DEDICATED
TO
OUR
"NOBLE SIX HUNDRED"

LIEUT.-COLONEL C. C. HERBERT-STEPNEY, D.S.O.
Commanding Officer.

A SHORT HISTORY
of
The 16th Battalion
THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS
(CHATSWORTH RIFLES)

BY

LIEUT.-COLONEL R. F. TRUSCOTT, O.B.E.

WITH A FOREWORD

BY

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, K.G.

1928.

FOREWORD

THE 16th (Service) Battalion, The Sherwood Foresters (Chatsworth Rifles) was formed in April, 1915. Its history ends in 1922, when, with an imposing ceremony which those who witnessed it will not forget, the Colours and the Memorial Roll of the Battalion were deposited in the Church at Edensor.

For five of those seven years I was in Canada; but frequent letters kept me in touch with the Regiment, and I read with pride of its achievements. It was right that its history should be written, and in this volume Colonel Truscott has embodied it in a full and worthy record. Let those who read it recall with thankfulness the brave deeds done and the hardships suffered by those who served in the Battalion, and hold in pious and enduring memory the six hundred who laid down their lives.

DEVONSHIRE,
His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant
for the County of Derbyshire.

CHATSWORTH, *July*, 1928.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

A History of an individual Battalion for inclusion in a Regimental Record might well assume in its readers a knowledge of the scenes and conditions in which the events to be recorded took place. The action, so to speak, might be represented without scenery, so familiar is the war background to all, either by actual experience or repute. In the present instance, however, the historian has felt that if he relied entirely on this knowledge in his readers his story would inevitably become but a bare chronicle. He believes the story is worthy of a better setting, and inadequate though his equipment and qualifications are for the task, he has essayed not only to write the drama, but to some extent to paint the scenery as well. Moreover, he was confirmed in this policy by the reflection that if the story was ultimately to find a place in the Records of the Regiment it ought to be written with an eye to future generations, to whom the conditions of campaigning in France during the Great War will be absolutely unfamiliar.

The historian has found it convenient in writing this history to use throughout the first person plural, rather than continually to refer to the "Battalion." The method adopted has many advantages, but it has one great disadvantage, viz., it identifies the writer himself with every incident described.

Up to the autumn of 1916 this disadvantage was hardly felt, since the historian served practically continuously with the Battalion during the preceding period. From then onwards it was otherwise, and the historian feels he should make it plain that during the winter 1916-7, his service with the Battalion was not continuous, that later, while in constant touch with his Battalion, he had not the distinction of serving with it, and that in the final period he was absolutely separated from it.

It should also be added that, in these circumstances, as the story continued, he had to rely more and more on assistance from brother officers, to whom he wishes to express his sincere gratitude. It would be an invidious task to name any, where so many have been helpful, but he cannot refrain from particularly mentioning the ungrudging assistance rendered to him by Captain and Adjutant S. F. Lilley, M.C.

The historian has to thank also Captain P. H. Coleridge, M.C., for the maps which have been specially drawn for this book, and Mrs. R. F. Truscott for the very comprehensive index.

The names of all the officers who served with the Battalion are not given in the text, as it was considered more convenient to set them out, with their dates of joining and other particulars, in a short Appendix.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE 16th BATTALION THE SHERWOOD FORESTERS (CHATSWORTH RIFLES)

CHAPTER I

ENGLAND

Origin and Training

WE began in this way.

Early in April, 1915, the War Office addressed a letter to the Duke of Devonshire, Lord-Lieutenant of Derbyshire, asking him if he could "raise a Service Battalion in the county, 1,100 strong, through any person, corporation or body he might select," and His Grace approached the Territorial Force Association of the County for assistance in carrying out his request. A special meeting of the Association, at which the Duke himself presided, was accordingly held a few days later, and resolved to form a Battalion as desired.

On the proposal of His Grace it was further resolved that Captain C. Herbert-Stepney, King's Royal Rifles, should be recommended for the command of the Battalion, which it was suggested should be known as the "Chatsworth Rifles."

These proposals were shortly afterwards approved by the Army Council, who agreed that the full title of the Battalion should be "The 16th (Service) Battalion The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire

Regiment), 'Chatsworth Rifles,'" and appointed Lieut.-Colonel C. Herbert-Stepney as Commanding Officer.

Such was our origin.

Our birthday was April 29th, 1915, when recruiting opened in the No. 6 District; all the recruits as they came in being accommodated in the Normanton Barracks.

Within a few days we numbered 70 men, in addition to the following Officers and Warrant Officers:—Second Lieuts. J. G. Cooke, R. H. Ellis and A. Schweder; R.S.M. J. Pepper and Q.M.S. T. Brindley. These moved to Buxton on May 4th with the Commanding Officer. Major E. S. Jackson, Welsh Regiment and Egyptian Army, joined us a few days later, and took over the duties of Second-in-Command and Adjutant. Recruits came in freely, and every day the numbers assembled on the parade ground at Buxton were larger and larger. The daily additions to our strength varied considerably (the largest being nearly a hundred), but with the assistance of the local Police Force all were billeted on arrival. We were fortunate, when compared with some Service Battalions, in that, through the good offices of the Derbyshire Territorial Association, we were straightway dressed—even if we did not look—like soldiers; every man on joining being completely equipped with two suits of uniform, two pairs of boots and a greatcoat.

By the end of May we were over a thousand strong, and had, in fact as well as in name, become a battalion.

The Army Council then requested the Duke of Devonshire to raise two further Companies, to form a reserve, and recruiting therefore was continued. In the meantime more officers were joining us—a few from the Nottingham University College O.T.C., the majority from the Inns of Court O.T.C.

By the beginning of June we had outgrown Buxton, and quarters were allotted to us at Redmires, on the Derbyshire Hills, about four miles from Sheffield. On

June 8th and 9th we marched there in two parties, and had our first experience of long-distance marching, and also of "billeting" (as distinguished from being comfortably lodged or billeted in private houses), the schoolroom at Castleton affording us shelter for the night we spent on the way. The two parties arrived at Redmires on the 9th and 10th respectively, and were followed a week or so later by the reserve Companies, as they had by then received their complement. Having reached our full strength, a word may be said of our composition. The majority of the Battalion came from the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Coal Mines—a fact which accounted for the remarkable digging powers we displayed in later days. There was also a valuable sprinkling from the Police Force, most of whom became N.C.O.'s, but there were very few old soldiers in any sense of the term. The senior officers and the warrant officers excepted, we were—like the majority of the battalions of the so-called "Kitchener's Army"—a battalion of amateurs, but in physique there can have been few superior to us, for even the lads just above the age limit had been hardened in thew and sinew by work at the coal face.

Redmires camp was well suited for the purpose of training a new battalion. It had been laid out on an old race-course, with 50 acres of level drill ground, surrounded by a high wall, and was situated in country which afforded excellent opportunities for all forms of tactical exercises and schemes. The huts were large, airy and comfortable, and the various offices up-to-date and convenient. Officers' and Sergeants' Messes were started, and we were able in most ways to begin to lead a regular military life. In this setting our Founder, His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, paid us his first visit. He came over, accompanied by the Duchess and their daughters, on July 4th, attended our church parade, and afterwards inspected us.

While at Redmires in these ideal conditions we made

considerable progress. Our greatest difficulty proved to be the training of men to become N.C.O.'s. Few of those who had joined us, fine as they were in intention and physique, had had any position in civil life which at all fitted them to command, and this want of any qualification for the position of N.C.O. was rendered more difficult to meet by personal diffidence and lack of self-confidence. However, such scruples were overcome in time, and the excellent training which the officers from the Inns of Court O.T.C. had received proved of the greatest value, and they worked day and night teaching the new N.C.O.'s their duties.

In the middle of July a supply of Japanese rifles was served out to us for drill purposes, and proved very useful in this limited rôle. "Ian Hay," in a book which has become famous—"The First Hundred Thousand"—has described for all time the humours and the difficulties of training the nation to become soldiers—"mass production" as we should call it in commercial terms to-day—difficulties which were so greatly increased by delays in obtaining necessary equipment; and it would be superfluous to repeat here experiences which, with variations, were common to all new units. The historian wonders, however, whether any battalion endured the particular variety of inconvenience which is involved in training a company of 250 men with 167 rifles, that is, training them with due regard to the importance of each man having a share of a rifle. It is easy to be wise after the event, and experience or necessity soon becomes the mother of invention, or at least of contrivance, but at the outset the unwary tripped. In ordinary circumstances each man has his own rifle, and he is responsible for its care, its cleanliness, its very existence. He is taught to regard it as his own peculiar charge, his friend, even his child. With 167 rifles among 250 men, each rifle belonged to no one in particular, it had no guardian, no one wanted to clean it, no one wanted to take a pride in it, no one wanted to father it—the proprietary principle had given

way to communism. This phenomenon was discovered by the 250 men before the five officers perceived it, and with a good start and the exercise of every form of resource, the smaller body was soon confounded. It was not long, however, before a day came when a parade of 167 Japanese rifles was not reported "all present," and a situation arose wherein the principles of Ananias were more helpful than those of George Washington. The officers, of course, were bound to win in the end, but it is feared that certain casualties among the rifles fell into the category of "missing."

On July 19th notification was received that the Battalion was to form part of the 117th Infantry Brigade, under the command of Brig.-General P. Holland, C.B., late Indian Frontier Force, the other Battalions in the Brigade being—

17th (Service) Battalion Sherwood Foresters (Welbeck Rangers).
17th (Service) Battalion Kings Royal Rifles.
16th (Service) Battalion Rifle Brigade.

