BELL'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE SERIES
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TALES OF THE GREAT WAR

Uniform with this Volume

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THE SCENE OF ACTION A Collection of Eyewitness Accounts. Compiled by A. A. LE M. SIMPSON, Head of the English Department, Royal Grammar School, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

THE DETECTIVE IN FICTION A Posse of Eight. Selected by E. A. SEABORNE, Assistant Master at University College School.

SCENES FROM MODERN HISTORY by Great Imaginative Writers. Selected by HAROLD TEMPERLEY, Corresponding Fellow of the Czech National Academy.

TALES OF THE GREAT WAR

Selected from
the best war literature by

ERNEST RICHARDS
HEAD OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
LEEDS GRAMMAR SCHOOL

. . . . we band of brothers ;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.

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PREFACE

EVERY year on November 11th, the machinery of English life is stopped for two minutes – a simple but splendid reminder of the heroism and sacrifice which saved the nation from disaster in the dark years of the War. Such an act, however, only has full significance for those who are acquainted with the events it commemorates. It is therefore not unnatural that, while the desire to settle disputes between nations by some more rational means than force of arms is steadily gaining ground in all parts of the civilised world, the rising generation should be eager to obtain authentic information of what the last great war was like, of how men felt who were engaged in it, and of the conditions under which they fought. This information can easily be conveyed in the form of a continuous historical narrative, and if the only aim is to make clear the causes and course of the struggle, nothing more is required. A history, however, rarely conveys that intense impression of reality which is needed to stir the feelings as well as to convince the mind.

It must not be forgotten that war brings out the best as well as the worst in men. As Dr. Cyril Norwood has said: 'It is possible, usual and sensible, to show war for what it is, brutal and beastly, and yet to give due honour to the shining virtues which it calls forth. It is right to be proud of the bowmen of Crecy, the sailors who fought the Armada, the squares that stood fast at Waterloo, the incomparable infantry of the Somme.' In the Great War, men of all classes and every walk in

life found themselves fighting side by side, inspired by the same purpose and under conditions which forced upon them the realisation of their common humanity: the 'bond of brotherhood' thus created is one of the most splendid memories that the War has left us and may still actively influence our national life through such organisations as Toc H. Yet it is difficult to believe that even young men bored with the uneventfulness of peace would lightly consent to another war, when they have once been brought to realise how stupidly futile and wasteful, and how inhuman the last war was.

There seems to be room for a collection of representative extracts from War books, giving not only an accurate impression of the conditions of modern warfare, but providing also the element of human interest which arises from following the adventures of individual characters.

H. M. Tomlinson says: 'In truth the Great War was almost as many wars as there were men who were in it'; and nothing could give a truer view of it than to see it through the eyes of a number of participants, all reacting in different and characteristic ways and regarding their experiences from widely different points of view. This book is an attempt to meet the need: it is not an anthology of 'purple patches' (though many of the best writers on the War are represented), but a series of 'stories of action,' each as far as possible complete in itself. The extract from *Undertones of War* is an exception and is included to give some idea of life in the trenches in the intervals of 'action.' No attempt has been made to exhibit every type of fighting or to describe the fighting on all the different fronts; but, while the majority of the extracts necessarily deal with France, the War in the Air, the Navy, Gallipoli and

Mesopotamia have all been given a place. Some disappointment may be felt that this or that particular book is not represented: in some instances this is because no passage of the type sought could be found, and in others because permission to reprint had been refused by the author. As originally planned, this collection was intended to include extracts from foreign War literature also; but the field of choice among English War books proved so large that it was felt that a representative series of extracts from these would be more valuable than a heterogeneous collection from wider sources.

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that, except for the alteration of a few phrases, the passages selected have been reprinted without change. The question of whether the language of the trenches should be reproduced in a book intended for schools has been carefully considered; and the conclusion reached is that, since it forms an essential part of the total experience which the War represents to those who passed through it, to make any radical change (such as the total omission of swear-words) would be to distort the picture and leave an impression quite false in one important respect.

It would be impossible in a limited space to survey the flood of books on the War which have appeared in England since its outbreak: every great upheaval produces a literature of its own, though what is produced at the time is rarely the last word on the subject. The Napoleonic era had to wait a century for Thomas Hardy and *The Dynasts*, and the Great War may conceivably have to wait as long or longer before it achieves an expression commensurate with its importance. It may be of interest, however, to note one or two of the characteristics of the works so far produced.

While the War was in progress, innumerable accounts appeared describing the fighting in detail – these were of immediate interest but few had any permanent value. On the other hand a good deal of poetry was also produced, and of this a considerable amount is of high quality; our younger poets did indeed 'learn in suffering what they taught in song,' and we have only to think of Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, C. H. Sorley and Julian Grenfell to remember what havoc the War wrought among English poets. After the Armistice and the rapid collapse of the belief that England would be 'a land fit for heroes to live in,' a mood of disillusion set in and finds expression in such works as C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment*. A period of comparative quiescence followed: men seemed to want to forget what they had passed through and War books appeared only in small numbers. Then in 1928, both in this country and on the Continent, the bonds of memory were suddenly loosed and an endless stream of novels, memoirs and plays began to pour from the press. These include many works of great literary merit: the passage of time has allowed things to be seen in truer perspective, judgment has had time to mature and men who were still young in 1918 have become skilled craftsmen in the art of letters. Some specimens of their skill will be found in the pages which follow.

E. R.

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ALL the extracts given are complete in themselves. Gratitude must especially be expressed to the author of *A Subaltern's War* for his kindness in completely revising the passage entitled 'An Adventure on the Somme.' The compiler's sincere thanks for permission to reprint are due to the following: Major John Hay Beith and Messrs. William Blackwood & Sons for a chapter from *The First Hundred Thousand*; Mr. Paul Bewsher and Messrs. William Blackwood & Sons for a chapter from *Green Balls*; Mr. Edmund Blunden and Messrs. R. Cobden-Sanderson for a chapter from *Undertones of War*; Mr. C. E. Carrington and Messrs. Peter Davies Ltd., for a section from *A Subaltern's War*, the latter for an extract from *Her Privates We*; Mr. John Easton and The Scholartis Press for a passage from *Broadchalk*; Mr. Wilfred Ewart and Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons for a passage from *The Way of Revelation*; Mr. Robert Graves and Messrs. Jonathan Cape for a passage from *Good-Bye to All That*; the Hon. Mrs. Herbert and Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., for a passage from *Mons, Anzac and Kut*; Capt. Norman Macmillan, M.C., A.F.C., and Messrs. Duckworth for a chapter from *Into the Blue*; Mr. John Masefield and Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., for a passage from *Gallipoli*; Mrs. C. E. Montague and Messrs. Chatto & Windus for a story from *Fiery Particles*; Mr. R. H. Mottram and Messrs. Chatto & Windus for a chapter from *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four*; Mr. Eric Partridge and

The Scholartis Press for a passage from *Frank Honywood, Private*; Mr. Herbert Read and Messrs. Faber & Faber for a passage from *In Retreat*; Mr. Edward Thompson and Messrs. Alfred A. Knopf for a passage from *These Men, Thy Friends*; Mr. H. M. Tomlinson and Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., for a passage from *All Our Yesterdays*; and Messrs. Hutchinson Ltd. and the Editors for a passage from *The Fighting at Jutland*.

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1

MONS

AUBREY HERBERT

¶ On August 4, 1914, England declared war on Germany, after the latter had refused to guarantee that the neutrality of Belgium would be respected. The British Expeditionary Force first came into contact with the invading German Army on August 23, in the neighbourhood of Mons. The failure of the French offensive and the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy compelled a retreat: the Retreat from Mons has passed into history as one of the most splendid achievements of British endurance – but for the heroic resistance of our troops and the check inflicted on von Kluck at Le Cateau, the successful turning of the tide of invasion at the Battle of the Marne would probably not have been possible.

The late Lt.-Col. the Hon. Aubrey Herbert, son of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, joined the Irish Guards as an Interpreter after experience in the Diplomatic service and as M.P. for Yeovil. He kept a diary of his adventures in France, at the Dardanelles and in Mesopotamia, which he published in 1919 under the title of *Mons, Anzac and Kut* (Hutchinson & Co.). He described the volume as 'a chronicle of events within limited horizons,' and stated that the section from which our extract is taken was 'dictated in hospital from memory and rough notes made on the Retreat from Mons.'

This passage describes the second part of the Retreat up to the time when the author was wounded near Soissons; the diary form provides us with a number of vivid pictures, admirably recapturing that impression of mingled confusion and excitement which was for the author 'a great deal of fun.'

SEPTEMBER 1st. The next morning we got up at 2 o'clock. The Army was passing all round us already. It was like the sound of deep, slow rivers. For

the first and last time we took a wrong turning, only for a couple of hundred yards. This was the only mistake I saw at all in the long march. After two hours we halted, and S. and I sat under a dripping tree and talked about the West Country. At the beginning S. had said to me: 'I shall be very disappointed if I go home without seeing a fight, but the worst of it is you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, and I don't want to see my friends killed.' I said to him: 'You are going to get your omelette all right now.' Some constituents[1] passed me. They said: 'This be terrible dangerous. Do'ee come along with we.'

Moonshine[2] would eat nothing, and this worried me. I had become very fond of her.

At about 6 o'clock we halted on what I knew to be a tragic plain. In my mind I associate this plain with turnips, though I am not sure that any grew there. There was stubble, high and wet lucerne, and a mournful field where corn had been cut but not carried. We sat about on the wet, muddy ground for breakfast, while a thin, dismal rain fell.

The C.O. called us round and gave us our orders. He said: 'We are required to hold this wood until 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We may have to fight a rearguard action until a later hour if there is a block in the road. We are to retire upon Rond de la Reine.' After this we breakfasted on hot cocoa; it tasted of vaseline or paraffin, but it was warm.

It was apparent that if the First Division took long over their luncheon we should be wiped out. By this time every one had got their second wind, their feet were hard and they were cheerful. Jumbo said he could go on walking for ever. I talked to Alex and agreed that we had seen a great deal of fun together.

[1] The author was M.P. for Yeovil. [2] The writer's horse.

He had said, while we were crossing the Channel, that it was long odds, not, of course, against some of us going back, but against any particular one of us seeing it through. This was now visibly true; we believed that we were three divisions against twenty-one or even twenty-eight German divisions. I wrote two letters, one of them a eulogy of Moonshine. I went to Desmond, asking him to post them. He said crossly: 'You seem to think that Adjutants can work miracles. Charles asks for letters under fire, you want to post them on the battlefield. It is quite useless to write letters now.'

He then borrowed some of my paper and wrote a letter. I have the picture in my mind of Desmond constantly sitting, in very tidy breeches, writing and calling for sergeants. We had little sleep. He never seemed to sleep at all. He was woken all the time and was always cheerful. We had nothing to do for a bit, and I read scraps about cemeteries from Shakespeare, to irritate the others. They remained cheerful. Then we moved off to the wood. Nobody had any illusions about the immediate future. One man said to me: 'I may live to see many battles; I think I shall, for I am very keen on my profession, but I shall never forget this plain or this morning.' It must have been about 7.30 when we went into the wood. No. 4 held the extreme right; they were protected by a wall, which they loopholed, and a wire fence outside. No. 3 was next on a road that ran through the heart of the wood to Rond de la Reine. I did not see Tom; I thought I was sure to see him some time in the morning. Stubbs was behind No. 3, down in the village (I forget the name). The C.O. said to me: 'I want you to gallop for me to-day, so stick to me.' I lost him at once in the wood behind No. 4, but rode right down to a deserted

farm and, swinging to my right, found him at the cross-roads.

