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Roderick Macleod

John Haller Jr.

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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MEMOIR OF AN ARTILLERY OFFICER IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By

Colonel Roderick Macleod, D.S.O., N.C.

edited by

John S. Haller, Jr.

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[Also are included in a separate file are 19 maps/illustrations that accompany the manuscript and are identified by number within the text.]

Acknowledgements

Ralph E. McCoy, dean of libraries and professor of journalism from 1955 until his retirement in 1976 at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, built one of the premier collections in the United States. From books and manuscripts on the Irish renaissance and modern theater, to modern philosophy and freedom of the press, to collections of diaries and correspondence from soldiers in the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, he managed to bring together under one roof some of the finest works in the English-speaking world. Today, the management of this fine collection is now in the able hands of a resourceful staff that includes Aaron Lisec, Nicholas Guardiano, Tony Bittle, Anne Marie Hamilton-Brehm, Matt Gorzalski, and Walter Ray. My appreciation extends to each of them for their help and attentiveness to my research needs but especially to Aaron Lisec who made me aware of this collection and of this unpublished memoir which was among them. His guidance was particularly helpful. My thanks go as well to the weekly banter from my colleagues David Werlich, Howard Allen, John Dotson, David Wilson, and James Allen; and to my wife, Robin, whose critical eye and caring nature have made each of my books a useful tool and roadmap for the discerning reader.

Editor's Comment

Roderick 'Rory' Macleod was born November 13, 1891, in in Benares, India, and educated at Rugby, a public boarding school in Warwickshire, followed by the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in southeast London. He was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery in 1911. In March 1914, he participated in the Curragh Incident when the British Officer Corps at Curragh Camp at Kildare, the main base for the British Army in Ireland, openly intervened in politics by threatening to resign or accept dismissal rather than conduct military operations against the unionist Ulster Volunteers.

Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28th, Macleod served as an artillery officer with the 80th Battery, 15th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, 5th Division in the British Expeditionary Force. During the retreat from Mons in 1914, he was wounded at the Battle of Le Cateau. Following his recovery, he was reassigned to the 5th Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, participating at Neuve Chapelle, Festubert and Aubers Ridge in 1915. Later in 1915, as temporary Captain, he served with the 10th Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, and 4th Brigade, Royal Flying Corps. As Captain in 1916, he commanded A Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, 240 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery; and in 1917, he commanded C Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, 241 Brigade, 48th South Midland Division, Territorial Force, at the 3rd Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) and Vimy Ridge. He was then posted to the Asiago Plateau in Italy, 1917-18.

Imbedded in the original manuscript were nineteen (19) maps and illustrations hand-drawn by Macleod. Each has been identified in its location in the text. However, they are provided separately for convenience of the reader.

After the war, Macleod remained in the service and graduated from Staff College, Camberly, in 1927. From there he rose through the ranks, becoming General Staff Officer, then Lieutenant Colonel, Inspector General of Overseas Forces, and finally Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1939-1940. During the Second World War, he was appointed by Lieutenant General Sir Andrew Thorne to command a fictitious British Fourth Army based in Scotland and employed in deceiving German forces on Allied strength and invasion targets in 1944. Called “Operation Fortitude North,” Macleod orchestrated a series of radio signals and other false positives designed to make the Germans believe that an imminent invasion was credible.

Macleod retired in 1945 but commanded the Guildford Home Guard Battalion in 1955; in 1959 he was appointed literary executor to the estate of Field Marshal Lord William Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1939. Macleod died in 1984.

* * *

The unpublished “Memoir” was discovered among the many papers of World War I American, British, Canadian, and German soldiers that are housed in Morris Library’s Special Collections. According to available information, the original handwritten “Memoir” was given by Macleod to a Father Simon in Glasgow, Scotland, who informed the priest that he had no one to leave it to and wanted it to be published. Aware of this desire, Father Simon handed the unwritten manuscript to Dr. Louise Grace Shaw, a Ph.D. in War Studies, who edited the document checked on the accuracy of the events described in the “Memoir.” Following that undertaking, she typed the manuscript to make it ‘reader friendly.’ Dr. Shaw then gave a copy of the typed manuscript to her father, Gill Shaw, who agreed to investigate the provenance of the document. He learned that more than one copy of the unpublished manuscript existed.

In doing my own research, I found that Maggs Bros. Ltd, a seller of rare books and manuscripts, offers a copy of the typed “Memoir” for sale on Google Books at £950.00. The site also states that at least two other copies exist: one at Southern Illinois University, and the other at the Liddle Hart Centre for Military Archives. Colonel Roderick Macleod’s papers are located at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives in King’s College London. In examining the Centre collection, however, it makes no mention of owning a copy of the “Memoir.” Still, the provenance remains troublesome.

Since the “Memoir” was manually typed by Dr. Louise Shaw, I took the liberty of digitizing it by retyping the manuscript into a computer. I also Americanized the language, and updated the punctuation to make it more readable. Because of the questionable record of ownership or provenance of the work. I decided not to seek a publisher for the “Memoir.” However, in the interest of making the work available to scholars, I am providing my digitized version through “Open Access.”

Forward

This account of the First World War has been written at the request of relations and friends who asked me to record my experiences before they were forgotten. Hence, I have included personal and private matters which may be of interest to them, but not to others. But I trust that others, who may read it, will find parts not uninteresting.

In the first Chapter, I have tried to show what life was like in the Army at home in the pleasant and spacious days before the War. Soldiering was not too strenuous and sport, for its toughening and cooperative qualities, was much encouraged.

The British was a long service Army, the men enlisting for six years with the colors and six in the reserve, many extending their service to twelve years with the colors, and a few re-engaging to serve for twenty-one years. Under a strict but paternal discipline they reached a high standard of skill in arms, movement and maneuver. Further, many officers and men had seen active service in the outposts of the Empire, such as the Northwest frontier of India and parts of Africa, and a few in the Boer War, so were hardened veterans. Hence our Army in 1914 was superior man for man to the conscript Continental armies where men served, at most, for three years and saw little, if any, active service. Our men were tough, staunch, resilient, active and smart, and imbued with great pride in their Regiments and loyalty to their officers. It was the best Army this country had sent abroad.

If I had dwelt overmuch on the Retreat from Mons, it is because war was then new to us, there was much more movement with the situations changing continually, and events were more dramatic and exciting, than in the hard slogging battles of the later years of the war.

I served through the war on the Western Front from Mons to the Armistice, and, though wounded in the retreat from Mons, on coming out once more, was lucky never to be hit again in a further four years at the front. This was partly due to the fact that, between battles, I was in units which were behind or frequently withdrawn from the line, and so was more fortunate than many of my brother officers.

Before the war, I was in Ireland and was involved in “The Curragh Incident.”

The account of the Retreat from Mons is based on a diary I made immediately afterwards, and of the Incident and the remainder of the war on letters I wrote to my father, mother, sisters and wife which they luckily preserved, and on my notes and recollections.

For security reasons I could not describe plans or operations, names of units or places, casualties, or state of morale and avoided descriptions of the horrors of war in order not to depress people at home; hence in my letters I dwelt more on the lighter side of the war, especially on our activities when out of the line, but the letters bring vividly to my mind the events about which they were written, and are pegs on which my memories hang.

I started the war as a Second lieutenant and finished as an acting Major commanding a battery. I served in the Field Artillery, Horse Artillery and Royal Flying Corps, and was present in the battles of Mons, Le Cateau, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Aubers Ridge, the Somme, Passchendaele (as the 3rd Battle of Ypres is now known), and, in Italy, of the Asiago Plateau. I saw much of the British soldier both Regular and Territorial and their great qualities filled me with admiration. They were wonderful men to serve with, and whatever I accomplished or the rewards I was given were mainly due to their efforts and support.

R. Macleod

CHAPTER I

IN IRELAND

In September 1910, I began my course at the Royal Military Academy in Woolwich. The “Shop,” the name it had held for fifty years, was the nursery for officers of the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers. Within its walls, any other Regiment or Corps was held to be a poor third. In my time, we had an infantry company there because Sandhurst was not large enough to take all the infantry cadets.

Our course was entirely technical: drill and marching, practical and theoretical field engineering, gunnery and gun drill on various equipment, administration and military law, sketching and map-making, signaling, science and mathematics, riding, tactics and military history. As I had ridden all my life, I enjoyed the riding at Woolwich, except that it always took place in a school. The methods they taught when I was first there were rather old fashioned. I was always told to take down my stirrups two holes, and to sit back over the jumps, whereas in civilian life, I had ridden shorter and jumped with a forward seat. In our third term we had to ride over four jumps down the side of the school without reins or stirrups: a good test of grip and balance. If a cadet became slightly unbalanced at one jump, he usually fell off at the next.

The infantry tactics, which held good for the first years of the 1914 War, was to advance to the attack in three lines: firing line, support and reserves, each at about one-hundred yards distance, and with up to five-yard intervals between the men. When the firing line was pinned down, the supports and then the reserves came up and joined in, and a fire-fight developed to master the fire of the defense. When this was felt to have happened, with no further orders, the men rose up and charged the enemy. In defense, there were the same three lines, but the reserves

were more concentrated under the battalion commander. The artillery supported the infantry by observed fire, usually a battery to a battalion.

In 1911, we lined the streets outside Westminster Abbey at the Coronation of King George V, and had a good view of the Royalties and procession.

We passed out at Christmas 1911. I was not high enough to take the Engineer's but was given a commission in the Royal Field Artillery which pleased me greatly as I was mad keen on riding and horses.

Early in 1912, all Field Gunner young officers attended a gunnery course at Shoeburyness where, among other things, we were taught to observe fire with the 15 pdr. Gun of the Boer War.

In March 1912, I was posted to the 80th Battery R.F.A. at Kildare, in Ireland. This again pleased me as I was looking forward to hunting with the famed Kildare fox-hounds. The hunting, however, was different from that in England. The fences consisted of banks of all sizes, up to twenty feet in the case of boundary fences, some with ditches on one side or the other, or on both. The banks could not be galloped, but the Irish bred horses naturally took them at a slow pace, getting well back on their hocks and "changed" on top instead of flying them. The first thing my senior subaltern said to me was that he would lend me an old horse who, though not fast, knew the ropes and would show me how the country should be crossed. He told me to let him have his head and he would go at his own pace and take the fences where he fancied. This I did, and he sometimes on reaching the top of a bank if there was a wide, blind ditch on the landing side, would walk along until he found a suitable plane for jumping off. This is why, I think Irish bred horses, who look after and collect themselves, do so well in the Grand National.

The Battery had recently arrived from Jubbulpore in India, and was commanded by Captain Fawcus, as the Major, Strong, was on long leave. Cubbins was the Senior Subaltern, I was the Second, and Harrison the Junior.

We were part of the 45th Brigade R.F.A. (later 15th Brigade), and the other Batteries were the 11th and 52nd. All the guns were 18 Fdr. Field guns, entirely horsed, and the gun detachments rode on the vehicles.

Another brigade of field artillery shared our barracks, at first the 28th, and 18 Fdr. Brigade, which was soon relieved by the 8th, 4.5” howitzer brigade.

Kildare was on the edge of the Curragh plain on which we trained, and the Curragh camp contained the best part of the 5th Division and 3rd Calvary Brigade, with detachments in Dublin and Ulster.

Life was, on the whole, very pleasant. Soldering was fairly simple as there were only three arms, cavalry, artillery and infantry, and all transport was horsed. We had to be expert in guns, gunnery, gun drill, horse and stable management and riding, and know something of signaling and range taking. Each subaltern had a section of two guns, four ammunition wagons, and their detachments (though in peacetime we had not enough horses for much more than the guns), and was responsible for training his men and horses. There was no Regimental Depot then, and recruits and remounts joined the batteries direct. The Section Commander had to know his men and all about them, their various characters and capabilities, and to be a master of “man-management.”

As our Battery had recently come home from India, many of the old soldiers had left time-expired, and there were a large number of young men. They soon settled down and were a

good crowd, keen, tough, hard, and when trained, proud of their unit and themselves – professional soldiers in the best sense of the word.

Our pay was 5/7. a day. We had to buy all our uniforms and pay for our food. There were no rations, and mess bills came to 4/- a day. In addition, there were subscriptions to games, the mess garden and the Hunt. An allowance from one's parents was necessary. Bachelor officers lived in mess. We had quarters in tin huts built during the Boer War, I believe, and only supposed to last for ten years. Some leaked. The mess chief was a Frenchman, employed at a salary of double a subaltern's pay. He turned out very good dinners, but breakfasts and luncheons were rather beneath him. We eventually dispensed with his services and took on, at a smaller wage, a female cook, who did not despise the breakfasts and luncheons. Dinner at night was a parade. Except at weekends when dinner jackets were permitted, mess kit was always worn and officers had to be in time. Every Friday night was a guest night when some of the married officers dined in mess, and toasts were drunk, after which there were often high-jinks in the mess. Once, I and another Scottish officer were prevailed upon to do Scottish dances on the Mess table. Our spurs scratched the surface and the next day we were had up in the Colonel's office and each fined £10 to make good the damage. Another game was to swing oneself from one end of the mess to another without touching the floor. Our kits were apt to suffer in the process.

Some of the majors were distinctly "livery" in the mornings. A few could not be approached till after luncheon. A new young subaltern joined our Brigade, and rather full of himself, on entering the dining room cheerfully addressed one of the majors at breakfast with "Good morning, Major," to which the Major replied gruffly, "Good morning, good morning, good morning, good morning. Now let that last you for a week."

Ireland was a splendid country for sport and the inhabitants were keen on it. The hunting was excellent, race courses good and many, the horses well bred, fishing when not over-poached reasonable, and shooting easy to obtain and sporting.

There was something attractive about the Southern Irish. They had a great sense of humor, and a fund of probable and improbable stories, were anxious to please even if it was sometimes blarney, were courteous and hospitable. They did not appear to be resentful against the English in spite of real or fancied ill treatment in the past, but it was not easy to tell how sincere they were. They were nearly all strong "Home Rulers." The horse was their passion, and often the stables were in better condition than their houses.

Soon after joining I was in charge of a working party under Captain Buckle, one of the 11th Battery, to prepare a new camp at Glen Imaal Practice Camp in the Wicklow Mountains. It had been at Leitrim Castle, but this was too small an area, so a new camp at Coolmooney House, a mile or two south, had to be prepared.

One difficulty was to find enough water for the large number of horses that had to be accommodated. Luckily Captain Buckle was an excellent water diviner, and with a Y shaped hazel twig which he held in his two hands, turned when over a source of water, he soon found several underground springs. I tried it but it would not work for me.

While we were preparing the Camp, or C.R.A., Brigadier-General Edward Fanshawe (later General Sir Edward Fanshawe, commanding a Corps) came over occasionally to see how we were getting on. He walked all the way from the Curragh, refused luncheon, subsisting only on biscuits he brought with him, and walked home in the evening. His total walk was some thirty miles. [See Sketch 1]

Fanshawe was a character. He used to get up very early in the morning, put on an old suit of clothes, and wander about in the lines. In those days, telephones were installed in guard rooms instead of in officers and messes. One morning, early, Fanshawe wished to telephone, so he went to the nearest guard room, but the sentry, thinking he was a tramp, refused to let him in. "Don't you know who I am?" asked the General. "I am General Fanshawe." "Oh, are yer," replied the sentry, "Well, I am the Prince of Wales, so buzz off." After that, General Fanshawe's photograph had to be displayed in every guard room, and shown to the sentry before going on duty.

General Fanshawe had meals at irregular times. Food was laid out on a long sideboard at which he and his guests helped themselves. He was very good to us young subalterns and occasionally asked us in to a luncheon – tea or other meals.

He bred his own horses, or rather ponies, for he was a small man, which he used to hunt. They occasionally gave him a toss, but they ran up the large Irish boundary fences like a cat up a wall. In fact, all the Irish cobs and ponies, even those ridden by small children, seemed expert in this.

As soon as we returned to Kildare, we started training for Practice Camp: intensive gunnery and gun drill with occasional driving drill and drill orders.

At Practice Camp, to teach us observation of fire, the Depot Battery manned a muzzle loading battery of old pre-Boer War, bufferless 12-pounder guns, firing gun powder, as at Waterloo. The fire was surprisingly accurate up to 4,000 yards. It was amusing to see the old-fashioned drill with "serving the vent," and the guns ran back when fired and had to be run up again by hand and sponged out.

Major Mark Leigh Goldie now took command of the Battery. He ran it as three separate and independent sections. Each subaltern was held entirely responsible for everything in his Section, so, if anything went wrong, he caught it. I was often told that I must attend all feeds till further notice, and, as horses were fed five times in a day, this meant practically confinement to barracks.

Goldie was the subaltern in command of the team and gun-carriage carrying the coffin at Queen Victoria's funeral in 1901. It was a bitterly cold morning, and, as Goldie told me, he had permission to exercise his horses first because they might be over-fresh and play up during the procession, but this was refused. The team hooked in, the coffin was put on the carriage, and the procession started. Goldie gave the order "walk March." The over-fresh team jumped into their breast collars, and the sudden strain was too much for one of the hooks on the limber, and it snapped. There must have been a flaw in it. There was no time to get another limber. The problem was how was the carriage to be moved? Kaiser Wilhelm II solved it. There was a detachment of sailors in the procession, and the Kaiser suggested that they should be used to pull the carriage. The drag ropes were taken off the limber, the sailors manned them and pulled the carriage. This started the tradition of sailors pulling the gun-carriage at Royal funerals.

Batteries were largely judged on the condition of their horses. The horse' ration was ten pounds of oats, twelve of hay, and eight of straw, but Goldie gave each Section commander the money equivalent instead and allowed him to spend it as he liked. In winter, when not much was required of the horses, the money was less, and in summer during the intensive training, it was more.

On Battery drill order days, to bring out all the vehicles, we borrowed teams from other batteries. Majors Goldie at least, had their own forms of drill, and the other drivers did not always understand our system. The Section commander was dropped on for any mistakes.

Section training lasted six months from October to March, each section training for two months, and on “drill orders” having the horses from the other sections to make up numbers. For the last two or three days of each Section’s training, Goldie put it through an intensive examination in everything, and woe-betide the Section Commander if his Section was not found up to the mark! I was lucky enough to pass, but our junior subaltern did not, and his annual leave was stopped so that he might continue training with another section.

During this period one subaltern went on leave for two months, and the other took on the odd duties to relieve the subaltern training.

While section training lasted, Goldie lived out with friends seven miles away and came in once a week in plain clothes, driving his two-horse carriage to sign up the papers.

During the leave season, the Sergeant-Major, Quarter-Master-Sergeant and Pay Sergeant went on furlough, and the subalterns were put in to do their duties. My first year I did Pay Sergeant, and the next Quarter-Master-Sergeant, and, although I disliked the work, learnt far more about the Pay and Mess Book and Quarter-Mastering than if I had merely aid out and signed papers. I never rose to Sergeant-Major as the 1914 War started before I could do so.

On joining we were once more put through the riding school with the recruits until we were again “passed out.” There was an officer’s ride, also, once a week including sword drill and saluting, and, even after we were passed out, all subaltern officers were given riding instruction under the “riding-master” every morning at 7 o’clock. I think we had too much of it and became

rather stale doing the same things so often. Besides, riding school in the open on a bitterly cold winter morning was not much fun.

We were also made to do “limber-gunner” which involved the maintenance of the gun in working order, and a knowledge of all its numerous parts and their functioning and we learned to clean and put together a double set of harness.

Our Colonel was Prescott-Decie. One day he was asked out to a shoot. They were having quite good sport when his host suddenly exclaimed, “Come on, we’ve got to run.” “I don’t want to run,” said Prescott-Decie. “We’ve got to run,” replied his host, “the keeper’s coming!”

The Curragh had a famous race course and we often attended meetings. Sometimes we went mounted and kept closer touch by following round a race. On one occasion two of our officers saw their bookmaker welshing. They galloped after him and collared him. They rode back, distributed his money to the backers, and kept his satchel as a souvenir.

Hunting was much encouraged. It was considered the finest training for a mounted officer. It gave him “an eye for the country,” taught him to find his way across country, improved his riding and knowledge of the capabilities of his horse, and taught him horse-mastership, invaluable for looking after the horses of his section. It also kept us hard and fit for active service. If we had enough horses we could hunt six days a week, four days with the fox-hounds and two with the harriers. Government horses could be hired and insured for hunting. Even the subaltern doing section training could hunt occasionally. He put on hunting kit with a military great-oat on top and a forage cap, and on hunting days, took his Section in the gunsheds by electric light on such things as gun drill at 6 a.m., and other drills, until it was time for him to leave, and on his return from hunting, his men were subjected to lectures in the barrack room.

Major Talbot-Ponsoby was our M.F.HJ. and huntsman. He usually gave us good sport, but we thought that he slowed things up at checks by casting backwards. His successor, after the War, Baron de Roebeck, cast forwards, usually found the line, and kept things moving at a brisk pace.

The Kildare country varied. Mondays were usually in the neighborhood of Kildare with small fields and now and again a strand of wire. Tuesdays were the bog days – Bog of Allan or King’s Bog. If you did not know the country it was advisable to follow someone who did, or you might find yourself in difficulties. Thursdays were in the Dunlavin area, with large grass fields and narrow, razor-topped banks, needing as clever horse that could kick back instead of “changing” to negotiate them. But the Saturday country was the best, big “double” banks (that is with a ditch on each side) and large grass fields. At some of the biggest ditches there were “wreckers” with ropes ready to pull your horse out if it fell in. You had best to bargain a price quickly before our horse sunk entirely! To get to this country we boxed our horses by train to Sallins, and on return, after boxing the horses again, while waiting for the train, were invited into the Stationmaster’s house for tea. Most hospitable. A real good meal, and the tea so black and strong that one could almost stand a knife in it! But when one was cold, wet and tired, it was a grand reviver.

On other days, hacking home after a hunt, we were often invited into people’s houses for refreshment or tea, while they gave our gorses gruel and hay in their stalls. But usually, after a long day, it was advisable to hack straight home before the horses stiffened up.

The Master and huntsman of the harriers was Captain Stokes of the R.A.S.C. at the Curragh. He sometimes got onto a fox and we had several good runs with his hounds.

Major Goldie was the greatest follower of hounds. He had two horses he had brought from England, but they were unused to the Irish banks, tried to fly them, and gave Goldie many falls. He never thought he had had a good day's hunting unless he had taken six tosses. One day, though, he was badly injured when, after a fall at a ditch on the far side of a bank, his horse trod on him when getting up. He came back with his numnah saddle saturated with blood, and I had to help him off his horse and get him to bed. He was in the hospital for some time.

When he went on leave, he offered me his horses to hunt. I had one or two days on them, but I must say they scared me! I decided that discretion was the better part of valor and gave them up.

During the whole of the summer, we had collective training (battery, brigade and divisional), practice came and man oeuvres, and, for the Gunners, there was not time off. But we contrived to train our horses for hunting at odd moments.

In 1912, Brigade Group and Divisional training took place near Birr, in central Ireland. A composite battery was formed from the 15th Brigade R.F.A., each battery turning out a section at war strength. The whole was under Major Nutt of the 52nd Battery, and Barber-Starkey, also of the 52nd Battery, was the captain. I was the subaltern in charge of the 80th Battery section.

Captain Barber-Starkey was a great sportsman. He could quote long passages from Handley Cross and Soapy Sponge. As a young man he steeple-chased and hunted. He was an expert shot, and the best dry-fly fisher in the world.

In the middle of Divisional training, we had a rest day. It was brilliantly fine, and near our camp ran a river of clear water only about two feet deep. At breakfast, the keen fishermen in the Brigade discussed the possibility of fishing, but all, except Barber-Starkey, agreed that under

the conditions it was impossible. After breakfast he said to me, "Come along with me and see what we can do." I went with him and watched him fishing with dry-fly. He waded upstream and cast his fly in the most skillful manner possible, like thistledown settling on the water, over the noses of the trout he saw in the stream. In an hour he had out nineteen of them.

One day when we were back at Kildare two salmon had in some extraordinary manner escaped the nets at the mouth of the Liffey and made their way up to Newbridge. The whole of the Newbridge mess turned out to catch them, but failed. They then telephoned to us, and Barber-Starkey went over. In an hour he had out both. He gave one to the Newbridge mess, and brought back the other. We had it for dinner that night.

Shortly before Christmas Barber-Starkey got news that geese were flying over at night at a place in the King's Bog, about seven miles away. He went over to try to bag one or two, possibly with a view to the men's Christmas dinners. The first night he stood in the bog nearly up to his waist, but they came over out of range. He went again the next night and bagged a couple. They turned out to be a rare species with black speckled breasts, so he sent them to the Natural History Museum who returned a grateful letter of thanks. As a result of his two nights in the bog he went down with a sever chill and had to spend his Christmas in bed. To keep him company I had by Christmas dinner with him.

I had bought a young thoroughbred mare through a friend from a place in England, and intended to hunt and steeplechase her. She had first to be taught to jump Irish banks, and being intelligent, soon learnt the tricks. She was as hard as nails, and I often hacked her fifteen miles to the meet, hunted all day, and hacked home in the evening. I hunter her twice a week, though one of the times would be with the harriers from the Curragh which wasn't such hard going.

The country house people were extraordinarily kind. We were often asked out to meals, tennis, dances, and sometimes to stay the night and hunt the next day. On one occasion I drove to a place in the battery dog cart, danced all night, hunted all next day (my hunter being ridden to meet by my groom), then on to another house, more dancing, and back to barracks in the early morning and, after changing, straight on to parade.

Goldie was a good soldier but a strict and rather harsh disciplinarian. Nearly all the officers and the Sergeant-Major left or got exchanges. Fawcus retired, Gubins exchanged to South Africa, Harrison to India, and the B.S. M. to another Battery. Paddie Hewson joined as senior Subaltern and Reay Mirrlees as junior Subaltern. I was the mutt who stayed on, but I thoroughly enjoyed the hunting and the kindness of the people around, so put up with the disciplining.

Every Saturday morning there was an inspection of gun-park and harness. Goldie used to go round wearing wash leather gloves and felt down parts of the guns and the harness. If a dirty mark appeared on the gloves, the subaltern was in for it! The gun stores or harness were then put down in skeleton order on Saturday afternoon, and, if not clean then, on Sunday until Goldie was satisfied. The steelwork was burnished till it shone like silver, and the leatherwork polished till you could see your face in it.

Goldie was very fond of drilling by trumpet on mounted drill order parades. A trumpeter rode behind him, and Goldie used to tell him to blow the various calls for such things as “form line,” “right take ground” “sections about,” etc. I hadn’t the foggiest idea what these queer sounds meant, but I had two excellent Nos. 1 who knew them well, so, keeping an eye behind, I followed their movements.

One day a new trumpeter came out. On one occasion he must have blown a wrong call, for we saw Goldie draw his sword, put spurs to his horse and ride at him. The boy galloped madly for barracks, pursued by the Major with levelled sword. He must have thought his last day had come! We nearly died of laughing! When he had chased the trumpeter away, Goldie returned and continued the parade.

Goldie made the subalterns drill the battery by word of mouth. We had to come out at least fifty yards and make our voices carry through the clatter and clanging of the moving battery. It took me a little time to get my voice trained to carry so far over the noise.

Our driving drill had to be exact. Often when driving the line Goldie would order “action front.” When the guns were in action Goldie would pace the intervals between them. If they were not precisely twenty yards there would be a row.

Goldie did not stay with us very long. One “tactical day” at Practice Camp at Glen Imaal targets were springing up all over the place. Goldie gave “Section Control,” each section taking on a different target and being switched about as more targets appeared. The battery was more than fully engaged. Suddenly an excited staff officer galloped up and called: “Major Goldie, Major Goldie, don’t you see the Cavalry coming down the Leo-Cannow Valley?” Goldie turned his back, threw his glasses on the ground and said, “Let the bloody battery shoot itself!” At the conference afterwards, the C.R.A. made some very caustic comments, and told Major Goldie that if there were too many targets for all to be engaged, he should shoot at those of the most tactical importance. Shortly afterwards Goldie left for India, and a Major Dooner joined us. He was Staff College trained and taught us a lot about tactics. He was most kind and friendly.

Messing in those days was in the barrack-rooms. The orderly officer had six rooms to visit at meal times. At Christmas he had to go round all of them, and the Sergeants' and Corporals' Messes too, and drink a toast at each. In 1912, I was on duty and had this pleasant (?) task. You had to take what was offered you. I was given a different drink at each, and felt distinctly the worse for wear at the end: The Colonel of the 8th Brigade, Duffus, had very kindly asked me to tea, so, to sober up, I saddled up my horse and galloped her three times round the Curragh. I suppose I was lucky to stay on her, but it did the trick.

Our doctor was Captain O'Brien-Butler, R.A.M.C. He was a noted steeplechase rider, but found hunting more dangerous. One day, early in the season when the country was blind, we were out with hounds and came to a large bank with a wide ditch on the take-off side. It was covered with brambles and foliage. Butler's horse, thinking it was solid ground, put all four feet on it, went right through, and, the ditch being deep, horse and rider completely disappeared. We peered into the depths thinking some calamity had happened, and were relieved to see Butler emerging a moment later by a cattle track fifty yards away, none the worse.

In the spring of 1914, we went over to Austria to ride for an Austrian Count in their Grand National. He liked the Austrians very much, and called them "the gentlemen of Europe." When walking the course before the race he was scared at some of the jumps: solid tree trunks five feet high: but in the race his horse cleared them easily, and he won, to the Count's and his delight.

Officers were always undergoing examinations. We had to pass from 2nd Lieutenant to Lieutenant in all the duties of the subaltern, and in the interior economy of a battery. Luckily, my work in the pay office and Q.M.'s stores stood me in good stead and I was pretty knowledgeable on horses. Gunnery, gun drill, equipment, signaling and range-taking were other subjects.

Captain Bartholomew now joined us from Adjutant. He was one of the most efficient officers I have known, and kept us subalterns well up to the mark. He had an eye like a hawk, and a head-roe twisted wrongly, a curb chain not quite right, or a lanyard not put on properly caught his eye at once, and then the devil to pay for the section commander who had not noticed these defects at his inspection!

Another form of training was “section marches.’ Each section was sent off for three days and two nights on its own, and had to fend for itself. Provision had to be made for food and water for men and horses, and for bivouacking. The major set a small tactical exercise on the march home on the last day.

The battery also practiced crossing rivers. With us this was usually the Liffey. We made improvised rafts from timber and empty barrels to float the guns and carriages over. The horses were swum across. We found the best way was to send a few men over with all the nose bags and a trumpeter. The nose bags were then lined up on the opposite bank, and the trumpeter blew “feed.”

The old hands among the horses plunged into the river and the rest followed, and we had all the horses across in no time. They were then hooked in and the Battery moved off.

On Thursdays we had mounted sports: alarm races, jumping competitions, wrestling on horseback, tent pegging, driving competitions, etc. They kept the men keen and on their toes.

Major Dooner did not stay long, but left shortly for a staff appointment. Major Birley then took us on. His eyesight was not good and he had a shaky hand, but he was a very good cricketer and stood up to and took fast bowling as a wicket keeper, and played an excellent game of squash. At Practice Camp, however, he sometimes had difficulty in seeing the target and the

burst of shell, and relied on his “battery commander’s assistant” or the “reconnaissance officer” to tell him the results of each shot. Somehow, he got away with it. He was most kind to me, and allowed me much time off to hunt, and train my horse for steeple chasing.

In the autumn of 1913, we had inter-Divisional maneuvers in Tipperary between the 5th Division (from the north half of Ireland) and the 6th Division (from the south half). The country was mountainous in places, and it seemed to be the object of the artillery on both sides to be the first to “crown the heights.” The guns which succeeded in getting there first were deemed to have scored a distinct advantage. We had some hair-raising climbs at times but usually managed to get there, sometimes by doubling the teams, or with all gunners on the drag ropes.

On unlimbering, on one occasion, a gun ran down the other side and came to rest with the muzzle buried and the piece back in its cradle.

We were issued with a limited amount of blank ammunition, so filled up the empty shell compartments with bottles of beer. We found, at pauses in the operations, that we were most popular with neighboring units, and sometimes staffs!

The music hall song, “Tipperary” had just come out, and, appropriately enough, for our maneuvers were in that country, I heard it for the first time sung by troops on the march.

Towards the end of two Seasons’ hunting in Ireland I decided, early in 1914, to train my young mare, “Be Early,” for steeple chasing, with a view to the Grand Military at Puncheatown. I wanted somewhere I could school her over jumps, and not knowing of such a place, asked a friend, who advised me to apply to Major Honner, who had a large estate of 360 acres, at Ardenode, near Brannockstown. He had his own breed of cattle, “dexter-shorthorns.” He also owned several racehorses, mostly steeplechasers, which he trained himself. He had his own

theories of training and feeding. He thought that trainers galloped their charges too much and broke them down. He did not believe in fast work more than twice a week, a good, long, slow exercise on other days with plenty of hill work.

He had a steeplechase course in his grounds and ran schools twice a week. So, I used to ride over the thirteen miles before breakfast, and the schools took place between breakfast and luncheon. Out hunting the jumps were taken at a slow pace, the horse getting well back on his hocks and projecting himself upwards. For steeple chasing, the jumps had to be taken at a gallop so the horses had to be sharpened up. We started by jumping a hurdle in company with one or two other horses to sharpen them, then over a medium sized bank or two at a canter. As the days went on the jumping was extended over larger and more banks, though we were never allowed to go at more than three quarters pace round the course for fear of breaking down. A little mare came on very well. She could jump like a stag and was fast and I had great hopes.

After luncheon I sometimes took Major Honner's daughter for a golf lesson in the fields near the house, and then rode "Be Early" back to barracks, a very pleasant existence. Two years later, in 1916, I married Miss Honner.

In March I ran "Be Early" in a Point to Point, and although she slipped and fell at an early fence losing 300 yards, she finished only eighty yards behind the winner, going strong.

The Curragh Incident

My father was planning a fishing holiday in Ireland and asked me to arrange it for him. He intended coming about March 22nd. Before he arrived, we had a shock. Our idyllic existence was interrupted by "The Curragh Incident." The Government passed the Bill giving Ireland

Home Rule and placing Ulster under a Roman Catholic National Government in Dublin. Ulster, strongly Presbyterian, was determined not to be thrown out of the United Kingdom and made subject to what would be to them an alien Government, and was prepared to resist by force if necessary. Mr. Winston Churchill on March 14 made a bellicose speech threatening Ulster. The situation was becoming tense.

In a letter home to my father, I wrote:

“March 19th . . . I am sorry you will not be able to come till next Thursday as I am running my horse on Wednesday in a point-to-point, which you might like to see. I think I will be able to give you a little fishing, but I don’t know that I will be able to come out with you as the best time for fishing is in the morning and I shall have to be on parade. All our guards now parade with arms and ball ammunition, as I believe the authorities are afraid the Nationalists (Southern Irish) might make an attempt on the barracks. Up in the North (Ulster) 80% of the Special Reservists are Unionists, and as all their arms and mobilization equipment are stored up there, the one battalion up there has to provide guards at all depots . . . They will probably send some troops (to reinforce) from the Curragh.”

“20th March, 1914.

At 7 p.m. all officers were ordered to the Colonel’s office. This was Lieutenant-Colonel Stevens who had replaced Prescott-Decie. He sat there looking grave with a paper in his hand. When we were assembled, he said, “I have a very serious communication to make. I shall not comment on it or give my views, but when I’ve read it. I’ll give you five minutes in which to make up your minds and I’ll then want your answers. No copies of the paper are to be made.’ He then spoke from the document:

“There is the possibility of active operation in Ulster. All officers who are domiciled in Ulster will be allowed to “disappear” until the operations are over, provided they give me an understanding not to fight against the British Army. Any officer who for conscientious or other reasons objects to taking part in the operation will be instantly dismissed from the service. All others will obey implicitly whatever orders are given them.”

Then:

“The King earnestly desires that as few officers as possible will avail themselves of alternatives one and two.”

This was a real poser. After Churchill’s speech “Active operations in Ulster” meant to us “War against Ulster;” but there was no time to consult one’s parents or to ponder deeply on the consequences. The whole of one’s career might be cast away in a few minutes. However, I did not have much difficulty in making up my mind. My Father, I knew had signed the British Covenant supporting Ulster and would be fighting on the other side. I would adopt alternative two.

When asked for their decisions two officers who were domiciled in Ulster decided to “disappear.’ One or two of the senior officers said that they could not afford to lose their pensions and would accept all orders, but under protest. All the rest of us decided to be instantly dismissed. We were asked to reconsider and the time was extended.

] It was too late now to catch the train for Dublin and the boat to England, but to confirm my course of action, I dashed across the road to the Post Office and sent a telegram to my father:

Handed in Kildare 7:15 p.m.

Can you support me if I resign instant dismissal or fight against Ulster? All officers have to decide tonight.

He replied:

Resign rather than fight against Ulster.

With the others, I packed that night to catch the morning boat train. My horse I would have to leave behind. I paid off my servant and groom.

Early in the morning the Adjutant came round and in effect put us under arrest by forbidding us to leave barracks.

We learnt that practically the whole of the officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade at the Curragh, under Brigadier-General Hubert Gough, had resigned almost *en bloc*. We were told that they had had the paper earlier than we and many officers were on their way to Kildare Station in the evening to catch the boat train when a staff officer caught them up at a gallop and ordered them back to barracks.

As we had all been “instantly dismissed” I cannot see that either the Adjutant or Staff Officer had the authority to give us orders.

On March 21st we were ordered to mobilize and fill the gun limbers and firing battery wagons with ammunition. As we were at peace strength, each Battery could only turn out three guns and three firing battery wagons. All harness was hung up in the stables behind the horses ready to slip on, and we were prepared by 2 a.m. that night to move at half an hour's notice.

We were told that the plan of campaign was for the Cavalry Brigade to advance and seize the three bridges over the river Boyne, and for the 5th Division (of which we were a part) to follow and cross the bridges into Ulster. Subsequent movements and actions would depend on the situation. The Government was so alarmed at the large number of officers choosing dismissal that they refused to accept the resignations.

That morning (21st March) we were all ordered to the Officers' Mess and later to the riding school and there addressed by our Brigadier and Divisional Generals. The first said that it was our duty to support the Government, and our actions could not be less than that on the frontier of India where the enlisted tribesmen were sometimes ordered to fire on their own kith and kin. The second said that a war was expected in Europe that autumn and it would be fatal to split the Army.

“21st March, 1914.

I wrote my father:

“We never knew the situation was serious until 7 o'clock on Friday night. We were then all had up in the Colonel's office and (he) explained the situation. I am not at liberty to say exactly what took place, but we were asked whether we should prefer to stay on and obey all orders or leave the service. Several of us, myself included, decided to leave rather than fight Ulster. We were afterwards given till today to decide. Our Divisional General (Fergusson) and Brigadier General (Headlam, C.R.A.) came to see us this morning, and said they were both in favor of Ulster, but the situation was very much graver than it would seem, for if the Army split up on this question there would be a rising in India, Germany would at once declare war, and the labor situation was so serious in England that if there were no Army a state of chaos would result. He said also if we went to Ulster, it would not be primarily to fight Ulster but to keep order, and he hoped that the measures being taken would prevent an outbreak. The leaders of Ulster were willing to give in, but they would have difficulty in restraining their more hot-headed followers. In view of all those issues we have decided that it will be more important for us to remain in the service, however disagreeable it may be, than to look on while India goes and Germany does what she likes with us. We hope we have decided rightly, but it is a very difficult choice”

Persuaded by the Generals' arguments I sent my father a telegram saying that I had now decided to stay on, and a letter (above) would follow explaining the reasons.

“22nd March, 1914.

“I heard yesterday that troops were only being sent over (the border) to prevent a row between the Ulstermen and the Nationalists, and to act as a kind of demonstration.”

“23rd March, 1914.

“You may be interested to hear about everything that has happened . . . On Friday afternoon I returned from playing golf at the Curragh about 6:40. As soon as I arrived in barracks my Major (Major Birley) told me that I should have to decide that night whether I would obey orders to march and take part in operations in Ulster. If not, I would have to resign. At 7 we were called to the Colonel’s office and we had a document read to us, which it was said was sent from the Army Council and sanctioned by the King. It said:

- (i) Officers whose homes were in Ulster would be allowed to “disappear” provided they took no active part in the operations.
- (ii) Any officer for conscientious or other reasons objected to service in Ulster would be instantly dismissed from the service.
- (iii) All officers would have to obey implicitly all orders issued them

It further stated that it was hoped that there would be few officers who would elect to be dismissed.

“There was no doubt in the minds of all present that active operations in the field were contemplated.

“When the question was put to us, seven out of the fifteen officers, myself included, elected to be dismissed. Some others might have gone but could not afford to go as dismissal would entail loss of pension and all other privileges. We were given til 8 next morning (Saturday) to reconsider our decision. We discussed the matter till late that night but I did not alter my views.

“It was pointed out the next morning that if many officers went, the Army would split up, and the effect of this would be:

- (i) A rising of the native population of India and the massacre of the white inhabitants.
- (ii) A probable attack on us by Germany.
- (iii) A rising of the socialists and syndicalists in England.

“(The General) further pointed out that at first the measures were only undertaken for the purpose of law and order.

“We were then given till a little later to decide . . . All officers and man had to stay in barracks and officers on leave were recalled.

“On Saturday night we got an order to mobilize three guns and wagons of each battery, and we had everything completed by 2 a.m. ready to move off at half an hour’s notice . . . All Sunday we stayed in barracks expecting an order to move. Church parade was cancelled. However, no order came, and this morning the situation was obviously easier as officers were allowed to leave barracks, provided they did not go far and left their address behind. We are still ready to move off at short notice.

“Several officers who elected to be dismissed under Clause 2 of the “Ultimatum” had their requests refused. A subaltern in our battery was refused permission to “disappear” because his home was fifteen miles outside Ulster. His father is an officer in the Ulster Volunteer force.”

“25th April, 1914.

“The 8th Brigade here (4.5 Howitzers) received just the same orders as ourselves and were ready to move at half an hour’s notice . . .

“On March 21st General Headlam addressed all the Artillery Officers at Kildare in the Mess. He said that he hoped no one would apply to be dismissed. He said that soldiers had sometimes to shoot down strikers with whom they sympathized, and it would be a bad example if we did not do so when ordered. General Fergusson, who was just coming, would explain the situation.

“General Fergusson commanding 57th Division also addressed us and told us that he was a Conservative and all his sympathies were with the Ulster people. But he was going to see the thing through, and he hoped we would all do the same. He had seen General Sir A. Paget the day before and had it from him that the notice we had on Friday came from the Army Council. General Fergusson said the “ultimatum” was an insult to any officer, but he did not know who was responsible. Four divisions were to be sent to Ulster. We were to stand as much punishment as possibly without replying. All strategic points had already been seized. If the Army split up on this question it would be the end of the Empire.

“Meanwhile General Hubert Gough (Goffy as he was known to all of us) had gone to England and had obtained a written guarantee from the Secretary of State and C.I.G.S. that we should only be sent to Ulster to keep law and order, and not to fight against Ulster. He was cheered by the troops on his way back from the station, and had the undertaking locked up for safe keeping. Attempts were made to get hold of it but were unsuccessful.

“We stood by at half an hour’s notice for four days and then the time was gradually extended, and finally we were “stood down.”

My father arrived at Kildare on March 26th and came on to the Kildare Hunt Races where my horse was running in a point-to-point, but, short of exercise, it was out of condition and only came in 5th.

He wrote to my mother:

Kildare, 27.3.14.

“It has been difficult to write a letter as I have had no time to myself so far! I have now got half an hour before starting off for Newbridge. Had a smooth crossing and R. met me at the station and after a wash and brush up I went with him and had breakfast in the mess . . . then back to the hotel for a shave, etc., and off with R. by the 10.8 to Sallins (?13 miles) and then in a car about five miles to the Kildare hunt Races. “Be Early” ran in the Point-to-Point, twenty-one entries of which eleven ran. “Be Early” was 5th, being somewhat out of condition. A frosty morning turned into a cold drizzle. We didn’t get back till 6:30 p.m. and R., tea, and another walk with R. to see a place laid out for “schooling.” Drizzling off and on all yesterday and everything very miry. Dined at the mess with Major Birley. Today fine and sunny – a welcome change. Round the stables with Major Birley and lunched with him at the Mess – At 4 p.m. I am driving R. over to Newbridge where the officers are going to hear a lecture by the General (Headlam) on “Rearmament.” It is confidential and they expect to hear something about the situation as well. Everyone is taking things very calmly, and awaiting developments of the situation in London. Tonight, I am dining at the Mess as a guest of the Mess. Everyone here is very friendly and I got a very nice letter from Major Birley yesterday morning inviting me to lunch and suggesting a talk, etc., etc.

“Orders to mobilize were received on Saturday last and on Wednesday morning to demobilize.”

Next night he dined in the Mess, and wrote to my mother:

Kildare, 28.3.14.

“I was to have started his morning at 9 a.m. in the Regimentals trap to drive to Major Honner’s place twelve miles from here and see R. schooling “Be Early,” and have lunch there if fine – but a little after 7 it came on so wet, windy and cold that I could not go. R. went off riding there, very early, to have breakfast there at 8.30. The weather is a nuisance; yesterday the only decent day so far.

“I drove R. to the “lecture” yesterday afternoon and then went on to see the Curragh barracks and returned and picked him up again after it was over. Nothing was said about the situation at the lecture, only the details of some magnificent new gun they are proposing to rearm the R.A. within course of time.”

In the evening I dined at the mess as Mess Guest. There was great excitement among the subalterns – about the Grand National only! – because some of them had made £20 unexpectedly on a most unlikely horse.

“Everyone is taking the situation absolutely calmly and I wish some of the Radical mischief-makers could have seen what was really going on in these wicked messes here. The subalterns are much tickled by the suggestions in the Radical papers that they are all aristocrats with from £400 to £1,000 a year of their own.

“On Thursday morning there was some surprise at the way the Government had repudiated Colonel Seeley and the Army Council . . .”

The Government spokesmen prevaricated; nothing more was ever intended than to keep law and order; no artillery was mobilized; no live ammunition was loaded into the limbers and wagons; we had disobeyed orders and there was a mutiny, etc. In fact, we had disobeyed no orders. We had been given a choice of alternatives and because we had taken one, we were blackguarded. One of our officers also found out that the King had not made the statement attributed to him, but it had been put in without his knowledge and he was furious. We were disgusted at the government’s duplicity.

The S. of S., the C.I.G.S. and the Adjutant General, all of whom had signed Goffy’s paper, resigned.

After all this excitement had died down, we resumed our normal occupations. I went on with schooling my horse, and in a 4-ball golf match on the Royal Curragh Club’s Course, Henry

Boyd and I defeated the Irish Champion, Lionel Munn, and a future champion, J.D.

MacCormack, a noted long driver. I was pleased because I found I could hold my own with him.

Officers had to pass tests in revolver shooting. Besides the usual firing on the range, we had a mounted test when we had to gallop past four figure targets and put a shot in each. At that time, I had a self-cocking Webley-Fosbery .45 revolver. We all collected at the starting point and the test began. I was riding “Be Early.” When my turn came, I galloped to the first target, fired a shot, which so alarmed my horse that she whipped round, and I found that I was pointing my revolver, fully cocked, at the crowd at the starting point. I have never seen a mounted party disperse so quickly! After this I had to ride a quiet battery horse for the mounted tests.

I had my ride at Punchestown. “Be Early” had high and rather tender withers, so instead of a weight cloth, I carried the lead weights in the pockets of my waistcoat. This was a mistake, because in the race they hammered against my ribs and almost winded me. she was inclined to jump to the left, and no wishing to interfere with her mouth, I usually countered this by giving her a tap on the left side of the neck with my whip as she was about to take off. But on coming to mount, I found that my groom had left the whip behind and there was not time to borrow one, so I had to ride without. There are some sharp right turns on the Punchestown Course and, sure enough, at the “up jump” past the stands where one has to turn right immediately after landing, the crowd there gave very little room and my horse went into them. By the time I had righted her I was well last, but she soon made up the ground and at the “big double” bank I was with the leaders. I then took a pull to ease her for the run in and was lying close behind coming to the last fence. Here some of the excited crowd ran onto the course, causing “Be Early” to shy, so we took the last fence at an angle losing distance, and I could do no better than come in third.

Immediately after the race I was offered 100 Guineas for “Be Early” but I refused, hoping to win the race the next year when I would ride her better.

One of our Brigade subalterns, Maxwell of the 11th Battery, had a rather ugly, Roman-nosed horse that was a good jumper, and Maxwell did well with him at several shows. One day when the horse was being schooled loose over jumps in the riding school, he finished by jumping the doors, about seven feet high, and trotted back to his stable none the worse. How he managed to get through the narrow space between the top of the door and the roof above it was a mystery.

That summer there was a little trouble with the Irish Nationalists, or Home Rulers, but nothing like as serious as the Sinn Fein troubles later. Some troopers were mishandled, and there had been one incident when a crowd attacked a marching column with stones, and one or two of the rear rank men had fired back causing a casualty or two.

“20th July, 1914.

R.A. Mess, Kildare

“Events seem to be coming to a crisis here. Hewson, who has just returned from the North, says that the Ulstermen cannot be kept under control much longer. All round here the Nationalists are drilling. We see them especially on Sundays. They are a very rough lot, and on Sunday’s march from public house to public house, and march home rolling drunk. It won’t be hard for them to start a row. Everyone round here is getting anxious about them. Apparently, they imagine they are giving some assistance to the Government, and will expect a reward afterwards. If they don’t get it there may be trouble. So wherever one looks events seem to be coming to a head. This rotten Government has let us in for a pretty mess, as we will probably be called upon to keep order. The Nationalists seem to have some money at their disposal, but so far have few arms.

“I will write again if there is any change in the situation.

“What the landlords here are afraid of is that there will be a repetition of ’98, when the rough element burnt all the country houses.

“We have a little rain lately, which has made the going much soften, and improved the golf course, but more is still badly wanted.

“There will probably be no hunting next season, on account of home rule, which will be a great loss to the country. It will also stop all steeple chasing, etc. The small owners say they will allow no soldiers to ride over their land, and as two-thirds of the fields are soldiers it will stop all hunting.

“We are busy training for the Glen at present. We go up on the 30th.”

Chapter II

AUGUST 1914

The situation in Europe had been gradually coming to the boil for War. Germany was adopting a more and more threatening attitude. On June 28th the Sarajevo Incident occurred in which the Austrian heir to the throne was murdered by a Serbian. Austria sent an ultimatum to Serbia, and then declared War on her. This brought in Russia which was allied to Serbia. Germany, allied to Austria then came in. France, allied to Russia, was next involved. Germany launched an offensive in the west and invaded Belgium on August 1st. We were allied to Belgium and gave Germany an ultimatum to withdraw. She refused and we declared War on her on August 4th. It was not unexpected, and came almost as a relief from the intolerable situation. We were anxious to get to grips with Germany and put an end to the brow-beating and bullying. We had great confidence in the French Army, and felt that the long service, volunteer British Army was much superior to the short service, conscript Germans.

At the end of July, the advanced party from our brigade under Adjutant had gone over to Glen Imaal to prepare for our annual Practice Camp. I was in the Brigade office acting as assistant adjutant when the "Preparatory" telegram for mobilization arrived late one evening. I could not get hold of the Colonel, so on my own ordered our advanced party back.

"30th July, 1914.

R.A. Mess, Kildare

"The situation apparently is very serious here now. We are ready to mobilize at a moment's notice. All officers on leave have been recalled and no more leave is to be granted. We have been studying mobilization regulations, so that everything will go off smoothly. We were to have gone up to the Glen today, but that has been cancelled and we are to remain here at present.

“Events in Dublin seem fairly quiet now. The K.O.S.B.’s daren’t leave their barracks, so it will be difficult to get them out of Dublin. The East Surreys, who were in camp at the Curragh, have gone up to Dublin at very short notice. No one knows why.

“I have been doing Adjutant while our Adjutant was at Glen from Tuesday till this morning. I had to get all arrangements for the brigade mobilization ready yesterday.”

“3rd August, 1914.

R.A. Mess, Kildare

“I cannot think what the Government is playing at. If we are going to do any good in this War, we should have mobilized some time ago Apparently the Government is afraid. Tonight, a naval battle has been reported between our fleet and the Germans, and the Germans are in full retreat.

“We are all ready to mobilize, and are expecting an order every day, but none comes. There are various rumors about it:

1. That France has asked us to stand aside.
2. That the Government is afraid of its “peace at any price” party.
3. That it depends on what Italy does.
4. That we will only act if Belgium is invaded.
5. That we are waiting for our fleet to clear the North Sea

“The Nationalists, it appears, are going to play the game. They have promised to help keep the peace for the moment.

“P.S. I fail to see what chance Germany will have in this War, with Russia and France to deal with. Her only chance lies in very vigorous and quick action. The French Army is better than hers, but apparently has not been got ready quite so soon.”

There is a report that if we mobilize, we shall go to the East coast of England, ready to move across as soon as the coast is clear.

On the declaration of War mobilization was ordered.

“4th August, 1914.

R.A. Mess, Kildare

“War is now inevitable. We are mobilizing. The evening papers report a naval battle in the North Sea; and also, that two German liners with Prince Adelbert and two million in specie have been captured. The mobilization order came out yesterday and reservists start coming in tomorrow.

“There is no excitement here as we have been expecting this order for days.

“At present the future is altogether uncertain. We don’t know our destination for certain.

“All our time will be full up for the next few days getting ready.

“Write to me and let me know the situation in England.”

Mobilization proceeded with the utmost smoothness, thanks to the care we had taken in preparing the mobilization scheme and keeping it up to date. All the horses needed to mobilize the Cavalry and Artillery brigades were collected at the Curragh Race Course under Major Honner. “Cully” Buckle, captain of the 11th Battery, was over there at once picking the best for our brigade.

We had a magnificent lot, including several thoroughbreds and hunters. A good many had come straight off grass and it needed a little time to get them fit for work. Teams were made up of outriders detailed. We also had two splendid heavy draught horses for one of our G.S. wagons from Guinness’s brewery in Dublin. We called them “Lager” and “Pilsener,” and they could have pulled anything.

“5th August, 1914.

R. A. Mess, Kildare

“We are pushing on here as fast as we can, and are at it all day long. We ought, as soon as we are ready, to push off straight to Belgium. We ought to be ready by Monday. We might move on Sunday. Do you think that you could come over for a day? There is no chance of my seeing you before I go, otherwise.

“We are only allowed to take 25 pounds of kit into the field with us. It is a problem to know what to take. One complete change comes to that amount nearly.

“We hope the War will not be a long one. It can’t last very long owing to financial and food considerations Some people say it will be over in six months.

“Our letters on service will be very strictly censored, so I don’t know when they, or how much of them will reach you. At any rate I hope to see you at the end of the War.”

“7th August, 1914

R.A. Mess, Kildare

“Horses and men arriving in large number today. Have had no time for meal. Probably ready to move Monday.”

Our reservists joined, and a fine lot they were, many of them most respectably dressed in dark suits and bowler hats. They were soon fitted with uniforms and kit.

By August 9th we were completely mobilized, and the Colonel inspected the whole Brigade in Field Service Marching Order on the barrack square.

In the middle of it all we had to be inoculated against typhoid. We queued up and were each quickly given the whole dose in one go. The Major refused to be done. He said that he was so pickled with alcohol that no germ would attack him! But he ordered a parade. He was an unfortunate business. We were all feeling pretty bad, my arm, I know, was very stiff, and many men fainted. However, next day nearly all had recovered. The intensive training went on, with some long marches in full field service marching order. The horses soon settled down, and the battery looked a grand sight.

I discussed the situation with my two Nos. 1, Sergeants Prior and Edmundson. I told them that the Germans were centrally placed and would be able to throw their weight first against one

side and then the other. Hence it would take some time to defeat them, and the War might be a long one. But they did not believe me and in their opinion the Russian “steam roller” and the efficient French Army and ourselves would soon squeeze the life out of the Germans. We should all be home by Christmas. This opinion was also held by many senior officers.

My father again came over, but I was too busy to seem much of him. He wrote to my mother:

“8th September, 1914.

Railway Hotel, Kildare

“I arrived in Kildare at 1:0 p.m. yesterday and found Rory very fit and very busy. If it hadn’t been for several strokes of luck I shouldn’t have been here yet! They told me at Cambridge before lunch and attain at 6.30 p.m. that the service to Ireland was all right, and the guard on the train to Bletchley told me that he had wired on and the connecting train would be kept back as we were late. At Bletchley the railway officials said the 8.00 p.m. from Euston had been taken off that night and no trains from Euston, except the Irish Mail, would leave Euston till after midnight, owing to extensive military movements in various directions. The problem was to catch the Irish Mail somewhere if possible. A train was due to leave for Northampton at 9.25 and we actually got off at 9.35. After a wait there, there was a train for Rugby where I arrived at 11.30. The railway people said the Irish Mail had passed $\frac{3}{4}$ hour before . . . (but) the train for Holyhead (for the North Wall boat) would perhaps arrive at 1.40 a.m. and stop for $\frac{1}{2}$ a minute to pick up a pilot to help the driver who was not acquainted with the line from Rugby to Holyhead – otherwise it would not have stopped there (1st stroke of luck). They popped me in, and I got a side to myself . . . There were a certain number of troops in the train. I managed to get a 2 hours’ doze (all the sleep I had till 5.00 p.m. yesterday afternoon). We reached Holyhead at 6.0 a.m. and found it very wet and stormy. The boat, the “Scotia,” the smallest on the line I was told, was fairly packed. About 1,000 troops of sorts came on board and we were off at 7.0 a.m. and arrived at North Wall (Dublin) at 11.00 a.m. We got a few others . . . The last hour was under the lee of Ireland and comparatively smooth.

“(The 11th Battery has just passed with their new teams going very well) . . .

“(11.45 a.m. Have been to the Station and got the Sunday edition of the “Irish Times.” There is a notice in it that “in consequence of mobilization” the L. & N.W.R.

have suspended their passenger service between Kingston and Holyhead, and North Wall and Holyhead, till further notice. How shall I be able to get back again!)

“Having arrived at North Wall the problem was how to get on to Kildare. There was a train standing there which would be passing Kildare, but a barrier was thrown across it and it was announced that only troops would be allowed to go by it . . . the military were in command of the station and trains and I had better take a care to Kingsbridge and try my luck there. I went to an officer (the station was full of troops) and trotted out the wallets for Rory (I had asked my father to try to get some to attach to the saddle of my second horse) as an urgent reason for getting on at once and he said to find an officer with a white band on his arm with “R.T.O.” on it. I found him . . . and he promptly said he would get me into the train. He took me to the barrier which now had a crowd of people about twelve deep and plunged through them and then came back and said it was arranged and I was passed in – the only civilian in the train. This extensive movement to Ireland is of Reservists, etc., who are being poured into Ireland to take the place of Regulars who are being sent off. We got off about 12.00 and reached Kildare about 1.00. There had been rumors all the way from Bletchley that the troops had left Kildare, and it was not till I asked the R.T.O. on the platform at Kildare that I could get definite information that no troops had yet left and that R.’s battery was still there . . . There was one car only at the Station but the driver (Irish like) had left the horse tethered to the railing and disappeared . . . He was fetched and we made a start. I stopped at the Hotel and found R. had engaged a room for me (jolly lucky to get one as the Hotel is full up with officers – and two ladies, relations of officers).