Brig.-General Holland inspected the Battalion on the 20th, and expressed his gratification at the appearance and bearing of the men, which he stated compared favourably with that of units of older formations.

On July 26th the Reserve Companies, 5 Officers and 90 men, proceeded to Bakewell and we thus parted with our potential reinforcements many of whom we were not to meet again until we had been some time in France. Our training proceeded normally—route marches, tactical schemes, night operations, lectures, drill, signalling, physical drill, punctuated by inoculation, concerts in the admirable lecture hall, and an athletic meeting arranged by Major Jackson, Second Lieut. Ellis and C.Q.M.S. Blake. This last was attended by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, a party from Chatsworth, and a large number of relatives and friends of members of the Battalion.

On September 2nd we left our comfortable quarters at Redmires, and proceeded to Hursley, near Winchester,

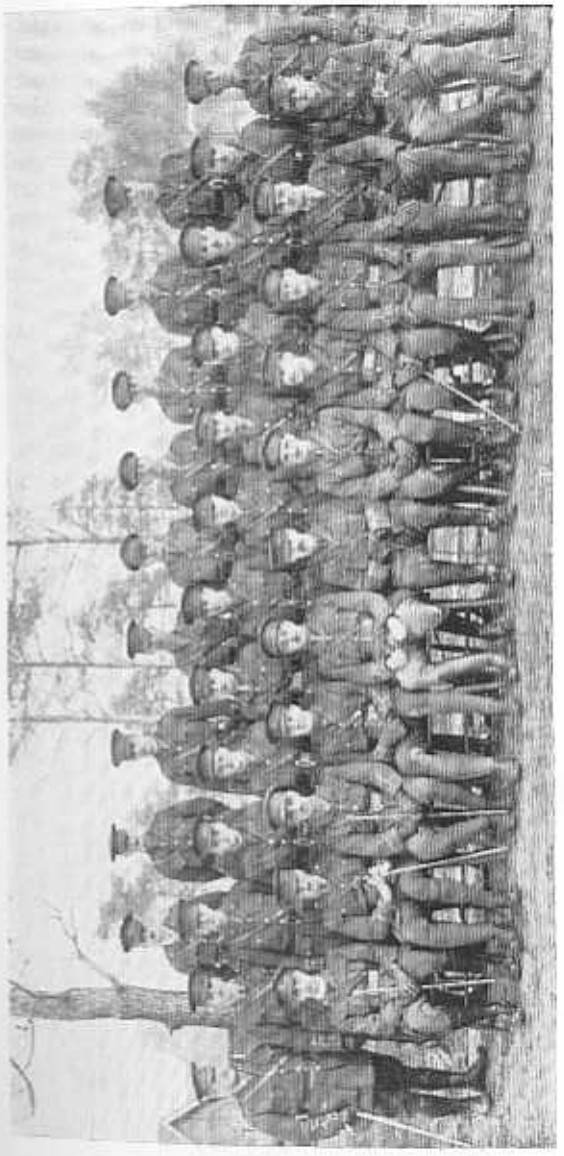
where three Battalions of the 117th Infantry Brigade were to be concentrated. Our strength was then 29 officers and 1,065 other ranks. At Hursley we lived in tents in very delightful surroundings in the Park, and there we were able to make the acquaintance of our comrades in the other units.

On September 17th we were inspected by Major-General N. Barnardiston, M.V.O., commanding the 39th Division, of which formation we had become a unit, and on this occasion were again complimented on our appearance and bearing.

During our brief stay of three weeks at Hursley we continued our training, and took part in several Brigade exercises. Moreover, in order that the three battalions might get to know each other, Brigade Sports were held, and in these we were successful, as we won five events and had six places out of the first seven in the hundred yards race.

On September 30th we moved to Aldershot, where the last Battalion—the 17th Battalion Sherwood Foresters—joined us, and thus the Brigade was completely concentrated for the first time. Oudenarde Barracks were allotted to us. Here, apart from our normal training, we learnt something more, something indefinable, but none the less valuable, for it is impossible to occupy quarters in Aldershot, the Home of the British Army, without learning unconsciously a great deal about the real owners who had preceded us to France. We could picture how soldiers live, and we began in those surroundings, steeped in tradition, to feel more like soldiers ourselves. The time we spent at Aldershot was all too short, but we were fortunate to have had the experience at all. Our training progressed normally and satisfactorily, both on the barrack square and in the surrounding country, where Battalion and Brigade schemes were carried out.

Here we were completely equipped with Transport, Field Cookers and Mobilisation Stores. It was at



THE OFFICERS, FEBRUARY, 1915—WITLEY CAMP.

Aldershot also that we first found out that as footballers we could give a very good account of ourselves, our team being led by Corporal Blood, a well-known and popular player in league matches. In all contests we triumphed over our opponents, except in that against the 14th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who drew with us.

We were inspected on October 28th, a few days before we left, by Major-General Sir Francis Howard, K.C.B., C.M.G., Inspector-General of Infantry.

On November 8th the Battalion marched to Witley Camp, where the whole of the 39th Division was concentrated, and we found that, instead of being "the only pebble on the beach," as at Redmires, we were but one unit in a vast formation, whose camps and horse lines were stretched all around us. Here we were to complete our training, and here we remained until we proceeded to France, except for a short interval during which we returned to Aldershot for musketry. There must be many worse places than Witley Common for carrying out practical training, and conditions there had by then greatly improved since the days of which "Ian Hay" had written. The Milford end of Witley Common was laid out as one great encampment, and in this we lived in comfortable huts. The surrounding country, as at Redmires, afforded excellent opportunities for every form of tactical exercise. One day in each week was devoted to a Brigade scheme, and the remainder was taken up with training from the individual or section upwards to the Battalion as a whole. Besides the normal programme—ceremonial, march discipline, physical training, night operations, bayonet fighting, musketry, we also were instructed in the "side lines"—care of feet, sanitation, cooking, signalling, bombing, etc. A miniature range was made on Thursley Common, and entrenchments were dug on approved sites. Finally we were thrust into a lethal chamber, where, choking and gasping, we were introduced to the unpleasant mysteries of gas and gas-

masks. We also received our full complement of service Lee Enfield Mark 3 Rifles (and were happily rid of their Japanese understudies) and four Lewis guns.

At Witley we celebrated Christmas in the customary manner. After Church Parade dinner was lavishly served in finely decorated huts, where the Commanding Officer came to give us his good wishes. The musical talent was also further exploited during the festive season, and several concerts were given, which were very popular, while our football eleven added further laurels to their brows. On Christmas Eve the Brigadier was well enough satisfied to issue an order congratulating all ranks on the progress made, and encouraging us to renewed efforts after the short holiday.

From December 1st to January 15th we proceeded by Companies on embarkation leave.

On January 20th we returned to our old quarters at Oudenarde Barracks at Aldershot, to fire the General Musketry Course. The demand for the ranges at Aldershot at this time was very great, or we should have liked to have had a longer time for this course, but as it was we acquitted ourselves with some credit. In the scores we headed the Brigade, and further were complimented by the G.O.C. on our range discipline. The final result was as follows :—

16th Battalion Sherwood Foresters	48·8
17th Battalion Sherwood Foresters	46·1
16th Battalion Rifle Brigade	40·4
17th Battalion King's Royal Rifles	39·6

Brigade average, 43·7.

The record of our achievements would be incomplete without a special mention of the Machine Gun Detachment, which was eminently successful under Lieut. R. F. Dunn, a born instructor. This detachment which had fired its musketry course earlier than ourselves, and at the same time as our Grenadiers (under Second Lieut. H. L. Morell), proceeded shortly after to fire a special machine gun course at Mytchett. In the results of this the

average score of our section was 37·5, the score of the next Battalion being 29·4. Our machine gunners were warmly congratulated on their handling of their guns and fire control by both the Inspector from the War Office and the G.O.C. 117th Infantry Brigade.

The Battalion marched back to Witley Camp on February 2nd for their final month's training. During this second period at Witley the Brigade was inspected in a tactical exercise by the Inspector-General of Infantry, Major-General Sir Francis Howard, K.C.B., C.M.G., and our normal training was varied by a two days' scheme carried out under service conditions. This latter took place on February 9th and 10th, when in the course of a miniature campaign we were billeted in a mill near Elstead. A further touch of realism was given in that during the night we were drawn forth by an alarm.

