretcher party to get around an awkward traverse,and when the wounded passenger's face came into view I was shocked to see it was my Pal who had shared a billet with me at Hatfield,the poor lad,he was only sixteen,was minus one arm and one leg,but in spite of all that,he was as cheerful as I had always known him.

Most of those lads, who were killed in this action, have no known graves, as the fighting continued over this ground for years after, but their names are recorded on a memorial tablet in the Le Transloy cemetry, where I have seen them on later visits.

It would be impossible to describe the feelings of we that were left, it is bad enough to lose one's pal, but to lose so many, in such a short time, seemed like the end of the road to us, however the war goes on, and one must not dwell too long on these things.

We subsequently moved on to Bethune, and it was here that the M.O. surprised me by saying he had submitted my name for a decoration, for carrying on after being wounded, but whilst nothing came of this, as there must have been dozens of names submitted my only boast is that my name was on the same list as that of L/cp Keyworth who received the V.C. for his outstanding work at Givenchy.

We stayed at Bethune for a few days, and soon the lighter wounded began to filter back to the unit, also we received a few small drafts, and, although very much under strength, found ourselves once more in the Line.

Chapter Two

The British Army was, at this time (June 1915), taking over further trench sections from the French, and we were moved to the new sector of North and South Maroc, which was, at that time very quiet, facing the town of Loos, held by the Germans, Maroc was one of the more modern mining villages of almost new houses, build around the main shaft, but the civil population seemed to have left in a hurry, as there was still quite a lot of household property remaining in the houses.

We fixed up the aid post in a cellar, and soon made ourselves comfortable in another one nearby, until one morning, our M.O. called down asking if we were all together, upon our answering that we were, he told us to split up, as he did'nt want us all to die on him at once, which made sense, as Fritz sometimes played a bit rough.

On looking back, I think that this, for us, was perhaps the best period of the whole war, it was fairly quiet up front, the weather was good, and when relieved, we went back to rest in the quite pleasant little mining villages of Mazengarbe, Les Brebis Annequin and Noex le Mines, and although these places were quite close to the Line, as the shell flies, (no sane crow would linger here), the French people were loath to leave their villages and put up a very brave show.

A few shops remained and for those in funds it was possible to get a feed of eggs and chips, which made a welcome change from the monotony of bully beef and tinned meat and veg, rations. During these pleasant Summer evenings it was no uncommon sight to see a group of our lads, in front of the local estaminet, singing the old songs, with an admiring ring of French people surrounding them, but perhaps the French people were only being polite?.

Whilst in this village I was detailed, by the M.O. to go and cook for the officer's mess as they had two or three on the sick list, my relief was great however, when I reported, to learn that the regular cook was still in action, the officers

should similarly have been relieved as they were spped at least one attack of indigestion.

The coal mines at Les Brebis were still being worked, so the male population was higher than in most of the places we visited, but of course, the men were mainly in the higher age group. The Germans occasionally lobbed over some shells, and I recall one hitting the end wall of a row of miner's cottages which collapsed and revealed the strange sight of a bed, complete with a man in it, sliding down the sloping bedroom floor and landing, right way up, in the road, but he was unhurt, and calmly got out of bed and walked back into what was left of his home.

On the rare occasions that we went into Corps reserve we went back to the village of Allouagne a few miles from Lillers where the people were very kind to us and from subsequent visits quite a bond of friendship developed, to the extent that many of us have revisited them several times between the wars, and continued to enjoy their hospitality.

We were all this time being built up to strength and received large drafts from the Suffolks and Somersets, which almost caused a language deadlock, as I heard one chap say, "London Regt ? it sounds more like the Tower of Babel to me ".

Apart from the difference in dialect, the new men were fine types and soon blended to give the Battalion a better look, and brought considerable relief to some of the overworked sections.

Returning to the Line the Division was again placed in the Maroc area, overlooking the twin winding towers of a large coal mine in Loos, and which bore some resemblance to Tower Bridge from the distance, naturally the Cockneys christened them accordingly, but we were to have a much closer acquaintance with them later on.

During this time many things changed affecting equipment and weapons, such as the Mills bomb which was introduced, and a very compact and efficient weapon it proved to be, the bomber sections were formed, with thier attendant bayonet men, ar-

so,in theory,any strongpoint offering determined resistance was their target,(we did'nt have any Typhoons and Rockets then

At this time we began to see,and hear,more of our own artillery,which,in its way,was heartening,we also found ourselves digging reserve trenches,and on numerous working parties carrying up gas cylinders to be installed in the Front Line, equipment of every variety was arriving and being stored,so the 'build-up'went on with shelling increasing on both sides, all a very clear indication that these were preparations for a large scale attack and the only question remaining was,when, and what Divisions would form the attacking troops.

We continued to hold the Line in the Maroc area,and in this fine Summer conditions were not too uncomportable.Fritz was using a Naval gun,which was reputed to be brought up on the railway and fired armour piercing shells,our experience of it was when one of these shells entered the end wall of a row of empty houses,skidded on the tiled floor,and made its exit at the other end,without exploding.

There were,at this time too,many rumours,and spy scares were news,frequently it was alleged that a German spy was trotting around the trenches,dressed as a British officer,resulting in everyone being put on the alert,but all to no purpose and we concluded it was probably a case of someone with too vivid an imagination,we did notice however that padres who previously had freedom to visit any part of the trenchs were suddenly stopped,apparently due to the fact that they could be enemy agents,as few of the troops knew who were their Divisional clergy.

We were still sleeping in the cellars,and one night,someone with over devioped ideas of hygiene sprinkled so much chloride of lime on the floor that we were almost gassed in our sleep,and were glad to stagger out into the fresh air.

I must mention Old Dave May,a very old soldier of the National Reserve,in the transport section,who caused many good natured laughs as he delighted to spin yars which usually started off with,"When I was 'art in British Burma,the orfficer

came up to me and said, Dave mate, the effelents is loose ", he had to take a lot of ribbing, with such questions as "What kind of bows and arrows did they use when you joined, Dave"? etc, but he was a good sport, and I am happy to record that he was finally sent home, and ended his days in peace with the old gentlemen at Chelsea.

We continued to hold the trenches in the Loos sector, alternating with the other two Brigades (I40 and I41st) in our Division until Sept, 24th, when we (I42nd Brigade) were relieved from the Line, and went back to Bully Grenay and Les Brebis, in support for the attack that was due to start the following morning, the I40th and I41st Brigades were leading the attack on our front.

The aid post staff spent the night in the buildings of the minehead at Les Brebis, and on the morning of Sept 25th the battle of Loos started. The attack was preceded by the use of gas, but I don't think it was quite the success that had been hoped, as the wind was tricky, and in some areas the gas hung about for a long time, as much a problem for the attacking troops, as our gas masks, at that time, were still not very advanced as the mica eye pieces steamed up and vision became very limited, One of the London Battalions, (the I9th), leading the attack, started off in fine form, by kicking a football towards the enemy lines and following it up.

Unfortunately all the German strong points had not been obliterated and one, the remains of an old building between the lines which Fritz had strengthened with concrete, and armed with machine guns, called machine gun house, caused many casualties before it was finally reduced.

The 47th Division were on the extreme right flank of the British Army, joining up with the French who were also attacking simultaneously on the adjoining Souchez and Lorette sectors, our objective among other points was the Double Crassier comprising two huge slag heaps, which formed the right flank.

Most of the objectives were reached according to plan, in fact , one Division, our old friends, the I5th(Scottish) over-

shot the target,and found themselves isolated,suffering severe casualties as a result.

As invariably happened,the depleted ranks found holding what they had won the biggest problem,as reinforcements were not immediately forthcoming to exploit what could have been a good moral victory.

On Sept,27th the Battalion was moved again to the Maroc area and were awaiting orders to move forward when tragedy came to our staff.I was in the mine yard,scrounging coal,when hearing a shell,I dodged behind some old trucks,and thought no more about it until I returned to the aid post to learn that the shell I had heard had killed our M.O.(Captain Giblin) as he was walking down the road to the Field Ambulance to give them a hand with casualties.

Everyone was deeply shocked but none more so than his staff,as he was respected by all,and,I believe,loved by those with whom he had worked.He had that rare charm of making friends at once,and it was no uncommon sight to see him,soon after we had arrived in a village,sitting on the grass,chatting and laughing,with a crowd of children around him.

We were waiting to go forward,and without a Medical Officer but the need was urgent,and fortunatly the D.M.S. moved quickly and a young Doctor,just up from the Base,found himself attached to the I/24th,for temporary duty.

On the evening of the 28th we moved forward over the open ground strewn with broken bodies and wounded,and made our way to Loos where quite a few heavy shells were falling and everywhere was confusion,resulting in us not finding our H.Q. until the early hours of the morning.We finished up in a cellar in the shadow of the twin towers previously mentioned, at the Loos minehead and here we noticed that the Germans had made themselves very comfortable by knocking passages through all the cellars in the row,introducing beds,and,if the woman's clothing was anything to go by,had undoubtably done some entertaining.

We found some German black bread (Rye),not very tempti-

and also some picture postcards snowing the sinking of the Lusitania stamped with their favourite motto "Gott Straffe England".

While exploring in the immediate vicinity we also found a tame rabbit in a hutch,in one of the outhouses,which,needless to say,was soon in the pot,or rather petrol can,and we were able to offer some of the wounded a messtin of stewed rabbit,as a bonus,much to their surprise.

Another surprise was when some of the lads came across a dead German officer,in a coffin,who apparently must have been a V.I.P. of some sort.

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The following episode was the experience of one of the lads,in the Loos battle,as related to us,by him.

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It was a common feature,when the Front Line trenches became,more or less,stabilised,for them to be named something akin to the Division holding them,on the Loos front we had a communication trench called Regent Street leading to the Front Line named Oxford Street,Regent Street was a death trap and on one occasion some seventeen men were caught by one 'Minny'.

The secton of the line was about 50 yards long,and on its far right there was a huge crater and a very hot spot,which the 21st London had realised some days earlier,our casualties had already been severe and to cover this bit of line only four bombers held it,on two hour shifts,often there would be no N.C.O, so the senior soldier took charge,which,on this occasion,was myself. every so often one man would crawl up to the crater to have a look around,don't ask me why,it was an order.

It was about midnight when I had to take the first look, and of course,when I got close to it up must go a verey light experience had taught one to keep perfectly still until the light petered out,I was on my knees and able to see inside that crater,and I was amazed at the number of dead men there were laying around,so many of whom were from our tunnelling

company of the 4th R.W.F.

As soon as the light went out I made my way back only to find one of the three bombers of my party had been caught by a rifle grenade, and in fact he was wounded everywhere, another man had a severe attack of shock, and was shaking all over, the third man however, who was only a little chap, was fortunately alright, as it was forbidden to leave the front line in any circumstances I realised I could not deal with the situation as it was, so I shouted at the man with shock to go back and bring up a stretcher bearer.

My shouting had the desired effect and in only a matter of or minutes he was back with the bearers, they managed to get the wounded man on to the stretcher and it was then I heard him mutter a woman's name, no doubt his wife's, the problem however was to get him away as you can't turn trench corners with a man on a stretcher, but fortunately the man who went for the bearers suddenly recovered from his shock and suggested that he should get on top of the trench and risk being hit, this they did successfully.

Now there were just the two of us, but fortunately nothing serious happened, and after a short while the shocked man recovered and we carried on. Very seldom did 'four' men return from this bit of Oxford Street, but we were lucky in only losing one, I never heard if our casualty lived but they had got him away.

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The Line was now very thinly held, and eventually the Brigade was relieved by the French and carried out after dark when it appeared to me that someone had slipped, as British verey lights when fired, describe a simple arc, and then fall, these were suddenly replaced by French ones which, after reaching a certain height, floated along on a parachute, clearly indicating to the enemy that a relief was in progress, and which he was quick to spot so our journey out was somewhat hampered and unhealthy, from the shells he sent over.

We came out past smashed up limbers, field kitchens, and dead horses, that had been caught on the road, and so the Bat-

alion proceeded to Allouagne on Corps rest,where it licked its wounds,cleaned up,and prepared for the next event.

It was surprising how soon a few good nights rest was sufficient to put the lads back into form again,after a sticky patch,and in a few days we were considered strong enough to stand an Inspection by Sir John French,I remember in his speech to us he said that his chief concern,in the Loos attack, was for the right flank,but by eleven o'clock our Divisional effort had put his mind at rest,and this,I believe,was almost his last official function before his recall to England.

Catering was still a problem in France and so it was left to the Tommy to find a solution and make a change of diet,we would sometimes buy a bag of flour (this was before the selling of flour to us was forbidden),scrounge a piece of suet from the Q.M. stores,and make a suet pudding which was wrapped in a piece of sandbag,and boiled in a petrol tin,the result was somewhat unshaven,but what are a few hairs among friends ? we enjoyed it.

Returning to the Line again,Nov,1915,opposite the town of Hulluch still in German hands,the view over'No Man's Land' was extremely depressing in the sea of mud and just the remains of a big factory visible on the skyline which,I believe, was what was left of the Michelin tyre factory.

The weather had now deteriorated rapidly which quickly reduced the trenchs to a quagmire,with the troops knee deep in mud and water resulting in many casualties from trench feet P.U.O. (pyrexia unknown origin) ,and exposure conditions.