“(The 52nd Battery has just passed with its new teams, one team rather obstreperous just opposite this gate, but got on at last).

“I drove on to the Barracks to R.’s quarters, and a man went off on a bicycle and retrieved R. who seemed mightily pleased that I had turned up. He was delighted to get the wallets and socks and said the cardigan would also be useful . . .

“The Mess has been dismantled and that entrance closed up and each Battery is messing separately, the 80th in Major Birley’s quarters. After a wash and brush up in R.’s quarters I went in with him to lunch and all six officers of the Battery were there.

“After lunch I went out to see the new horses being accustomed to their new work, for the first time. These are all the horses that have just been requisitioned.

“(The 52nd Battery has just passed back again going very well).

“They were first harnessed and sent about without guns, etc., to get them acquainted with the new harness . . . then brought back and harnessed to the guns. Soon the whole square was a mass of guns circling about all over the place. Some teams took to their new work very kindly; others were ‘cavorting’ and requiring great persuasion to

work together. This morning the Batteries are out with them going about the roads, and there is to be a parade at 1.30. It is wonderful what has been done in less than 24 hours to get them into working order. Some of the horses have apparently never been in harness before.

“R. has sold “Be Early” to the Government for £70, but keeps her as his charger, and he has also a 2nd charger – one of the new lot . . .

“R. is coming to dinner tonight and may bring another of the officers with him. He has too much to do for me to see any more of him till dinner time . . .

“The problem now is how to get back again.”

Captain Bartholomew left us to become Staff Captain, R.A., and was replaced by Captain Higgon. There were changes in other batteries, too.

There was an officers’ club at the Curragh at which we used to entertain to tennis, dinners and dances the people who had been so kind to us. After mobilization we were allowed there for a last dance before we went abroad. This was our “Waterloo ball.” Captain ‘Cully’ Buckle, who seemed to have second sight, told Miss Honner that few of the officers dancing that night would return alive and foretold ill-treatment of our prisoners by the Germans.

I wrote home:

R. A. Mess, Kildare

“I am writing this late in the evening of our last night. We move at 6.30 tomorrow morning. We leave Dublin on Tuesday, and we shall probably go by sea the whole way, but nothing has been told us yet. I will try and send a note when it is, but we probably shan’t know till we start off in the boat.

“Our full address is: c/o War Office
80th Battery,
XVth Brigade R.F.A.
5th Divisional Artillery,

Second Army,
Expeditionary Force

“Letters will be taken to the War Office and forwarded from there. We have to get up at 3.30 tomorrow in order to get ready for our move.”

The following is from an account I wrote when home wounded in September 1914.

At 6.30 a.m. on August 16th we marched out of barracks in route for Dublin, being played out by an Irish Nationalist band, a generous gesture which we much appreciated. The day was warm and sunny, and we halted at Naas to water and feed. After a march of 20 miles, we reached Rathcoole soon after one, and here we bivouacked in some fields beyond the village. After seeing the horses watered and fed and the men at their meal, we took our luncheon basked off the gun limber and had our luncheon. The batteries came through their first march very well. That night we slept under a hedge covered by our great coats. The next day we moved off at 1 a.m. and took again the high road to Dublin. After going ten miles we reached the outskirts as it was getting light and there was a heavy mist lying over the country. We clattered along the cobbled streets and took the turning for North Wall. Going across a swing bridge our precious G.S. wagon nearly came to disaster. Half way across one of Guinness's horses slipped and fell, and all our efforts to make him rise were unavailing owing to the slipperiness of the foothold. However, we put blankets down and finally got the wagon across. We reached our forming up place on a sandy waste at 5.30 a.m., and after watering our horses from a tap (a long job), we tied them to the guns and wagons and after seeing the men fed, we sat down to our own breakfast of bully beef, biscuits and coffee.

We now surveyed our surroundings. Beside the quay were lying several transports, and the work of embarkation was busily going on.

We and the 52nd were to embark on the “Cornishman” while the 11th and headquarters went in another ship. The “Cornishman” of 6,000 tons had originally been an Atlantic liner. Afterwards she had been converted into a grain boat. She had been commandeered at Liverpool and the whole work of fitting her up as a troop ship had been accomplished in a week.

There was a fair-sized crowd at the gates of the quay, but none were allowed inside.

The 52nd was the first to embark. The 80th did not start till about 11 a.m. after waiting two hours at the quayside. I was in charge of the 2nd half Battery.

By 12 noon the right half was embarked, so the Major, Hewson and Mirrlees went off to lunch in Dublin. The guns and wagons were put in the hold, and the horses were in two levels between decks. When the Major returned, Captain Higgon and I went to lunch at the L.N.W.R. Hotel at North Wall, and had a haircut. On our return the embarkation was nearly complete. By 5 p.m. the last carriage and horse was on board.

“17th August 1914.

Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin

“We are soon off. Have been embarking all morning, and got a few minutes off now. Had lunch in Dublin. Going by sea all the way. Left Kildare 6.30 a.m., yesterday, bivouacked twenty-two miles from Kildare. Left at 2.00 a. m, reached docks 5.30 a.m.”

General Headlam, the C.R.A., congratulated us on the discipline of the men, the way they had worked and the rapidity of our embarkation.

The first transports to go contained infantry. As soon as they started all the ships and the harbor's sirens set up a loud screeching in salutation. The 11th and headquarters went next, and we sailed about 7 receiving the same kind of send-off.

The officers took up their quarters on the boat deck. The luncheon basket provided all our meals on board (except one ship's dinner), and we bedded down on our valises spread out on the deck. Close by was one of the funnels which peppered us and our meals with soot (quite a new flavoring).

“18th August, 1914.

We woke to find ourselves in mid ocean. It was another warm, fine day. We passed along the south coast of England, and the red Devonshire cliffs looked beautiful in the early morning light. Shaving and washing presented difficulties which were overcome. At 10 a.m. the captain went the rounds accompanied by C.C. troops on board. At the same parade were issued out “comforts to the troops:” an apple, a packet of cigarettes and some chocolate. The King's and Kitchener's messages were also read out.

The 80th Battery occupied the aft portion of the ship. We visited the horses and the men's quarters. In spite of the flat calm some men felt ill, perhaps from the smell of the oil from the engines. After a lunch of bully and biscuits we settled down to enjoy our afternoon. That evening we had a swell dinner in the state room, given by the ship's officers.

“19th August, 1914.

Next day we went through the same rounds. The wireless had been rigged up on the ship the previous evening, and we got a morning “newspaper,” and wireless messages from the front were continually coming in during the voyage and were posted up for all to read. The atmosphere of the horse lines “’tween decks” had by now become somewhat tainted, and it required a strong head to keep below for long.

We arrived outside Havre about 6 p.m. and there saw part of the 28th Brigade on a boat which overtook us. After hanging around til 10 o’clock we were boarded by a pilot and steered for harbor.

On the quays were crowds of people who ran along beside us. Our men sang them “Songs of Araby,” “It’s a Long, long way to Tipperary,” etc. The Marseillaise rendered on a mouth-organ brought forth storms of cheers.

We berthed about 10 pm. The 52nd disembarked first and we started about midnight. Two electrically worked cranes assisted us, one landing the guns and carriages out of the hold, and the other the horses from the lower deck in a horse box. The Frenchies fairly made those cranes move Guns and horses were swinging from the ends of chains like pendulums. Several times there were nearly collisions in the air between the two, and then the jabber between the two cranes men and a sort of foreman was terrific. However, they were disembarked without accident, and about 2 a.m. the whole Battery formed up in a sort of huge grain store. Here we had a grateful cup of coffee at a stall, the owner refusing payment.

One of our horses had been so badly injured on the boat that we had to leave it behind on the Quay in the charge of a vet. This was our only casualty of the whole voyage.”

“20th August, 1914.

As soon as we got our route from the Embarkation Officer, we started off about 3 a.m. for our “rest camp.” We marched through the cobbled streets of Havre, guided by a boy scout, and the rattle of our carriages brought out the inhabitants on their balconies and in their doors in their “nighties!” We reached No. 5 camp about 5.30 a.m. where tents were already up for our use, and after watering and feeding the horses, turned into our tents and went to sleep for an hour or two. We then had breakfast, groomed the horses, etc.

Crowds of civilians soon gathered round the camp. They were intensely interested in everything and admired our equipment and horses. They quickly, especially the fair sex, made friends with our men, and I noticed many cap badges and buttons were missing.

A large box of maps arrived, but none were issued. After lunch I had to go off and reconnoiter the road to the entraining place (Point 5 as it was officially called) in order to guide the Battery there after dark. The route was not exactly easy to follow, winding in and out among the docks, and the sketch map given me had none of the names of the streets marked on it.

We moved off at 11 that night. In spite of my reconnaissance, I had difficulty in leading the battery along the right road after my horse had once slipped up on the cobbles, thrown me and broken my electric torch which I sued to read the names of the streets. Everything seemed to have altered in the pitch dark. However, we made our point without mishap about 1 a.m. Then we started entraining.

The horses and most of the men went into the large trucks marked in French “40 men or 8 horses.’ The horses faced inwards four at one end of the truck and four at the other, making

a convenient space in the middle for the “stablemen” and forage. We lay down in our carriages and on waking up the train had started.

“21st August, 1914.

We three subalterns were in the 1st class compartment, with the major and Captain in another on one side and the B.S.M. and B.Q.M.S. in another on the other side.

We fetched up at Rouen about 10 a.m. for an hour. Here we watered the horses from barrels placed alongside the train and gave them a feed. We bought some bread and a French newspaper, and tea was made for the men.

Our next halt was Amiens, where we watered and fed again. Buckets this time were placed along the line, from which we watered the horses. At the latter place some men nearly got left behind. They were filling some buckets with water when the train started. Running at full speed they leapt on to the footboard of the rear coach and scrambled on board.

As the Major and Captain had the luncheon basket in their compartment, and there was no corridor, we had to get our meals by walking along the footboard from one compartment to another while the train was moving.

On the journey Major Birley explained the situation to us. An Army of 360,000 Germans was advancing South from Brussels. The general plan was that we were to hold it frontally and two French armies on our right were to attack it in flank. The British Army was to be in the center taking up a line from Binche to Conde through Mons (as in the sketch below), with another French army on our left.

[Gen. Div.] [5 Div.] [3 Div.] [2 Div.] [1 Div.]

2nd Corps

1st Corps

A French Army of 360,000 men was in reserve in the woods near Charleroi. It had not yet been discovered by the Germans. It was to advance, attack the enemy in the flank and drive it into the sea. The Germans had no idea that the British would be in action so soon, so, instead of falling on the flank of the French as they intended, they would have to make a frontal attack on the French and British. It was too late now for the Germans to alter their plans.

This was the situation and plan as told to us. In effect the results were quite different, as will be related later!

Our destination by rail was, I believe, to be St. Quentin, but on the way, it was changed to Landrecies. We arrived there soon after 10 p.m., and at once detrained. It was very dark. There were only a few lamps at intervals. The trucks with the guns on board were backed into a siding with a platform, and were soon got off, a section at a time. The Brigade Ammunition Column, on the same train, was also unloaded here. The horses had to be landed on to the line itself, and for this purpose there were three gangways provided. This was a long job. Harnessing up in the dark was also not too easy. As soon as each driver had harnessed up his two horses, he took them to the guns or wagons, and hooked in when ready. About midnight we moved off to join the rest of the Brigade. On the way we had to cross the line, and here the G.S. wagon nearly came to grief. In the dark it missed the crossing. There was a deep pit just behind the line, and one of its wheels went into it. The wagon stuck, and the rest of the Battery went off in the dark unaware of the trouble, leaving me with the wagon. It was saved after some exertion.

The night was absolutely pitch black, and it was impossible to see the vehicle in front even when a yard behind it. Fortunately, we caught up the rest of the battery about half a mile on. We had to march on the right of the road, of course. The night, besides being dark was very stuffy. After marching about three miles, we pulled into an orchard on the left of the road. Several of our vehicles tried conclusions with the apple trees which could not be seen in the darkness, much to the detriment of the latter.

We unhooked the horses, and, after wandering about in the dark for some time found a pond by the side of the road. A kind inhabitant turned up with a lantern by means of which we were able to superintend the watering.

On returning to the orchard the whole Battery had a drink of hot cocoa, which had been brewed in our absence.

After resting for half an hour, we hooked in the teams again and moved off as dawn was breaking along a typically French popular lined road. [See Sketch 2]

“22nd August, 1914.

As it got lighter, we could see the country consisted of large turnip and wheat fields with no fences to speak of. We were given small pears and other fruit by the inhabitants as we went along. At 8 a.m. we caught up the rest of brigade near the straight Roman road by Le Cateau. Close to here, I passed Major Walker, R.E. Much of the Division was already here.

After watering our horses, we bivouacked in a small field and went to sleep for an hour or so.

It was here on the night before than an accident happened to the Brigade staff. A small advanced party under Younger, the brigade orderly officer, had gone on ahead. They were fired on by a French sentry on the railway bridge west of Le Cateau. They galloped back, and were fired on by our own men. One man was killed and the other badly wounded. He afterwards died.

At 2 p.m. after lunch, the Division continued its march to Dour, twenty-six miles to the North. We started off in a thunderstorm, which was a daily afternoon occurrence. We had a long, slow, weary, and hot march along the Forest de Mormal. The horses suffered from the heat, and two were so exhausted they had to be shot.

On the way we passed detachments of our infantry. They informed us that our cavalry and cyclists were in touch with the Germans, and the cyclists had been "cut up" near Ath, north of Mons, but our cavalry patrols had had some successful mounted actions against the German Uhlans. We were told that whatever happened, we were not to block the way of the cavalry as the Division was crossing over to the left flank. There were checks at crossroads to allow cavalry to pass from right to left so progress was slow.

In some of the villages the telegraph poles and light standards were of concrete, which were not so artistic as our wooden poles and metal standards.

There was much aeroplane activity, though whether they were ours or German we did not know. The infantry fired at them all impartially.

Enthusiastic country people lined both sides of the road and pressed fruit, chocolate, cigars, cigarettes, flowers and wine on us. In exchange, our men gave them badges and buttons. Some had the badges of all the regiments that had already passed.

I rode my two horses alternately, as I had to be continuously riding up and down my section watching the teams, and it was exhausting for them with the heat and dust. About 8 p.m. after a march since the night before of thirty-three miles we reached our bivouac at Dour, a few miles west of Mons. Our brigade bivouacked in a ploughed field surrounded by houses and slag heaps. It was a mining district. Crowds of inhabitants swarmed over the field, and one good lady promised to bring us milk and eggs in the morning. She was as good as her word. A German officer prisoner passed us in a car going south. He was dirty and unshaved. There was much execration and fist shaking on the part of the inhabitants! The townspeople here were most kind to us. They gave us fruit, chocolate, cigars, etc., which was as we had gone too far for the ration supplies to reach us.

No maps had been issued because we moved so far and so fast that we were off one after the other. They were still in their boxes in the first line transport. But we knew where we were by asking the inhabitants and from sign posts.

We had a hot dinner, and a thunderstorm coming on about 10 p.m. we dived into our "bivvies" and were soon asleep. My little bivouac tent came in handy as we had some heavy rain that night.

"23rd August, 1914.

The next day, Sunday, we were wakened at dawn by the church bells, and proceeded with the usual routine of camp duties. Everything seemed so peaceful and quiet it was hard to realize we were going to fight. We had an excellent breakfast, buying eggs, milk, butter and coffee off the inhabitants. Many were going to church in their best clothes.

We had an inspection of sights, guns, rifles, etc. After stables we settled down to enjoy ourselves. One incident I remember. Some men came up and asked to be given their pay in order to buy tobacco! They evidently thought we carried their pay about with us.

There was again a good deal of aeroplane activity. In the distance we could see German shells bursting and one or two fell in the town of Dour, but it was not sufficient to deter the inhabitants from going to church. There was sound of rifle fire to the northeast.

News reached us that Major Holland, one of our divisional battery commanders, had been killed by a rifle bullet through the head while out on reconnaissance.

About 10 a.m. Major Birley and Mirrlees rode off to reconnoiter for a battery position to support the infantry who were on the canal bank on the left flank of the 5th Division. These were the K.C.S.B.s who were having a very warm time of it. Besides the shelling along the canal the Germans had pushed up a field gun behind a hedge within 500 yards of a house they were holding and were destroying the house. A few shells fell round our reconnoitering party, who were unable to find a suitable position in this area. The country was absolutely flat cut up by ditches. A good deal of rifle fire could also be heard to the Northeast.

“23rd August, 1914.

I scribbled a short note to my father:

“In can write the names of no places, or give dates, otherwise I will try and give an account of what we’ve done.

“On Wednesday night we disembarked. It was carried through quickly and without a hitch. We spent the day in a ‘rest’ camp. On Thursday night we entrained and

spent the day in a train. On Friday night we detrained and marched twelve miles to a bivouac. We then marched another eighteen to here in the afternoon of Sat.”

My idea of distances was a little wrong!

The Major then got orders to go out with the Colonel on reconnaissance at 1 o'clock. While they were away, we had luncheon. This was our last proper meal for some days.

On the Major's return at 2 o'clock he gave orders for us to move. We harnessed up and moved off into the village in rear of the 11th Battery. We halted in a field in the middle of the village close to Dour church. Here all vehicles were left behind and we took forward the gunners dismounted. We marched through the village and turned into a field with a railway running at the bottom. The battery position was along the hedge bordering the railway, facing northwest, and on a forward slope. 100 yards behind us at the top of the slope was a factory with a tall chimney. We cut gaps in the hedge and dug the gun pits in such a way that the top of the hedge was to be level with the top of the gun shield. The field was of turnips so digging was fairly easily. We also made gaps in the hedge on the other side of the railway to be ready for an advance, filling in the ditches on each side of the railway with logs. The O.P. was the factory chimney.

To the north our view was bounded by a hedge 500 yards away, and beyond it we could see the high ground north of the canal crowned by woods which was in the hands of the Germans.

Infantry were digging in along the hedge 500 yards in front and others along the hedge on the other side of the railway. There was heavy gun, machine gun and rifle fire to our right front (i.e., north of us). [See Sketch 3]

In the late afternoon a train of seven engines retired down the railway turning southwards through Dours. I was expecting them to be shelled at any moment, but the Germans allowed them to get away.

As soon as it was dusk, we went back to the Battery and brought it up nearer. Here we had a small supper of hard-boiled eggs and bread.

When it was dark, we brought the Battery onto the position. The guns were then brought in and placed, each gun having its wagon body on one side and the wagon limber on the other.

Behind us a 60-pdr. Battery in a wood yard on the crest of the hill was firing over our heads toward the north. We could see the shells bursting in a village which was on fire. In fact, the whole horizon was lit up by villages and farms on fire. Behind us, the arc lights of the factory and the lights in the town were on all night making it almost as bright as day.

We did some more digging, and then lay down for a couple of hours' sleep.

“24th August, 1914.

When we awoke the next morning about 3.30, we found that the infantry who had been holding the trench in front of us had left without our knowing. Rifle fire opened up on our left, and a trooper galloped up to me in the left section to say that the Germans were only a few hundred yards from us, and the cavalry would hold the farm 100 yards to our left front to cover our withdrawal. I passed the message on to the Major and soon the order came to withdraw. The teams came up, hooked in, and we retired at a trot. It was disappointing leaving our position after

all the work we had done on it. We heard afterwards that the Germans were into our position not long after we had left it.

Our rendezvous was Dour church, and while there was a messenger arrived with orders for us to come under command of the 27th Brigade R.F.A. Evidently reinforcements were needed further east. A readjustment to the line had been made. The 3rd Division was withdrawn from the Salient round Mons to a position South of the town, and other formations were conforming by slight withdrawals. The Major and Hewson went on to meet Col. Onslow of the 27th and I brought on the Battery. There was some heavy shelling to the east just ahead of us.

After we had gone about two miles in an easterly direction through the streets of the town, we descended a steep hill into Little Wasmes and turned northwards. We could see that Wasmes itself was being very heavily shelled by the Germans. I received a message from the Major to bring the Battery “into a square with a fountain in it,” and to wait there for further orders. As I was advancing an infantry officer informed me that the square was being heavily shelled and advised me to wait. Luckily the shelling stopped just as we entered it. Here we found a company of infantry taking cover under the houses on the north side. The Mairie on the south side had several shell holes in it. We just had room to form up in line at half interval.

There was a furious fight going on not far to the north of us, and plenty of bullets were whistling over our heads and hitting the tops of the houses.

The Major came back with Col. Onslow. They had ridden up a railway embankment about 300 yards to the north of us and had found themselves in our front line. They were greeted by a heavy fusillade from the Germans about 300 yards away. The Battery could not be brought into action where originally intended as the position was already over-run.

We retired up the hill again, the Major and Col. Onslow going on to look for another position in the back gardens of some houses. I halted the Battery in the main street at the top of the hill. I found also halted there a section of guns under Lieut. Chapman of the 27th Brigade. He told me that he had been in action that morning in the front-line trenches and had taken on the Germans at 70 yards range as they topped a small bank in front of his guns. He had wrought tremendous execution in their dense masses, legs, arms and heads flying in all directions. They had finally turned machine guns onto him, and he had got out with a few casualties. Chapman said that they had nothing to eat since Saturday (it was now Monday) so I gave him some ration biscuits. Luncheon on Sunday had been our last proper meal (and was to be the last proper meal for some days). When riding through the towns and villages the inhabitants had very kindly given us bread and raw eggs, which was something to go on We knocked the tops off the eggs and drank them.

Col. Onslow now rode up to me and said the situation had changed. He pulled a chair out of a house, sat down and wrote out fresh orders for the Major, and a note to the C.O. of the K.O.S.B.s for a platoon to escort us because of our exposed position. The inhabitants were now beginning to leave their houses and retire, and the owner of the chair tried to seize it from the Colonel while he was writing his orders, but he would have none of it; so, the man locked up his house and withdrew. The Colonel said we were to come into action at once, so I moved off the Battery and went on to give the orders to the Major in the back garden of some houses. He told me to bring the Battery into action in an orchard behind the houses, to fire almost due east over a park with trees in a valley below us and towards some slag heaps beyond. After doing this the Major gave me orders for the platoon. Our left flank being the most exposed he wanted protection from that side. I then went off to get the platoon. The K.O.S.B. Colonel grumbled that

his men were very tired and needed a rest. The subaltern detailed said that they had had a very bad time on Sunday and had lost heavily. The Germans had pushed a field gun up to within 500 yards of them and blown to bits the house which they were holding. German artillery fire along the canal bank which the K.O.S.B.s were lining had also been very accurate and heavy. I told the subaltern what was needed and he sent patrols down the roads to the North of us, keeping most of his platoon concentrated and in reserve near the Battery. They were not called upon to defend us.

On my return I found the battery in action and firing over open sights. The target was German's massing near a slag heap nearly due east and moving south. The range was 2,400 yards. We also had to keep under observation the park in the valley below us in case the Germans tried to advance through it.

The situation was rather puzzling. We must now be on the right flank of the 5th Division. What had happened to the 3rd Division? Had it retired, or had the Germans driven a wedge between the 5th and 3rd Divisions?

My section was on the right. The honor of firing the first round in the Battery would have been ours, but No. 1 gun could not clear a tree in front of it, so the center section had been used for ranging.

Our field of view was a good deal blocked by numerous slag heaps.

The Church on the left of the Battery was a R.A.M.C. dressing station, and the Union Jack and Red Cross flag hung from the steeple. [See Sketch 4]

We had not been long in action before the Germans replied. One salvo fell short of the Battery and shortly after another over us, nearly in our wagon-lines. They seemed to be ranging

on us. But after that shells were falling all over the place, some very near us. Perhaps they were searching for us, or they may have thought the church was an artillery O.I. and were trying to shell that. The houses round the main street were being heavily shelled, and a cloud of brick dust and shell smoke hung in the air. Our wagon lines escaped by a miracle.

I was now ordered to limber up my section and bring it into action to support the retirement of the 2nd Battalion of the K.O.Y.L.I. the captain went on to find a position taking with my Sgt. Prior. We withdrew at a trot by a gate in rear of the Battery and along the main street. This was under shellfire, and bricks were flying in all directions. One salvo fell in the street just ahead of us. We passed over the spot and turned to the right. Another shell pitched on the pavement on the right, about thirty yards ahead, filling the street with a dense yellow smoke. My horse shied at this, but I got him through. One shell pitched under one of Chapman's ammunition wagons in the road, luckily without exploding the ammunition, and knocked off and wounded the gunners on the wagon and hit all the horses, but none was killed. We had passed them when Sgt. Prior galloped up and said I had overshot the mark. Luckily the street was wide and I was able to reverse without difficulty; just in time for immediately afterwards another shell itched on the spot we had just left.

We went up a lane off the main street. The position was more or less in the open and exposed, so we unlimbered behind some houses and ran the guns up by hand to positions in rear of a low bank. The ammunition wagons were twenty yards away under cover of the houses and ammunition supply was by hand. I observed from the bank between the guns. Captain Higgon now left to rejoin the Battery.

The K.O.Y.L.I.s. were holding a slag heap about 2,000 yards to the north of us. We could tell our troops by their round flat-topped caps which appeared white in the sunlight. We

could see the K.O.Y.L.I.s. firing at something beyond them, and German shells were bursting among them with a greenish smoke.

Nearer was another slag heap with a high conical mound on which was one of our machine guns. [See Sketch 5]

We could not see much beyond the K.O.Y.L.I.s. but they were obviously in the front line and hotly engaged, so we opened fire beyond them at a range of 2,400 yards. One of our howitzer Batteries was also assisting the K.C.Y.L.I. by dropping shells beyond the slag heap.

We had only been firing a few minutes when the Germans replied, but most of their shells fell twenty or thirty yards to our left in an open field.

Soon after this the K.O.Y.L.I. began retiring by small detachments at a time, and they finally took up a position along a bank about 1,000 yards away. We kept up our shelling, but no Germans appeared to follow up the retirement.

A motor-cyclist now appeared by would not come up to the guns because he said he did not like the sound of the guns firing. I think he must have been a university man who had joined up at the beginning of the War. I went back to him, and he gave me a signal ordering me to retire. I quickly limbered up and trotted out by a lane which led round a copse in our rear as the main street was still being heavily shelled. We had to cross about 50 yards of open ground which we did at a trot, and, although in full view, not a shot was fired at us.

On rejoining the main road, we found it blocked with marching infantry, but we fitted into a gap and retired south-westwards. At every halt I rode up and down looking for the remainder of the Battery. I eventually found them ahead of me and managed to join up when the

road became a little clearer. As the country became more open, the infantry took to the fields on each side, letting the guns and transport have the road.

Some of the infantry retiring were the K.O.Y.L.I. whom we had been supporting. They said, perhaps exaggerating the help we had given, that we had done great execution upon the Germans, and if it had not been for us, they would not have got away. Some German infantry had been caught coming under a railway bridge and had been severely mauled by our shells. At this time all field guns' shells were shrapnel and, with their 360 small, round bullets ejected from the shell at the end of its flight, had a devastating effect on troops in the open. But, as we afterwards discovered, were of little use against deep trenches or concrete pill boxes.

So ended the battle of Mons as far as we were concerned. We had been extraordinarily lucky getting through without a single casualty. The main pressure had not been on us, but on the 3rd Division on our right. Later we learnt that the French retirement on our right was due to the fall of the fortress of Namur, which was quite unexpected, as it was one of the strongest fortresses of modern times. The B.E.F. thus found itself in a very perilous position with its right flank in the air.

We now began to feel very hungry. We raked up an odd biscuit or two which tasted very good, although no one would touch them a few days before.

As we retired, we passed the other two Batteries of our Brigade somewhere in the neighborhood of Elouge, in action to the west of the road, firing in a northwest direction. I could hear the range being called out, "2,400.) The Germans apparently were moving parallel to us to the west, but we on the ground were concealed from them by a slight rise in the ground. The majors of both Batteries were observing from seats on tipped up lumber poles. The 119th Battery

was also somewhere near her, and its major, Alexander, got the V.C. for withdrawing his guns under heavy fire.

We had a very slow march with frequent halts. We fed the horses whenever possible from corn-stocks gather from the fields but there was little sign of any water for them.

We turned off south towards Bavai, and about 6 p.m. came into a position of readiness facing north in a field evidently to cover the retreat through the bottle neck of Bavai, but no Germans appearing, we did not open fire. We took the opportunity to have a snack of bully beef and biscuits from our luncheon basket. We waited here an hour and then continued our retreat to an area west of Bavai. That night the British Army bivouacked on a line running roughly east and west through Bavai, with outposts on the ridge just to the north.

It was pitch dark when we reached our bivouac in an orchard. We watered our horses as best we could from a small stream at the bottom of the orchard, the first water they had had for 24 hours.

The Q.M.S. went to look for rations and forage, but there were none that night, so giving the horses a handful of oats, all that remained of their feeds, we ourselves made a small fire, raked up a tin of bully between the five of us, and baked some apples we picked off the trees; then rolling ourselves in our coats we went to sleep round the fire.

“25th August, 1914.

We had hardly gone to sleep, so it seemed, when an orderly appeared with orders to “stand to” preparatory to continuing the retreat at 4 a.m. There had been a heavy dew in the night

and we woke up rather damp. We harnessed up in the dark and at first light continued our march. This day, August 25th, our Battery was detailed as a rearguard Battery with the rearguard to the Division. We marched into Bavai and then turned southwards. The Major went on to look for a position leaving me halted in the town. An infantry officer then came up and told me that our patrols had been driven in, so I moved the Battery off and went on to find the major. We had a hospital in Bavai and the patients were escaping while they could. One officer, wounded in the leg, had procured a bicycle and was pedaling away from the column. He seemed quite cheerful, and managed to escape.

About 600 yards south of Bavai a howitzer Battery, the 37th, was in position, ready, so they said, to engage the Germans if they debouched from the town.

I found the major and reported the situation. We did not come into action, but all the way along our retirement, he carried out reconnaissances in case we should have to do so. The country was close, like parts of England, and suitable positions were few.

We had had no breakfast. We tried to procure food for the men from the houses we passed, but many were shut up, and others had no food. I obtained a raw egg at one place, and at another a couple loaves of bread which I handed to my section. But there was an abundance of fruit in the orchards which we picked at halts.

We again passed along west of the Foret de Mormal. The day was very hot and close, turning, as usual, to rain in the afternoon. The roads were choked with refugees and their carts, making our march very slow and with frequent stops. Houses were being closed as we passed and the inhabitants joined others on the road. Some of the refugees turned into the Foret. One pretty girl came out of a house and asked me where the French were, as she wished to joint them

with her party. The only French I knew of were to our east, so I pointed in that general direction. They moved off into the Foret and I hope escaped Germans advancing on the east. At every stop when we could we watered our horses with buckets from wayside streams and from the houses, and we sent parties into the fields to collect stocks of corn and hay to put down in front of the horses, and when oats were available, collected some in nose-bags. Our men at these halts plucked apples and fruit from orchard trees and gave them to the infantry as we passed them, or they passed us. Some of them had had nothing since the previous Saturday (August 22nd) and they were very tired.

Several aeroplanes came overhead. The German machines were Taubes and had the distinctive shape of a bird. They were heavily fired on by our infantry, but I saw none brought down.

A rumor reached us that the reason we had had no rations or forage for the last 3 days was because some of the A.S.C. had been cut up in Valenciennes by German cavalry. Some lorries managed to escape but most had to be burnt.

At our stops I had talks with the infantry officers near us. The attack at Mons on the 3rd and 5th Divisions had been carried out by seven German Divisions instead of two as expected. They were all full of praise for their men. Their rifle shooting was marvelous, and they had fairly slaughtered the Germans who came on in dense formations. Some had also done good work with the bayonet. They felt the need of more machine guns as they only had two a Battalion.

Small dups of rations had been left in places at the side of the road, but when we of the rearguard arrived, we found nothing left but the boxes.

Another rumor that reached us was that the chief interpreter of the Division had been caught signaling to the enemy with a flash lamp from the outpost line, and had been shot that morning.

One or two squadrons of French cavalry trotted past us. They looked very smart in their light blue uniforms and red breeches, but their horses appeared jaded, worn and thin and some had sores. They seemed to do nothing to get them watered and fed, and many, when halted, still remained sitting on their horses. Two French infantry men in their long dark blue coats with the skirts buttoned back, red trousers, black boots, and kepis, accompanied us for much of the way.

Towards the latter stages of this retreat, we became so tired that to sit down was to fall asleep at once. Even when riding it was difficult not to go to sleep and fall off. Some men riding on the vehicles of other Batteries, we were told, had fallen off when asleep and been run over. The infantry dared not take their boots off as their feet were so swollen, they would never have got them on again. They won our unbounded admiration. They had marched further and fought harder than we and had had even less to eat, yet there was not one straggler. They even sang "Tipperary!"

The rearguard was not much worried. The Germans did not press forward. Perhaps they had respect for our gun and rifle fire.

We now heard that the 4th Division had arrived and were dug in in a position near Solesmes to cover us. We were told that this was to be the last day of retreating, that we were to stand and fight in position near Le Cateau with the 1st corps on the right and the 2nd Corps on the left.

In the 2nd Corps the 5th Division on the outer flank had been crossed over to the inner flank, i.e., on the right of the Corps, with the 3rd Division now on its left.

We told our men that our retreat had been a well-designed trap to lead the Germans on to a position favorable to us so that the French could attack them in flank. (This did not happen til the Battle of the Marne). It was amusing seeing our soldiers trying to explain this to the refugees and inhabitants by signs.

We moved past Le Cateau and about 7 p.m. reached our bivouac area near the village of Reumont, passing the railways bridge near which we had assembled before starting our march to Dour, and from which the French sentry had shot at two of the advanced party of our Brigade H.Q. the Friday night before. We turned off the main road into a corn field, parked the guns and took the horses off to water at a dirty pond. A Section of the Divisional Ammunition Column was waiting at the bivouac to replenish our ammunition, and, to our great delight, some rations and forage had arrived. The “bully and biscuits” were very palatable after our long fast and the horses appreciated their oats and hay. Captain Stokes of the Army Service Corps, when we were drawing our rations, handed me a tin of marmalade, a welcome treat for our suppers.

To turn now for a minute to the general situation. The French 4th and 5th Armies which were supposed to attack the Germans advancing from Brussels in the flank, had themselves been strongly attacked by German Armies advancing from the east, and had retired. General French did not know of this for twenty-four hours, and, finding himself left “in the air” and with his right flank very exposed, ordered a general retreat. It started with the First Corps on the right which was not heavily engaged, and had then been taken up by the 3rd Division and lastly by the 5th Division.

In the retreat the two Corps became separated by the large Foret de Mormal and lost touch. In fact, on the night of the 25th the Germans penetrated into the forest and attacked part of the First corps at Landrecies.

Von Kluch's First German Army, which had been trying to outflank the French, met the British 2nd Corps head on at Mons. Thinking he had driven the British from the field, and wishing to attack the French in flank, after Mons, instead of advancing south westwards, he changed his direction to southeast. So, the situation on the night of the 25th August was like this. [See Sketch 6].

The thunder showers that had fallen during the last few hours of the march had no settled down to a steady drizzle, and as night came on it began to rain steadily. So, we were pleased when our baggage wagon came up with our sleeping bags. Someone remarked, "you can take a proper night's sleep tonight." I dived into my "bivvy" and was soon asleep. The others made bivvies of corn stocks.

"26th August, 1914.

Our night's rest was rudely disturbed by an orderly who brought a signal that we were to "Stand to" at 3 a.m. with a view to continuing the retreat. We again harnessed up in the dark and formed up. While waiting we brewed some cocoa from the luncheon basket, which was very welcome in the chilly morning. But, about dawn, the order to retreat was cancelled, and we were told that we were now going into action. The B.C.s moved off northwards to meet the Colonel, and the Adjutant brought on the Brigade. The country here was much more open and rolling than that we had been marching through the day before. We formed up in mass behind a slight ridge,

and the Adjutant pointed out where each Battery's position was to be. The Batteries moved off in the morning mist to occupy them. Two Batteries came into action, but the C.R.A. ordered all to go into action further forward to give the infantry closer support. We therefore advanced again and about 6 a.m. our Battery came into action in a turnip field in front of a field of standing corn and 100 yards behind the crest of a low ridge. We faced northeast, i.e., in the general direction of Le Cateau. The Batteries in order from the right were 11th, 80th, 37th howitzers which came under command of our brigade, and 52nd on the left. [See Sketch 7]

The ridge dipped in front of the 37th, and the 11th Battery on our right was on slightly higher ground, so we seemed to be the best off for concealment.

As the mist began to clear we could see high ground beyond the River Sells on our right flank. One of the majors asked the colonel, "who is occupying it?" and the colonel replied, "First corps." (Actually, the First Corps had continued its retreat but we did not know it at the time.)

A hundred yards ahead of us on top of the ridge the Suffolks were hastily entrenching themselves with their entrenching tools. This was the front line. On our way up we had passed the Manchester's who were digging a reserve line north of Reumont. They later put in a counter-attack to the west of us. We could not clear the crest ahead under 1,500 yards, so our support in that direction could not be very close.

Captain Bartholomew, the Staff Captain R.A., rode along the position and told us that there was going to be a big battle and there would be no retreat. (The whole of the German First Army was on the front of 2nd Corps and fairly close and some of the British formations and units

had become scattered during the retreat and out of touch, so Gen. Smith-Dorrien, commanding 2nd Corps, decided that he must stand and fight before continuing the retreat).

We dug ourselves in as best we could, and the Major called us up to the crest in front where he had an O.P. and explained the situation. The British Army was to stand and fight. The First Corps was on our right. The Second Corps was occupying a horse shoe shaped position with the 5th Division on the right, the 3rd in the center, and the 4th on the left. The Germans were known to be close to us in force. If it became necessary to give the infantry closer support, he would give me the order to bring the Battery on to the crest.

In front of us was a large town, Le Cateau. In the valley north-westwards from it ran a railway embankment on which we would put down our fire, and beyond the embankment the ground rose again to a ridge which was still hidden in mist.

Our wagon lines were just north of Reumont, near the pond where we had watered the night before.

We opened fire about 6 a.m. and registered a few targets including the railway embankment. When the mist lifted the high ground on the opposite side of the valley beyond the embankment was seen to be crowded with Germans. We opened on them with Battery fire twenty secs. At 4,000 yards gradually reducing the range as the Germans advanced. And for two hours we kept up "Battery fire five seconds" at a range of 2,400 yards on the line of the embankment which they were trying to cross. They suffered severely.

The German artillery soon opened frontally on the trench in front of us. The fire became hotter and hotter and several "overs" fell among our Batteries. One of our first casualties was Lieut. Coghlan of the 11th Battery on our right. He was killed, and I saw his body being

taken to the rear on a stretcher along the back of our position to a sunken lane. We continued to fire at the German infantry. Some of them came within rifle fire of our infantry and were wiped out.

More and more German batteries came into action, a big concentration of them being at Rambourlieux Farm which was now visible on our left flank (it had been concealed by the early morning mist) and from which they enfiladed our position. Our wagon lines near Reumont were also shelled and there were casualties among the horses.

A German aeroplane came overhead about 9 a.m. and started dropping stuff like streamers of silver paper when over our trenches. Whenever he did this the German guns opened up on the spot he was flying over. He came over our Brigade and did the same. A ranging round fell near the 11th Battery from a German Battery enfilading from the left. Salvoes then began to fall on the 11th Battery, and their casualties started mounting up. Calls for stretchers became frequent.

The Brigade doctor was with our Battery when the action started, but had to go to attend the wounded in the 11th Battery. While doing so he was hit. Several wounded infantry and gunners began to trickle back to the dressing station in Reumont.

This or another aeroplane then flew over us and the 37th Battery and dropped more silver streamers. The German fire then became more accurate and heavier and we all began to suffer casualties, though many shrapnel bullets were kept off by our gun shields with a rattling noise. The enemy artillery outnumbered ours by about four to one. I was proud of the steadiness of my men. They might have been on a gun drill parade.

The German machine guns were carried on stretchers, and they had 16 to a Battalion. Our infantry at first did not fire on them as they took them for regimental stretcher-bearers. The M.G.s dropped into action and an intensive small arms fire was also opened on our infantry on the crest in front. Thousands of bullets passed over our heads buzzing like swarms of angry bees.

Our infantry was splendid as they had only scratchings in the ground made with their entrenching tools, which did not give much cover, but they stuck it out and returned a good rate of fire.

The German infantry fired from the hip as they advanced, but the fire was very inaccurate.

The 11th Battery now seemed to have been discovered and were subjected to a very heavy fire from the north and northwest, and many shells also fell on the 37th Battery on our left knocking out some guns and detachments. We, behind our low ridge, were more fortunate and only had comparatively few shells on the position.

The telephone line running from the Battery to the O.P. was broken by the hostile fire, and communication was established by flag until every signaler in the Battery became a casualty. We wondered how the Major was getting on in the trench in front, but while the telephone line lasted confident messages came down from him saying we were doing great execution on the Germans.

One of the O.P. Staff wounded in the foot came down to the Battery. He said things were very hot up there. The Germans had made several attacks in dense formations but they had been beaten back with heavy loss. The shell fire on the trench had been terrific and it had been blown in in several places.

German infantry was working round our right flank on ground that we thought was held by the First Corps, and our Battery was given a switch to the right which necessitated the guns of my section (the left) being run up by hand to engage them. The 11th Battery also turned a section round to deal with hostile M.G.s to their right rear. When we finished with this target my guns were run back into line again.

Numbers of wounded men from the 11th Battery were now making their way towards Reumont, and stretcher bearers were busy. All their officers were killed or wounded including the major.

The Germans fired their guns in salvoes of three, a half Battery at a time, all shells being concentrated on the same spot. They fired mostly H.E. air bursts of shrapnel. (They tried to combine high explosive and shrapnel in one shell, but, except when the shells burst very close to the target, the shrapnel bullets made a poor pattern and had not much hitting power, and as the shell was filled mostly with bullets there was not enough high explosive to have great H.E. effect. Considering the intensity of their fire not very much damage was done, except when they scored direct hits). About noon we saw the German infantry beginning to advance sought between us and Rambourlieux Farm. Major Birley came down from the O.P. He ordered "Gun Control" to take them on. Hewson took charge of Nos. 1 and 2 guns, Mirrlees of No 3, and I of No 4. Because of casualties in the Battery, the remaining men of my section were distributed to the outer four guns of the Battery. The drill throughout was admirable. All the men, in spite of the shelling and casualties, were as calm, quiet and steady as if on a gun drill parade.

We swung the four guns round to the left to face the German infantry and began firing at 1,600 yards, each gun firing almost over the one on its left-over open sights. The Germans went to ground behind a road embankment. [See Sketch 8]

The 20 Pdr Battery belonging to the Division now began to engage the German Batteries at Rambourlieux Farm and succeeded in reducing their fire to some extent. From German records seen after the War the fire of our 60 Pdrs was pretty effective.

The 11th Battery on which the German fire had been intense now ceased firing, and only two guns of the 37th Battery remained in action. An H.E. shell fell almost on top of one gun and, it seemed, killed or wounded all the detachment.

The shelling on our Battery now became heavier, and two of the men at my gun were wounded from a shell which burst a yard away.

Further to the left there had been intensive German artillery fire on other Batteries of the Division and several of them were still silenced. The German infantry again began advancing and we decreased our range to 1,200 yards and increased our fire, which caused them to lie down behind corn stocks.

The Royal Regiment of Artillery at Le Cateau” states: “Immediately to the left of 11, 60 (although enfiladed from both flanks) kept in action and maintained a heavy and effective fire on any German infantry that showed near Rambourlieux Farm, and drove them back. The corn stocks behind which the Germans sought cover from the bursts of shrapnel proved a great disappointment.”

We had to go easy now as our ammunition was beginning to run out, so Captain Higgon ordered up three ammunition wagons, one for each section. The first two for the right and center sections came up and the teams got away but the team of the one for my section got caught up in the Brigade telephone wire which ran through the standing corn behind the Battery. Seeing their predicament, we ran to extricate them, but the horses were plunging and struggling.

Some of us ran to them, and tried to unhook them, and others, including myself, went to the wagon-body to get ammunition out in order to continue firing. The Germans spotted us and a salvo burst almost on top of us. All the horses and men at the wagon were killed or wounded. At the time I was pulling a shell out of the wagon body. I was hit by shrapnel bullets in the head and arm and knocked to the ground. Several of the rest of the Battery ran to our assistance. Reay Mirrless applied 1st field dressings to my hand and arm, and we were escorted into the shallow pits we had dug at the guns. I think I must have passed out for a short time, for after the War, Major Birley told me he had gone round the Battery and saw me lying there unconscious.

I lost a good deal of blood and was feeling weak and dizzy, but from where I was, I could see Major Birley and Mirrless, who took charge of No. 4 gun also (and I believe Hewson too) standing up behind their guns which were firing away rapidly at the German infantry. The German artillery now seemed to have our Battery taped and concentrated on it. Salvo after salvo fell among the guns. No. 4 gun had a direct hit and my servant, Gunner Stewart, who was the layer was killed. Mirrless and the remainder of the detachment transferred to No. 3. The wheel of the wagon behind which I was laying, was also hit. Machine guns also started firing at the Battery from the direction of the road, and one could hear their bullets rattling on the gun shields. Our range came down to 800 yards. The Germans also heavily shelled a small ridge on our left behind which they evidently thought there was a Battery, but there was nothing there.

The sound of firing to our right rear was coming nearer, so I unshipped my revolver and put it handy to take on the Germans if they rushed us from behind.

When No. 3 gun was hit, Mirrless moved to No. 2 and we now had 2 guns and 8 men left in action firing away as hard as they could go, with salvoes bursting all round them. It was passed down that Hewson had been hit in the shoulder by a shrapnel bullet, but Mirrless standing

behind No. 2 gun seemed to bear a charmed life. Suddenly someone called out: “The Major’s hit.”

The officer commanding the Suffolk Regiment which we were supporting afterwards wrote: “I should like to place on record the more than excellent work done by the four Batteries under Lt. Col. C.F. Stevens, R.F.A., their behavior throughout was magnificent and the moral effect on us was great. In spite of being enfiladed first from the left and then from the right they continued to fire; and though some had better targets than others all behaved with the greatest coolness under the most trying circumstances. From my trench I could see Major Birley, 80 R.F.A., giving his orders as if it were an ordinary field day. In a position where a wrongly set fuse (would have) involved great loss of life to us I think I am right in saying that there was not a single premature during the whole day from the twenty-four guns—surely a wonderful feat.”

In the wagon lines there were several casualties to men and horses and Captain Higgon had to go back to sort things out.

On the right the Germans were round our right flank, but a gallant counter-attack by the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who had been in reserve behind us prevented them closing in on us from the right rear. I believe the Germans were also engaged by one of our Horse Batteries with some of our cavalry on that flank.

About 2.30 p.m. I saw all the brigade teams racing up at a gallop from the wagon lines led by Major Tailyour, the Brigade Major, and ours by Captain Higgon. Shells were bursting all round them. It was a magnificent sight. Now and again a man or horse or whole team would go down from the fire directed at them. Balaclava over again! My No. 6-gun team had only a pair of wheelers left, and No. 5 gun team a leader, a center and two wheelers. Major Tailyour helped to

limber up No. 6 gun before going to the O.P. where he was captured. I helped to limber up No 5 gun. There was no center driver, so assisted by a gunner, I mounted the center horse and we galloped out of action.

Luckily the German fire was not now so intense, so there were few casualties going out of action, and we got five guns away. We carried our wounded and some infantry wounded on the limbers. Our No. 1 team was destroyed, so the gun had to be left, but the breech block was removed. On our way back we passed a 69 pdr. Gun lying on its side with a shattered wheel, and further on several dead horses where the wagon lines had been near the pond where we had watered the night before.

We entered Reumont Village and I dismounted at a dressing station set up in a Convent, with a large red cross flag outside. Here I was sat down, and my revolver removed and put outside as no arms were allowed in the dressing station. I was given a cup of Bovril, and a doctor probed the wound in my head (far from pleasant) and the hole through my arm and clean dressings were put on. I was then put to bed in a ward with several other wounded, our uniforms and equipment taken from us and we were given receipts Nuns came round and gave us cigarettes, but I could not smoke. "Cully" Buckle came in soon after and was put in a bed close to me. He had a bad wound in the back.

On taking off my breeches I found that a bullet had gone through them and had grazed my leg. Perhaps it was when I was mounting to drive out of action.

Reumont was now being shelled by the Germans and the Convent came under fire. About 4 p.m. a very tired Lieut. Col. of the R.A.M.C. came into the ward, and called out that all who could walk must leave immediately as the Germans were expected to enter the village at any

moment. I never felt less like walking in my life, and at first stayed where I was. But an Infantry officer in the bed next door to me whose arm had been broken by a bullet, said that he intended to go, and persuaded me to make the attempt too, so I got up and began looking for my clothes and kit. After a hunt I found them. I put on coat, breeches and boots and took my field glasses. This was lucky because when I got home to England, I found that field glasses were difficult to obtain. I searched the building for other officers of the Brigade but found only Captain Buckle.

I said that I did not propose to leave unless “Cully” Buckle left too. He couldn’t walk, but an R.A.M.C. officer that he would very soon be carried on a stretcher and put in a horsed ambulance which was at the door of the dressing station. As I left the building I saw it, but I never saw Buckle again, and he shortly afterwards died in German hands, so the Germans must have been close on top of us and captured the ambulance. Shells were now falling round the building and, in the streets, outside.

The infantry officer and I then started walking down the road sought from Reumont. There was no sign of any troops but as we walked along, we met staff officers at one or two points and at one place the Divisional Commander, Sir. Charles Fergusson with an A.D.C. Seeing we were wounded he told us to “keep walking on” and appeared sorry for us. A mile or two on we met a G.S. wagon going northwards. We asked the driver where he was going, and he said to replenish the ammunition in the infantry Battalion he named. We told him that there was no infantry behind us and if he went on, he would run into the Germans. He turned about, and we clambered on to the wagon. I had to be assisted as the wound in my head had partially paralyzed me.

We went on for an hour or two and came across troops, guns and transport all mixed up. As a fork with a road coming in from the right, other troops came onto our road making the

congestion greater. Vehicles were now proceeding four abreast down the road, and the infantry were in the fields on each side. There was a lorry at a traffic block and Captain Higgon and part of the Battery. Captain Higgon very kindly told the lorry driver to make room for us, which he did, so we transferred to it. It was full of wounded. I was helped on into the cab and sat next to the driver. Some officers here were trying to organize a rearguard.

I came across other guns of my Battery spread out at long intervals in the column intermingled with other units. It now began to get dark, and officers at the sides of the road were calling out the names of their Battalions. The men were all mixed up and spread about in small parties or as individuals. "This way the East Surreys," "This was the Scottish Borderers," etc. Other officers were riding up and down trying to get some order out of chaos. I must say I was expecting the German cavalry to swoop on us at any minute.

The infantry were, of course, the worst sufferers. The men were absolutely exhausted. Some were reeling about as if drunk. Some were sunk in a sleep on the sides of the road and seemed unwakeable. Some fell from exhaustion as they marched. Some were hobbling along without boots. They had marched and fought unceasingly for the best part of five days, covering a distance of over 80 miles with practically no sleep at all. It is a wonder that any got away at all. But none had lost their spirits.

On the way we passed several abandoned motor lorries and buses which must have run out of petrol, still in civilian garb, mocking us with advertisements of "Grape Nuts for breakfast," or "Post Toasties," or London's latest musical comedies. How far away such things seemed and how incongruous appeared these reminders of civilization amid the barbaric scenes we had just come from. Men were smashing the lamps and machinery with their rifles, and rendering them useless in other ways.

At one point I saw Lieut. Palmer of the 65th Battery and he very kindly lent me his waterproof as the night was cold.

Further on I saw another gun of the 80th and managed to obtain my great coat off the limber.

Progress was very slow, but the lorry driver said that he knew there was a military hospital in St. Quentin and he would take us there. At times I dozed off, but fitfully because of my wounds and the cramped position gave me little real rest.

In the middle of the night some troopers without horses wanted to get onto our lorry but could not because it was full of wounded. We continued thus through the night.

“27th August, 1914.

We reached St. Quentin about twenty miles away at 5 a.m. Just outside the town we passed a long convoy of abandon motor vehicles. Our lorry went to the hospital, but it was packing up so could not take us. But they gave us a cup of Bovril each, and sent us down to the station where there was an ambulance train consisting of cattle trucks in which stretchers were slung, and a few 1st class carriages. I selected a compartment and shared it with two others, and bought a loaf of bread off a Frenchman, which was all we had to eat that day.

Late that night we reached Rouen. We were met by orderlies and taken by tram to the base hospital. They had not properly unpacked, and had little food available, but gave us some soup and bread. I was thankful to get to bed, as my head was bothering me, and I felt very hungry, weak and dizzy.

Telegram from the War Office to:

“R.H. Macleod, Esq., 4 Benet Place, Cambridge.

“Regret to inform you that Lieutenant R. Macleod, Royal Artillery, severely wounded will wire further details when received Secretary War Office.”

“28th-30th August, 1914.

We stayed in the hospital two days, the most solid food we had being bottled chicken (which was mostly jelly, skin and bone!), and then, as the Germans were advancing, the hospital packed up. We were put on a hospital ship on Sunday 30th August and arrived at Southampton on 1st September.

So ended my fortnight’s tour of the Continent.

Our casualties had not been light, for at Le Cateau the main German attack again fell on the 5th Division owing to von Kluck’s change of direction. Of our officers: the Colonel, Adjutant, Orderly Officer, all three Majors and two Captains were wounded and all taken prisoner except one Major (Henning).

Two of the three Captains died of wounds in German hands.

One subaltern was killed, one wounded and taken prisoner, and four wounded, one of whom (Hewson) remained with the Battery.

The Brigade Major had gone up to the Bde. O.P. after bringing up the teams and was captured there.

Out of its 18 officers, the Brigade had left one Captain (Higgon) and four subalterns.

Captain Higgon was killed later at the Dardanelles, Maxwell, 11th Bty., was killed on the Somme when commanding a Battery, Broadhurst, 52nd Bty., was killed at Ypres in 1915.

Guns lost were:

11th Battery – 2

52nd Battery – 6 (they were in a very exposed place)

80th Battery – 1

So. the Brigade served half its guns.

In the 37th Battery on our left, the Major and one subaltern were wounded, and the Major taken prisoner. Captain Reynolds and two drivers were given V.C.s and Lieut. Earle the D.S.O. for saving guns. They only lost one.

Five of the 80th Battery received D.C.M.s, one Driver Brown, for bring up the Major's horse and helping him out of action, my Sgt. Prior who was No. 1 of E subsection gun, Corporal Shufflebottom who brought up the teams, and two more.

The effect of the Battle of Le Cateau on the German First Army was great. They were prevented from outflanking the French, and received such a mauling that they failed to pursue, thus allowing us to escape, and were led into errors which produced our victory at the Marne. As General Joffre wrote: "The British Army fighting against very superior forces has made a powerful contribution to assuring the security of the left flank of the French Army . . ."

The Germans called the British professional Army of 1914 "a perfect thing apart."

Two eye-witnesses have described the heavy German artillery fire on the 15th Brigade R.F.A. as follows:

“The din of battle was dominated by the throb of noise from our right flank. We all looked instinctively in the direction of Le Cateau where the Montay spur was overhung by a bank of white and yellow smoke, punctuated by angry flashes. The whole spur was churned up by the German shells, and the earth was thrown about as if by a succession of mines.”

CHAPTER III

HOME WOUNDED AND RETURN TO FRANCE

From Southhampton we travelled by a most comfortable ambulance train to London and were taken to Sister Agnes's Hospital for officers. Here I was given a breakfast, the first proper meal for nearly a week, and a doctor had a go at our wounds. Some of were then sent to a private house, 21 Charles Street, Berkeley Square, belonging to Mr. Watney, which had been turned into a hospital. I was given another breakfast and then put to bed in a room with two or three others. My father and mother came and visited me here, and after a day or two I felt well enough to get up and go out, though the wound in the head was supposed to have semi-paralyzed me. One day a message came that the King and Queen were coming to visit us. We were put to bed again and clean bandages put on. His Majesty sat on my bed and chatted for a while about the War, then Her Majesty came and talked to each of us for a few minutes. It was a very kind act on their part and we much appreciated it.

My people lived at Cambridge where there was a hospital in the College, so I applied to go there. I was now getting better, so I lived at home and went to the hospital every day for dressing.

A friend of my Father, Mr. G.A. Aitken of the Home Office, wrote to him:

“20th September, 1914.

21 Church Row

Hampstead, NW.

“I was very glad to have the opportunity of a word with your son while he was in London. He looked very fit, and I hope his wounds have ceased to be any trouble. The

other day an old boy from the 'Cornwall' Reformatory School, wounded in the knee at Mons, was brought to see me. Noticing that he was in the R.F.A., I asked him whether he happened to have come across lieut. Macleod. He exclaimed, 'He was my officer at Mons!' This young man (his name is Moore) had been with your son at Kildare. He implied that they had had a very bad time at Mons and that Rory had in his eyes done exceedingly well. He 'didn't think he had it in him' to do what he did! You may like to have this frank and impartial testimony.

"As you may suppose much of the ordinary work at the Home Office has fallen off, while all sorts of new duties (aliens, etc.) have turned up. I have just been asked to undertake the collecting and sifting of evidence as to German outrages, as told by people coming to England or writing. I expect some people will be sent to Belgium to investigate matters there. I was so recently in Belgium, where I was very kindly treated by everyone in official circles, that this subject appeals to me."

The 6th Division which had not yet gone to France were about Cambridge, and I saw many of them and had talks. A recruiting campaign was active throughout the country. Meetings were held in towns and villages. I was brought in to make speeches, generally having to submit to a bandage round my head and with my arm in a sling, I suppose to make it more interesting. Names were taken after each meeting, and many likely men signed up. Their patriotism was admirable.

I now felt much fitter and applied to go back to duty. I was "boarded" by a medical board, and early in October sent to the 4th Reserve Brigade R.F.A. at Woolwich. Here we worked hard at training large numbers of gunners and drivers.

"20th October, 1914.

In a letter home I wrote:

“I went down to the (Woolwich) Arsenal today and saw one of my guns (marked with our Battery number) that had (had) a shell on it at Le Cateau. The size of the German guns firing at it was 5.9 inch at a range of 2,500 yards. There are also several guns there.”

I also saw one of the L Battery R.H.A. Nery guns. I was given as well the task of training an anti-aircraft detachment. A 13 pdr. Gun had been mounted on a pivot on a lorry. I had to make up the drill. Aeroplanes moved so fast that the ordinary orders would have taken too long, and minute corrections to range and line were not necessary. I believe the drill was later officially adopted.

Another subaltern in the battery was Furlong, and once or twice in the evenings we went up to London to see a show. “The Country Girl” was on at Daly’s, and Furlong knew one of the actresses, so after the show we took her and her mother to a restaurant for supper

I was anxious to get back to the front, and to my Battery if possible.

“10th November, 1914.

R.A. Mess, Woolwich

“I have been told to ‘hold myself in readiness to embark,’ so may go off at any time. One fellow went last night.

“There is practically no more news.