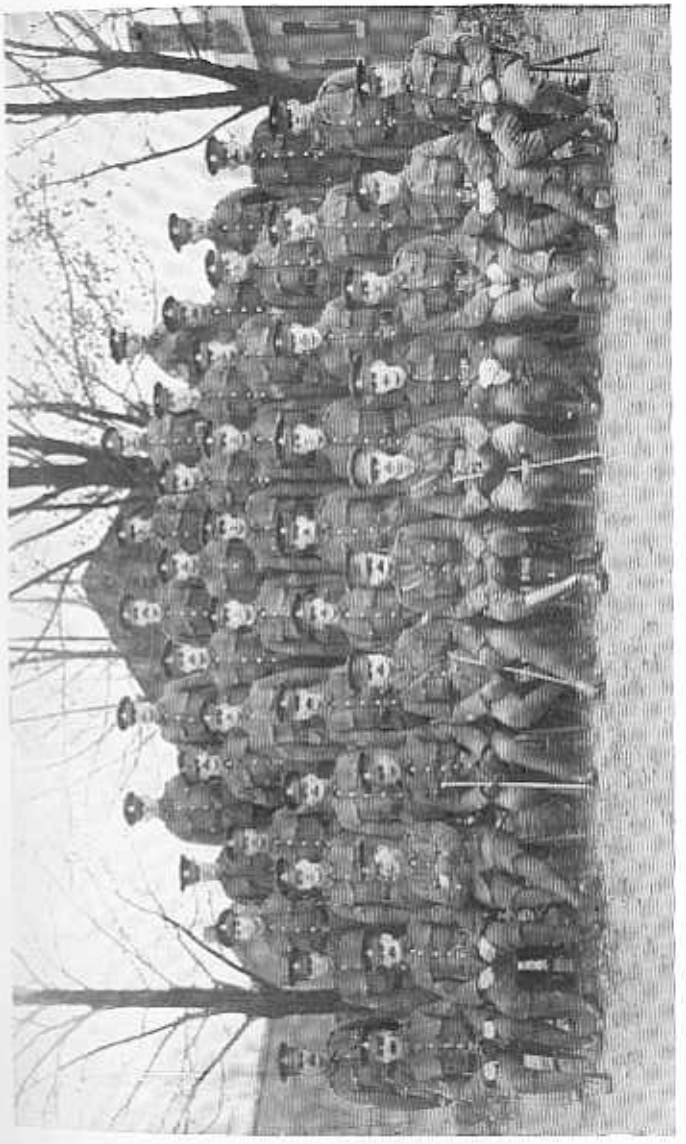
His Majesty the King signified his intention of inspecting the Division on February 24th, and a rehearsal of the Review, in which we took our part, was held on Hankley Common the day before. Unfortunately the next day was intensely cold, with heavy snow falling, and His Majesty cancelled the Review in consequence, but the rehearsal was very impressive in itself—the Great Plain, covered with the Divisional Troops of all arms, revealed to us something of the significance of the part we were later to play on a much larger scale.

During the month Major Jackson received an appointment in the Force, which was then being organised for the East African campaign—in that region of the world, in fact, where he had spent the greater part of his life. It was with feelings of sincere regret among all ranks that we learnt we were to lose his cheerful presence and able support.

On March 1st Major H. M. Milward, Sherwood Foresters, joined us as Second-in-Command. Three days later the Duke of Devonshire paid us a visit, and after inspecting us, expressed his satisfaction and bade us farewell.

March 5th, the last day of training, arrived. We had

finished our apprenticeship and now were to set out on our task. It was ten months almost to a day since we had arrived at Buxton without the rudiments of military knowledge, with a sturdy individualism struggling at first against the restrictions of collectivism. We had worked hard, and had accomplished much in that ten months. We were by no means perfect soldiers, and had much more to learn, but we had in that period acquired a sound working knowledge of our new profession, we had shed our individualism in the interests of the great cause, and each of us felt that he was a member of a team. We were indeed welded together by an *esprit de corps*, born of a common impulse and a common experience, into a unified entity, like a college, a school, or, we may perhaps say, like a regiment. Looking back over those ten months then we saw, as indeed looking back from a further distance now, we can see even more clearly, that we had got to know each other, to have confidence in, and reliance on, each other, and, moreover, we realised that, in spite of the unaccustomed restrictions, in spite of inevitable difficulties and discomforts, the time had been far from unhappy, and we looked forward to the great adventure in front of us with less misgiving because we entered upon it almost as a big family party.



Warrant Officers and N.C.O.'s, February, 1916, Witley Camp.

CHAPTER II

FRANCE

Round Festubert

Laventie, Auchy

MARCH 6th dawned extremely cold—there had been a hard frost and much snow had fallen—but we were up before it was light, and soon after the sun rose were in the train bound for Southampton. That night—a very calm one—we crossed to Havre, and proceeded in a snowstorm to the camp allotted to us, near the docks. It was a canvas camp, and hardly afforded us a welcome, as each tent was surrounded by snow. The next day we entrained for Steenbecque, and proceeded by means, the secret of which was kept by the Transportation Service, to take nearly 24 hours to reach our destination. (It remained throughout the war an insoluble mystery how it was possible to take quite so long getting from place to place by train in Northern France.) The journey was extremely cold. Frost and snow still pursued us to Steenbecque, and we spent three days there carrying out some route marches to keep ourselves warm. We received orders to move to Estaires by road on March 13th—a long march of 18 miles, and again we were the sport of the climate. We started with snow everywhere around, and a temperature of 35°, but by midday, in less than four hours, a hot sun had made the snow vanish; winter had gone, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say we found ourselves in midsummer. This sudden change of temperature made an exhausting march very trying, and we were exceedingly glad when we arrived at our billeting area, which provided a pleasant river for our ablutions. While on the march we were inspected by Lieut.-General Sir W. P. Pulteney, K.C.B.,

D.S.O., Commanding the III Corps, then in the First Army under General Sir C. Munro, G.C.B.

We continued our march the next day to Sailly-sur-Lys, where we were billeted for six days. This was our first experience of French billets, and very comfortable we were. The weather was mild, but that did not spoil our enjoyment of a further fresh experience—the first rum ration. The country round afforded excellent ground for training, and this was punctuated on March 16th by an inspection of the whole Brigade by the Army Commander, who complimented the Commanding Officer on the turn-out of the Battalion.

On March 19th we returned to Estaires, where we were attached for instructional purposes to the 23rd Brigade, 8th Division. "A" and "B" Companies started that evening for Laventie, to begin their instruction in the front line, under the supervision of the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment. This was a well-ordered course of instruction. Two platoons of each Company were in the front line system, supported by three platoons of each Company of our Yorkshire "tutors." We were enabled in these conditions to learn the intricacies of trench routine, and to become gradually inured to increasing hardship, increasing perils and increasing responsibility. In this respect we were more fortunate than battalions which had come out earlier, and which, in some instances, had had, perforce, to face straight away the full responsibility of holding the line, or even of taking part in more active operations. We learnt much from our kindly hosts, and we must all look back with gratitude on their patient, hospitable and considerate instruction. It was not mere routine. One night, as the result of our exploding a mine, there was a fairly heavy bombardment of the Battalion on our right, which overlapped our own right, and gave us our first sensation of being shelled—it also gave us our first casualties, one wounded in each Company, happily slightly. On March 22nd "A" and "B" Companies were relieved by "C" and

"D" Companies, which were attached to the 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles. They rejoined us on the 24th after a similarly happy experience, and without the casualties.

We spent four days in Estaires, which was then a very different place from what it became later. The town was full of troops, and large numbers of civilians were still living there. It also boasted the best baths we were ever to come across. These baths were in an old brewery, and while we wallowed in huge vats of hot water our clothes were seized and ironed with Oxford powder.

On March 28th we came under the command of the G.O.C. 19th Brigade, 33rd Division and proceeded to Bethune—a town we were to become very familiar with, both in prosperity and adversity. We were billeted in the Ecole des Jeunes Filles, a building which must have contained a vast number of *jeunes filles* before the war, for it provided us with excellent and spacious quarters. We were not, however, to enjoy them for long on this occasion, for the next morning we continued our course of instruction in the trenches at Auchy, near Annequin Fosse, our instructors being members of the 20th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, whose ranks were at this date still largely made up of old public school boys. Our second hosts were as kind as the first, though as a tribute to our progress there were not so many of them; in fact, instead of being a majority of the garrison, the instructors were decreased to a mere leavening. We found ourselves, however, in a somewhat harsher world. It looked it—and it soon felt so—for the front line being fairly near the enemy, afforded him an opportunity of sending over rifle grenades. Many of our dead—killed on September 25th, 1915—still lay out in "No Man's Land," while behind us the churchyard of the little ruined church of Cambrin was filled with the wooden crosses erected over those who had been killed behind our lines. The dug-outs were much more substantial—having been deeply and well constructed by the French in the early days of the war.

On April 1st, after one night in rest, we assumed full responsibility, for we took leave of our hosts, and became the garrison of what was known as the Auchy Right Sub-section. The enemy showed some activity, and we suffered several casualties from rifle grenades (one killed and 12 wounded, the latter including Second Lieut. H. L. Morell). We were relieved on April 4th by the 1/5th Battalion Scottish Rifles, and after one day in Bethune marched to Busnettes, near Gonnehem, where we remained till the 16th. While we were in this village Brig.-General P. W. Robertson reported on the Battalion's work while it was attached for instruction to his, the 19th, Brigade :—