I had seen a good deal of him the last days. He had a very attractive personality, and it was a delight to hear him talk about anything. I asked him what chance he thought we had of getting more than half of us away. He said he thought a fairly good chance. Then he said to me: 'How is your rest-cure getting on now? There is very little that looks like manœuvres in the millennium about this, is there?' I had told him some time before that I looked upon this expedition as a rest-cure, as in some ways it was. We talked about Ireland and Home Rule, riding outside the wood. The grey, damp mist had gone and the day was beautiful.

He sent me first to Hubert, Second-in-Command, with the order that in the retreat every officer was to retire down the main road, with the exception of Stubbs, who was to retire as he liked. I imagine that he was afraid that men would be lost in the wood. By this time the firing had begun, some way off, but our men could see the Germans coming over the rising land. The C.O. ordered me to find Colonel Pereira of the Coldstream Guards and tell him that, as soon as our own troops, now fighting the Germans in front of him, fell back through his lines, he was to fall back himself.

I went off at a hand gallop, and had got halfway there, with the wood on my left and open land on my right, when the Germans began shooting at about three-quarters of a mile. Our men were firing at them from the wood, and I felt annoyed at being between two fires and the only thing visible to amuse our men and the Germans. I turned into the wood, and, galloping down a sandy way, found the road filled with

refugees with haunted faces. We had seen crowds of refugees for days, but I felt sorrier for these. I suppose it was that the Germans were so very near them. I gave my message to Pereira, who advised me to go back through the wood, but I knew the other way and thought I should soon be past the German fire. I had not, however, counted on their advancing so quickly. When I came to the edge of the wood they were firing furiously – shrapnel, machine gun and rifle fire. Our men had excellent cover, and were answering. I then tried to make my way through the wood, but it was abominably rough. There were ferns and brambles waist-high, and great ditches; the wood was very beautiful with its tall trees, but that, at the moment, was irrelevant. Moonshine stood like a goat on the stump of a tree that made an island among the ditches, and I turned back to take the way by the open fields. When I got outside the fire had grown very bad. I raced for an orchard that jutted out of the wood. Bullets hummed and buzzed. Coming to it, I found that there was wire round it. I then popped at full speed, like a rabbit, into the wood again, through a thicket, down an enormous ditch, up the other side, bang into some barbed wire, which cut my horse. It was like diving on horseback. I turned round and galloped delicately out again, riding full tilt round the orchard.

I found the Colonel, who was standing under shelter at the cross-roads to the left of the road, facing the enemy, that led through the heart of the wood. He mounted the bank and watched the Germans advancing. I sat under the bank with M. and Alex. The German shells began to fall close to us, knocking the trees about in the wood. There were some sergeants very excited and pleased at the idea of a fight. They

said: 'Now has come the time for deeds, not words.' They felt that they were the men of the moment.

We considered whether the Germans were likely to charge down the road along which I had come, but thought we could hold them effectively in check from our corner and that the fire from the wood would reach them.

It was, I suppose, now about 10.30. Desmond, the Colonel and I rode back into the big, green wood. It was very peaceful. The sun was shining through the beech-trees, and for a bit the whole thing seemed unreal. The C.O. talked to the men, telling them to reserve their fire till the Germans were close on them. 'Then you will kill them and they won't get up again.' That made them laugh. The German advance began very rapidly. The Coldstreamers must have begun falling back about this time. The Germans came up in front and on our left flank. There was a tremendous fire. The leaves, branches, etc., rained upon one. One's face was constantly fanned by the wind from their bullets. This showed how bad their fire was. My regiment took cover very well, and after the first minute or two fired pretty carefully. Moonshine was startled to begin with by the fire, but afterwards remained very still and confidential. Desmond did not get off his horse; he told me to lead my horse back into the wood and then come back to the firing line. The Colonel then told me to gallop up to the Brigadier to say that the retreat was being effectively carried out; that there were two squadrons advancing and he did not know what force of infantry. In this estimate he was very much out, as subsequent events proved. Eric, now at home wounded, said to me: 'The Germans seemed hardly to have an advance guard; it was an army rolling over us.' When I found the Brigadier he

wanted to know if the C.O. seemed happy about things. I said I thought on the whole he did. There were bullets everywhere and men falling, but the fire was still too high. One bullet in about half a million must have hit a man. I returned to the Colonel. Our men had then begun to retire down the main road to Rond de la Reine. A galloper came up and, as far as I heard, said that we were to hang on and not retreat yet. This officer was, I think, killed immediately after giving his message. The Colonel said that the Coldstreamers had already begun to retreat, that we couldn't hold on there, but must go back to the position we had left. We were ordered to resume the position which Hubert had been told to leave. The Germans were by this time about 250 yards away, firing on us with machine guns and rifles. The noise was perfectly awful. In a lull the C.O. said to the men: 'Do you hear that? Do you know what they are doing that for? They are doing that to frighten you.' I said to him: 'If that's all, they might as well stop. As far as I am concerned, they have succeeded, two hours ago.'

The men were ordered to charge, but the order was not heard in the noise, and after we had held this position for some minutes a command was given to retreat. Another galloper brought it, who also, I think, was shot. Guernsey, whom I met with his company, asked me to gallop back and tell Valentine he must retire his platoon; he had not received the order. I found Valentine and got off my horse and walked him some yards down the road, the Germans following. He, like everybody else, was very pleased at the calm way the men were behaving.

I mounted and galloped after the Colonel, who said: 'If only we could get at them with the bayonet, I believe one of our men is as good as three of theirs.' He

started in the direction of the Brigadier. Men were now falling fast. I happened to see one man drop with a bayonet in his hand a few yards off, and reined in my horse to see if I could help him, but the C.O. called me and I followed him. The man whom I had seen was Hubert, though I did not know it at the time. The C.O. said: 'It is impossible now to rescue wounded men; we have all we can do.' He had a charmed life. He raced from one place to another through the wood; cheering the men and chaffing them, and talking to me; smoking cigarette after cigarette. Under ordinary conditions one would have thought it mad to ride at the ridiculous pace we did over the very broken ground, but the bullets made everything else irrelevant. At about 1 o'clock we went up to the Brigadier at the corner of the road. The fighting there was pretty hot. One of the men told the Colonel that Hubert was killed. The Colonel said: 'Are you sure ?' The man said: 'Well, I can't swear.' I was sent back to see. The man said he was about 400 yards away, and as I galloped as hard as I could, G. called to me: 'To the right and then to the left.' As I raced through the wood there was a cessation of the firing, though a number of shots came from both sides. They snapped very close. I found Hubert in the road we had been holding. I jumped off my horse and put my hand on his shoulder and spoke to him. He must have been killed at once, and looked absolutely peaceful. He cannot have suffered at all. I leant over to see if he had letters in his pocket, when I heard a whistle 25 or 30 yards behind me in the wood. I stood up and called: 'If that is an Englishman, get outside the wood and up to the corner like hell; you will be shot if you try and join the rest through the wood. The Germans are between us.' I bent over to pick up Hubert's bayonet, when again

a whistle came and the sound of low voices, talking German. I then thought the sooner I was away the better. As I swung into the saddle a shot came from just behind me, missing me. I rode back as fast as Moonshine could go. The lull in the firing had ceased, and the Germans were all round us. One could see them in the wood, and they were shooting quite close. The man who finally got me was about 15 to 20 yards away; his bullet must have passed through a tree or through Bron's greatcoat, because it came into my side broken up. It was like a tremendous punch. I galloped straight on to my regiment and told the Colonel that Hubert was dead. He said: 'I am sorry, and I am sorry that you are hit. I am going to charge.' He had told me earlier that he meant to if he got the chance.

I got off and asked them to take on my horse. Then I lay down on the ground and an R.A.M.C. man dressed me. The Red Cross men gave a loud whistle when they saw my wound, and said the bullet had gone through me. The fire was frightfully hot. The men who were helping me were crouching down, lying on the ground. While he was dressing me a horse – his, I suppose – was shot just behind us. I asked them to go, as they could do me no good and would only get killed or taken themselves. The doctor gave me some morphia, and I gave them my revolver. They put me on a stretcher, leaving another empty stretcher beside me. This was hit several times. Shots came from all directions, and the fire seemed to be lower than earlier in the day. The bullets were just above me and my stretcher. I lost consciousness for a bit; then I heard my regiment charging. There were loud cries and little spurts of spasmodic shooting; then everything was quiet and a deep peace fell upon the wood. It was very dreamlike.

It is really very difficult to reconstruct this fight. I think every man's attention was fixed like iron on doing his own job, otherwise they would all have noticed more. I carry in my mind a number of very vivid pictures – Desmond on his horse, Valentine and I discussing fatalism, the C.O. smoking cigarettes in the cinema holders that I had bought for him a few days before.

As I lay on the stretcher a jarring thought came to me. I had in my pocket the flat-nosed bullets which the War Office had served out to us as revolver ammunition. They are not dum-dum bullets, but they would naturally not make as pleasant a wound as the sharp-nosed ones, and it occurred to me that those having them would be shot. I searched my pockets and flung mine away. I did not discover one which remained and was buried later on – but neither did the Germans. It was first hearing German voices close by that jogged my memory about these bullets, and the Germans were then so close that I felt some difficulty in throwing the bullets away. The same idea must have occurred to others, for later I heard the Germans speaking very angrily about the flat bullets they had picked up in the wood, and saying how they would deal with anyone in whose possession they were found.

The glades became resonant with loud, raucous German commands and occasional cries from wounded men. After about an hour and a half, I suppose, a German with a red beard, with the sun shining on his helmet and bayonet, came up looking like an angel of death. He walked round from behind, and put his serrated bayonet on the empty stretcher by me, so close that it all but touched me. The stretcher broke and his bayonet poked me. I enquired in broken but

polite German what he proposed to do next; after reading the English papers and seeing the way he was handling his bayonet, it seemed to me that there was going to be another atrocity. He was extraordinarily kind and polite. He put something under my head; offered me wine, water, and cigarettes. He said: 'Wir sind Kameraden.' Another soldier came up and said: 'Why didn't you stay in England – you who made war upon the Boers?' I said: 'We obeyed orders, just as you do; as for the Boers, they were our enemies and are now our friends, and it is not your business to insult wounded men.' My first friend then cursed him heartily, and he moved on.