Pumps that had been instaled to reduce the water level were useless since water pumped out almost immediately returned to another section of the trench,added to these conditions was the fact that the Battalion was extremely low in numbers yet was still responsible for a normal sector,therefor posts were undermaned and the men were unable to get adequate rest from sentry turns,this resulted in some cases of men being found asleep at their posts,and some S.I.W. (self inflicted wound)cases,whilst they were dealt with,the conditions that

had to be endured prevented the extreme penalty being enforced.

Our reserve positions were sited in the villages of Vermelles and Philosophe,and the sections we held included La Rutoire,Lone Tree,and the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

The village of Philosophe exists to-day almost as it was in I9I4,with the Bethune / Lens Road fronting it,and one needs little imagination to ercall the War-time notices carrying the warning,"Under observation,do not loiter",It was on this road that L/c Ketworth was killed.

We were resting in Philosophe at the time,but he took advantage of a fog to go scrounging and souvenir hunting,with the sudden lifting of the fog the Germans observed the movement and promptly drenched the area with shrapnel before we could regain cover,resulting in casualties,and the most regrettable death of of Keyworth.

The Front Line trenchs were reached by following the Hulluch Road until we came to a place called Victoria Station where a small gauge railway terminated,then we turned off to cross a flat plain,(except for shell holes) which was about the last word in desolation and mud,the tracks we followed were just ruts in the mud,made by the nightly journeys of limbers,with rations,and G.S. waggons,taking up duckboards, barbed wire,etc.

In very wet weather,(and it always seemed to be while we were there),the tracks were covered with liquid mud so that the first intimation one had of a shell hole was a dip in filthy slime.

We did long spells in this area,not only in the trenches but on working parties most nights,and invariably we arrived back in the rest areas like mud-sodden ghosts,and so we felt, with the gerat shortage of man-power perhaps they were going to wear the old ones out first.

The ground was still in this state,and an indication of its effects is shown in the following incident,when I was told to take the water cart up with the rations,we had nearly

reached our destination when the cart slid sideways into a large shell hole hidden by the liquid mud,all the efforts by the two horses were fruitless,seeing a G.S. waggon,drawn by six horses passing,I approached the sergeant in charge for help,without hesitation he unhooked his six horses and put them in front of our two,but even then they could not move it.

Well,in the end the transport sargeant said that we must turn the taps on and he would pick us up onthe way back,this he did,and we reached depot in a filthy condition.

I thought that was enough for one night but I had only just got back to my shelter when a message came from the Q.M. to say the troops were short of water in the line,so, with a heart full of 'joy' we filled up the cart,and started off again,this time on our own. I walked in front to guide the driver and to enable him to take evasive action,we eventually arrived at the trenches and I jumped down and went along to the R.S.M.(this was R.S.M.Norris,D.C.M. admired by the troops and known as 'The Great White Chief),to report.

It did'nt add much to my pleasure to hear him say,"You've got that so-and-so cart up there,just turn those taps on,and get out of here as fast as you can" by this time it was light and if it had'nt been for a kindly ground mist,this account would not have been written,but that was Army Life.

The depressing time in this area continued through to Jan,1916,and I promised myself,that,if there was an 'After the War',I would never get up to see the dawn again,but little did I think that the sons of those chaps over the wire,would cause me to break that promise.

When we left England we were armed with the old-fashioned long Lee-Enfield rifle,converted to take Mark VII amnuntion, and they were far from efficient,so,the lads re-armed themselves with the modern short Lee-Enfield,which were salvaged from those laying around from the Loos battle,and immediately after.

By this time we had a new M.O. (captain Townsend),the temporary one that had joined us for Loos,had returned to his

unit,I believe he had been impressed by his experience with us and marked it by sending us a nice cake,each year,on the anniversary of the event.

We went in and out of this sector for what seemed an eternity,and when my old bones try to emulate the famous breakfast food,with their snap-crackle-pop,I think I know where I inherited it.

The Northern part of our area included the famous,or infamous,Hohenzollern Redoubt and it was the accepted thing that in doing a spell here meant unpleasant happenings,with mines exploding or raids,in fact,it was always a tense location and we suffered many casulties.

To ease trench duties during the Winter of 1915 some of the Cavalry Divisions took on the role of infrantry,and we were relieved by the 33rd Dismounted Cavalry Division,and so moved back to the Loos area again,also quite a warm spot,where at night the ration limbers made so much noise on the stone sett roads that an attempt was made,by fixing old tyres and sacks around the wheels,to make them a little less obvious, but,being a salient,Fritz seemed to know when we were about and made things as unpleasant as possible,and no one lingered longer at the ration dump than they could help.

One night,when held up in a traffic jamb,a newly arrived officer asked to be directed to the Front Line but we had to stop a few moments later to remove his body from the road,a shell had caught him.

The remaining month of 1915 was spent holding the Line at the Copse on Hill70,and the lads were mainly engaged building up at night what the German artillery had knocked down in the day,but a little comfort came when some gum-boots were issued,which were a great improvement on the everlasting sodden boots and putties,although this was somewhat spoilt by the fact that the outgoing troops were required to hand them over to the reliefs,which meant trudging through the knee deep mud to our billets,without them.

We spent our first Christmas in France at Sailly la Bou-

rse,and enjoyed,what was to us at the time,a good meal,even if the surroundings wer'nt all that could be desired.

Christmas over we were soon back in the mud again holding the Line,and,when in support,supplying working parties most nights,these working,or carrying parties,to the Front Line could be far more exhausting than than holding the Line,the long journey,overloaded,through deep mud,and rain,doing the set task,and then journeying back,taking in all pernaps eight or nine hours,and the troops were all-in at the finish.

I must confess here that in 1916 I broke army rules and kept a diary,I should'nt think they will put me in the Tower for that,after all this time,but the unfortunate thing is I wrote some of it with a copying ink pencil,so,some of the pages are just purple blobs,I had overlooked the fact that both book and owner would be soaked many times before the end of the year.

On Jan 1st 1916,we were relieved from the trenches in front of Vermelles and marched back to a little village called Noelles,in a very fed up and filthy condition,and suffering from loss of sleep mainly due to the Germans who had 'blown' a mine before we left,and sent over the usual bombardment, causing some losses,and a lot of repair work.

While we were in the village 'Fritz' shelled the church demolishing the roof among other things,we were located in a cellar where we tried to light a fire but were smoked out, however the draught problem was eventually solved and we made ourselves,more or less,comfortable.I have often wondered where we would have found shelter if it had'nt been for the fact that almost every house in France and Belgium contains a cellar of some sort.

Rumours of leave were now a big talking point,and tended to make one more 'windy'than usual,hoping that nothing would happen to stop,or delay,it.

Well,my turn came in Feb,1916 and togetner with a few others I marched,my feet hardly touching the ground,to Bethune to board the train to Calais,and 'Blighty'.

Six days only was granted in those days,and,smarting at every delay,we eventually arrived at the French coast,and then were soon gladdened by the sight of the white cliffs of Old England.

I don't intend to write much about my leave,just to say that I arrived at Headcorn just after 21.00 hours,to find that the last train,on the branch line from there to Tenterden had gone,so I was faced with walking the last nine miles or hiring a horse and trap,which,needless to say,I chose,and arrived home in style.

A good part of my time ,in the next few days,was spent banging my overcoat,trying to get most of the Loos mud out of it.

The leave passed all too quickly,and on Wed, Feb,16th,I returned to London to spend the night,and on the following morning caught the tram to Victoria,the clippie on the tram asked me if I wanted a return ticket,and I answered,"Yes,if it is valid for a year",a good job I didn't take one,as my next leave was seventeen months away,and I should have lost my twopence.

Those returning leave trains were quite a test,with everyone trying to put on an act of cheer,but I noticed the gay singing stopped very quickly once the train had left the station and the sad faced relatives.

Folkestone was reached,and we were held there until 19.00 hours when we embarked,and reaching Boulogne climbed the hill to the transit camp for the night.The next day,after parading three times we were put on the train and all we wanted to do now was to get back to our mates,since to remain at the camp gave the uneasy feeling that one might be directed to another unit,which did occur if men were needed for some sudden pressure point,but after a number of delays,for this and that,I was happy to eventually rejoin my unit at Allouagne, and so leave became just a memory.

Towards the end of Feb,a trek,supposed to last for four days,for manoeuvres,was the next item on the agenda,but as it

was snowing hard it was'nt easy going and we arrived at our destination,the small village of Boy near St Julien,soaked to the skin,but,having secured a broken down house for the aid post,set about trying,as best we could,to dry some of the lads clothing,and overcome the intense cold.

This village was cited between hills,and the snow gave it a wonderful Christmas card appearance but the heavy drifts bogged the transport down,we had to stay put for the four days and the exercise was lengthened to a week,parades were limited to snowfights,a welcome change from the normal routine.

We were all glad to get back to our old billets and thaw out although the first morning we were all hauled out at 06.00 hours for Battalion drill,(I wonder who thought that one up), and again the same the next morning.

About 23.30 that night the bugles sounded the fire alarm, it was'nt very serious,and after dressing the arm of a sergeant,who had been injured in the rush,we returned to bed.

Once again we were on the move,this time to the village of Sains en Gohelle,where we were fortunate enough to be billeted with some very nice people,but on we moved again to Bouvigny where we were housed in huts in a wood.

It was evident by now,March 1916,that we were changing our front,and that proved to be the case as we took over the Souchez sector from the French.when the takeover was completed we found ourselves landed in the houseless village of Ablain St Nazaire whose chief claim to fame was for the number,and size of the rats it produced.The French soldiers must have experienced a terrible time here,and at the adjoining village of Souchez where the ground was cratered from mine explosions and littered with German stick bombs,many of them unexploded,all kinds of equipment,and the stench from the bodies laying around was almost unbearable,statistics put the French losses here in dead alone,at 75.000.

We always found,when taking over from theFrench that their standard of hygiene was somewhat more lax than ours,and many hours had to be spent in cleaning up,but one felt it w

have been very grim fighting around this area.I remembered reading about the savage fighting around the sugar refinery and the Labyrinth at Souchez,and there I was standing on the site,where only the foundations now remained,visualising the hand to hand struggles that had taken place,the moon was clear and bright,but I was soon brought back to reality when a German plane flew over and laid a few'eggs'on the old ruins.

The brick rubble from the smashed up buildings had been used to fill up the shell holes in the road,which in turn,had been ground into powder by the transport,with the result that we had the doubtful pleasure of being covered with red mud instead of the black we had been used to,it's these little things in life that count.

March was with us now,and I must have been feeling a touch of Spring for I see a note in my diary that I picked some primroses,now I wonder to whom I was going to give them,as I am sure there was no room for them on my sideboard,among all the orchids.

A short time ago I mentioned the German stick bomb,for anyone that does not know,these consisted of a canister,about four inches long by two in diameter,containing the explosive, fixed to the end of a wooden handle about fourteen inches long,thus giving a longer throwing range,there was also a hook on the canister to enable them to be fastened to a belt,whilst the Germans were 'generous'in their use, the handle,and long delay fuse enabled one,in some cases,to return them to their rightful owners.

CHAPTER THREE

My diary records that on March 30th,1916,we were warned that if we saw any signals of peace,we were not to make any demonstrations,I wonder who was kidding whom.

Relieved once more we moved back to Verdrel,then on to Fresnicourt,and into huts built by French soldiers in Bouvigny Woods.

To digress for a moment,I was at the Liberation Banquet at Arras in 1964,and was introduced to the lady that owns these Woods,when she learned that we were there in 1916 she invited myself and Tom Heritage over,and on the next day she met us with her car,and gave us a most interesting afternoon,then loaded us with yoghourt to take back to the rest of the party.

This lady was now running a high class dairy farm,and we further learnad that she had been a member of the Resistance movement in the last war,and had assisted a number of British and American airmen to escape to England.

Now,returning to the task,the weather was trying to improve,and we had two or three bright days,which cheered everyone up and our stay was reasonably pleasant in the Woods,the main occupation,when not drillingetc,was hunting the rats,which invaded the huts at night to the extent that unless one completely covered the head,prior to sleeping at night,rat bites were not uncommon.

The saddest moment,whilst we were resting at Bouvigny came with the departure of Col,W.G.Simpson to take up a higher appointment on the Brigade Staff.The Battalion paraded and Col, Simpson made his farewell speech,regretting the occasion after his long association with the Battalion that he had had the honour to command and had been so loyally supported through times of peace and the various battle actions,in which the Battalion had been engaged.

Including the Colonel,there were few dry eyes by the time the farewell cheers in his honour had been concluded,Major Buxton-Carr,second in command was promoted to Battalion commander, a popular promotion as he also had been with the Battalion sin-

ce pre-war days,and the sight of him inspecting the men in the trenchs,dressed in long trench coat,French helmet,monocle and country walking stick,was a cheering sight for everyone.

Alas,with our ration of sun used up,the rains returned with renewed force,so that the roads were inches deep in liquid mud,so much so that the whole Battalion was put on to sweeping roads,this was not at all popular and moved our song writer (Vince Churchill),to churn out the following grouse.

Six blinking days,Six blinking days,
They are spent in different ways
Six up the Line,on the Heights of Souchez
Where we are mined by night,and shelled by day
And then we serve,six in reserve
Where working parties are the craze
Well,we don't mind doing those
But object to sweeping roads
For those whole six blinking days.

Anyone that served will know how difficult it was in the Army to protest about anything,without sticking one's neck out,and I think,in present day parlance,our song writer was something of a shop steward,he would put together a song about anything topical,and by singing it at the rough and ready concerts,when we were out of the Line,could sometimes put our point over in a nice way,did it have any effect ?,well we still hoped.