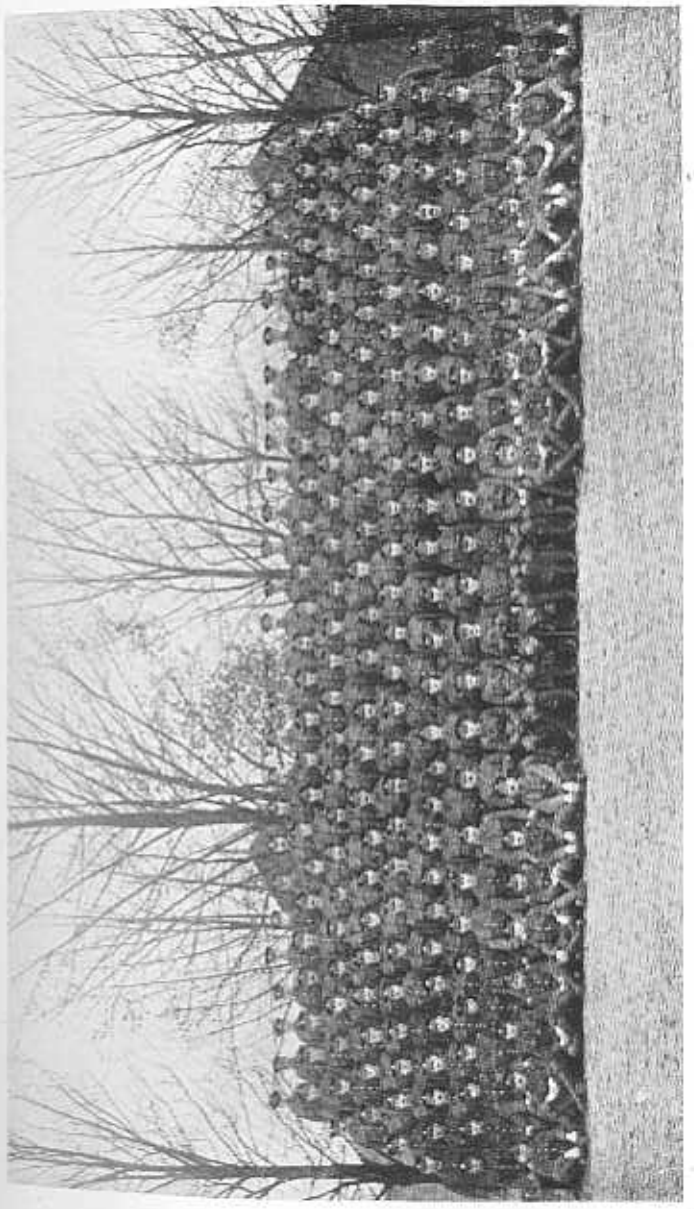
> "I consider from what I have seen that this is a good Battalion and well commanded. They seem to have a good system of work and organisation, and only require further experience."

When Lieut.-General Sir R. C. Haking, K.C.B., commanding the XI Corps, inspected part of the Brigade at Gonnehem on April 10th, he endorsed these reports, and added that the 16th Battalion Sherwood Foresters seemed to be particularly good.

On April 15th Brig.-General R. D. F. Oldman, D.S.O., succeeded Brig.-General P. Holland, C.B., as Brigade Commander. The next day we marched to Riez du Vinage, where, two days later, the new G.O.C. Brigade inspected us in billets. Here we spent an agreeable week or so—the country was pleasant, our hosts kind, the billets were comfortable and some of us were living on the grassy banks of La Bassée Canal.

Festubert

On April 23rd the Battalion took over C 2 Sub-section, Festubert. We were now feeling our feet, and were gratified to be actually holding the line for the first time, supported by the other Battalions of our Brigade, and under command of our own, the 39th, Division. Hitherto we had always been attached to other Brigades, and were



"A" Company, Aldershot, 1915

no doubt closely supported by veteran troops. At Festubert we definitely took our place as a combatant unit in the Expeditionary Force in France.

Though, generally speaking, there was a uniformity about Trench life, every sector of the British Front had its own individual characteristics. This sector was remarkable, even famous, for the well-known "Islands of Festubert."

The front was not held by a continuous trench, but by a series of island posts in "No Man's Land" drawn out along the front of the support line. The islands varied in size, the largest holding as many as eighteen men, and the smallest an ordinary sentry group. Headquarters for the front Company was a large, long island behind this archipelago, and accommodated about two platoons. The ground was marshy, so that the trenches were not "sunk," but consisted of sandbag breastworks. The support line was magnificent—the breastwork being high and broad, and solidly built. It was, however, unfortunate that it had been found necessary in the past to bury our dead just behind, so that we lived in fact in a cemetery. Rats were plentiful, and had made some of the dugouts, including Battalion Headquarters, almost unbearable. The holding of this line involved careful organisation, as all administration had to be carried out at night, since during the hours of daylight we were all perforce separate entities. Company Commanders in the front could not reach their island outposts, Companies in support could not reach the front Company. We kept a precarious touch by telephone, a luxury which later was given up owing to the perfecting of the "listening-in" apparatus. Directly night fell therefore, the support Companies sent large carrying and working parties to the front, the former to bring rations, water, the mails and rum; the latter to work on the linking up of the islands. All commodities had to be arranged in separate divisions and conveyed to each island party, while Company Commanders had to visit their posts,

reliefs had to take place, letters to be distributed, and rum served out. "No Man's Land" was alive with humanity, and it was well to have patrols out in front to cover us during these multifarious activities. Our first tour here was quiet, though we suffered two casualties, C.S.M. Drummond being wounded, and Sergeant W. A. Edwards killed. We were relieved by the 17th Battalion King's Royal Rifles on April 27th, and became the Battalion in Brigade support on the outskirts of Festubert. Those who were with us in these early days will remember the little hamlet in which we lived—they will recall passing Festubert Churchyard, with the great crucifix standing aloft in the moonlight among the debris of the ruined walls and monuments; the intricacies of the Tuning Fork, and the desolation of Le Plantin, unpeopled alike by soldiers or civilians.

While here we found working parties of 350 every night for the consolidation of the island line.

The few days in support were not without incident.

The first day broke fine and warm, which seemed to invite us to exceptional ablutionary effort. The Officers took baths in the garden by turns in the sunshine. In the midst of the series the enemy started shelling us; shells dropped in the proximity of the bath and stirred up so much mud as to neutralise its beneficial effects. Then one landed full on the thatched roof of the billet of No. 2 Platoon. It caught fire immediately, and one Company Commander had the misfortune to be compelled to direct salvage operations in a uniform which is not prescribed by King's Regulations. No. 2 Platoon billet was gutted, and much of their kit was burnt. A great effort was successfully made to save the cooker, which was in an outhouse. The shelling fortunately did not last long, though No. 2 Platoon's billet continued to make an excellent target by emitting smoke and detonating ammunition for several hours.

It is curious to recall that two civilians hovered round this village like cats round their old home, and were, of course, immediately suspected of being spies. They vanished suddenly—but at no point so near the line did we meet civilians again. Perhaps they had come to look for something which they had left behind, something they had buried—perhaps it was something which we found. It was on this wise. One afternoon certain members of the Battalion exuded a cheerfulness that hardly seemed warranted by the existing circumstances, and closer investigation revealed the fact that in the garden there had been unearthed a large number of glasses. This success had encouraged the digging party to look for something to put in them. Their efforts were rewarded, for further mining operations had brought to light a cask of whisky. The glasses were washed and filled, and the hot afternoon was going to be very pleasantly spent—but, well—the war spoilt many pleasant afternoons! We saved, however, on our rum ration that day.

There was also a gas alarm to add to the variety of these few days in support. Some shells dropped round us and we spent a short time in our gas masks. The gas itself, if it came over at all, did not reach us.

We proceeded from Festubert to the "islands" again, and spent an uneventful tour, helping to consolidate the line.

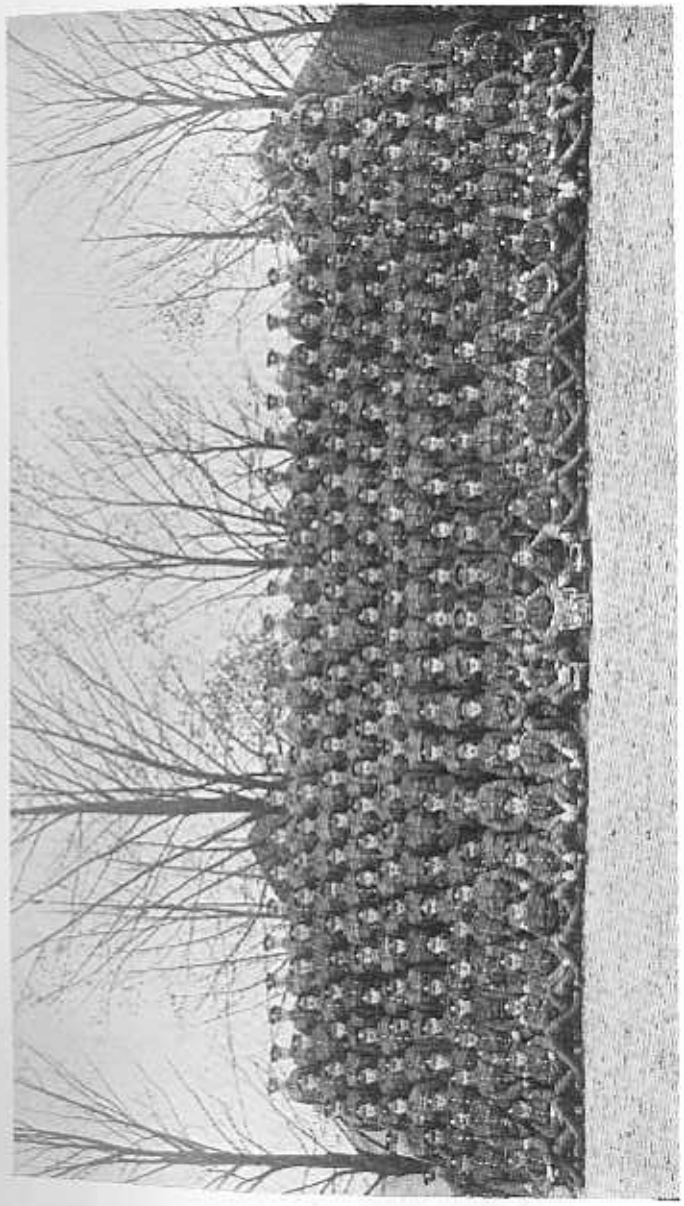
On May 5th we were relieved and proceeded to billets in Le Touret, for a short spell in reserve, during which we furnished large working parties. From thence we went back to our old quarters at Riez du Vinage. Here, the weather being warm, our training was pleasantly savoured with some bathing in the canal. One night Battalion Headquarters took fire and was burnt to the ground, very little being saved, though the Headquarters Staff did their best to salvage the farmer's goods.