The Germans passed in crowds. They seemed like steel locusts. Every now and then I would hear: 'Here is an officer who talks German,' and the crowd would swerve in like a steel eddy. Then: 'Schnell, Kinder[1]!' and they would be off. They gave a tremendous impression of lightness and iron. After some hours, when my wound was beginning to hurt, some carriers came up to take me to a collecting place for the wounded. These men were rather rough. They dropped me and my stretcher once, but were cursed by an officer. They then carried me some distance, and took me off the stretcher, leaving me on the ground. The Germans continued to pass in an uninterrupted stream. One motor cyclist, but with a bayonet in his hand, was very unpleasant. He said: 'I would like to put this in your throat and turn it round and round,' waving it down to my nose. That sort of thing happened more than once or twice, but there were always more friends than enemies, though as night fell the chance of being left without friends increased. As it grew dark, I got

[1] 'Quick my lads!'

rather cold. One of the Germans saw this, covered me with his coat, and said: 'Wait a moment, I will bring you something else.' He went off, and, I suppose, stripped a dead Englishman and a dead German. The German jersey which he gave me had no holes in it; the Englishman's coat had two bayonet cuts.

The wounded began to cry dreadfully in the darkness. I found myself beside Robin, who was very badly wounded in the leg. The Germans gave me water when I asked for it, but every time I drank it made me sick. At, I suppose, 9.30 or 10 p.m. they took us off into an ambulance and carried us to a house that had been turned into a hospital. I was left outside, talking to a Dane, who was very anti-German, though he was serving with them as a Red Cross man. He cursed them loudly in German. He said it was monstrous that I hadn't been attended to, that the Germans had had a defeat, and would be beaten. I said: 'Yes, it's all true, but please stop talking, because they'll hear you and punish me.'

Just before 12 o'clock they carried me into the hospital on to the operating table, and dressed my wound quickly.

Then I was helped out to an outhouse and lay beside Robin. It was full of English and German wounded. They gave us one drink of water and then shut and locked the door and left us for the night.

2

THE WAY OF REVELATION

WILFRED EWART

¶ Published in 1921, *The Way of Revelation* (G. P. Putnam's Sons Ltd.) opens in London on the eve of the War – a London of light and laughter, hurry and bustle, intent on the business of the moment without 'foreboding of an impending judgment upon humanity.' But 'illusion' is soon shattered, and the two young men round whose lives the story is woven are destined to tread a 'way of revelation' which leads the one to death and the other through suffering to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life.

The following episode describes a British attack in which Adrian Knoyle and Eric Sinclair were both wounded; it forms part of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. The use of the 'heavy high-explosive shells' referred to in the extract was a new idea at this time – one, however, which failed to ensure the great victory hoped for.

DAWN broke across the Flanders plain in streaks of black and ashen-grey, shedding upon the countryside a cheerless light. They soon left the road along which they had been marching, and in single file followed a light ammunition railway across fields. No word was spoken. It was all a man could do to pick his way along the narrow track on either side of which lay liquid mud. Now and again they met parties of weary Highlanders trudging back from the firing-line. In the distance a gun boomed. Close at hand another answered. One by one that sullen booming was taken up along the line behind.

As the light grew, bullets began to whiz and hum

above their heads, making every variety of odd sound. First occasionally, then increasingly until the air sang with them. Quite close in front there was a sudden little burst of rifle-fire like the crackling of dry sticks. They came to a road swarming with troops. It was the front line.

All were ordered to press close together behind a high, thick sandbag breastwork. Shells were bursting on and behind the road with an accuracy that was evidenced by the loud, childlike whimperings of men who had fallen or were crawling along it. Bullets, too, pattered against the breastwork's outer face.

They formed a sort of line. Orde looked at his watch. The advance was timed for seven o'clock. There were ten minutes to go. The two friends crouched close together. Eric was asking questions of his men, making suggestions to his platoon-sergeant, and giving orders in sharp, business-like tones. He seemed to know exactly what was expected of him; Adrian looked on, anxious to do whatever the situation demanded, but chiefly conscious of his own inadequacy.

Glancing along the line, he could just see Pemberton's smiling face. Pemberton was all there; Pemberton was equal to the occasion; was he not directing and inspiring his men? All that was most likeable in the fellow seemed to radiate from him at this moment: his simplicity, his solidity, his stolidity. Adrian studied the faces of individual soldiers; some of them wore a smile, some were unnaturally composed, some sickly-white. He was very frightened, nevertheless tried to compose his own to an unemotional rigidity. The word to 'fix bayonets' was passed down. A long-drawn rasping sound followed. His platoon-sergeant – a hulking fellow, already the hero of battles – said to a friend, 'Don't stick me, Jimmy!' and laughed.

The colonel of the battalion came along, with his adjutant, shouting bloodthirsty expletives in a sort of fox-hunting vernacular.

Orde had his whistle between his lips; every man's head turned that way. In that moment, Adrian saw Orde in flannels on a tennis-court.

Every man was poised in a crouching attitude, with one foot on the side of the breastwork and one on the ground. It was like waiting for the start of a race. Above the crash of the bursting shells and the gradually increasing crackle of musketry he could hear his Colonel bawling:

'One – two – three ! . . . Now, boys !'

Orde's whistle blew. Adrian caught sight of his lean figure on the skyline – and himself and everybody else clambered on to the parapet. But he found he could not run. He could only flounder and stumble forward through the mud. He had to leap trenches. He had to extricate himself from loose strands of barbed wire which snared him by the puttees. He barely apprehended a landscape that consisted of yellowish-brown mud, watery shell-holes, piles and rows of whitish sandbags, crooked iron stakes with bits of barbed wire hanging from them, one or two splintered stumps of trees. A hundred yards of this, and he saw low, irregular heaps of battered sandbags immediately in front – beyond these a shallow ditch. He saw the man on his right throw himself flat. They all threw themselves flat. One or two grey heaps of clothes and some pieces of revetting material lay about. He conjectured that they were in the German front line, and not a German to be seen – except those muddy grey heaps.

The men crowded into the ditch and behind the sandbags, but there was not room for everybody – or shelter from the bullets. The big sergeant who had said

'Don't stick me, Jimmy!' suddenly jumped up with a shout. Adrian thought he had seen a German, and shouted 'where?' But the man began groaning and sobbing, his hands clasping his forehead, from which blood poured down his face. Once, when a boy, Adrian had seen a man bleeding after an accident, and it had turned him faint. This sight only filled him with a grave wonder and disgust.

Every other moment somebody was hit. It was like shooting down animals. Every other moment he heard the half-strangled shout or whimpering cry which told of a man killed or wounded. Two or three soldiers lay propped, half-conscious, against sandbags, looking like stuffed figures. One, near him, lay stretched motionless. Then the line jumped up again. Now he lost sight of Orde, but he could see Eric away to the right loping across an open stretch of plough. An old grey-haired soldier in his platoon, with whom he had made friends in the trenches, tumbled down, shot through the stomach. His instinct was to stop and give succour, until he recollected that it was not a street accident but a battle. They dived under a strand of barbed wire and streamed diagonally in batches across an enclosure. He felt he must do all he could to keep his men together. No regular formation was possible in such ground – the men followed their officers in groups, or singly, as best they could. How the bullets hummed, sizzled, and zipped! . . . They came to another breastwork which afforded better protection than the last. It was the second line of German trenches – and still no sign of a living German. In front of them the ground had been blown into a mound some forty feet high by the action of heavy high-explosive shells. The soil had been hollowed and scarred and rent into a great cavity which provided a last shelter for many – a pit

of horror indescribable. Here all the refuse, all the material of the neighbouring trenches, seemed to have fallen. Many German dead lay here, grey and bloody amid the upturned earth. By itself lay the body of a British soldier, the face covered with a piece of white tarpaulin. Adrian vaguely wondered how anyone had found time to perform that act. All the trivial things of life lay here – biscuit-tins, scraps of food, hand-mirrors, ration tins, boots, books even. And everywhere litter of equipment – black shiny German helmets with the golden eagle emblazoned on the front, German caps and accoutrements, rifles, clips of bullets, pistols, weapons of all kinds. . . . The tradition of blood and iron seemed to have found its consummation in that one place.

Out of the pit they clambered, and up the mound beyond; and then along a kind of ridge. A small river or large ditch of stagnant water had been bridged at one place by a plank which had broken down. As he approached this a high-explosive shell burst with a staggering concussion and reek of gunpowder on the farther bank. Adrian's inclination was to throw himself flat, but it was not a time to hesitate. He waded through the greenish, sulphur-streaked water, which rose to the level of his chest; his rifle, clogged with mud, was already useless. Then he came upon Orde. Orde was lying back in the arms of his orderly, his face yellow and so twisted as to be hardly recognisable. Adrian threw himself on his knees beside his company-commander.

'Cyril!' he shouted. 'Cyril!' – the guns were deafening – 'where are you hit?'

'The shell got him full,' the orderly said. 'I fell flat; he went right on.'

Adrian could just hear Orde's whisper:

'It's got me – all over the place. Go on . . . and good luck !'

He made a feeble gesture as though to urge his subaltern forward.

The latter obeyed though to do so seemed an outrage on friendship and the humanities. He stumbled across a ploughed field heavy with recent rains. Men were falling right and left. Khaki heaps dotted the open ground like milestones. Some of his men had got slightly ahead in the race; others, unwilling to face the stream of bullets, were crawling forward on knees and elbows. Eric he could just see drop down into a slight depression in front. Here the thin line began to re-form itself, everybody wanting breath.

He made for Eric. A number of men of various regiments and battalions formed an increasingly thick firing-line on either side of them. Through the mist he could see skeletons of trees and the tall red-brick chimney of the Moulin de Piêtre – their objective.

When he had flung himself down, it took several moments to recover breath. Then:

'Cyril's done for.'

'Good lord ! Killed ?'

'Knocked over by a shell a couple of hundred yards back. What's to be done ?'

Eric thought a moment.

'I suppose I'd better take charge as I was second-in-command. We'll have to rush that damned mill. Come on ! Tell your chaps to get ready.'

Adrian afterwards recalled how naturally, how inevitably, how unconsciously indeed in that moment of peril he had accepted the leadership of his friend – reversal of their old relationship though it was. He crawled along to where some of his own platoon were lying.

Bullets were humming overhead like flocks of hurricane-driven birds; a machine-gun was enfilading from some vantage-point. The Moulin de Piêtre was evidently a formidable nest of Germans.

Both realised that it was the critical moment.

Eric's voice snapped out the cautionary words. His whistle blew. . . .

With what was left of his platoon Adrian started forward. He leapt a ditch. Two strands of barbed wire lay in his path – all the world seemed concentrated in those two obstinate strands. Interminable, intolerable moments passed. Men fell against the wire, groaning, lopsided, and were riddled with bullets. . . . Himself was violently struck. He staggered. He shouted out, thinking that some concealed enemy had hit him with the butt-end of a rifle. He felt a thudding pain in his right thigh, and fell backwards into the green, brackish water of the ditch.

Someone dragged him out. A voice said :

'Are you hurt, sir ?'

He realised that he was wounded.

For a long time he lay on his face. His leg ached and was limp and helpless. Presently it lost all feeling. He heard them pass down word that he was wounded; he wondered what had happened to Eric. He took his little phial of iodine from his haversack and tried to reach the bullet-wound. That was painful and too difficult.

Most of those lying around were wounded. Two or three dead lay near. It seemed that the line of advancing men, mown down here, would get no further.

Then he saw Eric coming to him. He came over the top of the ground without haste, and knelt on one knee as Adrian himself had done beside Orde.

'Where is it? Thigh? Keep still and let's have a look.'

'Lie down, Eric, for God's sake, or you'll get a bullet through the head!'