“On Monday I went to Mill Hill to fetch recruits for Kitchener’s Army to Woolwich. There is there a building which is the exact replica of a German mobilization store, on a hill commanding almost the whole of London. It has been searched for concrete platforms and wireless instruments, but with what results is not known. It was put up by Zeiss, the field glass manufacturer. At present the firm is turning out glasses for the Government, although it is run and worked by Germans, under police supervision.

“They also said in the news that the War Office was confident that the War would be over by Christmas. It seems impossible.”

I managed to get on a draft which landed at Havre on my birthday, 13th November, 1914. We went up to the same camp where we had been in August. Here they sorted us out. All the Gunner officers were sent up to Batteries, and I was disappointed at being sent to the Advanced Horse Transport Depot at Le Mans. I suppose I had not yet been passed completely fit for front line duty.

Another subaltern and I were in charge of a party of men to take to the Depot. We went to Paris by a slow supply train, but when we reached there, he said he knew Paris well and would take us a better way. We marched rapidly across the city and caught a comfortable Paris – Lyons – Marseilles express at the Gare Sud, and arrived before expected but in greater comfort.

At the Depot there was a large number of men, horses and vehicles. We had to organize and make teams of them. When a number of complete teams and vehicles were wanted at the front a train load was sent up, and we travelled round the Army delivering them to the various units. I was several times in charge of a train.

Major Birch, who commanded the Artillery Section at the Depot, had been through the Boer War when rations were often short, and he kept saying that he did not think much of this War as we had plenty to eat all the time. We three subalterns were billeted on a French family in the town who drew our ration allowance and fed us.

I had noticed that newspapers were publishing photographs taken by officers at the front, so I had brought out with me this time a vest pocket Kodak, in spite of the official taboo on private cameras. But the authorities were lenient, and I took a few pictures, until a newspaper at home started a competition for the “best photograph from the front.” They published one of an

artillery O.P., which gave it away. The order was then strictly enforced, and anybody with a camera was liable to be court-martialed, so I had to get rid of mine.

The First Battle of Ypres was just over, and in this way, we saw much of the Army, not only the Gunners, but all units, and heard their stories. When I was in the 5th Division area, I asked the C.R.A., General Headlam and the Staff Captain, my late captain, Captain Bartholomew, to get me back to my old 80th Battery, and they consented, but nothing came of it.

After delivering our teams and vehicles we were supposed to return by supply train to Le Mans, which would have taken three days. We thought that we could employ the time better than this, so took a fast passenger train to Paris where we could shop, and have a comfortable night at a hotel, and then an express to Le Mans, arriving often before the supply train. Some cavalry officers even succeeded in paying flying visits to England. Later the issue of tickets and passes was much stricter and this form of amusement was stopped.

We got up football matches for the men. The Mary objected at or doing anything so frivolous in wartime, and said that we should all be up at the front.

“21st November, 1914.

Advanced Horse Transport Depot

c/o No 50 F.P.O.

B.E.F.

“Just a line to let you know I am still alive. I don't see much chance at present of getting up to the Front except when taking up drafts, and then I have to come back again. In fact, they are talking about making a permanent staff here, and it rather looks as if I'd get roped in for that.

“It is still very cold. There is a hard frost all day. Last night we had some snow. It is worse for the horses, which have to be in the open, than for us. We are very comfortable in our present billet. Our only danger is overeating. We are provided with any amount to eat, and white wine to drink at lunch and dinner. We are done very cheaply, at 8 francs a day including washing and mending. I have quite a comfortable bedroom with a large bed and about five mattresses. All I want is to get more exercise. We spend rather a lot of time standing about teaming horses, fitting harness, etc.

“I am writing this with local ink. It is execrable stuff, impossible to dry with blotting paper and, in consequence, smudges.

“We get a billeting allowance of 6 francs a day, so, with ‘field allowance’ 2/6 per day, don’t do badly in the deal.

“We get very little news here. Most of it is gleaned from the ‘Paris Daily Mail.’

“This is quite a fair-sized town (I cannot mention it by name), and there are plenty of good shops, so there is no need to want for anything while the cash holds out.

“We are allowed to draw 125 francs per month from the Field Paymaster, so can make purchases with that. Also, cheques on Coz & Co. can be cashed locally.

“We can get English literature at the Station. The only thing we feel the lack of is English cooking. We never get roast beef or English pudding, but all sorts of fancy dishes.”

“25th November, 1914.

A.H.T.D.

No., 50 F.P.O.

B.E.F.

“Many thanks for your letter. I am very sorry about Barber-Starkey. I never knew he was even wounded.

“The weather today has turned much warmer. It is rather muggy, and inclined to rain. It is quite a change after the recent hard frosts.

“There is still no more news. We really hear very little down here.

“We are all very comfortable here. There is nothing we want at present. But, of course, it’s not as good as being up at the Front.

“I am glad to hear that the two Buchanans were only slightly wounded. I have seen no casualty list today in the Paris Daily Mail.”

“2nd December, 1914

Adv. H. Tprt. Dt.,

No. 50, F.P.O.

B.E.F.

“I am just off again with another draft, this time some of them are for the 5th Div., and if possible, I shall go and see the 80th Battery and how they are getting on.

“The weather her is vile. It has been pouring for the last three days, and part of the horse lines are under a foot of water, besides the mud.

“I do not expect I shall come back to this place; I will probably go to the place we are moving on to. If you address letters ‘Advanced Horse Transport Dept., C/o F.P.P. No. 46, B.E.F.’ they ought to find me.

“I am taking up a very big draft, bigger even that the one last time.

“There is practically no news, except some confidential which we are not allowed to repeat.

“The ‘Weekly Times’ of Dec. 5th has arrived. It’s the first time I saw Sir J. French’s last dispatch.”

The battles in 1914 – Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne, and First Ypres – practically wiped out the men of the originally Expeditionary Force. They were a magnificent lot, and the country had a right to be proud of them. Their type has been well described by Lt. Col. Sloane Stanley in the Old Contemptible Association’s paper for June, 1963.

On December 19th we moved to Abbeville and continued our activities there. One day a Zeppelin air ship flew over us.

At Christmas an extraordinary thing happened on the 6th Division front at Armentieres. Both sides fraternized in no-man’s land, and from the trenches sang carols at each other.

Opposite us were the Saxons who suggested that the armistice should continue indefinitely as they hated the Prussians as much as we did. We proposed that they should then come and join us, but they declined because their families in Saxony would be at the mercy of the Prussians. After a day or two we said that the War must start again at 11 o'clock next morning, but, as they were still wandering about in the open, our men refused to shoot. The Saxons sent a message to say that a General was coming to inspect their snipers' posts next day and warned us to remain under cover. Sure enough, for an hour there was continuous sniping after which the fraternization continued. We again gave notice that the War would begin again at 11 o'clock next day. A staff officer came down to see that it was carried out. This time we opened fire and killed a fat little Saxon captain, evidently a popular officer, for this so enraged them that they started firing into our trenches and we soon had 17 casualties.

“3rd January, 1915.

Advanced Horse and Transport Depot

c/o No. 46 F.P.O. B.E.F.

“There is very little news here. Nothing ever seems to happen. The only break in the monotony was the coming of ‘Taube’ the other day. We noticed it first flying over our exercise. It circled round once or twice, and we were fully expecting it to drop a bomb, but it flew on again. It dropped a bomb close to one of our working parties, but it fell into a ploughed field, with only a slight explosion. The bomb was dug up. The parts found were cylindrical body and a propeller at the rear end. The propeller is evidently meant to steady it while falling.

“On Monday night we had a very strong wind which demolished several wooden sheds put up for the men, and other erections, shore-sheds, etc. Sheets of corrugated iron were flying across the road to our Mess, so we had an amusing time dodging them in order to get to it. Everything was patched up next day, the only signs being trees blown down.

“I read an extraordinary account in the ‘Times’ in ‘Letters from the Front,’ of the way Christmas was spent up there, the Germans and English fraternizing, etc.

“We are doing practically nothing here now. A few teams are standing by ready to be sent, but no big drafts are wanted

“I am now a full Lieut. We automatically get our 2nd star after 3 years, but I have not seen it in the Gazette yet. I should now be getting 9/6. A day under the new scale. In addition, we get –

Billeting Allowance – 3 fr. A day = 2s. 6d.

Subsistence Allowance 3 fr. A day = 2s. 6d.

Fuel and Light = 2 s. 3d.

We spend about 6 fr. A day on

Messing (incl. light etc.) = 5s. Od.

2s. 3d.

“So, we ought to be making now about 11s 9d a day. But we have spent rather a lot setting up the Mess, as we are likely to be here for some time. We have also, of course, to keep up our clothing, etc.

“I might be able to get leave about February. We are allowed four days from here. We can get home in 1 day, so it will leave two complete days at home. The leave dates from the time you leave Boulogne.

“We manage occasionally to get a game of football here. This afternoon we are having a match Officers and Sergeants v. the Remainder!

“The weather has turned out very wet, but being under cover and not in tents, we do not mind it much.

“The country round here is very highly cultivated. There is no place to gallop a horse, and no jump of any kind within miles.”

“28th January, 1915.

Adv. Horse Tpt. Depot.

c/o No. 46 F.P.O.

B.E.F.

“Everything here is very quiet at present. Occasionally we send a few teams up to the Front, with a conducting officer, but not nearly so often as from Le Mans.

“The weather has now turned much colder, but the rain has stopped.

“The Germans don’t seem to have celebrated the Kaiser’s birthday in any way. Perhaps the news will come in later.

“If the Government have paid in all my claims I ought to have a big balance at Cox. There still seems to be further difficulty, however, about my claim for loss of kit, as they are asking me now what steps I have taken to ascertain that it was lost!!! I don’t want any more allowances from you till the War is over.”

CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF NEUVE CHAPELLE

“2nd March, 1915.

Adv. Horse Tpt. Depot

c/o S/1 Army Post Office

B.E.F.

“I have just been told that I am posted to the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division. I don't know yet if it will be an Ammunition Column, or an R.H.A. Battery. The Indian R.H.A. are the best there are, so I am very pleased. I will let you know my address when I get up there. All letters will be sent on from here in the meanwhile.

“I also see by the Gazette that I have not got my 2nd star. I will probably go up tomorrow or the day after.”

In 1915, the Germans transferred many divisions from the West and home to the East against the Russians. It was hoped to take advantage of the comparative weakness of the Germans on the Western Front, and at the same time to help the Russians by carrying out a series of offensives. The British Army was still small, so the main part was to be played by the French, but the British were to carry out limited attacks on their front with a view to helping them. The first of these was in the Neuve Chapelle sector, where it was hoped to gain the Aubers Ridge, to assist a French attack further south on the Vimy Ridge.

The Augers Ridge had previously been captured by a brilliant attack by the II Corps under Smith-Dorrien in the “race to the sea” in October 1914, but, unsupported, with its flanks in the air, and thin on the ground, the Corps had to give way to increasingly heavy German

pressure, and withdrew to the low ground west of the ridge, covering Neuve Chapelle.

Subsequently, the Germans also captured Neuve Chapelle. [See Sketch 9]

Before the British attacked in March 1915, the French offensive was called off, but the British attack still went on.

Early in March 1915 I was appointed to V battery,¹ Royal Horse Artillery, and joined them on March 5th in action at Croix Barbée, on the Neuve Chapelle front about 3,000 yards from the Germans. They belonged to the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, and were part of the Meerut Cavalry Brigade. Only the guns of the Division were in action to support the coming attack at Neuve Chapelle, the cavalry being in reserve behind. In fact, at this stage of the War the Horse Artillery was used as Army Artillery and took part in nearly all the battles.

The Battery was in rather low spirits because of an accident just before coming into action. They had been detailed to demonstrate trench mortar firing. The Germans had trench mortars and we had not, so someone with a bright idea had invented one. The barrel looked like a bit of gas piping on a stand and it fired bombs consisting of jam tins filled with high explosive and nails. The Battery intended to practice first. They formed up in a hollow square round the mortar. The first three bombs were fired successfully, Wingate-Gray, a subaltern being the demonstrator and lighting the fuse. The fourth bomb exploded in the bore and killed the Major, who was my old friend Mark Leigh Goldie, and 13 men, and wounded about 40 others, including a subaltern, Purchase. Wingate-Gray, by some miracle, escaped injury. In action at Croix Barbée the Battery was commanded by the Captain, Nicoll, and Wingfield-Digby was the third subaltern.

¹ R.H.A. Batteries were lettered and R.F.A. batteries numbered.

“6th March, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cavalry Division

Indian Expeditionary Force

“I got up here last night. I cannot at present give any indication of where we are. The country all round is very flat and water-logged. Going across the fields the mud comes up to your knees. Our Battery is in action less than 3,000 yards from the German trenches. Our billet is just behind the Battery. Our observation post is a house 500 yards from the German trenches. Part of the house has been already demolished by shells. To reach it we have to go across bits of open ground, and snipers occasionally have a pot shot at us, so far without success. There is a good cellar to the C.P. house, and when they start bombarding it, we retire to this if there is nothing on. Today they fired fourteen shells at the house while I was in it, but as nothing important was happening, I retired to the cellar after the first shell.

“My kit and horses turned up all right.

“The weather today has been atrocious. This house (the Billet) leaking a bit, but nothing compared to the O.P., which has its roof off.

“This house is partly demolished by shells in the fighting which took place round here before our line was pushed forward.”

There was a crossroads near, and some cottages along the road behind the position, and the Germans occasionally shelled the cross roads with salvoes of six H.E. shells bursting in the air.

The O.P. was near Pont Logy in a small brick house about 2,500 yards ahead of the Battery and 500 yards from the Germans. Two telephone lines ran from the Battery to the O.P. by different routes so that if one was shelled and broken it was hoped that the second would hold.

The country was flat and low-lying. Houses and farms were dotted about with clumps of trees round the farms, and the courses of streams were outlined by willow trees. But the Germans had a great advantage in the Aubers Ridge, half a mile to the east of Neuve Chapelle, which dominated the low ground to the west and provided them with excellent artillery observation.

I was put in command of the center section. Not far behind us was an 18 pdr. Battery firing over our heads. They had one gun that “prematured,” that is to say, the shell burst near the muzzle of the gun and spattered us with bullets. We had to build an earthen bank behind each gun to protect the detachments.

There must have been something wrong with this gun because when we picked up the shell cases there were the marks of the gun rifling all down the case, indicating a choke in the bore.

The Battery indignantly denied that they were prematureing into us until we sent back some of the shell cases and showed them

A gun called “mother,” a 14-inch Howitzer came into action for the first time. Its target was Aubers. It did not open fire till the day of the attack. There were also some 9.2-inch Howitzers.

Except when on duty at the Battery or O.P. we slept in the cottages behind the Battery, leaving an orderly officer and skeleton detachments at the guns. S.O.S. (“Save our Souls”) lines were laid out to put a barrage of fire in front of our infantry if the enemy attacked. In such a case the infantry sent up a certain colored Verey lights as a signal which could be seen from the O.P. and probably from the Battery position. When we were there, it was “green over red over green.”

We “registered” our targets for the attack, and on March 10th the battle opened. The assault was on a narrow front of 2,000 yards and carried out by two Brigades of the 8th Division of the IV Corps and one Brigade of the Indian (Meerut) Division. The remainder of the IV Corps and the Indian Corps were then to attack and advance to the Aubers Ridge. We had a great concentration of guns and the bombardment was short sudden, heavy and terrific. Owing to the wet, low-lying country, trenches could not be dug, so sandbag breast works formed the front and support lines on both sides Our bombardment blew down the German breast works and destroyed their wire. Our infantry went through and captured Neuve Chapelle. The reserves should now have gone through and exploited the success, but they were under Corps or Divisional H.Q. who were only in touch by telephone. The German counter bombardment broke all the wires, so rear H.Q. got the information very late, and it was a long time before orders reached the reserves. The Germans had time to reorganize and further attacks were held up.

March 11th dawned mistily and mist hindered observations throughout the day. We found it difficult to observe and support the infantry. Some attacks were made but they met with little success coming under heavy German fire. German shell fire on Neuve Chapelle was also heavy, but a counter-attack they made from the Bois du Biez was beaten off by the Black Watch of the Meerut Infantry Division. They also heavily shelled all the roads and tracks leading to the front including Croix Barbée cross roads, evidently to stop reinforcements from moving forward.

“11th March, 1915.

V. Battery R.H.A.
2nd Indian Cavalry Division
Indian Ex. Force

“We are in the middle of a tremendous battle. All yesterday and today we have been making a heavy attack, and our infantry have gained a lot of ground. We started at daybreak yesterday with the hell of a bombardment. I have never heard such a noise before. The batteries are one behind the other in rows, wherever they can fit in. There seemed to be an earthquake going on by the way the ground shook. Every gun was blazing away about as hard as it could go for an hour. We are still continuing our fire. The infantry has done wonders. I believe the 2nd Camerons are among them, but have not yet found out for certain. One of the officers of our Battery has picked up a German helmet and bayonet.

“We fire by the map. We have to calculate the direction and range. The infantry telephone back as to what is happening; so far, our shooting has worked out very well.

“As we started the bombardment, the Germans tried to do the same on us, but we soon silenced their guns. We have made a large haul of prisoners, and caused enormous casualties. Our own have not been slight either.

“P.S. Terrific bombardment started again.”

“12th March, 1915.

At about 5 a.m. the Germans put in a heavy counter attack which was also beaten off by our fire. We also made a few limited attacks not all of which were successful. There was not much German shelling of the rear areas. The Croix-Barbée cross roads were occasionally plastered, and a few odd shells fell round about, some in our position, apparently not aimed at anything in particular. One fell close to our telephonists' dug out, and we saw three heads suddenly appearing and saying, “Where did that one go?” Bruce Bairnfather's picture of exactly the same sort of incident had just appeared, so it gave us a good laugh.

The German guns were 77-millimeter field guns, 4.2-inch field howitzers, 5.9-inch medium howitzers and 8-inch heavy howitzers. They also had a 17-inch howitzer. We noticed that they seemed to have little or no gun error and the laying must have been very accurate, for if

a shell made a hole the next shell was liable to land in the same hole, or very near it. So, the adage that the safest place to go to was a new shell hole did not hold true

Wingate-Gray was the F.O.O. during the battle and was up in front for the first three days. I then relieved him.

“13th March, 1915.

V Battery R.H.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“I am going forward with the infantry tonight and tomorrow to do a sort of F.O.O. Today has been grim.

“It was Major Goldie, who commanded the 80th for a bit, who was killed by a trench mortar explosion while they were practicing with it. This was before I was posted here.

“The attack is still going on.

“No more Jack Johnsons over today, yet, thank goodness.

“I don’t get much exercise these days. For about three days I haven’t let the field, and I spend most of the time in a dugout.

“I am glad Jock is enjoying himself at H.Q.” (My brother had been made M.G. Officer of the Camerons).”

I went up into Neuve Chapelle which was now only a heap of rubble, but could find no suitable O.P. I saw one or two of the recent German M.G. nests in cellars of houses and there were many dead lying about. I returned to our regular O.P. from which I could see much better, especially the German line along the Bois de Biez. There was a good deal of German shelling and some shells were popping through the houses. While I observed from the top story, the

telephonists were below. A shell hit their part of the house so I descended to see the damage. I saw some men covered in red and apparently wounded, but I was relieved to discover that it was only brick dust caused by a shell disintegrating some bricks.

Both telephone lines were broken in several places with the shelling, and the head signaler with me had to go out more than one under shell fire to replace them. He eventually received a Russian medal for his gallantry.

The fire of our 13 pdr. Guns seemed extraordinarily accurate. This was partly due to the very good gun drill and laying in the Battery, to the good gun platforms which were made from bricks from ruined houses, and our guns which were new and in first class condition.

On one occasion Captain Nicoll and Wingfield-Digby went to observe our fire from the steeple of Richebourg Church. The Germans shelled the place, setting fire to the altar, and they came down much quicker than they went up.

Fighting on subsequent days gradually died down though there was still constant shelling.

I was sent to range our guns onto targets further north, so went to "Moated Grange" for an O.P. I again noted the accuracy of our fire.

The battle was a disappointment. It had opened so promisingly and then petered out. We had hoped to take the Aubers Ridge. A hole had been blown in the enemy line, but at the same time the German counter bombardment broke all telephone wires, so headquarters in rear were out of touch with the situation. There was a delay in sending forward the reserves who should have exploited the initial success, and the opportunity was lost. Owing to the heavy expenditure of ammunition which depleted our stocks and could not soon be replaced, a further

offensive had to be called off, and we were cut down to a ratio of sixty shells per Battery per week. The problem was whether to harass the Germans by firing ten rounds per day, or to save them up for a grand strafe on some important target.

“17th March, 1915

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cavalry Division

I.E.F.

“Yesterday we had a fairly peaceful day. The rain seems to be over for the present, and the weather has become quite spring like. Today is splendid.

“Last night there seemed a bit of bombardment going on north of here. This morning the Germans are ‘sprinkling France’ with shells, just dotting one down here and there. I see by the papers that the French Artillery are supposed to have supported the attack on Neuve Chapelle. As far as I know there were not F.A. near us. Reading some of the accounts is very amusing. I see one paper speaking of ‘hills’ and ‘valleys.’ The country is as flat as a pancake. Also, all the windows in N.C. were broken by bullets. As a matter of fact, there were hardly two bricks left standing on top of each other.

“We had a little spy hunt the other day. We shifted our billet to a new place. On going into the loft, we discovered a little observation place very neatly made in the roof. There was a place where 2 tiles could be easily slid up, giving a very good view over part of the country, the rest of the tiles being cemented down. There was also a supply of provisions concealed up there. At the back of the house there is a large barn, apparently filled with straw. On examining the place, it was found that the straw was hollow, and contained a small room with a passage leading to it through which a man could crawl. There was also another passage leading out to a trap door very cunningly concealed under a heap of straw above a cow stall. There were also several minor indications of spy’s work. No spy has been near the place since. We only discovered the presence of the room and passage by walking on top of the straw, and finding it giving way under our feet.

“The Germans are letting off rather a lot of ammunition for them this morning. If they are short of it, they don’t seem to believe in husbanding it.”

After the battle, when the fighting had died down, our batteries side-stepped to the north. V Battery came into action again South of Fleurbaix, South of Armentières. This was a comparatively peaceful spot, due, no doubt, to the shortage of ammunition on both sides. Armentières was an attraction, and occasionally one or two officers went in there and had a meal at a restaurant and did some shopping, for life seemed to be going on fairly normally in the town in spite of its closeness to the front line. There was a rumor that our engineers blew up a cable which led into the German lines, and General Joffre sent a protest saying we had cut him off from his two best agents in Lille and the cable must be repaired immediately.

We lived fairly comfortably, those not on duty at the guns being billeted in buildings close at hand. Some of our men were in the loft of the barn, reached by a ladder, and one night the farmer, as a protest, removed the ladder when the man wished to descend. He had to be forcibly restrained as the men might at any moment be needed at the guns. [See Sketch 10]

Many of the inhabitants were still living in the cottages. When we wanted a bath we had it in the kitchen. Madame would boil water over the kitchen fire, and the whole family would gather round and chat while one had it.

One night two of our subalterns were sleeping in a house near the Battery close to an infantry brigade H.Q. In the night they heard a series of rifle shots so went to the door to see what it was about, and were fired on. They hurriedly retreated, and next morning went to the Brigade H.Q. to enquire about the incident. It turned out that the sentry had heard movement near the cottage and challenged it. Not getting a reply he fired, and then he said he saw two suspicious characters coming out of the cottage and fired on them. We eventually discovered that the original movement had been caused by a cow in a field near the cottage.

We sometimes rode into Lavantis and Estaire.

Major Wardrop, commanding the “chestnuts” (‘A’ Battery, Royal Horse Artillery), of the 1st Indian Cavalry Division, was in action close to us. One day he told his Captain to procure tarpaulins to put over his guns (6 in all). His Captain protested that they were not authorized issue, and where was he to get them? “Your hunt, my boy, your hunt,” exclaimed the major. Next day each gun had its tarpaulin. No questions asked!

On our left we had the Canadians, and we arranged football matches with them which were played in a field close to the guns. The Germans used to shell this field with clockwork regularly at 3 p.m. each day for 15 minutes though there was no target. Perhaps they thought our Battery was there. So, at 5 minutes to 3 the referee blew his whistle to clear the field, and at 3.20 he blew it again to continue the game.

When the Canadians took over from us we heard that they discovered the perpetrators. One man, ploughing, had a German rifle concealed at each end of his furrow, so they shot him. Another man they found loading turnips. They tipped out the load and found a German rifle underneath, so they shot him. Rumor also said that a man was discovered hanging out washing on a line in a certain way as a message to the Germans, and he was shot, but I think this is a doubtful story. Our interpreter, on hearing about the incidents said that when the Germans withdrew from this area, they no doubt handed rifles, ammunition and some money to certain people, and “some men would do anything for five francs.”

Notes from my note book:

“5th March, 1915.

Arrived V Battery, at (A). (Crox-Barbee).

“6th March, 1915.

Went out to observe with Capt. Nicoll at (B). (Pont Logy). Weather wet. Sniped going to house 500 yards from German trenches. Shelled a bit when inside house. Observed fire and returned.

“7th March, 1915.

Nothing important happened.

“8th March, 1915.

Same as yesterday.

March 9th, 1915.

Went on registering points.

“10th March, 1915.

Grand bombardment starts 7.30. Kept up for one hour. Noise terrific. Few shells dropped among us. Infantry report first line trenches captured without single casualty. Bombardment kept up most of the day. Result N.C. taken, and advance beyond.

“11th March, 1915.

Bombardment still continues. Reported good work done by artillery.

“12th March,” 1915.

Still firing pretty hard. In evening some J.J.s dropped close to us. Noise of explosion tremendous. Splinters of shell flying about but no one hit.

“13th March, 1915.

Fairly quiet at Battery. In evening went out to a F.O.O., and keeping touch with infantry. Battery behind had more J.J.s. Shifted billet.

“14th March, 1915.

Spent day in trying to find good spot to observe from. Very misty and hard to see. Went through trenches this side of N.C. Finally returned to (B). Was shelled several times when in the house, three hitting it. Shells dropping all up and down road outside. Telephone wire kept

breaking owing to shells. Tel. op. very pluckily went out twice to repair it. Spent evening in dugout. Very damp. More J.J.s dropped round Battery this day, one hitting old billet.

“15th March, 1915.

Relieved as F.O.O. Quiet day on whole, some “White Hopes about.”² Heard two spies caught not far off.

“16th March, 1915.

Quietest day we have had so far. Went out to register two new points. Day was beautiful.

“17th March, 1915.

Germans open ball by shelling most of the morning. Bit of a bombardment last night. Move during night, to new position (X). Start digging in.

“18th March, 1915.

Spend most of day digging in and improving cover. Fire few rounds registering. Very quiet day. Sniper in rear of our lines active.

² Shells that burst in the air with a large puff of white smoke. They never did any damage.

“19th March, 1915.

Very quiet day. Go on digging in. go out to observe for registration of further points. Germans and English appeared to be walking about unconcernedly behind their trenches. Snowed heavily during last night. Day cold and snowy.

“20th March, 1915.

More snow in night, but morning fine and sunny. Warm sun soon melted frost. Absolutely quiet day.

“21st March, 1915.

V. Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“The last two days have been very quiet. We have had some German aeroplanes over. Yesterday they dropped some bombs on a town a few miles behind us, and killed seventeen civilians. They also ‘Jack Johnson’ the same place.

“Today has been beautifully fine. I went up to the observing station again close to the trenches and saw both sides wandering about behind their trenches unmolested. They seem to have a mutual agreement about it.

“There have been some sniper spies caught close to here. They even have the cheek sometimes to snipe in broad daylight. It seems extraordinary that they don’t clear all civilians out from near the firing line. There is also some individual who signals by flashes at night close to here, but he has not yet been caught. All these spies involve directly or indirectly great loss of life, by giving away concealed positions, etc. several have already been caught and shot.

“If we do another advance, I will try and get hold of another German helmet and rifle. It was a pity I had to relinquish the last one when they started shelling me.

“We have a telephone attached now to each of our billets and the observing station, Brigade Headquarters (where orders come from) and Battery, so wherever we are we can get orders. So, you can imagine the number of wires there are along roads.

“We do a great deal of firing now ‘by the map.’ It works out really very accurately.

“We lay our lines out by compass, and then work out the switches and ranges to different targets by means of the map. We have a large scale one issued. The system used is that of ‘squares.’ The map is divided into small squares, which are numbered. Then a target is located in a square its number is sent down to the Battery from the observing station, and the fire is then switched onto that place. The big square M is divided into smaller squares, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., and these into smaller squares, a, b, c, d, etc. Say you want to shell the point X, you send back: M 2 a (8.2). The numbers in brackets are made out by again dividing the smaller square by eye into 10 equal parts each way. If the line of the Battery has been laid out by compass, say due north, and the target is at T, all that has to be done is to measure the angle from N to T, and the range. It all works very quickly.”

“24th March, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“We again had a quiet day yesterday.

“We had very good news that PRZEMYSL and SMYRNA had fallen.

“Yesterday evening we had some very heavy rain. The weather also, has turned much muggier. This morning is damp and looks like rain.

“It’s not very pleasant for the men who have to sleep in the dugouts.

“There is no news at all today.”

27th March, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“The weather today is much colder. There is a N. wind. Last night we had a sharp frost, and today there have been several showers of a light, powdery snow.

“This morning I went for a ride on a horse, as there was nothing doing. Things still seem to remain quiet. In fact, some days we don’t shoot at all. Other days we only ‘register’ (find range to various points).

“Here is a sketch of gun pit and dugout. [See Sketch 11]

“It is necessary to have a back wall to the dugout to keep off splinters of H.E. shells that burst behind.

“The overhead cover is to prevent aeroplanes from seeing the guns. It is composed of branches, etc.

“I will do my best about Br. Fielding. All his effects ought to have been sent home to Mr. Fielding.³

“Here is a haystack ‘prepared’ for observation.

“If time permits, the haystack can be lined with sandbags. Straw provides very good protection.”

“31st March, 1915.

V. Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“Everything is still quiet here. I believe we are going to rejoin our unit (Cavalry Brigade) in a few days behind the line, if we do not push on somewhere else.

“Today I had a walk to reconnoiter the country in case of an advance, 100 yards behind our trenches, and 300 yards from the German trenches. They make no attempt to shoot at me till I tried to make for a haystack to get a better view, and to use it perhaps as an O.P. but we were met by a hail of bullets and had to put back. It seems funny to see people on both sides walking about behind the trenches like this, without being shot at, unless doing something

³ One of my men who was killed.

peculiar. I know one fellow, a gunner, who goes down to the trenches occasionally, who never uses a communication trench, but walks into our trenches across the open. The Germans opposite I believe are the Saxons, who are not nearly so bitter against us as the Prussians. When the Canadians were here, they shouted across that they should like very much to see them, apparently thinking they were Red Indians, so some of the Canadians got up and showed themselves, at which they expressed great surprise that they were white men.

“The weather today was a little warmer, although there are still frosts at night. This afternoon we had a scratch game of Rugger!

“The Germans are very methodical in their shelling. There is a place about 500 yards from the Battery they shell regularly at a certain time each day. It is not far from where we play football, but as the shells all burst in almost exactly the same spot each day, we take no notice.

“I have lately been sleeping in a bed.

“A carrier pigeon was brought down not far from here the other day. The spies are up to all the dodges. I expect there are several secret telephones that are used as well. We ought to have a special anti-spy service; but no one seems to have made any provision against spies in the British Army. The British nature is altogether too trusting. They wait till they can actually catch a man at work before moving against him. Here are some of the methods spies use:

1. Secret telephones (laid in peace time).
2. Rockets and flares
3. Flash lamp signaling
4. Hanging clothes, etc., on clothes lines
5. Certain chimneys smoking in certain homes
6. Dogs carrying messages
7. Carrier pigeons
8. Wireless (perhaps)

“I have firsthand information about these, either seeing them myself, or hearing from people who actually saw them.

“In our last position (N.C.), two men were caught sending up rockets not far from our position who actually saw them.

“One night I personally saw some flash lamp signaling going on from behind our lines, and being answered in the German lines.

“One man was caught hanging clothes out on a line in full view of the Germans.

“I have noticed that when troops pass along a road, or certain batteries open fire, chimneys in various houses begin to smoke. This may be coincidence, for I wasn't long enough in the last position to verify it.

“A dog was caught carrying a message the other day. Our sentries now have orders to shoot all dogs straying about. One day I found two civilians in our observing station. I could prove nothing against them so all I could do was to turn them out. But they may have spotted what the place was for and given it away to the Germans for all we know. It was shelled one day but we were not in it.

“I am not surprised if the Germans got to hear of our concentration before N.C. there is no doubt, they were very much stronger than we expected

“Our battery took on the exits of the Bois du Biez on the days of the counter-attack. I see in the papers that fearful execution was done in this quarter.

“There are civilians here living within 1,000 yards of the trenches. They must see everything that’s going on.”

CHAPTER V

BATTLES OF 2ND YPRES, FESTUBERT AND AUBERS RIDGE

Towards the end of March, or early in April, we were withdrawn from the line. A 15-pounder battery of the Highland Division took over from us, and I was left behind to see it in. I took the Major to the O.P., pointed out the country and shot his Battery in for him. We moved to Wittes, two miles North of Aire, west of the Foret de Nieppe, in which area the rest of our division, and carried out training with them. Here our new Major, Arthur Wainewright, joined us.

7th April, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“The weather has been very wet here. It has rained every day except the day we marched in.

“We are having more work than even when in action, as we have to train the young drivers and gunners who came in to fill up after the trench mortar accident.

“We have had some difficulty in getting all our horses under cover for the wet weather. It can be no joke for the inhabitants when a swarm of 220 horses and nearly as many men and guns, wagons and transport descend on a small cluster of farms, demanding shelter; but by utilizing everything with a roof on it we have got all our men and horses under cover, and the guns. I have two rooms in a small cottage with my section. They are not over luxuriously furnished, but I have a bed, a table and a chair or two. A half-barrel does very well as a bath, which I have every day. We also have a combined mess in an Estaminet, about the middle of our little group of farms. The men sleep in hay lofts, etc., and seem quite comfortable.

“We are making a jumping course in one of the large grass fields here, to train our horses over. At present the ground is too wet to go over grass.

“It is curious the difference with which we are treated by the farmers. Some do everything they can for you while others next door will put every obstacle in your way when you want anything. One of the farmers here was very objectionable when I went into his far, and when I put some horses into an empty shed of his he advanced with a whip on the interpreter, who was trying to explain matters. Next door there is a farmer who cannot do enough for us; he cleared some stuff out of a couple of barns of his to let me get ten horses in, and his farm was really outside our area. He then brought clean straw as bedding, which was quite outside his obligations and then invite me to have a drink. He has also made the men staying in the place very comfortable. I am glad to say there are not many of the first class about. We had one close to us in our last position. He was a most disobliging fellow. Not only could we get nothing out of him for making gun pits, etc., but when our men collected timber to build a telephone house, he pinched the lot while they were at breakfast and locked it up! He had to disgorge it again, of course. Then one night he locked our guard up in the loft which was the guard room, and took away their ladder. That was going a bit too far, and he was warned that if there were any more complaints against him he would be evacuated. He calmed down a bit after that; but he got in a fearful state when we cut down one or two of his fruit trees which were in our line of fire, saying he would complain to the mayor, that he was a poor man, etc. The people in our billet, however, were quite the opposite. They would sit up all hours of the night to give us hot coffee when we came in from a ‘job of work,’ and gave us their best bedrooms, etc.

“Everything on this front seems to remain quiet.

“We were going to have made another big attack in the last position we were in, but owing to the Germans bring up big reinforcements opposite us, hearing about it perhaps through spies, the idea was abandoned, and we were withdrawn.

“I believe I am going soon to N Battery R.H.A. which is rather short of officers. I will let you know when I go. It is in the same brigade as this.”

V Battery horses were not in good condition. They were nearly all Australian Walers and inclined to be long in the back. Before moving to Neuve Chapelle they had spent the winter under cover in cowsheds and barns, and Major Goldie had had them well rugged up with blankets and horse rugs. Standing out in the pollen in the wagon lines when we were in action in bleak conditions of cold, mud, rain and snow, after their warm stables, stripped the meat off them and they appeared like lean greyhounds. It took much time and energy to get them back into condition.

We also enjoyed ourselves. Sometimes we went into Aire which carried on under normal peace conditions. Football was arranged for the men, and on some nights, they had “sing-songs” to which we were invited. Their usual songs included “Thora,” “Forget,” “Cigarette,” and music hall ditties. Our interpreter was a good singer and sang several French songs such as “*Au Claire de la Lune, chacun avec sa chacune*” and “*sur le pont d’Avignon.*” He sang the “Marseilles” with so much spirit that Wingfield-Digby said that he felt like going out and charging the Germans on his own! Somehow, I acquired a golf club and a few balls, and we knocked about in the fields. We were relaxing thus when at 4 p.m. on the 22nd April an orderly came from Brigade H.Q. with a message to say that we were to be prepared to move at once. In the incredibly short space of thirty minutes the Battery was mounted and formed up ready to march with the Division.

A rumor reached us that the Germans had attacked with gas at Ypres and the Canadians had been driven back. In actual fact this was the German chlorine gas attack; the French black troops had panicked and left a hole in the line, exposing the left flank of the Canadians, who had gone to Ypres from Fleurbaix. The Canadians had gallantly stuck out the gas attack, but owing to their exposed left flank had to adjust their line with consequent heavy losses.

About 4.30 the Division began its march and continued throughout the night towards Poperinghe with the object of counter-attacking or blocking the gap. We reached Mount Carmel on April 23rd and Proven on April 24th, where we remained until the 29th. As we moved up and while here, we could hear the “drum-fire” of the guns in action. The Germans did not follow up their advantage, the line was reestablished, and the Division, or at least our Meerut Cavalry Brigade, did not come into action.

We remained in the neighborhood for about a week observing the situation.

“26th April, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“It is a long time since I have written to you. We have been very busy the last few days and are now on the trek. For the last day or two we had orders to be ready to move at one hour’s notice. I was playing a little golf on our links when the order reached me, so getting off was a bit of a rush. We are now ready to move at twenty minutes’ notice.

“The weather has been rather colder lately, with a N.E. wind.

“We can distinctly hear the bombardment at Ypres going on.

“The Canadians have done very well recently. I cannot give you any more news, but things have been happening.

“We are at present in a big farm, and fairly comfortable. The farmer seems a decent sort of chap, but they are all very inquisitive.

“The Germans are using asphyxiating gases in the trenches. I believe we will now reply in kind. We have a much better one, they say.

“Last night we had some heavy rain. Today is finer and rather warmer.”

“Telegram to R.H. Macleod, Esq., 4 Benet Place, Cambridge, from the War Office.”

“30th April, 1915 – Deeply regret to inform you that Lieut. R. Macleod Y. Battery R.H.A. is reported from Alexandria to have been killed in action 25th April. Lord Kitchener expresses his sympathy Secretary War Office.”

Early in May we received orders to march at once to a rendezvous just north of Bethune. We did the march in two days, and then came into action to support the attack on

Festubert. This was to be carried out by the First Army under Sir Douglas Haig and was to support the postponed French attack on the Vimy Ridge by drawing in German reserves. Our Battery was given the task of cutting the wire in front of the German trenches, and our position was fairly close, 1,500 yards from the wire, to give the shell its best effect. Low shrapnel air bursts were used, and it took a good deal of ammunition.

Our O.P. was behind a brick wall in the Rue de Bois because all the houses were already occupied by other O.P. parties, and we, being late comers, had to put up with what was left. Two of these houses, called the Carlton and the Ritz, were solidly filled with sandbags, except for a narrow passage to reach the observation point, and gave tremendous security, but our plain wall was quite unprotected.

I was given the task, with a small party of men, of burying the telephone wire from Battery to the O.P. to protect it from shell fire. It had to be at least six inches deep.

We dug ourselves in at the Battery as best we could.

In a house nearby was the H.Q. of the Black Watch whom we were to support.

We went on with the wire-cutting carefully day after day, and at night kept harassing fire on the gaps to prevent the Germans from repairing them. Wainwright took the greatest trouble with the wire-cutting, and infantry patrols went out at night to report on the results.

Our O.P. was manned at night in case the Germans attacked, or anything unexpected happened. The Officer was not expected to be in observation the whole time, but an N.C.O. relieved him sometimes with orders to call him up if needed, and he was in touch with the infantry in case of emergency.

One night I was the officer detailed. A small dugout in which the telephonists sat had been made below the wall and they had left a sort of shelf on which the officer could lie down and rest when not observing. When I came down from O.P. I lay on this. In the morning I noticed a peculiar smell, and looking down I saw a bit of rabbit wire netting and a piece of grey cloth projecting from the side of the shelf. I asked the signalers what it was. They replied that when making the dugout they had come across a dead German wrapped up in the netting, so decided to leave him in situ, and the shelf was the part of the ground on top of him!

During one of the nights, I was up there the Germans put down a sudden heavy concentration of fire on an area behind us, it may have been in answer to our harassing fire which perhaps they thought was the beginning of a barrage heralding an attack. I could see little from the O.P. except the flashes of guns, but in case a German attack was about to begin I ordered a slow rate of Battery fire on the S.O.S. lines. It would, at any rate, stop the Germans from work on repairing their wire.

“6th May, 1915.

V Battery R.H.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

I.E.F.

“I am very sorry indeed for the fright you got from the W.O. I hope it won't occur again. That is the worst of there being so many Macleods in the Regiment. We are always being mistaken for each other.

“I simply had no time to send you even a line, not even a service P.C. for two days. We were away from any Field Post Office, and were so much on the move, that we could not get out the sensor stamp even if we had time to scratch a line.

“I have also been very busy indeed today. Haven’t had a spare moment from 5.30 a.m. till now (7.30 p.m.) I will always try and send you a line somehow. The number of field Service P.C.s is rather limited, so I don’t know if I can send one every day.

“The weather has been very warm and sunny lately. It is difficult to know what to wear, as we have to work hard in the day in the sun, and then, having no time to change, have to sleep in the same clothes at night.

“The Germans seem to have started the Spring Campaign first. If only there were some more men out here on our side, we could do a lot more. Especially would this have been true at the beginning of the War, when we held a good deal of the ground we are now attacking, but had to retire through lack of numbers; and so, the Germans have now got the more favorable position. I think it will be realized when this war is over that no having compulsory service was the greatest mistake we ever made. The War would practically have been over now if we had had enough men at the start. Haldane also made a big blunder in cutting down the number of guns. We have none too many now, and we never had any heavy guns to match the Germans because no funds were provided to manufacture them. We are now, in consequence, spending about ten times what we would have done if we had been properly prepared. The reserve of ammunition was also very much cut down by Haldane. It has been the ‘Pacifists’ and the ‘small army’ gentry who have made this War as bad as it is; the first thin to be ever “economized” was the Army Vote, and the funds were devoted to social reform, etc., so we have to thank them for our lack of men, lack of guns, and lack of ammunition. And now they are starting to whine about peace, although it is entirely due to them that there is no peace now. Their real home ought to be in Germany, the country they have loved so well. They are about on a par with the people who use asphyxiating gases, etc.

“Must stop now to go to bed, as I have to get up early tomorrow.”

On May 9th we attacked. Our Battery had cut the wire on their part of the front and now fired on targets much in the same way as at Neuve Chapelle, but unlike Neuve Chapelle the Germans were in deep trenches with concrete emplacements for their machine guns. Our shrapnel fire (we had not H.E.) had little effect on the trenches and non on the M.G. posts. Our Black Watch succeeded in one place in getting into the German trenches, but in other parts of the front the wire had not been properly cut, and the infantry were held up by the wire and subjected to devastating fire from M.G.s. The attack failed with great loss.

Major Wainewright at the O.P. had an uncomfortable time as German shells kept popping through the brick wall.

The attack was ordered again at 2 p.m. with a fresh Division, the artillery to put over the same bombardment starting on the German front line trench. Our Major protested that the Black Watch on our part of the front were in the German front line, but he was ordered to carry out the bombardment. The second attack failed exactly as had the first.

The ground between the British and German lines was thick with dead where our attacks had been slaughtered by M.G. fire.

“10th May, 1915.

Same Address. (Festubert)

“We have had another big fight yesterday. We bombarded the Germans heavily twice; and made attacks; and helped the French to gain a lot of ground. Our infantry was splendid. They attacked again and again against terrific odds and massed machine guns. The ground between the trenches is thick with dead. I was down in the trenches today myself and saw them. The Germans also lost very heavily.

“Today things have been quieter, but there has been some shelling. You will doubtless see an account of the operation in the papers, and I cannot give details on account of the censor.

“I have not had much sleep lately and have been kept pretty busy, so have no time to answer letters yet.

“I am off to the trenches again tonight.

“The weather has been very fine, but rather colder than it has been when fine before, due to a cold wind. It is a wrong wind for the Germans to use their poisonous gases.”

The German artillery next day and for some days attacked our rear areas with their fire. Crossroads were always a favorite target, hence the expression “Dirty work at the crossroads,” and it was advisable to avoid them if possible, so tracks were often made round them. One shell landing in our Battery position wounded Wingate-Gray and two or three gunners. We were in the middle of a shoot and Wingate-Gray insisted on carrying on, but he had to be sent down the line that evening.

When here we captured a German spy. Our sentry at the Battery saw a British soldier bicycling down the road just behind the Battery. He challenged him and made him dismount and halt. He then noticed that the buttons on his coat and his cap badge belonged to different regiments, so he arrested him. We rang up the military police and handed him over. I believe he was tried and shot.

Two or three days after the battle we again side-stepped to the left, and came into action in a high bank to support an attack towards the Aubers Ridge. The guns were in action in gaps cut in the bank. Our O.P. was in Richebourg.

The attack took place on May 16th, had a limited objective and was completely successful. The Germans counter-battered us with a large shrapnel shell, the bullets being as big as small racquet balls. Perhaps this was a naval gun. Luckily our bank gave us excellent protection, but the Divisional padre who came to pay us a visit and was present at the time did not like it at all.

Nearly a whole battalion of Saxons surrendered during the battle. They had been cut off for two days and were without supplies or water. They stood up on the parapet of their trench

with white flags. The German artillery opened fire on them causing several casualties, but many escaped to come over to our lines.

One day a battalion of the 51st Division which had recently arrived in the country bivouacked behind the right continuation of our bank and started lighting fires, with much smoke, to cook their dinners. We sent across and warned them that they were under German observation from the Aubers Ridge and the smoke of their fires would draw shell fire. They promptly cleared off. On returning sometime later they accused our men of having taken their dinner. I am sure our men had not done so as I was present all the time, but probably some unit on the other side had seized the opportunity.

“17th May, 1915.

Address (Aubers Ridge)

“We have been taking part in some very stiff fighting lately, and have managed to gain some ground. Today several hundred German prisoners were escorted to the rear. We moved our position a day or two ago and have been kept very busy ever since. I haven’t had my clothes off for a fortnight. The Germans have been shelling pretty heavily all round. They seem to have a lot of big guns.

“Today in several German trenches the white flag was shown. The only answer was a bombardment by us: but they gave themselves up all right, and we are now in their trenches.

“We have very little peace here. We are at it all day and every day. We live on preserved rations chiefly, and what we can find locally. We have no billets, but have some very superior dugouts. One block of them, which is our mess, has a dining room, a bathroom, with a sitting bath, a bedroom (for the Major), a kitchen, and a sort of recreation room with a piano!! The latter is a bit out of tune, but provides some amusement even when the Germans are shelling.

“What I should like most now would be a good day’s rest, with a decent meal, a bath, some clean clothes and a comfortable bed.

“Yesterday the Germans dropped a ‘Jack Johnson’ about twenty yards from us, which knocked me absolutely flat, but did not touch me.

“P.S. Sent you a F.S.P.C. yesterday. We are being shelled at present, and are in the midst of another fight.”

“19th May, 1915.

Same Address

“I have very little news today. It has been more or less quiet, though there has been more shelling on both sides, as usual.

“The weather still continues wet and cold. It is more like November than May. The ground is very heavy, the mud being of a very heavy nature.

“We can’t move about much behind the guns like we did in our last position, as the Germans send an occasional shell over all day long, and sometimes start a small bombardment, so it is advisable never to be very far away from a dugout. Of course, we have to move about a certain amount but we then take our chance that we are not caught in the open. As a matter of fact, the chances against being hit are very great, and it adds an element of interest to move about when necessary.

“I actually managed to have a bath the other day in an old tub and feel the better for it.”

“21st May, 1915.

Same Address

“Many thanks for your last letter. I am glad Jock is getting on all right, though I see there is still heavy fighting in his district. (2nd Battle of Ypres).

“The weather today is again wet and everything is wet and sloppy. Last night we gained more trenches with very little loss.

“We have had some casualties in the Battery recently. One subaltern, Wingate-Gray, was wounded.

“I am running very short of reading matter. Could you ask mother to send me out books regularly? I don’t mind what they are about. I like the last one, “The Grand Babylon Hotel.”

“Our piano is in full swing now. The other day we nearly lost it. A shell hit the dugout it was in, but the dugout, being well sand-bagged, the shell did not penetrate into the interior. It is floored with boards, has two windows and a door, and, inside, pictures and armchairs, a table and a sofa, besides the piano, so we are in clover.

“I see by the papers that there has been a row between Churchill and Fisher. I suppose it is Churchill interfering again. He ought to go and not the other fellow.

“My chill has quite gone now, and I feel very fit, but I should like some more exercise. The only exercise I get is going up to the observing station and back. I shan’t be sorry when we go back for a rest for a bit.”

CHAPTER VI

BACK AT REST

After this battle died down, towards the end of May, we were again withdrawn and rejoined our Cavalry Brigade in a rear area. We were billeted in a village called Rely, 8 miles south of Aire, and began the usual training with the Cavalry and ordinary routine of the Battery under peace conditions.

“26th May, 1915.

Same Address

“The weather is still fine and warm; the horses are doing well now the weather is so good.

“There is really no news of any sort, except what we get from the papers. The Germans appear to have gained ground again at Ypres through poisonous gas.

“I hope Jock has been having a good time on leave. By this time, I suppose he is again back in France.

“Both my horses are looking very well at present.

“We are doing very well in the food line now we are out of action. The whole of the three weeks we were in action we lived on tinned food, which got rather monotonous, especially the bully beef.”

“29th May, 1915.

Same Address

“Time does not hang heavy on our hands here. This is the first free moment I have had today (9.15 p.m.) since 5 o'clock this morning.

“The weather the last two days has been much colder; we have taken to our winter clothes again.

“I see in the papers that the Territorials have been getting on well in the place we have come from. The Germans are supposed to be quite demoralized in that part of the world. The day they surrendered the German artillery were expecting them to do it, and no sooner did they stand up, with their hands up, than their own guns opened on them.

“The first attack (May 9th) was a hopeless affair. Our losses were very heavy. The sight between the trenches was pretty horrible. When our second attack succeeded, a week later, we found several men who had been lying out there wounded the whole time. Even when we did capture the German trenches, we could not bury the dead between the trenches, as the Germans fired on all fatigue parties. The dead by this time were all black and charred, as if they had been burnt. The smell was pretty overpowering, too. They had been lying there nearly three weeks! For two nights I slept on top of a dead German, who was buried one foot under the soil. We were making a dugout close to the observing station when we came upon him, don up in wiring netting. He smelt a bit as well!

“This is a fine healthy spot on top of a hill. The only trouble is water for the horses, but we have a duck pond which they seem to like. It must be like beer to them.”

I was given a week's leave in June, which I spent with my people in Cambridge.

After France, the countryside in England, through Kent to London and thence to Cambridge, seemed wonderfully peaceful and unspoilt, like a well-kept garden. Although there were a few men in khaki, “business as usual” seemed to be the order of the day, and on this, my first leave from the front, there appeared to be no shortages of anything, and life going along normally. My finance from Ireland came over for a few days, one of which we spent boating on the river Cam. My sisters were then training to be school teachers, and in their holidays worked on the land. My brother had been given a commission in the Cameron Highlanders at the beginning of the War, joined the 2nd Battalion in France, and took part in the fighting of 2nd Battalion in France, and took part in the fighting of 2nd Ypres. He was one of the four officers out of thirty left in the Battalion after the battle.;

On returning I brought out a motor-bike which I had bought, and which I thought would be useful in the Battery. I had no difficulty in getting it on to the boat and into Boulogne. The difficulty was getting it out of the town because I had not a pass for it, and I was stopped at every exit from the place. I therefore put it on a train and when it had gone a certain distance, dismounted it and rejoined the Battery. I was careful to use only French civilian petrol and have repairs done only in French garages. My servant knew something about motors and was able to do the small repairs himself.

I had a number plate affixed with "VBOO" painted on it. The GS01 of the Division on seeing the bike asked me what VBOO meant, and I told him "V Battery Observation Officer or Orderly Officer." He was much amused, and kind enough not to forbid the bicycle for private motors were not supposed to be allowed. But some others went too far in using Government petrol and having repairs done in Government workshops, so the order was eventually enforced, and I had to abandon the bike. But until then it was extremely useful in going ahead for billeting, for whoever arrived first secured the best billets, in scouring around to get provisions for the messes, and in visiting field cashiers to draw pay for the Battery. I, and I think the Battery, missed it when it was put down.

G.H.Q. sent down a letter saying that as the Horse Artillery had had such an easy (!) time, they expected subalterns to volunteer for the new trench mortar batteries which were being formed, and asking for names.

Our Adjutant, Captain Alan Brooks (the late Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke) replied that of the nine original subalterns, three had been killed and three wounded, and if any more left it would affect the efficiency of their batteries. Nevertheless, one officer of V Battery decided to go so we had only two subalterns left.

“15th June, 1915.

“I told you in my last letter (to Mother) that we had moved. We have moved to a village, about four miles due West of our old place, because the water supply for the horses ran out. Here we have a running stream, which is much better.

“Our mess is in an old chateau on top of a hill. It is a delightful house, with an extensive garden and grounds. The roses are in full bloom. We have a run of the dining room, kitchen and conservatory. The Major and Captain also have bedrooms in the house, which belongs to the Governor of Algeria! During the recent warm weather, we have been having our meals outside.

“The other day the King and Queen of the Belgians inspected our division, and seemed much amused with the trick riding of the Indians.

“The inhabitants of this place don’t seem as friendly as those of the last, but they may improve with time.

“We are now under 4 hours’ notice to move so I cannot go far on the stink-wheel. I have been several short journeys, however, and it once let me down, owing to an important wire breaking, but it has been repaired, and is going as well as ever. Everyone wants to borrow it, which is a nuisance. I believe Digby is bringing one back when he comes off leave which will relieve the pressure somewhat.

“We are having some divisional sports here on June 24th if we don’t move. I am entering a horse for jumping.”

“22nd June, 1915.

Same Address

“The weather has now turned quite warm again. Our village is very shaded, however, with big trees. So, we do not feel it much. The day after tomorrow we are having a horse show. There are entries from all over France, French Officers competing as well as English. I am jumping one horse but it has not much chance against two Olympia jumpers, one owned by a French and the other by a British Officer. It is my Major’s horse and is quite useful in ordinary company.

“Today we had a long route march. It was very warm.

“Have you any more news of Jock? I hope he is still in comfort at Armentieres.

“The motor bike still goes. I used it almost every day; shopping at the large town six miles off to the N. (you know the one), or searching the country for places for the horses to graze or water when out at exercise, or places where one can get a gallop, etc.

“We are also entering for the show a Battery jumping team for N.C.O.s and men of three horses, and a gun team in the g.-t class. Our time is fairly full up getting ready for the events.”

“25th June, 1915.

“We had a horse-show yesterday. It was a great success. There was a very stiff jumping course. Not a single horse got round without a fault. We jumped off some heats the day before, and unfortunately, I got put out in the first heat. However, one of the horses I had been training, ridden by another fellow, came in 4th out of 150, but on the day of the show slipped up at the water-jump, and did not quite clear it.

“We also had a team in from the Buttery, which won the 1st prize for teams.

“The gathering was a great success, officers from all over the country being present, as well as almost as many French Officers. Luncheon and tea were provided at small tables. It might have been Richmond Horse Show except for the sound of guns in the distance.

“The weather which has been very warm started changing on the horse show day, and we had some rain, but not enough to spoil the show. Today has been very wet. It is a pleasant change in some ways not to get so much dust on the roads.

“The motor bike is a great success. Everyone is wondering how I managed to get one out here. The General saw it today, and said he thought it ought to prove very useful. I fetched his car today for him, so I can get any amount of petrol, oil, etc., for it from French garages, and can get repairs done by the travelling A.O.D. Workshop, attached to the Brigade, or the M.T. Section workshop free, except for a tip to the workman.

“As we are still on notice to move, I can't go away and see Jock, but if you could let me know where he is, more or less, if he moves, I might be able to someday.

“27th June, 1915

“Many thanks for your letter. I should like to read ‘Ordeal by Battle.’

“I hope by this time the country has come to see what a great mistake was made by not having compulsory service before the war, and that many thousand lives might have been saved if we had had it.

“The Germans will now probably drive the Russians as far back as they can into a difficult country, then hold the line and send every available man to the Western Front, and make an attempt to break through again.

“For this we shall want every available man and every available shell. Everyone is still asking when more men are coming out. Those who are now at the Front have been only just sufficient to replace casualties. A fellow just down from Ypres reports that they have been very short of shells up there. He did not say why.

“The weather has been very wet lately.

“Can you send out some more books?”

For a few weeks we had quite an easy time. Lord Kitchener came out and inspected us, and we marched past General Allenby, then commanding the Third Army. As Wainwright was on leave I was commanding the Battery. The usual routine and training continued:

5 a.m. Water and feed the horses (Orderly Officer).

7 a.m. Stables, water and feed.

8.30 -- 11. Battery Parade. Mounted Drill.

11.30 -- 12.30. Stables, water and feed.

2 – 3. Laying or gun drill

3.30 – 4. Water and feed (Orderly Officer).

5.30 – 6.30. Stables, water and feed.

10 p.m. or after. Turn out the guard (Orderly Officer).

Our horse-artillery drivers were armed with revolvers. When out at rest it was decided to put them through the annual practice at a nearby range. I was in charge at the firing point. It was one of the most dangerous practices I ever attended. I think that no many knew how to handle the weapons, and shots were going off in all directions. One man had a misfire, so pointed his revolver straight at me, pulling the trigger several times, and exclaiming, "Please Sir, this revolver won't fire." I think, if the drivers had had to use their revolvers in an engagement, they would have been more of a danger to themselves and their horses than to the enemy.

I laid out a miniature 9-hole golf course in a field and it was most popular. Even the Colonel came and played, and one day the General on a tactical exercise described a situation as being "just to the N.E. of V battery golf links."

We also had a cricket match against the Divisional Ammunition column, mounted sports and a horse show at which our Battery did a "gallop past." Wainwright was riding a good-looking, well-bred horse which he had taken over from me because I thought, in spite of its looks, it was rather a slug. In the gallop past, a horse battery goes flat out. On this occasion we had difficulty in not overriding the Major. A regiment of Indian cavalry made a charge: nothing was visible except galloping horses until the last moment when the men, from a position almost underneath their horses, swung themselves into their saddles, drew their swords and charged stopping just short of the spectators. Most spectacular.