Givenchy

On May 17th the Battalion returned to the line, relieving the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment in B 2 Subsection at Givenchy. As we completed three tours in this sector we became very familiar with its environs.

While in reserve we occupied billets on the canal in the pleasant village of Gorre. Our way to the front line from there lay along the north bank, past Brigade Headquarters at Canal House to Givenchy itself, the battered township, which with the remains of a factory and some houses, afforded shelter for us when serving as the Battalion in support. At the point called Windy Corner (it was never clear whether meteorological or psychological conditions had been the origin of this name) we entered the trenches. Those who have been there will remember the long walk up Hitchin Road, by this date well overhung with vegetation, to South Moor Villa, the ruined house on the left which, with its protecting redoubt, accommodated Battalion Headquarters and on from there the winding trench which brought us to the Headquarters of the Company in support. This was called Moat Farm, and it must have been a fine place in its prime—a great building making the four sides of a square like a fort, with a large courtyard in the centre; the whole surrounded by a moat. Leaving this on the left, we proceeded through Upper Cut, past Poppy Redoubt and the new left front Company Headquarters (built while we were there by our Divisional sappers), until we reached the long lateral communication trench called Piccadilly, which lay behind the greater part of our front, and ran appropriately into Park Lane and from there, with less topographical accuracy, into Coventry Street. They will recall Scottish Trench, lying behind the deserted, impassable and sinister Dead Man's Trench, where quite suddenly, owing to a substantial stream in "No Man's Land," the crater area ceased, and our line fell back to a distance of over 400 yards from the enemy's or striking to the right, The Avenue leading to the Centre Company Headquarters at French Farm, or, pushing on further south, Berkeley Street which took us into the Front Line and the Saps leading to the Red Dragon Crater.

It has already been observed that each sector had its own characteristics, and Givenchy was no exception, for



"B" Company, Aldershot, 1915.

it had two—craters and rifle grenades. It was part of the normal day in Trench life to apprehend that a shell might bring your roof about your head, but at Givenchy we were prepared for the floor to come up as well. A mine on our right was exploded about 5 a.m. one morning, and though it was only a small one, and not on our immediate front, it was quite impressive enough. There were craters nearly all along this front, culminating in the already mentioned Red Dragon Crater, notorious as the largest in France. Constant pumping operations made "No Man's Land" very wet which constituted a great hindrance to our patrols. Our line was very close to the enemy and our posts at the end of each sap were nearer still—indeed at some points we were hardly forty yards apart. When we first arrived there the enemy's rifle grenades were a constant menace. They came over in no sort of system—ones, twos, or perhaps burst like the streamers from a rocket. One communication trench was such a favourite target that it had been put out of bounds and the sides became a sort of pin cushion, bristling with the stocks of innumerable grenades. We soon determined to put down this nuisance, for, though the trenches were good, they were inadequately equipped with shelters or with rifle grenade batteries. We remedied both these defects. We sent for large supplies of grenades, and systematically set ourselves to dominate the enemy, sending over ten to each one of his, till he had evidently had enough of it. Second Lieut. E. H. Lifetree, Sergeant Fletcher and three men were killed, and thirteen men were wounded during the first tour in these trenches.

Though one is apt in any account of trench warfare to lay emphasis on the predominant characteristics of the sector—in this case mines and rifle grenades—it would be unjust to the enemy and to our own arms if an impression was conveyed that our tour at Givenchy was without artillery, machine gun or sniping activity. All these arms were very much to the fore on both sides,

and in addition to their normal shoots, our Artillery and Trench Mortar Batteries—one battery 4·5 howitzers, one 18 pounder battery, two medium trench mortars, five Stokes guns and three 7" light trench mortars—carried out a special demonstration on May 22nd, supported by two West guns and eight rifle grenade batteries. This demonstration was arranged by Brigade Headquarters as retaliation for the enemy's rifle grenade activity. The German response was short and sharp, chiefly directed at Moat Farm. Machine guns were very busy on most nights, especially on our support lines, while our snipers here began to acquire experience which was most valuable later on. Furthermore, about 9 o'clock one evening, the enemy caused much discomfort to our transport which was bringing rations to Windy Corner by sending over tear gas. We were all dissolved into tears but these expressions of grief can hardly be said to have reduced us to silence, and the Transport Section gave us a remarkable illustration of the elasticity of the English language.

On relief by the 17th Battalion King's Royal Rifles we held the support or village line. Company Headquarters were scattered in Givenchy, and the platoons occupied the cellars of the ruined houses and factory.

Our second tour of the Front Line cost more casualties than the first—4 killed and 25 wounded, the latter including 2nd Lieut. A. D. Parkin. On May 29th we proceeded to Gorre as Battalion in Brigade reserve, and spent four very hot days in comparative rest.

Our third tour in the Front Line at Givenchy began on June 3rd.

On the following night we carried out a bombing raid on the enemy trenches south of the Duck's Bill. The plans had been very carefully worked out, and Lieut. Davies had reconnoitred the ground the night before and had located the gap cut in the German wire, while the four Officers and 70 other ranks who were to take part in the operation had been carefully instructed in their

various rôles. These, for the purposes of the raid, were divided into four parties:—

The first under Second Lieut. R. C. Davies.
The second under Lieut. A. Hardy.
The third (liaison) under Second Lieut. J. R. Cholerton.
The fourth (support) under Sergeant Bradwell.

The historian is at a disadvantage in describing a raid, for, to do justice to one of the most difficult and hazardous enterprises of modern warfare, he should not only have taken part in one, but should also be gifted with considerable descriptive power—handicaps which in the present instance are increased by the modest reserve of those who so gallantly carried out this particular operation. A modern battle by daylight is almost impossible to describe—the whizz and thunder of the shells, the spitting of the machine and Lewis guns, the cracking of the rifles, the dust, the casualties, the crumbling or crushing out of existence before one's eyes of the immediate landscape—combine to make appear chaotic what in effect may be a most ordered action. By night the conditions are, of course, much worse, and any operation is bewildering; darkness allies itself with noise to blunt one's sensibilities to any conception of order or clarity. Only a very bald account can therefore be given.

Preceded and covered by a heavy artillery and trench mortar barrage, to which the Germans responded with considerable weight and persistence, Lieut. Davies and his party reached the enemy wire. Here they were met and held up by a spirited resistance and suffered a relatively large number of casualties from the German bombs. Among the wounded was Sergeant Wyatt, who had ably seconded his leader. So hot was the resistance at this early stage that, except for Lieut. Davies, the only casualties we suffered in the raid were inflicted at this point, before the party had penetrated the wire. Undeterred, Lieut. Davies, having found the gap, and followed by Private L. Boaler, his leading bayonet man, and his

small remnant, pressed through into the enemy trench. There they turned to the right and on their doing so the majority of the enemy garrison went to ground and sought refuge in the dug-outs. Lieut. Davies went into one and dragged a prisoner half out, but could not succeed in getting him away, as, exposed in the doorway, he was the target of all within. The dug-out was then bombed. In the meantime Private Boaler entered two dug-outs further on and bayoneted a German in each.

Lieut. Hardy and his party followed the first party very closely into the German trench and turned to the left. They pursued their course of hide-and-seek round traverse and fire-bay but met no one. In these conditions they proceeded for about 60 yards down the trench, systematically bombing the dug-outs, and building blocks to the communication trenches.

The third or liaison party, under Lieut. Cholerton, followed the second, and established themselves between the two others in the German trench, keeping both wings in touch, replenishing the bomb supply, and covering the line of withdrawal. Lieut. Davies, owing to the heavy losses he had suffered in "No Man's Land," sent a message for the fourth party to come and reinforce him. Sergeant Bradwell responded with promptitude, and on proceeding to the right, encountered an enemy bombing party which had evidently come up a communication trench, or had emerged from a dug-out. This party attacked them with great dash, but Sergeant Bradwell and his men drove them into a dug-out and bombed them there into silence. Lieut. Davies afterwards estimated that he had penetrated about 60 yards to the right, and with the assistance of the fourth party he also blocked the communication trenches. All the dug-outs were bombed systematically, and the only rifle grenade stand they could find was demolished.

In view of the prefatory observations on night operations in trenches, it should be stated that this raid proceeded "according to plan," and was carried out like

clockwork in a thorough and deliberate manner. Half an hour after entering the enemy trenches our parties were in absolute possession, and the German garrison were either killed or wounded in the dug-outs. All that could usefully be done had been accomplished, and a withdrawal, covered by a strong point on each flank, was thereupon carried out with great coolness and judgment under the direction of Lieut. Cholerton, whose party acted as a rear guard. Unfortunately, Lieut. Davies, who was among the last to leave the trench, and to whose gallantry the success of the raid had been largely due, was severely wounded while recrossing the wire. He was brought in by Sergeant Bradwell, and has happily recovered. Last of all came Lieut. Cholerton and his party bringing in our wounded. In this halting description the chief actors only have been mentioned, but it should be added that everyone carried out his duties in a cool, collected and admirable manner.

Our casualties were—

Killed—

2 Other Ranks.

Wounded—

Second Lieut. R. C. Davies.