'Lie down, sir! Lie down!' voices shouted from all sides. 'They can see you!'

'All right! All right! I know what I'm doing. Now then——'

He slit the coarse khaki material with his clasp-knife, examined the tiny punctured wound and applied a phial of iodine. He then began carefully to bind up the wound.

Shrapnel burst low with a shattering crash. Eric's hands gradually ceased in their task: he sank very slowly backward. As he did so, he clasped the back of his head with fingers through which blood trickled. In his own helpless state Adrian could not raise himself sufficiently to reach his friend.

Eric rolled gently over on his face and lay still. A spasm of fear amounting almost to certainty, shot through Adrian's mind. Eric was dead! He shouted for help. The groans of the wounded answered. Through the other's clasped fingers blood continued to ooze.

A kind of ghastly stagnation descended upon the battlefield. Through the smoke and the mist and the noise the tall, red-brick chimney continued to stare down at them with maddening serenity. An unceasing stream of bullets came from it, but bullets also came from their right flank and even from their right rear. A machine-gun enfiladed them with a monotonous 'clack-clack-clack' at regular intervals. Regular as a heart's beat, minute by minute, came the wail of high-explosive shells. These skimmed their heads, bursting

every time a few yards behind. Bits of iron hummed through the air and hit the ground on either side, hissing hot. Showers of earth and stones fell upon the back and neck. The earth around was soon tainted a yellowish-green. Hands and uniforms assumed the same colour. Adrian silently prayed for the end.

Then to his unspeakable relief, Eric raised his head and looked round. His face, papery-white and smeared with earth and blood, was indescribably shocking. Adrian had never conceived of his friend so. The first thing the company-commander did was to drink from his flask. He then took out his handkerchief and proceeded to roll it into a bandage.

'Gurr-r-r,' he sputtered. 'Are you there, Adrian?'

'Yes. . . . Thank the Lord! I thought you were done in.'

'I've got a bit of shrapnel in the back of the head. How difficult it all is! I must have fainted or something.'

'Keep still, or you'll faint again!'

'I shall be all right in a minute – if only – I can – blast it! – get this bandage fixed.'

'What's to be done?'

'Oh! hang on here and dig in. You and the other cripples had better make your way back. Wait till the shelling slacks off a bit, though.'

'What about you?'

'I've only got a scratch. You've got a leg. If you can crawl – crawl.'

'Plenty of time when you go.'

'Don't be an ass! If you can crawl – crawl.'

'Why?'

'Because I tell you to.'

'I can still shoot.'

'Yes, but you can't run. Frankly, you'll be quite

dreadfully in the way. Go – quit – hop it, there's a good boy !'

But the moment had not yet come. There had been a brief pause in the racket of shelling. Now it began again with redoubled fury – the whistle and roar, the ear-splitting crash, the sulphur reek, the showers of earth and stones. Behind, in front, the clamour of the guns never paused. Boom – boom – boom – boom ! A German field battery was firing salvoes at short range, and Adrian thought the four clockwork piercing reports at intervals would drive him crazy. Bang – bang – bang – bang. Away to the right lyddite was bursting in clouds of sulphuric smoke amid the ruins of Neuve Chapelle. An aeroplane sailed overhead. He longed to be in it, to be at least *above* all this, with one turn of a lever to sail back and in a few moments leave behind the fumes and the flames and the noise. Shrapnel cracked low, enormous high-explosive shells burst a short distance away, throwing up fountains of earth amid billowing black smoke. Rifles spat at intervals, more often a machine-gun swept round. The boom – boom – boom – boom of the German field-battery went on. Once or twice only in those weary hours was there a minute's complete silence – like the pause that now and then falls upon an animated conversation – and then they could hear a lark sing.

Late in the afternoon the opportunity for reorganisation came. Guns and men seemed to have grown weary of killing; at least to have grown weary of shooting at that which they could not see. Eric gave the word to dig in, and those who could began working feverishly with their entrenching-tools. A medical officer and two stretcher-bearers came up over the open and set to tending the more desperately wounded. Eric passed the word:

'All wounded to the rear!'

He turned to his subordinate.

'Now be off – and good luck!'

That tone of admonition admitted no dispute; and with a heart heavy for his friend, Adrian started to crawl back aided by both elbows and one foot. Halfway across the ploughed field the shelling began again. He now found himself in the centre of the shell-area, of which the firing-line was slightly in advance. 5.9 inch shells, that tore through the air with a mild whistle, finishing up with a roar like high-power machinery, seemed to burst on top of him. Shrapnel exploded above his head in a series of ear-splitting crashes. A high velocity shell arrived like a bullet simultaneously with the report of the gun. He crept into a shell-hole and lay flat. It reeked of lyddite and contained a German pistol of curious shape, bearing a Birmingham trade mark. He could see the blue sky above flecked with fleecy white puffs of aerial shrapnel. At intervals between the booming and banging of the guns, the detonation of the bursting shells, and the incessant metallic clatter of machine-guns behind, he could hear the droning hum of aeroplanes. Death from above, from before, from behind, death, shapeless and repulsive, in every shell-hole; death usurping, beckoning, tyrannical. Terror seized him, such terror as he had never known in his life before. Hitherto he had been conscious only of the profound unpleasantness of the whole business; now it was all he could do to prevent himself from yelling hysterically.

A head appeared above the rim of a shell-hole.

'Ye'd better give me yer-r pack, zur-r. Ye'll never be able to get on with it as y'are.'

He blessed the sound of a human voice. And there was something familiar about this voice – something

inexplicably friendly: – not the voice but the accent. He recognised it as a West Country accent. And with that came a second's vision of the hills behind his home as they would look in the bright March sunlight, the white chalk horse on Stane's steep side, the silent spaces of the down-land beyond. He yielded his pack gladly to those large, willing hands.

Slow as his progress was, and often as he stopped for breath in shell-holes, he came at last within sight of the white, irregular sandbags which marked the old German second-line. The stream through which he had waded during the advance lay between, with one visible means of crossing – a single greasy plank, across which lay a dead soldier. He poised himself on the plank straddlewise, bullets hitting the sandbags on either side. Several times he came near to falling off sideways, but recovered. Reaching the boots of the dead man, with extraordinary repulsion he dragged himself across the stiff, unnatural figure, whose dark blood was dripping slowly from a bullet-wound in the neck. He felt the cold blood moist on his hands, and brushed over the soft, clammy face, so unlifelike – a mere heap of flesh. He saw a head looking over the breastwork.

'Come on, sir! Pull yourself up! Here's a hand!'

With the assistance of the arm extended he dragged himself over the heap of sandbags and found – his own stretcher-bearers.

Near to fainting now, he knew little more until he felt the swaying, jogging motion of a stretcher as they carried him along a road which he did not recognise. But he saw the battlefield receding, the setting sun, dead horses and dead men, a tableau of khaki – and one German – in an orchard, as though all had there lain down to sleep. Then he heard the purring of a

motor, and was hoisted out of daylight into the gloom of an ambulance's interior. Almost before he realised where he was the vehicle had started with a jarring of brakes – full-speed ahead. The journey seemed a long one. At first he thought he heard shells bursting; then the sound of traffic. His companions were noisy. One groaned loudly and ceaselessly. Another, with a pronounced Irish accent, poured forth volleys of blasphemy, proclaiming that he had 'done in' at least half-a-dozen Fritzes. A third whistled 'Tipperary.'

Beside him lay an officer without sound or movement.

With no noticeable transition he found himself lying on a bed in a large whitewashed room which looked out upon a courtyard. Something about the place told him that it was either a convent or a school. Once a young doctor came in, looked at his wound, gave him an anti-tetanus injection, and tied a white label on his chest. Once an orderly brought him a bowl of soup. Lying very still, he watched evening steal into the courtyard and saw the sunlight fade on a red-brick wall. He heard the twittering of sparrows without, ivy leaves rustling against the window-ledge, and at infrequent intervals a moan from the next bed.

In the failing light the door opened, and there slipped in a gaunt figure in a cassock, who, after glancing at him and doubtless thinking him asleep, turned to his neighbour. It gazed long and earnestly, made the sign of the cross, then went out silently as it had come.

Adrian peered at the adjacent bed. It was growing dark, but a last sunbeam lit up the pillow, illuminating features that were familiar and yet strange. Blood had gone from them, their fulness being drawn into thin, ugly lines by pain. It was only at the second or third look that he realised Pemberton lay there.

8

GALLIPOLI

JOHN MASEFIELD

Great poets have not invariably been successful as writers of prose, but the Poet Laureate has demonstrated his mastery of this medium in such novels and stories as *Captain Margaret, Sard Harker, Lost Endeavour* and *A Tarpaulin Muster*; in drama with the flexible dialogue of *The Tragedy of Nan* and *Pompey the Great*; in criticism with the acute comment in his *William Shakespeare*; and finally in his war sketches, *Gallipoli* and *The Old Front Line*. His poem, '*August*, 1914,' has been described as 'the best of the numberless poems the War produced.'

Gallipoli (William Heinemann Ltd.) was written only four months after the end of the campaign, 'at the request of two of His Majesty's Ministers,' as an answer to hostile critics abroad, particularly in America. The book was not intended to be a history, but a sketch exhibiting the Dardanelles campaign as 'a great human effort which came, more than once, very near to triumph,' as 'the second grand event of the War.' In his view, 'the campaign in Gallipoli was brilliant and bold in idea, and generous in intention . . . designed as a way out of the mud of Flanders, and as a help to Russia'; and it failed 'as many great deeds of arms have failed, from something which had nothing to do with arms or the men who bore them.'

Sir Ian Hamilton's message to the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force described their adventure as an attempt 'to force a landing upon an open beach in the face of positions which have been vaunted by our enemies as impregnable.' The passage chosen describes the Gaba Tepe Landing carried out in the early morning of April 25, 1915, by men of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (whence the name Anzac thereafter applied to this part of the peninsula). Masefield gives a magnificent description of the reckless bravery of the attackers,

advancing over unknown country of the most difficult description against overwhelming odds, and ultimately establishing their position.

THE place selected for the landing was the southern beach, the nearer of the two to Gaba Tepe. This like the other landing-places near Cape Helles, was strongly defended, and most difficult of approach. Large forces of Turks were entrenched there, well prepared. But in the darkness of the early morning after the moon had set, the tows stood a little farther to the north than they should have done, perhaps because some high ground to their left made a convenient steering mark against the stars. They headed in towards the northern beach between the two little headlands, where the Turks were not expecting them. However, they were soon seen, and very heavy independent rifle fire was concentrated on them. As they neared the beach, about one battalion of Turks doubled along the land to intercept them. These men came from nearer Gaba Tepe, firing, as they ran, into the mass of the boats at short range. A great many men were killed in the boats, but the dead men's oars were taken by survivors, and the boats forced into the shingle. The men jumped out, waded ashore, charged the enemy with the bayonet, and broke the Turk attack to pieces. The Turks scattered and were pursued, and now the steep scrub-covered cliffs became the scene of the most desperate fighting.