Back to the Line again,and it was during this spell that I had to take one of our chaps,suffering from shell shock,to Mesnil Boucney to go before the A.D.M.S. for examination,cases such as these were heartrending,as some reached breaking point sooner than others,I was glad to get back to the unit,as I felt like the 'odd man out 'with the R.A.M.C. although they were all very friendly.

We next moved on to Estree Cauchie and spent many hours poshing up for an inspection by the Divisional General,Major General Barter,these Generals,if they gave you a pat on the back,would insist on saying what they expected next time,which

was not popular,as attacks or raids were tne main subject.

Our next stop was at Gouy Servans,a very dirty village, with strong smells,but in spite of that we made the best of it and it was ajoy to find here a trench filled with water,that served as a bath,but then it did'nt need a lot to make us happy in those days.

From here we served two short tours of the Line at Lieven between Loos and Souchez,that,except for experiencing a new form of enemy aggressian in the shape of rifle grenades, was reasonably quiet.

Whilst in this sector,the 62nd (Naval) Division joined the 4th Army Corps,and one of the R.M.L.I. Battalions was alloted to our area for instruction in trench duties,in view of their fighting experiences in Gallipoli there was little that we could teach them,although I'm sure we gained something in learning how to "Splice the Mainbrace".

The sector at Lieven was a quiet one,for some reason,but not unpopular with the troops,even the support lines,which ran through the village was mainly composed of cellars,of which some were occupied by miners and their families,only 800 yards from the Front Line.

Moving again to the sector on our right,towards Souchez, the quietness continued,and moving out on rest we were quartered in Bouvigny Boyeffles,with the Battalion aid post sited in a much shell shattered chateau.

It was here that,with a friend,we climbed a hill overlooking the trench system,some three or four miles away and we lay among some bushes watching the shells burst over trenches and roads,it gave us a strange feeling to be looking down on it all,when most of our time was spent looking up.

On this sector we enjoyed another singular experience in carrying out daylight reliefs with the Front Line troops,a new and welcome experience compared to the night reliefs carried out often in appalling conditions of darkness and rain along communication trenchs,trying to negotiate unseen obstacles

such as broken duck-boards,looping overhead telephone wires, unsuspected sump holes,and taking wrong turnings,here also there was an estaminet at the entrance to the communication trench,still occupied by an old Frenchman,who sold wine to the troops as they went up the Line.

Appropos of reliefs,the system was for guides of the Battalion to be relieved,to proceed to the communication trench entrances,meet the incoming troops and guide them through the trenches to the supports of Front Line,it was the guides duty to go ahead and warn them of the various hazards (mentioned above),the warnings being passed on from man to man in undertones,but it was essential that it was clearly communicated and that touch had not been lost with the next man,otherwise the hazards were met in such a way that tempers were sorely tried and much bad language expended.

This quiet state of affairs was too good to last and we were moved,via Carency and the Cabaret Rouge, to the village of Villers au Bois,and then to make our first VISIT to the now renowned Vimy Ridge,while there the R.E.s exploded four mines under the German trenches,our aid post was a small and flimsey dugout,and the bombardment that followed made us suspect that Fritz was getting cross.

About this time Vince produced the following song,which proved very popular,the last verse was added later,during our trek to the Somme.

==========

We are four Merry Bombers,from over the sea
Bill Battye,Dud Pippin,Dick Mills and Charlie Ammonal,
We've been in the trenches,the Huns to delay
From Richebourg,to Loos,and the Heights of Souchez
If we don't push up daisies,we'll go home someday
With Medals,and Ribbons and Honours,
Quite a lot of 'em

==========

Chorus

Yo,Ho,Blow me down,the Germans want to fight me
But I'd rather be in the land where the the 'Fiddlers'are

Far away in 'Blighty'.

==========

At big working parties, we're well to the front
With trench boards, trench mortars, sandbags, and gas cylinders,
We curse and we blind, and we say, "What a chump
I am, to be sure, then you'll hear, with a grunt
Oh, blow all these wires, pass the word to the front
We've lost touch in rear, pass the word up
To wait a bit.

==========

Our dearest delight is to see Germans run
And our oppertunity shortly will come
To capture more villages, down on the Somme
Old Fritz will get angry, and turn round, and say to us
"Gott straffe you Englanders, Hock, Hock, we'd like to crush yer
You bombard very hard and we've just had a basinful
Far away in Russia".

==========

Reveille three-thirty, we rise from our nest,
They shout, "On Parade" er'e we've had time to dress
And our destination they leave us to guess,
With packs on our backs, just like walking Carter Patersons
But I've had quite enough of it
And next time I'm going to
Indent for a pony

==========

Whilst these early days on Vimy were fairly quiet, the defences left by the French were so poor that a system of building up and improving trenches was started, providing support lines, and rewiring defences that involved endless working parties, and soon the area became one of continual bombing alerts, shelling, and mining, from which the Division was to suffer very heavily in its five months sojourn here.

The approach to the Ridge was through some long communication trenches named Ersatz Alley, Bag Alley, I30 Alley and Long alley which wound through Zouave Vally, or as it came to

be known, Death Valley because, when Fritz wanted to be thoroughly nasty he could fill that Vally with such a barrage of bursting shells that it was a 'good' place to be away from.

One German weapon that caused a lot of trouble and casualties on the Ridge was his Minewerfer, a very large canister, filled with explosive, which he discharged from his trenches, and which could be observed, lumbering end over end, through the air, and the explosion, on landing, was terrific and shattering, lookouts had to be posted to watch for them, who gave one blast on the whistle indicating that they were falling to the right of the lookout, or two blasts for those falling to the left, perhaps our songster's effort will explain better what I mean.

==========

Oh, that sneaky, freaky, Minenwerfer glide
It's the best there ever was to make you slide,
The shrapnel trot, is fairly in the shade
In fact, it beats the blooming lot,
Raise your eyes up there towards the pale blue skys
Where 'Minies' rise, and take a liking to you
First you duck your nut, then do a dive
Down the nearest dugout, if you're still alive
And when the straffe is over, then you come outside
Thats the Minenwerfer glide.

==========

It was here that I developed an attack of trench fever, and was ordered to hospital, but we were so shorthanded that no one could be spared to take me down to the Field Ambulance which was situated in dugouts, in the side of a sunken road, at Cabaret Rouge, and at the junction of Ersatz Alley, so I started off with my kit, and feeling like something the cat had brought in, some time after I reached the Field Ambulance where I collapsed, and remember no more until I came to, in the 22nd Casuality Clearing Station.

I remained on a milk diet for several days, and then the pangs of hunger started and I would have given anything for a crust of bread and cheese, in the end they relented and let me

eat,so,I asked the doctor,on his next visit,if I could have my teeth attended to as they had been giving me some trouble.

The meeting with the dentist was fixed for the next day and I think he must have been anchor man for the local tug-of-war team,he dragged out about a dozen and sent me back to bed the bleeding would'nt stop,and in the night the nurse got the 'wind up' and fetched the doctor,they bundled me round to the dentist again who gave me a wonderful time plugging the cavities,but thank goodness that was the end of that,and I was passed on to the Convalescent Depot at Arques.

After a few days at Arques I began to feel a bit more like a human being,and was keen to get back to my mates,so, I asked for my discharge from hospital,which,after going before a gentleman with a lot of red adorning him,was granted.

The gates opened,and a party of us were at liberty to make our ways to our several different units,hoping to find a'welcome' on the mat.

During my absence the Battalion continued its trench routine on the Ridge and I understand that each fresh turn in the Line became more tense from the increasingly offensive enemy actions, the Germans had quickly learned of our efforts to strengthen positions on the Ridge and as its stratagic importance was vital to both sides,the Germans were not slow to react with counter action in sniping,hand bombing,trench mortaring,and mining under our trenches.

The 'Pimple' sector,overlooking Souchez was the focal point and here our sapheads were within 10 yards of the German trenches and activity developed so intensly that,during both day and night extreme alertness and care had to be observed,noises,movement and even cooking meals,or making tea,had to be limited so as not to attract bombs,casualties increased sharply,particularly from Minenwerfers and in one incidend six machine gunners were killed by one 'Minnie'.

Mining was probably one of the most nerve wracking experinces as the steady cutting in the chalk,by both sides,could be heard going on underground,whilst the sappers worked,the

position could be regarded as reasonably safe,but a stoppage indicated their withdrawal and the imminence of an explosion.

On one occasion in June our suspense lasted for twelve hours before we were relieved by the 6th London Regt,we had no sooner arrived in the rest billets at Villers au Bois than we learned that the mines had been 'blown' causing nearly 100 casualities to our reliefs,despite our tiredness we had to return to the Line,and relieve the 6th London.

Due to the exhausting demands of these tours the periods spent in the Front Line,supports and rest billets was adjusted so that no more than three days was spent in any position.The 'Rest' period at Carency or Villers au Bois was a misnomer as any spare time had to be devoted to cleaning off the mud-caked uniforms and equipment,and getting a spot of sleep during the day,but at night we were back in the trenches for ration or carrying parties,or repairing trenches as necessary.

One wondered at times when,and how, the breaking point would come,but amazingly our youth and the Cockney humour would rise above it all and so we continued on the tasks on hand.

The breaking point however did eventually come when the Germans attacked the 140th Brigade front and quickly overcame their first and second lines,we were moved to this sector, bounded by Ersatz Alley and given the job of regaining the lost ground,but due to heavy casualties,particularly to the bombing parties,the attack had to be abandoned,A fresh Battalion however was called in from the Corps and the ground was eventually recovered.

The Battalion returned again to the 'Pimple' sector to resume the activites as before but for some reason it was noticeable that the intensity was dying down.

The time (early July 1916),coincided with the opening of the Somme offensive and the Germans had quickly moved their best troops and artillery to cope with the situation in that area,and had substituted less militant units on the Ridge,the respite from the intensive action was very welcome,from our point of view,but the officers took a very poor view of the

situation when Germans began calling out,in English,for us to fraternise with them .Some more venturesome Germans began to show themselves above the parapet and thereupon Captain Whiteley ('A' Coy) warned them,in German,that if they continued to expose themselves after a five minutes interval,they would be shot.

Fortunately conditions did not develope to the old intensity but with the completion of this tour we were relieved by the Tyneside Division and shortly were to make our way to the Somme area.

Now,the question of pay,the importance of this seemed to vary according to the locality we were in at the time,and the arrival of the Field Cashier,whose appearances were very spasmodic and not unusual for a space of three weeks to occur between his 'red letter' day visits.the amount we received,in the early days,seldom exceeded five francs,approximately three shillings and seven pence in English money,and to anyone with a thirst,this was a trial,it was possible to put in an indent for more,if one knew long enough before the day,and was in credit.

One little incident regarding pay springs to my mind,when the transport men had to parade with their respective companies for this event,in this section we had a chap,Tommy French who was quite a character,he had been a London dray driver all his working life,he also stuttered.

Prior to the parade Tommy had been leading off about what he was going to do if they had the nerve to offer him only five francs this time.

The payout started,and the ensuing dialogue went like this,Tommy marched up to the pay table and saluted,
Officer,"Do that button up"
Tommy had left his breast pocket undone,
Officer tendered pay-book with five franc note protruding,
Tommy,"W'w'what's that?Sir"
Officer,"Five francs,you'r pay"

Tommy,"F'f'five francs,you can keep it",
Officer,"Fall in two men",

As Tommy was marched away,under escort he turned to the officer and shouted,"T't'two salutes,and a choke-off,for F'f'five francs,you keep it till it grows".

==========

Poor Tommy,he spent many hours,during the next fourteen days handcuffed to a limber wheel,serving his sentance of No I Field Punishment.

Vince Churchill's parody about the amount of pay we received went like this.

When pay day comes,upI runs
Plonks me book down
And smartly 'Shuns'
I asks for,on the spot
Ten francs,He shouts,"Great Scott"
In these hard times
You mus'nt go backing horses now
In these hard times
You can't keep up two homes
Next time we're paid
I'll try somehow,for fifty francs
Or there'l be a row
And I hope he's listening to me now
In these hard times.

==========

Our M.O. fell sick at this time,and his orderly went with him to hospital,but as the orderly,in turn,was taken sick,yours truly had to take his place until, after three days the M.O. was sent down to the Base,and I had to return to the Battalion which,I found,after a long tramp,had moved to Devion.My diary tells me that,whilst here,they paid us out the princely sum of fifteen francs,it seems they must be trying to spoil us.

Conditions were not too bad here,as the 'powers that be' fixed up a cinema,and we saw some films,which was a welcome change,and if only we could get rid of the lice (boys on the

ice),as the lads call them,we could put up with life like this for a time.

I regret to record that one of the lads shot himself here a newly posted man who just could'nt face going up the Line.

Rain again,with storms thrown in,which was a pretty good sign that we were bound for the Line again,and so we proceeded to Hersin Coupigney,we were lucky enough to find a good billet in the village,and the people were very good to us,another comfort here was the stream in which we could swim,although the water was very cold.

Raids,to capture prisoners in order to identify German troop movements,were now the order of the day,or night,and every spell meant 'standing to',for a raid,either by one or other of our Brigades,or ourselves,the reason for this becoming clear when we heard,on July Ist,that the attack on the Somme had commenced.

Remembering the official bulletins issued then,and what history,and our own experience revealed afterwards,I wonder what made us so gullible,however I suppose they were meant to cheer us up,and it worked,everyone was keen to join in the 'wonderful advance'.