18 Other Ranks.

Missing—

5 Other Ranks.

The services of the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officer commanding the parties, and of Sergeant A. Wyatt and Privates L. Boaler and H. H. Chilvers, were specially recommended to the notice of higher authorities.

General Sir C. Munro and Lieut.-General Sir R. C. Haking subsequently sent for the Commanding Officer and the Officers concerned, and congratulated them on the success of the operation. Major-General N. Barnardiston, M.V.O., further congratulated the Battalion, not only on the success of the raid, but also on being the first unit of the 39th Division to enter the enemy trenches. Subsequently Second Lieut. R. C. Davies was awarded the

M.C., Sergeant Bradwell the D.C.M., and Private Boaler the M.M. These were the first honours awarded to any Non-commissioned Officers and men who had come out with the Division. On June 30th a letter was received from His Grace the Duke of Devonshire congratulating his Battalion on winning these distinctions.

The next morning the enemy shelled our lines, and rifle grenade activity continued intermittently on both sides throughout the day and night. Apart from the raid our casualties during the tour amounted to three men killed and eleven wounded. We were relieved on June 6th by the 1st Battalion Cambridgeshire Regiment, and went into reserve at Essars, marching to billets in Les Chocquaux the next day. From here we were able to indulge in the good things that Bethune could then offer us, i.e. a restaurant, where the chef was famous, and the amenities of the Officers' Club.

On June 10th Major-General R. Dawson assumed the command of the Division vice Major-General N. Barnardiston, M.V.O. Major H. M. Milward, Second-in-Command of the Battalion, was appointed to command the 17th Battalion Sherwood Foresters on June 14th, and Major N. Houghton became our Second-in-Command.

Richebourg L'Avoué

At the time of holding them it is difficult to maintain a sentimental attachment for any system of trenches, but many a cheerful evening has been spent by those who have had the good fortune to survive the Great War, going over familiar ground, comparing notes, and sharing reminiscences. After such an evening we find that time has somewhat rounded the angles, and has suffused our memories with a softer and redder glow, and in these moments we can recall, almost with affection, scenes which at the time were associated with hardship. Probably of all the sectors on the British Front with which we were to become familiar, Richebourg (or rather "Ferme du Bois—Right Sub-section," to give it its official

designation) occupies the warmest, or at any rate, the least frigid, place in our hearts. Nor are the reasons far to seek. First, during our stay there the weather was fine and warm—a factor of the greatest importance to those resident in ditches. Secondly, the trenches were in good order, and generally speaking, dry, while the dug-outs as shelters from the weather were satisfactory, and even comfortable. (As shelters from enemy activity they were—certainly when we arrived—about as useful as tents would have been.) Further, the breastworks repaid work on them, in that, unlike so many sectors where one's efforts seemed lost in the general state of semi-demolition and patchwork repairs, one could quite definitely see the improvements effected. But, apart from these reasons, it is probably the length of time we spent there that promoted the affection in which we hold Richebourg, for our long sojourn gave us the confidence which results from knowledge. We *knew* the Ferme du Bois trench system, and felt that if it had come to defending our position, we could have got out of it everything there was in it. We took over the line on June 16th, and, owing to the necessity for concentrating as many troops as possible on the Somme, where the great battle had started on July 1st, spent thirty-four consecutive days there. During that time there was very little in the sector with which we did not become familiar—the great flat plain dotted with scattered ruins, the tree-bordered Rue de l'Epinette with its ruined houses just habitable enough under R.E. renovation to form Battalion or Sapper Headquarters, the little cemetery where some of us were to rest, the turn to the right towards La Quinque Rue or the Rue du Bois, according to which Company front we were to occupy, the maze-like redoubt which formed the entrance to the trenches, the walk up through the remains of the old British and old German lines (relics of battles of the previous year), along the communication trench overhung with wheat and poppies, to the headquarters of the support Company

at Tube Station, on past the ruins of the natural spring, and again into the Communication trench, leaving on our right Rope Keep (where a small garrison was always maintained), into the front line, with its fine breastwork of sandbags, its orderly uniformity of traverse and fire-bay, backed by the dug-outs or sandbag huts, spread along behind it like native kraals in an African village.

Yes, if one must spend a portion of one's life holding trenches, there is a good deal to be said for the "Ferme du Bois—Right Sub-section" in July. However, our thirty-four days there was no holiday camp. We worked hard, and like ants defended and improved our hill, with listening posts, patrols, wiring and working parties by night, and trench construction by day. Moreover, we kept the enemy well aware of our presence, lest it should dawn on him we were rather a thin khaki line in front of him.

When, however, we come to look back we realise it was essentially a sniper's tour of duty, and our snipers—who had been brought to a high standard of efficiency under Lieut. P. U. Laws—seizing their opportunity, obtained a complete domination over their *vis-à-vis*. They began their activities on the 18th with a claim for five Germans. That evening our artillery breached the German parapet, and our Lewis guns played on the working party which attempted to repair it; our snipers took charge during the day, and when darkness fell the Lewis gunners continued their leaden spray—so that on the 20th the gap was still open. Our snipers added daily to their roll of victims; with the result that by the 22nd the enemy snipers were beginning to show signs of nervousness, and paid us the compliment of closing their loop-holes and removing their periscopes. They even went further, and put up a notice near the Ferme Cour l'Avoué: "Why fire when peace is so near?" Our snipers claimed three more victims as their reply to this *rapprochement*, and indeed, seldom failed to take a regular toll, on unassailable evidence. Their view of the enemy was so distinct that they were able to discern the details of the uniforms of the

regiment opposite. Unhappily their leader and trainer, Lieut. Laws, was slightly wounded while on patrol, and we lost him for some weeks. He had been out several nights reconnoitring in "No Man's Land," and had even on one occasion, with Private Appleby, gone to a ruin between the lines one evening, observed all day, and returned to our trenches the following night. For this valuable reconnaissance the Divisional Commander sent a special letter of congratulation and appreciation. Other important reconnaissances were carried out by Second Lieut. F. H. Chappell, Lance-Corporal Needham and Private Marriott. The tour continued with normal variations on these themes in addition to which there were by day artillery duels resulting in but little damage to our side, and Lewis and machine gun fire by night.

An element of novelty was introduced into the programme on the 29th, for at midnight the Engineers discharged gas from Quinque Crossing. The enemy "took it lying down" and did not retaliate, so we wondered if he ever inhaled it at all. We ourselves were very glad when the "all clear" signal at 12.30 a.m. relieved us of the old-pattern gas helmets which were still used in those days.

On the 30th the 116th Brigade on our left attacked the Boar's Head, and we took a subsidiary part in the operations, as we created a smoke barrage from our front line by means of P. bombs and smoke candles. This pyrotechnical display was a great success. There was something impressive and even exhilarating about the fringe of fire and smoke belching forth from the long length of our parapet, with our guns booming behind, shells whistling over our heads, and our machine guns adding to the din by their cracking and spitting. We began at 2.50 a.m. and ceased about 3.25 a.m. The enemy got his guns on to us in less than five minutes, and supported this retaliation with machine guns. His proportion of direct hits was more creditable to his gunners than pleasant for us, as he breached our parapet in a number of places—there being ten gaps on the left

Company front alone. As soon as our machine guns opened fire he sent up a number of red rockets, followed by green ones, but the significance of these was never made clear. Our punishment did not last long, as the enemy very soon found out that we were not the real offenders, and turned their attention to the 116th Brigade, who had successfully decapitated the Boar and reached the support line, but soon realised the salient in which they found themselves was too narrow and exposed to hold. They, therefore, retired later in the day.

During the attack our stretcher bearers, under Sergeant Trueman, did very good work by going out and bringing in many of the wounded from "No Man's Land." Our casualties were few—6 wounded. When day dawned our snipers dispersed a small working party, and the enemy continued desultory shelling for some time, with no result.

The first eleven days of July were typical of this long tour. They had a marked similarity, but no inanition, for none passed without a certain amount of bombardment varying from a hundred 4·77 to a half-dozen "whizz-bangs." These favours were distributed over a wide area—sometimes on one company front, sometimes on another, sometimes on the support line, and sometimes on Battalion Headquarters and the Rue du Bois. It was, generally speaking, remarkably ineffective; a break or two in the parapet, a dug-out "stove in," or unhappily a few casualties. Our machine guns were almost always active directly darkness fell, and our Lewis guns played on the gaps made by the artillery in the German parapet and kept these wounds open. Officers' patrols, sometimes more than one, were out for several hours, every night, but never actually collided with an enemy patrol. We had reason to believe they were about, for on July 1st a small listening patrol came in and reported a party of 10 to 15 Germans advancing on our wire. These were dispersed by rifle and Lewis gun fire, several being seen to get up and run towards their own lines. We could, however, never lure the enemy patrols into our traps, although a variety

of expedients was adopted. Once our patrols bombed the enemy trenches, once a working party at Ferme Cour l'Avoué, and on another occasion an enemy listening post. This latter "drew" the enemy, who next evening bombed the point in the hedge where our patrol had been the night before.

Our snipers continued active, and our diary of this period has many such entries as this:—

"At 6 p.m. our snipers observed water being bailed out of the enemy trenches, by means of a bucket—a man was seen to show himself, head and shoulders, during this work and was finally brought down by our man."

The following entries explain something of the infinite patience and persistent observation of detail which this work involved:—

"2/7/16.—An enemy sniper was shot by our snipers. The German method of work is (for the sniper) to wear a black mask on his head and fire over the top of black sandbags on the parapet, so that at the range at this point it is exceedingly difficult to spot him. One of our snipers laid in wait all the morning until his (the German's) position was given away by the flash of the rifle. Our man is convinced that he obtained a clean hit through the head, as the German was seen to fall forward, his rifle canting upward."