"4th July, 1915.

"Weather at present is very warm

"We may be going into action again soon but at present it is only a rumor.

We are having a church parade this morning.

“There is no news to give you from here.”

So much extra equipment now has to be carried that the weight on a horse's back was 20 stone for a trooper. An officer's horse carried not much less. The officer himself was loaded like a Christmas tree with:

Revolver

Field glasses

Map case

Magnetic compass

Pouch for revolver ammunition

Haversack, containing iron ration, range tables, etc.

Box respirator

Water bottle

Steel helmet

We thought that some of the Indian Cavalry horses were too light for such a load. Many of them were country bred Indian horses and belonged to the men who rode them. Under the “silladar” system the man and his horse were enlisted at the same time, and light weight men naturally owned light weight horses.

Trotting when wearing a steel helmet was an unpleasant experience. It bumped on the head and was hard to keep straight.

Extra stores were also issued to batteries, but no more transport was authorized in which to carry them.

One day we did a “gas attack” exercise. The men were standing to their horses. When the “alarm” went and the men put on their masks, the horses were so frightened at the awful objects that they reared and bolted. It took some time to recover them. But on further occasions they got used to the frights they saw!

“14th July, 1915.

“Weather here today is very wet after being fine in the morning, so we have not had our usual round of golf.

“There is no news today, beyond a few minor incidents along the front. We are evidently expecting a heavy German attack soon but how soon no one seems to know.

“There seems to be an awful lot of back-chat in Parliament and the Papers about how the War is being run, which is the worst possible thing for the “morale” of everyone.

“People seem to think that the demand for high explosive shells is quite recent. As a matter of fact, two years before the War we asked to have 50% of our shells to be high explosive, and were refused, I believe on the ground of expense. We are starting to get them now. I also wonder if Lord Haldane thinks he was really doing good when he cut down three brigades (?) of artillery.

“There are two occasions on which we could have driven the Germans out of Belgium if we had had the men.

1. At the fight at Mons.
2. When we advanced into Flanders in October.

“We are now sacrificing many thousands of lives in attempting to do what could have been done with half the casualties if we had had the numbers. And yet people still believe that our system before the War could not have been bettered. Perhaps they will never know the truth,

as it will not be in the interests of any politician to let them know. But at any rate we hope the same mistakes will not be made after the War. Why always economics at the expense of the army?"

"21st July, 1915.

"We are still in the same place, but it looks as if we might move soon.

"The weather the last day or two has been very fine. We had another cricket match the other day.

"We still play golf every day on our course. A lot of people have played over it now.

"We might go into action again soon now that our front is being extended to Arras, perhaps close to that place."

"25th July, 1915.

"Many thanks for Punch and Sketch.

"We are going into action again opposite to the large town where I thought we might billet. Quite a new part of the line for the British Army, several miles south of the place where I thought we might go into action again.

"The weather has been very damp lately; not at all like July.

"The golf course is much patronized now. The Colonel has an iron and mashie, against our jigger and mashie.

"The stink wheel still goes all right."

28th July, 1915.

"Many thanks for the "Ordeal by battle," which I got yesterday. The honey made it and the other book rather sticky, but I have had them cleaned up with petrol, and they are quite all right now.

“Last Sunday we were cinematographed close to hee, the following were the ‘incidents’:

1. 13th Huzzars in billets
2. Native troops in billets
3. Native troops passing through a village (our ammunition wagons). I am riding at the head of twelve ammunition wagons.
4. Mail being issued.
5. Rations being issued
6. Sports. Football

“I don’t know if this film will be produced in England. (It was for use in India). The incidents would not necessarily be shown in that order.

“We are off into the trenches again in about four days. We have a four days’ march.”

The First Army was commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig. He was a good looking and impressive figure, but apt to be tongue-tied, and rather shy and reserved. One day, when inspecting troops, he stopped and spoke to one of the men: “Where did you start this war?” “Please, Sir, I didn’t start this War,” was the unexpected answer. This did not encourage the General to be more affable with the troops.

At the end of July, the two Divisions of the Indian Cavalry Corps took over from the French north of the river Somme. We marched down in three days. The marches were long, the weather hot, and our Indian Mohammedan drivers who were celebrating (if it can be called that) Ramadan suffered severely through not being allowed to eat or drink during the hours of daylight. But they made up for it at night.

We usually had a midday halt of an hour when the horses were watered and fed, and tea was brewed for the men. This was done by taking a dixie, or camp kettle, putting it in a double handful of tea, a double handful of sugar, emptying in a tin of condensed milk, filling with water, and then bringing the concoction to a boil over a fire. They offered me a mug. It

tasted strong, stewed and bitter. I asked whether they enjoyed it, and they replied that they liked something with a kick in it. It certainly had that.

The artillery did not go into action at once but remained in a reserve area while the cavalry were taking over from the French supported by the French artillery. The weather turned very wet and, as we were living in the open, it was not too pleasant.

“11th August, 1915.

“Many thanks for the letter card.

“I have finished ‘Ordeal by Battle,’ and enjoyed it very much. I agree with every word of it.

“We go up to the trenches again the night of the day after tomorrow. The position is apparently a fairly good one, but we will have no billets, and will have to spend all our time in dug-outs. There is some talk that we will stay there some time.

“I am glad to hear that Jock has been promoted.

“I have been playing golf here this afternoon. We have some quite nice links. They are about four miles away, but it is nothing on a m.-b.

“The weather has been better lately, but we still get heavy thunder-showers at times.

“I am going, D.V., to run over to the Adv. Horse Tpt. Depot tomorrow, which is only 10 miles from here by road on my m.-b.”

We moved into action in the front edge of a small wood just south of the village of Martinaart. It had a steep bank facing northeast into which we dug our guns. Here was the ideal position: good aeroplane cover, excellent gun positions on a forward slope, good gun platforms and firing over the large Aveluy wood which gave us good cover from ground observation.

It was a treat getting down here after the mud and dirt and heavy shelling up north. The country was completely unspoilt, rolling downland. The trenches were deep in chalky soil with deep dugouts, and quite dry. There was almost perfect peace, though, as usual, when the fighting stopped in 1914 the Germans were left in occupation of the high ground, and could command much of the country on our side. Our cavalry said that when they took over not a shot had been fired for 8 months except once, and then the Germans sent over and apologized that one of their men had let off his rifle by mistake when cleaning it. Newspapers were exchanged in no-man's land, and French officers from Battalion headquarters in Authuille dined with their German opposite numbers in Thiepval, and vice versa. In fact, a glorious country and a glorious War. When we had taken over, we had three little pip-squeak horse batteries on the whole divisional front. How different from a year later! Our Battery zone included Thiepval, and the headquarters of the regiment we supported was in the village of Authuille.

To the south of us, on our right, was the town of Albert, which had been the scene of fighting in the early part of the War. The Germans had shelled it, and the golden figure of the Madonna holding out the infant Jesus in her arms, which surmounted the spire of the church, was leaning over at right angles. Local legend said that when it fell the War would be over in six months. We thought of secretly sending a party to bring it down! Strange to say, when the Germans attacked in March 1918 the place was again shelled, the Madonna fell, and the War was over in seven months.

We could see little from the front-line trench, so we had a back O.P., 4,000 yards from the enemy, on the ridge running south from Martinsart from which the zone could be covered, but in Aveluy wood the French had constructed a wonderful O.P. in a tall tree, called "Le grand arbre," which we were sometimes allowed to use. [See Sketch 12]

From our O.P. we could see the German artillery officers riding up to their O.P. in Pozieres windmill where they dismounted and entered the building. It all seemed very friendly.

But it did not long remain so. We were told we must be “offensive,” and so we started to tickle up the Bosche. He did not take long in replying, and as he had the advantage of ground, we suffered more than he did.

We were still very limited in ammunition which was strictly rationed. We had a number of “retaliation” targets. For example, if the Germans shelled Authuille we shelled Thiepval. One night when I was the liaison officer at our regimental H.Q. in Authuille the Germans put a few shells into the village. I asked to retaliate, and the Battery fired its ration of 4 shells into Thiepval. The Colonel did not hear them, so asked me when I was going to start. I told him that the 4 shells had gone off. He said, “Four shells! Why, when the French Battery was supporting us, they let off 400 and then apologized for not firing more. They took a stretch of trench, fired heavily at both ends to drive the defenders into the middle, and then opened up on the middle.”

A certain amount of trench mortar activity also went on, and a little light shelling of back areas.

We not only had to dig in in our position at Martinsart, but to construct 4 or 5 other positions, so we were kept fairly hard at work. But compared to the fighting up north the life was idyllic.

“20th August, 1915.

“We have been very busy lately ‘digging ourselves in.’ We have been at the job for 5 days. This is a much better part of the line than we were in before. You can dig down without coming to water, so we have made a rabbit warren of our position.

“The Germans on this front are much quieter than the last place we were in. They don’t seem to have many heavy guns down this way, so we live fairly peacefully. The country is much hillier than in the other place, so we have made ourselves quite comfortable.

“The French, whom we took over from, had been living on very friendly terms with the Germans, neither side firing a shot at each other for days on end. When we first came the Germans seemed to want us to go on the same way, but we stirred them up a bit, so there is a certain amount of shelling going on each day.

“The Germans have some Minenwerfers on this front, and occasionally give our trenches a dose. They put 6 in in one day when I was in them as F.O.O. They made a colossal row, but did not hurt anyone beyond burying 6 fellows, who, however, were none the worse. They blew in part of the trench, however, and some fellows got hit repairing it.

“The weather has, on the whole been rather sultry with occasional heavy showers. It is also cold at night.

“We have two observing stations, one up a tree, and one a dugout on top of a hill, some way from the trenches. [See Sketch 13].

“We have dug ourselves her a sort of underground village. We have no billets at all, so our mess and everything had to be made underground. One of our Batteries moved into an old French position with beautiful dugouts, wainscoted, with pictures, etc., but the Germans have their range to a T, so I am not sure we are not better off at present.

“Our line is not continuous. We are in the norther sector of a new part of the line taken over by the British Army. One of the snags to this position is the water, which is hard to get and is hard when got.”

“26th August, 1915.

“Have no news to give you. Everything very quiet here at present – weather nice and warm. We are busily engaged in ‘digging ourselves in’ still. The flies are rather a pest.”

“30th August, 1915.

“Many thanks for your letter-card.

“I am glad you are managing to get a holiday in Ireland.

“The last two days here have been wet. Today is much finer, but looks as if we might get rain sooner or later.

“I might soon be getting another leave having now been nearly three months in the country without a break, but don’t expect me till you see me. I won’t be able to get away till at least a week from now, probably later.

“My motor bike has had a slight accident. The captain rode it the other day, and cracked the gear case. I have written for a new one from Cambridge, for which he will pay.

“I shall be going up to the trenches again tonight, and each of us gets up at daylight (4.0 a.m.) every 3rd morning for the observing station. It is delightful at that hour at this time of the year, but I wouldn’t get up unless it was necessary.

“We had a few shells over our position this morning. They were probably only chance rounds. Here is a sketch of our position. We ought to be fairly safe in it. There is a rumor that we are likely to be here all the winter.”

While here our Captain, Nicoll, left us to take over a Battery (The Chestnuts) in the First Indian Cavalry Division.

In their spare time the officers constructed a palatial mess dugout, lined with wood, and with windows, a door and a stove, and a bell to the cookhouse. We lived pretty well; Breakfast: porridge, eggs and bacon, toast and marmalade, tea and milk. Lunch: stew, stewed fruit with custard or rice pudding. Tea: Bread and jam, cake, tea and milk. Dinner: Soup, tinned salmon (sometimes), roast beef, vegetables, sweet (jam omelet or similar dish or tart), savory (Scotch woodcock or toasted cheese).

The O.P. had to be manned during the hours of daylight, which meant that the officer who was first on duty had to be up at 4 a.m. to get there in time. Reliefs took place every 4 hours, so each officer had a spell at the O.P. each day.

CHAPTER VII
STILL AT REST

On September 17th we moved out of action into what we imagined were to be our billets for the winter. As Nicoll had left us, I took over the duties of Captain and was sent on to do the billeting. I had to find and organize:

1. Billets for 200 men.
2. Cover or standings for 260 horses.
3. Gun Park.
4. Guard room.
5. Hospital.
6. Mobile Veterinary section.
7. Store room.
8. Billets for 6 officers.
9. Officers' Mess.
10. Kitchens for men and officers.
11. Places for watering horses.
12. Brigade supply stores and emergency train.
13. Army Post Office.
14. Ordinance Office.
15. Farrier's shop.
16. Saddler's shop.
17. Canteen and recreation rooms.
18. Baths.

And to lay in supplies of hay, straw, and firewood.

In interviewed the maire and obtained a list of house-holders, and then went round and chalked up the accommodation on the doors of the houses. Some of the householders were not too pleased with the idea of men and horses being billeted on them but after we had been in for a few days usually unbent and offered us more accommodation.

In billeting the village curé was often a good man to see. If there were difficulties, he could generally smooth them over, and he was usually very hospitable with a large supply of drinks. Visiting him was a popular occupation.

The Battle of Loos was fought on September 25th and subsequent days in conjunction with a French attack to the south. We took no part in it, not even in reserve.

“18th September, 1915.

“We have not come back to our ‘rest billets’ about 30 miles behind the line, and in a different place by a few miles to where we were before.

“We had two night marches to get here.

“This is a large, straggling village, with nothing much in it except cafes.

“The weather has been fine lately, but dull, and rather oppressive. Today, however, is much brighter.

“I believe we are going to have ‘maneuvers’ with all the British and French cavalry, round about here. As a consequence, all our leave has been sopped for these ‘autumn maneuvers.’

“Please thank whoever sent off my parcel. The honey leaked a little again, but not too badly. They want to know what books I like best. I have liked the following:

‘In Mr. Knox’s Country’

‘Some Irish Yesterdays’

'A Millionaire of Yesterday' by Philip Oppenheim

'Market Harborough' by White Melville

'Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour'

'Handley Cross'

'Mr. Romford's Hounds'

"There is one more of his I haven't read yet, 'Ask Mamma.'"

"I like most of A.E.W. Mason's books. I didn't care much for 'Trent's Last case,' and I don't want any more Nat Gould's.

"I am glad you had a good time in Ireland, and feel better for it."

"20th September, 1915.

"Very many thanks for your book on 'Finding Your Way by Night Without a Compass.'

"We are still staying in the same place. The French have done very well in the south: according to what we heard yesterday, they had broken through. Up this way, the ridge has been captured that there was all the fighting for las spring.

"These places are the two ends of the pincers, by which they hope to cut off all the Germans in the Soissons bend.

"The weather has lately been abominable here. It has rained steadily for the last few days. It has probably affected the operations somewhat, but if it has hindered the attack, it has also hindered the German counter-attack. Today is much finer, but there is quite an autumn nip in the air.

"We are chiefly occupied now in drill, and exercising the horses, getting them fit in case we have to do a long advance."

"28th September, 1915.

"Our trek has now halted, and we are stopping in a small village. Perhaps the meaning of 'maneuvers' is now apparent. If a sufficiently large hole is made in the line we shall be pushed through.

“The weather has been very wet, and we have had some mist, which is not very favorable for this sort of operation.

“Post is just going.”

As usual when out at rest, we trained with the cavalry, and then, early in October, had grand cavalry maneuvers lasting several days. There were plenty of cavalry charges and we galloped into action, as might have happened in the days of Waterloo but unlikely in modern War.

On returning from maneuvers, we moved on to other billets, in accordance with the Practical Joke Department of G.H.Q. If you are told you will be sometime in one place you are certain to be moved on in a few days. We moved, in fact, several times before being able to settle down, and eventually settled down in an area between Amiens and Abbeville.

The idea now was that there should be a system of reliefs in the line, each Battery going into action for a fortnight at a time and then coming back to its billets for a fortnight. But it did not pan out that way. We stayed in billets for several weeks.

“20th October, 1915.

“It is some time, I am afraid, since I have written to you. I have had a fair amount of work to do, as the ‘push’ is still going on, but not so much as in the earlier days when the days were longer.

“I may be getting leave again soon. My Colonel says I may go on leave when the weather definitely breaks. It is quite fine again today, and there does not seem much prospect of a break at present.

“The Bosches seem to have been picking up a bit lately. The bad weather, no doubt, has given them time to consolidate their positions more or less, while our aircraft have been

badly hampered by it. However, if we get a spell of fine weather again, we ought to be able to push a bit further. The German airmen, also, are beginning to get a bit bolder, and have actually taken to coming over our line occasionally. There have been several scraps with them, and today one of their latest was driven down.

“We have certainly had bad luck with the weather; but one could expect it to keep fine the whole time.”

I was given leave in October 1915 which I spent at Cambridge.

Arthur Wainwright now left us to command a brigade and Major Rochfort-Boyd joined us. He subsequently went on to command a brigade R.F.A., and he and his adjutant were killed in the German offensive in March 1918.

“29th October, 1915.

(On returning from leave) “I slept the night at the town where I left my bike, and journeyed on it this morning down to the Battery, which is about twelve miles south by a little E. of that town.

“I found on arriving here that Capt. Strawbenzee had gone away to command another Battery, and our new Major, Major Rochfort-Boyd, had joined. A new subaltern had joined also. I am now acting captain, and will be soon promoted ‘temporary captain,’ which carries the pay of the rank with it.

“The King was going to have inspected us today, but he had an accident, falling off his horse, so did not turn up. A German aviator nearly caught him with a bomb when passing the town, I left my motor bike at the other day. The German aviator, evidently thinking he was going to inspect the camp, hung about over the camp, and dropped a bomb on it ¼ hour after the King’s train had reached the station. Fortunately, the King was not inspecting the camp, but was going through it.

“The Major sent me back to A. this afternoon on my motor-bike to arrange about getting some things about starting a canteen for the men here, so altogether, with trying to find the Battery this morning, I have done about fifty miles on it.

“My job as ‘Captain’ is now purely administrative. I have no direct command of any sort. I am in charge of all billeting, rationing, foraging, etc., etc., and supervising the quartermaster-sergeant’s side of the Battery.

“The weather today has been fine. The roads were rather greasy for motor-biking from the rain of yesterday.

“Our billets here are, on the whole, not quite so good as in the last place. The horses and men are not in quite such good places, and the mess is not quite such a niche place. My own billet is very comfortable. It has electric light, and is warmed with steam radiators. It is in a mill, and the electric light is run from the same water power as the mill.

“There is a rumor that we are soon going into action again into a ‘cushy’ place with the native cavalry. It is only a rumor, however.

“The divisions that went to Serbia, do not include Jock’s Division.”

“7th November, 1915.

“Please thank Jock and M. & B. for choosing and having the rubber bath sent. It came in very useful, as I had one after playing football this afternoon.

“It does not appear certain yet that we are going up into action again soon. There is a rumor that we are to be dispatched to a foreign country, perhaps Mesopotamia. But this is very unlikely.

“I am very busy these days with accounts, etc. Before I had to do the Captain’s and one subaltern’s jobs, and now I am commanding the battery, and also have the Captain’s job. It does not leave much spare time in the day.

“The weather has lately been fine, but rather cold. There have been sharp frosts at night.

“We have been busy lately fitting up recreation-rooms for the men, and also a canteen, and a place to eat meals in under cover, near the cook-houses. Every afternoon from 3.30 – 4.30 there is football or a route march, at which we are expected to attend. (The Major insisted that every man in the Battery must play or march). Our program is as follows:

8:45 a.m.	Inspection of men, billets, cook-houses, recreation rooms And stables by section-commanders.
9.00 a.m.	Physical training.

9.30 a.m.	Parade.
11.30 a.m.	Stables.
12.45 p.m.	Dinners.
2.00 p.m.	Parade
3.00 p.m.	Water and Feed.
3.30 p.m.	Football or route-march.
7.00 pm.	Feed

“In addition to the above I have to run the Canteen, Officers’ Mess, Pay accounts, billeting and claims, and forage account, and also command the Battery.”

“10th November, 1915.

“Many thanks for your letter. Please thank Mother also for her’s. All letters now take a day longer to reach here. We have had no parcels for the last three days, so it looks as if everything was going a longer way round.

“Jock seems to have had a lucky streak. Has he gone back yet?”

“No more news yet about us going into action again. The last I heard was that it was indefinitely postponed. I expect we shall go up sometime this winter.

“Tomorrow we are having a parade of the corps. Some of our men are going to be presented with French Decorations. Our division has been congratulated for its good work in the trenches!!!

“It rather looks as if I am going to lose my stinking-wheel. They have sent round to ask how many privately owned motor-bikes there are in each unit. The next step seems to be that they must be disposed of. It has not actually come out yet. However, I have had my full money’s worth out of it, and it is still full of running, so I ought to get a good price if I sell it.

“We have had a very wet day today. Hope it will be fine for the inspection tomorrow.

“I wonder what the truth is about Lord K? Everyone out here seems to think he has resigned. I notice the Cabinet state that they make up their plans without consulting any of the Naval or Military experts. They seem to be merely asking for trouble, as their ideas of strategy are puerile. I hope the nation will soon realize that it wants a small cabinet to run the War, with a larger percentage of Naval and Military men.”

“16th November, 1915.

“I hear that Jock has at last gone back to France; I believe his division is not far from here, and I shall go over to see him if I have time.

“We had no posts for three days until today owing to storms in the Channel which uprooted mines and sent them adrift, so until they were cleared away no boats were allowed to cross.

“We have had a heavy fall of snow, which has stopped all our parades.

“We are not going abroad this winter, but I believe are to remain in billets, perhaps going into the trenches for a short time.

“Jock’s division, I believe, is under orders for Serbia. I have just heard that it has gone.

“We are going to shift our billets to another place, which is not so delectable a neighborhood as this.

“I am soon going to be made Temp Captain, and after three months as such become full Captain; so, I should like to get married on my next leave. I believe Colonel Honner will consent to it as well. I will then be getting £260 a year, not counting allowances.”

I did not remain long with the Battery because Colonel Askwith brought me in as adjutant in succession to Alan Brooke who left to command a Battery.

We had a delightful time in a comfortable billet, a certain amount of office work, riding about the country visiting and inspecting batteries on exercises and in billets, and in the evenings after dinner, settling down play bridge. There were five or six officers, Colonel, Adjutant, Orderly Officer, Signal Officer, Medical Officer, and O. C. Brigade Ammunition Column, so it was easy to find a bridge four. The Colonel was an expert and taught us well. When he went on leave, he made £200 playing at his Club, enough to pay all his expenses and

some over. An officer of B.A.C. was an excellent pianist who had composed music, so we sometimes had a musical evening.

“26th November, 1915.

“I have been appointed Adjutant to Colonel Askwith. My address in the future will be:

Lt. R. Macleod, R.H.A.

2nd Indian R.H.A., Brigade

Indian Exp. Force

“I ought to get a little extra pay on that job, but it won’t be all beer and skittles as I hear the Colonel is sometimes a little liverish. I am very sorry to be leaving this Battery, as I have got quite at home in it.

“My Major tells me that all subalterns with four years’ service are going to get promoted full Captain. I will get my four years’ service on December 23rd next.

“It looks as if the Germans might be going to make another attack here before long. I must say I think our politicians are mudding this War a lot. There is one place where this War will be decided and that is on this front. They don’t seem to realized that yet. One of the most elementary rules of strategy is not to make any detachments of troops from the decisive place unless it is to contain larger bodies of the enemy. What the Germans appear to be doing is to divert our attention at present to Serbia, by making a large demonstration there, in order to make us withdraw troops from this country, the decisive theatre, and to give them a more favorable opportunity of attacking again here. That’s what it looks like, but it is not certain. If we had had all the troops in this country that have gone to the Dardanelles, Serbia, etc., we might have had some sort of show here, and so frightened the Germans that they dare not send any men away to make demonstrations in other countries. That would have been the soundest strategy.

“As it is we seem to be playing their game by making these detachments. Now should be the time to concentrate every available man, gun, and shell in this country in order to make a demonstration against the Germans here, and prevent them removing troops to other areas. As it is, we are trying to be strong everywhere, and the consequence is that we are trying to outnumber the Germans in every theatre of War, without being decisively superior in the decisive theatre of War. Of course, there may be more behind it than meets the eye. But what would have been the soundest strategy would have been so concentrative every available man, gun, and shell here; at the same time, have made a demonstration against the Turks at the Dardanelles with a few troops

and contained a large force of them, with the threat of breaking through to Constantinople at any minute; and perhaps, a demonstration against Bulgaria in Serbia, to draw down reinforcements from the Germans there. When the Germans were committed to a new scheme, then we could have made our grand attack on a large front in this theatre, with every man, etc. All our attacks have up till now been made in too narrow a front to be really decisive. That's how things appear to me.

“One thing, we always seem to be too late with everything. We ought to have made the demonstration in Serbia first, and not let the Germans and Bulgarians get the initiative. In the same way, we could have walked through the Dardanelles at any time we wanted to if we had had the troops ready, instead of which, a comparatively small number of Turks are holding up a large number of our troops away from the decisive theatre of the war. We have not gained the initiative anywhere yet.

“The weather has turned much colder again. Today we had a heavy fall of snow, and now it is freezing hard.”

“7th December, 1915.

“I believe it is my turn to write to you.

“I have now been promoted to Temp. Captain., so kindly address my letters in future to ‘Captain Macleod,’ etc. I will probably go back to one of the batteries as Capt.

“There is very little doing out here now. We have made ourselves fairly comfortable with a billiard table (French pattern) and a piano. I have lent the gramophone to the Column for the time being, where it is much appreciated. One of their officers comes and plays the piano here.

“Last Saturday I went up to Abbeville in the car to do some shopping. I found not a single man left that I had known there before.

“The weather is now much warmer, but very rainy.

“I have no news of any kind. More troops are coming into this country every day, and we are making room for them.”

Mr. Winston Churchill had now come out and joined a Battalion, and his C.O. told Askwith this amusing story;

One day when the C.O. was on leave, a lady asked him at dinner: "I suppose Winston is teaching you a lot about world politics?" to which the C.O. replied: "Yes, and we are trying to teach im minor tactics."

The colonel went on leave and left me in administrative charge of the Brigade.
Correspondence went on the old familiar lines after this fashion:

A.G.P.Q.R.E.

2nd Indian Cavalry Division

4580 x X.54

321 242

5.12.15

With reference to my A.Q.J. dated 5.11.14, for 'brickbats' read 'half bricks.'" Para 2 of the same does not appear to have been strictly complied with.

To C.R.A.

A.D. Q. F.R.Z.

So, I send out:

R.Q. 32/TS

C.R.A.

2nd Indian Cav. Div.

6.12.15

With reference to my J.T.12 B.R. of 9.3.15 for 'brickbats' read 'half-bricks.'

Para 2 must be read out to all ranks again, and strictly complied with. When bricks are issued to improve standings for horses, they should be used for that purpose, and not as supplement to ammunition.

To all Boys

R.M.

Adj. 2nd Ind. R.H.A. Bde.

My pleasant life at R.H.A. Brigade H.Q. did not long. A War Office order said that temporary captains were not to be employed as Adjutants unless they reverted to their permanent rank. The colonel decided to post me to a Battery as Captain. I wished to go back to my old Battery, "V," but he sent me to "X" under Major Harris, and I joined them on the 20th December, 1915.

"21st December, 1915.

"I have now joined X Battery, R.H.A., as Captain. So please address all my letters there in future.

"I may be getting some leave again soon but nothing can be settled at present. The Major is at present on leave in Paris so I am commanding the Battery. He comes back about the 27th. I may get away after that.

"Have you heard anything more from Jock yet? There is a rumor that we may be following him; but there are so many going about at present that the chances are very much against it being true.

"Do you know if the Derby Scheme has been a success? We hear out here that it was not as successful as was hoped. At any rate they can't now delay compulsory service much longer. We ought to have had it at the beginning of the year.

"Everything out here seems fairly quiet now. We have got up a Divisional Football Tournament, and on Christmas Day there is going to be a Marathon race and a bomb-throwing competition.

"The weather today is very wet. Yesterday we had it fine and had a practice match for the tournament. "There is no news out here to give you."

Early in January 1916 I was given a week's leave and went first to Ireland to see my fiancée and her parents. To my delight and astonishment, they had made all arrangements for our

marriage. After the wedding we spent a few days with my parents at Cambridge and with relations in London. The return journey to France via Southampton and Havre was not very comfortable. We left about 8 p.m. and the sea was rough.

“11th January, 1916.

“The leave boat was a very small affair, with no cabins or any other place to lie down .

..

“The men had to sit or lie about the decks and passages. We were twelve hours at sea, the boat not being able to berth. The men were sick all over the place, decks, and passages. When we reached Havre, we could not even get a cup of tea.

“On landing we got at once into a very dirty train. It was very slow and very late, so I missed the connection to the village where my Battery is, and had to spend the night at a small country inn. I had no meal from dinner of a sort on board the boat till 7.30 the next evening, owing to the leave train never stopping at a station, but always between stations. I had rather a job to get to my Battery, but a fellow with a care very kindly gave me a lift. Altogether the journey took nearly 48 hours.”

“18th January, 1916.

“I have only just time to scribble you a line. “We are not for abroad after all; but it seems likely on account of the weather which has been wet and muggy. We were inspected by the Corps Commander last Friday who ‘battered us uncommon.’ Yesterday we had a ‘Brigade Day,’ with a scheme. Tomorrow we are going to a lecture on the Battle of Loos which ought to be interesting.

“I hope you are having a bit of a rest now after your strenuous work.”

“7th February, 1916.

“We have so far received no orders to move up into action, but are holding ourselves in readiness.

“As you will have seen in the papers, our part of the line has been fairly lively, our position being a mile or two east of the place I mentioned.

“We seem at present to be leading a peacetime existence, with gun drill or other parades in the mornings, and golf or football in the afternoon.

“According to the papers, the Germans seem to be going to make a big attack on this front. Perhaps it is only bluff. Even if they do, they can’t do much unless they have some quite new invention, such as gas was. At any rate it will probably be their last desperate effort on this front.

“The weather out here has been very mild on some days, almost like spring. Just lately we have had a little rain.

“What sort of time has Jock been having?”

“13th February, 1916.

“Just a line to say that I am getting along all right.

“Our move up has now been cancelled. We may have to go up later on.

“It looks as if we might have to shift billets soon. I went over to where our new quarters are likely to be if we do move today to prospect. I was not much taken with the new place. It seems mostly mud and smells.

“In spite of the economy in paper, we still seem to get any amount of stuff from various Government departments, that might just as well never have been written. Today, for instance, we had a priceless document from the ‘Board of Agriculture and Fisheries.’ It starts – ‘Conditions on which Geldings – The Property of the War Office – are loaned to Custodians for breeding purposes.’ Then follow the conditions.

“Some wag has written underneath – “Seen with interest. This upsets all previous theories as to the value of eunuchs as trusted custodians of Oriental Harems.

“We are now busy with quite elementary training. The promotion of N.C.O.s is very rapid, and we are always having to train new lots. Every fine afternoon we play football or golf. In the evenings we generally do some reading, sometimes of Military History. Sometimes we do some ‘buzzing’ on the telephone (signal training in Morse on a dummy instrument).

“Science has played such an important part of this War that it looks as if in future Wars the following changes will have been made.

1. Horses done away with. Guns, etc., driven by motor power. 'Cavalry' mounted on bikes or motor-bikes. Infantry taken about on motor-buses.
2. Very much more powerful field guns, capable of a much longer range and great improvement in equipment.
3. General establishment of wireless, instead of telephone or flag-signaling.
4. Wearing of armor. This has already been partly started by wearing steel helmets.
5. Machinery for digging trenches quickly, and also for mining.
6. Improved types of aeroplanes.
7. Automatic rifles for Infantry."

CHAPTER VIII

INSTRUCTIONAL WORK

We soon moved north again, and came into action near Richebourg St. Vaast, close to where we had been for the battles of Neuve Chapelle and Festubert. Many new divisions were now coming out, both Kitchener's Army and Territorials, and some of their batteries were sent to us to be trained in the work of a battery in the line. Their officers and men doubled with ours, and we taught them the trench warfare routine, including 'shooting in,' calibration, keeping an 'Artillery Board,' and the various duties.

"22nd February, 1916.

"Very many thanks for yours of 18th.

"I'm afraid I cannot give the no., date, etc., of the 'Precious circular,' as it has been purposely omitted when sent round to us. It was sent round to us by the Corps Commander, who vouches for its accuracy, so it ought to be true enough.

"We are now in action and are having a very busy time. We have taken over a position that is half in ruins, and we have put that right before we can make new dugouts, the old ones being full of water. Tonight, we changed guns, and have now two officers for every other ranks attached for instruction, so we will all have a pretty busy time for some time."

"The weather has been cold lately, but we are in fairly comfortable billets considering we are in action. Today there was a heavy fall of snow."

In February 1916 the Germans launched a heavy attack on the French at Verdun which lasted some months. The fighting was bitter. The French fought gallantly, many divisions were thrown into the battle, but some ground was lost. The German losses were also heavy.

In March we came out of action and after a long march moved again into action on the 16th on the Somme front at Mailly-Maillet. Major Harris now left us to command a Brigade and I was left in command of the Battery We continued our work of training new batteries. One of our jobs was to teach wire-cutting with shrapnel shell. The only place we could properly see from was the front-line trench, so we went down there with a periscope with which to observe the fire. When the Germans saw the periscope raised, they turned a trench mortar onto it. We could see the T.M. bombs in the air coming towards us, and had time to dodge round the traverse into the next bay. Naturally we were not very popular with the infantry who had to repair the damaged trenches.

A 15-inch howitzer Battery was in the woods near Mailly-Maillet, and the whole country was now filling up with batteries, very different from the three pip-squeak batteries of last autumn.

“21st March, 1916.

“It seems a long time since I last wrote home. Just lately, I have been extremely busy. I am now commanding ‘X’ Battery, and we are now up in action again. We are an instructional wire-cutting Battery. I have to instruct some of the new K batteries in wire-cutting. I have three Brigades on hand at present, and I do one Battery a day. It seems rather a lot of work, as we have to shift into a new position nearly every day, and it has to be first of all prepared. I had my first go yesterday. As all this country is new to me, it takes me a little time to pick up the points. I also have to arrange about the shoot. Altogether my time has been rather full up lately.

“The weather has been magnificent lately. It might quite well have been spring.

“We have now left our uncomfortable huts and are accommodated in billets again.”

“25th March, 1916.”

“I am glad Jock is having a fairly cushy time at Salonika. He is safe, at any rate, from crumps at present.

“My job has been indefinitely postponed owing to lack of ammunition.

“Our new O.C. has not yet joined us. When he does, I hope to get leave, if it has not been shut down again by then.”

In April we moved out of action and Major Walker took over command. He was a very keen and efficient officer. I had known him before in Ireland when he was a subaltern in a Horse Battery at Newbridge on the Curragh, and had often met him out hunting and racing.

I had leave again in April and spent it with my wife visiting relations. She now had a flat in London. England was wonderfully peaceful, quiet and beautiful after France. There were few shortages of anything, but nearly everyone was during War work of some sort. On my returning to France, we again had cavalry maneuvers, this time directed by General Gough. Apparently G.H.Q. was not satisfied with many of the older officers in command of the Indian brigades and regiments, for soon afterwards he took them on tactical exercises and set them small problems. Major Walker attended most of them and told us what happened:

General Gough to a Lt. Colonel: “How would you move across this country?” (It was a wide open, rolling country with few obstacles).

Lt. Col.: “I would move by bounds, Sir.” (This appeared a correct solution in such country).

Gen. Gough: “What? Like a ballet girl jumping on to a stage?”

Gen. Gough to another Lt. Col.: “I am Corporal Gough in charge of a section, and you are my troop commander. What orders would you give me to move through that wood?”

Lt. Col., after thinking a bit: “I should tell you to keep close together.”

Gen. Gough: “Keep close together? There is no word of command in the book, ‘Keep close together’.”

Gen. Cough gives a tactical situation to a brigadier and tells him and his brigade-major to write their orders. He takes out his watch and after 5 minutes says: “Time is up. Your orders are too late, and the enemy will be on you.”

In this way nearly all the senior officers of the Indian Cavalry Corps were ‘ungunned.’ Most of them had had long service, but were now old, and out of touch with modern European War. I think it would have been kinder if a less brusque way of dispensing with their services had been used. They were replaced mostly by younger officers of the British service.

We continued our training for the big battle which we knew was coming soon, and had more maneuvers with the new senior officers.

“26th May, 1916.”

“We are being kept very busy nowadays with training, drill orders, staff-rides, etc. This, with one’s ordinary job, leaves very little spare time in the day. Owing to our billets being scattered over rather a large area, I find it takes me a long time to get round, and sometimes I find I have not time to get all the way round.

“I am glad you have been gingering up the authorities a bit about the No-Conscriptionists, and such like, and that it has had some effect. The authorities never seem to

take action till they are pushed. Some pretty amazing evidence is coming out in the Irish Enquiry about the Government's policy of laissez-faire.

"Just lately the weather has been rather warm, a sort of thunder-heat. Today, however, is cooler.

"I was inoculated last Saturday again against typhoid. I was laid up on Sunday, but was out and about again on Monday.

"Last Wednesday our Cavalry Division gave an exhibition to a French corps (you may guess where they have come from [Verdun] to rest). Our Battery gave a driving display. Other events were – A gallop past of Horse Artillery and Cavalry, Tent-pegging, Trick-riding, and a V.C. race.

"Altogether, I believe, the Frenchmen were very pleased with the show. It was only marred by a very heavy two hours' thunder shower just before the start, which made the going very slippery. What seemed to strike the Frenchmen most was the grand condition and quality of our horses. They were also much taken with the feats displayed in trick-riding, such as picking handkerchiefs off the ground at a gallop, one man standing on one horse and leading three others. Tent-pegging standing up in a saddle, etc.

"We are having Brigade Sports next Saturday and Sunday week, when there will be jumping competition, etc. I am entering one of my horses that was second in the corps show last year (when it belonged to another officer), but it has not had much practice this year."

"30th May, 1916.

"I have not heard from you for a long time.

"I hope the Pacifists are now fairly quiescent."

"Today has been another of my busy days. At 8.30 a.m. we had a drill order, and we were out till 12.30. From 2.30 – 3.30 we had 'miniature-ranging,' at 3.30 practicing jumping for the horse show, at 4.30 stables, 6.0 practicing tent-pegging, 7.30 water and feed. At any odd moments after breakfast, before lunch and before dinner I had office work to do. Since dinner I have had to go through a Divisional Scheme for tomorrow, and the canteen accounts.

"Tomorrow I will be C.R.A. of division, as for various reasons all the senior officers are away. The Colonel and one Major are at the School of Instruction, and the other two majors are on leave, and I am the senior Captain of the Division.

“Our miniature range is a model of a landscape put up in a barn. The burst of the shells is represented by a small ball of cotton-wool on a wire, worked by an operator. Its object is to practice officers and N.C.O.s in giving out orders.”

“8th June, 1916.

“Many thanks for your letter and for the cutting. I am glad that the authorities are at last sitting up a bit and taking notice. It is about time. Too. When this War has come to an end perhaps, we shall have a proper sized Army, enough ammunition, and all traitors and cowards properly dealt with.

“There is another rumor here this evening that Lord Kitchener has not been drowned after all, but has been picked up in a small boat. I wonder if there is any truth in it.

“We are off again to our maneuvers area next Saturday. There is some talk about having sea-bathing after that. We then become a school for training officers of the new Army.

“It has turned very wet and cold here lately, not a bit like summer. It is having a bad effect on the horses.

“We are still very busy training, and having staff rides and maneuvers.

“The Russians seem to be going good work against the Austrians. Things are beginning to look a bit brighter for us now. If only the Germans will keep on attacking at Verdun, they will used up their reserves.

“I hear that when Sir Wm. Robertson took over the job of Chief of the Imperial General Staff, he told the Government that he would only take it over if they let him have a free hand. He found that they were all for splitting up the Army over the world, as they had been doing before, but he soon put a stop to that. The Government still try to convince him to do things he doesn't want to do, and he says the arguments they put forward sometimes are so plausible that he has to keep his mind fixed on what he knows to be right in order not to be convinced. He said that if he put a wine glass in from of him, the Government would convince him it was a tea cup unless he kept continually saying to himself, ‘That is a wine-glass.’ So perhaps now according to sir. W. r. the Government are the most muddle-headed lot of idiots he has ever had to deal with. Please don't publish these statements or else I'll be getting it in the neck.”

“20th June, 1916.”

“We are being kept very busy these days with drilling and maneuvers.

“The weather has been rather cold for summer up till now. I hope it will be warmer for our next ‘maneuvers.’

“There seem to be rumors now that the War will be over this year. Certainly, the Russians seem to be pushing on a bit, and the Germans seem to be using up a lot of men at Verdun. The papers seem to think that the Germans have no reserves to help the Austrians with, but they have been wrong before.

“How many men have you now for the I.C.S.?”

“I hope the Pacifists at Cambridge are fairly piano now, and that you are resting after your labor of bring them to book!!! I wonder when the Government are going to wake up at last to all that has been going on.”

Towards the end of June, a heavy bombardment of the German defenses on the Somme front began and continued up to the battle. All the Cavalry, British and Indian, were moved up close to the front.

CHAPTER IX

THE SOMME

“29th June, 1916.

“We have been very busy indeed lately. We have had marches on two nights out of the last three. Last night we were thankful to get a night’s rest. We are now bivouacking out in the open, which is all right when it is fine. We have some practically only the kit we stand up in and a blanket, as our transport is left behind. We have a tent as a mess and office combined.

“We had a few days very wet while marching. Today, however, has been fine which has given us a chance to dry our clothes.

“All the troops are in high spirits. The Bosche seems to be reaching the end of his tether, although, no doubt, he will still put up a stubborn resistance to keep what he has got. The War must be decided on this front, as every military man has known from the beginning, although the Government seem to think other places of equal importance.”

On July 1st 1916 the Battle of the Somme started. General Haig, who was now Commander-in-chief, and not wanted to begin it so soon, because many of the new divisions were not fully trained, but General Joffre pressed him to start the battle to relieve the pressure on Verdun. Also, the scale of the battle was reduced because many of the French divisions which it had been planned should take part, had been drawn in at Verdun instead. Hence the British bore the major part.

The plan in general was; It was hoped that the line Martinpinch – Courcelette, astride the albert – Bapaume Road northeast of Albert, the rear of the German defenses, would be taken at zero plus 4 hours. Beyond there was open country with no obstacles. All five cavalry divisions would then go through the gap. Our division was to lead and was to go straight through at a gallop to Bapaume where there was a German Army Headquarters, which it was to capture and

seize all the documents. It was then to hold Bapaume against all counter-attacks. The other cavalry divisions were to form defensive flanks to the north and south to prevent the Germans closing the gap behind us, and to form a front to enable infantry reserves coming through behind the cavalry to attack northwards and roll up the German line from the south. [See Sketch 14]c

A bold, imaginative and ambitious plan if it could be carried out, but unfortunately Martinpuich – Courcellette was captured not at zero plus 4 hours, but not until zero plus 2 ½ months, by which time the Germans had built up several defense lines in the rear and there was no opportunity to use cavalry.

A certain advance was made on July 1st in the southern half of the battle area, and we saw many German prisoners being brought back, but in the north, at Thiepval, the Germans held out and repulsed our attacks with heavy loss.

To the south of us, more ground was gained by the French than by us because, in view of Verdun, the Germans were surprised by the French attacking at all.

“2nd July, 1916.

“Today the weather is really summery after a wet and cold June. It is a treat to get it like this now as we are bivouacking . . .

“There seems to be a general idea that the War is likely to be over this year. It is very difficult to believe, as the Germans still seem to be holding out, and no crushing military victory seems to be in sight yet. The Russians seem to be the only ones that have got a real move on . . .”

[Our Cavalry Division withdrew to bivouacs south of Le Querrieux where Fourth Army Headquarters were situated.]

“10th July, 1916.

“I have no news to give you. We are still bivouacking out in the open, but the weather has changed for the better. The last two days have been much more like summer. We cannot leave camp very far, so getting exercise is a bit difficult.

“We have now been issued with tents so we will not feel the bad weather so much, but we may be moving in a day or two in which case the tents will have to be left behind.

“I heard today from Mrs. Birley (Mother of Major Birley) who has gone to see Major Birley in Switzerland. His leg still seems to be very bad, but he has hopes of getting better.

“We seem to be gaining ground here slowly. Last night there was a heavy bombardment, but what it was about I don’t know. We shall probably hear today.”

A new attack was planned for July 14th, the objectives being Delville Wood, Longueval and Basentin-Le-Petit, and our Cavalry Division was to be used to exploit success.

A subaltern of the Battery, White, and I went up to reconnoiter the ground. We went through Fricourt and Mametz, which had been villages but were not completely demolished, and studied the country from the high ground in that area close to our front line. There was not much activity except some shelling by both sides.

The attack was to be a night attack, before dawn on the 14th, and our cavalry division moved up during the night into the Carnoy Valley ready to move forward at daylight. Two of the divisional commanders carrying out the attack were to decide mutually whether and when we were to go through.

Some shells fell in the valley without doing much damage, and one of our balloons here was ranging one of our big guns in the valley.

It was soon reported that Delville Wood and Longueval had been captured, but no word reached us that we could advance. It appeared that the two divisional commanders could not agree, so referred the decision to Corps. Corps said that it was an Army matter and referred to Fourth Army Headquarters. Fourth Army said that the Cavalry were the last G.H.Q. reserve and referred it to G.H.Q. G.H.Q. gave permission and by the time it reached us it was 6 p.m., twelve hours wasted. The Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade with N Battery (The Eagle Troop) R.H.A. went through. The Battery came into action and the Cavalry charged and speared some German machine gunners, captured all High Wood (except the northern tip) and the high ridge running east from it. German reinforcements were seen advancing from Bapaume obviously to counterattack, so the Brigade hung on to the ground they had seized.

Hundreds of German prisoners were now streaming back. They seemed rather pleased at being taken, and said that our bombardment was worse than anything they had had yet, including Verdun. I saw a German general and his staff in an officers' cage. All seemed keen on bully beef and biscuits, and there was quite a scramble when a tin of bully was put in among them. Our men treated them very well, giving them cigarettes and chocolate. The Germans seemed well mannered and anxious to please. In one cage our medical orderlies were dressing the wounds of wounded prisoners. They looked a fairly sturdy lot though there were one or two weakly ones among them. One prisoner said that he hoped we would soon win the War, and another said that it would have to end soon because supplies were running out in Germany.

When night came the infantry came up to relieve the cavalry, but said they had no orders to take over High Wood and the ridge to the east, so only took up a position south of these features, in spite of the cavalry's protests. But there was nothing the cavalry could do about it, so they withdrew during the night, and next day we went back to our bivouacs near Le Querrieux.

The German front line trench was now some 200 yards beyond the crest of the ridge, running east from High Wood, out of view of any artillery O.P. In subsequent attacks we lost heavily from German M.G. fire as the infantry topped the ridge, and it cost us four divisions to retake the ground seized by the cavalry on the 14 July, 1916.

“18th July, 1916.

“Many thanks for your letter. It is in my wallet, so I have not the date of it on me.

“The weather has turned wet again, and rather muggy, after being fine for a week.

“There is a heavy bombardment going on at the present moment, that has been going on as well for the better part of the night. The Germans seem to be feeling the effects of our continued bombardment. One of their captured officers said that if we kept it up for a couple of months, they would throw their hands in. We intend to give them no rest, provided we have the ammunition, and we shall try to bring the War to an end this year.

“As soon as the Germans show signs of breaking up we shall be pushed through to try to rout them. We were once used the other day, as you may have seen in the papers. When the infantry have broken through all the trench system and it comes to open warfare again we shall have more of a chance. By that time, I hope the weather will have turned fine, as it is very difficult for cavalry to move easily across rain-soaked country, as they will be slipping about in the mud. In the same way, it hampers our guns even more.

“The ground is pock-marked with hell holes, some 12 or 14 feet deep, which it will take us all our time to keep out of it. Once we get beyond the trench system and get the Germans ‘on the run,’ there ought to be a chance for us, but we still have some way to go before we come to that. The Germans still have more lines of trenches left which we shall have to blast our way through first.

“While sitting here we are not very busy, but all sorts of odd jobs keep cropping up every day, such as reconnoitering tracks across country, crossings over rivers, etc., that we don’t know how long we can sit down for. Also, at every attack we must ‘stand to,’ in case the infantry get through. It is not likely to happen, as the German is a very stubborn fighter, but the hundredth chance might come along, for which we want to be ready.

“I can give you no news about the fighting except what you see in the papers. These don’t at all convey the impression of the battlefield, where the dead are lying out in hundreds, or

the difficulties the infantry have to overcome in taking the trenches, or the strain they undergo through being continually fired at with every sort of shell. However, it must be ten times worse for the Germans.

“Several hundred prisoners have passed by here. I have not conversed with them personally, but there is a ‘cage,’ or barbed-wire enclosure, where they are examined close by, and we manage to get some of the information they give.

“They are nearly all seem fed-up with the war, and some of them say they hope our offensive will be successful as it will probably end the War. They also say there is a shortage of provisions with them at home, though how far towards starvation they are is not known. They admit it is due to the blockade. It seems a pity now that the blockade was not made more stringent from the beginning of the War as the War might have been over by now if it had been.

“It is extraordinary how the post manages to reach one out here. The other day we were moving about all day, over trenches and back again, and when we had been sitting still about an hour, the post came it. We got the London papers only a day late, as we always do. The post comes as follows. It arrives by train at rail head, and from there travels up in a mail van as far as brigade H.Q., the mail van visiting the different Brigades in the Division. Brigade H.Q. inform us of its arrival, and we then send over for it.

“We are lucky here in having a stream running past the Battery. You know the name of it. The country elsewhere is very dry, and watering is a very difficult matter. It will get still harder when we get into the country now occupied by the Germans. They say they are finding it difficult to provide enough water for the men in the trenches.

“The only objection to being by the river is that the camp is low-lying and muddy. The mud seems to get everywhere; over one’s clothes, on the blankets, and even in the food; but we have no right to complain, as there are others far worse off than we are.”

“19th July, 1916.

“We are still sitting here in the same place. When the German line is broken, they’ll want us again. Perhaps you saw in the papers about one of our small shows (attack on Deville Wood) the other day. The Germans still seem to be putting up a very stubborn resistance, and the only way we can hope to beat them is by keeping on hammering away at them with heavy artillery.

“One of the subalterns in this Battery (Lieut. White) has got bagpipes out from home and is practicing on them! They are only ‘drawing room’ ones, fortunately, without reeds.

“We have nothing much to do here except studying the country we may have to advance over and some hours drilling every day.”

CHAPTER X

WITH THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS

Not long after our return to Le Querrieux I was offered the appointment of liaison officer between the Artillery of the 4th Army, then fighting on the Somme, and the 4th Brigade of the Royal Flying Corps supporting it. I decided to accept, because I could not see any future for the cavalry in the present War and because I did not fancy sitting for several months in billets behind the line doing the duties of Captain of a Battery. These duties were not particularly interesting being entirely administrative, dealing with the supply of ammunition, rations, forage, clothing and stores, and equipment and quarters, all very necessary but, after a time, rather boring. The new job seemed much more attractive and I felt I would be contributing more to the War effort.

“23rd July, 1916.

“We are still in the same place, but are moving today. I am also sending a F.S.P. card today in case this letter does not catch the post.

“We do not get much exercise as we cannot go far from camp. The weather has lately been fine.

“Last night there was a heavy bombardment on. You may see what happened in the papers, if they are allowed to publish it.

“Most of the infantry regiments out here now have bands. It must make a difference to them.”

“24th July, 1916.

“The Colonel has recommended me for liaison officer between the Artillery and R.F.C. of one of the armies. The job sounds very interesting. He said it was a good thing to get

away for a short time from regimental soldiering My new address will be -- 2nd Wing, R.F.C., B.E.F., and Capt. R.H.A. as before.

Letter to my father from Major R. A. Birley.

11.7,.16

Pris. Of War,

Grand Chalet

Rossinicia

“Many thanks for your p.c. of the 24th June, and also for that of the 11th Jan., which I got at Main 23; but had no opportunity to answer.

“I am very glad to hear that both your sons are fit. It would have made you very proud to have seen your son’s behavior up to the time of his being wounded, and indeed, the conduct of all three boys (Rory, Hewson, and Mirrlees) and every man in the Battery on the 26th Aug. filled me with admiration. Rory and I were the unlucky ones that time, but if the colonel and I had not been taken prisoner perhaps even more in the way of reward might have been done, though the 80th Battery cannot complain on that score.

“I am in a delightful chalet here and my mother is here with me which is good for both of us. We certainly had a wonderful and surprising welcome here beginning immediately we left Germany. To my mind it means with regard to the feeling in Switzerland all that, or even more than, the English papers have suggested. Some more unhappy ones ‘come out’ on 17th, 18th and 19th. I wish we all could come after two years, as I have heard is remotely possible.

“With kindest regards to your wife and trusting that you may only hear the best news of your sons.”

X Battery R.H.A. came into action again in Delville Wood with the task of enfilading a German trench, and Lieut. Whit who was acting Captain in my place was killed. ‘There but for the Grace of God . . .’

The 4th Brigade R.F.C. consisted of an Army Wing, a Cooperation Wing, both of aeroplanes, and a Balloon Wing. The Headquarters of the two aeroplane wings were in a large chateau at Bertangles, five miles north of Amiens. The whole of the 14 (Army) Wing, consisting

of three squadrons of fighters and bombers, was accommodated on a large aerodrome at Bertangles. The three Squadrons of the 3rd (Army Cooperation) wing were nearer the front, one squadron supporting each Corps.

Lieut. Col. Hoare commanded Army Wing He had given orders that the enemy must be attacked at all times whatever the odds. They had done magnificently, though with many casualties, in driving the enemy aeroplanes out of the sky over the battlefield, and it was only when our machines attempted to cross the Bapanme – Peronne road, above which the Germans maintained patrols, that they were attacked. Consequently, the cooperation machines could fly over the battlefield practically unmolested except for A.A. fire. One of the Army squadrons had Sopwith triplanes, an extremely good machine, the second had, I think, Sopwith Pups, and the third two-seater F.E. 2b's, in which the observer sat out in a projecting nose in front, giving him excellent observation. This was really a bombing squadron. One of the fighter squadron commanders was a Major Hawker who had shot down several German machines, but he was later killed near Loupart Wood. One of the gallant fighter pilots was Wedgwood-Benn. I believe he was later shot down and captured.

Most of my work was with the Cooperation Wing, commanded by a most efficient Lieut. Col. Ludlow-Hewitt. He had brought cooperation to a fine art and was an expert in the subject. The squadrons were numbered 3, 9, and 34 and later, when the Army had another Corps added, 52 squadron joined us to operate with them.

The Cooperation machines were Morane Parasols in the 3rd, and B.E. 2c's in the 9th and 34th Squadrons. Their top speed was only about 60 miles an hour. One squadron later had R.E. 8's. These machines had a fairly high stalling speed, and there were several crashes on taking off. Landing, also, required a steep angle of descent which again was not easy until the

pilot was used to it. The aeroplanes were controlled by a 'joy-stick.' A pilot needed as 'good hands' as a horseman, and good horsemen made the best pilots.

Each squadron was divided into three flights, each of six aeroplanes. Two flights worked with the artillery of the Corps and one flight with the infantry usually by means of contact patrols.

"2nd August, 1916.

"I have only time to write you a hurried line. Many thanks for your letter containing the newspaper cuttings. I certainly congratulate you on laying Bertrand Russell by the heels.

"My job is as follows. I visit Brigades and Batteries with which aeroplanes cooperate, and find out if the cooperation is going all right. If anything goes wrong, I explain the Battery's point of view of it to the aeroplanes, and the aeroplane's to the Battery so that they may understand what is wanted next time or explain the reasons for any apparent failure. I also make arrangements about turning onto targets, e.g. field guns into Infantry, heavy guns onto batteries.

"The aeroplane squadrons also send in reports each day, from which I compile information I think useful for the artillery, and forward it to the G.C.C., R.A. of the Army. I also keep a list of all German batteries discovered and flag them up on the Colonel's map, who commands the wing."

"12th August, 1916.

"Many thanks for your last letter. I think it was dated the 6th.

My job is as follows:

"I am artillery adviser to the Colonel commanding the Wing of the Flying Corps consisting of 3 squadrons. I have to be able to tell the Colonel at any time where most of the fire

from the German batteries is coming from, the disposition of the German batteries and their numbers, and the areas they shell.

There is a map in the Colonel's office of German batteries which I keep flagged up, those which we have successfully engaged (i.e., had direct hits on) being a different color.

I prepare his reports when he asks for them, about how our batteries have been doing (i.e., has the shooting been successful), how the cooperation with the aeroplanes had been doing, and any points which want improving, also anything he may want to know about German batteries.

I keep a list of all our batteries with all their 'shoots' which have not been successful, and reasons for not being successful.

Any features in cooperation I have to investigate and find out what they are due to, and inform whoever is responsible for putting them right, e.g., 'Wireless Failure' to the wireless officer.

Each day each Squadron and the 'Kite Balloons' sent me a 'Daily Artillery Report' showing all the artillery work they have done during the 24 hours, and Hostile Batteries seen.

From this I prepare a list of Active Hostile Batteries seen each day which is forwarded to the chief artillery officer of the Army and a copy to each Squadron, so that Each may know what the others have seen. I also prepare a list of new batteries seen each day for the Flying Squad Corps H.Q. of the B.E.F. I also send in a 'Summary of the Daily Artillery Reports' to the chief artillery officer, showing all useful artillery work that has been done during the day in cooperation with aeroplanes. I keep for reference a list myself of all hostile batteries with the dates when they have been active, and their 'calls,' or numbers by which they are known. Each

day I forward a duplicate of the D.A.R.s to the head 'Map Officer' of the Army who issues a weekly list of German batteries from the information which he has checked with air photos. He forwards me daily lists of useful information which the 'Observation Section' has obtained. I forward copies of them on to the Squadrons.

In order to help the cooperation of the artillery and aeroplanes, I go round occasionally in a 'side car' to the batteries and artillery H.Q.s, and to the Squadrons, so that I can explain the difficulties of each to the other, and find out if they have any point they wish to bring forward to improve the cooperation, such as a change of the system of ranging, and also to find out the reasons for the 'failures' in the wireless breakdown, or Battery moving its position and the aeroplane getting 'in touch' with the Battery. I also explain to the artillery what the aeroplanes want doing, and to the aeroplanes what the artillery wants done.

Cooperation now is most important as practically all observing, especially for heavy guns, is done from the air.

You must not think there is an excessive number of failures. There are really very few indeed, and these generally cannot be helped. We have been doing a lot of useful artillery work on this front. In one day, we had over 40 direct hits on German guns.

Most of my work comes in the evenings from 5 – 8 p.m. after the reports have come in. On a day when much has been seen I don't get away much before 9, and on a bad day for aeroplanes I am generally finished by 7. I start about 9 o'clock in the morning when I send in a 'Summary of the Daily Artillery Reports' to the chief artillery officer of the Army, after comparing the D.A.R.s of the Squadrons with the 'Squadron Record Book' which comes in the evening, but which I don't get till the morning as the Colonel and Adjutant want it then. This

takes altogether from 1 – 2 hours. I may then have to make a report for the Colonel: e.g. How has a certain system of ranging been working for the past week? I have then to look through the D.A.R.s for the past week. After lunch I may visit one or two of the Squadrons and find out if there are any points they may wish to raise about the Artillery with whom they work. I might then visit an artillery H.Q. group, to see them about some point that the Squadron has raised. The Colonel will very likely want me to see them about one or two details as well. I will then have to come back, and finish off my work for the day.