The scattered Turks dropped into the scrub and disappeared. Hidden all over the rough cliffs, under every kind of cover, they sniped the beach or ambushed the little parties of the 3rd Brigade who had rushed the landing. All over the broken hills there were isolated fights to the death, men falling into gullies and being bayoneted; sudden duels, point blank, where men

crawling through the scrub met each other, and life went to the quicker finger; heroic deaths, where some half-section which had lost touch were caught by ten times their strength and charged and died. No man of our side knew that cracked and fissured jungle. Men broke through it on to machine guns, or showed up on a crest and were blown to pieces, or leaped down from it into some sap or trench, to catch the bombs flung at them and hurl them at the thrower. Going as they did, up cliffs through scrub over ground which would have broken the alignment of the Tenth Legion, they passed many hidden Turks who were thus left to shoot them in the back or to fire down at the boats, from perhaps only fifty yards away. It was only just light, theirs was the first British survey of that wild country; only now, as it showed up clear, could they realise its difficulty. They pressed on up the hill; they dropped and fired and died; they drove the Turks back; they flung their packs away, wormed through the bush, and stalked the snipers from the flash. As they went, the words of their song supported them, the ribald and proud chorus of 'Australia will be there' which the men on the torpedoed *Southland* sang as they fell in expecting death. Presently, as it grew lighter, the Turks' big howitzers began shelling the beach, and their field guns, well hidden, opened on the transports, now busy disembarking the 1st and 2nd Brigades. They forced the transports to stand farther out to sea, and shelled the tows, as they came in, with shrapnel and high explosive. As the boats drew near the shore, every gun on Gaba Tepe took them in flank, and the snipers concentrated on them from the shore. More and more Turks were coming up at the double to stop the attack up the hill. The fighting in the scrub grew fiercer; shells burst continually upon the beach, boats

were sunk, men were killed in the water. The boatmen and beach working-parties were the unsung heroes of that landing. The boatmen came in with the tows, under fire, waited with them under intense and concentrated fire of every kind until they were unloaded and shoved off, and put slowly back for more, and then came back again. The beach parties were wading to and from that shell-smitten beach all day unloading, carrying ashore, and sorting the munitions and necessaries for many thousands of men. They worked in a strip of beach and sea some five hundred yards long by forty broad, and the fire directed on that strip was such that every box brought ashore had one or more shells and not less than fifty bullets directed at it before it was flung upon the sand. More men came in and went on up the hill in support; but as yet there were no guns ashore, and the Turks' fire became intenser. By ten o'clock the Turks had had time to bring up enough men from their prepared positions to hold up the advance. Scattered parties of our men who had gone too far in the scrub were cut off and killed, for there was no thought of surrender in those marvellous young men; they were the flower of this world's manhood, and died as they had lived, owning no master on this earth. More and more Turks came up with big and field artillery, and now our attack had to hold on to what it had won, against more than twice its numbers. We had won a rough bow of ground, in which the beach represented the bowstring, the beach near Gaba Tepe the south end, and the hovel known as Fisherman's Hut the north. Against this position, held by at most 8,000 of our men who had had no rest and had fought hard since dawn under every kind of fire in a savage rough country unknown to them, came an overwhelming army of Turks to drive them into the sea. For

four hours the Turks attacked and again attacked, with a terrific fire of artillery and waves of men in succession. They came fresh from superior positions with many guns, to break a disorganised line of breathless men not yet dug in. The guns of the ships opened on them, and the scattered units in the scrub rolled them back again and again by rifle and machine-gun fire, and by charge after counter-charge. More of the Army Corps landed to meet the Turks, the fire upon the beach never slackened, and they came ashore across corpses and wrecked boats and a path like a road in hell with ruin and blasts and burning. They went up the cliff to their fellows under an ever-growing fire, that lit the scrub and burned the wounded and the dead. Darkness came, but there was no rest nor lull. Wave after wave of Turks came out of the night, crying the proclamation of their faith; others stole up in the dark through the scrub and shot or stabbed and crept back, or were seen and stalked and killed. Flares went up, to light with their blue and ghastly glare the wild glens peopled by the enemy. Men worked at the digging in till they dropped asleep upon the soil, and more Turks charged, and they woke and fired and again dug. It was cruelly cold after the sun had gone, but there was no chance of warmth or proper food; to dig in and beat back the Turk or die were all that men could think of. In the darkness, among the blasts of the shells, men scrambled up and down the pathless cliffs bringing up tins of water and boxes of cartridges, hauling up guns and shells, and bringing down the wounded. The beach was heaped with wounded, placed as close under the cliff as might be, in such yard or so of dead ground as the cliffs gave. The doctors worked among them and shells fell among them, and doctors and wounded were blown to pieces, and the survivors sang their song

of 'Australia will be there,' and cheered the newcomers still landing on the beach. Sometimes our fire seemed to cease, and then the Turk shells filled the night with their scream and blast and the pattering of their fragments. With all the fury and the crying of the shells, and the shouts and cries and cursing on the beach, the rattle of the small arms and the cheers and defiance up the hill, and the roar of the great guns far away, at sea, or in the olive-groves, the night seemed in travail of a new age. All the blackness was shot with little spurts of fire, and streaks of fire, and malignant bursts of fire, and arcs and glows and crawling snakes of fire, and the moon rose, and looked down upon it all. In the fiercer hours of that night shells fell in that contested mile of ground and on the beach beyond it at the rate of one a second, and the air whimpered with passing bullets, or fluttered with the rush of the big shells, or struck the head of the passer like a moving wall with the shock of the explosion. All through the night the Turks attacked, and in the early hours their fire of shrapnel became so hellish that the Australians soon had not men enough left to hold the line. Orders were given to fall back to a shorter line.

4

THE BATTLE OF THE SLAG-HEAPS

IAN HAY

In such delightful books (written before the War) as *Pip, A Knight on Wheels* and *The Lighter Side of School Life*, Ian Hay displays his gift for seeing the humorous side of things and his sympathy with youth. He has also written plays and short stories. From the beginning of the War, he served with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and his account of his experiences was published serially in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Later issued in book form as *The First Hundred Thousand* (with continuations in *Carrying On* and *The Last Million*), these sketches bring the reader into very close touch with 'Kitchener's Army,' and give a vivid picture of the courage and cheerful good humour with which the Old Contemptibles faced the difficulties and dangers of their position. He himself describes his book as 'a record of some of the personal adventures of a typical regiment of Kitchener's Army. . . . The characters are entirely fictitious, but the incidents described all actually occurred.'

The passage chosen forms the last chapter of *The First Hundred Thousand* (Wm. Blackwood & Sons Ltd.). It is a description of a part of the Battle of Loos, and opens on September 25, 1915. The author states in a private note that 'the chapter in question was written after we came out of action, while the Battle of Loos was still in progress and undecided.' The British losses in this battle were 60,000 killed, wounded and missing, for very little tangible gain.

I

'HALF-PAST two, and a cold morning, sir.'

Thus Bobby Little's servant, rousing his employer from uneasy slumber under the open sky,

in a newly-constructed trench running parallel to and in rear of the permanent trench-line.

Bobby sat up, and peering at his luminous wrist-watch, morosely acquiesced in his menial's gruesome statement. But he cheered up at the next intimation.

'Breakfast is ready, sir.'

Tea and bacon are always tea and bacon, even in the gross darkness and mental tension which precede a Big Push. Presently various humped figures in great-coats, having gathered in the open ditch which did duty for Officers' Mess, broke into spasmodic conversation – conversation rendered even more spasmodic by the almost ceaseless roar of guns. There were guns all round us – rank upon rank: to judge by the noise, you would have said tier upon tier as well. Half a mile ahead, upon the face of a gentle slope, a sequence of flames would spout from the ground, and a storm of shells go whistling on their way. No sooner had this happened than there would come a shattering roar from the ground beneath our feet, and a heavy battery, concealed in a hedge fifty yards to our front, would launch its contribution. Farther back lay heavier batteries still, and beyond that batteries so powerful and so distant that one heard the shell pass before the report arrived. One of these monsters, coming apparently from infinity and bound for the back of beyond, lumbered wearily over the heads of 'A' Company, partaking of breakfast.

Private Mucklewame paused in the act of raising his canteen to his lips.

'There's Wullie awa' for a walk!' he observed.

Considering that they were upon the eve of an epoch-making combat, the regiment were disappointingly placid.

In the Officers' Mess the prevailing note was neither

lust of battle nor fear of death: it was merely that ordinary snappishness which is induced by early rising and uncomfortable surroundings.

'It's going to rain, too,' grumbled Major Kemp.

At this moment the Colonel arrived, with final instructions from the Brigadier.

'We move off at a quarter to four,' he said, 'up Fountain Alley and Scottish Trench, into Central Boyau' – 'boyau' is the name which is given to a communication-trench in trenches which, like those in front of us, are of French extraction – 'and so over the parapet. There we extend, as arranged, into lines of half-companies, and go at 'em, making Douvrin our objective, and keeping the Hohenzollern and Fosse Eight upon our left.'

Fosse Eight is a mighty waste-heap, such as you may behold anywhere along the railway in the colliery districts between Glasgow and Edinburgh. The official map calls such an eminence a Fosse; the Royal Engineers call it a Dump; Operation Orders call it a Slag-Heap; experts like Ogg and Hogg (who ought to know if any one does) call it a Bing. From this distance, two miles away, the Fosse looks as big as North Berwick Law. It is one of the many scattered about this district, all carefully numbered by the Ordnance. There are others, again, towards Hulluch and Loos. Number Eight has been the object of pressing attentions on the part of our big guns ever since the bombardment began, three weeks ago; but it still stands up – gaunt, grim, and defiant – against the eastern sky. Whether any one is left alive upon it, or in it, is another question. We shall have cause to remember Fosse Eight before this fight is over.

The Hohenzollern Redoubt, on the other hand, is a most inconspicuous object, but a very important factor

in the present situation. It has been thrust forward from the Boche lines to within a hundred yards of our own – a great promontory, a maze of trenches, machine-gun emplacements, and barbed wire, all flush with or under the ground, and terribly difficult to cripple by shell fire. It has been a source of great exasperation to us – a starting-point for saps, mines, and bombing parties. As already stated, this mighty fortress has been christened by its constructors, the Hohenzollern. It is attached to its parent trench-line by two communicating trenches, which the British Army, not to be outdone in reverence to the most august of dynasties, have named Big and Little Willie respectively.

A struggling dawn breaks, bringing with it promise of rain, and the regiment begins to marshal in the trench called Fountain Alley, along which it is to wind, snake-like, in the wake of the preceding troops, until it debouches over the parapet, a full mile away, and extends into line.

Presently the order is given to move off, and the snake begins to writhe. Progress is steady, but not exhilarating. We have several battalions of the Division in front of us (which Bobby Little resents as a personal affront), but have been assured that we shall see all the fighting we want. The situation appears to be that owing to the terrific artillery bombardment the attacking force will meet with little or no opposition in the German front-line trenches; or second line, for that matter.

'The whole Division,' explains Captain Wagstaffe to Bobby Little, 'should be able to get up into some sort of formation about the Boche third line before any real fighting begins; so it does not very much matter whether we start first or fiftieth in the procession.'

Captain Wagstaffe showed himself an accurate prophet.

We move on. At one point we pass through a howitzer battery, where dishevelled gentlemen give us a friendly wave of the hand. Others, not professionally engaged for the moment, sit unconcernedly in the ditch with their backs to the proceedings, frying bacon. This is their busy hour.