The enemy, however, was not easily quelled, for on July 7th we paid the following tribute to their perseverance:—

"In view of the increased hostile sniping activity of the last two days, we have been right down the line and put two or three steel-piercing bullets into every loophole that could be spotted."

On July 12th we carried out our second raid. In preparation for this, Second Lieut. H. S. Seabrook had reconnoitred the ground very carefully two nights before, and had located the point through the German wire where the entry into the trenches was to be made. The

operation was planned to be effected on a front of 160 yards. (S. 22. C. 45.65).

A raid is, in all respects, an eerie and awe-inspiring business—the terrific din of the preliminary bombardment, the crawl over the parapet, the slither through our wire, the plunge into the dark unknown—all tend to make the raider appreciate that the trenches he has up till then roundly abused for their discomfort are not such bad places after all, with the security and almost homeliness they seem to offer, manned as they are by his own "pals." If there is one point about a raid more than another which impresses one's imagination it is seeing one's comrades in the dim light assembled in the front line, with blackened faces, and one almost sympathises with the Germans who are suddenly, in their own abode, to find themselves confronted by these fearsome death-dealing "negroes." Thus we saw them just before 1.30 a.m. when our Artillery and Trench Mortars bombarded the enemy's lines. He retaliated heavily all along our front, breaching our parapet in several places, while Lieut. Seabrook and the raiders divided into three parties slipped quietly into "No Man's Land" and lay down. On the completion of the bombardment the raiders advanced to the enemy's wire and without difficulty found the gap which had been cut by our Trench Mortar Battery. They suffered several casualties both before and after getting through, as, unlike the German garrison at Givenchy, the enemy did not immediately seek refuge in the dug-outs, but gallantly defended themselves, and on turning to the left our party had to fight their way along the trench. Lieut. Seabrook and his orderly, Private Clements, bayoneted four of the enemy, and then, supported by his party, drove the rest of their opponents before them as they proceeded; these latter, including two German officers, retired into dug-outs as they fell back. Unfortunately, this progress was accomplished at the cost of the lives of Lieut. Seabrook and Private Clements, who were killed by bombs while

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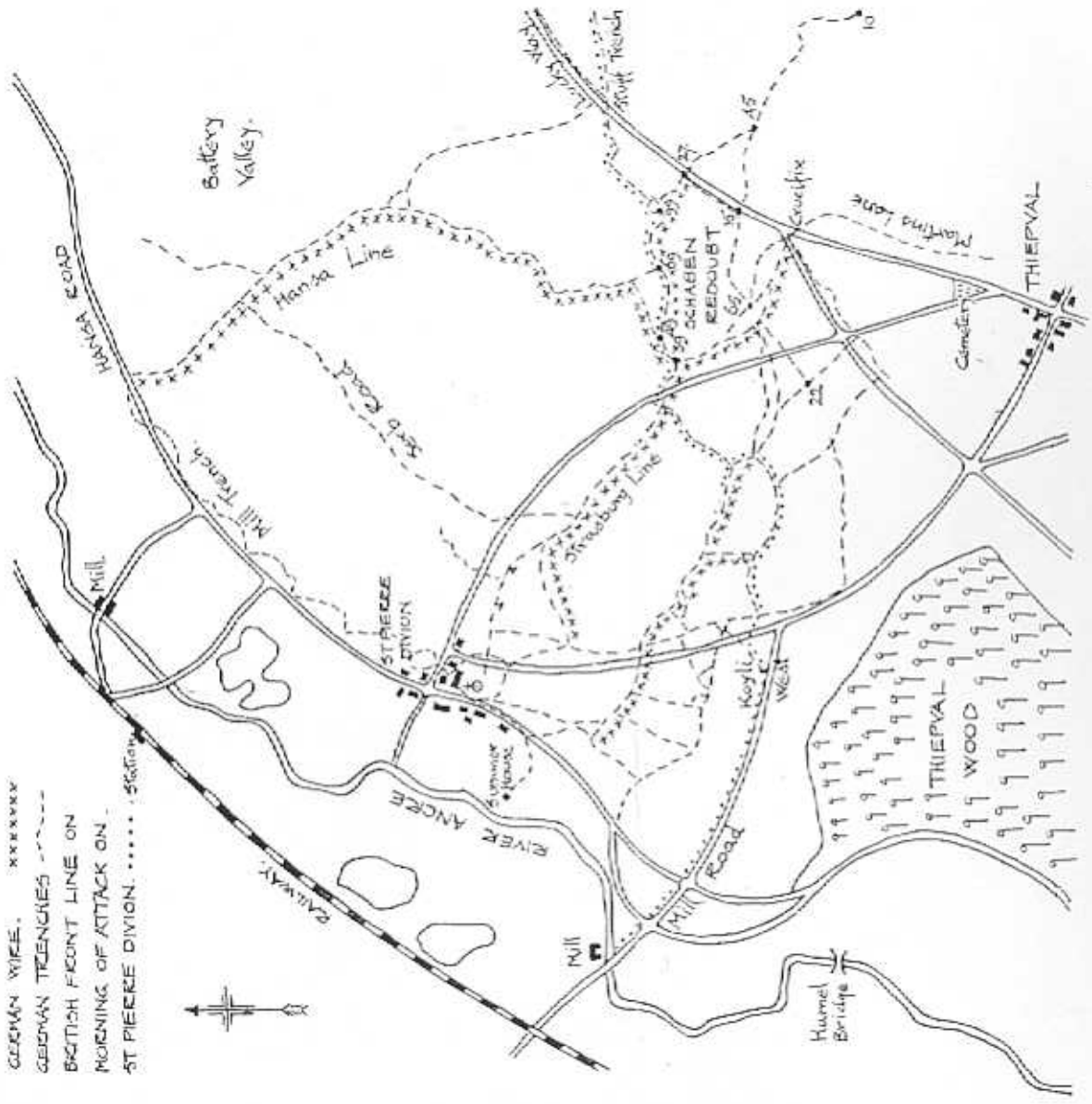


AREA OF SOMME BATTLES, 1916.

still leading the attack. Sergeant A. G. Hildreth then took command of the party, which pressed on for fifty yards, and passed four dug-outs full of Germans. These were bombed; one caught fire. In the meantime, there being no sign of the other two parties, Privates Hutchinson and Pegg had returned to the point of entry, and had obtained further bombs from our casualties. These were, however, soon exhausted. Finding that he was without ammunition and entirely unsupported and, therefore, unable to continue any offensive action, Sergeant Hildreth made arrangements for a withdrawal. This he conducted with great resource and ability, bringing the wounded with him; but at considerable risk, as his numbers were now very much reduced, and a strong counter-attack by the enemy while he was getting his party and his casualties through the wire must have made the position desperate. The German casualties were estimated at fourteen, in addition to many found killed by our artillery, but it was unfortunate that the party was unable to exploit its success to the full. It transpired later that the second party (and in consequence also the third) lost touch with Lieut. Seabrook's party very early in the action, and being unable to find their bearings, missed the gap in the enemy's wire. It was as a result of this miscarriage of the plan that Sergeant Hildreth found himself unsupported, and the greatest credit was due to him for having so successfully extricated his party from a difficult situation.

Our casualty list, including those killed and wounded in our line by enemy artillery, was, as has been shewn, unfortunately headed by Second Lieut. Seabrook, who had led the raiding party with conspicuous élan and gallantry—

Killed—

Second Lieut. H. S. Seabrook.

Second Lieut. N. C. Dawson, mortally wounded by artillery fire while serving his trench mortar in our front line.

1 Other Rank.

Wounded—
Second Lieut. J. R. Cholerton.
Second Lieut. C. J. Hart.
26 Other Ranks.
Missing (believed killed)—
2 Other Ranks.

On the 13th the Army Commander, General Sir Charles Monro, G.C.B., inspected one Officer and 15 other ranks of the raiding party at Loisne and congratulated them on their success, and on the 27th he presented military medal ribands to Sergeant Gilbert, Private J. Hutchinson, and Private T. E. Pegg, at Merville. Notification was received on the 29th that H.M. the King had conferred the D.C.M. on Sergeant A. G. Hildreth, who also received the following letter from Brig.-General R. D. F. Oldman, G.O.C. 117th Infantry Brigade :—

" I am very pleased to be able to congratulate you on getting your D.C.M. Every time the 16th Battalion Sherwood Foresters have tried conclusions with the enemy in his own trenches they have distinguished themselves. Your action was worthy of the highest praise, and you very well deserved your decoration.

" R. D. F. OLDMAN,
" *Commanding 117th Infantry Brigade.*"

Our normal Richebourg life was resumed the next day and continued with many events, but nothing outstandingly eventful, until we were relieved. The snipers were consistently successful, and more than once put steel-piercing bullets into every loophole opposite; the enemy artillery was rather more active, but in most cases responded to treatment from ours. Officer patrols were out every night and practically made " No Man's Land " our own, for the enemy seemed to leave that neutral area entirely to us.

The long tour came to a close on the 20th, when the front was taken over from us by the 12th and 13th Battalions Royal Sussex Regiment.

The total casualties during the thirty-four days were—
Killed—2 Officers ; 12 Other Ranks.
Wounded—4 Officers ; 85 Other Ranks.