We were getting baths more orten now,also a chance to change our underclothes,the trouble seemed to be that the big chaps got the small outfits and vice versa,which led to someone remarking that his pants were too tight under his armpits.

Another spell in the mud,and this time we were relieved by the R.M.L.I. of the 62nd Division,and we asked them why they had'nt brought their boats with them,and so we trudged back to Hersin.

There was a place in Hersin where one could get photos taken,and I still have one of a small group of us,we were then wearing shorts,which we continued to do until Fritz,with his mustard gas,put an end to it,where the gas came into contact with exposed flesh it caused painfull blisters.

Back to Villers au Bois again,I applied for a pass to vi-

sit an old schoolmate,who,I heard,was not too far away,the pass was granted but it was a fruitless journey as his Battalion was in the Line,and so I had a ten mile walk for nothing,

Our evenings were occupied with the old pastime of rat hunting,but although the bag was generally good,it did'nt seem to decrease the numbers in the slighest.

The next period in the Line was at a place called the Grouse Butts,where the trenches were all chalk, and we came out looking like millers,then we mover to the Quarries,and things were fairly quiet,with the exception that Fritz blew in a dug-out next to us,killing two and wounding several others.

Now I would like to apologise to my reader,if he ,or she, is still with me,for the constant in,and out,of the trenches, the very nature of our job made this inevitable,but I realise that it sounds like a radio broadcast of the boatrace,in,out. in ,out,and if you get bored with it please remember we had to 'Do' it for nearly four years.

Relieved again we marched back to Gouy Servans arriving there at 05.00 but by 13.00 we were on the move again for fifteen miles,and this time under a boiling sun,that was how our journey to the Somme,on July 15th started,but first we had a General's inspection,then it was a case of rising at 03.00 moving off at 05.00 and marching until about mid-day,passing through a number of villages,and arriving at Neuville,where we stayed for a few days.

Whilst here we were able to get passes into St Requier, and quite enjoyed ourselves with a brass band playing in the square,provided,I think,by the 21st London Regt,this was really a very small town,but we were amazed to see it's very fine catnedral.

We continued our wanderings toward the Somme,and whenever we rested for a few days route marches were ordered,(I think they were afraid we would get rusty),or a field day fixed up, just to keep us fit,then on again,this time to Neuilly le Hopital,which was quite near the site of the battle of Cressy, where they did a bit of fighting in the old days.

The Battalion was being put through its paces now, training all the time, with, it seemed, hardly enough time left to sleep, altnough I was very fortunate in missing a number of parades through duty at the aid post, but nevertheless fell in for some of the night manoeuvres starting at 21.30 and getting back to billets at 05.00 hours the next day weary, footsore, and sad, not to mention wet through.

Onward again to Bellancourt, passing through Flexicourt one of the lagger towns, and next Vignacourt, then on to Pierregot where we stayed for one night. No rest for the wicked, shades of the 'Wandering Jew' this time with Behancourt our next haven of rest, where we found a stream, and were able to indulge in a swim, whilst here I had a birthday, although the cake was missing.

On Sept Ist we finally reached Millencourt, having completed a 100 mile trek, where we were to spend a few days, the R.Es were building a large P.O.W. cage, and it seems they are waiting for us to provide the customers, and by the sound of the nearby bombardment apparently there are still plenty of them left.

Among the troops returning through the village, having completed their spell of dirty work were the 4th London (Camberwell Gun Brigade), among them I espied a chap with whom I had worked in London, waiting until they halted in the village I approached him with a glass of beer, and he thought he was seeing things, it was quite a moment.

The next day was spent sterilising the water bottles of the Battalion, and getting everything ready for the move up on the morrow, I think most went to bed with mixed feelings.

The morrow came and we started on another adventure along the Albert/Bapaume Road to Becourt Wood and saw a scene that was difficult to describe, but it appeared like a huge pleasure fair, minus the pleasure, as far as the eye could see there were lines and lines of tents, limbers, horse lines and everything that goes to make up a modern army, not a foot of ground

but was covered,and,it seemed, without the least effort at concealment,it looked impossible for Fritz to land a shell anywhere without it taking its toll of men,or horses,or both.

Becourt Wood was our first stop,and we stayed there the night,it was here that,during the hours of darkness we heard a new noise on the road,outside the Wood,and on going to look saw our new weapon,the tanks,moving up into support positions ready for the attack due on the I5th of Sept,and to which we were to be committed, The Battalion moved into the Line fronting High Wood on Sept IOth.

Our introduction to the Front Line was a depressing one for,whilst the overnight relief had been carried out quietly and almost without casualties,when the dawn broke the scene was one of devastation and chaos,the Wood itself was just a desolate area of tree stumps,and either side of the Front Line presented a mass of debris and casualties from the previous attacks.

The Front Line trench had been hastily dug,no traverses existed to contain shell bursts or blast,or even dugouts and cubby holes,in which troops could shelter,or rest,during daylight hours,the position was made worse in that troops were so crowded in the trench that it was impossible to set about any tasks to improve the conditions,added to all this was the warningthat early attacks,by the enemy,were to be expected, and in view of the key position of this sector,no retirement would be made from it.

Fortunatly the day passed quietly,except for some desultory shelling and it permitted some re-arrangement of manning the line,until a support trench could be dug,slighty in the rear,immediately dusk came a number of men moved out to dig the new trench,which proceeded well until a bomb was accidentally struck and the resulting explosion seemed to be a signal for everything to happen,

The enemy was in a highly nervous state (wer'nt we all ?) and promptly thought the explosion was the prelude to an attac and called on his artillery to lay down a barrage on our li-

Both on the Front Line and support casualties were heavy one shell alone,on the'B' Coy sector killed Leut Collins and nine men,the three days spent before relief was a trying period of alerts and bombardments,but eventually the Battalion went into reserve line dugouts at Bazentin Le Petit.

After three days resting and recovering a second return was made to the Line and experiences were similar to those of the first tour.It was now the I4th of Sept,when the Battalion was relieved by the I4Ist Brigade who were due to make the attack on the I5th,in conjunction with the tanks,the Divisional front covered the area from Martinpuich to High Wood,the 24th moved to supports along Mill Street ready to reinforce the attack as it developed.

At dawn the attack opened and whilst the combined efforts of tanks and troops were very successful at Martinpuich and Frers,the advance at High Wood was held up due to the tanks stalling on the tree stumps,the battalion and the remainder of the I42nd Brigade were ordered,in the afternoon,to attack the Wood,but by this time,the enemy,outflanked by the Martinpuich advance,was withdrawing to the Starfish Redoubt.

Attacking this sector the Battalion became seriously engaged but managed to clear the enemy from the Redoubt,only after suffering many casualties,the Battalion remained for a furtner two days.

High Wood,or rather what had once been a wood,was on the highest ground for some miles,which,no doubt, was the reason that the enemy took so much shifting,I believe that when our Division cleared it,there had been fifteen seperate attacks on it,and the cost,in suffering and death,was beyond estimate, even the German prisoners taken were in a sorry and dazed state ,but were aware that they were fortunate in that at least they were alive and finished with the war.

I had been raked in to help a party taking up bombs and small arms ammunition,rather a strange job for a chap on the medical staff,but all in the days work,the Germans were using a lot of tear gas shells,abd sometimes one was almost blind

the sickly smell of almonds was very strong,caused by the gas, and even now,if I encounter that smell it brings back memories

After constant attacks by the different units in the Division,so many,that one lost count of the number,the losses had been heavy,and the men were in such a worn out condition that the Division was withdrawn and marched back to a position in an open field near Albert,where the enemy continued to shell us,We had no cover and in the rain that subsequently started had only mud to sleep in,but to men even in such an exhausted condition,the realisation that we were temporarily out of the Line,sleep came easily.

On Wednesday,Sept 20th,we marched into Albert under the famous 'Golden Virgin',leaning from her lofty Basilican tower and from there the Battalion was lorried back to Millencourt, and believe me,it did'nt take many lorries.

The town of Albert was in a very smashed up condition, and appeared to be the hub through which most of the traffic, to and from the Line passed,We saw here a factory where Singer sewing machines had been made,and under the piles of debris some of the machines were still visable,

At Millencourt we were billeted in barns,which,to us,at the time,seemed like palaces,and to take our minds off our troubles cleaning up was pressed hard,the Battalion also received a large draft of the 'Buffs',I think I am right in saying they numbered about five hundred,these were a smart looking addition,and a large number of them seemed to have been employed in banks.

Among them I was surprised to see an aquaintance from my home town of Tenterden,he was'nt a schoolmate but used to pass my home every day on his way to the other school in the town.

He,and his brothers and sisters had to walk a distance of over four miles,with their dinner bags over their shoulders night and morning,to school and home,school children of to-day should note,but I am digessing so please excuse me,as I am supposed to be writing about the war.

Whilst at Millencourt news came through that the fortified villages of Thiepval and Combles,had been taken,which raised our sprits,and so we moved up again to Becourt Wood ready for the next episode.

The transport proceeded to Mametz Wood where the ground was churned up,with broken trees all around,and masses of equipment,including boots,some containing feet,strewed the once peaceful countryside,and over all was the ever present stench common to all the trenches.

On Sunday Oct Ist, the Battalion moved into the Line again (once more into the breach),past High Wood and Eaucort le Abbaye and on in the direction of Flers via Crucifix Corner finally arriving at a delightful place called Switch Trench, with the rain still falling,and boots seeming to weigh a ton when covered with the clinging mud.

I was detailed for ration party that night and we plodded back through the mud,slipping and sliding,to High Wood,the nearest point to the Line to which the limbers could get,just when we were feeling about exhausted,as so often happened,a cockney voice,from somewhere in the rear,shouted,"Could anyone eat half a pork pie "?,perhaps you will think that was'nt much, but the timing was was perfect,and the effect wonderful,so we trudged on passing artillery parties who were taking up shells pannier fashion,on the backs of mules,to the forward guns.

Once again we emerged from the slime like primeval animals and make our way to the Quadrangle,near Mametz Wood,for the night,and then on the next morning to Lavieville where we were housed in tents,and still it was raining.

The next move was to Albert where we entrained,about fifty men to a truck,for a twenty-one hour ordeal to Lapre, where we detrained and marched to Bellancourt,with the rain still falling.

It seemed we were now about to bid goodbye to the Somme, at least,for the present,and our chief regret was for the hundreds of our friends we were leaving behind,but could not forget.

The I/24th London (The Queens) was now a sadly depleted Battalion after only one month on the Somme,taking part in a battle in which our hopes had risen so high but had resulted in a bloody war of attrition.The men's feelings were generally philosophic,in that the position was accepted but hoping that by some miracle,a conclusion would be brought to it all.

Besides the grevious losses in men,those of orricers had also been high and which included Captains Mobberley,Clarke, Wheater and Kelly (Adjt),all killed,Captain Gamage was also severely wounded,these were all great leaders,and had been an inspiration to us at all times.

After one night spent at Bellancourt we were packed into a train again,and moved off for another "Health resort" called Ypres,where we were to spend the next eleven months,but that is another story, During the long drawn out train journey,the shortage of rations,I am afraid,caused a great number of us to use our emergency rations,chancing the wroth of the 'powers that be',so our big concern was to replace those rations before anyone thought of a kit inspection,but as usual, the men overcame this problem by a well organised plan,and so everything ended well.

Perhaps I should explain that these emergency rations consisted of a tin of bully beef,six hard biscuits approximatly 4 inches by 3 and $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick,and a small tin containing tea and sugar,which were carried in a linen bag,but after a few months of travelling around they appeared anything but appetising,the paint from the bully tin had usualy rubbed off on to the biscuits,or these had been reduced to powder,but these rations had to be regarded as a sacred trust,and not to be used without orders from the 'top brass',although really the tea and sugar were the main temptation.

The humour of the 'Tommy' was ever present and which, no doubt,was the source from which he was able to survive the war and win,was never better exemplified than in the Bairnsfather cartoons,but that he could take ration biscuits,cut out the centres,insert a photo of a 'pin-up' girl,and hang it on his

dugout wall.

The train took us over the French/Belgian frontier and we arrived at a place named Godewaersvelde,where we detrained and remained for a further two days of preparation.Then we passed through Ypres,very much on the alert,having heard so much about the place,seeing the famous Cloth Hall,now a big heap of rubble with just enough cleared away to make progress along the road possible.

The town itself was a mass of broken masonery,with here and there cellars,over which, the collapse of buildings had strengthened,and had made,more or less,shell proof,continuing the journey,we passed through,and out of the Lille Gate,built of ancient,and very thick brickwork,showing the effects of many direct hits by shells,and on to make our first acquaintance with the famous Hill Sixty.This was a 'jumpy'sector,and one was always expecting something to happen,where mining and counter mining seemed to be the chief pastimes,with the area a mass of craters,but fortunately things were fairly quiet for our first spell.

There was always something sinister about the Salient, which could have been a form of claustropobia,perhaps it was, because it gave one a very odd feeling to see Verey lights going up in almost a complete circle around one,and so it was only natural to wonder what would happen if that small outlet was closed.

Our transport had taken up their quarters at Dickebusch which became,more or less,their permanent home whilst we were in this area,and it was from here that they made their nightly journeys,with rations and supplies to the points where they were dumped,and troops from the trenches could pick them up.

After the first spell at Hill Sixty we moved back to Halifax Camp,which consisted of wooden huts,and was sited on the road to Poperinghe,it would have been fairly comfortable if only it would stop raining for a few days,but that seemed too much to expect,and as usual it became a sea of mud.