I find that practically my only time for exercise is before breakfast in the morning. I have been out for a ride once, but generally go for a walk for about half an hour.

One of my duties I forgot to mention is that I am in charge of the stables, where there are about 4 or 6 officers' horses.

I also forgot to say that with each Squadron there is an 'Artillery Officer' in charge of all returns about artillery work of the Squadron, and who I have to see does his work properly.

After dinner the Colonel may want me to talk over something with me, so very often I don't get to bed till after 11.0. Just lately when plenty has been happening, we have not generally had dinner before 9, as nearly all the officers have been pretty busy.

We live very well. Our quarters are a large chateau, inhabited by a Marquis, which has beautiful grounds, with avenue vistas from the window. Beyond the grounds is a fair-sized wood, which is a pleasant place to exercise in while the weather has been hot. We are done very well in the way of food. The only drawback is that it makes the messing rather expensive."

One of the difficulties in battle for a general was knowing the position of his forward troops. All telephone wires were usually cut by hostile shell fire, and visual signaling was

generally impossible. The contact patrol flew low over the battle field making a signal by dropping flares or sounding a klaxon horn for the infantry to put out their signals consisting of yellow strips of cloth or flares to show their position. The observer in the aeroplane then marked the position on a map and dropped the map at the brigade or divisional headquarters. The patrol often cooperated in the battle by shooting up targets that were holding up our infantry. We invented a signal for the infantry to put out, a white arrow pointing to the target with 'feathers,' or bars, on the long shaft to indicate each hundred yards the target was estimated to be distant. Say, therefore, a machine-gun 1,000 yards away was holding up the infantry, they put out an arrow with 10 'feathers,' or bars.

The patrol saw the arrow, counted the bars and looked for a target 1,000 yards away in the direction in which the arrow was pointing—it might be a strong point, a mortar or a machine gun—and attacked it.

The contact patrol sometimes attacked the Germans in their trenches by flying along and enfilading the trench with its machine guns.

Many gallant acts were performed in this way. The Germans shot up the machines with rifle fire and they often came back riddled with bullet holes. Several were lost.

But the greater part of my work was with the artillery flights.

Before the battle, when the line was static, the pilots knew the position of practically every German and British Battery. Counter-battery shoots could be prearranged. But during the battle German and British batteries moved and pilots did not know their new positions.

Another way of pointing out targets had to be invented, hence the 'area' or 'zone call' system came into being.

Each Corps detailed beforehand batteries to answer calls from the air. If a pilot saw a German Battery firing, he sent down 'G.F' (guns firing) with the map coordinates of the Battery and then waited ten minutes. The Battery detailed to fire into that area then worked out its direction of fire and the range, and got its guns loaded and pointing in the right direction.

The pilot then sent down 'KT. K.T.' ('Fire. Fire') on which the Battery fired 'two rounds gun fire.' This made a good splash, so the pilot could pick out the Battery's shells from the many others that were bursting about, and it was hoped that if the direction and range had been accurately worked out, the shells would fall as a surprise on the German Battery and cause casualties. If the fire was off the target the pilot sent down a correction. He then went on ranging each gun of the Battery onto a gun or pit of the German Battery by means of the 'clock code.'

In this the target is the center of an imaginary clock with 12 always to true north, and imaginary circles round the target at 25, 50, 100, 200 etc. yards.

A direct hit was "C.K.'

The A circle was 100 yards.

The B circle was 200 yards.

Etc.

The Y circle was 25 yards.

For example, the aeroplane might send down 'A.2'. The Battery then knew that the shot fell 100 yards away at 2 o'clock from true north, and could work out the correction to bring its fire onto the target.

By using this method, it was not necessary for the aeroplane to know the position of the Battery for which it was observing.

The actual observing was done by the pilot who could place the machine in the best position from which to observe the fall of shot, and signaled back the results. The observed looked round for other targets and kept an eye skinned for hostile aeroplanes which might attack.

My job in general was to train the pilots in artillery cooperation, gunnery and observation of fire, and this artillery (tactfully) in shooting with air observation. I had to investigate all cases of failure find the cause and put it right. Sometimes batteries would not answer calls because hostile aeroplanes were about, or there might be a failure in the wireless at sending or receiving ends, or the target might be out of range, or the Battery on the move.

To help our aeroplanes, the artillery was good in answering calls on hostile A.A. batteries which were annoying air pilots.

When the battle became stabilized again for a time, prearranged shoots were again carried out. Hostile batteries were given degrees of accuracy of fixation. An 'A' accuracy meant that every hostile gun or pit could be seen, 'B' that the flanks of the position could be accurately located in, say, a hedge or edge of a wood, but the gun or pits could not themselves be seen, a 'C' accuracy that a Battery position was known to be there but could not be pin-pointed within 100 yards. The balloons could rarely fix an accuracy greater than 'C.'

Most of the artillery work was counter-battery, but other targets were also engaged, such as columns of infantry, transport, counter-attacks developing, or even stationary targets such as important cross roads, or a railway station liable to be used by the enemy.

As a principle, targets that could be seen from the ground were not to be engaged by air observation.

Here is an example from a letter home dated 9th August, 1916, of what sometimes happened when I visited batteries:

“I started at one end of the valley. As soon as I got into it the Germans put 4 shells all round me. I then moved to another place (a Battery) and was just having a conversation with an officer when I heard some more (shells) coming. We jumped into a trench and they burst on the parapet covering us with earth. I got out of the trench to go along (to another Battery) and they (followed me). They then started barraging the (Battery) I had to go to, so the only way to get there was along the trench. They burst 2 more on the parapet, and blew in a dug-out which I had been in a few minutes before. I then got safely in the one I was bound for, and remained there in a dug-out for 2 hours (discussing air cooperation) while they shelled all round. When they finished, I went on. It was quite like old times.

“You will see from the papers that the artillery has been doing useful work against the hostile artillery. They are gradually smashing up their batteries.

“The Weather here has been magnificent. There is rather a heat haze which makes observation work in aeroplanes rather difficult, but it is better than rain. There is scarcely a German aeroplane that dares to show itself over our lines now. We brought down two yesterday. As soon as they see our fighting planes coming, they make a nose dive for home. When things get a bit slacker, I hope to go up in one.”

All Squadrons, Army and Cooperation, had machines fitted with cameras, and much useful information was obtained from aeroplane photographs, both vertical and oblique. I found that there was considerable delay in getting photographs down to batteries, so arranged that two advanced copies of each photograph should go at once to the artillery concerned. As batteries were not trained in interpreting air-photographs, possible targets on them, such as hostile batteries, were marked. With experience it became possible to distinguish the type of the hostile Battery: 77mm., 4.2”, 5.9”, 8 inch, and so on. Also, M.G. posts, dugouts, and ventilator shafts,

the tracks made by supply parties often to or round otherwise well concealed or camouflaged Battery positions and headquarters, and the blast marks made by the guns. Our aeroplanes sometimes flew over our own batteries and reported on their visibility.

Whole areas of the battlefield were photographed and a 'mosaic' map of aeroplane photographs made showing accurately trenches, Battery positions, roads, tracks, decauville railways, etc., giving a very good idea of the battlefield. The map makers then made maps from the mosaic and distributed them throughout the Army.

By comparing recently taken mosaics with those taken before, one could see new works, the effects of bombardments, and progress made.

Two photographs of a place taken from slightly different angles, and put in a stereoscope, gave a very good indication of the heights and depths of objects, and we were able to distinguish dummy trenches which were only about two feet deep.

'Oblique' photographs were useful to the infantry in locating their objectives and landmarks.

After a successful shoot a photograph was taken of the target and sent down to the Battery which did it. This encouraged them greatly in cooperation with the air.

When I first joined there was in some artillery formations a certain prejudice against the air. I had to go down to the units, sometimes with a pilot, to persuade them that the air could help a great deal in artillery work, and after a good shoot or two, many of the units became most enthusiastic.

In a battle all squadrons were fully engaged in cooperation, the contact patrols in helping the infantry, and the artillery machines in subduing the enemy artillery fire. I sometimes went down to our batteries to see how calls were coming in and were being answered.

I kept a complete record of every German Battery and the effect of shoots on it, and every evening I sent a report to the Army Artillery Headquarters on the work carried out during the day, and the main areas of concentration of the German Artillery.

We had a system of wireless listening posts which listened in to the signals the German aeroplanes were sending out. We soon found out the code numbers of their batteries and of the targets they intended to engage. We often tried to warn our people when they were going to be shelled, but owing to the delay in getting through on our Army telephone system the target was often shot up before the warning arrived telling him he was going to be shelled half an hour after the shelling had stopped.

To ensure that all artillery and R.F.C. fully understood cooperation and its methods, I wrote a booklet on the subject and sent it out to all our Squadrons and Brigades of artillery. A copy reached G.H.Q. and they published it as an Army pamphlet (S.S. 131).

I also produced a small work on the interpretation of air photographs in conjunction with the Wing photographic officer. Fourth Army headquarters took it up and published it for the Army.

The Army Wing sometimes spotted hostile batteries active at night, thought they could not always give their exact locations unless near some easily identified landmark. But they helped to compel the picture of German artillery activity. Some of their batteries only fired at night.

In time we worked out a connection between German batteries and the areas they shelled. If, say, German shells were falling in a certain area, we knew it was from Germany Battery, say, N3 or N9. They could then be engaged in turn and the offending Battery silenced.

The Battle of the Somme went on for months with periods of battle and intense activity and periods of consolidation. But shelling and counter-battery work never ceased.

On September 6th, Col. Ludlow-Hewitt took me up with him in a Morane Parasol of No. 3 Squadron in order to discover exactly where our line was after the last attack. The country appeared spread out below as if it were a colored map, and it was interesting to compare it with the maps and aeroplane photographs of which I had made an intensive study. It was easy to recognize the features and targets. As the shelling had completely destroyed all landmarks, such as the villages of Ginchy and Guillemont, the infantry themselves did not know where they were, but we, from above could place them pretty accurately. It was not always easy to spot the troops themselves as the light was not too good. I was also interested in seeing the effects of our counter-battery work on the German batteries.

On our return the Colonel and I went on to XIV Corps Headquarters. This Corps did not permit counter-battery work during an attack. All guns fired in close support of the infantry. Some battalions, when out at rest near us at Bertangles, complained of the heavy German artillery fire to which they had been subject, so Ludlow-Hewitt went to the Corps to persuade them to engage the German batteries. They finally agreed, and later attacks were not so harried by the German artillery.

After the Conference we were sent to have tea in the H.Q. Mess. There was a young staff officer there who acted as our host and conversed freely. It was only when he said that he

wished to fly but his father would not let him that it dawned on us that he was the Prince of Wales.

Major Godley, our Brigade-Major, was one day motoring to the front, and, on the way, had to pass an Australian Battery also moving up. It was straggling across the road not giving the car room to pass, so the driver sounded his horn. One of the Battery subalterns then let fly a stream of abuse at its occupants. Major Godley asked the subaltern for his name. "I suppose you are going to report me," said the subaltern. "No," replied Godley, "but I like to know the names of all the really nice people I meet." There was no trouble after this and the road was quickly cleared for Godley to go through.

On September 15th our tanks were first used in battle. Not many broke through the enemy lines chiefly because of mechanical failures. The inventors and builders had not reckoned for the shell-holed ground and other obstacles they encountered. But one tank reached the village of Flers and went up and down the main street shooting up Germans until our Infantry arrived. Wherever tanks appeared they caused consternation to the enemy.

On this day Martinpuich and Courcelette, our objectives on July 1st, were captured. The positions of the tanks, some in our lines and some in enemy country, were unknown to Army headquarters, who asked us to locate and report.

Col. Ludlow-Hewitt decided to go himself and offered me to go with him. So, borrowing a machine from No. 34 Squadron we flew low over the battlefield and saw many of the broken-down tanks. We are not attacked by any hostile machine, thanks to the good work of our Army Squadrons, and if we had been, I should not have been of much use, not having been trained to shoot at hostile machines from an aeroplane.

The patrol lasted three hours, and we landed back at Bertangles aerodrome. The Colonel sent in his report to Army headquarters.

Ludlow-Hewitt was a strict disciplinarian. He saw that all his officers – who came from many regiments, for most were only seconded to the Flying Corps – were properly and smartly dressed. They were also drilled, and he insisted that every officer should have an hour's strenuous exercise every day. He himself went for a run every morning before breakfast. He went round his squadrons often and carried out meticulous inspections. He had a most efficient Wing.

Guest nights in the squadron messes were sometimes rowdy affairs. Young men letting off their high spirits. In one mess all visitors were pushed through the window. Even the Brigade Commander was not exempt, and seemed to enjoy it.

One flying officer was a hypnotist. On one occasion he hypnotized a brother officer, and handing him an onion, said, "That is a juicy apple, that is a sweet, juicy apple, now take a bite out of it." The hypnotized one took a good bit, and, coming to, spat out his mouthful in disgust.

Another officer claimed that he could not be hypnotized. The hypnotist did his best, but failed. But his prospective victim (or should it be patient?) on getting up, promptly fainted.

A further big, successful attack took place on September 25th and subsequent days, gaining much of the high ground near Thiepval and High Wood; but in early October the rains came and the country became waterlogged, especially near Le Traneloy and Saily-Saillisel where all the shell holes filled with water making operations very difficult. In spite of this we slowly pushed on with limited attacks.

We were occasionally visited by senior and staff officers. Gen. "Boom" Trenchard, head of the Flying Corps, came once or twice. He did not seem to know much about cooperation and picked Ludlow-Hewitt's brains. There was talk of forming a separate Royal Air Force, combining the Naval and Army services. Ludlow-Hewitt was all for it, but I don't think "Boom" was very keen. Boyd-Rochfort and "Brab" Brabzon were staff officers who also paid visits, and General "Splash" Ashmore, our Brigade Commander, sometimes came to dinner. About this time the Germans started bombing London from aeroplanes. As one or two of our machines in France had been brought down by running into balloon cables when returning from patrols, I jokingly said that if I were in command of the London defenses, I would put up a barrage of balloons round London to bring down the German machines. To my surprise when Ashmore was put in charge of the London defenses shortly after I learned that he actually put up a barrage of balloons round the capital.

The French had some of the best machines in the War, such as the Spads. When the French fighter pilots shot down German machines, they occasionally landed at one of our squadrons for confirmation. In this way we met some of the famous French aces. One was Nungesser who had shot down several machines. One day he came down on a Squadron aerodrome and was given luncheon in the mess. He was a gallant man and had had an adventurous life. He was expatiating on his flying exploits when a member of the mess introduced him to our silent, flying hero, Ball, who had shot down a record number of German aeroplanes. This silenced Nungesser.

There was chivalry between the German and British Air Forces. When distinguished pilots on either side were killed, the other side dropped wreaths on their aerodromes, and when our airmen were made prisoners, they told us and we dropped their kits over to them. When

German pilots were captured, they were entertained in Flying corps messes before going on to Prisoners of War Camps. There was method in this also because under the influence of good food, good drink and good company they sometimes disclosed useful items of information. We had to warn our own pilots against giving anything away if they were similarly treated when captured.

Both sides adopted the technique of attacking hostile aeroplanes from a position with the sun behind them so that the intended victim was blinded if he looked in the direction of the attacking machine. Wing H.Q. warned pilots to “Beware of the Hun that sits in the sun.” While the pilot was doing the observation, the observer behind him had to watch out for hostile aeroplanes.

Our own balloons in France had a poor time from German raiding machines, which came over and shot them down with incendiary bullets. One machine shot down ten in a row. It could have been no fun observing from a balloon, and when a hostile machine was observed approaching, the balloons were all quickly pulled down.

Basil Hallam, of “Gilbert and Filbert” fame, was one of the observers. Unluckily his balloon was shot down and he was killed.

The R.F.C. maintained patrols in the air during all the hours of daylight, keeping the enemy under constant watch. Each patrol lasted for three hours, and in winter in the exposed cockpits of those days, it was freezing work. But the pilots and observers, although each day they might have three unpleasant hours from enemy attack and the elements, at least on their return had comfort and peace in their quarters and mess, unlike the infantry who had to endure constant shelling and lived in mud and discomfort. I once again went up with Ludlow-Hewitt, to check up

on certain “successful shoots,” and to have a general look round. Our and the German shell fire had reduced the country to a completely devastated area of shell holes. All villages and towns in the battle zone were reduced to rubble, if not entirely obliterated, and woods to mere tree stumps. But with practice, it was possible amidst the devastation to pick out the destruction done to targets.

“27th September, 1916.

“I have not written home for some time. At present, however, I am extremely busy, for as we gain ground, the German batteries are continually shifting, and I spent most of my time keeping pace with their movements.

“The weather has lately turned quite warm again, after being rather chilly for a bit. I hope we shall make a big advance soon, as every building within range of the guns has been razed to the ground, and it will be rather difficult to find good billets for the winter if we don’t. At this rate of progress, it will be some time before the Germans are back at the Rhine.”

German machines occasionally came over, as it was beginning to get dark, after our patrols had returned, and machine-gunned the Albert – Amiens Road which generally had a fair amount of transport moving on it. Battalions came out to rest sometimes near Bertangles, and Colonel Ludlow-Hewitt used to ask some of their officers to dinner. One Australian Colonel complained that several of his men had deserted. When we commiserated with him, it turned out that they deserted to return to the front!

One British battalion said that when they were in “Hunter-Bunter’s” Corps at Ypres, he was fond of visiting the trenches unannounced. He was rather pompous. On day one of their sergeants had seized a rum jar, drank himself blind and was “out,” when they suddenly got a

message to say that the Corps commander was on his way up. They did not know what to do with the drunken man, and then conceived the brilliant idea of treating him as a corpse. They put him on a stretcher, covered him with a blanket, and carried him back down the communication trench. On their way they met the Corps commander and his staff. Hunter-Bunter drew himself up, saluted, and said, "Your Corps Commander salutes the gallant dead." Voice from under the blanket, "What's that old beggar's saying?"

Hunter-Bunter was also fond of testing gas drill. There was a strict order that all ranks must at all times carry their gas masks. On his way to inspect a battalion out of the line he suddenly realized that he had not got his own gas mask. Seeing a soldier at the side of the road he asked him to hand over his. The man appeared reluctant, so Hunter-Bunter said "Your Corps Commander orders you." The man then handed it over. At the inspection Hunter-Bunter then ordered "gas alert" and then "gas." Not satisfied with the drill, he said, "Now I'll show you how it should be done." He opened the respirator case, and pulled out a dirty pair of socks!

"12th October, 1916.

"I am being kept very busy at present as the positions (of the batteries on both sides) are continually changing, and it takes me all my time to keep up to date with the changes of position, as well as informing other people of the same. I have a lot to do with aerial photographs, with which I supply the artillery. . . .

"The weather has been very bad lately for aeroplanes. There is no doubt it affects the infantry too."

In November I was given a week's leave, and on return wrote as follows:

"14th November, 1916.

“I was held up 2 days at Folkestone as there were no boats running (probably on account of German submarines). However, we crossed on Tuesday. The sea was very choppy, but not really rough. There were several people very seasick but I managed to get across without succumbing. A car met us at Boulogne and took us home (the Wing H.Q.).

“Most of my time has been taken up in going through the work that was done while I was away. The weather has been too bad for much (flying) work lately.

“I have been going about a good deal the last few days, as there has not been enough work done to keep me long in the office. I have run (into) Major Bartholomew (staff officer at H.Q. XIV Corps) who was at Kildare with me, and General Prescott-Decie, who was my first Colonel at Kildare.

“Now the weather has turned so bad I hope to have more time for writing, though advantage is taken of this sort of weather to work out new schemes and improve existing methods, so it is not the complete rest it might be.”

“16th November, 1916.

“The weather has been bad lately for aeroplane work on account low clouds and thick mists. Today, however, there has been more than usual activity, as the weather was finer. There have been sharp frosts at night, but generally mists during the day.

“Many thanks for your letter containing the newspaper cuttings of your letters to the papers. I hope all pacifists will be severely dealt with before the War is over. In Germany, if a man says he is a conscientious objector, he is shot. Consequently, they have practically none. Perhaps we might achieve the same result if we acted similarly.”

As the weather deteriorated and the battle moved eastwards a large devastated muddy area was left behind through which we had to go to reach our batteries. My usual mode of conveyance was in the sidecar of a motor bicycle, but this so often stuck in the mud that I asked for and obtained a car in which to make my visits. The cars were Sunbeams, rather highly geared, and often the top gear could not be used under the difficult conditions. Most roads were

almost obliterated because the shelling had destroyed all the metaling, but the engineers and planners did what they could to make them passable.

“23 November, 1916.

“I am still kept pretty busy for though the amount of work done per day (i.e., aeroplane flying) is less, the number of returns, etc., has gone up. Also, the system of aeroplane cooperation is at present changing and I am working out the new system.

“I have not much time for riding . . . This afternoon I did a little boxing with another officer. I hope to keep it up. It is splendid exercise.

“The weather today has been very fine, and quite a lot of work has been done.’

“The state of the country is still very bad, and the roads are difficult to get along in places owing to mud and (shell) holes.”

2nd December, 1916.

“Many thanks for your newspaper cuttings and letter. Pleas thank Mother also for her’s. I think I forgot to thank her for the mittens which were much appreciated by my men.

“The weather has been very bad for flying lately; and not much work has been done in consequence. I have been busy, however, preparing a small book of air photographs, with notes attached explaining them, for the Army Artillery School. It has kept me fairly busy hunting up old photographs and looking up their references.

“The first intimation I had that I had been promoted Capt. Was the letter from Colleen, in which she said you had showed her it in the paper. . .

“The rumor about the month’s leave does not seem to have come true. Personally, I should not mind getting a month’s leave now, when there is practically nothing on.

“There have been a great many changes lately. (Perhaps they may come out in the papers later on), and I have been travelling round aa certain amount. The other day I went down to the French Army H.Q. to have a chat about some things, and it was very interesting comparing their systems with ours.

“I am glad you are still keeping up with the exposing of the Pacifists and their ways. You would have thought they would have learnt some sense by now. Every one of them ought to go into the trenches to see what War is like. Enough fuss seems to be made about one bomb dropped in England, but being in the trenches is worse than a continual shower of bombs the whole time. In some of the trenches here soldiers have been drowned. So, there will be more than one form of death awaiting them.

“When I have time, I will send some more notes on Strategy on the ‘Offensive and Defensive.’”

“7th December, 1916.

“Many thanks for your recent cuttings. I am glad you are still on the track of the Pacifists. If we are not careful now, they will try and get peace when Germany is at the top of her power.

“The Romanians seem to be catching it badly. Rumor out here says that they came in against the Allies’ advice, because they thought they saw an opportunity of gaining territory in Transylvania. However, they seem to have made the hopeless mistake of splitting up their forces, and getting each portion defeated in detail. The Germans, on the other hand, have brought off a wonderful piece of strategy, but then they have soldiers managing their country, and not politicians.

“Another rumor says that Germany issued an ultimatum to Romania to deliver up corn, and Romania refused.

“The Government seems at last to have realized that they weren’t so good at making War after all. I hope the next Government will let the soldiers run the War, then perhaps we may get on with it a bit better. The ideal really would be a very small committee composed chiefly of soldiers and sailors, who had executive powers. In fact, a species of martial law. Then perhaps we should not have to wait so long to get what we want.”

“ ? December, 1916.

“The weather has been beastly lately. There has been a damp fog for days. Everyone has a cold, including a slight one myself. There has been practically no flying

“I have been busy for the last few days preparing a book of air-photographs for an Army School. I finished it today

“I have laid out a golf course of sorts here. I have only played on it twice so far. The only difference between the fairway and the rough is that the stubble is a bit shorter. There are no greens. However, it provides exercise when I have the time for it.”

19th December, 1916.

“I am bringing out a 2nd edition of the photographic book. It is keeping me fairly busy.

“The weather has been very bad lately. Flying has been practicable impossible. There is a very strenuous course of instruction on the ground for pilots and observers, so they won’t find time hanging heavy on their hands.

“We may be moving from our billets soon. I shall not be sorry if I get within easier reach of the people I have to see.

“I am not getting much exercise at present owing to the weather. The country is too muddy to make walks pleasant, and there is no other form of exercise available. I have been out all day today in a car going round batteries. We ran into a snow storm on the way home.”

“21st. December, 1916.

“The weather is still bad. I don’t think much will be done even if frost and sun combine to dry up the country a bit. Now and again there comes a suitable day for flying.

“I am busy now preparing exam. Papers on artillery work for observers on probation. I have finished the photography book. It is going to be printed in large numbers.

“I have made up a section of the new book (on Artillery) that is coming out; the section that deals with counter-battery work.”

“31st December, 1916.

“The weather has been very bad lately. Flying has been practically impossible.

“I have been busy lately giving lectures to the Squadrons, and writing some notes for the use of observers on Gunnery and Artillery Organization.

“The book I partly helped to make up on Aerial Photography is going to have 2,000 copies made of it. It is going to be issued to Infantry as well as Artillery.

“Would you mind sending me out a copy of my Diary of the ‘Retreat?’ as I am giving lectures on it.

P.S. There has been no post for some time. Mother’s letter of Christmas Day, and M. & Bs of Christmas Even have arrived, for which please thank them from me.”

The Cooperation squadrons were now too far behind, and early in the New Year moved to aerodromes nearer their Corps. Wing headquarters went forward too. We moved to a small two-roomed shooting box near Bray on the River Somme.

“26th January, 1917.

“Many thanks for your letters, the newspaper cuttings and for sending the Diary.

“I am hoping to get leave again about the middle of February. I am going to apply for 3 weeks or a month, as I believe they are giving most of those who were out here at the beginning a month’s leave. I shall want some evidence to forward with the application, so would you mind sending me out a copy of Major Birley’s letter?

“The weather her is still very cold with a strong N.E. wind. The ink, wine and soda water were all frozen.

“The posts are very irregular at present. They only come on the average every other day. Sometimes we have five days without a post.

“We are now fairly comfortably settled in our camp. The stoves are working fairly well when we have the fuel to put in them.

“I hope you are keeping fit, and have shaken off the chill which you had a little time ago.

“I am still pretty busy with various affairs. I have finished the photos for the present, and most of the screeds.”

“1st February, 1917.

“I am afraid some of my letter’s home cannot be arriving. I sent at least one between 31.12.16. and 23.1.17.

“I will try and get the results of my literary efforts home. Some of them have not appeared in print yet (the photo book). I have only got rough copies of one or two of the others.

“I am glad to hear you have quite recovered again, and hope you will still continue fit.

“I have just been recommended for three weeks’ leave by the Colonel. The application has to go up to the Army Commander, and in the process the length of leave may get whittled down. But with luck I should get a fortnight. The Colonel is going to push me off as soon as possible as he wants to go on leave himself. I am afraid I could not wait for that letter from Major Birley, which might have been a good chit to put in.

“The G.O.C.R.A. of the Army gave a lecture at the Artillery School the other day while I was there. After the lecture he said he was very pleased with my literary efforts, and that if I wanted a job on the Staff of the Artillery School, I could have one.

“I am very busy at present, and I have just been getting another screed off my chest, and I have also just taken over the mess, which was rather upside down, and I have been trying to straighten it out. I am also in charge of the Wing Headquarter Stables (consisting of 3 horses).

“There is some talk of making liaison officers a Staff appointment. I think it is only talk. There will be a little more pay, and I will be able to go home on leave by a quicker route, if it comes off.”

The river Somme froze over, and aeroplanes often could not fly and motor cars stopped because the carburetors froze up. It became an ‘airman’s holiday.’

Ludlow-Hewitt had an ice-yacht with sails constructed with the idea of sailing up the river Somme when he wanted to visit headquarters within reach of the river.

We also obtained skates and had some skating.

While it was not so bad for us, the infantry in the frozen trenches had a terrible time. Under the conditions prevailing in the waterlogged areas sometimes both sides came out and sat on their parapets without shooting at each other. There were a few cases of men being frozen to death and several of ‘trench feet’ in spite of all precautions.

With the cold came snow. This was in the way a great help to us because tracks and the blast-marks of batteries were far more visible in the snow, hence it was possible to locate the active batteries and centers of activity such as headquarters

“2nd February, 1917.

“I told Father in my last letter that I had applied for 3 weeks’ leave. It has been forwarded to the Army, and has to be sanctioned by the Army Commander . . . I will try to bring some of my literary efforts home with me. I will have to get permission first. I am also going to take some lantern slides of photos if I am allowed to. I thought of giving a lecture (on air cooperation) at Woolwich or Rugby.

“The weather is still very cold here. It has now been freezing for three weeks. We have had a week’s skating (on the Somme) . . .

“My (writing) efforts so far are:

1. Photo book
2. Summary of Artillery Directions for the R.A. of the Army.
3. Notes on the Concealment of Battery positions.
4. A pamphlet on Gunnery and Artillery Organization for pilots and observers of the Flying Corps.”

I was granted the leave, and gave the lecture at Cambridge University and the R.A. Institution at Woolwich. My wife had gone to live at Lincoln where she took up war-work. I spent my leave in London, Cambridge and Lincoln. Mr. Danby, the M.F.H. at Lincoln, very kindly mounted me for a ride which I much enjoyed, though the weather was too severe for hunting. Rationing at home had now started, and was increasingly restricted, but the butchers at Lincoln very kindly saved tit bits for soldiers home on leave. My wife and I also went to theatre and a dance.

R.A. INSTITUTION

A LECTURE

Will be delivered at 5 p.m., on Friday

23rd February, 1917 on

“Cooperation between aircraft and Artillery”

(Illustrated by Lantern Slides).

Comdg.

The Troops Woolwich, in the Chair

TO BE FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION

Officers of the Royal Artillery only are invited to attend.

Teas will be served in the R.A.I. Library, at, 4.30.

Woolwich, February, 1917 J.E.H. Orr, Capt. R.H.A.

a/Secretary, R.A.I.

In his dispatch issued about Christmas 1916, the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Douglas Haig, stated:

“In this combination between infantry and artillery the Royal Flying Corps played a highly important part. The admirable work of this Corps has been a very satisfactory feature of the battle. Under the conditions of modern war, the duties of the Air Service are many and varied. They include the regulation and control of artillery fire by indicating targets and observing and reporting the results of rounds; the taking of photographs of enemy trenches, strong points, battery positions, and of the effect of bombardments; and the observation of the movements of the enemy behind his lines.

“The greatest skill and daring have been shown in the performance of all these duties, as well as in bombing expeditions. Our Air Service has also cooperated with our infantry in their assaults, signaling the position of our attacking troops and turning machine guns on to the enemy infantry and even on to his batteries in action.”

On returning to France, I wrote home:

“4th March, 1917.

“I dare any colleen will have told you of what happened at Folkestone. The afternoon we arrived there, one boat was blown up by a mine just outside the harbor. It was towed in, where it sank. An aeroplane, also, landed in the water close to the shore. We did not see either of the two events.

“I crossed the next day. The sea was like a mill pond. I stayed that night at the French port, and travelled down by train the next day, a car meeting me at the station, so I had a very comfortable journey.

“Several changes have taken place here in my absence, and I have been kept pretty busily at work ever since.

“We have had two glorious days, one today, and the other the day before yesterday, which were almost like spring.”

Early in 1917 the Fourth Army began taking over the French front north of the Somme and our front and finally extended to about 4 miles South of the river. Some of the area was terribly wet, a sea of mud with shell holes filled with water. I visited the French Air force and Corps H.Q. with the object of gaining all the information I could about the new area, particularly of the German batteries.

The French worked on a different system to us. They did not pinpoint accurately each German gun or gun-pit, but noted the area occupied by the hostile Battery, and then deluged it with shell fire. They seemed to have much more ammunition to expend than we had. I was given photographs of the German positions from which, on returning, I plotted the locations of their batteries and gun pits on to our maps and sent the results to the Army Artillery and the R.F.C. squadrons.

During the winter and in the first weeks of 1917, our reconnaissance and photographic patrols were bringing back constant information of an extremely strong position the Germans

were developing several miles to the east, in places using parts of the St. Quentin and Nord Canals. It was called by us 'The Hindenburg Line.' We examined the photographs with stereoscopic lenses which gave a good idea of heights and depths. In places where the canals were dry, they were about 20 feet deep, with deep dugouts and with belts of barbed wire in front often 100 yards wide. We could spot the ventilating shafts for the dugouts on the aeroplane photographs. The line lay mostly on reverse slopes and out of artillery observation. It relieved the Germans of holding an awkward salient and considerably shortened their line.

"7th March, 1917.

"We have only had one post since I came out here again, as I hardly know what is happening at home now. We have had no post now for several days.

"The weather has lately turned much warmer, although we have had heavy snow falls and frost. On mornings when it is possible, I am riding before breakfast, as I find I have very little other time for exercise, as the Adjutant is on leave and I am during his work as well.

"Our Colonel came back the other day after touring the Italian front, with a great deal of interesting information about the Italians. He says they are extraordinarily good engineers, and do wonderful things in the mountains. The Austrians don't seem to be very far behind them either."

Early in March 1917 the Germans began a fighting withdrawal to successive lines between their front and the Hindenburg Line, and we followed them up by a series of attacks with limited objectives forcing them out of each position in turn. This continued during March and April.

Col. Ludlow-Hewitt now offered me a permanent commission in the R.F.C., but this meant going to the bottom of my permanent rank of Captain, and below several people to whom

I was now senior. In fact, I found that several of my contemporaries were getting command of batteries. Command of a Battery was one of my ambitions, so I applied to go back to the Gunners.

“15th March, 1917.

“I am still fairly busy. You will see from the papers that we are still advancing. News has come through this morning that Bapaume had been captured. It is not official, and my only be a rumor.

“Many thanks for the cutting which I enclose.

“I gave a lantern slide lecture at the Artillery School yesterday evening. I had several more slides than I showed at Cambridge. They seemed very interested in it.

“My colonel has recommended me for the command of a Battery. If I get it, I will probably be an ‘acting Major’ with the pay of a Major. He has also told me that the G.C.C.R.A. may recommend me for a Brigade Major, if I take up command of a Battery for some time. This, however, is only problematical.

“I am going to a conference this afternoon on counter-battery work.”

We were now getting too far behind the front, squadrons were out of close touch with their Corps, so Ludlow-Hewitt sent the Adjutant, Ralph de Poix, and me on a reconnaissance to find a place to move to. Bapaume and Peronne had just been captured (March 18th), so we took a care and started by going through Albert to Bapaume. We passed many places of interest on the way, Pozieres, Martinpuich, the Butte de Warlencourt and le Sars Valley where there had been a concentration of German batteries much shelled by us. We entered Bapaume and dismounted. The German artillery then began a strafe on the place, so we took shelter for a short time in one of the ruined buildings. When it was over, we took the road to Peronne. I do not think the German Line was far distant, for we became an Aunt Sally for one of their batteries. We kept

varying our pace to upset it so that its shells were constantly falling ahead of us or behind us We eventually reached Peronne and continued south till we met the long, straight road from Amiens to St. Quentin where we turned east, and stopped at Mons-en-Chaussee.

Near Peronne I saw a wooden cross put up by the Germans to mark Moncton's grave. He had been in the 11th Battery at Kildare, but, having learnt to fly, had been called up by the R.F.C. on mobilization.

The country had been devastated by the Germans on their retreat. Every tree had been cut down and most of the buildings blown up. A few houses that were left standing had bobby traps or delayed action mines in them.

South of Mons-en-Claussee there was a splendid site for a large aerodrome capable of taking several squadrons, so we sat down and ate our sandwich luncheon.

As we were doing so a civilian came along in a cart and started dragging box after box out of a filthy pond near a ruined farm house, and loading them on his cart. We asked him what he was doing, and he said that when the Germans advanced here in 1914, he had dumped all his cases of champagne in the pond so that they wouldn't find them. They had lain there for two and a half years. He presented us with a case. We did not fancy the idea of drinking it after lying at the bottom of a dirty pond for so long, but when we opened a bottle in our mess that night it tasted excellent.

"23rd March, 1917.

"You will see from the papers what is happening down here.

“I have been round one or two places just recently captured. I was in the ‘modern Gibraltar’ (Bapaume) the day after it was captured, and did not find it so badly knocked about as I had expected. Some of the houses were still burning, and the whole place was littered with debris, fallen walls, etc., and the smell was rather bad. But here and there, there were four walls with a roof on.

“The weather has turned rather wintry again with snow and N.E. winds, but the country itself is drying up rather well.”

On April 1st one of our bombing machines went over and saw a group of Germans. It launched its bomb, and saw the group rapidly dispersing, only this time the ‘bomb’ was a football with the words ‘April Fool’ painted on it. The Germans must have been surprised when they saw it hit the ground and bounce up instead of exploding.

“31st March, 1917.

“I have been over most of the reconquered country now. The Germans seem to have indulged in an orgy of destruction. Houses, and even whole villages, have been blown up and burnt, and nearly all trees have been cut down. The few houses left standing have been thoroughly looted. There may be some military object in destroying villages. The Germans may think that it will delay our offensive if there is nowhere to billet our troops, and we have to get up hutting or other accommodation for them. The systematic destruction of trees has no military object that one can see. In fact, the Germans have provided us with an almost unlimited quantity of firewood, and wood for repair of roads, etc. The fruit trees and trees along roads that they have not had time to cut down have been ringed round so that they will eventually die. The only object seems to be political. They seem to be trying to handicap France so that when the war is over all her resources for some years will be spent in restoring the invaded country, and she will not be able to compete with Germany in trade.

“I have applied to go back to the Gunners. I have been recommended for command of a battery and I have been told I will go back ‘soon.’ That was about a week ago, but I expect I shall go back in about another week.

“The band weather, I think, hampers us rather more than the Huns, as we have to advance over the strafed country which has been very much cut up by shell fire.

“The Germans have blown up several cross-roads, but the success of their object is doubtful as a track round them can be made very quickly.

“I am keeping fit. I have not very much work to do, but it takes me a long time to get anywhere now owing to the long distances to be covered.”

On April 9th the Canadian Corps attacked in a snowstorm, captured the Vimy ridge and 10,000 prisoners, a brilliant piece of work, and the Germans withdrew some distance. But they brought up strong reserves and the success could not be exploited.

9th April, 1917.

“I have now moved up to our new Wing H.Q. Camp, although the rest of the Wing are still back. I had to move up, as I found I could not get at my work properly back there.

“There is good news today from almost the whole British Front. I expect you will see all about it in the papers. The only setback is the reported knock taken by the Russians.

“I will probably be going to a battery in a few days. I am now get command of one fairly soon.

“I have been busy the last two days ‘handing over,’ and going round all the Artillery Units in the Army. I am finishing them off tomorrow. I will then probably have one more day here, and then join my battery. I will let you know my new address as soon as I know it.

“The weather today has been unpleasant, but yesterday was a real spring day.”

CHAPTER XI

A GUNNER AGAIN IN COMMAND OF A BATTERY.

THE CLOSING STAGES OF THE SOMME BATTLE.

I was posted to the 48th (South Midland) Territorial Division, and was given command of 'A' Battery 240 Brigade. [See Sketch 15]

"14th April, 1917.

"Please address me in future 'Captain Macleod, A/240 R.F.A., B.E.F.' I am in temporary command of this battery while the O.C. is away sick. If he does not return, I may get command of it. If he does, I don't know what will happen. I shall probably go to another battery.

"I arrived here last night. The battery seems a good one. It is at present in action. We are living in a tent at present till dugouts are constructed. I have not yet seen the horses, as they are down at the wagon line some way from here.

"The weather yesterday was very fine, thank goodness and today it looks as if it would be fine again. The day before yesterday we had heavy snow.

"I should very much like to have parcels sent out to me again.

"There seems to be some slight chance of the war ending this year. One officer I know, who is generally a confirmed pessimist, has turned completely round and says he thinks it will end in July! That, however, I think is much too optimistic."

The Battery was in action in a sunken road, well camouflaged by trees which had been cut down by the Germans, between Ronssoy and Villers Faucon, firing in an easterly direction, with an O.P. in Ronssoy. The infantry line was some six hundred yards ahead of the O. P. with the Germans in occupation of the ridge beyond and Guillemont Farm. Over the ridge the ground sloped down to the Hindenburg Line, and we could catch glimpses here and there of the wire protecting it. The O.P. was not entirely suitable, so I found another, in a small cottage, near the cross roads in the village, which had a better command. When it was dark, we pushed out a

couple of bricks and put red gauze across the aperture to camouflage the observation hole. The only trouble was that owing to its exposed position it was not easy to reach without being spotted.

It was a pleasure to get away from the devastated, shattered and shell torn area and trench warfare into more open country where the ground, at least, was not muddy and pock-marked with water filled shell holes. We lived above ground. The type of warfare was more interesting, much more like open – than trench warfare. The shelling was not intense. Most of the German batteries had been withdrawn behind the Hindenburg Line.

‘A’ was an excellent shooting battery, and in peacetime had won the prize for the Territorial Artillery. They had come through the whole of the Battle of the Somme up to date, fortunately with few casualties, the Major being one. The officers and men were good material – the best type of Territorials. But I was not so impressed with their ideas of discipline and administration. Unused to Territorial ways I thought that the N.C.O.s were too familiar with the men. The administration was not very efficient. This was not their fault because in peace time all the administration was done by the permanent staff of Regular Officers and N.C.O.s and the Territorial Officers and N.C.O.s were not trained in it. Their drill hours were too few to learn both gunnery, drill and interior economy. But in wartime, with no permanent staff, all administration had to be done by themselves. The officers did not appear to take a grip of their sections, nor the sergeants of their subsections. Orders were given in a conversational tone, almost as if asking a favor, and the men did not jump to them. When I checked the N.C.O. for this and for seeming to be too familiar with some of his men, he said he had to be careful because one of the men in civil life was his foreman and the rest his work mates! In fact, officers and men were often from the same firms and knew each other well, and their sort of discipline

was perhaps suitable for the type of war we were then fighting. Maybe I should not have attempted to alter it.

Administration was a different matter. Territorial units were apt to be 'one-man shows' in which the battery commander did everything and went round personally to see that his orders were carried out. For example, during a quiet period I ordered a gun park inspection. Only the limber gunners turned up, so I had to send for the sergeants and officers. There was a shortage of stores, so I told the officers that they were responsible, the stores would be made up, and the officers must see that they were always complete. Also, I told them that when I gave an order it was the duty of the officers to see that it was obeyed.

We had several visitors to our O.P., not always very careful about not giving it away. The Divisional Commander, General R. Fanshaw, decided to make the Divisional H.Q. O.P. there. It then became so crowded that I shifted to another house not far off, with not quite such a good view, but adequate.

There were some small operations to drive back the enemy rearguards.

"17th April, 1917.

"I have had a strenuous time lately, and have not even had time to wash and shave for two days. We have moved and taken part in operations. The weather has been vile. It has been wet and cold, and everything is a sea of mud which permeates everywhere. I have had no sleep for two nights so forgive a somewhat disjointed letter."

"20th April, 1917.

"We are having a strenuous time. I have hardly had a night's sleep since coming to the battery! We are hustling the Germans. I think I told you I was in command of 'A/240.' It seems quite a good battery. I have not seen much of it, as I have been spending nearly all my time at the O.P.

“The weather has been very bad lately. It has been the worst April I have known. Today has been fine, and the ground is beginning to dry up a bit at last. But till today everything used to get covered in mud, and it was impossible to keep clean.”

General Fanshawe ordered an attack on Guillemont Farm. One battalion was to attack and it was to be supported by our brigade of artillery. Zero hour was an hour before dawn.

I was instructed first to cut the wire in front of the Farm. Even with a powerful telescope I could see no wire, so I sent a message to my late friends in the R.F.C. asking for a reconnaissance. They sent a machine over which reported that there was only a single strand of trip wire. This was a comfort, for it would not hold up the infantry. The attack went in at night under a short but intense artillery barrage, and watched by the Divisional Commander and his staff from our late O.P. Guillemont Farm and its surroundings were captured, but in the very hazy dawn light the Germans put in an immediate counter-attack. I could just make them out for a few seconds topping the ridge before they entered the Farm area, not giving us enough time to put down defensive fire. They retook the Farm. I cannot imagine why our infantry did not engage them with rifles and machine guns, but the infantry had become so accustomed to the Gunners doing nearly all their firing for them that they had rather neglected small arms fire.

The attack was ordered to be repeated the next night with another battalion. It was again successful, and this time I immediately went to defensive fire and was lucky enough to catch the counter-attack before it reached the farm. We now remained in secure possession of it.

The Germans had treated well our wounded who they captured in the first attack. They were collected in the farm, their doctor had seen to them, and they were given chocolate and water. We found them there when we retook the farm.

As we hoped some time to break through to open warfare, I had a few badly needed mounted training exercises, and the Battery soon improved in movement and drill.

“2nd May, 1917.

“We are back at rest now, where we shall probably be for a few days before going into another part of the line.

“I am occupying the time in training the battery. There are no Regulars in it, so I have to train them to the routine of a Regular battery.

“I have been told that I have been recommended for a Major. It will probably come out in a day or two.

“The weather is perfectly lovely. I hope it will be like this the whole time.”

“6th May, 1917.

“We are back resting. I am occupying the time training the Battery. It is a Territorial Battery and not used to Regular ways, but it is improving every day. If I could only have it for a month’s training it would be a different battery.

“The weather today is much colder after rain last night, but today has been fine

“We are going back into action in a day or two”

“8th May, 1917.

“It has just come through that I am Major, so please address me now as ‘Major Macleod.’ This is only an acting rank.

“We move up into action again tonight. Our rest has not been very long! But we may get a little more later.

“The weather has been very warm and fine up till last night. We had heavy rain last night and today, but just at present it has cleared up a bit.

“We had no post yesterday, so there was no news from you. I have had one or two letters from you, but owing to the continual shuffling about of my kid I cannot find them at present.

“There are several rumors going about that peace is very near now.

1. Our Divisional General said the war might end this summer or even sooner, if operations went well.
2. An unauthenticated rumor that Germany had agreed to clear out of all conquered territory and restore it, and give up Alsace Lorraine, provided she were allowed a free hand in the Balkans. The latter, however, we were not prepared to agree to.
3. Another unauthenticated rumor that Germany was prepared to give up all conquered territory and restore it but refused to pay the indemnity we demanded of her in addition.

“There seems to be something in it then. Our Div. Gen. even said that peace might come without our having broken through. We must, however, do down the Germans first.”

I was not left long in peace here, and my battery was ordered up into action into a sunken road east of Ronsoy, close to the front, to enfilade a trench about 1,000 yards to the south-east which was to be attacked by the 61st Division. The position was barely under cover owing to the short range and flat trajectory of the shells, and the gun flashes could be easily spotted. Also, the ground all round was under view, so the movement up had to be by night. I rode up to do a day reconnaissance. There was a long belt of barbed wire with a narrow gap in it to be crossed south of the village. I carefully noted the position of the gap and returned to the battery. After dark we moved up. The night was pitch black, and obviously no lights could be shown. However, riding ahead, I found the wire, but could not find the gap. I dismounted and made my way along the wire again feeling with my hand, and luckily came across it, for it was no place to be caught in daylight. The Battery passed through, we found the road, and the guns came into action. In the morning I laid out the lines (i.e., getting the guns pointing in the right direction) by compass. A few registration rounds to make sure that everything was all right and

we were ready to support the night attack on the trench the next night. But for some reason it was postponed, and postponed again the next night, and eventually cancelled. My battery then returned to the wagon lines by another night march.

Of course, I should have marked the gap in the wire by white tapes which would just have been visible in the dark. It is not easy to realize in daytime the difficulties there will be in cross country movement at night with no landmarks visible, no lights to be shown, and objects only distinguished at a few yards distance.

“12th November, 1917.

“We have now come back from action again . . . These Territorial batteries don’t know the usual battery routine . . . and unless one sees practically everything done oneself, it does not get done. The battery is improving every day . . . the worst of it is that being in the line so much one (seldom) sees $\frac{3}{4}$ of the battery . . . We shall probably be going into action again in a few days in another part of the line . . .

“I went to church this morning.

“The weather is warm but rather muggy. We have had some heavy showers of rain.”

“16th May, 1917.

“We have moved to another Army area, and expect to go into action in a day or two.

“We are in quite a comfortable camp at present. We marched today; the weather was fine to start with but later turned to rain and it is now raining hard.

“We are two officers in a tent with beds of sorts, so we are well off. The weather having turned much colder may have a bad effect on the horses.

“I am enjoying myself very much and am keeping very fit.”

We were here for a few more days, and then moved up into action against west of Hermies, which we held, with the enemy in the next village to the east, Havrincourt, which was in the Hindenburg Line beyond the Canal du Nord. We had not the resources to attack such a strong place, so merely watched the front. I took over from an Australian battery. It had a good position, but from its O.P. south of Hermies it could not observe its Zone which was north of the ridge running from Hermies to Havrincourt. The battery commander said that he shot entirely 'off the map.' The infantry sent down the coordinates of the target they wanted shelled and he then switched on to it.

The Australian Corps was commanded by General Birdwood, 'The Soul of Anzac.' The Australians had some good stories about him. One day when he was going round the trenches with Admiral de Roebeck, commanding the Fleet, he came on a sentry with his back to the enemy, his rifle slung on his shoulder, and smoking a cigarette. He took no notice of the General, so Birdwood asked him, "Do you know who I am?" "Know," said the sentry, "I am General Birdwood." "Oh, then why don't you wear feathers in your tail, same as any other bird would." Seeing that the man was unimpressed the General asked; "Do you know who this is?" indicating the Admiral. "Naow," said the sentry. "This is Admiral de Roebeck." "Shake," said the sentry, extending his hand, "I've always wanted to meet a real, live Admiral."

"19th May, 1917.

"Many thanks for your letter and for sending me the 'Pan-German Plot Unmasked.' I won't have much time for reading the latter as we have just moved into a new position, and I expect to be pretty busy the next few days. When we have settled down a bit, I may have a little more time.

“We moved in some of our guns last night and completed tonight. I was very busy all today ‘taking over’ from the outgoing battery, and in registering my zone.

“We are in a fairly comfortable position; but a good deal of work still remains to be done on the gun positions. I have a small hut I live in with a table and a couple of chairs. It is floored with boarding so is really very comfortable for a firing line billet.”

I decided that I must have proper observation of my zone, so first chose an O.P. on the ground on the norther outskirts of Hermies. It was not a comfortable spot, could only be reached in the dark, and was much shelled, but I had had some South Wales miners as reinforcements in my battery, and they were grand fellows. They soon made a deep dugout with steps leading down in which we could take cover when necessary. Reconnoitering round, I found a better place in a house in Hermies which we prepared and occupied.

To avoid giving away our battery position, I put out a ‘sniping’ gun to engage small targets, and we had quite a few shoots at odd Germans, or small parties moving about near the Canal du Nord.

There were no active operations in this area except for a few raids which we supported, but there was a certain amount of shelling including some by German Heavy Artillery on our wagon lines near Velu Wood. My Battery was lucky, some of the others suffered more from the shelling than we did.

One of the roads in our area was on a forward slope exposed to German observation. General Fanshawe asked me how it could be made usable by transport in daylight. I suggested a method I had seen used on the Somme: a succession of canvas screens across the road, carried on poles at the sides, so that transport could pass underneath them.

The screens were put up and excited German suspicions, for they began to subject the road to considerable artillery fire. This pleased the General. I suppose he felt that we were bluffing them, but it still did not make the road of much use to our transport. The screens were damaged and had to be repaired each night. After a time, I think the Germans began to tire of shelling nothing and their fire became less intermittent, and our transport began to use the road.

“21st May, 1917.

“Our General seems to think the war will be over this year. As a matter of fact, he said ‘this summer,’ but that seems very early . . . I am afraid it is unlikely.

“We are having a fairly strenuous time . . . I cannot get through all I want to do . . .”

“23rd May, 1917.

“We are not having at all a bad time just at present . . . I have not been to bed before 12 for the last three nights and it is nearly that now . . .

“I have at present 8 officers in the battery. We are not settling down in our new positions . . .”

“25th May, 1917.

“We are still in action, and likely to be so for some time. I should like to have had the battery all together out at rest for a little longer, and to have gone on with the training for a bit. This battery, has been in the line for two years, with only a month out altogether, so one half of the battery hardly knows how the other half lives.

“I am out most of the day, and after dinner in the evenings I generally have a large pile of orders to go through. I have not been to bed before midnight since I came here.

“We are not in the push but all the same we are having a fairly strenuous time. We have had a lot of work to do in preparing our positions, etc.

“I have practically no time for solid reading. I never see a paper, even. Would you mind sending one out, say the Daily Mail? I find I am getting very out of touch with what is going on. Papers come out fairly quickly. One fellow I know gets them the day after they are published. They would come out more quickly from London I imagine. I am getting the ‘Weekly Times’ already.

“As I told you before, this is a Territorial Battery. The men are an exceptionally good class, but their ways are not quite the same as those of the old Regulars. The officers, also, are all Territorials and Special Reservists. They all come from Clifton and Bristol!, so we have something in common to start with. They are all a very willing lot of fellows. If only they could all have a couple of months’ training on the lines of the old Regular Army they would be simply first class.”

“26th May, 1917.

“I have not much time for writing letters so this will only be a short one.

“The weather is splendid at present, and life would be very enjoyable if the shelling stopped! But we cannot let the Huns have any peace now; we must keep on battering at them.

“I am keeping very fit and flourishing, but I am still very busy. I have not been in bed before 12 since I came here. I get plenty of exercise every day, generally 12-15 miles walking.”

“30th May, 1917.

“We are not having a very strenuous time now . . . There is a certain amount of shelling going on, but that never really stops.

“The weather has certainly been beautiful the last fortnight or so, and the ground has tried up wonderfully.”

“31st May, 1917.

“The weather is still fine. We had a shower yesterday afternoon, which has freshened up the air a bit.

“We are still fairly busy. There is always the position to improve, O.P.s to make, reconnaissances to be made, etc., etc., so one never feels idle.”

“5th June, 1917.

“I have let Charadame’s book to another officer, who is very interested in it.

“While the Italians seem to have bucked up a lot, the Russians still appear very sticky in getting to work. Until they buck up a bit, it will be difficult for us to make a big push, as all the Germans on that front will come across to this. While if the Russians throw their hands in, the war will last years longer, until, in fact, American is fully mobilized and can send a large sized army over.

“Very many thanks for having the ‘Morning Post’ sent out. It get it nearly every day now, the day after it is published. I find I can keep in touch now with what is going on. ‘Punch’ also arrives regularly.

“The 1,500 cigarettes Mother sent out about a month ago arrived safely and were very much appreciated in the Battery.

“I am having a fairly slack time now. My daily program is somewhat like this: I get up at 7, have breakfast about 8. Inspect the battery at 8. Then deal with the correspondence and orders that have come in overnight, read the paper, if I have time, and write letters. After lunch I generally have one or two small jobs to do, and after dinner, correspondence and evening orders generally take me till nearly midnight. The mail also comes in the evening.

“The weather is magnificent, and we are having quite a good time, and hear a certain amount of shelling. We sleep in ‘shacks’ made of corrugated iron and tarpaulin, but I am having strong dugouts made.

“We live a very healthy open-air life. In the daytime it is too hot to do much work, so we do most of our work in the early morning, evening and night.

“Have you heard any rumors yet about the war ending? There are very persistent rumors out here about its being over this year, but personally, I don’t see a chance of it.”

On June 7th, at 3.10 a.m., the Battle of Messines started with the explosion of a heavy concentration of mines under the German positions on the Messines ridge. Under a strong artillery barrage the infantry advanced and captured the ridge. A notable success.

“8th June, 1917.

“Many thanks for sending out the M.P. It arrived the evening of the day after it is published, which is quick work, considering.

“The weather is still extremely warm, but rather muggy. We rest during the heat of the day and work at night, when we are not taking part in operations.

“I am still keeping very fit. The steel hats are rather a trial this weather, as they get very hot in the sun.

“Yesterday we had a heavy thunderstorm, which cleared the air for a time, but it is very warm again now.

“We are not in the main fighting yet. The news we had yesterday was good. I hope we keep it up. If only we hammer away long enough at the Germans now, they will become demoralized sooner or later, as we now have for more ammunitions than they have, and a continual harassing fire is bound to have its effect, especially when it cannot be replied to effectively.”

“10th June, 1917.

“We have moved our position since I last wrote and are busy settling down into a new one.

“The battle up at Messines has been a great success. Everyone coming from there says so. The Germans are not fighting with anything like the same spirit and our troops are improving every day, but it will be a very long time yet before they are driven back to the Rhine . . .

“The Russians still seem to be in such a chaotic state that they will not be able to take much of a hand this year. Meanwhile we must wait for the Americans to come in . . . The Germans are certainly beginning to feel the strain a bit on this front.”

“15th June, 1917.

“We are having a fairly quiet time now, and the weather is magnificent. I now have a little spare time for reading the papers, and follow what is going on. Now is the time that the Pacifists must be squashed, as Germany will be all out for making peace before our big offensive can develop. The Messines show was apparently a big success, and must have been a nasty shock to the Germans.”

“17th June, 1917.

“Please excuse this dirty sheet of paper. It is all I have left at present.

“I neither now, felt nor heard any of the great mine explosions. They took place some way from me.

“Please tell Mother I have no idea why I was given the M.C. I did not even know I had been recommended for it. As far as I know I have not done anything out of the ordinary.

“Please thank Mr. Bilderbeck for his congratulations.

“I am still fairly busy. Yesterday I was out the whole day, first of all at a gas demonstration, then on a reconnaissance, then I went to see my wagon line, and stayed on for some sports there. It was more of a holiday than anything else. I had a ride for once in a while.”

We were in action here till the third week in June and all batteries were then withdrawn to Fricourt on the back edge of the Somme battlefield to an alleged ‘rest’ area among old trenches, rusty wire, shell holes, and the debris of the fighting, not exactly the most comfortable or pleasant of surroundings.

“25th June, 1917.

“We are now out of the line resting for a bit. The weather is magnificent. Our surroundings are not exactly all that could be desired as we are billeted in an old German prisoners’ camp in the middle of a battlefield, on which there are still several relics and some powerful odors . . .

“This afternoon we had a cricket match: the Battery against the officers of the Brigade. We just managed to find a small space free from shell holes and trenches where we could make our pitch . . . The Battery defeated the officers of the Brigade by over 60 runs to 37.”

“28th June, 1917.

“We are having a very easy and comfortable time now and are starting to enjoy ourselves as much as we can in this benighted spot. We can’t do very much in the way of training as we cannot go off the roads owing to the shelled state of the ground.

“This evening we had a violent thunderstorm, but now it is fine again. I am very fit still . . .

“Although the Wing (R.F.C.) has gone, the Flying Corps Brigade H.Q. is still down here, and they have asked me to go and spend a night with them . . .

“What General Fanshawe said about me was very nice. (He had written home to say that I had done well) but I realize my own shortcomings.”

“1st July, 1917.