Perhaps nothing could summarise this period of our life in France better or more concisely than the following, which appeared in Battalion Orders on the 21st :—

" The Commanding Officer wishes to thank all ranks for the soldierly spirit shown during their long tour in the Trenches at Ferme du Bois. The Battalion has been continuously in the front line trenches for a period of thirty-four days. Although the Battalion has undertaken no offensive on a large scale, they have been constantly engaged with the enemy. Patrols, listening posts, and wiring parties have entered ' No Man's Land ' nightly. One successful raid has been carried out, and much useful work done in strengthening and improving our defences."

During July Lieut. Max Jackson, a brother of our first Second-in-Command, joined us as Transport Officer, and Captain W. P. H. Munden, R.A.M.C., our Medical Officer, left us for duty with the Staff of the D.A.D.M.S., 39th Division. He was succeeded by Lieut. S. J. L. Lindeman, R.A.M.C.

We parted with Captain Munden with very great regret. He had been our Medical Officer for eight months, and had earned the gratitude of all ranks by his constant care, kindly sympathy and conscientious devotion to duty.

We spent from the 21st to the 24th as reserve to the 118th Infantry Brigade, in billets at Gorre and round the Tuning Fork, with Headquarters at Canal House, and on the latter date we proceeded to Bethune, and occupied the Ecole des Jeunes Filles once more, as Battalion in Brigade Reserve. Here we spent our time in resting, refitting and recreation, and on the 26th returned to the Tuning Fork to fill our former rôle.

The Second Visit to Givenchy and the March Southward

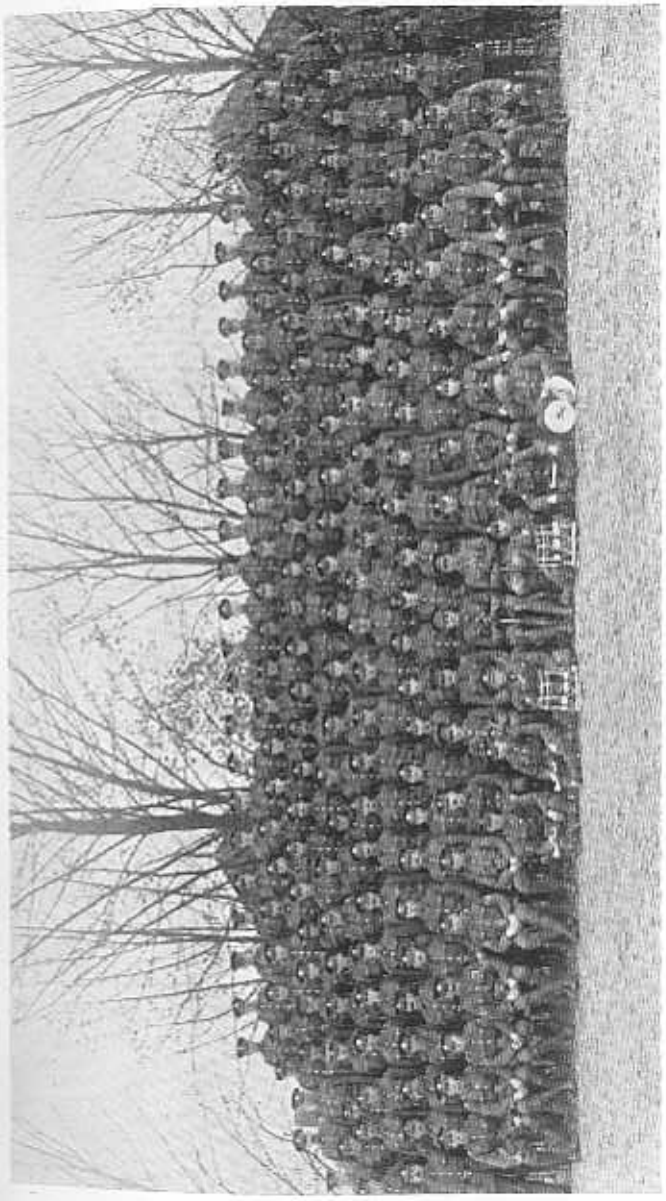
On August 1st we returned to the crater area in the Left Sub-section at Givenchy, with Battalion Headquarters again at South Moor Villa. Here we found that the enemy, whom we had left fairly quiet, was falling into bad habits again, and the situation needed attention. Every arm was active on both sides—artillery, sniping, rifle grenades and trench mortars. These last included the terrifying variety termed "rum jars," which soared aloft so high and were so difficult to judge in descent. One morning, at 2.15, this form of activity developed into a brisk duel, the enemy bombs falling near Poppy Redoubt, happily without much effect.

A variation was arranged on the 3rd, for our Sappers exploded a small mine south of F sap, west of the crater already in existence there, and in the approved style a crater party went out to occupy the lip. It was found, however, that it was unsuitable for consolidation. The enemy replied very quickly with rapid rifle fire, rifle grenades and trench mortars.

Their snipers were careful during our stay, but one of ours shot his *vis-à-vis* (who was looking over the edge of the sap opposite) through the head at forty yards.

We may sum up the events of this short return to familiar ground by saying the tour was in all respects very similar to the previous ones, but that in every way it was more active. As on the former occasions, we had the satisfaction of quieting the enemy's rifle grenades.

On the 6th we were relieved by the 14th Battalion Hampshire Regiment, and, leaving Givenchy for good, finished also our duty with the First Army. We proceeded to billets in Le Hamel and Essars, and spent one of our three days there being tested in the gas chambers at Le Touret—a valuable but unpleasant way of passing a morning. On the 9th we marched to Bethune and stayed for the last time in the Ecole des Jeunes Filles.



"C" Company, Aldershot, 1915.

Bethune since our last visit had undergone a severe trial, having been bombarded; much damage had been done, the hospital had been hit, and one of our own sick there had been wounded.

In the meantime the summons had come for the 39th Division to take its turn in the Battle of the Somme, which had now been in progress for six weeks. It had been arranged that we should march south and spend some days specially training for our part in the battle on the way.

We started on August 10th with some trepidation, as our long sojourn in the trenches had not fitted us for marching. However, we were encouraged by the fact that the health of the Battalion was excellent. We left our quarters in Bethune with some regret (the more so as we considerably reduced our kit for battle purposes), and marched that day to Auchel, where we slept. We continued our march the next day, and as on the first were favoured with glorious weather. On the road we were inspected by our new Divisional Commander, Major-General G. J. Cuthbert, C.B., C.M.G., who had a few days before succeeded Major-General Dawson. That evening we reached the village of La Thieuloye, where some fine farms and barns afforded us excellent accommodation. So far we had found our pedestrian qualities quite up to the demands made upon them. The march in good weather through smiling country had in fact been a refreshing change from the trenches. At La Thieuloye we immediately began business—Brigade Training from the smallest unit up to the whole formation—and a vast area had been allocated to us for the purpose, rolling, treeless country, with every variety of crop being raised on the open-field system. We were hard at it from morning till evening, and so short was the time available that even Sunday could not be spared for rest. As we embarked upon every sort of exercise, we even found out how rusty we had become in some of them, particularly in drilling on the square. The whole programme was

carefully directed to one object—to fit us for the great battle.

We were given maps and aeroplane photographs of the line of German trenches opposite Beaumont Hamel at the point where the Somme battle front turns from a north-west direction due north, and is cut at the angle by the River Ancre. On the large training area it was not difficult to find contours which approximated to those of Beaumont Hamel, and here we laboriously dug a system of model German trenches, driving them through the crops with the same lack of respect which the enemy no doubt had shown when he constructed the originals. We were even given the names of the main German trenches, and these we indicated in the usual manner by setting up sign boards. When the whole system of trenches was ready, we rehearsed attacks until we really felt we should know our way when we reached them; and we wound up our programme with a Grand Dress Rehearsal of an attack on the whole front, under the command of Brig.-General Oldman.

The day after—August 23rd—we continued our march southwards, sleeping that night at Buneville, the 24th at Neuvillette, and the 25th and 26th at Auchie, where we received a draft of 50 men. On the 28th we marched into Beaussart in fine spirits and with not a little exhilaration.

After the comfortable villages far behind the line through which we had just passed, Beaussart brought us back to realities with a jerk. In its day it must have been a well-favoured village, but it had been sadly knocked about. It offered, however, excellent accommodation compared with that which we were to experience later in this area, for the battered houses in most cases retained their roofs. The weather continued excellent, and our memories of the place are pleasant for another reason, *i.e.*, for the first time since we had left Steenbecque we were all billeted so near each other that the officers were able to resume a united Mess, and we had a very enjoyable reunion at the house allocated to Battalion Headquarters.

Up to this time the billets of each Company had been so scattered that Company Messes had become almost an established custom. From this time onwards, however, though occasionally it was necessary to revert to the latter system, we were never again forced by circumstances to give up the Battalion Mess for long. During our stay at Beaussart we were able to carry out training on a small and cautious scale, keeping a careful watch for enemy aircraft, which was of course busier than in the north. Those who were there will remember with very warm feelings of gratitude the kindness and hospitality extended to us by the 252nd Tunnelling Company, R.E., who, being permanently quartered in the village, were able to add much to its amenities, especially for those who like Monte Carlo. It seems strange to recall, moreover, that within a few days of our entry into the great battle we found conditions such that we were able to start football again, and enjoyed a hard-fought match between Companies.

Here, at Beaussart, we learnt that the 39th Division was to form part of the Reserve (later called the Fifth) Army, commanded by General Sir Hubert de la Poer Gough, K.C.B., and further that we were to be in the V Corps, under the orders of Lieut.-General A. E. Fanshawe, C.B.