From this Camp we were occasionally able to get passes into 'Pop' for an evening out,but it involved a long walk, nevertheless we were used to that,and without a pack on our back could have gone on for ever,it was frustrating to see empty lorries pass,but the drivers were forbidden to give us a lift,particularly as the Military Police were on the watch, which surely was the main reason why there was little love lost between the infantryman and the police.

Our Divisional Concert Party,the 'Quarante Sept' worked hard to put a little laughter into our lives,and were sure of a good attendance when they were performing near us.

I can recall an occasion when,roaming around Poperinghe one dismal night,seeing a notice of a concert party,on an old building,and upon entering the first turn was a tenor,in evening clothes singing,'The end of the perfect day',the conditions made it very moving,and I am sure that most of us suffered a lump in the throat,I think it was the 6th Divisional Concert Party.

To get back to the war,the next time we went into a sector called 'The Bluff',this was a huge pile of earth,excavated I think,when the Ypres-Comines canal was dug,as the canal, now empty,ran beside it,this heap had been turned into a string of tunnels and dugouts,I don't know how many troops it could accomadate,but quite a large number.

CHAPTER FOUR

We held this sector,and Hill Sixty on alternate visits, for a long time,so came to know the place well,but I never heard of anyone falling in love with it.

One night,while we were tenants of that desirable residence,The Bluff,a fire broke out and eweryone was turfwd out on to the duckboards outside,all entrances were closed,and in the end the fire was extingushed,it caused some 'Wind up' lest Fritz should see the smoke,and try to add to our troubles,but one interesting fact was that the G.O.C. was due to make an inspection that day,and which moved our songster to sing the following at the next concert,

Now a fire's alright on a Winter's night
If for hours in the cold you've stayed
But it's a great mistake,if a fire you make
When you ha'nt got a fire brigade
For we lost our packs,and rifles,and kits,
And if Fitz could have seen us
He'd have blown us to bits,
But the G.O.C. made a right-about turn,
I guess he'd rather see the home fires burn.

Once again we moved back to Halifax Camp,for a rest (army style),although H.Q.s idea of rest,and our's,never seemed the same,but expect they knew best,in any case they always had the last word,but we were at least able to get a bath,and clean change,which meant a lot to us.

Whilst here this time we saw an observation balloon break its cable and drift over to Fritz,the observer jumped with his parachute and landed in our lines,but the balloon was last seen over the German lines,with our guns vainly trying to bring it down.

The next move was up to Belgian Chateau,in reserve,just behind Ypres where we seemed to have guns all around us,and we furnished working parties,going up,and down,every night,on

repair work.

So the Winter passed along slowly,and we passed out time between Hill Sixty,The Bluff,Halifax Camp,Railway Dugouts and Devonshire Lines,whoever named the latter camp must have had his tongue in his cheek,for anything less like Devonshire it would be hard to imagine,the huts were surrounded by a sea of mud,and woe betide anyone that fell off the duckboards,as for the huts,they did not so much stop the cold winds,as strain them.

One day we were detailed to get braziers in each hut,also we were told where to get wood to burn,as apparently there was to be an inspection by some V.I.P. We were thrilled at this generosity but a climax came when,after the inspection, we were told to return the fuel to the dump. It was incidents like this that made the chaps wonder,at times,whether some of the officers,a long way back,wer'nt more concerned with the temperature of their wine,at dinner,than they were about our frozen feet.

The Winter of I9I6/I7 was,as some of you may remember, very severe,and although it made getting about somewhat quicker and better as one was able to walk on top of the frozen mud,instead of through it,the question of retaining body heat was also a big problem,when men were restricted to a few yards of trench for days on end.

Another risk was that the frozen hard ground caused shells that normaly buried themselves before exploding,now burst on the surface,making the smallest dent,but throwing the fragments a very long way,which seemed to us to be bending the rules.

Whilst trenches were broadly similar, each had some special feature to be memorised and treated with caution,such as a low parapet,or a gap created by shell fire,and so,for health reasons one often became a midget,to cheat the sniper,who was always looking for targets.

Unfortunately many losses were suffered due to momentary forgetfulness and I recall,at North Maroc I think it was a narrow iron bridge over a cutting,near the front,over which

we were told to dash,one at a time,and which gave one the feeling of being naked,or Aunt Sally at the local fair,sniping was ever a problem.

During one of our spells at Devonshire Lines,after a sticky patch at Hill Sixty,the Brigade organized a concert to boost morale,with prizes for the best straight song,and the best comic one,the winners to be judged by the volume of audience applause,the following was Vince Churchill's comic effort or at least,part of it,

==========

Take an M.M.P, with his L.S.D.
They're goob blokes,we never doubt
But to you and me,it's a mystery
The way as they brags and shouts,
For they are all dressed up
And blimey they knows
When the war packs up
Back to 'Blighty' they goes
They never sees no Huns
Of the squareheaded stamp,
Les't they happens to pass
Near a prisoner's camp
They never get'Wind up'
From a 'Minnie' or 'Mine'
Co's they're all dressed up
And far from the Line.

==========

Well,Vince won,hands down,but the shock came when it was announced that the prizes were to be presented by no less than the A.P.M.(Assistant Provost Marshall) Himself.

With some trepidation Vince marched up to the platform to hear the A.P.M. say,"Well,my man,they have awarded you the prize,but I don't think I should give it to you,after what you sang about me and my men ",but back came the answer in a flash "O.K. Sir,we'll go halves".

This Vince Churchill,whose name crops up so often,had a spontaneous wit,and the ability to compose doggeral and rhym-

es at will, and regularly he relieved the very trying times with parodies that so fitted the occasions that the lads roared and sang them, with an unbelievable gusto, he was of untold value to the Battalion in boosting morale, at the right time.

During this very severe and trying Winter, probly the worst of the war, it is worth recalling the nightmare conditions of journeys to the Front Line, whether on relief, working or carrying parties, mostly it was raining, and one was always heavy laden, some of the communication trenches were miles long telephone wires were a menace often hanging loose, and becoming entangled in ones equipment, or rifle, and the duckboards at the bottom of the trench would often be broken, or at an angle in the mud, so that one's boots would slide off, and the wearers seat would come into sharp contact with the ground, but apart from these troubles we tried to smile, and there was often a wit in the party.

Another bane in the life of the trench dweller came in the form of the Stokes Trench-Mortar Batteries, these gentlemen would appear out of the blue, select a site that they considered suitable, fix up their weapons, present Fritz with a few dozen mortars, and then, fold their tents like the Arab, and silently steal away, leaving the permanent resident to receive whatever Fritz felt disposed to offer by way of retaliation, and these chaps even claimed that they were on our side.

On each occasion that we came out of the Line, during this Spring period of 1917 we could see the ominous signs of preparation for more attacks, as all along the sides of the roads great shell dumps were springing up, most of which were camouflaged to look like ruined houses or barns, but sometimes the German artillery would locate one, resulting in a terrific explosion, and on one occasion I saw one of the lorries, bringing up shells, set alight by artillery fire, making the immediate neighbourhood very unhealthy for a time.

Counter artillery battery work regularly went on, and I witnessed one battery of our howitzers, sited alongside the

hedge in a field,next to our transport lines at Dickebusch being suddenly 'spotted' by Fritz ,and we had to stand by helplessly watching them being put out of action,gun by gun,which was very tough on the crews,but the German marksmansnip was top class.

I believe this particular British battery nad been nitting Fritz where it hurt,as a day or two previously we had been watching one of our planes 'spotting'for them,but unfortunatly the airman ultimately got in the path of one of our own shells and was brought down,falling just beyond the village,and by the time we reached them both pilot and machine were a complete writeoff.

Returning to Hill Sixty the tension continued to build up as the big mines,that were ultimately to be neard in England,were nearing completion,and so there was always the question which side would explode their's first,and although Devonshire Lines was'nt quite like home,the lads were glad to be relieved and get back there,for a sleep,and a chance to relax.

Vince had this to say about the camp,

==========

I'm Birlington Bertie,
Each morn at six thirty
Reveille is blown at my door,
The first time they sound it
I say,"Oh,confound it
Just call round again,about four"
This one story billet
For room is the limit,
There's just room for four
But there's twenty four in it,
When dozing,we're posing
Like a fresh opened tin of sardines
And I don't mind disclosing
The air is so bracing
Our billet is next the latrines.

==========

But life went on,and with a Church Army hut opening near the camp,which was a very welcome added comfort,and so,with the weather becoming warmer,if not much drier,and the odd pass into Pop:, life became endurable,and the weeks passed.

In this area,the water refilling point was on the road to Poperingne and it is worth recalling,one day,going with the driver,to refill the water cart,we ran into trouble,the cart was filled,and when the driver attempted to mount,he slipped,which frightened the horses and in less time than it takes to tell,the heavy cart had gone over the prostrate driver,I found that he was bleeding rather badly,so,having noticed a car along the road,complete with Staff officer,I ran across to him,and,against all army proceedure,saluted,and asked him if he would allow his driver to take the injured man to hospital,some distance down the road,fortunately he was a gentleman,and vacated his seat,so,in a very short time the sufferer was receiving attention in hospital.

Some months later,when on leave,I was walking along the Walworth Road,when I heard someone calling,it was this driver who had fully recovered,and insisted that I had a drink with him,as I had saved his life,according to him.

I met him once again,at a Reunion Dinner when he told me he was in the printing trade,and had assisted T.E.Lawrence in the printing of 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom'.

It was round about this time that I enjoyed the finest drink of cocoa I have ever tasted,we were returning from the 'Bluff',fed up,covered with mud,and wet through,when, on entering Ypres,at the Lille Gate we were halted,and in one of the ruins the Church Army were handing out drinks of cocoa,it was in a jagged condensed milk tin,but the contents were nectar, and did us a power of good,we plodded on thinking perhaps everyone had'nt forgotten us.

I think I have already mentioned that the transport remained in the same place for almost all the time that we were in Belgium,so much so,that I am sure the horses knew their way home,this was just as well,as you will see when I tell of

another little episode concerning Tommy,he of the pay parade rumpus.

Tommy was the driver of the officers mess cart,and it was his job to make regular trips into Poperinghe to replenish stores,one day the transport men were surprised to see the mess cart returning with no sign of the driver,but upon closer inspection,Tommy was found blissfully asleep in the bottom of the cart,having apparently discovered some very strong 'coffee'in Pop.

After another few days at Devonshire Lines,the Battalion moved up to 'The Bluff' in readiness for the attack on the Messines Ridge,it was on this occasion that,onthe way up,one of the lads suddenly lost his nerve,and refused to go on,my chum,and myself hung on to him and by pointing out that he stood a chance going forward,but none at all going back,fortunately he soon calmed down and there was no more trouble,in fact he survived the war.

This was early in June 1917,and we took over our usual places in the tunnels previously mentioned.

The air,as usual,before an attack,seemed to be charged with electricity,but was slighty relieved on this occasion, when,about eight o'clock in the evening a message came from the Battalion on our left,requesting someone to test some water that they were doubtful about,suspecting poison,now,why they had'nt their own staff to deal with this I don't know,but two of us made our way to the spot and found a dirty old pond, overgrown with duckweed,it was the last source from which one would expect to obtain drinking water,we made the test and finding nothing more than a trace of arsenic,not unusual in stagnant water like that,reported and lost no time in getting back to our own domain.

Just before dawn the next morning,and I had been watching over a dump of petrol cans,filled with water,in the bed of the empty canal,when a shell burst too close for comfort,the splinters puncturing nearly all of the cans,but not myself,although it made me gasp for breath,a near miss.

Apart from this things quietened down and we waited tensely for the big bang, when it came the earth shook and the heavens were split by the terrific bombardment, which was the signal for the lads to go into the attack. Soon all was confusion, with conflicting reports, but we were kept busy with the wounded, and it appeared that things were going quite well, the worst part was always the number of fine lads that failed to return, and I was particularly saddened to learn that the boy from my home town, that I have mentioned before, was among this number, I have since seen his name on the Memorial at Mennin Gate.

We captured quite a bit more mud, and fortunatly some of it was higher ground than we had previously held, but all it seemed to mean, to the ordinary man was, that the next time up the Line would be that much further to trudge from Ypres.

After a spell we were relieved, which gave us the chance to scrape the mud off and clean up, I am afraid we did'nt reach very high standards of cleanliness and the advised test, by a certain humourest, for socks, was threw them against the wall, and if they stick, they are dirty.

Next we moved into reserve, in the ramparts of Ypres, which were the ancient brickwork fortifications reaching down to the moat, surrounding the town.

The general belief was that the rats made the tunnels in the first place, the army just enlarged them, but be that as it may, the rats always outnombered us and we felt that we were the intruders and incidentally the aroma from the stagnant moat was also something not to be overlooked.

Our aid post, at this time, was in a ruin just inside the Mennin Gate and I recall that an artist, on the staff produced a rather morbid sketch, he portrayed a dead Tommy, and next to him a business billhead with the heading, Debtor to J.Bull & Co For one blanket, Ten Shillings, which he pinned up on the wall, as it happened the Major paid us a visit that morning, and, after looking at the sketch, while we were nolding our breath,

he said,"Even if it is true,we don't want to advertise it, please take it down".

From the Ramparts we moved again to take over a new sector further to the right of our old positions,that had been captured in the recent fighting and my first journey up there was quite an experience.we,that is H.Q.company,fell in,just inside the Mennin Gate as soon as it was dark,under Sgt,Major Rowley,and marched out along the Mennin Road passing Hell Fire Corner without incident,and reaching Birr Crossroads where the guide,who was supposed to meet us and show us the way,failed to turn up.