“We are having quite a good rest. Owing to the country we can’t get off the roads, so we cannot do very much in the way of training, which is what I should like to push on with.

“The weather just lately seems to have completely broken.

“I rode over yesterday to visit the Flying Corps Brigade I was with . . . but they were all out so I had to come back . . . I had quite a good ride (of 18 miles there and 18 back) . . .

“I have given up smoking again . . .

“We are having a church service this morning. I always go to everyone I can.

“The Colonel the other day very kindly said he was very pleased to notice an improvement in the Battery since I took it over. I have a very good lot of officers, N.C.O.s and men.”

CHAPTER XII

PASSCHENDAELE

Rumors were now current that we were shortly to move to Ypres. Unlike most rumors it turned out to be true.

“3rd July, 1917

“This may be the last letter you will get from me for a little time, as I shall be on trek.

“We have been having quite a good rest here. It has been more like barrack life than active service. We have been living in huts, with regular hours for parades, etc. If only the country was a bit more prepossessing it would be very enjoyable, but as it is, we cannot leave the rounds out riding, and walking across country becomes almost impossible owing to the shell holes. The country now, however, is nearly all covered with a thick growth of rank grass.

“The weather has been rather variable lately. We have had one or two quite cold days, but today has been very warm again. This morning we were out on a tactical scheme, this afternoon there was a rifle shooting competition, and this evening I went to a performance by the Divl. Concert party, which was quite good.

“By this paper we got today, dated July 2nd, the news from Russia did not seem very good, as it stated that the Revolutionary Party were for stopping the war. But there is a rumor this evening that the Russians have taken 9,000 prisoners.”

Early on July 5th we started our trek northwards by easy stages.

“8th July, 1917.

“I have just time to scribble you a line.

“We are marching every day now. It is very enjoyable when the weather is fine. Last night, however, we had a very heavy thunderstorm, and it rained on the march this morning, but this evening it cleared up wonderfully and we all got dry again.

“We have got to a place now where there are billets, and I am actually in a bed again. I am writing this to you while in bed.”

“I had tea and a dinner today in a town nearby. It was a pleasant change from rations which are now chiefly bully and biscuits. . .”

“9th July, 1917.

“We are still on the march. We have halted for a day in a pretty little French village, which is much more like an English village than the average run of French villages. I have quite a good billet in a farm. We leave early tomorrow.

“Yesterday evening we had a battery dinner party in the town nearby. It was quite a success. This evening we are having a sing-song.

“The weather has not been very good just lately. We have had some heavy showers at night, and low black clouds, with some fine drizzle in the day time.

“It is very pleasant marching through France in this way. It is more like maneuvers than war, and is even better than maneuvers, as now we are billeted.”

“12th July, 1917.

“We are still continuing our march. I expect it will come to an end soon, somewhere near where Jack was in April, 1915. (Ypres)

“It has been very pleasant marching by stages through the country. I have enjoyed it very much. The weather, on the whole, has been magnificent. Yesterday evening we even found time for a cricket match.

“We have been billeting in a far more civilized country, and have been able to get supplies better. Fresh butter and milk are a pleasant change.”

“13th July, 1917.

“I am afraid the little fowl was mistaken after all. I tried to get leave, but it did not come off.

“We had a very pleasant, though rather warm, march again today. We are now in tents.”

There were two Armies in the Ypres sector, in the north the Fifth under General Gough, and in the south the Second under General Plumer. The Army staff under Plumer had a conference on discipline at which dissatisfaction was expressed at the saluting of the Canadians. "Plum" let it go on for some time, and then broke in with: "Well, gentlemen, I don't think there's much wrong with the saluting of the Canadians. Nearly every Canadian I salute returns it." That brought it to an end.

On July 13th we passed through Poperinghe, which was heavily shelled by long range artillery not long after, and went into action north of Ypres and a few yards west of the Yser Canal. The place was crowded with batteries and we newcomers had last choice. Nothing was ready. The position had to be dug and sandbagged. The O.P. was in the front-line trench near Hill Top Farm. The French had removed the stump of a tree, about ten feet high, and put up an exact replica in painted steel with a hollow inside up which one climbed and observed through the slit. Unfortunately, the steel tree was not very securely fastened and when I was in it, took a bit of a tilt! However, the Germans did not seem to notice it, though I was rather afraid they would open up on it when they saw it was a bogus. From here I shot the battery on to its zone and did some 'calibration.'

There were several fairly deep dugouts in the eastern bank of the Yser Canal where the ground rose slightly, and these were occasionally shelled by German heavy artillery. One very heavy shell, perhaps from a 17-inch howitzer possibly aimed at the dugouts, fell between two guns of a battery just north of us, and the crater made embraced both gun pits knocking out the guns.

There was a good deal of high explosives and mustard gas shelling round the battery position, but the gas drill was good and we had no casualties on that score. But my head signaler,

walking with me, was unluckily killed by a splinter through his temple from a 5.9" shell which burst 500 yards away.

One evening we were bombarded by a new type of shell which gave off a pink, acrid smoke which almost gassed me. The usual gas shells made a very distinctive, high pitched whining noise and a low 'pop' as they burst on hitting the ground, and as soon as one heard it one ordered 'gas.'

"16th July, 1917.

"We are up in action again. I have been so busy the last few days that I have not had time for writing.

"I am writing this in a dugout, which will be my future home for some time . . .

"We have had rather a lot of rain lately which has made the going rather bad."

We were now in the 18th Corps of the Fifth Army. On the evening of July 16th, Major Tod, the original commander of A/240, came up to the Battery. He was very anxious to take over his old troop again, but I was not at all keen, now that I knew it and had trained it, to give up the command. We sat in my dugout the whole night arguing the point. In the end he implored me so persuasively that I finally agreed, and informed the Colonel. Tod took over the Battery the next day. Some days later he, and the senior subaltern, Fullerton, were killed with a shell fell on their dugout. I was posted to commanded "C" Battery in 241 Brigade R.F.A. in the same Division and joined them on the 18th. It was in action a little way back, just north of Reigersburg Chateau in which were the brigade headquarters. The battery position was in a hedge from the front of which one could see the Pilckem ridge, in German hands, not a very bright outlook for us. about

100 yards behind us was a copse out of which a battery had already been shelled. I went to the O.P. and tested the registration of targets and calibration.

The preliminary bombardment for the 3rd Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, began on July 18th. [See Sketch 16]

“19th July, 1917.

“This battery, C 241, that I joined yesterday, appears to be a very good one . . . Altogether there are nine officers in the battery.

“Last night we had a fairly quiet night. I was only called upon to fire on three different occasions . . . There was no gas for the change.

“The weather is still very damp. It has not rained much, but there has been a fair amount of drizzle and mist . . .

“You never heard such a row as there goes on here when we all open out. It must be like hell let loose.”

Brigade History states:

“The ensuing three months were to be the most terrible and disastrous period of the war for the 241st Brigade, and let it be said also, the most glorious . . .

“The pessimists . . . foretold events of such appalling horror, that, writing now, long after the events, one is able to see clearly that those horrors of the pessimists were almost as bad as the reality.”

Mustard gas was used for the first time in this battle. It was not really a gas, but a liquid which vaporized fairly slowly, and was apt to lie for days in shell holes and on the ground. It, as with all gas, needed a good concentration to contaminate an area. Gas was no much use in rain or a high wind. Muggy, close days, or rather nights, were best for its use.

On several nights we were gas-shelled, but luckily with no casualties, thanks to good gas drill. I think it was more humane than high explosives. Few of the casualties were fatal, and most recovered to come back. A high explosive shell might blow a man to bits or maim him badly for life, and he did not return. Two of the subalterns in A/240 after I left were in a dugout when a mustard gas shell fell in the entrance. They were rather burned up by the liquid and had to be evacuated to the Base Hospital, but eventually recovered.

Another letter dated:

“19th July, 1917.

“The weather seems to have broken again. We have had rain and mist for the last two days, and high wind which has made shooting difficult.

“This battery (has) two Regular Officers in it, one used to be in the 7th Hussars . . . They (the battery) seem a hard-working lot . . .

“I am enjoying life as much as I can under the circumstances. The day before yesterday I had a narrow squeak. An 11-inch shell burst about four yards away. Fortunately, it was in water (it burst in the canal as we were crossing it coming back from the O.P.), or I certainly would not be here now. It soaked us and sent up a column of water 100 feet at least.

“They are rather unpleasant with gas round here at nights. The lachrymatory kind makes one feel as if one had a heavy cold . . . one’s eyes smart so much that one cannot see out of them. The lethal kind is more unpleasant. When it gets you faintly it makes you feel weak, and strongly may do you in altogether. But we have very good respirators, and there is no need to feel any ill effects if they are put on in time.”

“20th July, 1917.

“We are having a fairly lively time at present, with gas and shells, etc., but it can be nothing to the time the Bosche is having. There are rumors that he is beginning to get fed up with it, and if our next attack is successful, that he will sue for peace, but that remains to be seen!

“As you know, I have taken over a new battery. It is not really the best time for taking one over, as life will be too strenuous to keep an eye on it at first.

“I went round some of the trenches today. The fighting has been very severe round here in past times, and the ground is very cut up and littered with debris. The smell is one of the worst features, but there are still some dead to bury.

“I have a fairly comfortable dugout to myself, with a little room where I can put things.

“My hours are fairly regular. On account of generally being up most of the night, owing to gas, I get up and have breakfast about 9. After that I generally walk round the position, and see how they are getting on with the work, and supervise it. In the afternoon I generally go to the O.P. and stay there till the evening. Today, however, I went round the O.P.s in the morning and also did a reconnaissance for a new O.P. and for another position. I had a late lunch, at about 3 o'clock, on returning. Then I always have a good deal of office work and correspondence to deal with besides issuing orders, making out reports, etc.

“The weather today has been fine but very muggy. I was quite tired after my walk this morning. It looked like rain two or three times during the day, but none fell.

“There is a pretty fair artillery duel on tonight. I think the Bosches are getting the worst of it.

“What do you make of the situation in Germany? I thought at first that the Liberals (?) had got the upper hand, but they seem to have put in more of a Prussian than ever. Then is Germany going to have an elected Govt., or is it merely bluff on the part of the Kaiser? Did Lloyd George's speech in which he said he would be more ready to deal with a democratic Govt. in Germany have anything to do with it? Is it true that there are impending signs of a revolution in Germany? It would be interesting to know the real state of things.”

The plan for the attack now came out – about 100 pages of typed foolscap which had to be read through, digested, and from which the battery program of shooting had to be extracted and the calculations made. After two hours' bombardment our artillery brigade as to move to forward positions to continue supporting the advance of the infantry. From our O.P.s we selected positions in no-man's land near Hill Top Farm to which to move, but they had also to be reconnoitered in detail. The problem was to choose the time to do it. One did not want to be caught in no-man's land in daylight, so we decided that 'first light' or very early dawn was the best time to be on the positions. Things were generally fairly quiet then with both sides having

their breakfasts. We should have to make the approach in the dark and arrange to go independently and meet at Hill Top, an easily recognizable feature. The night we chose was pitch black, low cloud and with the Germans gas shelling. I started from the battery at midnight, wearing a respirator, on a compass bearing to one of the crossings over the canal. I had to remove the mask occasionally to read the compass. Unfortunately, there was a large pond, or lake, short of the canal and into this I fell. The compass was jerked out of my hand, sunk and lost. I scrambled out and tried to find my way to the bridge, but must have lost my sense of direction, for after an hour I found myself walking into the back of my own battery position. I felt humiliated, but on ringing up brigade headquarters was told that neither the C.O. nor the other battery commanders had managed to get to the rendezvous.

“22nd July, 1917.

“We are having a very strenuous time. It is not too pleasant as we have both gas and shells (shot at us).

“I am still keeping quite fit.

“Please excuse short letter, but I am going out again tonight and have not time for much writing.

“I hope that in another month or two the war will be much nearer an end. It is hard to realize that it has been going on now for nearly three years, and yet it seems a lifetime.

“We tried again next night. Luckily there was no gas shelling, it was a clearer night, and we were able to get to the front-line trench, reconnoiter our forward positions and back again without incident.”

“23rd July, 1917.

“I went out on my reconnaissance early this morning to find O.P.s and gun positions. I went down the trenches and saw some of the horrors of war (the shambles at the bridges). The

smell in places was very bad, which rather put me off my lunch afterwards, but I had a very good tea and dinner.

“I had no very narrow squeaks today though there were one or two (shells) fairly close, but that is only to be expected when there is so much flying about. The nearest was a shell which pitched between the officers’ mess and cook house.”

We had now to get sufficient ammunition onto these forward positions for the further bombardments, barrages, and answering S.O.S calls when we moved up to them. I reckoned we should need at least 600 rounds per battery and as much more as could be managed afterwards. The problem was how to do it.

The German night shelling of roads and tracks on our side was severe, particularly at the bottlenecks of the few bridges over the canal. Every morning there was a shambles at each of them, smashed up wagons, dead horses and men, and through these one had to pick one’s way. I decided that to send up ammunition wagons would be asking for trouble, so asked for, and got, pack saddles with attachments for carrying ammunition. Each pack saddle took 8 rounds, 4 on each side. The horses and mules with their drivers went up every night up to Zero day, and luckily there were few casualties.

As Zero day approached fire intensified on each side.

“24th July, 1917.

“Last night was not a very pleasant one again. We got no sleep on account of gas and shells, as I am feeling a little tired today . . .

“What I loathe more than anything else is gas. It makes me feel sick and I cannot eat afterwards. It rather takes the ginger out of me, and makes me want to rest all the time instead of working.”

On the evening of July 24th the Germans opened heavy fire on my battery with direct action H.E. The shells burst as soon as the tip of the nose-fuse touched the ground, making no crater, and broke into small pieces of steel which flew all round close to and parallel with the ground with great velocity, most unpleasant to anyone in the open. I lost my senior subaltern, Lieut. Hamilton, who was wounded in the leg by a piece of shell. Lieut. Allday and Sgt. Duggins performed gallantly and the latter was awarded the Military Medal. He was later killed.

I thought, from the intensity of the bombardment, that there would be much damage to the guns, but luckily, except for a few dial sights there was very little. Obviously, the Germans had our battery taped, and it was not a very good look-out for Zero day when we might expect severe counter-battery work from them.

“25th July, 1917.

“We are having a pretty strenuous time. I am feeling a little better today having worked off most of the gas effects. If we are having not too good a time, I believe the Germans are having a very much worse . . .

“Today is wet. I am not sorry as there can be no gas, and we shall have some rest from it for a little time.”

“26th July, 1917.

“We are still having a strenuous time. I got the ‘Morning Post’ the day before yesterday, but before I had time to read it, it got soaked through by rain, so I do not know how they describe what is going on.

“We are not having too pleasant a time with shells and gas. The only comfort is to think that the Germans are having a very much worse one.

“All the higher powers seem to think that the war is going well for us, and some of them have expressed an opinion that they think it will be over by Christmas, though it is rather hard to see how it can be.”

“27th July, 1917.

“We are having a very strenuous time indeed now. We got no sleep last night owing to shells and gas. The latter makes me feel rather ill the next day and I cannot eat much.

“I must say I have a splendid lot of officers in this battery. They are all as brave as lions. The men are also splendid. It makes one proud of the race. If only they had a Govt. worthy of them.

“I was very sorry indeed to leave my old battery. I have now to start all over again in this one. But it is also a good battery. I should like to have had them out at rest first in order to have got to know them all.

“I hope the next battle will make the end of the war very much closer. I don’t think anyone who has been through this war will lightly have another, not even the Germans.

“I believe we are giving the Germans quite a bad time. I hope they are having a good deal worse time than we are.

“I find it rather awkward coming to a new battery when times are so strenuous, as I have not time to get hold of it properly. Also, owing to our position, we cannot do much moving about in daytime.

“I believe all the higher authorities think the war is going very well for us. If only Russia would buck up a bit and to her share we could get along faster. There seems no chance, however, of it ending yet awhile.

“Today I have also had a fair rest. We had a shoot early this morning, and I went out on reconnaissance this afternoon, but otherwise I have not had much today, and up till now things have been fairly quiet. So far, we have had one or two narrow squeaks, but it is all in the game.”

On July 29th our “D” Battery was also heavily shelled, and had several casualties. The brigade history says:

“During the fortnight’s bombardment before the battle, the Brigade suffered severe losses.”

Each division in the line had about four divisional artilleries supporting it. This meant that in the subsequent operations, though the infantry were relieved periodically, and they certainly deserved it, the artillery was constantly in action.

I now quote the Brigade history:

“The attack, so long prepared, was launched at 0350 hours (a.m.) on July 31st. In the half light of a cold grey morning, the Batteries of the Brigade worked through the stages of the (creeping) barrage allotted to them.”

Close behind us there was a railway on which there was a travelling naval 12-inch gun. It fired straight over our heads, and the blast would have lifted off our tin helmets if they had not been held on by straps.

To my pleasant surprise few German shells fell in the Battery, and German prisoners began to come past under escort.

To continue:

“On receiving news of the Infantry advances, orders were given for a forward movement some two hours after zero.

“Teams had been in readiness for some hours just behind Reigersburg Chateau, and in a very short space of time these were on the gun positions. Having pulled out, the Batteries . . . moved across the Canal to the forward positions already reconnoitered . . . Shelling encountered in the advance was responsible for relatively few casualties although some occurred both to horses and men. Lieut. A. Bonham-Edwards (B/241) was shot through the lung, and Lieut. Forsyth (A/241) was gassed.”

On our way up, one of the bridges over a trench collapsed, and nearly all the Brigade was halted for a time closed up in column of route. It was not possible to disperse because of the

trenches and shell holes. I thought the Germans were bound to turn on to such an excellent target, but we were lucky to escape.

The position we were going to occupy in the old No-Man's Land was at the rear end of a shallow, narrow valley reaching 1,800 yards forward to Kitchener's Wood. The position was under light shell fire, possibly a German battery still firing on its defensive fire lines in No-Man's Land, but we occupied it without casualties, although a shell bursting close to my horse made it want to bolt, and I had some difficulty in restraining it. To the left of our position a stretcher party of 4 men carrying a wounded man were all lying dead, evidently killed by a shell, or by a M.G. burst of fire.

Brigade History:

“Immediately the Batteries had occupied their new positions . . . no time was lost by them in taking up their appropriate sections in the barrage.

“Without doubt, the forward movement of the Brigade was an extraordinarily creditable performance, and in high quarters was acknowledged to be such at the time. The Brigade advanced, took up new positions, and was taking its place in the new barrage well within the time allowed to it to do so in the operations orders, in spite of the greatest difficulties.

“The rest of the day was spent by the Batteries in continuing the attack.”

The pioneers were soon up and working on Boundary Road where it went forward on the left front of the Battery. They came under light shell fire. One shell landed under a man, blew him several feet into the air and killed him.

After the program was finished the Germans launched several counter-attacks. The infantry many times sent up their S.O.S. Verey lights and the batteries answered. Nearly all the ammunition we had on the position was exhausted.

The Official History says:

“Soon after 4 p.m. the drizzle . . . had turned into a steady downpour . . . The German advance as it approached the Steenbeek was slowed down by the strengthening opposition as well as by the heavy rain and the consequent state of the ground near the stream, the worst patch on the whole battlefield. In many places the men were seen to be up to their knees in mud and water . . . At 6 p.m. the artillery and machine gun barrage opened on S.O.S. Signals as arranged, and under its withering fire the Germans turned and withdrew up the slope, leaving many casualties in their tract; but they still held on to the ruins of St. Julien.”

The Brigade History continues:

“The (ammunition) wagons supplied ammunition from the vacated positions west of the Canal. (This continued throughout the rest of the day). The latter task became one of increasing difficulty as the day wore on. Roads, not unnaturally, became hopelessly congested . . . while as he settled down the enemy paid increasing attention with his artillery to all our arteries of communication behind the lines. The teams that turned into Reigersburg Chateau grounds for midday watering presented a very bedraggled and war-worn appearance indeed. The arduousness of the task and the accuracy of the enemy’s fire had told their tale. (They had to continue to supply ammunition during the night.)”

In the afternoon our C.R.A., Brigadier-General Strong, visited the batteries in action.

On the night of 31st July/1st August the weather broke We had gone to sleep in shell holes there being no other cover or dugouts; They began to fill with water, and we woke up the next morning with everything soaked through.

Brigade History:

“August 1st dawned wet and chill. Rain was the greatest enemy to the Batteries as they were then situated. In the unprepared positions, in the midst of a desolate, low lying, shell-torn area, they had not the slightest bit of cover, and their plight on August 1st was indescribable.”

I had little idea, with the attack and many counter-attacks of the 31st July, exactly where our infantry was, so early on August 1st I went forward taking a paper “trench map” on which to mark their positions. It was still raining. I went to the high ground near Kitchener’s Wood and down the forward slope, all in the open in full view of the Germans, and was never shot at. Both sides were evidently sorting themselves out and reorganizing and the Germans could not give attention to such an insignificant target. I came across small parties of our infantry as far down as the Steenbeek River except that the Germans still held St. Julien (or what was left of it). There were many concrete pill boxes, some of which we held and, beyond the Steenbeek, those held by the Germans. My paper map disintegrated in the rain, but I had a good idea where our positions were. On my way back I chose an O.P. on the ridge near Kitchener’s Wood, close to a pill box in which there was a dead German, evidently killed in our advance. From this O.P. we had a very good view of all the ground sloping up beyond the Steenbeek. Col. Colville, commanding our Brigade, was also reconnoitering and we met at this O.P. and compared notes.

I then returned to the battery and marked up a map from memory with the results of my reconnaissance.

In the afternoon the Germans made another attack in St Julien area covered by an artillery barrage and gained a small success, but were driven out by a counter-attack.

On August 2nd we saw the Germans massing near St. Julien, evidently to counter-attack, and we shelled them heavily breaking up the attack. Taking advantage of this an attack by one of our infantry brigades at last succeeded in seizing St. Julien and securing a bridgehead over the Steenbeek.

“2nd August, 1917.

“Many thanks for the numerous letters I have had recently from you and Mother. I have had no time to answer them properly, and have no time now.

“You will see by the papers what has been happening.

“By the way, that shell landed in a canal. Mother was nearly right!

“The weather has turned very wet, which is most unfortunate just now, as it gives the Bosche a breathing space. All our kits and clothes are wet. But we are getting as much to eat as we want so there is nothing, really, to grumble about.

“Last night we had a fairly good night’s rest. It rained hard all night, but we slept through it pretty well.

“I am afraid leave looks very far distant still, as now, of course, it is all stopped.

“The mud is rather bad in this wet weather, especially as it is naturally rather marshy round here. We cannot make any dugouts.

“I am writing this during a lull in the fighting. Things seem to be just getting lively again, so I will have to stop.”

Owing to the heave rain, orders for further attacks on subsequent days were postponed, and the fluctuations on the St. Julien front died down.

We continued our night harassing of German communications at the rate of 600 rounds a battery every night. I again used a section to do this while the other rested.

Official History continues:

“The rain which had set in on the evening of the 31st July continued three days and nights almost without cessation.

“It converted the shelled area near the front into a barrier of a swamp, four thousand yards wide, and this had to be crossed to reach the new front line. The margins of the overflowing streams were transformed into long stretches of bog, passable only by a few well-defined tracks which became targets for the enemy’s artillery; and to leave the tracks was to risk death by drowning.”

In fact, many men and horses were drowned in the mud. The enemy shell fire also made gaps in the duckboard and log tracks, gaps which somehow had to be crossed at the risk of drowning.

“3rd August, 1917.

“I am still alive though at present I am more likely to die from drowning than from hostile fire. It has rained solidly for three days and the place is knee deep in mud. All our clothes are wet. It is extraordinary weather for August.”

The Brigade History states:

“The forward positions had been reconnoitered with a view to their being occupied for a short period only, but owing to the attack being held up . . . the Brigade were destined to remain in their unsatisfactory and exposed positions for three weeks.”

“6th August, 1917.

“We are still having a strenuous time in a way, though the mud is really worse at present than the shelling. It seems to get in everywhere, including one’s bedding. Yesterday afternoon and this morning were fine, and did a lot to dry things up, but this afternoon has again turned wet.

“I had 24 hours off duty and got back to the battery again yesterday. I went to a Town (Poperinghe) about 10 miles from the line, where I spent the night, and had some good meals, a bath, and a fairly good bed, and did some shopping.

“My clothes are nearly all dry again now. We are getting a little more comfortable but have not a very good position. I would not mind going back for a short rest and to get everything tidied up. I have seen practically nothing really of my new battery, and life has been too strenuous to make any reforms or anything.

“We are not very comfortable here, but the men are splendid. It is rather a strain always wearing a steel helmet and a gas respirator in the ready position, even at night, and it is difficult to put in much work with the ground in its present condition.”

More and more batteries now came forward into position ahead of us until the whole narrow valley between "Boundary Road" just behind us and almost up to the Kitchener's Wood ridge was filled with guns; and on the other side of Boundary Road behind us was our howitzer, "D", Battery. A little further back a 60-pounder battery came into action. Batteries fired over the next in front at 100 yards distance. The row when all were firing was terrific.

The noise of the 60-pounder battery firing over our heads at night was penetrating, more so than the 12-inch gun at Reigersburg. As each gun fired there was a very sharp crack followed by another, called "shock" and "under-shock," which was deafening, and made sleep impossible.

"6th August, 1917.

"I am still carrying on. I could not write yesterday as I was away all day at the O.P.

"The weather has very much improved. We are still having a pretty strenuous time. It is very hard to get clean clothes as we cannot wash them up here on the gun position, or even hang them out to dry. I have had to send mine down to the wagon line.

"This position is not very comfortable yet, and our quarters are very cramped. We are gradually getting up some form of shelter, though, as material becomes available, and we can put it up unobserved. But we cannot make proper dugouts as we cannot dig at all in this soil without coming to water.

"I am afraid the rain has spoilt most of my kit, as it has penetrated everywhere, and everything of cardboard or paper has simply dissolved.

"The fine weather now, however, has brought out the aeroplanes, on both sides.

"It does not look as if the war would end this year. The Germans show no signs of cracking, and are, indeed, still putting up a very stiff fight. Perhaps their civilians may not be able to stick another winter. Otherwise, I do not see what is to prevent the war going on for another year or more. The Germans still seem well provided with guns and men, and still seem to have plenty of kick left in them. This Russian business also has probably encouraged them a lot. I hope the Russians will not eventually chuck it, as it will probably mean the release of 2,000,000

prisoners, and the concentration of Germans and Austrians on this front, which would mean a much longer war.

“Now that the weather has turned finer we are having a very much more comfortable time, though aeroplane activity and shelling have naturally increased.

“I am generally awake till fairly late at night, as by far the greatest activity occurs then, and I don’t go to sleep till things have become pretty quiet again.

“Everyone out here seems fairly cheery about the war, thought it will obviously take some time to finish off, and not without some very hard fighting. But the Bosche is undoubtedly on the down grade and is fighting a defensive and not an offensive war. If only we had been properly backed up by the Govt. from the start, the war would probably have been over by now. I think all sides are beginning to feel the strain a bit, but the side that sticks it best will certainly come out on top.”

“9th August, 1917.

“The weather has now taken a decided turn for the better, and we are all dry again . . . The finer weather has naturally caused an increase in artillery and aeroplane activity . . .

“We are not having too hard a time just at present, though there is still a great deal of shelling, etc.”

The German artillery soon spotted the concentration of guns in our narrow, shallow valley. In fact, standing at the trails of my guns I could see the tower of Passchendaele Church which the enemy must have been using as an O.P. With a concentration of the fire of every gun that could bear he began a series of “area strafes,” causing many casualties to men and guns in the crowded area. I had several casualties, for example, on August 8th I had two men killed and eleven wounded, and more on other days. So, to save my detachments when they were not firing, when we were heavily shelled, I withdrew the men into our old front-line trench just the other side of Boundary Road behind us, but officers and signalers stayed on the position. I then went round to see that all the men were clear. Once I found a wounded a wounded man in a gun pit and took him to the dressing station on a stretcher.

One morning, not having had my clothes off for some time, I decided to have a bath, outside our dugout, in my rubber folding bath. I was covered all over with an encrusted layer of mud. I was in the middle of bathing when an area strafe started. Shouting, "Clear the position," I dived into the dugout to get some clothes on before going round the Battery.

Now and again the shelling set fire to the camouflage netting over the guns, making some of the ammunition on the racks explode. The two subalterns and I jumped out of our dugout and put out the fires with buckets filled from shell holes, not a pleasant job with shells exploding at intervals!

The Battery 100 yards in front of us, which I passed on my way to the O.P., was twice completely destroyed in the area strafes, every man killed or wounded, and every gun knocked out. We were luckier, being at the rear end of the Strafe, where the concentration of shelling was not quite as great.

It was extraordinary, though, what damage the odd stray shell would do. One day, when the men were eating their dinners at their guns, a single shell landed on No. 1 gun pit, killing one man and wounding another, the only shell fired in the area for some time. Another time one big shell entered the ground just in front of the telephonists' dugout, and exploded deep down, shaking it like an earthquake. We laughed at seeing four scared men rushing out of it. Another day we were not so lucky, and a shell killed one of my few remaining signalers at the rear of the dugout.

I think the muddy ground saved us a good any casualties from shellfire, for many of the shells were buried so way down in the mud before they exploded instead of on or near the

surface, thus blanketing much of their effect. But to get the 1,800 yards from my Battery to the O.P. took nearly have an hour struggling through the mud.

Some of my men complained that they, married and with children, were only getting a shilling a day to pay plus married allowances, and were exposed to the dangers and discomforts of the war, while some of their unmarried pals had not joined up, and had managed to get into reserved occupations at home at several pounds a week. It seemed that the nearer the front, and the greater the danger, the less the pay. It caused some bitterness.

When things were not too hectic officers, one at a time, were given short periods of leave to Poperinghe, and I arranged reliefs for some of my men at the wagon lines. On August 11th I was again given 24 hours' leave, and spent it at the officers' club in Poperinghe, and enjoyed a rest, good meals and a bed.

“12th August, 1917.

“I was given 24 hours' leave yesterday to go to the same town behind the lines that I went to last time, and I am there now writing to you. It is the only chance we have of getting a bath, haircut, etc., and we get a good rest at night in a bed, and some civilized meals. I feel all the better for it, and am just about to return to my battery.

“We have begun having rather a thick time of it largely, but it can be nothing to what the Germans are having. I hope we shall smash them up soon, but I am afraid that owing to the Russian debacle it will take much longer than it should have done.

“The weather has been very much finer lately, and aeroplanes and artillery activity has very much increased in consequence. We have had one or two heavy showers of rain though.

“I am glad to hear that the English Revolutionaries and peace cranks have so little real influence. If we don't win this war, it will have to be all fought out again at a later date.”

“12th August, 1917.

“Just a line to let you know I am still carrying on. I am writing this at an ‘Officers’ Club’ behind the lines where I have had 24 hours’ rest with a bath and bed. It is a treat to get under a roof again and to a fairly quiet spot away from the guns and shells! We have been having rather a strenuous time lately and are all a little tired, but it must be nothing to what the Bosche is having. The weather is decidedly better now though occasionally we have heavy thunderstorms. I have just finished my 24 hours and must be getting back.”

I returned to the Battery much refreshed.

The road from Poperinghe to Ypres was always under fire from the German long-range artillery. There were certain spots he strafed at certain times as regularly as clockwork. Long columns of traffic used the road, and it was amusing to see military policemen with stop watches out halting the traffic when the next shell was due and, as soon as it had burst, letting it on again till the next shell was due.

One heavy shell, by accident or design, missed the road as I was going up it, fell in some transport lines about 100 yards to the north, and blew up a G.S. wagon and its horses.

On my return a fresh attack which we were to support was ordered for August 16th.

“14th August, 1917.

“The mud has to a great extent dried up now, and we are living a little more comfortably.

“We are living in strenuous times. I hope it is very much unpleasant for the Bosche than it is for us. I imagine it must be, as I think we have superiority in guns, and have lately been giving him a warm time.

“No one seems to know how long the war is likely to last. The optimists think it will be over by Christmas, but they have though the same every year. I think it must go on for another year at least, unless the Germans chuck it of their own accord before then.

“We are still having a shower or two occasionally, but not the steady downpour that was at the beginning of August.”

The Germans still went on with their “area strafes” and harassing of communications and, as the Brigade History says, “Losses in men and horses were heavy.”

Ammunition supply and the delivery of rations and stores was a problem. One did not want them to arrive on the position with a strafe was on. But I had noticed that round about dawn was usually a quiet time, both sides carrying out their reliefs and probably eating their breakfasts. So, in spite of the harassing fire I gave orders for the night march from the wagon lines to be timed to arrive accordingly.

After a night of shelling, when daylight came there were often loose horses and abandoned transport vehicles. We collected some of these and thus had unauthorized vehicles in which to carry all the extra stores with which we had been issued, and other things. Later, when about to make a long march, during which the Divisional or other high Commander might watch us marching past, the extra transport had to be sent on ahead to the next stopping place to avoid it being seen and confiscated.

As losses in horses became heavy, they were replaced by mules. These were fine, big South American animals. First, they drew the transport, then the first line ammunition wagons, and eventually some of the firing battery wagons. They were all right when the going was good, but if a vehicle stuck in, any, a boggy patch or a shell hole, they would cease pulling, and nothing on earth would induce them to go on. I had sometimes to unhook them and hook in a team of horses which would at least pull till they dropped, but usually succeeded in extricating the vehicle.

The hand rope was no good for tying up a mule. He would eat his way through it and go loose.

Going round the horse lines and inspecting the animals one had to be careful. A horse can only kick backwards, but a mule can kick sideways as well.

Horses are not particular about their drinking water. They will drink from muddy ponds. But they are particular about their forage. It has to be good. A mule, on the other hand, will only drink clean water, but is not fastidious about its food.

“15th August, 1917.

“We are certainly having rather a heavy time of it.

“The weather has been none too good lately, and the Germans are getting very active again, both with their aeroplanes and artillery. They are making a desperate fight of it for supremacy in both.

“I am very busy indeed just at present, so please excuse a short letter.

“I am just going to start a Court of Enquiry of which I am President. It is rather an extraordinary place to hold one on a gun position, which is none too healthy!

“As some of the witnesses are a bit late, I am continuing this while waiting.

“I am afraid there is very little chance of the war ending this year unless the Bosches suddenly throw their hands in, which there seems very little likelihood of their doing at present. They are, in fact, fighting with the utmost stubbornness. Their morals do not appear to be very bad, and their troops appear well fed, so they do not appear anywhere near cracking up yet. It rather looks as if we should have to wait for the Americans to come in.”

“15th August, 1917.

“We are bearing up in spite of the rain, mud, shells and gas, and the minor horrors of war . . .

“The Bosche is still putting up a very stiff fight and is making a bold bid again for the supremacy of the air . . .”

There was heavy rain again on August 16th. The attack across the Steenbeek was launched at 0445 hours supported by a creeping barrage from us, but, struggling through the mud, it was slaughtered by German machine gun fire from their concrete pill-boxes which our field guns could not damage. One of my guns was knocked out by a German counter-battery strafe on us.

During the attack my Lieut. Gascoyne was Forward Observation Officer for the Brigade at our O.P. near Kitchener's Wood and had a nasty experience. As an F.O.O. party from another Brigade started to go forward from the O.P. a salvo of German shells fell among them killing the all just in front of him.

On August 20th there was a further attack, this time with tanks. One section (four tanks) was to advance up the rising ground eastwards from St. Julien. I saw the tanks near the Battery moving up the night before. I was ordered to support them by observed fire from my O.P. and decided to put down a smoke screen on the rising ground to blind possible enemy artillery O.P.s and mortar detachments while the tanks were crossing the Steenbeek by the bridge at St. Julien and during the advance eastwards. The attack began at 4.45 a.m. and the screen was good, but I could see the tanks bogged down east of the Steenbeek and brought to a halt. Nevertheless, the infantry gained four strong points, as it was not abortive.

Another attack, again supported by tanks, was ordered for August 22nd. This time we were to support the infantry, and I, as usual, worked out the barrage tables for each gun and had

the in the dugout with me ready to issue to the gun detachments in time for the barrage. I had only five guns in action as one had been knocked out.

The night before the attack was pitch black with low cloud. When we were in our dugout about midnight the Germans started gas shelling, and I told Gascoyne to sound the gas alarm for the battery while we donned our masks. While he was doing this on the rattle, one shell hit the H.E. ammunition dump of 3,000 rounds of our 4.5 How. Battery, just the other side of the Boundary Road and 15 yards behind us. Luckily it did not hit the dump next door of 3,000 rounds of gas shell. I remember a blinding flash and nothing more for a time. When I came to, I found myself covered with earth, in a deep hole which was hot and smelt abominably. It was black as pitch. I could not think where I was, but soon realized what had happened. The crater from the explosion took in our dugout. Why we were not all killed I do not know. Gascoyne had a miraculous escape. He might have been blown to bits but was with the Battery, but I persuaded him at least to go to a dressing station not far from the left flank of the Battery to have his wound seen to. It must have been more serious than appeared, for they kept him, and he was eventually sent to a hospital. With Lieut. Allday, who was the only officer I now had left, I went to see what damage had been done in the Battery and found the two left hand guns knocked out and several of my men. It was extraordinary that we who were so near the explosion suffered so little, and the Battery, 80 yards from it, so much. The blast and pieces of metal must have passed over our heads. All my barrage tables and orders had gone west, so I went to D. Battery behind me and, wearing a gas mask, for the shelling was still on, in their dugout, by the light of a candle, with a borrowed copy of the orders and barrage forms, made out a fresh set of tables for my three remaining guns which now had to do the work of the original six.

The Brigade History describes the incident:

“On the night of 21st/22nd August, D/241 again had their huge ammunition dump blown up, C/241 losing Lieut. Gascoyne wounded. It is hard to say which of these two events caused greater consternation . . .

“One referred to the noise of the dump blowing up and the enormous crater made thereby; the other talked of Lieut. Gascoyne’s dramatic appearance, wounded and wearing loud pajamas and carrying a large gas rattle.”

At 0445 a.m. on 22nd August we opened fire on our creeping barrage with our three guns. We were not much worried during it by the German artillery. The attack was partially successful. When it was over the German artillery turned on to our batteries. Another gun was soon hit and put out of action. I withdrew my men to the trench behind and as I was standing with Lieut. Allday behind the Battery, looking up I saw three German shells in the air. I suddenly realized that they were beginning to drop and said to Allday, “they are coming damned close.” All three burst on one of my last two guns, and when all the smoke had cleared away there was nothing left except a large crater. We examined it. There was no sign of a gun, or any part of it! I had now one gun left. When I reported this to the Colonel, he ordered me to hand it over to the Battery next door, which had also lost some guns, withdraw my Battery to the wagon lines, and draw six new guns from Ordinance.

“22nd August, 1917.U

“Just a line to let you know I am still going on.

“We have been having a very rough time, and are now out for a short rest.

“Our dugout was blown in on top of us (last night), burying us all . . .”

On August 23rd I went to the Ordnance for my six new guns. They flatly refused to believe that I had lost a gun completely destroyed and no trace left, in spite of my certificate, and would only give me five. If I wanted a new gun, I must at least produce a part of it. I had to send up two men to dig round the gun's crater and they eventually found well buried the fore end of the buffer. I imagine that the force of the explosion had driven the rest of the bits of the gun deep into the mud. It took the men a day or two to find the buffer.

I found some officers and men at the wagon lines to replace the casualties, but many were only semi-trained.

For some reason which I cannot recall, Allday left me temporarily attached to another Battery. The Officers were four young subalterns enlisted, I think, under the "Derby" scheme, straight out of home, who had never been in action before, and knew little of guns or gunnery. It was cruel sending them into the Salient before going to a quieter sector where they could have been broken in gradually.

"23rd August, 1917.

"I have quite enjoyed my rest today . . . I had a parade of the men and inspected their clothing. After that 'stables.' Then office work, lunch, and a 'court of Enquiry' of which I was President. Tea at the wagon lines of my old Battery A/240. More office work consisting of (Battery) accounts which I have not been able to attend to in the gun position, 'paying out,' going through the Battery roll, rearranging duties and replacing casualties."

On August 24th we had orders to move up again into action.

“24th August, 1917.

“We had rather a hot time of it the other day, and are now having 48 hours’ rest at the wagon lines. Our dugout was blown in on top of us, and we had to dig ourselves out. Your letters were buried, but I think I have recovered them. I have not got them here at the moment.

“Our rest is just drawing to an end, and we go up again today. I was feeling rather done up when I came out, but am much better now, after the rest.

“The weather has not been too good, as we had a lot of rain yesterday afternoon, evening and night. We have tents down here, so are fairly well off.

“What appears to be happening now on this front is that we are trying to make the pace too hot for the Germans. They seem to realize it, and are retaliating fairly heavily. They seem to have plenty of stuff to throw about, at any rate. I don’t think the intensity of this fighting can be kept up for very long, and one side or the other will have to give in sooner or later. This is only what I imagine is happening. The Bosche, at present at any rate, shows no sign of cracking. He is still fighting very stubbornly, and his artillery is still very active. If we could only smash up all his guns we would have a walk-over, as his infantry are no great shakes; what stops us more than anything else is his artillery and machine guns.

“I cannot say all I would like to about the situation without giving away information.

“The war is very different now to what it was in the early days. It has reached an intensity never equaled before. Consequently, we live much more uncomfortably now. Whereas formerly we often had a billet near the gun position, now we live in shell holes. Sometimes we cannot light a fire in daylight, and often no work can be done by day on account of hostile aircraft. We cannot move about much during the day for the same reasons. We have to sleep with our clothes on, always ready for immediate action, and our only chance of getting a bath or changing of clothes is at the wagon line. Counter-battery work also is much more gone in for than formerly. Gas shells have made life rather more unpleasant also.

“But if it is uncomfortable of us, I hope it is much worse for the Bosche, as we currently have a superiority of artillery. We are, however, advancing over the strafed country, while he is retiring to a better place each time.

“Most of our work, of course, has to be done at night. We therefore get what rest we can in the daytime. The early morning is generally the best time for this, though even that is not always so quiet as it might be.

“We seem at present to be straining every muscle to defeat the Germans this year. We may only drive them back to another line, but it is bound to have a bad effect on their ‘morale.’

“Some people are saying that the Germans are in a bad way internally and cannot last much longer. Have you any news?”

“24th August, 1917.

“Just on point of starting up again . . . Am feeling much fitter after two nights’ rest. My kit is all over the place, having been buried (in the dump explosion), and all officers’ kits mixed together: I never seem to have a servant for long. They go sick or become casualties. My new servant does not know my kit and some of it is lost.”

When I had been in action, I had noticed that area strafes started a little distance west of Kitchener’s Wood because there were no Batteries to be shelled close up to the ridge. Hence there was an area of about 200 or 300 yards from the crest of the ridge westwards which was little shelled. The Germans, being very methodical, all strafes would probably remain on their original areas, so I decided to put my Battery just behind the crest. Going up by night would be unpleasant because of the numerous shell holes to be negotiated in the dark, the muddy ground, and the intensive enemy harassing fire. On the other hand, I had seen a battery going up by daylight completely smashed up by artillery fire. It was in too close formation and was spotted by the enemy. I finally decided to go up in daylight but with intervals of at least 100 yards between vehicles. I rode up through the Valley in some trepidation, but not a single round was fired at us and we got all guns into action and the teams away without a casualty, for which I was thankful.

This was a good position. It was only about 200 yards behind the O.P., there was an old German double pill box on the right flank which made a suitable officers’ sleeping quarters, mess, and office, and the men had good dugouts in an old German trench close to the Battery. But our communications ran through the heavily strafed valley. To start with we got everything up by pack, but, as I heard that a decauville railway was being run up to Boundary Road, I

requested that it might be extended to my position to bring up ammunition, rations, and stores.
This was eventually done.

“26th August 1917.

“We have moved to a new position, and I had all my work cut out to get everything ready. I am rather short-handed . . . so have rather a lot to see to . . .

“I am writing this at the O.P. while waiting to shoot . . .

“Besides the men, the horses could do with a rest.

“All things considered, I think the men are wonderfully cheery. They have all had a strenuous time of it.

“The weather is very much cooler now, rather different from this day three years ago! (Battle of Le Cateau.) How little we thought then . . . that it would last as long as this. We gave it a year at the outside.

“You would never recognize your smart soldier husband now in his dirty (muddy), out of shape (through constant soaking) uniform and untidy hair . . . If we could only have open warfare, it would make a difference.”

Another attack eastward from St. Julien was ordered for August 27th. Zero hour was 1.55 p.m. I watched it from my O.P.

Heavy rain came on at the time of the attack, and the wretched infantry, who had marched up during the night before, had been standing for hours up to their knees in mud and water.

The creeping barrage was terrific. It covered the sloping ground beyond the Steenbeek in a heavy smoke cloud in which were the flickering red and yellow flashes, several every second, of bursting shells. I did not think anything could live in it.

The infantry struggled forward through the mud and water making very slow progress, but succeeded, with the help of three tanks, in capturing a couple of strong points on the rising ground beyond.

“27th August, 1917.

“I am most frightfully busy today, as you will see by the papers

“The weather today is rotten. It has been raining most of the day making everything very muddy and unpleasant.

“All things considered we are not too badly off here. We have a fairly waterproof place as a mess and sleeping quarters . . .

“The artillery duel is still violent . . .”

All my signalers became casualties, and the officers at the O.P. and at the Battery had for a time to send and take messages themselves. The signalers had had to go out whatever the condition and shelling and repair the telephone lines broken by shell fire, for communications from O.P. to Battery are vital. Luckily, in my new position, with the Battery so close to the O.P., orders could sometimes be shouted down and sometimes an Aldis signaling lamp used.

If our men suffered, the Germans suffered worse. General Kuhl, Chief of staff of Crown Prince Rupperecht’s Army Group, wrote: “The Hell of Verdun was surpassed. The Flanders battle was called the greatest martyrdom of the World War.” There were no trenches and no shelters except the few concrete block-houses: “in the water-filled craters covered the defenders without shelter from weather, hunger and cold, abandoned without pause to overwhelming artillery fire.”

More attacks were ordered but, because of more rain and the state of the ground, were cancelled. In fact, it was doubtful whether it would be profitable to attack again until the country had dried up.

Young Nicholls, of Brigade Headquarters, one day had to swim the Steenbeek near St. Julien with a telephone line to establish communications forward to the infantry. For his exploit he was awarded the M.C.

Many of the men who had joined to replace casualties had hardly seen a gun before. As I was going round the battery during a shoot, I noticed the layer at one gun having trouble with the dial sight. He said that he had never seen on day before and had only been a soldier for a fortnight! I could not be sure of some of the others, so had to go round and practically lay every gun myself.

Owing to the rain and the shell-torn ground, no wheeled vehicles from our wagon lines could reach the battery, especially at night. At first everything came up by pack, but this was expensive in horses and men. The decauville railway when it had been laid up to the battery was a great saving to the wagon lines, the ammunition, rations, drinking water in petrol cans and stores being put on trucks and given up by a patrol engine at night. Each truck could carry 900 rounds of ammunition, sufficient for a night's firing and a little over. The track was laid up our shallow valley which was subject to heavy German fire. The driver of the engine did not always like this, and uncoupled his engine and went back. I had to send down parties from the sections not engaged in night-firing to push up the trucks by hand. As the track was often damaged by shell-fire they had to repair it as they went along from the dump of lines near Boundary Road. It was heavy work on the men for they got little rest day or night.

Close behind us a 6-inch howitzer battery came into action, evidently also taking advantage of the decauville railway for their ammunition supply. They shared our O.P., and their main tasks seemed to be to knock out the enemy held pill-boxes on the slopes east of St. Julien. We could follow their shells in the air, and we used to have bets on their hitting the target or not. One shell fell under a small pill box and tilted it. Others, when they hit a box, raised clouds of dust, but the damage seemed superficial. I expect they needed heavier guns to destroy them properly.

We never thought our 6-inch and 60 pounders were very effective, certainly not as effective as their German opposite numbers. A 5.4 (German) barrage was most unpleasant. But our infantry complained of being shelled by some new German guns which were the worst they had met yet. We asked them to send us back pieces of the shells. They turned out to be from British 6-inch and 60 pounders which the Germans were using, evidently taken from the Russians when they stopped fighting in 1917 from stocks of these guns we had sent to that country.

German aeroplanes were sometimes active at night and dropped bombs near us. They appeared to be aimed at nothing in particular. Perhaps they were frightened of running into the searchlights and A.A. fire further back, so released their bombs and cleared off.

My pill box was occasionally hit at night by 5.9-inch howitzer shells. No doubt the Germans guessed it would be occupied and had a gun laid on it. If so, the shooting was extraordinarily accurate. The shock of the explosions blew out the candle, which was all the light we had, and dust rained on to us from the ceiling. I sometimes wondered how long the roof would stand up to it!

“28th August, 1917.

“We are still having a strenuous time. Just at present we have moved into more comfortable quarters (our new position) . . .

“I am as fit and well as I can possible be in the circumstances. No chance for any rest yet awhile, though. It is really a struggle now of who can endure the longest, us or the Bosche.

“The work itself is not very difficult or hard, except physically for the men to have a log of ‘spade work’ to do . . . There is a lot of heavy work in building the position, the firing, getting up ammunition, etc., and I have to decide which is the most important job for them to do first, how long they are to work at it, etc., at the same time seeing that they are not so hard worked that they become exhausted. Yet the work must be done. Then we have to allow for time when the enemy is shelling and very little work can be done. When there is so much to do, it is all rather a problem.

“The weather today has been very windy with occasional heavy showers. The wind was 60 miles an hour . . . for the greater part of the day. While the wind is drying things up, the rain makes everything muddy again . . .”

“29th August, 1917.

“I am glad you were having fine weather at Hastings. The crab to fine weather as far as we are concerned is that it increases the artillery activity very much on both sides, which often compels one to stop in a dugout, thus not even enjoying fresh air! Aeroplanes also hover about, forcing one under cover. Sot it is not an unmixed blessing. If there is not much wind, there is generally a good deal of gas shelling, so really stormy weather, such as we have had the last few days is a relief of sorts. We have had very strong winds and heavy showers of rain, which has made the ground very muddy again.

“I am glad the Govt. are taking up such a firm attitude. It shows that they mean business, and that puts more heart into the fighting man. In the early days of the war, it was most disheartening feeling one was not being properly backed up by the Govt., who seemed completely out of touch with what was going on.

“Our position here is more comfortable than our last position. We walked into some ready-made dugouts, and there is better ground for making dugouts on than in our last position. I hope, at any rate, that this dugout won’t be blown in on top of us.

“The Germans are still fighting very doggedly on this front. They seem to realize that it is neck or nothing now. Sooner or later the strain ought to be too much for them, if not altogether from a military point of view, at any rate economically. If the war is not over this year,

America ought to be able to give us a great deal of assistance. With the continually increasing weight of men and metal against them, sooner or later they must reach the breaking point. The thing to do is to make the pace too hot for them and to give them no rest, as we have been doing this year.”

“31st August, 1917.

“We have to pump to keep the water out (of our dugout).

“The mud is very muddy, and makes walking difficult . . . We are getting plenty of rations, which is the chief thing in keeping the men cheerful . . .

“There is a rumor going round today that Austria is suing for peace. I don’t know what truth there is in it, but if it is true, it ought to make a great difference to the war.

“Today has been a little finer, but there are still low clouds and an occasional shower.

“There is no prospect of us going out to rest for some time yet. We want all the weight of artillery we can get for use against the Germans.

“The Italians seem to be going well against the Austrians. I hope, if Austria does make peace with Italy, that the Italians will continue the war against the Germans.”

1st September, 1917.

“The weather has turned wet again today . . . It is wonderful how quiet things appear to become when the weather turns bad.

“There are a hundred and one details to be thought out. The actual shooting is a mere incident, and the simplest of them all. We have problems of ammunition supply, of rations, hours of work, so that the maximum amount may be done but with the least fatigue. Then I have the actual shooting to do, returns have to be made out and signed; the best method of constructing the gun pits decided on, how ammunition has to be stored . . . telephone communications, etc., etc. . . . I have not many spare minutes.”

“1st September, 1917.

“We are at the moment fighting not the Hun, but the weather. Today has been wet again, though a strong wind has dried up the ground to some extent on the surface though there are still bog-holes underneath.

“There is a rumor going round today that Austria is suing for peace. But lie most rumors, there seems to be no foundation for it.

“We are still having a pretty strenuous time. There is still plenty of work to be done, although the fighting is not so severe now. The artillery ‘duel’ of course goes on as usual, though in bad weather it is not so intense.

“There is just a faint chance I might get leave about the middle of this month, but it is very faint under present circumstances. I consider it rather unlikely.

“I hope Jock will be recommended for a job at home by his medical board. I don’t suppose he is likely to be sent to France, is he?”

During night firing on September 1st, a shell fell on No. 6 gun wounding the sergeant and a man. I could see no wound on the sergeant but whilst we were carrying him down to the dressing station he complained of a pain in the stomach. A splinter of shell had penetrated, and he died soon afterwards. The gunner also died.

Next day, when shooting, another shell fell on the same detachment, wounding them all. An unlucky gun!

“3rd September, 1917.

“We are not fighting quite so hard now, but there is plenty of work to do still, constructing gun emplacements, making dugouts, etc. . . .

“Today has been beautifully find again. It would be a perfect day for golf at Dornoch!

“Today I saw some papers dropped by a German aeroplane. One article called on the Socialists of all belligerent countries to declare a general strike and stop making ammunition, etc., and so end the war . . . As far as I can make out it spoke about the German Republicans. It appears to be a ‘blind’ for our people.

“The artillery duel has increased in activity today, no doubt owing to the finer weather.

“Am still in the same hole as before.”

“4th September, 1917.

“The weather has now turned beautifully fine again. Consequently, the artillery activity has considerably increased. Yesterday, particularly, the Bosch artillery were very active, and we are today.

“If all goes well I ought to be home on leave about Sept. 14th, but it is not by any means certain yet.

“We still have a great deal of work to do on this battery position. As soon as we have got settled in, we can begin to make ourselves comfortable if we are here long enough for it.

“It is a pity we have to sit in dugouts in this glorious weather but if we all went into the open, we should give the position away to the Bosche aeroplanes. The mud is drying up splendidly, and may soon allow us to get on with our work. It is rather too late in the year though, to make a really big offensive. We want to start in the Spring and to have the whole summer and autumn to ‘push’ in. But this year of course, we were delayed to a certain extent by the Somme, and then we were fighting for a good jumping off place for a really big offensive, by getting Vimy Ridge, Messines Ridge, Hill 70, etc. When we have the advantage of the ground all along the Western Front, we have a better chance of success in the big push, which I hope will come off next year.”

As things were now comparatively quiet and there was no attack in the offing, on September 5th the officers and men of the Battery were sent down to the wagon lines north of Vlamertinghe for a few days rest, leaving the guns in action under a guard. The weather was drying up.

Normal peace routine was carried out but the lines were subject to long range artillery fire and bombing raids.

As the Brigade History says:

“After the wagon lines had moved forward to Vlamertinghe, they suffered more heavily and were constantly shelled. The chief damage, however, was inflicted by hostile aircraft. Scarcely a night passed but what they bombed in the immediate vicinity, and frequently in the wagon lines themselves.

“In September daylight raids were carried out in addition to those at night. These raids were very costly. As a measure of precaution, and to minimize as much as possible the effect of these raids, horse lines were scattered in thin lines and along hedges. Walls of sandbags were erected whenever practicable as an extra safeguard, while trenches were dug to afford cover for the personnel.”

In the tents we made circular trenches round the tent poles. We had a few of these raids when we were down there. One night a bomb dropped in my line, killing a few horses and wounding others. I had to go out with my revolver and shoot some of the badly wounded.

What annoyed us most was that the raids usually started at 8 p.m., just as we were about to begin dinner. All lights had to be doused, cover taken and we had to wait till the raid or raids were over.

“6th September, 1917.

“We are going to have a football match, just so as to give the men a little amusement before returning to the battle area.”

“I am down at the wagon lines for a day’s rest. This evening I played a game of football!

“I go back to the guns again tomorrow.

“We had a very heavy thunderstorm this afternoon, which flooded us out for a bit. It will make the going very bad again.

“I am afraid my leave seems very uncertain. It all depends, of course, on what is happening, which depends on the weather. On the whole the weather has been much better just lately, and the ground has dried up wonderfully, but today’s thunderstorm will, I am afraid, have put it back considerably.

“Please thank Mother for her letters of 31st and 2nd. Also, for sending ‘The Scratch Pack’ which I had not read.

“I am afraid I do not feel very much up to solid literature except occasionally. The worst of it is that good books get so badly damaged out here, getting wet and knocked about.

“We have a certain amount of excitement, even at the wagon lines, from aeroplane raids and even shells; but the latter nothing like the same as in action.”

“7th September, 1917.

“We have had a 24 hours reprieve and are not going up again (into action) till tomorrow . . .

“We played football again this evening, and I feel a lot better for the exercise.

“I am very much refreshed by my short rest down here.”

The Brigade History says:

“On the night of 7th/8th September the wagon lines were bombed and no less than twenty-three horses killed. During this battle the drivers of the brigade had had a particularly hard time. They were shelled by day while bringing up ammunition and were bombed by night.”

“8th September, 1917.

“The weather has greatly improved. We had a heavy thunderstorm, though, yesterday evening.

“We had another 24 hours’ rest, and are not going again till tomorrow . . .

“I am afraid leave is now very doubtful, in fact, most improbable. I am sorry, as I would not have minded a few days . . .

“There is a rumor today that London has been bombed and 2,000 casualties inflicted. I hope it isn’t true.

“Rumor also says that the war will end this year, as Germany will not be able to hold out much longer, but that does not seem at all likely, now that the Russians have cracked up.

“We have (had) some bombing raids by aeroplanes . . . but they are nothing compared to the shelling while in action.

“I played football both yesterday evening and today, and feel much better for the exercises.”

“9th September, 1917. (In action near Kitchener’s Wood again)

“Today has been very fine again. It would have been a delightful day for golf in the old days . . .

“The Russians seem to be cracking up very badly. I am afraid it is that infernal socialism of theirs that is doing the mischief. When a soldier can do what he likes and no officer can stop him, and he is taught to look upon himself as the equal of all officers, it is the end of discipline.

“Meanwhile we must wait, I suppose, till America sends across an army before we can do much more . . . The war certainly does not look like ending in October.

“On the whole we had quite a restful night last night. We haven’t got a bad dugout (the pill box), but it is rather damp and smelly, and makes one sleep very heavily. (All dugouts had to be made proof against gas by hanging impregnated blankets over doors and all apertures). I have one little place to sleep in all to myself. It is used as the mess in daytime till our new mess is finished. We have to thank the Bosche for his good work in making it.”

“10th September, 1917.

“The weather has been much finer lately and the mud has pretty well dried up.

“I am very busy at present, and have no time for reading.”

On September 11th, during the gas-shell attack, one burst at the entrance of a shelter occupied by eleven gunners of A/241 Battery on our right rear. Although they immediately donned their masks, before dark all were dead. The door openings of the pill boxes faced the wrong way: towards the Germans.

During this period of inactive (except for shelling) warfare, the Batteries of the Brigade went to rest at the wagon lines in turn. So, on September 12th we were again there:

“12th September, 1917.