Presently the pace grows even slower, and finally we stop altogether. Another battalion has cut in ahead of us, and we must perforce wait, snapping our fingers with impatience, like theatre-goers in a Piccadilly block, whose taxis have been held up by the traffic debouching from Berkeley Street.

'Luckily the curtain doesn't rise till five-fifty,' observes Captain Wagstaffe.

We move on again at last, and find ourselves in Central Boyau, getting near the heart of things. Suddenly we are conscious of an overpowering sense of relief. Our guns have ceased firing. For the first time for three days and nights there is peace.

Captain Wagstaffe looks at his watch.

'That means that our first line are going over the parapet,' he says. 'Punctual, too! The gunners have stopped to put up their sights and lengthen their fuses. We ought to be fairly in it in half an hour.'

But this proves to be an under-estimate. There are mysterious and maddening stoppages—maddening, because in communication-trench stoppages it is quite impossible to find out what is the matter. Furious messages begin to arrive from the rear. The original form of inquiry was probably something like this: 'Major Kemp would like to know the cause of the delay.' As transmitted sonorously from mouth to mouth by

the rank and file, it finally arrives (if it ever arrives at all) in some such words as: 'Pass doon; what for is this (asterisk, obelus) wait ? ' But as no answer is ever passed back it does not much matter.

The righteous indignation of Major Kemp, who is situated somewhere about the middle of the procession, reaches its culminating point when, with much struggling and pushing and hopeless jamming, a stretcher carrying a wounded man is borne down the crowded trench on its way to the rear. The Major delivers himself.

'This is perfectly monstrous ! You stretcher-bearers will kill that poor chap if you try to drag him down here. There is a specially constructed road to the dressing-station over there – Bart's Alley, it is called. We cannot have up-and-down traffic jumbled together like this. For heaven's sake, Waddell, pass up word to the C.O. that it is mistaken kindness to allow these fellows down here. He *must* send them back.'

Waddell volunteers to climb out of the trench and go forward with a message. But this the Major will not allow. 'Your platoon will require a leader presently,' he mentions. 'We'll try the effect of a note.'

The note is passed up, and anon an answer comes back to the effect that no wounded have been allowed down from the head of the column. They must be getting in by a side-track somewhere. The Major groans, but can do nothing.

Presently there is a fresh block.

'What is it this time ?' inquires the afflicted Kemp. 'More wounded, or are we being photographed ?'

The answer races joyously down the line –

'Gairman prisoners, sirr – seeventy of them !'

This time the Major acts with promptness and decision.

'Prisoners? No, they *don't*! Pass up word from me that the whole boiling are to be hoisted on to the parapet, with their escort, and made to walk above ground.'

The order goes forward. Presently our hearts are rejoiced by an exhilarating sight. Across the field through which our trench winds comes a body of men, running rapidly, encouraged to further fleetness of foot by desultory shrapnel and stray bullets. They wear grey-green uniform, and flat, muffin-shaped caps. They have no arms or equipment: some are slightly wounded. In front of this contingent, running even more rapidly, are their escort – some dozen brawny Highlanders, armed to the teeth. But the prisoners exhibit no desire to take advantage of this unusual order of things. Their one ambition in life appears to be to put as large a space as possible between themselves and their late comrades-in-arms, and, if possible, overtake their captors.

Some of them find time to grin, and wave their hands to us. One addresses the scandalised M'Slattery as 'Kamerad!' 'No more dis war for me!' cries another, with unfeigned satisfaction.

After this our progress is more rapid. As we near the front line, the enemy's shrapnel reaps its harvest even in our deep trench. More than once we pass a wounded man, hoisted on to the parapet to wait for first-aid. More than once we step over some poor fellow for whom no first-aid will avail.

Five minutes later we reach the parapet – that immovable rampart over which we have peeped so often and so cautiously with our periscopes – and clamber up a sandbag staircase on to the summit. We note that our barbed wire has all been cut away, and that another battalion, already extended into line,

is advancing fifty yards ahead of us. Bullets are pinging through the air, but the guns are once more silent. Possibly they are altering their position. Dotted about upon the flat ground before us lie many kilted figures, strangely still, in uncomfortable attitudes.

A mile or so upon our right we can see two towers – pit-head towers – standing side by side. They mark the village of Loos, where another Scottish Division is leading the attack. To the right of Loos again, for miles and miles and miles, we know that wave upon wave of impetuous French soldiers is breaking in a tempest over the shattered German trenches. Indeed we conjecture that down there, upon our right, is where the Biggest Push of all is taking place. Our duty is to get forward if we can, but before everything to engage as many German troops and guns as possible. Even if we fight for a week or more, and only hold our own, we shall have done the greater part of what was required of us. But we hope to do more than that.

Upon our left lies the Hohenzollern. It is silent; so we know that it has been captured. Beyond that, upon our left front, looms Fosse Eight, still surmounted by its battered shaft-tower. Right ahead, peeping over a low ridge, is a church steeple, with a clock-face in it. That is our objective.

Next moment we have deployed into extended order, and step out, to play our little part in the great Battle of the Slag-Heaps.

II

Twenty-four hours later, a little group of officers sat in a roomy dug-out. Major Kemp was there, with his head upon the plank table, fast asleep. Bobby Little, who had neither eaten nor slept since the previous dawn,

was nibbling chocolate, and shaking as if with ague. He had gone through a good deal. Waddell sat opposite to him, stolidly devouring bully beef out of a tin with his fingers. Ayling reclined upon the floor, mechanically adjusting a machine-gun lock, which he had taken from his haversack. Captain Wagstaffe was making cocoa over a Tommy's Cooker. He looked less the worse for wear than the others, but could hardly have been described as spruce in appearance. The whole party were splashed with mud and soaked to the skin, for it had rained hard during the greater part of the night. They were all sick for want of food and sleep. Moreover, all had seen unusual sights. It was Sunday morning.

Presently Wagstaffe completed his culinary arrangements, and poured out the cocoa into some aluminium cups. He touched Major Kemp on the shoulder.

'Have some of this, Major,' he said.

The burly Kemp roused himself and took the proffered cup gratefully. Then, looking round, he said –

'Hallo, Ayling! You arrived? Whereabouts in the line were you?'

'I got cut off from the Battalion in the advance up Central Boyau, sir,' said Ayling. 'Everybody had disappeared by the time I got the machine-guns over the parapet. However, knowing the objective, I pushed on towards the Church Tower.'

'How did you enjoy yourself passing Fosse Eight?' inquired Captain Wagstaffe.

'Thank you, we got a dose of our own medicine – machine-gun fire, in enfilade. It was beastly.'

'We also noticed it,' Wagstaffe intimated. 'That was where poor Sinclair got knocked out. What did you do?'

'I signalled to the men to lie flat for a bit, and I did

the same. I did not know that it was possible for a human being to lie as flat as I lay during that quarter of an hour. But it was no good. The guns must have been high up on the Fosse: they had excellent command. The bullets simply greased all round us. I could feel them combing out my hair, and digging into the ground underneath me.'

'What were your sensations, *exactly* ?' asked Kemp.

'I felt just as if an invisible person were tickling me,' replied Ayling, with feeling.

'So did I,' said Kemp. 'Go on.'

'I heard one of my men cry out that he was hit,' continued Ayling, 'and I came to the conclusion that we would have a better chance as moving targets than as fixed; so I passed the word to get up and move forward steadily, in single file. Ultimately we struck a stray communication-trench, into which we descended with as much dignity as possible. It led us into some quarries.'

'Off our line altogether.'

'So I learned from two Companies of an English regiment which were there, acting as reserve to a Brigade which was scrapping somewhere in the direction of Hulluch; so I realised that we had worked too far to the right. We moved out of the quarries and struck over half-left, and ultimately found the Battalion, a very long way ahead, in what I took to be a Boche third line trench, facing east.'

'Right ! Fosse Alley,' said Kemp. 'You remember it on the map ?'

'Yes, I do now,' said Ayling. 'Well, I planted myself on the right flank of the Battalion with two guns, and sent Sergeant Killick along with the other two to the left. You know the rest.'

'I'm not sure that I do,' said the Major. 'We were

packed so tight in that blooming trench that it was quite impossible to move about, and I only saw what was going on close around me. Did you get much machine-gun practice ?'

'A fair amount, sir,' replied Ayling, with professional satisfaction. 'There was a lot of firing from our right front, so I combed out all the bushes and house-fronts I could see; and presently the firing died down, but not before I had had one gun put out of action with a bullet through the barrel-casing. After dark things were fairly quiet, except for constant alarms, until the order came to move back to the next trench.'

Major Kemp's fist came down upon the plank table.

'Move back !' he exclaimed angrily. 'Just so ! To capture Fosse Alley, hold it all day and half the night, and then be compelled to move back, simply because we had pushed so far ahead of any other Division that we had no support on either flank ! It was tough – rotten – hellish ! Excuse my exuberance. You all right, Wagstaffe ?'

'Wonderful, considering,' replied Wagstaffe. 'I was mildly gassed by a lachrymous shell about two o'clock this morning, but nothing to signify.'

'Did your respirator work ?'

'I found that in the heat of the moment I had mislaid it.'

'What did you do ?'

'I climbed on to the parapet and sat there. It seemed the healthiest spot under the circumstances: anyhow, the air was pure. When I recovered I got down. What happened to 'A,' Bobby ? I heard rumours, but hoped——'

He hesitated.

'Go on,' he said abruptly, and Bobby, more composed now, told his tale.

'A' Company, it appeared, had found themselves clinging grimly to the section of Fosse Alley which they had captured, with their left flank entirely in the air. Presently came an order. Farther forward still, half-right, another isolated trench was being held by a portion of the Highland Brigade. These were suffering cruelly, for the German artillery had the range to a nicety, and convenient sap-heads gave the German bombers easy access to their flanks. It is more than likely that this very trench had been constructed expressly for the inveiglement of a too successful attacking party. Certainly no troops could live in it for long. 'A' Company were to go forward and support.

Captain Blaikie, passing word to his men to be ready, turned to Bobby.

'I'm a morose, dour, monosyllabic Scot, Bobbie,' he said; 'but this sort of thing bucks me up.'

Next moment he was over the parapet and away, followed by his Company. In that long, steadily-advancing line were many of our friends. Mucklewame was there, panting heavily, and cannily commending his soul to Providence. Messrs. Ogg and Hogg were there, shoulder to shoulder. M'Ostrich, the Ulster visionary, was there, six paces ahead of any other man, crooning some Ironside canticle to himself. Next behind him came the reformed revolutionary, M'Slattery.

Straightway the enemy observed the oncoming reinforcements, and shrapnel began to fly. The men pressed on, at a steady double now. M'Ostrich was the first to go down. Game to the last, he waved encouragement to his mates with a failing arm as they passed over his body.

'Come along, boys!' cried Captain Blaikie, suddenly

eloquent. 'There is the trench! The other lads are waiting for you. Come along! Charge!'

The men needed no further bidding. They came on – with a ragged cheer – and assuredly would have arrived, but for one thing. Suddenly they faltered, and stopped dead.

Captain Blaikie turned to his faithful subaltern panting behind him.