At this time Fritz started throwing 'hardware' about,but, as the road ran through almost liquid mud,there was no cover of any sort,the only thing in sight was a deserted tank that, as soon as it left the hard road,just sank, In those days with the early tanks,the entry was effected through a door in the side,and getting out must have given the crew quite a problem.

A guide was still not available (we later learned that the poor chap was killed on the way down),so the Sgt,Major said,"Come on,we'll chance it,and find our own way ",striking off to the left and finding a duckboard track,with plenty of gaps in it,we followed it,noping we were going in the right direction.

After a long,and heavy,slog we ultimately reached the Pilckem Ridge,but no sooner had we got there than Fritz opened a bombardment forcing us to spend the next half hour again hugging that stinking mud,but,as the shell holes were all full of water we could'nt find any cover,or a friendly hole to crawl into,however Fritz finally used up his ration of shells which enabled the S.M. to send out scouts,who eventually contacted some of our boys and thus we soon joined the rest of the Battalion.

The enemy had held this sector with a system of blockhouses,or pillboxes,as we called them,and the aid post was sited in one of these,but the snag was that the entrance faced the enemy,and he had already scored one direct hit on it

dislodging a huge piece of concrete which had fallen across the entrance, so one had almost to crawl inside, and made it impossible for stretcher cases to enter.

I think we spent four days in this place, and it is not a happy memory as every time a shell burst near, it seemed to force the air dowm into the lungs, and make one gasp. It was during our spell here that a couple of Germans, bringing up soup and coffee, strayed into our lines, or rather outposts, but after judging the quality of the food they were transporting the lads decided not to swap cooks.

Well, all good things, and bad, thank goodness, come to an end and, eventually we made a nightmare trip back to Railway Dugouts but, after two days, when we were supposed to go back again, someone must have realized that there were limits to man's endurance, and the rest was extended for another day or two.

We now found that living for any length of time in dugouts or tunnels played havoc with one's morale, and an instance of this was when one of our staff was warned for home leave while in Railway Dugouts and told he could make his way back to the transport lines as soon as he liked, believe me he hung about all day before he could take the plunge.

The next day, nowever I received my notice for leave, and being determined I would'nt get in the same state, I packed up and started at once, but felt much happier when, at last, I had left Hell Fire Corner and one or two hot spots behind me, but to give us a good send off Fritz dropped a few bombs around the transport lines that night

The troubles gradually receded on the next day as we made our way to Poperinghe station and started on anotner trip to 'Blighty', just about seventeen months after the first one, but the period of leave had now been extended to fourteen days, and it did'nt seem a day too long.

One little incident I recall on this leave was when I reached home and went to collect my ration cards, imagine my surprise when the gentleman to whom I applied, started off by say-

ing it was a shame that they had given us the 1914-15 medal, and that it should have been reserved for the Regulars, I am afraid I didn't agree with him, and pointed out, rather forceably perhaps, that if the 'Terriers' had'nt filled the gap when the Regulars were almost wiped out, and before Kitchener's men were trained, he would'nt be sitting in that comfortable chair than.

The leave passed all too quickly, and once again I was back in Victoria Station, for the rather dismal journey back to Belgium.

CHAPTER FIVE.

I found the Battalion still in the Salient, continuing to do the old in, and out, as in the previous months, and it began to appear that we would continue to do this for the remainder of our lives, the monotony was only broken when occasionally the sun shone, but for most of the time it was, 'further outlook unsettled'.

In Sept, 1917, we finally bid Ypres goodbye, and looking forward to, at least, a change, we boarded a train, full of wonder as to where we would end up, our destination turned out to be Arras, where we went into billets in the St Catherine district of that town.

Arras had undergone some rough treatment, and all around the vicinety of the Station was nothing but heaps of rubble, many of the houses still standing were minus a wall, and it was not uncommon to see a bedroom, with perhaps a child's cot, exposed to view, but nevertheless we still thought it a great improvment on Ypres.

We wer'nt left long to 'kick our heels', and were soon headed for the Line again, this time taking over the sector that ran through the village of Gavrelle and where conditions were tolerable, It was possible here to hear the German ration limbers coming up each night, and, no doubt, they could hear ours, this developed into sometning of a competition as each one tried to be the first away, so that they could liven things up for the other side, it was amazing how quickly rations were unloaded, and taken away, under these conditions.

Our forward positions contained a well, and one of my jobs was to go up each night, after dark, to test the water for poison, I suppose it was thought that Fritz might creep over and drop in a 'Mickey Finn', but no one can imagine what a noise a bucket can make, on a quiet night, going down a well.

I don't remember just when it started, but a new item, the rissole, was ontroduced into our diet, it was made up of soaked hard biscuits, bully beef, onions atc, passed through a mincer, which made a welcome change, and could be quite tasty, dependi-

of course,on the cooks,but what stray tnings went into them we did'nt bother to enquire,I think they were subjected to many experiments.

One night,whilst in the Line,I was told to collect some medical stores from the Field Ambulance,which meant going back with the ration limbers,staying the night,collecting the stores from a village SOME DISTANCE away,and then returning to the Line with the ration party the next night.

Arriving at the ration dump and finding one of the grooms had brought up a new officer,whose horse had to be returned to the transport lines,I was invited to ride 'Nigger',which I accepted,and all went well until we had nearly reached the main road,when the shelling started.Everyone broke into a gallop,'Nigger'included,but I had forgotten that mounted troops make sure that the chin-strap of their 'tin hat'is firmly under their chin,mine was slack,and it started bouncing up and down on my head,then it slipped forward,and I was travelling blind,but at great risk,I managed to release one hand,reached up and threw the offending hat away,fortunately I reached the transport lines in one piece,but was very careful when I sat down,for the next few days.

I think John Gilpin suffered a similar fate,on his famous ride,but he did'nt have a 'tin Hat'to add to his troubles.

The outstanding event,while holding the Gavrelle Line,was the big raid,carried out by our's and an ajoining Battalion, which was a very well planned job,as the companies taking part had previously practiced over ground laid out to resemble their objectives,thus each man knew his job,resulting in one of the few ventures that went according to plan,with very little loss.

We had several different M.O.s,and as was to be expected some were more popular with us than others,one I have in mind I don't know if he did'nt realize the danger,or just did'nt care,each morning he would select one of his staff to accompany him on his tour of inspection ,one day,with orderly following,he plodded along on the top,ignoring the trenches,unt'

he came to one filled with wide eyed men,on asking them where the Front Line was,they replied,"This is it,jump down quickly, Sir",on another occasion he wanted to inspect the remains of an aeroplane that had crashed,just inside our lines,some time previously,and which was in full view of Fritz ,although he was persuaded to give up the foolhardy venture after a time, no doubt you will believe me when I say there was no keen competition to be his orderly on these escapades,

One thing that always struck me when we 'took over' German trenches,was the pecular smell,I don't mean the communication trenches,but the ones that had been lived in,perhaps they said the same about ours,but the odd smell was always there, Fritz spent a lot of labour in building deep dugouts,which,of course,we made full use of when a change of ownership took place,and in the end our people did the same,but for a long time we were content with a sheet of iron,covered with a few sandbags of earth,and thought ourselves lucky to get even that

I remember one special occasion,in a bombardment,we were dressing wounded in one of those flimsey shelters and every time a shell landed near it blew the candles out,so one of us had to stand by with matches,to relight them each time,wondering how long it would be before they scored a bullseye.

After some further spells in front of Arras we were withdrawn,and were waiting,rumour had it,to go to Italy where things were pretty shaky,and in preparation we were told to get rid of everything except regulation kit ready to entrain.Our spirits rose very high that at last a chance had come to bid farewell to France and its depressing trench warfare,which the Battalion had endured continuously for two and a half years, and so a lot of small creature comforts.and souvenirs were dumped,but alas,our hope was short lived as anotner serious situation had developed at Cambray,and we were rushed,full speed,back to the Line, And so,after our hopes of a change of climate,and conditions,by a trip to Italy,had faded,we round ourselves,all too quickly,back in action,this time on the Cambrai (Flesquieres) front,in the Bourlon Wood area.

On the 25th of Nov,1917,the Battalion moved into the Old Front Line overlooking Graincourt,in Brigade reserve,available for use in the attack,as required,we remained in this position for three days,and during this time rumours circulated that the advance had been halted,and that now all along the Moeuvres Ridge,through Bourlon Wood,and on to Gouzecourt,the fighting had returned to the normal trench warfare routine.

At the time we little realised that some of the enemy counter attacks had all but succeeded in cutting off the salient,and the only heartening factor we had actually witnessed was the R.A.Fs successes against Richthofen's Flying Circus, who had quickly concentrated to cover the area,and protect reconnaissance aircraft when observing B.E,F. troop movements in the salient etc,The German aircraft were easily distinguishable with their red painted fuselages,but in one day,nine were brought down,in arial combats,within our lines (Nov 28th)

The forward troops of our Division were holding the line through the Wood,and partly on the Ridge towards Moeuvres,and it was on the 29th,late in the evening,that we were ordered to move up and take over the sector witnin the Wood,facing Bourlon village.Moving off at dusk,and skirting Graincourt we headed to cross the Bapaume/Cambrai Road,to pick up the main road through the Wood,noting on the way,the wire netting that had been strung for miles,from the trees,to hinder the cavalry,and which had had some effect until the tanks had arrived to cut through it.

The three to four miles march to the Wood was arduous but was completed without incident,altnough directly the Wood was entered problems arose,firstly from large trees,felled every few yards across the road,which,for the next mile was to prove a most exhausting experience,clambering over them, particulary as we were loaded down with equipment,and secondly the enemy naturally suspected tnat troop movements would take advantage of tne darkness,either relieving,or bringing up equipment and rations,also working parties,and so commenced to shell the roads fairly intensivly,causing casualties

and creating a din that echoed through the wood,and temporarly held up any progress.

After a lull we moved on to the Chateau and there picked up our guides to take us to the front line,we branched off the road,through a clearing,and almost immediately we were again subjected to intense shelling,trees were brought down,causing further casualties,but we pressed on fervently hoping soon to meet the troops in the Front Line and gain some cover there.

To our dismay we found no trench system existed,and the holding troops were merely taking cover from depressions,trees or anything that gave it,as apparently,with the constant attacks,and raids,no opportunity had been found to dig.

After a hurried handing over,which primarily consisted of knowing our position,and realising that the enemy was on both our right and left flanks,and so instructions were passed to us to dig in immediately,and at the same time keep a sharp lookout for enemy patrols,who were apparently raiding,this was brought home to us by the duty officer bringing information that 'A' company,on our left,had lost nine men immediatly after they had taken over their sector.

It had taken us some five hours to get to our present position,under the most arduous conditions,but despite tiredness we all realised the necessity of providing cover,although the only implements available were entrenching tools,with which we had to dig,and cut through tree roots,Gas shelling,and frequent 'Stand to,s' interrupted the digging but by dawn the task had been completed,and we remained in this position for three days,enduring a nightmare state of attacks,and alarms, snatching odd hours of sleep whenever we could.The extreme conditions can be appreciated when it is pointed out that the nights were moonless,rain fell for most of the time,and gas masks had to be worn for hours at a time.

By the third evening (Dec 2nd),our N.C,Os told us to prepare to evacuate the position and destroy,or bury,all surplus equipment and ammunition,as apparently the enemy was now too strong to be dislodged,and the salient too lengthy to man w

tne troops available.

The withdrawal was covered by our patrols,and despite tne quietness,that must have indicated to the enemy our intentions for artillery support was also withdrawing,he made no attempt to harry us.So we trudged back tne five miles to Flesquieres and the Hindenburg Line ,there to immediately prepare it for defence,wiring,and cutting fire positions,as all the German defence positions were,of course,on the reverse side of the trench.

The next morning we were to observe the enemy coming over Moeuvres Ridge,and from tne Wood to take up his position near to us,and resume all the old routine of trench warfare again, so much had been expected of tnis attack,brilliant in conception but failing,as so often before,of insufficient troops in reserve,to exploit it,there was,perhaps,some little satisfaction in seeing our artillery,from its new position,taking toll of the enemy as they came into view over the Ridge.

Everyone felt that the next few months would be pretty tough,the Germans were being reinforced by troops released from the Russian front and the burning question was,whether they would exploit their renewed strength before the arrival of the U.S.A. troops.We had seen some of the advance guards of the Americans (mainly pioneers),on our marches and whilst we were cheered to see them,we wondered how they would react at the right time.

Our Front Line was now established in the Hindenburg Line and in reconnoitering it we were all amazed to observe how skillfully it had been devised,as a defence line,and the comfort embodied in the deep dugouts for tne troops.I felt a bit disgruntled because,at that time,I was residing in a pigstye, a low-pitched concrete structure,and when we took over the aroma was that powerful I would have risked a small bet that the straw was the bedding of tne original tenants,so we not only had tneir bed,but their B.O. as well,however we soon cleaned it up,and made it home for a few days.

The Battalion was to remain in this position in the Li-

in front of Flesquieres,for the next few months,and the weather steadily deteriorated,with frequent snowfalls and bitterly cold.Taking the water cart up one night,I found,on arrival, that the taps were frozen solid,so,finding what cover we could behind a broken wall,we held tommy cookers under them,and,at last,managed to get the water flowing,in spite or constant calls to 'Put that light out '.

When relieved from the Line we returned through Havrincoutrt Wood via a road made by embedded tree trunks in the mud, and which led to a bare field,which was to be our camp,and was covered with about three inches of snow,and little,or no,shelter of any sort.