“We are now back at rest again at the wagon lines for a day or two.

“I am afraid leave for the present is off. My next three senior officers have gone and I have no one to hand over the battery to.

“I cannot tell you very much of what is happening out here now. But we are wearing out a lot of Bosche Divisions if we aren’t gaining much ground. Our progress should be judged, not so much from the amount of ground we gain, but from the rate at which we use up German Divisions and wear out their morale. When their morale is completely broken, they will break up, and we shall be able to advance as we wish. But it will take a long time, and affairs in Russia are no doubt encouraging for them. The war will certainly not be over this year unless something very unforeseen happens. Colleen says our business people say that Germany cannot last much longer as she will soon break financially. But, although broken financially, she might still be able to continue the war, as the South did against the North, in the American Civil War.

“The weather has been delightful lately, fine yet cool. I should have enjoyed it more if I had been able to spend more time in the open. But yesterday I got a good walk, most of the way from the gun position to the wagon lines. Down here I hope to get some exercise again.

“We are rather disturbed here at nights by hostile aircraft, and no lights can be used, so we generally go to bed soon after dark.

“I am afraid there is no chance of my getting leave yet awhile. I have no one I can hand over the Battery to while I am away. I have already lost three captains. They seem to be unfortunate in this battery.

“We are now having delightful weather, fine but cool. It reminds me of the weather we used to have at Dornoch . . .”

Another letter:

“I am out resting now for a day or two at the wagon lines . . . It is the only time I ever get on a horse.

“We are getting quite accustomed to air raids now. I had never actually been in one till the other day, but we have had several lately.

“I ought to have been on my way home today . . . but my next three officers have all gone (my three senior subalterns) and there is no one to take charge of the Battery . . .

“Tonight, quite a strong wind is blowing with occasional showers which will put a stopper on air-raids tonight.

“The only things out of the ordinary that I have been doing during the last two days were dining with the Colonel last night, and going for a long ride with this afternoon to have tea with a friend.”

One day of low cloud, when the men were sitting round having their dinners, a flight of German Gotha bombers came over above the clouds. One dived under, was only visible for a few seconds, not long enough to engage it, dropped its bombs and climbed up into the cloud again. They fell in D Battery’s lines, next door to us, and killed 13 men and 60 horses. We, luckily escaped damage.

“15th September, 1917.

“Yesterday was a very fine day. We had a football match in the evening which is a good thing for the men as it takes their mind off the war for a bit.

“I am still at the wagon lines. We are moving them today.

“The weather is much more autumnal now. It is grand weather for exercise if we could get it.

“The authorities say the Bosche is being gradually worn out. We have only to keep on at him and he will break sooner or later, especially when America puts all her Army into the field.

“We had a quiet night again last night with no air raids”

The country had by now pretty well dried up, and it was time to be thinking about the next attack due to take place on September 20th.

“16th September, 1917.

“We go up into action again tomorrow. We moved to new wagon lines yesterday, which are distinctly better than the old. I hope they let us stay here sometime.

“Even though back at ‘rest’ I have plenty to do. It is the only chance I have of having most of the battery together.

“I am afraid leave is still very uncertain. An officer from the battery will probably be going about the 23rd, but I am afraid I shall not be able to get away, even then.

“I saw about Major Birley being released from Switzerland in the M.P., and wrote him a letter.

“The weather has been magnificent just lately. I hope it won’t break up before I come home.

“The Germans make a point of coming over and bombing every day now when the weather is favorable.

“Trapnell, whom you may remember at Clifton, is our Divisional Gas Officer, and is coming to see us this afternoon.

“I hope everyone is fit at 4, B.P. Please give my love to them all. Please tell Mother I read ‘The Scratch Pack’ with much pleasure. Was it Betty who sent it?

P.S. I have started reading the European History. But I have always to read in snatches. I can never settle down to it. So, I generally prefer rather lighter literature. I also want an atlas to follow the division of States, etc.”

We went up into action in our old position near Kitchener’s Wood, and worked out our barrage tables for the attack on the ridge east by north of St. Julien.

A huge ammunition dump had been built in our valley close to the Boundary Road about quarter of a mile behind our battery. It was a silly place to put it, and, sure enough, one day it was hit by a big shell and blown up. It sent up an enormous pillar of smoke with a mushroom top. I want back to see what damage had been done and if I could find the man in charge. All I could see left of him was the top of his skull.

The Germans, we had noticed, seemed to have a set piece counter-attack. As soon as an attack by us started, the reserve divisions moved up to counter attack us before we had consolidated our objective. Our artillery, therefore, prepared for this too.

Our attack went in at dawn, and, over the dried-up ground, was most successful. We gained the high ground and beat off the German counter-attacks with great loss.

The Official History says:

“About 5.30 p.m. large numbers of Germans were seen moving down the western slope . . . On their coming within a hundred and fifty yards of the foremost strong point the barrage came down. An eye-witness . . . states that the effect was beyond description and the enemy stampeded.”

“20th September, 1917.

“I have only time for a short note, as I am very busy. You will see about it probably in the papers tomorrow or the next day. We, of course, had some rain for it last night, but today, fortunately, proved fine.

“It is long after midnight, and as I had very little sleep last night, please excuse short letter.

“I am hoping to get leave somewhere about the beginning of October.”

Next day one of my subalterns, Lieut. Warham, went forward as Brigade F.O.O. and shortly after I joined him at the O.P. On the way up I went through St. Julien. The dead were lying so thick east of the Steenbeek where our assaults in August and the German counter-attacks has been slaughtered, that one could not avoid treading on some of them.

Warham was established in the front line, close to an ex-German pill-box, and we had to stand up above ground of be able to see. Not very comfortable if the Germans had attacked.

But in no-man's land there was a German party, with a red-cross flag and red-cross armbands, walking about, searching for their wounded where the counter-attack had been smashed. Everything was peaceful. Not a shot was fired by either side. I wanted to register my new zone, but on grounds of humanity avoided opening fire. After a good look round, I returned to the Battery.

“21st September, 1917.

“You will see what has been happening in the papers. I am rather tired as I have had very little sleep for three nights.

“The weather has been very fine today, with a cool breeze. I have had a good deal to do today as well as yesterday.”

General sir Ivor Maxse, the 18th Corps commander under whom we were serving, paid a visit to the Battery. He was only the second brass hat I saw during this campaign, the other being our C.R.A., Brigadier-General W. Strong, who visited us at Boundary Road. Maxse enquired about our state. I told him my men were tired, but otherwise we were all right.

“24th September, 1917.

“We have been exceptionally busy lately, as you will see from the papers. Things have not by any means quietened down yet. The Germans seem to feel the loss of ground badly.

“I believe, if I am lucky, I may get leave about the beginning of October. It will depend to a great extent, though, on circumstances.

“I see the Morning Post is making a great mystery of the way we deal with ‘pill-boxes.’ There is no mystery about it at all. We turn the 15” How. On to them. Nothing else does

any good. There is no new system of tactics. I am afraid the papers talk a lot of nonsense altogether about the fighting, and the talk about ‘pill-boxes’ is no exception.”

Another very successful attack which we supported was carried out, starting at 5.30 a.m. on September 26th to advance the line a short distance. We had a light shelling but most of it passed over. During the shoot while talking to one of the Section Commanders, young Jones, and watching the drill at one of the guns, a big shell passed between us head high—we both felt the wind of it on our faces—and buried itself a yard or two behind us. Luckily it was a dud. It went deep down and did not explode. We again got on to the German counter-attack in the afternoon and slaughtered it. They must have lost heavily.

“26th September, 1917.

“You will see by the papers that we have had another busy day today. I hope we have damaged the Bosche a bit.

“We have not yet secured the main ridge that Father wrote about. In fact we are some way from it yet . . .

“In my opinion it would have been Korniloff and not Kerensky who would have done the best for the Russian Army. Kerensky has introduced a very cumbrous system, making civilians responsible for the discipline of the Army, which, of course, will not work. I doubt if the Russian Army will be very much good again. There is too much civilian control.”

“On September 27th, the battle being over, we withdrew to our wagon lines near Vlamertinghe. That night the wagon lines were again twice bombed, but this time without damage, though neighboring brigades suffered.”

On September 28th the Brigade marched by Poperinghe to Noordpeene and went into rest billets, and I went on leave to England.

I first went to Cambridge where I found my wife, and then we traveled to Lincoln where she was staying with relatives.

“5th October, 1917. (From Lincoln)

“I enjoyed my stay at Cambridge very much . . .

“I see from the papers that in our advance east of Ypres we are supposed at one point to be on the main ridge from Passchendaele to Cheluvelt, which ought to make the German hold on the remainder of the ridge precarious.”

During my absence the Brigade had suddenly been ordered into action again east of Ypres to support an attack on October 9th by the Australians. It was carried out in heavy rain. More casualties in my battery, Lieut. Hall killed when taking a liaison party forward which ran into a German barrage, and some men wounded. His body was never found; sunk in the mud, probably. As the attack progressed the batteries were ordered forward, but the shelling had smashed the “Corduroy” roads and the mud was too bad. In fact, one gun of “C” Battery sank in it, the team just unhooked in time, and the gun disappeared in the bog. However, from their original position they were enabled to shell into Passchendaele.

With infinite labor and double teams and detachments half the guns of the Brigade managed to advance during the night 10th/11th October and from their forward positions supported an attack by Australians on October 12th up the Passchendaele ridge. One of the guns manned by my battery was hit while in action and the whole detachment killed or wounded.

On October 13th the Brigade handed over its guns to a Canadian division which relieved it, withdrew the men, and took over guns and equipment from the Canadians out of the line.

“12th October, 1917. (Calais on return from leave)

“Have crossed over safely today.

“I got one extra day, yesterday, through the boat not sailing at the tie we were told it would go.

“We just crossed in time to escape this stormy weather.”

I rejoined the Battery on the evening of the 13th. The casualties in our Battery had been heavy. The wounded and sick officers passing through hospital were:

Captain Leather	Lieut. Hamilton
Captain Rhodes	Lieut. Gascoyne
Captain Gregory	Lieut. Allday

And Lieut. Hall killed.

Among the men the casualties were about 150 percent of the gun line and 50 per cent of the wagon line.

In the Divisional Artillery, Colonel Colville and I were the only two field officers (Majors and above) left. Even the C.O. of the Divisional Ammunition Column was a casualty.

During the battle I had nine guns put out of action for which I had to draw replacements.

“14th October, 1917.

“I arrived at my Battery late yesterday evening after a rather adventurous journey. The weather was very bad. My battery had had a very rough time of it while I was away. We are now on the trek again.”

Passchendaele was finally captured by the Canadians, after which the battle died down.

To us, struggling through the mud, the 3rd Ypres battle appeared a useless waste of life. It was not till after the war that we learnt the full reasons. Sir Douglas Haig had been informed by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Jellicoe, that in view of the heavy loss of ships by enemy submarines, unless he turned them out of Zeebrugge, we should lose the war. The French armies had mutinied and, in spite of some subsequent successes, Haig thought that they were generally in rather a shaky condition. This was so secret that on one, not even our government could be told in case news of it should leak out to the Germans.

The Russians were practically out of the war, and German divisions were being transferred to the West; it was important not to let the Germans fall upon the French and knock them out, hence they must be drawn into the battle in the north. Finally, the Ypres salient with the Germans sitting on the higher ground all round, was an unpleasant spot, and casualties, even when there were no active operations, were heavy, so it was desirable to eliminate it.

On October 14th we began our march to the Vimy front. [See Sketch 17]

“15th October, 1917.

“I reached the battery safely on the 13th, not being able to cross on the 11th. I returned to London for the night of the 11th and crossed on the 12th. Since I joined the battery, we have been trekking.

“While I have been away my battery has had a very rough time of it in action, I am afraid. But now it may be able to get a little rest.

“Just lately the weather has improved a bit, but the day I rejoined it was very wet.

P.S. the wire granting my extension of leave was sent off the same day as I crossed, so it just missed me.

“I have heard from Major Birley. His address is Hotel Rembrandt, London.”

16th October, 1917.

“Just to let you know I am still alive.

“The cigarettes and a parcel of food arrived while I was home on leave. The men appreciated the cigarettes very much.

“We are trekking every day and will soon be in action again.”

“17th October, 1917.

“We go into action again tomorrow. I have been up today to have a look round. The position is better than the last one we were in! The dugouts are much better, and it appears more comfortable in other ways.”

CHAPTER XIII

VIMY AND THE MOVE TO ITALY

“18th October, 1917.

“I go up into action again tomorrow, in a different place to last time.

“We have reached the end of our trek, and except for shifting our wagon lines to another place, are more or less settled down now.

“We are fairly comfortable here, the horses being under cover, and we have a hut to sleep in.

“We have had some rain lately, a particularly heavy shower coming last night.

“I am sending you Conan Doyle’s book on ‘The British Campaign in France in 1914.’ The descriptions seem quite good, though I don’t know if they are always altogether accurate.

“We are glad of a fire now in the evenings, as it is getting chilly then.”

We went into action along the railway embankment east of the Vimy ridge. Our Battery was about 100 yards west of the embankment, shooting over it. Our dugouts were in the embankment, and the O.P. had been made by boring a hole through the top of the embankment, so we were all very compact. One disadvantage was that nothing could approach the Battery down the steep forward slope of the Vimy ridge in daylight as it was in full view of the Germans, so all traffic had to be by night. I established a general O.P. on top of the ridge from which one had a wonderful view eastward into the German lines, so they could not move much by day either. I detached one section a few hundred yards to the north to do sniping and small bombardments.

After Ypres and Passchendaele, we were in clover! The artillery on both sides was only moderately active, and there were no attacks or raids.

“21st October, 1917.

“We are in action again . . . I hope they leave us here for the winter . . .

“The weather seems to have settled down to a fine spell. The nights are frosty, and the days are beautiful.

Another letter:

“This is rather a bleak and desolate country, all villages having been destroyed (Battles of Loos and Vimy Ridge), but there is green grass about, and there is a certain amount of peace, which makes it seem very restful after our last place. How long it will stay like that I don’t know. The country also is far better drained, and it is possible to make deep dugouts . . .

“I am feeling quite happy and contented now.”

“23rd October, 1917.

“I am still very busy . . . Still, commanding a battery is a great experience, and one I enjoy quite a lot. What I should like more than anything else would be an opportunity to train it out of the line . . . The material is there all right. All that is wanted is training . . . I have spent a large part of the last two days at the O.P. (Shooting in the Battery and registering the Zone).

“Today has been wet and misty.”

“23rd October, 1917.

“Many thanks for your letter, which came yesterday. I have lost it for the present in shifting my quarters. It is probably in my kit somewhere.

“The weather has turned very wet today. It has made the ground very muddy. I am afraid the weather is against us again, though one cannot expect to have it always fine.

“I am still very busy, for, though this place is a good deal quieter, there is still a great deal of work to be done.

“I hope the Government will have a good go at the Pacifists and finally squash them. They only encourage the enemy at a time like this, giving him a false hope that if he holds out long enough, we shall give up the war.

“I will stop now, as it is getting late, and I was up rather early this morning.”

However, I was not long left in peace at the Battery:

“27th October, 1917.

“I am temporarily commanding the Brigade while the Colonel goes on leave. I have just taken over.”

“29th October, 1917.

“The Colonel has gone on leave and I am now in command of the Brigade. There is not much doing and the work is not very hard. We are some ways back, however, and the distances to the batteries, etc., are rather long, so I am generally out for the greater part of the day. I am getting plenty of exercise, anyway.

“The weather has been rather changeable. One or two days have been very wet while other days have been fine with occasional showers.

“We still seem to be pushing on at Ypres. I hope we will take Passchendaele and Gheluvelt before the winter sets in. things will then be very uncomfortable for the Germans for the winter and next year. Until we do, they will be on higher ground than we. The French seem to be doing very well on the Aisne; but the Italians seem to have had rather a severe defeat. No doubt the Russian fiasco is responsible for it, and the Germans and Austrians are now able to leave the Russians alone, and to concentrate on the Italians. I hope they pull themselves together. We have some batteries out there which I hope have escaped capture.

“Would you mind sending me out a set of chess men and a board/ I have time now for an occasional game.”

The Brigade H.Q. was in comfortable dugouts on the western slope of the Vimy ridge, and, among other things, I was given the task of reconnoitering for a large number of battery positions, presumable in case the front was to be reinforced:

“9th November, 1917.

“I am getting plenty of exercise now. I have been out finding positions for 35 batteries.

“The Russians seem to have completely thrown up the sponge. The Italians must be very hard hit, as they have lost the equivalent of one army out of three (the Caporetto disaster), and the guns of two armies. I hope they will soon pull themselves together and make a stand. Otherwise, the situation for them will be very awkward.

“The weather is still very wet and we get rain nearly every day now.”

Little did we realize then what a profound bearing events in Italy were to have on our fortunes. One unfortunate incident which occurred during my period of command was that a shell burst at the entrance to one of our “B” Battery’s dugouts, causing several casualties. The bodies of two men who were entombed were never recovered.

“14th November, 1917.

“It is very kind of you to give me your set of chess-men for a birthday present. I hope they won’t get spoilt on service. Please thank Mother also for her cheque of £.1

“I am glad to hear that Jock has sent a telegram to say he was only temporarily delayed. I hope he will turn up soon, and will not be delayed by this Italian business.

“The weather has improved considerably lately. We have had some quite warm and sunny days. I hope it will keep on for a bit like this and dry up the mud a bit.

“I am keeping very fit and well. I get plenty of exercise altogether, as I have to walk about 3 miles to get down to the batteries and the going is none too good.

“I am expecting the Colonel back off leave tomorrow when I will go back to my battery. I am only commanding the Brigade as I happen to be the senior B.C. in it.”

On November 16th all personnel, including Lieutenant-Colonel Colville, who were on leave were recalled, and on November 18th we handed over our guns in action to the Canadians

and withdrew to the wagon lines, there taking over the Canadians' guns. They had no spare stores of any sort.

We guessed we were going to Italy when we heard that the staff were buying Italian dictionaries.

“18th November, 1917.

“The Colonel has come back and we are on the move again. Don't be disappointed if you don't hear from me for some time.

“This is a nice peaceful spot, and I shall be sorry in some ways to leave it.

“The weather has been quite fine lately and warm and sunny, like a return of summer.

“I had a very pleasant birthday and a small party in the evening with bridge.”

“20th November, 1917.

“Please thank Mother for the parcel containing the chess-men, chocolate, etc., which arrived yesterday. Many thanks also for the board, which arrived today. I hope neither will get damaged on active service.”

“There is a rumor this evening that we have made a big advance opposite Cambrai. I hope it is true. That will really be the best means of stopping the Bosche advance in Italy instead of sending many troops there. I hope Lloyd George's scheme of the politicians taking control of strategy will not come off as that will mean almost certain defeat for us. The politicians have messed up enough things. I hope we shall be spared them.

“I have had a day or two to give my battery a little training, for which I am glad as it does not often get much chance of it. I am hoping we shall get a little more opportunity later on.

“The weather lately has been moderately fine. Today had been rather misty and damp, however. I hope it will keep fine for the next few days, at any rate.

“I wonder if Jock has got home yet. If not, I may pass him within a few days if he is on his way home then.”

On November 21/22 we entrained. The French trains were made up to carry four guns, the size of a French battery, so we had to put four guns and its complement of wagons on one train, and the other section traveled in another train with a section of another Battery.

The trains did not all go by the same route. We traveled by Mont Cenis but our section on the other train by the Riviera. Complications ensued after we had arrived in Italy and detrained!

Altogether five British and six French divisions were sent to Italy.

The journey in France was comfortable and well arranged. We had our 'haltes-repas' where the horses were watered and fed, and the men had their meals, and had a long halt at Modane, the frontier station, where an electric engine took the place of our steam engine for the passage of the Mont Cenis tunnel.

After France the conditions in Italy were chaotic, which is perhaps understandable if not excusable considering the situation at the front. We never knew when or where we would halt or for how long. There were no haltes-repas. Whenever the train stopped at a station, I sent the men along to water and feed the horses. It often began moving again before all had been watered so those missed out were done at the next stop. The men had to make do with bully and biscuits.

We moved along slowly to Turin and then to Milan, stopping for a time at both. At one of them, while all the officers and men were down with the horses, thieves (I suspect the Carabinieri who were supposed to guard the train at stations) stole a pair of my boots and one officer's complete kit by slicing down one side of his valise, extracting the contents, and stuffing

it with straw. It had been done so neatly that he noticed nothing wrong until later in the day when he wanted to put down his valise to sleep in.

At the end of November, we detrained late in the day at Isola della Scala. Horse lines were put up, the guns moved to a gun-park, and all the men, less guards and picquets, and the officers were accommodated in the local theatre.

Next day, we began our march to the front. We had been given a series of towns and villages to billet in on the way up, but found them full of the men of the defeated army, without arms, equipment, organization or discipline, and apparently without officers. We had to sleep in the open, not very comfortably as it was freezing. As we moved up the inhabitants turned out and greeted us, but some of the defeated troops seemed to object and threw stones at us. They were sullen and dispirited.

At one place there was an Italian supply column. The officers kindly invited our officers into their mess for drinks. An Italian captain, having had quite a few, turned to me and said, "What a pity you have come here." I asked why, because we had come to help them. He replied that if we had not come, they might have had peace by now.

One day on the march I met my detached section marching in the opposite direction. It had gone by the riviera and our meeting was fortuitous. I told it to join in behind. The section commander informed me that they had had a grand time along the Riviera, and all had enjoyed the journey.

We finally reached the village of Longa, where we billeted. Owing to the chaos on the Italian railways supplies and posts were a long time reaching us, and the bread was often moldy. When the fighting settled down, they became regular again.

“1st December, 1917.

“I hope you have not been anxious about my long silence, which has been due to circumstances over which I had no control. Our post office has been shut for some time, but opens again at 10 a.m. Very many thanks for the chess-men. I hope they will not get spoilt on active service. They seem almost too good to expose to the knocking about I am afraid they will get in the transport and elsewhere. But I have them well wrapped up.

“The weather has been beautiful lately. We have had a train journey, which has really been quite pleasant, as we passed through beautiful scenery. The nights have been frosty, and the days cold, but bright and bracing.

“The villages here are rather better built than where we have come from, the house being chiefly of stone, and better furnished. I am very comfortable at present, billeted in a house, with a bed, etc. Just at present the young lady of the house is singing Italian opera in the next room.”

In fact, all the Italians seemed potential opera singers, even the peasants working in the fields.

The enemy advance had by now been brought to a standstill on the Piave River where one or two British divisions were in line, but in the mountains the attack was still being pressed. We therefore reconnoitered for gun positions in the foothills guarding the Venetian plain. [See Sketch 18]

“14th December, 1917.

“No post has come now since one of fortnight ago. I have no idea what you are doing.

“My address now is B.E.F., Italy. I gave this in my last letter, but it mayn't have reached you.

“We are still out of the line, and I am exceptionally busy training the Battery.

“The weather has been fine except for a couple of days, though frosty. Today I have been out on a reconnaissance among the mountains for which I am not yet in proper condition, and I am going out on another one tomorrow.

“I am enjoying myself immensely.

“The Italians are quite different to what I expected. The houses are much better built than those in N. France, and there are some quite fine buildings left. They have no fire in any rooms except the kitchen, and yet they don’t seem to feel the cold in this frosty weather. Some of the men look like the stage villains of popular melodrama, but they are a very obliging lot, and seem well behaved.

“I am hoping to be here for a little time, but it depends, of course, on circumstances.”

“18th December, 1917.

“I am extremely busy at present training the battery and going into the mountains for reconnaissances . . . We are now living under more or less peace conditions . . . I have a little time each day for games and sport.”

One day when we were out on reconnaissance in the mountains an Austrian heavy howitzer battery was chucking a few shells round about. There was a monastery near, and a monk ran out and complained to us of the “bombardimento infernale”! I am afraid we laughed. I don’t know what he thought we could do about it.

The Austrian advance was finally brought to a halt in the mountain sector too, so we did not go into action.

We spent some time at Longa drilling and having a few field days with the infantry. It was a very pleasant change after France. Christmas was celebrated in the traditional way.

“24th December, 1917.

“I have had two posts since I last wrote . . . I have been out reconnoitering nearly every day up in the mountains, and have to work up till after 12 nearly every night . . .

“We had a church service today instead of tomorrow. I am having Battery sports tomorrow.”

27th December, 1917.

“Many thanks for your letter and wishes for Xmas. It just arrived on Xmas Day.

“We had a very merry Xmas. We had sports, mounted and dismounted, in the morning, a football match in the afternoon and a concert in the evening. I sang two songs at the concert, an extempore topical one, and another out of a song book. Both seemed to go down well.

“Yesterday was a beautiful day in the mountains. Although freezing hard, it did not seem at all cold when out of the wind. The sun was brilliant, and the mountains covered with snow.”

Captain Pearce now joined as Battery Captain, which relieved me of much work.

“30th December, 1917.

“Today I was out on a long reconnaissance in the Mountains, and I have still to write my report.

“The Italian dictionary I find very useful. It always goes on with the billeting officer and with the mess secretary when he wishes to buy anything. I have not learnt much Italian yet but I intend to make a study of it when I have time.”

6th January, 1918.

“We have had no post now for 4 days. It seems to have got hung up somewhere.

“I have finished reading the ‘Second Diary of the Great War’, and found it very entertaining. I have not had time yet to read the first Diary.

“I have been pretty busy the last few days with reconnaissances. I have been cut out on each of the last 3 days. The day before yesterday I went up to part of the Italian front where there has been some fierce fighting, and saw round some of their batteries and O.P.s. It was very interesting seeing their way of doing things.

I am making all the officers in the battery give lectures in the evenings. Each Officer has one subject, and he lectures on it once a week. The lectures are on such subjects as:-

Tactics

Organization and Administration

Gunnery

Horse Management

Field Engineering

Map Reading and Field Sketching

Life in foreign countries: Mexico, Argentine, S. Africa

Signaling in the Field

Strategy

Retreat from Mons

The Flying Corps

“The last three are my subjects. It helps to fill in the long evenings, and gives the officers lecturing something to learn up. Besides which the other officers are quite keen on listening to what one of their number is saying, and learn more than if they had all to learn up all the subjects. The men are all very interested, too.

“I am also getting the men very keen on turning out well by giving monthly prizes for the best harness and best gun-park, and stopping the leave of those who are dirty and untidy in their turnout, thus applying two sorts of ginger!”

11th January, 1918.

“We are having a very good time here now . . . I have got all my men and all my horses and guns under cover and most of the wagons. I am busily proceeding with the training of the Battery. As I am out nearly all day and every day on reconnaissance in the mountains, I have to leave most of the actual training to the section commanders.”

19th January, 1918.

“We are still behind the lines in comfortable billets. The snow and frost has practically all melted now, and the country is almost as impassible as when the snow was on the ground.

“Yesterday we had a ‘field-day’ with the infantry to keep our hands in. My new teams looked very well. (I had re-teamed the Battery.)

“We are still digging in up in the hills nearly every day which takes a good many men away from the battery making it difficult to carry on a progressive program of drilling.

“I am still reading the ‘Diary of the Great War’ (First Volume). It is very good. Many thanks for the 2 volumes of the Diaries. I don’t generally have much time for reading except for an odd 5 minutes before or after a meal.

“Sir D. Haig’s dispatch shows how he suffered during nearly all 1917 from a lack of men. I wonder when the Government will wake up to the fact that we must have more men out here.”

One day an officer in an Italian supply unit offered to take me to see the troops in the High Alps. I asked if I might bring my Colonel, and he agreed. We set out in a small 30 cwt. Lorry and soon got into a region thousands of feet up of peaks and deep snow. It was most interesting. The trenches ran generally along the crest lines and there was a wide no man’s land. The artillery was nearly all mortars, a type of howitzer on a mental stand with no wheels, because guns would have been useless with their flat trajectories. After visiting various units and headquarters we returned to the plains with admiration for the efficient, soldierly and workmanlike Alpini.

In these reconnaissances it seemed to me that the layout of the Italian defense system was not altogether sound. From the trenches running along the crests of the hills there was only a field of view and of fire of about ten to twenty yards before the hill dipped into the valley, and the next sight was the hill on the opposite side at about 1,000 to 2,000 yards. Hence the enemy

could form up unseen in the valley, move up, and then rush the trenches in a short assault giving the defense no chance.

The Austrians occasionally fired shells from a 17-inch gun over the hills onto the plains beyond, but I never heard of them doing much damage. Perhaps it was done for the morale effect. Their Skoda works produced these guns besides the giant howitzers with which the Germans bombarded the Liege and Namur forts at the beginning of the war.

At the end of January, as the situation in the mountains became stabilized, the Brigade moved to a new area at Malcontan near the Piave, ready to go into action.

28th January, 1918.

“We have marched some way since I last wrote. Just at the moment we are in a very comfortable quarters, both officers and men, in a fair-sized town. I have electric light in my room, and it is also well furnished, and might be a room in a hotel.

“I should very much like the ‘Main Currents of European History, 1815-1915.’ I am rather hard up for literature at the moment, so would you kindly send me some more of the same kind of stuff? I have sent the two ‘Diaries of the Great War’ to Colleen to read.

“The Political world seems to be moving nowadays, with all countries stating their peace terms. But I can see very little of the end of the war yet awhile.”

4th February, 1918.

“We have been marching since I last wrote. I also commanded the Brigade again for a short time while the Colonel was on a course, and I have been out for reconnaissances on two days.”

“9th February, 1918.

“We are still out of the line, and having a good time. We have never had such a good opportunity for training before, and are taking full advantage of it. The line of this part of the front also seems very compared to France, and our infantry say they have never been in such comfortable trenches before. The only unpleasantness is the bombing, which takes place nearly every night, and is carried out with great violence.

“The postal arrangements have lately improved considerably and we are now getting letters about six days after they have been written and newspapers about four days old.

“I would very much like to have some books on Napoleon’s Campaigns in Italy if there are any to be had. If you could get me any I would pay you back.”

13th February, 1918.

“We are not in action yet . . . We are busy, among other things, with getting ready for a horse show which is to come off near this locality on the 23rd. there are to be driving and jumping competitions, etc.”

One day General Plumer, who commanded the British Army, came to inspect us. We were all formed up mounted, but when he came to my Battery, he said he would like all the men brought to the front so that he could speak to them. I gave the necessary orders. “Plum” then went along speaking to a man or two in each detachment. He asked one man if he was married. “Yes, Sir.” Good man, good man.” In the next detachment he picked on another man. “Are you married?” “Yes, Sir.” “How many children have you?” “None, Sir.” “Well have a good try next time you are on leave.”

I think he was concerned at the heavy casualties of the war, and thought that the good stock of the Army was the best source from which to breed.

We also had a dismounted parade of detachments from each unit for the King of Italy. He was a small man, and we marched past him. After the parade we were each given a small package of useful articles, such as soap, etc.

27th February, 1918.

“Many thanks for their letter of 21.2.18. and for the trouble you have taken over the boots and books on Napoleon’s Italian Campaign.

“The weather is still glorious. This afternoon we had a boxing competition for which my battery had several entries, and won one event.

“I think I have already told you that I have met several old friends up in this neighborhood, including the old 89th Battery, in which some of my old men are still going strong, though they are now chiefly senior N.C.Os.”

Early in March we went up into action near Spresiano on the Piave front. The river, 1,000 yards wide, divided the two sides. The country on both sides was flat, but the banks of the river, 20 feet high, made observation difficult. The front-line infantries were dug into them. Some way to the left there was high ground on both sides.

I chose a very good position in a long, low Italian farm house about 2,500 yards from the enemy, which was the distance we had to go back to enable the shells to clear the trees and houses. We put four guns in the house itself, making holes in the walls for the gun muzzles, concentrated them in four separate pits, and my miners dug deep dugouts under the position with stairs and a connecting corridor. We had rooms in the house for stores, reserve ammunition, officer and men’s quarters, kitchen and messes. The officers slept on the first floor, and I also had a rear O.P. there in the roof from which I could see more of the enemy country than from the front-line trench.

The right section was dug in the open under trees, with camouflage nets over the guns.

“6th March, 1918.

“We are up in action now and are really very comfortable. In my bedroom I have a bed, chest of drawers, table and wash-handstand, as well as pegs, etc., for hanging clothes on . . . My men are also very comfortable, more so than when out of action . . . On the whole, the Italian houses are much better and more solidly built than the French in the battle areas. They are nearly all of stone, about two feet thick, and so are bullet-proof, though not shell proof.”

Conditions were very quiet. The two lines were too far apart for much rifle and M.G. fire, and there was little shelling by day and none at night by either side. If my position should be strafed, the house would merely collapse on top of the concrete gun emplacements, making them even stronger.

Almost the only shelling I did was to register the zone. It was all wonderfully peaceful.

By bad luck, the commander of a battery of our sister brigade, 240, was killed when his battery was shelled one day.

On the high ground over the river on our left there was a big chateau, a long building with a balcony across the front. We had orders not to shoot at it. Rumor said that it belonged to an Italian nobleman who did not want it damaged or destroyed.

It was much used by Austrian officers apparently as an O.P. We could see them on the balcony looking our way with field glasses. After this had been going on for some days, we decided that it was a bit too much. So, the battery commanders of the 48th and 5th Divisions arranged among themselves to have a shoot. It was to be at 3 p.m. and every gun that could bear was to fire 3 rounds gun fire. For one battery of the 5th Division commanded by Major Fellowes it was out of range, but by digging in his trails and heating the shell cases first in hot water in

buckets behind the guns before loading, he hoped to step up the range. The shoot came off, and the front of the building disappeared in a cloud of smoke as the shells burst on it. When it had cleared away the front was scarred and there were several holes in the building. No Austrian officers used the balcony again.

About March 15th the Italians relieved us in this sector, the infantry changing over first.

My young liaison officer, as was usual, accompanied the battalion commander on his rounds at dusk. He noticed that the men were very thick on the ground along the river bank. He asked the Italian Colonel where his supports were. The Colonel told him there were no supports. "Then where are your reserves?" "We have no reserves. Every man is in the front line." He reported this to me. Here was a dangerous situation. If the enemy broke through the front line there was nothing between him and the Battery, so, besides the S.O.S. barrage to come down in front of the infantry, I arranged, if necessary, to bring down another barrage behind them.

A day or two later an Italian battery came up to take over from me. The captain commanding locked round, and then said that he could not take over the position. I asked him why not? It was an ideal position, covered from ground view by trees and houses, and with strong and safe gun pits. He said that he could not see the target from near the battery, so could not lay his lines out, and that in the Italian artillery it was necessary for the director to see both the target and battery to lay out the lines. He eventually came into action 600 yards behind the river bank on which presumably he put his director to point to target and then battery. The consequence was that he never fired because he would have been found from the high ground on the enemy's side on our left flank.

Brigade History:

“The Brigade pulled out of the line and returned to the wagon lines, which were moved a short distance outside Canalo. After a few days’ rest, the batteries again went into action, this time on Il Montello, a little to the west of the first position.”

We took over a position from a battery of the 7th Division. The Montello is a curious feature, about 1,000 feet high, with large round hollows on the top, almost as if it had been shelled by a giant howitzer. It dropped steeply at its northern end to the Piave, and on the enemy’s side there was equally high ground with a steep drop.

My battery came into action in a hedge shooting in a northerly direction, about 2,000 yards back from the top of the cliff. I took as my Zero line a church tower on the low ground to the right. It was about the only suitable feature marked on the (Italian) map, and, as I was to discover later, was about 100 yards wrongly marked. The O.P. was dug into the top edge of the cliff from which one obtained a magnificent view over the low ground. There was a farm behind the battery which provided quarters for most of the men.

“19th March, 1918.

“I have only time to scribble a few lines.

“I have been in action, gone out, gone down to a C.C.S. to have my teeth seen to, come back again, and gone into action in another place, all of which have kept me very busy.

“Please thank Mother very much for the parcels she has sent me out. They always come in very handy. I have enough Tommy cooker refills for a little time now. I will write for some more when I want them. Thanks also for the Orilux lamp battery.

“The books that Col. Edwards sent out have arrived, but I have so far had no chance of reading them. Please thank him very much for lending them to me.

“I met a Major Gore-Brown and another Major today who say they are teaching at the Staff School of Caius, Cambridge. Have you ever met them, as they did not seem to know you.

“The weather still continues beautiful. I hope soon to be able to get up some polo.”

We were not long here because after a week another Italian battery came up to relieve me. The relief was carried out in two stages. On the first night a section of Italian guns relieved my center section. I asked the Italian commander whether he would like the “aiming posts” to be left so that he could obtain his lines. He replied that he was quite happy, he knew how to get his lines and did not want the posts, so I sent them back with the section.

I arranged with him that we should go up to the O.P. at nine o'clock next morning, when the mist from the river should have lifted, to shoot in his section

At nine o'clock there was no sign of him, or at 9.30, so I went to see what had happened.

I saw him in front of the Battery playing around with his “goniometer” (director). I asked him what the trouble was, and he said he could find no place from which he could see the Zero point and guns. I told him he certainly could not, and it was no good trying, but why did he not lay his lines out on a compass bearing? (The goniometer had an inset compass). This was a new idea to him, but he said he would do it.

After another half hour's wait, he said he was ready and we started for the O.P with his two signalers. On reaching there I pointed out the country and the Zero point (church tower), and he said he was ready to shoot.

I told him to fire his first gun. “Primo cannone spararo,” or words to that effect. Bang. We put our glasses up and could see nothing round the Church. Unobserved.

“Fire the second gun.” “Secondo cannone sparare.” Bang. Again unobserved.

There was obviously something wrong because the ground round the church was flat and open, so anything near it should be seen without much difficulty. However, perhaps a salvo would raise some dust, so “fire both guns.” “Due cannone spararo.” Bang, bang. No sign of anything. Certainly, there was something wrong. I ordered “repeat” and this time did not put up my glasses, but when the shells were due to arrive glanced quickly right and left; and there I saw a couple of splashes in the Piave River well away to the left.

Plotting the approximate position on my map of the fall of the shells, I concluded that the Italian officer had put the magnetic variation on the wrong way when giving the line to his guns.

We got the section onto its Zero point and returned to the Battery.

The next night the other two guns of the Italian battery came in replacing one of my sections.

I went around and saw them in, and then went to see the men at their evening meal. There was no sign of any officer, so I entered the officers’ mess in the farm, and saw them all having dinner with a white table cloth, crockery, silver and glass (we ate and drank off tin plates and mugs and had no cloths). I asked them if they were not going to see their guns in and their men fed. The captain replied that the Sergeant-Major would see to that!

We withdrew to Montechio Maggiore, behind the line, and, while the Battery remained there some time, I was sent to attend a course of a month at the French Artillery School at Caprino, on the shores of Lake Garda. I suppose I was chosen because I stated that I could speak French. It was all in French, and although I had a little difficulty at first in understanding,

especially at the pace some lecturers spoke, I soon got into it. A number of Italian officers were also present. They all seemed to be well decorated with medal ribbons, some with the same ribbon repeating itself, and I had noticed before that several of the Italian soldiers had the same repeating ribbon. I asked an Italian officer what they were, and he told me “fatica de la Guerra” (“tired of the war”) and that for every six months they spent on active service they got a medal. Most of our men who had spent years at the front had nothing.

The French meal times were different to ours and it took me a little time to adapt myself. We were called at 7 a.m. with a cup of coffee and a slice of toast, then did three hours work, generally lectures, from 8 till 11 when we had dejeuner, then five hours in the open from 12 to 5, and dinner at 7 p.m.

I was ravenously hungry for the dejeuner which was a large meal, and I sometimes felt very sleepy after it, and even hungrier at the end of the five hours in the open in the afternoon and having to wait for the dinner at 7. I sometimes went to a local café and had a cup of chocolate to fill the void. But I must say that at the end of the course I felt extraordinarily fit. I wonder whether the British have too many and too starchy meals.

The French demonstrated all their different methods of ranging and firing for effect, and allowed me to conduct a shoot. They were more prodigal of ammunition than we were. Their 75 was certainly a wonderful gun.

The battlefield of Rivoli, where Napoleon defeated the Austrians, was near. I had studied the battle in military history in peacetime, and read it up in the book my father sent me. The French and Italian officers were interested, so I took a party of them over the ground and explained it, for which they thanked me.

On March 21st the Germans launched their great attack in France. Soon after, two British and four French divisions were sent back to France, leaving three British and two French divisions in Italy. One was the famous 21st French “Iron” Division. The school still carried on though some officers had to go.

One day we went to the French Infantry school on the shores of the lake for a demonstration of tactics and the fire power of a platoon. Unfortunately, they killed a man with a bullet when a charge covered by M.G. fire was being demonstrated.

“10th April, 1918.

“I have just time for a line before dinner.

“The course has become very much more strenuous since I last wrote, and I have not now nearly so much spare time.

“The weather lately has not been very good. The local inhabitants say it will be like this for about a month. Today we had pouring rain nearly the whole day. Last night we had a gale of wind and rain.”

Towards the end of the course, I was asked to give a lecture on the British Artillery.

“14th April, 1918.

“I am preparing a lecture they have asked me to give on the British Artillery. As it has to be translated into French it is rather more of a job than the usual lecture.”

I was also preparing for a good time at the Battery position:

“Please tell Father not to send out the polo sticks, but I should like the football, Badminton set, boxing gloves and rubber-soled shoes.”

On one off day I went with a French and an Italian officer into Verona and had an interesting time looking round the ancient Roman and other buildings.

“21st April, 1918.

“I have now left the French Artillery School and taken over my Battery again. Before leaving I gave a lecture in French on the British Artillery.

“I got a letter a day or two ago from the Baroness de Virte (a cousin) to go down and stay sometime this month, but as we are off up into action (on the Asiago Plateau) very soon, I am afraid I cannot do so.”

“Asiago, in peacetime, was a well-known winter sports resort. The Italian officers at the school called it “the Ypres of Italy,” and seemed to pity us going there.

“We are now near (Romeo and) Juliet’s house. I don’t think much of it. Romeo must have had rather a time climbing up and down the hill to get to it. There is no balcony there now.

“The Italian lake (Garda) was magnificent on fine days (the Austrians held the northern tip). There are reported to be a lot of Bosche houses round it; it was one of their favorite resorts.

“The weather today has been perfectly rotten . . . I hope it will keep fine when we march tomorrow.”

In the third week in April, we moved up into action on the Asiago Plateau, west of our last position, about 4,000 feet above sea level and having to cross the southern rim of the Plateau at 5,000 feet. [See Sketch 19]

We took over a position from the 23rd Division in the forest area on the forward slope. The front line ran along the edge of the forest, and the Austrians had the open flat ground beyond

and the northern wooded slopes of the plateau. This was as far as their advance had gone, and they held the town of Asiago in the middle of the Plateau.

Our battery was in the forest well forward, down the slope, and fired in semi-enfilade to the north-east, but the O.P. was on a high hill some 3,000 yards east of the Battery overlooking the low ground to the north.

The forest concealed movement forward, so we could reach the trenches and our positions from the rear without being seen. The trees also concealed our position from the high Austrian mountains to the north, and, to some extent, the flashes of our guns, but many trees had had to be cut down to enable guns to fire to the north east.

While our infantry positions were concealed, the Austrian's were all out in the low ground in the open overlooked by our O.P.s on the high hills within our lines. An uncomfortable situation for them. Our gun pits were well constructed of logs and stones with overhead cover, and our dugouts were of rock and stone with log roofs covered with large stones.

The country was still under snow, but it went after a couple of weeks.

Certainly, conditions here were livelier than in the plains, but nothing like France. Indeed, after France, Italy was a rest cure.

There was a fair amount of shelling by both sides, and the infantry carried out a few raids which we had to support.

In one of them the infantry found all the Austrians in the trench they were raiding killed by the artillery bombardment. I am not sure that our infantry were pleased as they wanted some live prisoners for questioning.

The Austrians had some big 12-inch howitzers with which they occasionally scattered a few shells round about. They made a tremendous explosion on the rocky ground and threw rocks and fir trees high up into the air.

“1st May, 1918.

“Some of the letters I wrote from the Artillery School have gone astray. You have not received all I wrote.

“I am sorry you have been so ill. Why don’t you try a short change of air?

“The weather has turned much finer here now. The last two days have been very fine and practically all the snow has melted.

“Please excuse a short letter, but I am extremely busy these days. Yesterday I was out the whole day, only getting back for dinner, and having to do my office work afterwards, and today has been much the same. The Brigade orderly comes about 12 midnight, and I then have to make out my orders for the following day, so I don’t always get much sleep.

“I believe I was sent to the French Art. School as they asked for a Battery or a Brigade Commander who could speak French and they were under the impression that I could.”

8th May, 1918.

“The weather the last day or two has been very bad . . .

“My O.P. is two hours’ walk away, which cuts very much into the day, and I have a lot of office work to do.”

Our wagon lines were miles away, down in the plains, and getting ammunition and supplies up was a problem. Finally, an arrangement was made whereby they were sent half way up the mountain, and from there a supply unit took them to the top, from which they were fetched by the units’ transport.

There was also a “teleferia,” a rope railway run by the Italians. It had little flat platforms on which supplies were loaded and then pulled by an engine in a power house. We tried this once, but it was not a success, for we found that in one or two places the inhabitants pushed off the loads with long poles, so the supplies arrived short.

Our 3-ton lorries were no good on the mountain roads with their numerous hairpin bends, so our supply units were issued with the Italian 30 cwt. Lorries with an extremely good lock, which could whizz round the bends. The Italians drove their lorries at great speeds on these mountain roads, and quite a few were lost down the Khud side. But on the whole they were very good drivers.

The Italians were certainly wonderful engineers, especially at making roads up the hills and dugouts in the rocks in the mountains. They run a road up in almost no time and in our zone, there was an excellent, well-graded road zig-zagging up the mountain. From places on it one could see the Austrian Dolomites. By means of a petrol driven drill they bored their way into rocks like rabbits. They made some dugouts for us.

Once or twice, I went down to visit my wagon lines. The journey on horse by the zig-zag main road took a long time. An Italian officer suggested that I should use the mule track, a much shorter way, by which they got their supplies up by mule pack. I started down on my horse followed by my groom on another. The track got narrower and narrower till we found we were going along a ledge about 4 feet wide with a cliff wall on one side and a precipice with a vertical drop of hundreds of feet on the other. My horse did not like it at all, so, at a place where the track was a little wider, I dismounted, followed by my groom, and we led our horses.

At one place there was a boulder on the track. My horse got his forelegs over all right, but his hindlegs on the boulder began slipping. I thought his end had come, but my groom, with great presence of mind, seized his tail and stopped his fall.

After visiting the wagon lines, we returned to the Battery in the hills by the road.

Towards the end of May we were relieved and side stepped to a new position further west. My position was in a saucer shaped hollow in the hills, out of the forest, but overlooked by a mountain called Interrotto on the Austrian side.

Brigade History:

“The Brigade was on the left of the British sector, and on the most difficult bit of ground that it had ever encountered. The guns were literally carried up the hillside off the road, over rocks and fallen trees, and it took some of the batteries two full days to get into position.”

Although my battery was in the open, I had the guns well dispersed among rocks and bushes, so that they would be difficult to pick out until they fired.

The O.P. was on the forward rim of the saucer, about 300 yards in front of the guns, and it would have delighted the Italian gunners because from it I could see both my target area and the guns of the battery.

We did our usual shooting in, and then prepared for an attack which was ordered for June 18th (anniversary of Waterloo). We selected a position near our front line to move to as the advance progressed, and filled it with ammunition in readiness.

“10 June, 1918.

“I have been extremely busy lately, and have not had the time to write. We have been in action, out of action, and into action again. Going out of action and into action always means a great deal has to be done in the way of handing over and taking over the position, together with all the alternative and reserve positions, and getting to know the country. Also, when out at rest, there is a great deal to be done for the first week or so checking stores, training, etc. the consequence is that every minute of the day is occupied. There is always a great deal of correspondence to attend to which I like seeing to myself as much as possible.

“The weather is now glorious in the hills. Asiago used to be a summer health resort for the Italians. The air is certainly good.

“Several new officers have joined some of whom are quite good fellows and experienced. I can therefore delegate a good deal of the work I had to do before to them.

“I am glad to see that the Sinn Fein leaders have been arrested. It is a pity the Government did not take firmer action sooner. They still seem rather weak on the manpower question with regard to Ireland.

“It is also a pity that they did not listen to Robertson’s advice on the need of men for the Army and the Western Front question. A politician, however, cannot have the same mentality as a soldier but always seems to see the end without reckoning the means of obtaining it, whereas a soldier is trained according to the principle that in preparing a plan he must be prepared for any possible eventuality, and has his plans for meeting each one. He is always taught that it is the unexpected that happens in war. He always, therefore, aims on a plan he puts it into execution with all available force. As Napoleon said, “Be fearful in council, but bold in execution.” The politician, on the other hand, sees what is wanted, but does not consider any outside eventuality, or make any provision to meet it. When Russia fell out, they must have known that it would release a large number of men for the Bosche, but very little seems to have been done to meet it.”

On June 15th the Austrians anticipated us by themselves launching an attack.

I was woken at 4 a.m. by a heavy bombardment, it seemed of all our battery positions. It was obvious something was up. Putting on a waterproof over my pajamas and seizing a steel helmet and gas mask I rushed from my dugout to the battery position and ordered “action,” and “counter-preparation” (fire on possible enemy assembly and forming up positions). The battery was under fire, and while I was going round it the command post, a small hut built of rocks and stones, was completely demolished by a heavy shell. Luckily no one was in it at the time. All

telephone lines were cut by the bombardment, so I could not speak to Brigade H.Q. or the other batteries and had to act on my own as I saw the situation. Having got the battery into action, I went up to the O.P. while the signalers tried to repair the telephone lines to it. The O.P. now came under fire with gas and H.E., so we had to don our masks. After an hour or two, the Austrians brought back much of their bombardment of the batteries to a barrage of the infantry positions, although they kept up their shelling of the O.P. Their fire became intense on our forward positions. It was obvious that the attack would soon start, so, immediately their barrage lifted off the front line was the time to send "S.O.S." to the battery. As the telephonists were still all out repairing lines as soon as this happened, I seized a signaling flag left at the O.P., stood outside it and signaled "S.O.S." myself. It got through, and the battery fired on their S.O.S. lines, which were across a narrow valley leading into our foremost infantry position. The telephonists finally succeeded in repairing one of the lines, and the head signaler joined me at the O.P. and passed messages to the Battery. A shell burst wounded him in the face and he was temporarily blinded, but gallantly refused to leave and continued passing messages. I am glad that he eventually got a decoration for it.

More fire was now opened on the Battery, and we had a few casualties. My senior subaltern, R. A. Kirby, who had joined the Battery not long before, was one of them. He had an arm blown off, and was also sent to the dressing station.

I then saw Austrians appearing out of the wood where our front line had been and on to the Perghele ridge, some distance within our lines, so obviously our front line had gone. There was a bayonet fight between an Austrian and one of our men on the ridge, who, I am sorry to say, got the worst of it. The Perghele ridge was now entirely Austrian, and they would probably continue their advance from there.

Owing to the crest in front of them my guns with their flat trajectory could not fire on the ridge, so I ordered them to be manhandled back one by one up the slope behind them, and to continue firing as soon as they could clear the crest.

Meanwhile I heard our machine-guns in action also apparently engaging the Perghele ridge.

The combination of artillery and M.G. fire stopped any further advance of the Austrians here.

Brigade History:

“The Brigade assisted to repel the Austrian attack on June 15th, sustaining heavy casualties but losing no guns.

“It was admitted by everyone that the preliminary bombardment equaled in severity anything that the Brigade had encountered before, although, being a surprise bombardment, it lasted only a few hours. Under cover of this heavy fire, the Infantry were driven from their trenches.”

To the left I could see from the O.P. the flickering flashes of several Austrian guns firing from their trenches. They must have been brought in overnight to previously prepared gun pits. Some were firing at the O.P. But it was not long before our heavy batteries got on to them and silenced them. Bring in view they sustained heavy casualties.

Several of our batteries had been moved forward, some into no-man's-land, in anticipation of our attack on June 18th, and were quickly overrun by the enemy. The gunners then, with their rifles, fought as infantry and put up a stout resistance.

There was now a short pause in the operations. I imagine the Austrians were reorganizing for a further advance. The shell fire lessened on both sides. I ordered the Battery to

keep up a slow rate of fire on the ridge and send a few men from each detachment in turn to get a meal. Someone at the Battery, also, very kindly sent me up a plate of stew and a mug of tea. It went down very well.

In the pause I wrote a situation report for our Brigade H.Q. (the telephone line was still broken) and sent it by my young trumpeter who was up doing ‘runner.’” After an hour he came back saying he could not get through because of the shelling, so I sent it a second time by a responsible N.C.O. The Colonel afterwards said that it was most useful because he nor the Infantry Brigadier he was with knew what the situation was until the report arrived.

I saw a column of our men, captured by the Austrians, being marched back up the slope towards the Val d’Assa. Poor devils.

Newbold, one of my young subalterns, came up to the O.P., and I told him to escort the wounded signaler, who was blind from his wound, to the dressing station on the right flank. I am glad to say that the signaler eventually recovered and rejoined us some months later.

As the situation of four infantry was obscure, I sent Lieut. Martyn on an officer’s patrol to discover their exact positions, dispositions and intentions. He went round most of the Divisional front and brought back a very good report, a copy of which I sent to our Brigade H.Q.

So, the day wore on, with some light shelling by both sides. The Austrians made no further advance, and we made preparations for a counter-attack next day with our reserves.

As dusk was falling, I saw Austrian parties, evidently bring up rations and ammunitions, coming up the narrow valley which was our original S.O.S. target, apparently thinking they were concealed. This was too easy. I merely ordered “S.O.S” to the Battery and three rounds gun fire dispersed them.

When darkness fell, I came down from the O.P., rejoined the Battery and took stock.

I went back to the O.P. before dawn next day to support the ordered counter-attack. It was completely successful, and I had some good shoots on Austrian troops withdrawing over the open towards their positions and the Val d'Assa.

In the counter-attack, all the guns that were lost on the 15th were retaken intact. The Austrians had neither removed nor destroyed them. The Austrians seemed demoralized, and we captured more than double the number of our total casualties.

I think if we could have continued attacking, we would have completely defeated the whole Austrian army.

For this battle the British had two divisions in line and the Seventh in reserve in the plains. (When the attack started it came up onto the plateau). The French on their right had two, and the Italians, on the right of the French, also had two. They formed an Army.

We lost our front line because we held it lightly, partly because many men were away with the 'flu epidemic' and partly as policy. The French stood absolutely firm and did not lose an inch of ground. On their right, the two Italian divisions disappeared off the mountain down on to the plains. The Austrians captured a mountain to the right rear of the French from which they enfiladed the French positions. The French asked the Italians to retake the mountain. They put in four counter-attacks, which all failed. The French, therefore, tired of waiting, with their reserve brigade retook the mountain, retook the whole of the position which the Italians had lost, and handed it back to the Italians.

“18th June, 1918.

“Just a line to let you know I am alive after the Great Austrian Offensive.

“We had the time of our lives on that day, killing off thousands of them, and only having very small losses ourselves. They had a very small success to start with, but we counter-attacked and drove them back. The number of prisoners we took exceeds our total losses. They have left thousands of dead behind. They must have been mown down by our barrage and machine-gun fire.”

I will now quote from a letter I wrote to my sisters during a quiet period. I must apologize for its facetiousness, probably a reaction after the strain of battle.

“2nd July, 1918.

“We gave the Austrians a good dressing down on the 15th. I don’t think they are anxious to repeat the experiment, though they may be forced to by their Hun masters. I don’t think the Austrian has as much guts in him for fighting as the Hun and prefers the peaceful life. Rumor says that he is very badly off in his country for food, but he still seems to keep going somehow.

“As you know we are up in the mountains. We are not in the eternal snow line yet (we had plans for an attack but it did not come off), but it is quite cool up here.

“The region consists of pine trees on the mountains of each side, and in front of the rich Asiago Valley. The mountains are limestone, and huge limestone boulders project everywhere through a thin coating of soil. It is not a hospitable region.

“The artillery had a great time on the 15th. I have never seen such masses of enemy before except on the Retreat (from Mons).

The Austrians opened with a very violent bombardment at first, which, however, caused surprisingly few casualties considering, and then made a very determined attack behind a heavy barrage, but although they gained our first line, as is nearly always bound to happen if the attack is heavy enough, we soon counter-attacked and drove them back with enormous losses. We took in prisoners more than twice our total casualties. I visited the ground afterwards and they lost hundreds of dead alone. The next day we could have taken anything we wanted as the Austrian was completely disorganized.

“One of my subalterns who was wounded (R.A. Kirby who lost an arm) got a D.S.O., and two of my men, as well, got honors, so we did not come off badly . . .

“The only amusement (?) we have is the enormous quantities of paper that arrive at all hours of the day about every conceivable subject under the sun, all demanding an immediate answer. That is what prevents life becoming dull, but at times it becomes a nuisance, as one cannot settle down to any particular subject without having to leave it every half minute to attend to something else.

“The telephone is another curse of modern war. It rings all hours of the night and day:

“Specimen:

“10.15 p.m. ‘tonight you will fire ten bursts on (target given).

“This has to be worked out.

“After this go to bed.

“12. Midnight. Telephone rings and wakes me up. ‘How many size 6.4 boots were you issued with last Wednesday?’ Send for Q.M.S. and his ledger.

“1 a.m. ‘A’ report is immediately required on what ground is visible from your O.P.

“2 a.m. ‘How many men have you in the battery who have had no leave for 12 months?’

“3 a.m. ‘How many horses in your battery have died of colic in the last year?’

“4 a.m. ‘What is the average number of children per man in your battery?’

“5 a.m. ‘A company of enemy is reported moving through _____. Turn on to them at once.’

“6 a.m. ‘How many miles of cable have you used in the last fortnight, and on what has it been expended?’

“7 a.m. ‘At what ranges do you clear the crest all-round the compass?’

“In the above game the number of questions that can be asked is practically limitless. The winner is the one who guesses most of the answers right.

“All the above have to be attended to as well as fighting the battery so you must not imagine that when ‘there is nothing to report on the Italian front’ we sit down and twiddle our thumbs. The only way to cope with the situation is to have a competent clerk who can hunt up the answers for you. I have been unfortunate enough to lose four in the last month, so now I have not a single man who understands the job, so I have to do a very great deal of it myself. I might be in the middle of working out of a complicated barrage table for a raid, when the dispatch rider

arrives with an urgent note asking farmers, electricians, corset manufacturers, poultry fanciers, burglars, cross-eyed, weak-kneed, eat their young, drink their bath water, with their Christian names, qualifications, birth certificates, marriage certificates, numbers of their box respirators, size in hats and capabilities. In the old times I just called in the clerk, told him to draft out a reply, which he brought me later and which I signed, knowing it would be correct. But now I have to lay aside the barrage and probably have to make out the reply myself. I then have to divert my mind from domestic details and take up higher mathematics again, only to be interrupted by a ring on the telephone to say that the barrage has been completely altered, and it will have to be worked out again, only giving me just time to get it ready before it is time to start. For mental training the Pelman course isn't in it. Generals also turn up unexpectedly at any time and expect you to have answers ready for any of the conundrums they want to put.