'We are done in, Bobby,' he said. 'Look! Wire!'

He was right. This particular trench, it was true, was occupied by our friends; but it had been constructed in the first instance for the use of our enemies. Consequently it was wired, and heavily wired, upon the side facing the British advance.

Captain Blaikie, directing operations with a walking-stick as if the whole affair were an Aldershot field-day, signalled to the Company to lie down, and began to unbutton a leather pouch in his belt.

'You too, Bobby,' he said; 'and don't dare to move a muscle until you get the order!'

He strolled forward, pliers in hand, and began methodically to cut a passage, strand by strand, through the forest of wire.

Then it was that invisible machine-guns opened, and a very gallant officer and Scotsman fell dead upon the field of honour.

Half an hour later, 'A' Company, having expended all their ammunition and gained never a yard, fell back upon the rest of the Battalion. Including Bobby Little (who seemed to bear a charmed life), they did not represent the strength of a platoon.

'I wonder what they will do with us next,' remarked Mr. Waddell, who had finished his bully.

'If they have any sense of decency,' said Major Kemp, 'they will send us back to rest a bit, and put another Division in. We have opened the ball and done a lot of dirty work for them, and have lost a lot of men and officers. Bed for me, please!'

'I should be more inclined to agree with you, Major,' said Wagstaffe, 'if only we had a bit more to show for our losses.'

'We haven't done so badly,' replied Kemp, who was growing more cheerful under the influence of hot cocoa. 'We have got the Hohenzollern, and the Boche first line at least, and probably Fosse Eight. On the right I hear we have taken Loos. That's not so dusty for a start. I have not the slightest doubt that there will be a heavy counter-attack, which we shall repel. After that we shall attack again, and gain more ground, or at least keep the Boche exceedingly busy holding on. That is our allotted task in this entertainment: to go on hammering the Hun, occupying his attention and using up his reserves regardless of whether we gain ground or lose it, while our French pals on the right are pushing him off the map. At least, that is my theory: I don't pretend to be in touch with the official mind. This battle will probably go on for a week or more, over practically the same ground. It will be dreadful for the wounded, but even if we only hold on to what we have gained already, we are the winners. Still, I wish we could have consolidated Fosse Alley before going to bed.'

At this moment the Colonel, stooping low in the tiny doorway, entered the dug-out, followed by the Adjutant. He bade his supporters good-morning.

'I am glad to find that you fellows have been able to give your men a meal,' he said. 'It was capital work getting the ration-carts up so far last night.'

'Any news, Colonel?' asked Major Kemp.

'Most decidedly. It seems that the enemy have evacuated Fosse Alley again. Nobody quite knows why: a sudden attack of cold feet, probably. Our people command their position from Fosse Eight, on their left rear, so I don't altogether blame them. Whoever holds Fosse Eight holds Fosse Alley. However, the long and short of it all is that the Brigade are to go forward again this evening, and reoccupy Fosse Alley. Meanwhile, we consolidate things here.'

Major Kemp sighed.

'Bed indefinitely postponed!' he remarked resignedly.

III

By midnight on the same Sunday the Battalion, now far under its original strength, had re-entered the scene of yesterday's long struggle, filing thither under the stars, by a deserted and ghostly German *boyau* nearly ten feet deep. Fosse Alley erred in the opposite direction. It was not much more than four feet in depth; the chalky parapet could by no stretch of imagination be described as bullet-proof; dug-outs and communication-trenches were non-existent. On our left the trench-line was continued by the troops of another Division: on our right lay another battalion of our own brigade.

'If the line has been made really continuous this time,' observed the Colonel, 'we should be as safe as houses. Wonderful fellows, these sappers! They have wired almost our whole front already. I wish they had had time to do it on our left as well.

Within the next few hours all defensive preparations possible in the time had been completed; and our attendant angels, most effectively disguised as Royal

Engineers, had flitted away, leaving us to wait for Monday morning – and Brother Boche.

With the dawn, our eyes, which had known no sleep since Friday night, peered rheumily out over the whitening landscape.

To our front the ground stretched smooth and level for two hundred yards, then fell gently away, leaving a clearly defined skyline. Beyond the skyline rose houses, of which we could descry only the roofs and upper windows.

'That must be either Haisnes or Douvrin,' said Major Kemp. 'We are much farther to the left than we were yesterday. By the way, *was* it yesterday?'

'The day before yesterday, sir,' the ever-ready Waddell informed him.

'Never mind; to-day's the day, anyhow. And it's going to be a busy day, too. The fact is, we are in a tight place, and all through doing too well. We have again penetrated so much farther forward than any one else in our neighbourhood that we *may* have to fall back a bit. But I hope not. We have a big stake, Waddell. If we can hold on to this position until the others make good upon our right and left, we shall have reclaimed a clear two miles of the soil of France, my son.' The Major swept the horizon with his glasses. 'Let me see: that is probably Hulluch away on our right front: the Loos towers must be in line with us on our extreme right, but we can't see them for those hillocks. There is our old friend Fosse Eight towering over us on our left rear. I don't know anything about the ground on our absolute left, but so long as that flat-head regiment hold on to their trench, we can't go far wrong. Waddell, I don't like those cottages on our left front. They block the view, and also spell machine-guns. I see one or two very suggestive loopholes in

those red-tiled roofs. Go and draw Ayling's attention to them. A little preliminary *strafeing* will do them no harm.'

Five minutes later one of Ayling's machine-guns spoke out, and a cascade of tiles came sliding down the roofs of the offending cottages.

'That will tickle them up, if they have any guns set up on those rafters,' observed the Major, with ghoulish satisfaction. 'I wonder if Brer Boche is going to attack. I hope he does. There is only one thing I am afraid of, and that is that there may be some odd saps running out towards us, especially on our flanks. If so, we shall have some close work with bombs – a most ungentlemanly method of warfare. Let us pray for a straightforward frontal attack.'

But Brer Boche had other cards to play first. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the air was filled with 'whizz-bang' shells, moving in a lightning procession which lasted nearly half an hour. Most of these plastered the already scarred countenance of Fosse Eight: others fell shorter and demolished our parapet. When the tempest ceased, as suddenly as it began, the number of casualties in the crowded trench was considerable. But there was little time to attend to the wounded. Already the word was running down the line –

'Look out to your front!'

Sure enough, over the skyline, two hundred yards away, grey figures were appearing – not in battalions, but tentatively, in twos and threes. Next moment a storm of rapid rifle fire broke from the trench. The grey figures turned and ran. Some disappeared over the horizon, others dropped flat, others simply curled up and withered. In three minutes solitude reigned again, and the firing ceased.

'Well, that's that!' observed Captain Wagstaffe to

Bobby Little, upon the right of the Battalion line. 'The Boche has "bethought himself and went," as the poet says. Now he knows we are here, and have brought our arquebuses with us. He will try something more ikey next time. Talking of time, what about breakfast? When was our last meal, Bobby?'

'Haven't the vaguest notion,' said Bobby sleepily.

'Well, it's about breakfast-time now. Have a bit of chocolate? It is all I have.'

It was eight o'clock, and perfect silence reigned. All down the line men, infinitely grubby, were producing still grubbier fragments of bully-beef and biscuits from their persons. For an hour, squatting upon the sodden floor of the trench – it was raining yet again – the unappetising, intermittent meal proceeded.

Then——

'Hallo!' exclaimed Bobby with a jerk (for he was beginning to nod), 'what was that on our right?'

'I'm afraid,' replied Wagstaffe, 'that it was bombs. It was right in this trench, too, about a hundred yards along. There must be a sap leading up there, for the bombers certainly have not advanced overground. I have been looking out for them since stand-to. Who is this anxious gentleman?'

A subaltern of the battalion on our right was forcing his way along the trench. He addressed Wagstaffe.

'We are having a pretty bad time with Boche bombers on our right, sir,' he said. 'Will you send us down all the bombs you can spare?'

Wagstaffe hoisted himself upon the parapet.

'I will see our C.O. at once,' he replied, and departed at the double. It was a risky proceeding, for German bullets promptly appeared in close attendance; but he saved a good five minutes on his journey to Battalion Headquarters at the other end of the trench.

Presently the bombs began to arrive, passed from hand to hand. Wagstaffe returned, this time along the trench.

'We shall have a tough fight for it,' he said. 'The Boche bombers know their business, and probably have more bombs than we have. But those boys on our right seem to be keeping their end up.'

'Can't *we* do anything?' asked Bobby feverishly.

'Nothing – unless the enemy succeed in working right down here; in which case we shall take our turn of getting it in the neck – or giving it! I fancy old Ayling and his pop-gun will have a word to say, if he can find a nice straight bit of trench. All we can do for the present is to keep a sharp look-out in front. I have no doubt they will attack in force when the right moment comes.'

For close on three hours the bomb-fight went on. Little could be seen, for the struggle was all taking place upon the extreme right; but the sounds of conflict were plain enough. More bombs were passed up, and yet more; men, some cruelly torn, were passed down.

Then a signal-sergeant doubled up across country from somewhere in rear, paying out wire, and presently the word went forth that we were in touch with the Artillery. Directly after, sure enough, came the blessed sound and sight of British shrapnel bursting over our right front.

'That won't stop the present crowd,' said Wagstaffe, 'but it may prevent their reinforcements from coming up. We are holding our own, Bobby. What's that, Sergeant?'

'The Commanding Officer, sirr,' announced Sergeant Carfrae, 'has just passed up that we are to keep a sharp look-out to our left. They've commenced for to bomb the English regiment now.'

'Golly, both flanks! This is getting a trifle steep,' remarked Wagstaffe.

Detonations could now be distinctly heard upon the left.

'If they succeed in getting round behind us,' said Wagstaffe in a low voice to Bobby, 'we shall have to fall back a bit, into line with the rest of the advance. Only a few hundred yards, but it means a lot to *us*!'

'It hasn't happened yet,' said Bobby stoutly.

Captain Wagstaffe knew better. His more experienced eye and ear had detected the fact that the position of the regiment upon the left was already turned. But he said nothing.

Presently the tall figure of the Colonel was seen, advancing in leisurely fashion along the trench, stopping here and there to exchange a word with a private or a sergeant.

'The regiment on the left may have to fall back, men,' he was saying. 'We of course, will stand fast, and cover their retirement.'

This most characteristic announcement was received with a matter-of-fact 'Varra good, sir,' from its recipients, and the Colonel passed on to where the two officers were standing.

'Hullo, Wagstaffe,' he said; 'good-morning! We shall get some very pretty shooting presently. The enemy are massing on our left front, down behind those cottages. How are things going on our right?'

'They are holding their own, sir.'

'Good! Just tell Ayling to get his guns trained. But doubtless he has done so already. I must get back to the other flank.'

And back to the danger-spot our C.O. passed – an upright, gallant figure, saying little, exhorting not at

all, but instilling confidence and cheerfulness by his very presence.

Half-way along the trench he encountered Major Kemp.

'How are things on the left, sir?' was the Major's *sotto voce* inquiry.

'Not too good. Our position is turned. We have been promised reinforcements, but I doubt if they can get up in time. Of course, when it comes to falling back, this regiment goes last.'

'Of course, sir.'

IV

Highlanders! Four hundred yards! At the enemy advancing half-left, rapid fire!