Fortunately there was an R.E. dump some distance down the road,and it was surprising how many sheets of galvanised iron strayed into our camp that night,but it was still a pretty grim picture,and 'Daddy' Jarman,who was always an early riser was a most welcome sight,in the early hours,with his messtin of 'Sergeant Major's ', (Tea),to you, This was an example of the infantryman's resourcefulness,in his ability to overcome problems,and make himself comfortable even at somebody else's expense,but this was all considered fair game,and practised by all.

From here we moved to Behancourt,and each night,whilst out of the Line,at dusk,a fleet of lorries would draw up along the road,which did not thrill us,as,from past experience we had found that the only time they gave us a ride was when we could'nt walk to the trouble fast enough,but the distance to the Front Line was now so great that conveyance,either by lorry,or light railway,was necessary,when relieving or going on working parties.

It was whilst in this village that Vince Churchill found, while exploring,a wooden box containing a Frenchman's best suit complete with peaked hat,and as he always carried greasepaint etc,he had soon made himself up as a farmer,and going along to the Officer's Mess he asked 'Nobby' the cook what was the next item on the menu,being told it was fishcakes he grabbed the

dish and proceeding to the messroom put them down in front of the Colonal,saying"Your rissoles,Sir",after the first surprise they entered into the joke,and Vince spent the evening singing his songs to them,he returned to the billet much later,and somewhat the worse for wear.

Christmas(1917) came,we were lucky enough to be out of the Line at Lavieville and to be able,in some small way,to celebrate,as we had,for some months past been saving up to have a 'DO' at Christmas,each man putting so much into the kitty every time we were paid,a good idea,although the suggestion that we should mount guard over the member holding the cash was not put into effect,his health was a major concern,but the highlight of the whole affair was eventually in seeing one of our staff leading a fat goose up the road,on a piece of string after concluding a deal with a local farmer.

The meal,with all the trimmings we had been able to buy, was a great event,but we hardly had time to work off that lazy feeling before duty called again,and it was pack up and move on to another sector,and so we were grieved to leave behind a large pile of firewood that we had worked hard to collect,but could only hope the next arrivals would enjoy the fruits of our labours.

This move was to the front covering Ribecourt/Trescault, but due to the very low strength of the Battalion,the time was a very anxious and exhausting one,and still the weather continued very severe causing the roads to be covered with ice,and so the journeys to the Line were a test for both man and beast slithering about on the frozen surface.

I had developed a swollen knee and the Doctor had done a bit of probing in the morning,making it very tender,and every time I slpped my knee came into contact with something hard, so I did'nt enjoy that march very much.

From December 1917 to March 1918 the Battalion continued its tours,in and out of the Line at Welsh Ridge,Trescault and Ribecourt,(facing Cambrai) in extremely hard Winter conditions at low strength,and little chance of change from the dull ro-

tine,and altogether we were to serve some five months in the devastated Somme area,without relief or oppertunity of seeing normal civilian surroundings,and because of the shortage of reinforcements,leave home was also suspended.

This was a very trying time,and the fact that it was followed by the long retreat,back to near Amiens during March 2Ist to 26th serves,if nothing else,to show the resillience of men.

History tells of the sequence of events during the later period,but mainly it was the sad task of fighting an exhausting rearguard action,over ground,much of it,that the Battalion had helped to win,at high cost in casualties during the Sept-Oct,I9I6 attacks.A brief account of events is not without place here and will recall incidents interesting to those that survived the action.

On the 20th of March we (I42nd Brigade) moved up from Divisional reserve in the Bertincourt area to Brigade reserve at Ruyalcourt,and the I40th Brigade took over the Front Line sector.

Whilst a heavy German attack in the Spring was generally anticipated,the bombardment that broke out at dawn on March 2Ist,few thought was the prelude to it,but as the shelling increased however,and extended back to our area,causing a number of casualties,more serious views were taken,and it was not long before we were alerted and promptly moved off to reinforce the front beyond Ribecourt.

Due to the intense shelling we went into extended order but the heavy mist,and gas shells bursting,necessitated wearing masks delaying progress,but we eventually gained the Trescault /Havrincourt Road,where heavy shelling again hampered movement,and from which R.S.M.Norris was killed and Colonal Milner wounded and shell shocked.Only a few minutes previously news had been passed along that Major Nadaud ('C' C@y) had been killed by a stray shell,all sad losses to 'The Queen's) for they had all been with the Battalion from pre-war days.

The information that now came through from the front was alarming as the I40th Brigade had been overwhelmed in the mist

by the enemy and those not killed had been taken prisoners, also, that our right flank was wide open, here the 5th Army had been completely overcome and our position was parlous indeed, orders to move forward were countermanded and so we were ordered to fall back on the Havringcourt (Blue) Line, and hold it at all costs, and so it was clear to us at this stage that, if we were to survive the next few days, it would mean hard going, and and the possibility of a long retreat.

Whilst strengthening the Havrincourt Line German aircraft were soon reconnoitering our position, and with the sight of enemy troops advancing on our immediate front, it was obvious we should soon be engaged. During the early afternoon we were surprised by a sudden attack on our on our left, the enemy had riltered obliquely through the Wood and was endeavouring to take our position from the rear, which gave us no option but to seek the cover of the Wood at its Western end, and to withdraw quickly to a position in open country, and defend a new line.

This surprise attack unfortunately created confusion, as infantry streamed back from all directions, and with the artillery also retiring and firing at intervals, the serious position could be realised with very little imagination, but we were able to get to Ytres, where the officers recovered the situation, and by the evening a more orderly state prevailed.

At dusk however we were able to see the serious position we were in, as the German verey lights were forming an arc across our front and part rear, indicating that a pincer movement was under way, and as our right flank was still open the retreat had to continue. Meanwhile patrols went out to ensure against further surprises, and from one sortie they returned with information that Bus was occupied by the enemy, but as this was on our route back, and there was an immediate necessity to join the main Divisional body, it was decided to take the risk of entering the village.

With bayonets fixed we went through the village but without molestation, apparently it had been a light patrol reconnoitring the ground, although it is interesting to note here

that all the way through the retreat the enemy declined any night engagements,which had its advantages in allowing us to gain some rest,if fitfully,and to reorganise.

On the morning of the 22nd we continued the retreat to Barrastre but it was slow going keeping in touch,and in the ho days which highlighted this period,it was exhausting,particularly as we were mainly without food and water,having to depend on dumps that were left for us to chance upon,but more often missed.

At Barrastre we were able to snatch some rest as the 1/24 th Queens with the rest of the 142nd Brigade were required to assume the rearguard position,and so we had to wait until all of our Divisional troops had passed through.

We remained in position until the dawn of the 23rd broke when we fanned out to cover the Divisional rear and our first sight of the enemy was to see bodies of his troops crossing the main Bapaume /Peronne Road near Sailly,at about 1,000 yards distance,but apparently content to follow and observe our movements,leaving action to be taken on the flanks.We were now proceeding in the direction of Le Transloy and Flers and ultimately making for High Wood.

The movement continued uneventful until the late afternoon,when we came under German rifle fire from our right flank where,from cover of some dead ground,the enemy had come abreast of us,but fortunately a disabled tank,in our path,with a 6lb gun was promptly operated by a gunner officer,which delayed the enemy long enough for us to make High Wood in reasonable order,and where we were able to prepare a defence line.

By dusk the enemy came to within hailing distance of us but we were able to hold him off with rifle and machine gun fire.He however still refrained from a night action,being content to hold us there,and call on us to surrender.Our patrols went out to maintain contact,and whilst prisoners were taken on either side we were unfortunate to lose Captain L.C. Gamage (wounded)and Lieut, Sievier,and a number of men of 'D' Company

as P.O.W,s.

During the night the enemy withdrew completely and we had orders that at dawn on the 24th we were to retire to the Pozieres/Contalmaison Road,and it was a sad occasion to pass through High Wood,where in Sept,1916 the Division had lost so many men in the final capture of the Wood.

CHAPTER SIX

The Battalion reassembled on the Contalmason Road and were immediatly ordered to dig in,as information obtained from prisoners captured the previous evening indicated that an enemy attack was planned to be made from Bazentin,opposite our front,on the Pozieres/Contalmasin Road,and timed to start at IO am,the next day,we were promptly ordered to dig an assault trench,in which we waited,looking for enemy movement, promtly at IO o'clock the enemy came through the wooded slope opposite at about 750 yards distance,and at the same time we left our trench system to meet them,which provided the extraordinary spectacle of the two lines possibly meeting,and hand to hand fighting ensuing,although at this stage ,a section of the Motor Machine Gun Corps,also anticipating the attack, were patrolling the road to our rear and,at the sight of the enemy the M.M.G.C moved to the flank,at nigh speed,and as they approached the extreme points they poured a heavy enfilade fire into the enemy,which quickly stopped his progress.

A solitary 6 inch gun,sited in our rear,also did good work in breaking up the attack,and of the many incidents that we experienced during the war,this action of the Motor Machine Gun Corps was undoubtedly one of the most stirring and memorable,particularly at this stage of the retreat when we needed an example,to put up an extra effort.

However we returned to our recently dug defence system there to await the enemy's next move,which was soon evident from his attempts to take advantage of any dead ground,and moving round our open flanks,but fortunately we were on the high ground,and could observe most of his movements,and so from then on until nightfall,with steady rifle fire,we were able to defeat his intentions.

We had had little opportunity on the retreat to contest the enemy,and this action was a highlight in giving us the chance of inflicting many casualties to deter him,and the fac that by midnight he had again withdrawn,confirmed surmisies

and gave us a welcome respite.

By early morning of the 25th of March we were ordered to again withdraw on to the Albert/Bapaume Road which was fortunately completed without loss, but not without some trepidation as it was eerily quiet, and both the M.M.G.C, section, and the 6 inch gun had left us, and so as an isolated body we were open to any assault the enemy might attempt, fortunately we were able to withdraw in good order, and without molestation.

As we neared Albert we could see that it was undergoing a heavy aircraft bombing attack, due undoubtedly to the fact that it was an important railhead, and from it ran the only road which all heavy transport and guns could use, to reinforce the front, therefore we skirted the town to finally make Millencourt, where we were informed that the Australian Brigade would take over our front, which would give us the opportunity to recover, refit, and pick up reinforcements before being ready for the next detail.

We were however, moved back another three miles to Warley where, to our intense relief, we were to see the assembly of troops, British and French who were ultimately to be successful in the final stand, that was to save Amiens.

The Battalion had retired over 45 miles, we had lost many colleagues, and had an exhausting and demoralising experience, but had kept together due undoubtedly to the efforts of our officers, and N.C.O,s who had, all through, shown untiring zeal.

At this time the Germans were troubling us with new offensive weapons that included the Whiz-Bang shell, its high velocity and low trajectory made it a menace, and it had an unnerving effect in coming on one so quickly, also the spring bomb dropped from aircraft, which had a percussion fuse in its long steel nose, and exploded about a foot above the ground, thus spreading the splinters on a lateral plane, causing many casualties in camps and horse lines.

Night bombing, by aircraft, now became more frequent, I recall one night, an enemy plane, in trouble, which could be heard

circling,until it finally crashed,just outside the camp,the pilot was taken prisoner but the other airman was mixed up with the engine,on another occasion,two or three officers, waiting to go on leave,were sleeping in the front room of a farmhouse when Fritz unloaded some bombs,one of which hit the barn of this farm,killing an old white horse,and blowing him halfway through the window,into the room where these officers were sleeping,it must have given them quite a shock.

It was about this time that I was returning from the Line I forget what my trip was for,when I met four U.S.A.soldiers and was accosted with,"Say,Bud,which is the Goddamed main road to this war of your's?",I replied,"Keep going,chum,you'll find it ",they had'nt gone more than five minutes before Fritz sent over a salvo of shells in thrir direction,so guess they found it alright.

Whilst at Warley,refitting and recovering from the ravages of the retirement,our Battalion was subjected to the reorganisation that became necessary as a result of the parlous manning situation,Divisions were reduced from twelve to nine Battalions,and brigades proportionately,fortunately our Battalion retained its identity,and we were reinforced by men from those Battalions who were dissolved in the rearrangement,and so for us to keep together was a tremendous boon,as there was still a fair proportion of men,among the companies who had been together since the 1914 days,which was the essence of the Battalion system,and probably the main reason that they were still able to carry on ,despite the depressing times and the monotonous routines that comprised trench warfare.

After a weeks rest we were on the move again,to take over a new sector running through Aveluy Wood just North of Albert, a position at which the enemy's March offensive had been halted,but nevertheless he was still very active in an endeavour to clear the Wood,reliance for defence was placed on small keeps,spaced out,and manned by one of three teams, (1) a rifle post, (2) a bomber post,or (3) a Lewis gun post covering the intervening ground,and so,in this dense,sapling type wood it

was dangerous to move between the posts,unless accompanied and well armed.We completed our first tour of six days without serious losses,and maintained the ground alloted,but after three days rest we returned again to the sector,(April 9th) and took up our previous positions,and kept vigilant, hoping that the tour would be as successful as our previous one.We were troubled with rain as there was little,or no,cover but nevertheless hoped that this would be the worst of our experiences.

It was on the 9th however,that Cpl,Vic March ('B') Coy, was on one of his lone reconnitering patrols,between our's and the enemys positions,Incidentally March was an extraordinary strong personality,very confidence inspiring,never over exuberent,but possessed of a spirit to take the war to the enemy,thus he never had to be asked to do things,each evening, at dusk,in the Line,he was off with another equally redoubtable colleague,in Ernie Card,patrolling the the enemy's Line, sniping,or 'snaffling' one of the enemy for interrogation and recognition purposes.