“This is a wonderful war, isn't it? I wonder how Napoleon managed to get on without the varied knowledge now required of the regimental officer. I wonder if he knew the average number of false teeth per man in his army, and if he went round and saw that all his men changed their socks when their feet were wet and did not bold their food at dinner, and the thousand things that the modern regimental officer is responsible for.

“Then there is that wonderful instrument the gun, each one of which has a personality of its own and is entirely different to all the others, and in consequence each one requires a separate list of corrections from normal, which are determined by actual shooting. This is a constant source of joy (?) to the battery commander, and some guns seem as inconstant as the average female heart (brute!). One day they do their best and you think you have found out all about them but the next they sulk, and either simply refuse to chuck the shell so far again, or give it such a savage shove that it sails miles over the objective . . .

“All sorts of funny things are done with guns now. You take their temperatures, feel their pulses, examine their tongues, see that they have washed and shaved, measure their jump, and their droop (when they are down in the dumps), measure the size of their breeches 9or should it be breaches?). If they take an outsize, allowance must be made in the range. If they take an insize you can pat yourself on the back that, at any rate, one less allowance has to be made. They you must not forget barometer, temperature of air and wind (force and direction) . . . (I might have added ‘different shells and different fuses also increase complications.’)

“So, you may see that if the life of the staff is a loaf . . . the life of the regimental officer by no means approaches the cultured ease which is proverbially associated with it.”

“My battery was congratulated on the work it did no the 15th. They all did very well and we made the Austro-Hun sit up a bit, and gave him something to think about. I think he is not anxious for another dose.”

After the battle my Captain and I went into no-man's-land, which was fairly wide, made a reconnaissance for a possible advance position and had a look round. The Austrians had a little pom-pom gun (one pounder) with which they had a few shots at us, but did no damage. We saw the effect of our fire by all the dead lying about.

Soon after the battle, General Strong, C.R.A., came round the batteries, and asked them what they thought the main lessons were. I told him that in this mountainous country, with our fixed charge and flat trajectory, the difficulty was to clear the crest, that to fire on the enemy on the Pergole ridge I had had to run my guns back up the slope, and that we ought to have some reduced charge ammunition which would give a more curved trajectory. Not long after, ammunition with reduced charges was issued to us, and proved most useful, especially in our next position.

The Austrians now were given no peace. Nearly every night we raided them, a different sector of trench each time, supported by the artillery. They did not seem to show much fight and I think would gladly have gone out of the war.

Every month we were to have had an offensive and we stocked up our forward positions with ammunition, and every month it was canceled, and we had to withdraw it all again. The Italians, when it came to the touch, refused to play. We became heartily sick of the frustration and procrastination.

“7th July 1918.

“Many thanks for your letter, received a few days ago. It is still packed up, so I have not its date. We have moved to a new position, where things are a little easier. We have not so much work to do here, though there is always enough to occupy all our time.

“The weather has been very changeable. We have had heavy rain alternating with hot sunny days. It never seems to get hotter up here than during an English summer.

“I have applied, and my Colonel has forwarded the application, for 31 days’ leave. The chances are about even on getting it. Otherwise, I will not get leave till November at the earliest, at the present rate.

“I hope I shall manage to see Jock in this way before he has to go out again. I expect I shall hear whether I have been granted leave or not in about a week.

“I have to deal with so much correspondence these days that I have turned one of my subalterns into ‘acting adjutant’ to the battery. I had to do this, as otherwise I would never have been able to get about at all.

“I am keeping very fit at present and am enjoying myself. The scenery is magnificent. In the distance are alps covered with snow, while in the valley are open fields, and on the slopes of the mountains round about are woods of fir trees and bushes. They are at their best just now.

“I hope something comes of the present Imperial Conference.”

“9th July, 1918.

“The weather here is variable. We get brilliantly fine weather with occasional violent thunderstorms. They come up in a minute and are gone, sometimes, as quickly.”

In the third week of July, we moved again to our right, back into the forest, to a new and unprepared position. On our right was an Italian battery of four guns which was grouped with us. We had to make gun platforms, dugouts and huts, and to cut down trees to enable the guns to cover their Zone. I put in a demand for material with which to build my position. The D.A.Q.M.C. of the Division promptly cut it down to half, telling me to be more reasonable. He did not appear to realize that in Italy, unlike France, there were no reserves to draw on, such as ruined houses. He got a D.S.O. for running the cheapest division in the British Army! A little later a party of pioneers came to help to build the position. The officer was appalled at the meagre amount of material and at once demanded, and got, double what I had originally applied

for! The Italian battery, on a rise in the ground, had an extra-ordinary feature just behind it: a very deep vertical hole in the rock, about 20 feet in diameter. We dropped stones down it but could not hear them hit the bottom. The Italian officers' mess was a dugout in the rock on the edge of the hole with a balcony jutting out and overhanging the chasm. They seemed very cozy and comfortable.

“29th July, 1918.

“We have now moved to another portion of the front, and, as usual, I am very busy getting things organized in this new place. A battery commander rarely gets much rest as there is always a great deal to be done . . . In war, unlike peace, the conditions are always changing, the personnel of the battery changes quickly, and one stays such a short time in each locality. We have of course to construct our own huts and dugouts, (and) work is not always done under the most congenial conditions (shelling, etc.). Orderlies are always arriving with messages which require attention. It is difficult to give undivided attention to the work in hand.”

As soon as the battery was ready to fire, I registered our zone from the O.P. in front not far from the battery. We continued supporting raids at night, and one day from the O.P. I saw a lorry standing on the road to Asiago from the northwest. It had evidently broken down. I ranged on it, and the third shell hit it. It blew up, so must have been full of ammunition.

I also trained my young officers how to shoot the Battery, for they could not be efficient F.O.O.s until they were able to do this, and there had been little chance of training them before. One day, when taking Newbold in a shoot, the Austrians counter-battered us with 12-inch howitzers. They seemed to have their guns well separated, perhaps one in each valley, for the shells came from different directions, but they must have been controlled from one place for they fired at regular intervals, one after the other. There appeared to be three of them. Looking

back from the O.P. I could see the bursts and whole fir trees being flung about in the air as if they had been matches. Telling the battery to stop firing and get the men under cover, I went back to the Battery to see what the damage was. It was surprisingly little, and the men were all safe in their dugouts bored into the rocks (the Italians had helped to make them). But one shell had hit the far side of the hole opposite the Italian officers' mess and had brought down the whole of their balcony into the chasm.

That evening the Italian Captain came to me and said that his battery was moving down to the plains that night. This was news to me, and, as he was grouped with us, I should have had a copy of the order to him; so, I asked him about it. He said there was no order, but his men's nerves could not stand the shelling anymore and they would have to leave. I at once telephoned the Colonel, and he gave the Italians a definite order that they must remain in position and not move. They stayed!

Our men thought that the lack of spirit in the Italians was due to the fact that they only got meat in their rations twice a week, whereas our troops had it every day. The Italians, to make up for it, had double our bread ration, 2 lbs.

“19th August, 1918.

“I am fairly busy again. We are having a good deal to do (raids, etc.) . . . The weather has, on the whole, been quite good lately. We have had one or two heavy thunderstorms which have cleared the air a bit . . . On the Plains it has been very hot.”

One raid I was asked to support was so far to the right that I could not switch on to it from the guns in their pits; so, we had to pull them out, switch them round, and cut down many

more trees in order to be able to fire, which reduced to some extent the effective cover the forest gave us. As our new target was well outside my zone, and I had had to move my guns, I registered one or two points in the new direction to be sure of hitting the trench which was our target in the raid.

I was now given a month's leave home:

“30th August, 1918.

“I am just packing up to go on leave. I go down to the wagon lines tomorrow, then go off from the railhead next day. I ought to be in London on September 6th.”

In the leave train we had four officers in one first class compartment for nearly a week!! We could not all lie down at the same time at night, so had to take it in turns. We were given bully and biscuits for our journey, and had to make all our meals ourselves. It was a monotonous diet, so, when we stopped, we sometimes swapped tins of bully for eggs with the local inhabitants, and I cooked them on a “Tommy's Cooker” in the corridor—boiled eggs one day, scrambled eggs another, etc.

We whiled away some of the time by playing bridge.

29th September, 1918. (Returning from leave)

“I am writing this at a rest camp (Le Havre). We are staying a few hours before proceeding by train to Italy . . .

“I had tea on the train down to Southampton, dinner on the boat, a bunk, and breakfast at the Rest Camp here where we marched on disembarking at 7 a.m. this morning.

“We went straight on the boat at Southampton from the train so I was unable to send a telegram. None of the people on shore would send it for me as they said they had strict orders against it.”

7th October, 1918.

“I got back to my Battery last Friday after traveling six days (across France and Italy).

“I only had one day at the Battery as on arriving I found I was detailed for a course for senior officers at the G.H.Q. central School out here.

“We are billeted in a monastery, a gigantic building, surrounded on three sides by hills 100-200 feet high covered with low scrub. Two of us share a small room with a bed, table and chair each (monk’s cell). The course lasts six weeks, and consists chiefly of Infantry subjects. There are only 3 artillery officers on it. It does not appear particularly strenuous.

“There is a large anti-room and mess-room. They are large stone rooms heated with only small stoves, so must get rather cold in the winter.

“I did not have a bad journey down. We got up a four in our carriage and played bridge most of the way. My total gain, I think, was 2 francs!

“My battery is still in action.” (In the same spot as when I left it before going on leave.)

“13th October, 1918.

“The news today is great. The Germans appear to be in a very bad way, and it rather looks as if Austria-Hungary and Turkey might be going out of the war.

“We start rather more intensive training again next week . . . Now I have got my horse here I shall be able to get about a bit.”

“All the other stuff is quite old: Infantry Drill, Musketry, bayonet fighting, elementary tactics, sketching, etc. I did most of it at the Shop (R.M.A., Woolwich.)

“Our daily program is:

Classes	9.00 – 12.30
	2.00 – 3.00
	5:30 – 6.30

Exercises, games and sport, 3.00 – 4.30.

“This afternoon I went over to the artillery School to see my horses. I also went there to dinner, one of my subalterns (Newbold) invited me who is on a course there. After dinner we played bridge.

“Tomorrow I am going for a ride before breakfast at 7 a.m.”

We were also taught revolver shooting by an American cowboy. Formerly, we had slowly pulled the revolver out of its holster and taken careful aim with one eye on the sights, as in rifle shooting, but he would have none of this. It was much too slow, and we would be shot first if we met an enemy. He carried his revolver hanging down as far as his thigh with the flap of the holster always open and the handle sticking out. He whipped it out and shot in one movement. “You are sort of clurks, ain’t you?” he said. “When you write you don’t aim along our pen. Your fingers point the pen for you. The same with a revolver. You don’t need to aim, your fingers will do it.” He was certainly an expert shot. We threw jam tins over his head from behind, and he shot them in the air one after the other. We were then made to go along a trench and shoot at dummy figures – one popped out of a dugout, and another suddenly came round a transverse – all of which tested our speed at the draw and getting the shot off.

“22nd October, 1918.

“We are having a very pleasant course here. The work, though not difficult, takes a long time, and most of my spare time is now taken in copying out my notes. I have also been asked to give a lecture on the ‘Retreat from Mons,’ which I have been preparing. The first week here I managed to get a little bridge in the evening, but I have had to give that up now.

“The weather has not been very good lately. The rainy season seems to be upon us. It has, unfortunately, stopped most of the outdoor sport. Football is now impossible as the ground is under water. Riding, too, is not much fun here, as one cannot get off the roads the country being a mass of vineyards.

“I suppose you had no time before you left Cambridge to see if Major Birley was still at the Rembrandt Hotel.

“The news now is splendid. The Huns seem to be getting demoralized both at the front and at home.”

“27th October, 1918.

“I am still at G.H.Q. School. I find the work very easy on the whole.

“I gave a lecture last Friday to the School on the ‘Retreat from Mons.’

“We have Italian lessons here every day.

“I have been out riding most fine mornings before breakfast, but yesterday, my horse got excited as I was mounting and barged me over after bucking a bit. I scraped my knee on the road and it has been stiff and swollen since.”

At the end of October, it seemed that the Austrians were on the point of collapse. The school closed down and officers were sent back to their units for the final offensive.

The damage to my knee, which stopped me from riding, prevented me from being with my Battery for the attack and advance into Austria.

Two British divisions, 7th and 23rd, had been withdrawn from the mountains and took over on the Piave front, leaving only the 48th Division on the Asiago Plateau.

The Italians had refused to have an offensive until Lord Cavan, commanding our Corps, said that if they would not, he would withdraw the whole British force back to France. On this they gave way.

The 48th Division in the mountains was paired with an Italian division to form a Corps under an Italian general, Graziani.

On the Piave, two Italian divisions on the left of the British and two on the right made up, with our 7th and 23rd Divisions, an Army of three corps under Lord Casvan.

A few days before the attack across the Piave the island in the river opposite us was occupied by a British brigade as a jumping off place for the Corps. When the attack when in only the British crossed the river. The Italian never moved. The British were over for three days, and were shot in the back by the Italians who could not believe that they could have got so far. Finally, the Italian divisions on each flank had to be brought across behind the British and then fanned out onto their own fronts. On the 48th Division front in the mountain patrols found some of the Austrian trenches unoccupied. An attack was ordered but only the 48th Division advanced. The Italian division remained in its trenches. The British battalions captured the Austrian batteries and chalked their battalion marks on them. When the Italians later advanced, they removed the chalk marks, painted their own signs on them and posted sentries, so when our men came back to collect their trophies they found them in the possession of the Italians, to their disgust.

One of my subalterns, Jones, was in command of the section of guns with the advance guard of the Division moving up the Val d'Assa. The Austrians were surrendering in thousands, but at one place there were 600 Austrians in a redoubt who appeared to be going to resist. But when Jones dropped the trails of his guns and prepared to fire on them, they at once surrendered without a shot being fired.

When our troops were 4 miles from Trent and going hard, the Italian Corps Commander came up, and begged them to stop so that the Italian division might have the honor of entering Trent first. So, the 48th Division side stepped to the right, East of Trent.

“2nd November, 1918.

“We are now having ‘open warfare’ and are on the move. I just got back in time from the school.

“My knee, which I crocked the other day, is not well yet, and I cannot, unfortunately, ride, so I am missing some of the fun. In fact, the transport is my place. I should not be surprised if Austria threw her hand in soon . . . Once her troops get on the run it will be very difficult to stop them . . .

“The news is good from all fronts.”

In fact, an armistice was signed on the 2nd November and came into effect on November 4th.

“4th November, 1918.

“Just a line to say I am quite well, except for my knee, which still prevents me riding. I have to go with the transport now, which is not very exciting.

“You will have had all the news by the time this reaches you. We have got over the frontier and are sitting tight for a bit. We were trekking hard all yesterday. The road was frequently blocked by prisoners. There was a continual column of them marching past. The number of guns, material, etc., abandoned is colossal.

“Many thanks for your letter. Hope you are fit.”

“5th November, 1918.

“The Battery has moved on (in the advance) but I am remaining here (Asiago Plateau) as the doctor has said I must give my knee a rest and walk as little as possible for the next three or four days . . .

“It is magnificently fine today and quite warm . . .

“I am stopping in a small wooden hut, and, my battery having gone one, have very little to do. It is rather boring being at a loose end.,

“I wonder what is going to happen to us. We might either go as an army of occupation into Austria, or march through Austria and attack Germany from the south, or be taken back to France. I think the proper policy now is to throw every man we have got at Germany in order to force her to surrender as quickly as possible.”

As soon as the armistice came into force some of the Italian troops went mad with excitement. They entered the ammunitions dumps and fired off all the rockets and Verey lights, and, I believe, let off some of the grenades as well. It was lie a super Brock’s Benefit display.

I was now determined to get forward and try to rejoin my Battery. I found a 30-cwt. Lorry that was going up to deliver supplies, so, cadging a lift, went along the Val d’Assa, a narrow valley with towering mountains on both sides, towards Trent, which I knew was our final objective:

“8th November, 1918.

“Never saw such a sight as after the Austrian retreat. Ground covered with innumerable steel helmets, guns of all calibers, trains full of stores and masses of equipment generally.

“I am quite fit except for my knee, and that is getting better.”

We dropped down to Caldonazzo. It was full of parked guns, trains and stores of all descriptions, and I saw what appeared to have been the 17-inch gun on a railway mounting which had shelled the plains. It has been destroyed by the Austrians as they retreated by an explosive charge in the barrel which burst it. Then we went by Levico and a very beautiful lake and country round about; it was almost like fairy-land after the forbidding Val d’Assa and the

scenes of battle, and finally reached Trent. The place was full of Italians. Not a British soldier in sight, until I saw the G.S.O.1 of our division and reported to him. He asked me what I was doing there as Trent was out of bounds to the British. I told him my story, and he then directed me to the British area. Here I saw our C.R.A. and said that though I could not ride I was willing to do any office job. He said that the British were very shortly going to withdraw to the plains because of the difficulties of supply in the mountains, and that they did not want any extra mouths up there! However, he put me up for the night, and I took the lorry back next day to the Asiago Plateau where I waited for my battery to come back and join men.

“8th November, 1918.

“I have just returned, after being away for 2 days in Austria to the farthest point that we have got.

“It looks very much as if Germany were being badly smashed up now. I wonder if she will go like the rest. The change in events these last 4 months has been marvelous.

“I hear that the Austrians have asked that the Army of Occupation may be French and British! I also hear that three German delegates interviewed Foch and asked for an armistice, and he sent them back again for three days to think it over.

“I have not time to write very much, and I cannot say much owing to the Censorship Regulations.

“I am very fit, except for my knee, which is not quite well yet.

“I have had no post since rejoining my battery, no doubt there is some hitch in forwarding the letters on from the Central School.

“I trust you are all well at home.”

I now had time to reflect on the war.

The Italians had four good Corps; the Cavalry, the Alpini, the Bersagliere, and the Arditi who were battalions of jail birds; if they did well, they had their sentences remitted or reduced. The remainder did not seem to have much fighting spirit.

“8th November, 1918.

“We hear that an armistice has been signed with Germany. It must be ‘unconditional surrender,’ I imagine. Isn’t it splendid? I wonder what they will do with us . . .

“It is hard to grasp all the news that has been coming in lately. It is so portentous; what is going to be the future of Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria? So far only armistices have been signed and not peace terms . . .

“Demobilization will, I imagine, take some time as we have not the ships to do it quickly . . .

“Life was very uncertain while there was a war still on. So many people were killed, one never knew when it would be one’s turn next. It was really only sheer luck and perhaps some Higher protection and brought me through. Time and again, men have been (wounded or) killed within a yard or two of me, sometimes almost touching me, and all the time I have come through without a scratch except at Le Cateau. I have, indeed, a lot to be thankful for. At one time, at Ypres, it seemed very unlikely that I would come through alive. I had more than twice the number of my men at the guns laid out, and, after firing a barrage one day, I handed my one remaining gun over to the battery next door and went out and drew 6 new guns from ordnance! We had our total establishment of officers in the Divisional Artillery laid out. But somehow, I managed to escape. Every other battery commander became a casualty except myself. Just after I had handed over the command of A/240 the new battery commander was killed by a direct hit on his dugout. There seems to have been some sort of Providence watching over me.

“I have just heard that a rumor about the armistice with Germany is unconfirmed. Three German delegates came over to see Foch, who sent them back and gave them 3 days to think it over. So perhaps we may go back into the war again.”

In a few days the 48th Division came out of the mountains and we marched down to the plains. We ended up in billets at Tezzze D’Arzignano, and the King of Italy held a review of the British troops.

Brigade History:

“The billets were not too good, the men being crowded into wretched barns and outhouses, and most of the horses were in the open throughout the winter, and all guns and wagons were also parked in the open.”

As peace had not yet been signed, and there was a possibility, though a remote one, that we might have to fight again, we could not neglect training completely, but we arranged all we could to entertain the men in the form of recreational training and football and hockey matches. The flat and level aerodromes formed excellent pitches, and the officers used them too for polo.

Many Austrian ponies, used for their transport, had been captured, and several of them, after a short training, turned out quite well. Major G. Nicholls, the international polo player, later joined the Brigade, and was a most useful coach and member of the Brigade and Divisional teams.

“19th November, 1918.

“Here is a little thing that happened the other day. The padre was visiting our men. We went to the cook-houses and spoke to one of the cooks: ‘Have you been confirmed?’ ‘Yes, sir,’ said the cook, ‘it was some time ago, but I have got the blinking marks on my arm still.’ !!”

“24th November, 1918.

“Since I last wrote we have moved our billets, and are now settled down in a new place. We are now ‘cleaning up’ and the men are being educated for peace. I don’t quite know what system we are going to follow in demobilizing, but I hear all Regular soldiers will be sent home first to form an Army, which will go out to India and relieve the present garrisons out there. In that case I hope they will give us some leave first.

“We are being kept fairly busy now preparing for demobilization, which is almost as big a job as mobilization. Every man now has quantities of papers, all of which require filling up and keeping up to date, no light task when amendments are continually appearing changing the method.

“I have been getting some polo lately. I am feeling rather stiff today after my first game of it.

“The weather has been delightful lately, up till today, when we had a heavy fall of snow. We had a Thanksgiving Service this morning, but it was rather cold standing about in the open.”

“29th November, 1918.

“I had a very good game of polo yesterday afternoon. I have one quite good pony . . . All the others require hard riding as they are not trained, and shy at the sticks and ball . . . Tomorrow I am playing in a hockey match against the Corps Staff . . . On Sunday I may be playing in a polo match against another Division.”

“30th November, 1918.

“This afternoon I played in a hockey match for the Divisional Artillery against the Corps Staff. We won by 4 goals to 4 after a very exciting match.”

“11th December, 1918.

“I have filled up and sent in a proxy paper, appointing you my proxy. I hope it has got through all right. The soldiers are not at all anxious to vote. They say the Govt. ought to have waited till they got home.

“I have not played much more polo lately, but I have been playing a lot of hockey in the Divl. Arty. Team. We have had some very good matches.

“We are very busy now with Demobilization Schemes, with inspections by Generals, and training. A great deal of correspondence is the result. We are settling down to peace conditions more or less.

“I am going on the course of January 5th in England. I do not know the exact place. It is called the ‘Senior Officers’ Field Course.’ Do you happen to know where it is held and how long it lasts? I have been promised leave at the end of it.”

17th December, 1918.

“I am going out on a scheme on Thursday next with the Divisional Commander. Although the end of the war has come, we still carry on with our schemes and training, perhaps to keep us out of mischief as much as anything else.”

One disadvantage we discovered was that nearly all saints’ days were holidays in Italy when all shops were shut and we could get no work out of the Italians. But we had 500 Austrian prisoners attached to the Brigade. They lived in a separate camp, under Feldvebel, a splendid, smart man who ruled them with a rod of iron and had them jumping to his work of command. They were used to build horse standings and do other work for us to make things more comfortable for the winter. The Hungarians among them produced a band which played in our mess most evenings. Altogether they were a good lot of men, and we preferred them to the Italians who, we thought, were not very friendly, and seemed rather arrogant after the final victory which they did little to win. On one occasion two men from one of our battalions in a neighboring village were bicycling into a town in which there was an Italian Regimental H.Q. had a battalion. They were set upon when crossing a bridge, and they and their bicycles thrown into the river. They returned to their battalion, collected 8 of their friends, and at night chased the Regimental headquarters and most of its battalion some miles down the road.

“22nd December, 1918.

“We have a great deal of work to do in connection with demobilization. Every man has to have about 40 forms filled up for him, and it is a job collecting all the information . . .

“I am hoping to go on a (gunnery) course in England, at Shoeburyness, on January 15th . . . The C.R.A. is trying to get it stopped as he wants me here for demobilization . . .” (I did not go).

“26th December, 1918.

“Yesterday being the first Peace Christmas, the festivities were considerable. One mess was invaded for most of the day. The men, also, thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and, on going in to see them, I was carried round the place on their shoulders while they shouted and sang . . . The British commander addressed them and told them it was the duty of every man to have as many children as possible (to make up for the war losses and because they were the right sort of men to breed from) . . .

“I have just seen my Confidential Report. It states; ‘A very keen energetic officer. Possesses a very good professional knowledge and leadership and is a strict disciplinarian. Has considerable capacity for training. For 9 months acted as Liaison Officer between Artillery and R.F.C. Is physically fit . . .’”

“28th December, 1918.

“We spent a very jolly Christmas. Everybody enjoyed it all immensely. It is the first ‘peace’ Christmas we have spent . . .

“We are still carrying out a pretty strenuous program of training. In a way it is as well, as it gives everybody something to think about instead of loafing about doing nothing.”

Colonel Colville went on leave, and I again command the Brigade for a short time. On his reaching home he was posted elsewhere, and Major Powell joined us. He was senior to me so took over. Then Major Nickolls, who had commanded our “D” Battery until he was a casualty, rejoined, and, as he was senior to both of us, took command and Powell was posted elsewhere.

About mid-December the demobilization scheme reached us. It was rather complicated, but left much to the discretion of unit commanders. The first essential was to send back ne who had been in key industries to start the industrial life of the nation going. Then students and teachers were to go. There had to be left a cadre of 50 men to bring the battery home. This I made up of essential men such as the Quarter-Master-Sergeant, the Battery Clerk and the Pay Clerk, and of men least entitled to go home, such as those who had most recently come out. The men to go home first, after the industrial men, teachers and students, should be those who had been out longest, and married men with the largest families, then the remainder of the married men.

As the Cadre would have to remain in Italy for some months, I sent them all home on leave in order to get them back before demobilization got under way. But when they were in England a newspaper agitation started for all men on leave from Expeditionary Forces to be demobilized at once. The Government weakly gave way to the pressure, so I lost my cadre and had to build up another. There was much soreness among them that the least-entitled men had been demobilized first. I also had to fine other men who were not trained in the work to take over Q.M.S. and clerks.

“1st January, 1919.

“Many thanks for your letter dated Dec. 29th. I have already written and told you that my course has been cancelled.

“The results of the election are certainly very good and much better than I ever expected. I hope the new Govt. will do their duty to the country and will not fall short of what they have promised.

“We all had a very jolly Xmas here. I hope our next will be at home. I am certainly getting rather bored with waiting for demobilization. Practically all our men are going back to civil life and do not take a very great interest in training.

“I went into Vicenza yesterday to get some clothing at the officers’ clothing depot.

“I see those teachers and students still be among the first to be demobilized, so Jock may be home before very long.

“I have just been informed that I have been given the D.S.O.”

In the second week in January very heavy rain came down for some days, converting rivers and streams into raging torrents. They were above the level of the plains and only kept to their courses by high banks. One morning, on my pre-breakfast walk, I saw that the bank of the stream near our billets was almost being washed away, and the town and country near it was in danger of being flooded. I turned out my men and by heaving down large stones, rocks and logs behind wire netting they temporarily built up the bank and averted the immediate danger, until some Italian engineers arrived and made a professional job of it. They were grateful for what we had done because in one or two other places there were extensive floods, and Tezze would have been under 5 feet of water.

“11th January 1919.

“Many thanks for your letter dated Jan. 4th, with congratulations, and paper enclosed. Please also thank all the friends who send congratulations.

“I am very sorry my course is off. I was hoping to get home for a bit. Leave is now uncertain, and I do not know when I shall be home. I cannot at present ask for Italian leave as I am commanding both the Brigade and battery. But before I leave Italy for good, I hope to pay a visit to Madame de Virta, and also Rome and Venice. At present, though, there is rather too much to do.

“The weather has been bad lately, the river Agno rising and almost breaking its banks. We just averted a catastrophe by a few feet! Meanwhile all sport has had to stop as the country is waterlogged.

“My Colonel, Colonel Colville, is at present on leave, staying at the Army and Navy Club. Should you happen to be in Town in the near future, would it be any trouble to you to call on him?”

“17th January, 1919j.

“We are busy on demobilization now. The scheme is complicated though no doubt practical, but is liable to go wrong if the slightest hitch occurs, witness events at Folkestone when men did not receive their ‘release slips’ in time.

“The weather is still wet, and games are at a standstill. It is a problem how to keep the men amused and exercised.

“Lord Cavan bade us farewell today and said it would not be long now before we were all home.”

The Brigade suffered heavily in the influenza epidemic that swept the world in the winter of 1918/1919, and unfortunately some men who had gone through the war succumbed.

In February there was a British Forces race meeting at which I again rode my horse in a steeplechase. It was made the favorite; I cannot think why because there was more than one real steeplechaser entered. There had been a hard frost the night before, and some ice on the course, but with the sun it seemed to have cleared.

I was going well, on the inside berth, laying second and ready to ride a finish, when at the second last fence my horse slipped on a patch of unmelted ice in front of the fence, skidded into it, hit it with his chest and shot me into the next field as if catapulted.

Early in March I had a telegram to say that my wife was dangerously ill at home, and was given special leave, after which I was posted to the 1st Battery R.F.A. (the Blazers0 at

Ipswich and reverted to my permanent rank of Captain. I served for two years at Ipswich and Aldershot, and then, in 1921, went as Adjutant of the 36th Brigade R.F.A. at Newbridge, on the Curragh, where 'the troubles' were still on, thus completing the circle.

CHAPTER 14

ENVOI

There was little elation at the armistice. After all it was only a cessation of hostilities. The German army was defeated but not destroyed, and fighting might start again if the peace terms could not be agreed. We were thankful for the chance of a rest. I certainly distrusted the idea of a League of Nations. If two nations, ourselves and the French, could not agree, what chance was there of agreement between 52? The League had no military power to enforce its decisions, and some important nations were outside it. All history showed that a country's influence in the world depends on its military strength. Britain must remain strong in spite of war weariness.

The first essential was to train the reformed units. Nearly all the old soldiers had left, time expired, and batteries were full of young recruits. They must be brought up to a high standard of efficiency fit to play their part in the new Army. There was no knowing when the Army might be called on again to intervene in a troubled spot. There was a feeling of unrest throughout the world fostered by such cliches as "self-determination" which encouraged discontented minorities to strike out for themselves. There was the menace of Bolshevism spreading its doctrine in the countries. I could not see that this war had in truth ended wars. The seeds of future wars were too obvious.

We had our own troubles in Ireland and India and other places. There was no let up for the Army.

I had the greatest admiration for the British fighting man the original B.E.F. of 1914 were the finest soldiers in the world. Their courage, endurance, toughness, efficiency, pride in

their units, gaiety in danger and terrible conditions, and delight in battle were unsurpassed. They felt and knew they were superior to the Germans, and were prepared to take on any odds. In the retreat from Mons their one thought was to have another go at the Germans. They never let you down. There was a grandeur and cool efficiency in the way they fought. When things were at their worst they were at their most cheerful. The Territorials were patriots. They had joined up and fought for love of their country. Kitchener's Army contained most of the finest young men of the nation. Time had not allowed the Terriers and K's men to be fully trained and made into thoroughly efficient soldiers as were the old Regulars. But in the blood baths of the Somme and Passchendaele they fought and endured with a grim determination and as sardonic humor. All other nations, except the Germans, had times of collapse but not the British. They were never rattled or panicked. At the same time, they were kind to local people, especially children, and, unless the enemy had behaved brutally to men in their units, any prisoners they captured were treated as pets and given cigarettes, water and food. There was no malice in their fighting. They were men of whom any nation would be proud.

APPENDIX I

OLD CONTEMPTIBLES

By

Lt.-Col. Sloane Stanley late Middlesex Regt.

“DIE-HARD”

I recently attended an “Old Contemptibles” annual Reunion Dinner, and a remark made by my neighbor, a Cathedral Dean, who had been an Army Chaplain in the 1914-18 war stuck in my mind.

“You know,” he said, “the Old Regular Army of 1914 were a race and breed apart, and quite unique.”

I have pondered over this for some time, and how right he was. I joined the army three years after the Boer War had ended. The Battalion which I joined in Dublin still had a fair proportion of men with the South African war medals. They still used the Boer War slang, and odd phrases such as “Voetsack,” for go away, “Scoff,” food, “Ikona,” no, no good, “Trek,” for a march, etc. Much as I liked and respected the private soldier of those days, few of them enlisted for patriotic motives.

A large number joined because their fathers and even grandfathers had served in the regiment and they were brought up in it. Others because they could not get employment, or had got into some trouble in civil life.

A great many, I am afraid, because they were on the verge of starvation.

But after a few months in the army, they began to acquire affection for the Regiment, a toleration of their officers and N.C.O.s and a withering, though quite unmerited, contempt for all “Civilians.”

A uniform, full dress, a well fitted scarlet tunic, blue “Strides” and polished badges aided a cachet, and there is no doubt that a soldier, walking out, looked and felt that he was different to others. And of course, the girls loved a colorful uniform and brass buttons.

Another attraction of courses was the free sport provided. Cricket, football, hockey, swimming and athletics were open to all, and you need not be an expert to have taken part in them. Many men had never had a chance of games when young.

Food, though plain and monotonous, was plentiful and good of its kind. Pay was 1/- a day, but the money went much further then. Beer 1d. a pint, 10 cigarettes for 3d., a seat in a music hall gallery 1/-. Of course, a man could earn a bit more by being a 1st Class shot, or having some specialized trade in the army. But a bob a day was the usual pay Extras such as jam, pickles, cake, etc., was provided by grants from the President, Regimental Institutes. There was no N.A.A.F.I., the Canteen and Grocery shops were run by a contractor. The whole way of life of the Regular soldier was quite different to that of his civilian counterpart in shop, mill or factory.

Off parade he was pretty well his own master, though certain necessary disciplinary restrictions on his Pass out of barracks had to be complied with.

To marry, a man had to be of good character, have so much in the Savings Bank, a wife of reputable character and various other conditions. Once accepted on the married roll, he was allotted a free quarter, rations and fuel for his wife and family, if any, and was pretty well settled wherever he went. But only a small percentage of men were married in those days.

A married subaltern was anathema to his Commanding Officer and was none too popular with his brother officers.

“A soldier married is a soldier marred,” was a popular saying of the time.

In an Infantry battalion there were few technicians. Pioneers, Signalers, and Machine Gunners were aloof aristocrats. Machine Gunners talked loftily of “Infantry Companies.” Band and Drums were also trained as stretcher bearers. But everyone, whatever his employment, had to learn to use a rifle, and to use it well. They were all highly trained in this weapon, and the results were well shown in 1914. Even an indifferent shot could fire his fifteen aimed rounds a minute. And this needs a great deal of training.

The ability to march long distances, with rifle and equipment was a “sine qua non” then. Very few men ever fell out on the line of march, unless for a very good reason.

Even the cavalry man was often made to dismount, march on foot, leading his mount, to rest the horses.

The children of the “Married Families” were educated in a Regimental School, under an Army Schoolmaster, usually of Warrant Officer status. I am quite sure that an Army education was far superior to anything that those same children would have received in civil life.

They all got individual attention, and every Company Officer knew and was expected to be interested in his united married people and their children.

Regimental entertainments were periodically organized for them, especially at Christmas.

The effect of the monastic life – at any rate in barracks – led by the men showed itself in their outlook.

The hard bitten, cynical, tough soldier, trained to kill his enemy, to avoid being killed himself, developed a Rabelaisian sense of humor. In any account of the British Armies' many campaigns, this sense of humor factor always crops up. No temporary defeat or hardship was proof against it, and it saved many a desperate situation. Even during the retreat from Mons, half starved, marching until they literally fell asleep on their feet, you could hear the grim jokes made by men, who by every known standard had met with a series of defeats.

Nothing could quell their spirits. And the old time Regular felt no hatred for his enemy. His enemy always became a "Target" and was usually referred to as Jerry. The hate was whipped up by Politicians and Press.

One day a decimated unit had received reinforcements, who had never been in action, in the early days of the first Ypres. The battalion was marching up to the Salient and passed a grimy, battle-scarred private, sitting by the roadside and endeavoring to bandage a wounded arm. He looked up as the battalion passed him and growled out, "What's this mob?"

"We are the Die Hards," was the answer.

"Die 'Ards, are yer? You'll die flipping easy up in the Salient," came the reply.

Troops constantly sang on the line of march, music hall tunes adapted to bawdy verses.

"Mademoiselle from Armentieres," as sung by the troops was quite unprintable. But crooners, thank Heaven, had not been invented. There was a swing and lift in every tune.

One priceless remark was made by a surviving private soldier during the appalling battle of Passchendaele. After 24 hours without food, some few rations were got up with great difficulty, and had to be split up to feed those who could be reached, an Orderly Corporal dishing out as and where he could, was greeted by an old sweat who said, "Not's this 'ere, Corporal?" Answer – "Your Bread Ration." "Oh! Is it, I thought it was 'oly Communion!!"

The Old Regular Army practically ceased to exist as an army in being in November, 1914. Those left alive were used to train new troops and helped to infuse the Regimental spirit into them.

With the old Regular Soldier, his Regiment was his whole life. His Regiment was always right. Other regiments were alright up to a point, but usually referred to as "Mobs." You could make any remarks you liked about the Army as a whole, the War Office, or his superior officers and this was never resented. But make a derogatory remark about a man's Regiment, and a fierce oath and probably a blow followed.

I consider that the troops used, and sacrificed on the Somme were some of the finest ever put into the Field by this country. They were mostly well educated, and joined for patriotic reasons. They lacked training but were as brave as lions. But they were different to the old 1914 Regular. Chiefly in their outlook.

The same applies to the soldier of today. He is just as good a fighting man as ever, but has a different view of things to the Old Timer.

For one thing more often than not he is married, and is naturally full of family affairs and cares.

It is difficult to assess, after nearly 50 years, the characteristics of the Old Regular Soldier.

But he was definitely an individual who lived in a world of his own. Wherever he served, from Portsmouth to Peking he was always part and parcel of his own unit. Every Regiment differed slightly from others. Each had its own customs, its own outlook and frequently its own prejudice.

This the War Office never grasped. To them all Regiments were alike, and ill feeling was frequently caused by the suppression of some little peculiarity or custom.

I can remember the days when the 20th Hussars proudly called themselves, "Nobody's Own." The Somerset L. I. Sergts. Wore their sashes over the same shoulder as the officers, in memory of a battle in which all the officers became casualties and the Sergts. Took command.

The Minden Regiments all wear a rose in their caps on "Minden Day." The men plucked roses and stuck them into their head dress before going into battle on that occasion. Royal Welsh Fusiliers still wear a black flash on their napes, to keep the powder from their pigtails soiling the tunic!

The Gloucesters wear a "fore and Aft" cap badge. In memory of a battle when they were surrounded, and turned the rear rank about.

These are only a few odd e3xamples of Regimental customs. Some of those curious habits are lost in the mists of antiquity, but they always persist and troops are very proud of them.

Anyone who has read, 'The Letters of Private Wheeler,' cannot fail to be impressed by the overweening pride in, and love for his Regiment, the K.O.Y.L.I. and that in the days of harsh discipline, poor pay and rations, and plenty of flogging!

This spirit was still very much in evidence in 1914.

I remember the case of a man brought up in front of me for being drunk and creating a disturbance in the town. He pleaded "Guilty," but modified his plea by saying, "It was only civvies as I knocked about, Sir."

Poor Civilians, they muttered little to the old Regular!

Some Regiments had long standing feuds, and it was never safe to station them in the same place. Though the origins of the feud were quite lost, this didn't prevent fierce fights breaking out, especially on pay night.

One battle cry between two of these Regiments was, "Who shopped us at Dettingen?"

Had you asked any of the contending parties where Dettingen was, when it was fought and why, you would have been met with a blank stare!

In spite of the fact that the old-time soldier's views were absolutely matter of fact, practical and materialistic, he was capable, on occasions, of a sentimentality that was the antithesis of his normal outlook. Any one who attended a regimental concert of those days will remember the rapt attention given to such ballads as, "It was only a beautiful picture, in a beautiful golden frame," "Just give my love to Mother," and many others of like nature. The parody, "She was poor, but she was honest" was not far off the mark of the nature of the ballads.

These tough fighting men loved Sobstuff! A modern crooner's dirge would sound like a comic song compared with them.

The humor on the other hand was decidedly broad. We often wondered what some of the officers' wives who attended thought of the Regimental Comedian's songs and patter.

It would be interesting to hear some of the verses of "Lillibulero" as sung by Marlborough's troops.

I am sure that one of the main reasons for the old Regular soldier's unique character and outlook was due to the fact that war, up to and including the South African campaign, was fought by the Regular Army. It was very much his own business.

War in Tirah, Afghanistan, Soudan, South Africa, was a long way off. It only affected the civil population indirectly, as it had to be paid for. Then in many cases, he served on, again overseas, and looked on himself as a being apart.

Who the enemy was, why the war was being waged concerned the troop very little. It was their duty to fight and if possible, to survive. The whole soldier's training tended to this. Politics were a thing apart and officially the army had no political opinions.

The uniforms up to 1914 were really beautiful. Well cut and individually fitted. No other army could compare with them, as regards other ranks. Hussars all wore this red forage cap. The tunic which was blue, was frogged with yellow braid. Lancers wore the double-breasted tunic with red, white or French grey breasts. Dragoons the scarlet tunic.

All troopers in the cavalry wore tight, well-cut overalls, strapped over Wellington boots. The heels ended in swan necked ringing spurs.

Infantry all wore scarlet tunics with the exception of Rifle Regiments who were dark green with black buttons. Gunners, R.A.S.C., Ordnance, R.A.M.C., all wore blue, with appropriate facings.

The Army was certainly colorful and decorative. The only relics of full uniform are now worn by Food Guards and Household Cavalry.

Those days, and those colorful uniforms have, alas, gone forever.

But thank Heaven, horses no longer have to go to war and suffer for human folly.

The men of the old army were as far removed from the present day as those of Marlborough and Wellington.

They were a separate race and breed and we shall not see their like again.

The "Old Contemptibles," members of the most exclusive Club in the world, are the only surviving link with the old Regular Army, who fought the enemy to a standstill and died forever in 1914.

APPENDIX II

ART OF WAR

Elementary Principles

I wrote to my father:--

The meaning of Military terms, and the most elementary principles of the Art of War do not seem, even now, after 2 years of war to be properly understood by the Public.

The operations of war consist of: --

1. Strategy, which is the art of leading the armies before touch with the enemy has been obtained.
2. Tactics, which is the art of leading troops on the field of battle

The rules of strategy have remained the same throughout all ages, while those of tactics are continually changing.

The main object of all war is to annihilate the enemy's field forces. Every other consideration is of secondary importance to this. The capture of towns, strong points and fortresses is only a means of an end, the final crushing of the enemy.

The object of strategy is to concentrate the decisive force, at the decision place at the decisive time. By no other means is it possible to win a war.

- (a) The Decisive Force. This is the largest available force that a General can muster.

For this reason, the making of detachments is a weakness, unless by so doing the detachment can keep a larger force of the enemy from joining in the main fighting.

It is chiefly in this that the skill of a General shows himself. By making feints with

small detachments against important places, he may so play upon the fears of the enemy as to make him detach from his main army considerable numbers of troops for the defense of these places. He then attacks the weakened enemy by a very much superior force which he has kept concentrated. There are many instances in history in which this has occurred. Napoleon was an adept in the art. The superiority of a force may consist of: --

- i. Morale
- ii. Numbers
- iii. Equipment

Of these the first is the most important. "The morale is to the physical as 3 to 1."

- (b) The Decisive Place. This is the place from which most result can be gained by a decisive victory. A decisive defeat, for instance, of Germany or German East Africa would have as much effect as a decisive victory on the Western or Eastern Front.
- (c) The Decisive Time. This can only be gauged by those who know all the facts. A General may seize the moment when the enemy is demoralized to fight for a decisive victory, or he may be compelled by the internal conditions of his own country to seek a decision as quickly as possible. There are many other obvious factors.

Another rule of strategy is to attack the weaker of 2 enemy forces first. The reasons for this are too obvious for many remarks.

By attacking the smaller force first, and defeating it, the field is cleared for maneuvering for the main battle. The two forces are prevented from joining hands, and the morale of one's own troops is raised. By attacking the larger detachment first, the delay in coming to a decision might allow the smaller force to join hands with the larger, and actually allow the enemy to gain a superiority on the field of battle.

If the larger was defeated before the smaller could join hands, the result of attacking the larger force first might so weaken one's own force that it might fall prey to the weaker of the enemy's forces.

In the above diagram, the sound policy for black, with 8 divisions, would be to detail a small force, say 2 Divisions, to A to hold up the white 6 Divisions, and to attack the 3 Divisions with the remainder.

With regard to this war, the first question one naturally asks is which is the decisive front? – i.e., on which front will a decisive victory have most effect? Obviously the Western or the Eastern (Russian) Fronts, for a decisive victory on either of the fronts would seriously threaten Germany, the mainstay of the Central Powers. It is, therefore, on the Western Front that our main effort must be made, and the maximum number of men, guns, etc. must be concentrated there. Every other force, therefore, in every other theatre of war is a detachment, and its rein should be to keep a larger number of the enemy away from the decisive fronts. By threatening important points, town, etc. They may endure the Germans and their allies to detach a considerable number of troops to defend these points, and to prevent their taking part in the decisive battle. The times at which our strategy has been at fault over this (perhaps due to politicians), are easy to remember, and need no pointing out.

While on the subject of detachments, it is as well to remember another axiom: “It is only by making up in energy, what it lacks in numbers, that a smaller force can hope successfully to operate against the larger.” Therefore, detachments sent out to cause the enemy to scatter his forces must act vigorously in order to cause the enemy to detach a larger force to meet them.

The next point is: What is the decisive time in this war? We have seen how the Germans very nearly won at the beginning of the war. Time was “decisive” then. It is difficult for anyone who does not know the facts to say if the time has not become decisive again. Are we so superior in morale, numbers and equipment now as to stand a fair chance of gaining a decisive victory? Will we get the best results if we strike now, or if we put it off for a bit? That must have been one of the questions asked before the Somme offensive, and the answer was evidently that the decisive moment was at hand.

What constitutes a decisive force in this war?

- a. The Morale of all European nations is practically the same. Perhaps the Germans are deteriorating slightly now. It is difficult to say. “Morale” and training are very intimately connected. An untrained force will very soon become demoralized.
- b. Numbers. The Germans undoubtedly had a great superiority in numbers at the beginning of the war. This partly helped them to drive the English and French before them.
- c. Equipment. The German equipment at the beginning of the war was vastly superior to ours, especially in heavy guns and machine guns. There equipment also gave them their victory over the Russians in 1915.

Next, as to attacking the smaller force before the larger. The Germans have done this practically all along. They quickly disposed of the Belgians, Serbians and Montenegrins, and now seem to be trying to do the same to Romania. They will then probably try to mop up the Salonika Force; and they will then be able to devote their whole time and energy to keeping ourselves and the Russians out, if they cannot defeat us singly.

Another point that can only be lightly touched on is the advantage which the Central Powers have in possessing "Interior Lines." That is to say, they can move a force from one point to another on their front in a much shorter space of time than can the Allies. They can choose the spot where they wish to strike, and concentrate against it long before we can arrive on the scene with help. It is therefore, doubly important for us in this war not to make "detachments." These will only lead to defeat in detail while our main force is held up on another part of the front unable to help.

APPENDIX III

OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE IN WAR

I wrote to my father:--

Either strategy or tactics in war may be offensive or defensive. The side that takes the offensive first strategically is said to have the initiative. The side that is ready first generally acts on the offensive, because the advantage to be gained is immeasurably greater than in being on the defensive. The advantage of acting on the offensive, or assuming the initiative, is that you can force the enemy to follow your plan. If you are ready before he is, you can invade his country and threaten important points which you may force the enemy to defend. If the enemy is not careful, he may in this way be induced to split up his forces in a dangerous fashion, and allow each portion to be defeated in detail. The side, therefore, that assumes the initiative gains an advantage that may be decisive if the enemy acts indiscreetly. The moral effect of acting on the offensive is also great.

The side that takes the defensive only does so because it is compelled to by force of circumstances; not being ready in time to attack the enemy. Its object, therefore, is to gain time, and induce the enemy to commit mistakes which it may eventually take advantage of. It only acts on the defensive till it can seize a suitable opportunity for assuming the offensive. It therefore must not split up its forces to meet the enemy in strength everywhere. It should, on the contrary, send forward a covering force to induce the enemy to show his hand, and it must retire if necessary. Meanwhile, the main force should be kept concentrated, ready to strike as soon as a favorable opportunity presents itself. It is during this course of operations that politicians are so likely to make a mess of things. They see important places threatened and perhaps falling to the

enemy and, on their own, detach portions of this concentrated main body to defend them, instead of keeping it concentrated ready to take advantage of the first mistake of the enemy. This may not be for a long time, but the enemy will probably blunder, of which immediate advantage may be taken if there is a concentrated force ready to act.

To summarize: The great advantage of taking the offensive is that it forces the enemy to act according to your will. If you have to take to the defensive, never split up your forces, even if important places are threatened and fall. The whole object of the enemy is to induce you to split your forces. Above all, keep concentrated.

There are many illustrations of the above in this war. The Germans took the offensive at the start through being ready first. By doing so they forced the French to abandon their campaign in Alsace Lorraine and concentrate on the Belgium frontier to meet the Germans coming through Belgium. The Germans forced us to retire as they were able to concentrate superior numbers against us. We retired, but managed to keep concentrated. We did not attempt to defend Calais, Paris, Maubeuge or any other important places, which would have meant the splitting up of our force, and its defeat in detail. In consequence, we were able to take advantage of the first German blunder, and to drive them back on the Marne. The war on the Western front then became stationary. We then proceeded to make a series of blunders:--

1. The Gallipoli Campaign. This campaign took men away from the western front where they were urgently required. If they had been at the western front for the battles of Neuve Chapelle and Loos, these might have been much bigger shows. In the latter case, especially, when a great part of the German troops was operating against Russia, and their line was very weak in the west, a large force might have broken through.

The object of the Gallipoli campaign was, presumably, to force the Dardanelles and to join hands with Russia. This object was more political than military. It might have been a very good thing from a political point of view to join hands with Russia. From a military point of view, what was the objective? How was joining hands with Russia going to help the military situation? Were they going to get ammunition from us, or were we going to send a force to help them? At the time the military advantage of forcing the passage was not very great. We required all the munitions we could get ourselves. Our best method of helping the Russians was not to send men there, but to use them on the Western front, where they would have kept German reserves from going across to Russia. As it was, they were a detached force, in very great danger of being defeated by an active enemy acting on interior lines. Even if the passage had been forced, and they were successful, it might have been difficult to protect such a long line of communication against a determined enemy.

Another disadvantage was the difficulty of supply of ammunition and food to a force as far detached. For every journey a ship carrying ammunition or food could make to Gallipoli, it could make ten to France. Therefore, the force in France, besides being robbed of men, was also being robbed of a very considerable amount of the material of war. If the boats were not taking ammunition across, they could have been taking, say, engineering material.

2. The Mesopotamian Campaign to relieve the pressure on Gallipoli and to prevent the Turks from invading Egypt. The campaign was practically doomed to failure at the start,

owing to the totally inadequate forces and the inhospitable nature of the country.

However, it was pushed on, doubtless on political grounds.

3. It is very hard to see what the object of the campaign in Gallipoli really was from a strategical point of view. From a political point of view, it might have been of great value to have defeated the Turk, but hardly more so than a decisive victory over the Germans, of which there seems to have been an equal chance if the troops had been used in France. If the object of the campaign was to protect Egypt, this could have been done better by acting purely on the defensive in this theatre of war. The Turks had a very bad line of communication in Egypt, and the Mesopotamian Force might have been employed with advantage merely in defending Egypt. Our real fault seems to have been that we tried to act on the offensive in every theatre of war, thus causing a splitting up of our forces.

4. The Salonika Campaign. The object of this campaign is also rather in doubt. It might have as its real object one of the following: --
 - a. To save the Serbians
 - b. To join hands with the Russians
 - c. To disrupt the "Berlin – Constantinople" Railway
 - d. To induce Rumania to come in
 - e. To protect Egypt

The disadvantage of sending a force to Salonika are just the same as in sending a force to Gallipoli. It takes men away from the decisive theatre of war in the West. A far smaller

amount of ammunition can be supplied to it than can be supplied to a force of the same size on the Western Front. Let us imagine our objects are as stated above.

- a. In order to save the Serbians, it would have been far better to employ a force vigorously on the Western Front. The German reserves would then have to be concentrated on the Western Front to meet the offensive. This would have considerably relieved the pressure on the Serbians.
- b. It is doubtful whether this could possibly have succeeded without at the same time inducing all available reserves of the enemy to have been concentrated elsewhere. As this latter was impossible, this object had not much chance of success.
- c. With a strong enemy force at liberty to act, this object was not likely to succeed.
- d. The Romanians would have been more likely to have come in if we had had a sweeping success in the West, and all enemy forces had to leave their neighborhood.
- e. Egypt would have been far better protected as stated earlier

These were the blunders of 1915.

Our great offensive planned for 1916 had to be postponed owing to the German offensive at Verdun. The Germans again assumed the initiative, and forced us to act as they wished. When we in our turn assumed the offensive, we forced them to abandon the pressure on Verdun, and enabled the French to regain some ground. I cannot give the inner history of this part of the war as it is too recent. It is sufficient to say that by assuming the initiative the Germans forced us to act on the defensive so long that our offensive had not time properly to develop till it was stopped by winter. They were, therefore, enabled to strike at Romania and

knock her out when operations became impossible on the Western Front. If we had had the men and the ammunition etc., in time we might have forced the Germans to act on the defensive on their front, at any rate, much earlier, and abandon their Verdun and Romania campaign, if they had ever thought of starting the latter.

Meanwhile, what of the force at Salonika? Has it done its job by keeping a greater number of the enemy from the decisive theatre? I don't think it has. It is difficult to supply them with sufficient ammunition for the big campaign, and without vigorous action they cannot hope to pin down a larger force of the enemy. The Germans have the great advantage of working on interior lines and are able to concentrate at any point much more quickly than we can. They can, therefore, concentrate against any of our detached forces, e.g., Romanians, Salonika force, in superior numbers, and defeat them in detail. We can only prevent him from doing this by concentrating all our forces ourselves, and so threatening him that he has to concentrate against us. I don't wish to say never make a detachment, but in certain circumstances it is dangerous, especially if detailed by people who know nothing of strategy.

There is one point I have not brought out. For certain months in the year the Western Front, in its present state of trench warfare, is closed for offensive operations. The side then that is on interior lines has the great advantage that it can concentrate much more quickly than we can on other fronts. We should, therefore, be very chary of leaving any exposed detachments when operations in the main theatre have closed down. At other times they may be useful in diverting troops from the main theatre, though with our present difficulties it is doubtful. It would be much better to assume such a vigorous offensive with all available forces during the open months as to leave the enemy too exhausted to continue operations during the winter. Then by making

detachments judiciously they might meet with some measure of success, and divert troops from the enemy's main force when our operations start next year.

If only we had had enough men at the beginning of the war, so that we could have started a grand offensive in the West before trench warfare came in, the war in the other theatres would have gone very differently. Meanwhile, don't let us fritter away our strength in useless detachments and partial attacks.

It is impossible to be strong everywhere. Decide to win in one place, and feint in the others to draw the enemy's forces away, and force him to make detachments.

APPENDIX IV

OFFICER'S OUTFIT

All officers had to provide themselves with a complete kit. This comprised:

Full Dress, Review Order, Mounted.

Full Dress, Review Order, Dismounted

Frock coat (for Court-Martials and Official Garden parties).

Undress, petrol jacket.

Mess Kit.

Khaki, Field service, mounted with slacks for occasional wear.

Sword, Great-coat and British Warm.

In addition, his plain clothes were:

Morning coat and topper (de rigueur in London).

Evening dress, tail coat.

Dinner jacket suit.

Lounge suit.

Coats and breeches for golf, shooting and fishing.

Flannels for cricket and tennis.

Football kit.

Hunting kit.

Riding kit (hacking and schooling).

With boots, caps and hats, great coats, waterproofs, saddlery, etc., it was a considerable layout for one's parents.

APPENDIX V

RETREAT FROM MONS. 1914

XVth Brigade, R.F.A.

Bde. H.Q.

Lt. Col. Stevens	Commanding	Wounded and taken prisoner
Capt. Leach	Adjutant	Wounded and taken prisoner
Lieut. J.E.T. Younger	Orderly Officer	Wounded and taken prisoner

11th Battery R.F.A.

Major P.W.B. Henning	Wounded
Capt. H. Buckle	Died of wounds
Lieut. Moneton	Joined R.F.C. on mobilization (later killed)
Lieut. Stanford	Wounded
Lieut. Coghlan	Killed
2 Lieut. P.W.B. Maxwell	Wounded—later killed

52nd Battery R.F.A.

Major R. Nutt	Wounded and taken prisoner
Captain Barber-Starkey	Died of wounds
Lieut. R. C. Rome	

2 Lieut. G. H. Broadhurst Wounded – later killed

2 Lieut. R. B. Neve

80th battery R.F.A.

Major R. A. Birley Wounded and taken prisoner

Captain Higgon Later killed at Dardanelles

Lieut. A. G. Hewson Wounded

2 Lieut. R. Macleod Wounded

2 Lieut. W.H.B. Mirrless

Attached

37th Battery R.F.A. (4.5” How.)

Major Jones Wounded and taken prisoner

Capt. D. Reynolds Awarded V.C.

Lieut. Rawson-Shaw Taken prisoner

2 Lieut. W. Morgan

2 Lieut. Nottage

2 Lieut. F.G. Earle Wounded and awarded D.S.O.

VIIIth Brigade, R.F.A. (less 37th Battery)

61st Battery R.f.A.

65th Battery R.F.A.

Major Wilson

Major J. Livingston-Learmouth

Captain Trench

Captain French

Lieut. Housden

Lieut. Cunningham

2 Lieut. Edge

2 Lieut. Richardson

2 Lieut. Tyler

APPENDIX VI

OFFICERS OF C/241 AT YPRES, VIMY RIDGE & ITALY

Major R. Macleod

Captain H. J. Rhodes Wounded or sick

Captain S.J. Leather

Captain S.D. Gregory

Captain H. Pearce Joined in Italy after recovering from sickness

Lieut. R. Hamilton Wounded at Ypres

Lieut. C. Gascoyne Wounded at Ypres

Lieut. P.G. Allday Wounded—posted away

Lieut. P.K. Hall Killed at Ypres

Lieut. H.G. Bassett Joined at Vimy ridge but posted away in Italy

2 Lieut. H.B. Jones Joined at Ypres

Lieut. L.W.H. Robinson Joined at Ypres

2 Lieut. G.H. Newbold Joined at Ypres—died in the ‘flu epidemic,’ 1919

2 Lieut. C.F. Warham Joined at Ypres

Lieut. R.F. Martyn Joined in Italy

Lieut. C. White Joined in Italy

2 Lieut. R.A. Woods

Joined in Italy

Lieut. R.A. Kirby

Joined in Italy—wounded

That seems the lot, but, at Ypres, before Robinson, Jones, Newbold and Warham joined, owing to casualties, we were down to three and two officers, and once to one.

APPENDIX VII

A FIELD SERVICE POST CARD

Nothing is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

(Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card).

I am quite well.

I have been admitted into hospital

Sick and am going on well

Wounded and hope to be discharged soon

I have received your letter dated _____

telegram dated _____

parcel dated _____

Letter follows at first opportunity

I have received no letter from you

Lately

For a long time

Signature only

Date _____

We sent this when we had not time to write.