On this occasion March was patrolling in daylight,alone, but some hours after,returned highly elated,as he felt he had obtained some useful information regarding the enemy's plans.

It transpired that on this patrol he had feigned death, and a German officer,similarly on patrol,began to search him, but March quickly overcame,and killed the German,and remained to extract his papers and maps,which disclosed that a German attack on our position,was planed for 10 o'clock the next morning.

All companies were alerted,to be ready at this time,and given the information that they would be supported by a strong artillery barrage on the German positions.The attack commenced on time,and the enemy made a very concerted effort to break through despite the barrage,unfortunately the Battalion on our right was forced to give ground,which caused us to move back slightly,and in the movement we suffered a number of casu-

vous casualties, particularly among N.C.Os.

The attack persisted throughout the day, and by the late afternoon we again had to withdraw our line further back into the Wood, to conform with that on our right, but there is no doubt that, but for Cpl, March's patrol the consequences would have been far more serious, but instead the attack had been broken for only a very slight loss of ground, for this valient effort Cpl, March was awarded the D.C.M. to add to the M.M and Bar which he already held.

Cpl, March continued his efforts with distinction right up to Nov, 1918, when within a few days of the Armistice he was regrettably killed.

The Battalion was relieved the next day by a fresh Battalion, from a new Division, who subsequently regained the lost ground.

It was during this last tour that news was circulated that the famous German flying ace, Von Richthofen had been killed in combat near to the area that we were engaged in, and it's tonic effect on the troops was as if the war was almost at an end.

The tour of Aveluy Wood had only lasted fourteen days, but it had been an exhausting one as through the period it had rained ceaselessly, little shelter existed, and rations were again very limited, the fighting had also taken a heavy toll of the Battalion, among whom were many greatly revered officers N.C.Os and men.

From Aveluy we went into rest at Engelbelmer, for a few days, and thence moved to a new sector bounded by the Bray/Corbie Road but overlooking Albert, fortuneately conditions here improved considerably, not only from the weather, but the state of the trenches and communications. Food however was the difficulty, as it was restricted to hard biscuits and bully, due to all transport being earmarked for the movement of mutitions and equipment, to make good the losses from the March retreat.

This was an extreme hardship, as the restriction lasted

for eight weeks and feelings were only relieved by the knowledge that the enemy had been held,and the future outlook was a little more reassuring by the sight of American troops,who were arriving and visiting our sector to acquaint themselves with trench routines and duties.

The Americans,in their enthusiasm to see the war,did cause many problems in exposing themselves unneccessarily,which, on one occasion,when they had left the Line,meant a heavy bombardment from the enemy,and causing us,and the adjoining Battalion some serious casualties.

Time was passing however,and with the weather still improving,and enemy offensiveness decreasing,our outlook brightened considerably,and so we passed on into July completing tours over the sector,extending to Bray.

We also found,with the influx of American troops,and their high rates of pay,our canteens were soon bare,but after a bit of moaning this was partially corrected,except that the price of most things began to rise beyond our means.Our basic pay,which,for the average British Tommy was,at the bagining of the war,one shilling per day,had only crept,very slowly,up to two shillings per day by 1917,although there were some slight additions for proficiency etc,but pay was far from sufficient to meet normal needs.

The stoicism of the British Army has often been lauded, but the glaring inequalities of pay seldom realised,particularly when ancillary troops,such as Motor Transport drivers were paid three times as much,but despite this it was an amazing thing that,right to the end of the war,the humour of the infantryman was such that he could sing,

We get a bob a day
And they call it Army pay
But we work,work,work
For evermore.
==========
And still carry on.

This was the time when the U.S.A. Army was 'Finding it's

feet' further South, and one of them said to me, "I'd give my right arm to be down there", I replied, "Yes, and after a month you would probably be offering the other one, to get out", why did they have to boast so ?.

We were now due to go on Corps reserve (July 1918) and so we went to the village of Bissy, a very clean and attractive place, and in spite of an epidemic of Spanish Flu, which kept us busy, and from which few escaped, When the epidemic subsided we had a reasonably good time as sports were organised and here I met an old schoolmate of mine, in the Tank Corps, who took me along to view his 'Toys', I was filled with admiration for their work, but envy did'nt come into it.

Colonel Friend had now been posted to the command of the Battalion, and we were to experience a very unsympathetic attitude from him, in demanding extra drilling and turnouts which became a nightmare, making the men extremely disgruntled.

At this time the Battalion received a draft of four hundred boys all aged eighteen years, who were very welcome, but it was sad to realise what the casualty situation had done to the B.E.F. to see these youngsters sent as reinforcements, they were nevertheless very fit and keen to do their part.

During July we moved to the left of the Australian Corps and we were to see here many fine examples of their high morale and fighting spirit, troublesome German patrols and strong points were not tolerated and were attacked promptly by the Aussies and the attack by them on the 8th of August was a masterpiece of organisation and execution.

We had noticed, and it should have cheered us, that the Germans were now having to improvise in many things, for instance, in some of the trenches we 'took over' we were struck by the varied colour of the sandbags, which, on closer inspection showed that they were made from 'Fraulein's' old skirts etc, paper was also being used for sandbags, bandages, horses nosebags and many other things, which was strong evidence that the blockade was succeeding and creating a serious shortage of raw materials.

On Aug,22nd we were involved in the Happy Valley (Bray/ Corby Road) attack which was the Second Offensive action that was to lead to the cessation of the war.It was during this attack that I saw one of the remarkable things that shells can do,in the sight of a German soldier laying in a shell hole,neatly opened and all his organs spread out beside him just as if a group of students had been having a lecture, other dead were all around,and so I wondered where the word 'Happy' fitted in.

Whilst we advanced some distance in conjunction with Tanks and Cavalry,our casualties were again heavy even though preparation for this attack was highly organised,with Tanks, Artillery,and Cavalry on hand to exploit the breakthrough which was quickly achieved.

The pace of the breakthrough was now accelerating and in one of our marches,in pursuit we passed through Bapaume where, what had been the Town Hall was just a big crater,in fact,the whole town had been levelled to the ground,a little further on we passed a German cemetry,where,at the entrance a huge pile of coffins was stacked.

Booby traps were one of the big dangers in these days, and in one case we had been drawing water from a certain well for two days,when the Engineers discovered a delayed mine half way down it,testing water for poison also kept us busy, and sometimes,after a long march,almost before we had taken our packs off,the Adjutant would trot up on his horse,to enquire if the water was usable.

The expression,'Caught with his pants down',is quite a common saying now,but I had not heard it when it happened to me,we had come out of the Line the night before,and were housed in tents,it was just after daybreak that I had to answer a call of nature,and made my way to the latrine,this was the usual type,a pole,with a low hessian surround,suddenly,looking up,I saw a Fritz plane making for the camp,with guns blazing, I don't know if I hold the record for 'Adjusting my dress'but

it was only a matter of seconds,and I dived into the nearest shell hole,I was cheered to see I was in good company wnen I saw the Colonal and Adjutant making for similar shelter in some haste.

Fritz also dropped some bombs (one of wnich took the top off the tent in wnich the signallers were sleeping) and used his machine guns,but the only casualty was one man slighty wounded,although I doubt if his report,when he returned to base,told the truth.

The next big event was the attack at Lille,for wnich the Battalion was rushed to the scene as Fritz was reported to be retiring,and it was in this action that 'D' Company suffered rather badly in meeting the enemy head on. It was in such actions as this that the ordinary soldier did'nt see much sense in making a frontal attack,when the enemy was going back,and who,by the next day could be some miles away.

The pressure of the aforementioned attack liberated the important town of Lille,and we had the honour of being the first British troops the inhabitants had seen for about four years.

We were then withdrawn to the outskirts of the town,and the medical staff were billeted in a cotton factory,from which the Germans had removed all the machines. We spent a few days on 'spit and polish' and then,with the band going full blast and chests well out,we marched through Lille,amidst cheering crowds,and that,I suppose,was our moment of glory.

The photo of this event appeared in the Illustrated London News,there is also a copy in the Regimental History,and the Imperial War Museum.

Having marched to attention past the saluting base,in the centre of the town,it was 'March at ease' and the remainder of the journey was carried out with a little more freedom and I am afraid the ranks were sometimes broken by the enthusiastic populace.

We were billeted at the far end of the Town,in the house of a French lady,who had been married to an Irishman,whilst

we were there,her son came from Paris to visit her,and it was interesting to see them digging up sewing machines,cycles,etc, from the garden,where they had been concealed from the Germans

A young lady,in the estaminet we visited,on being asked what she thought of the different troops said,the Germans had good teeth and bad eyes,while,what she had seen of the British had good eyes but bad teeth,so,I suppose that summed us up.

We were not allowed to rest on our laurels for long,and soon were back in the open country again,in pursuit of the enemy,who had fallen back some distance,and the Division had to send out patrols to get into touch again. The ground we were now passing through was cultivated,and going through turnip fields,we were able to try a change of vegetables.

It was now my turn for leave again,only six months this time,and a party of us lucky ones plodded back to Lille,from where trains were now running,we arrived at the station around midnight,and,there being no other shelter available,we were allowed to spend the night in the coaches of a train standing in the siding. We asked nothing better,but about 3.30 the next morning we were aroused by a terrific explosion,with all kinds of debris falling on the roofs of the coaches,we scrambled out to find that a delated mine had been placed where the lines converged,just outside the station,it had exploded making a large crater that had to be bridged over before our train could get away.

Well,at last we were on the move and after the usual ups and downs,reached England once more.

I maintain that I picked the best place to hear of the Armistice I was enjoying a good lay-in when someone dashed into the bedroom at eleven,that morning,bursting with the news it took quite a time to sink in,it did'nt seem possible,but there it was,at last.

Fourteen days passed,and Victoria Station once again,the partings had lost sometning of their pathos,and the way they jockeyed us around,when we reached France was quite an ordeal, they packed us into camps,and fed us hard biscuits,some of the

tougher lads demanded to see the orderly officer, and when he appeared he was pelted with the aforesaid biscuits,in the end they thought the best thing was to get rid of us,and we were welcomed back to the Battalion at our favourite village of Allouagne.

The time here was spent trying to organise games of foot-ball,boxing,etc,and some effort was made toward education, but no one seemed to have much heart in their work,which was understandable,as most of the lads felt their chief concern was to get back to their families. After such a long time, seldom staying in one place for more than a day or two,it was difficult to settle down.

As the time came round for leave again we were given permission to apply for demobilsation when in England,which most of us did,and so the Army gave me one final kick. I was sent to Wimbledon for demob:,and after going through all the procedure, I was told to wait for my name to be called, I waited and waited,until some hundreds of names had been called,then, going to find out what was wrong,found that my papers had fallen behind a desk,and I might still be waiting there now, but eventually I got off in time to catch the early milk trair to London,once again a free man.

And so ended four and a half years of strangly mixed, good and bad times,I rate the biggest gain I made was the friendship of some fine people,some of whom I can still count as real friends to-day.

APPENDIX

LONDONER'S C.O. DURING THE WAR.

Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Barter Dies Abroad.

HIS DISMISSAL

Claim that He was Disgraced in Hour of Victory.

The man who commanded a Division composed entirely of Londoners during the war, Lieut-General Sir Charles Barter is reported to have died in a nursing home in Madrid when he was taken ill with pneumonia. Sir Charles Barter commanded the 47th Territorial Division from 1914 to 1916, but was summarily dismissed after the capture of High Wood.

Speaking at a dinner in honour of the Division after the Armistice, he said: " I was charged with wanton waste of the men entrusted to my command at the battle of the Somme. I repudiate that charge with indignation, The measures taken, which led to this loss were either in opposition to my representations or I was not responsible for them. I was dismissed at an hour's notice, with disgrace from my Division, a Division which I had trained, and which I had been so proud to lead in every success. I was dismissed at an hour of the most brilliant achievement of the Division, the capture of High Wood which several other Divisions had made futile attempts to take

I think it is unexampled in military history that a military commander should be disgraced in the hour of success of the troops under his command without any attempt at investigation. The charge of having been responsible for the useless sacrifice of lives of those under me, was, I maintain, a cruel and unjust accusation.

My immediate appeal for investigation was totally ignored . Successive protests at home have met with the same fate, I have even been refused official information relating to superior orders and material facts connected with the operations in question which are necessary to the prosecution of my case!

The son of an Irish clergyman, Sir Charles was unmarri-

and first saw service with the Ashanti Expedition and then with the Tiran Expedition,1897-98,being mentioned in dispatches.

In the South African War he was wounded at Modder River. He was appointed to command the 47th Division in September, 1914,trained it,and took it to France in March,1915, commanding it at Festubert and Loos.

When it relieved the French 18th Division at Loos in January,their commander,General Lefevre,wrote to Barter expressing his great admiration for the manner in which every service of his Division had been working during the relief operations.

Heavy Losses.

The heavy losses incurred at High Wood in September,1916 were due,in Barter's judgement,to an unfortunate decision,against which he strongly protested at the time,regarding the disposition of the tanks in the Divisional area.

He contended that if the tanks,which were then employed for the first time,had been placed outside the Wood,they would not have been held up as they were,and the infantry would not have been obliged to attack without artillery assistance.

G.W. JARVIS.
54. LITTLEHAVEN LANE
HORSHAM
SX.