Twenty minutes had passed. The regiment still stood immovable, though its left flank was now utterly exposed. All eyes and rifles were fixed upon the cluster of cottages. Through the gaps that lay between these could be discerned the advance of the German infantry – line upon line, moving towards the trench upon our left. The ground to our front was clear. Each time one of these lines passed a gap the rifles rang out and Ayling's remaining machine-gun uttered joyous barks. Still the enemy advanced. His shrapnel was bursting overhead; bullets were whistling from nowhere, for the attack in force was now being pressed home in earnest.

The deserted trench upon our left ran right through the cottages, and this restricted our view. No hostile bombers could be seen; it was evident that they had done their bit and handed on the conduct of affairs to others. Behind the shelter of the cottages the infantry were making a safe detour, and were bound,

unless something unexpected happened, to get round behind us.

'They'll be firing from our rear in a minute,' said Kemp between his teeth. 'Lochgair, order your platoon to face about and be ready to fire over the parados.'

Young Lochgair's method of executing this command was characteristically thorough. He climbed in leisurely fashion upon the parados; and standing there, with all his six-foot-three in full view, issued his orders.

'Face this way, boys! Keep your eyes on that group of buildings just behind the empty trench, in below the Fosse. You'll get some target practice presently. Don't go and forget that you are the straightest-shooting platoon in the Company. There they are' – he pointed with his stick – 'lots of them – coming through that gap in the wall! Now then, rapid fire, and let them have it! Oh, well done, boys! Good shooting! Very good! Very good ind——'

He stopped suddenly, swayed, and toppled back into the trench. Major Kemp caught him in his arms, and laid him gently upon the chalky floor. There was nothing more to be done. Young Lochgair had given his platoon their target, and the platoon were now firing steadily upon the same. He closed his eyes and sighed, like a tired child.

'Carry on, Major!' he murmured faintly. 'I'm all right.'

So died the simple-hearted, valiant enthusiast whom we had christened Othello.

The entire regiment – what was left of it – was now firing over the back of the trench; for the wily Teuton had risked no frontal attack, seeing that he could gain all his ends from the left flank. Despite vigorous rifle

fire and the continuous maledictions of the machine-gun, the enemy were now pouring through the cottages behind the trench. Many grey figures began to climb up the face of Fosse Eight, where apparently there was none to say them nay.

'We shall have a cheery walk back, I *don't* think!' murmured Wagstaffe.

He was right. Presently a withering fire was opened from the summit of the Fosse, which soon began to take effect in the exiguous and ill-protected trench.

'The Colonel is wounded, sir,' reported the Sergeant-Major to Major Kemp.

'Badly?'

'Yes, sir.'

Kemp looked round him. The regiment was now alone in the trench, for the gallant company upon their right had been battered almost out of existence.

'We can do no more good by staying here any longer,' said the Major. 'We have done our little bit. I think it is a case of "Home, John!" Tell off a party to bring in the C.O., Sergeant-Major.'

Then he passed the order.

'Highlanders, retire to the trenches behind, by companies, beginning from the right.'

'Whatever we may think of the Boche as a gentleman,' mused that indomitable philosopher, Captain Wagstaffe, as he doubled stolidly rearward behind his Company, 'there is no denying his bravery as a soldier or his skill in co-ordinating an attack. It's positively uncanny, the way his artillery supports his infantry. (Hallo, that was a near one!) This enfilade fire from the Fosse is most unpleasant. (I fancy that one went through my kilt.) Steady there, on the left: don't bunch, whatever you do! Thank heaven, there's the

next line of trenches, fully manned. And thank God, there's that boy Bobby tumbling in unhurt!'

V

So ended our share in the Big Push. It was a very small episode, spread over quite a short period, in one of the biggest and longest battles in the history of the world. It would have been easy to select a more showy episode, but hard to find a better illustration of the character of the men who took part in it. The battle which began upon that grey September morning has been raging, as I write, for nearly three weeks. It still surges backwards and forwards over the same stricken mile of ground; and the end is not yet. But the Hun is being steadily beaten to earth. (Only yesterday, in one brief furious counter-attack, he lost eight thousand killed.) When the final advance comes, as come it must, and our victorious line sweeps forward, it will pass over two narrow, ill-constructed, shell-torn trenches. In and around those trenches will be found the earthly remains of men – Jocks and Jimmies, and Sandies and Andies – clad in the uniform of almost every Scottish regiment. That assemblage of mute, glorious witnesses marks the point reached, during the first few hours of the first day's fighting, by the Scottish Division of 'K (1).' *Molliter ossa cubent.*

There is little more to add to the record of those three days. For yet another night we carried on – repelling counter-attacks, securing the Hohenzollern, making sorties out of Big Willie, or manning the original front-line parapet against eventualities. As is inevitable in a fight of these proportions, whole brigades were mingled together, and unexpected leaders arose to take the place of those who had fallen. Many a stout piece of work was done that night by mixed

bands of kilties, flat-heads and even cyclists, marshalled in a captured German trench and shepherded by a junior subaltern.

Finally, about midnight, came the blessed order that fresh troops were coming up to continue the attack, and that we were to be extricated from the *mêlée* and sent back to rest. And so, after a participation in the battle of some seventy-two hours, our battered Division came out – to sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion in dug-outs behind the railway line, and to receive, upon waking, the thanks of its Corps Commander.

5

GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT

ROBERT GRAVES

¶ Among recent autobiographies, few give a more striking impression of the writer's personality or a franker account of his experiences and the feelings they produced in him at the time than *Good-Bye to All That* (Jonathan Cape, Ltd.) Whether he is describing his school-days at Charterhouse, his adventures with the Royal Welch Fusiliers in France or the queer behaviour of the students at the new University of Cairo (where he lectured after the War), Graves never fails to grip the reader's attention.

Almost immediately after he left Charterhouse, the War broke out and he joined the army. In the following passage he describes part of the same action as that recounted in the extract from Ian Hay's *First Hundred Thousand*, to which he refers. The date is September 25, 1915.

THE Béthune-LaBassée road was choked with troops, guns and transport, and we had to march miles north out of our way to get back to Cambrin. As it was we were held up two or three times by massed cavalry. Everything seemed in confusion. A casualty clearing-station had been planted astride one of the principal crossroads and was already being shelled. When we reached Cambrin we had marched about twenty miles in all that day. We were told then that the Middlesex would go over first with us in support, and to their left the Second Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with the Cameronians in support; the junior officers complained loudly at our not being given the honour of leading the attack. We were the senior regiment, they protested, and entitled to the 'Right of the Line.'

We moved into trench sidings just in front of the village. There was about half a mile of communication trench between us and the trenches proper, known as Maison Rouge Alley. It was an hour or so past midnight. At half-past five the gas was to be discharged. We were cold, tired and sick, not at all in the mood for a battle. We tried to snatch an hour or two of sleep squatting in the trench. It had been raining for some time. Grey, watery dawn broke at last behind the German lines; the bombardment, which had been surprisingly slack all night, brisked up a little. 'Why the devil don't they send them over quicker?' asked The Actor.[1] 'This isn't my idea of a bombardment. We're getting nothing opposite us. What little there is is going into the Hohenzollern.' 'Shell shortage. Expected it,' answered Thomas. We were told afterwards that on the 23rd a German aeroplane had bombed the Army Reserve shell-dump and sent it up. The bombardment on the 24th and on the day of the battle itself was nothing compared with that of the previous days. Thomas looked strained and ill. 'It's time they were sending that damned accessory off. I wonder what's doing.'

What happened in the next few minutes is difficult for me now to sort out. It was more difficult still at the time. All we heard back there in the sidings was a distant cheer, confused crackle of rifle-fire, yells, heavy shelling on our front line, more shouts and yells and a continuous rattle of machine-guns. After a few minutes, lightly-wounded men of the Middlesex came stumbling down Maison Rouge Alley to the dressing-station. I was at the junction of the siding and the alley. 'What's happened? What's happened?' I asked. '—— mess-up' was the most detailed answer I could get. Among the wounded were a number of men yellow-faced and

[1] The nickname of an officer.

choking, with their buttons tarnished green; these were gas cases. Then came the stretcher cases. Maison Rouge Alley was narrow and the stretchers had difficulty in getting down. The Germans started shelling it with five-point-nines. Thomas went through the shelling to battalion headquarters to ask for orders. It was the same place that I had visited on my first night in the trenches. This group of dug-outs in the reserve line showed very plainly from the air as battalion headquarters, and should never have been occupied on the day of a battle. Just before Thomas arrived the Germans put five shells into it. The adjutant jumped one way, the colonel another, the regimental sergeant-major a third. One shell went into the signals dug-out and destroyed the telephone. The colonel had a slight wound on his hand; he joined the stream of wounded and was carried as far as the base with it. The adjutant took charge. All this time A Company had been waiting in the siding for the rum to arrive; the tradition of every attack was a double tot of rum beforehand. All the other companies got it except ours. The Actor was cursing: 'Where the hell's that storeman gone?' We fixed bayonets in readiness to go up to the attack as soon as Thomas came back with orders. The Actor sent me along the siding to the other end of the company. The stream of wounded was continuous. At last Thomas's orderly appeared, saying: 'Captain's orders, sir: A Company to move up to the front line.' It seems that at that moment the storeman appeared with the rum. He was hugging the rum-bottle, without rifle or equipment, red-faced and retching. He staggered up to The Actor and said: 'There you are, sir,' then fell on his face in the thick mud of a sump-pit at the junction of the trench and the siding. The stopper of the bottle flew out and what was left of the

three gallons bubbled on the ground. The Actor said nothing. It was a crime deserving the death-penalty. He put one foot on the storeman's neck, the other in the small of his back, and trod him into the mud. Then he gave the order 'Company forward.' The company went forward with a clatter of steel over the body, and that was the last heard of the storeman.

What had happened in the front line was this. At half-past four the commander of the gas-company in the front line sent a telephone message through to divisional headquarters: 'Dead calm. Impossible discharge accessory.' The answer came back: 'Accessory to be discharged at all costs.' Thomas's estimate of the gas-company's efficiency was right enough. The spanners for unscrewing the cocks of the cylinders were found, with two or three exceptions, to be misfits. The gas-men rushed about shouting and asking each other for the loan of an adjustable spanner. They discharged one or two cylinders with the spanners that they had; the gas went whistling out, formed a thick cloud a few yards away in No Man's Land, and then gradually spread back into the trenches. The Germans had been expecting the attack. They immediately put their gas-helmets on, semi-rigid ones, better than ours. Bundles of oily cotton-waste were strewn along the German parapet and set alight as a barrier to the gas. Then their batteries opened on our lines. The confusion in the front trench was great; the shelling broke several of the gas-cylinders and the trench was soon full of gas. The gas-company dispersed.

No orders could come through because the shell in the signals dug-out at battalion headquarters had cut communication both between companies and battalion headquarters and between battalion headquarters and division. The officers in the front trench had to decide

on immediate action. Two companies of the Middlesex, instead of waiting for the intense bombardment which was to follow the forty minutes of gas, charged at once and got as far as the German wire – which our artillery had not yet attempted to cut. What shelling there had been on it was shrapnel and not high explosive; shrapnel was no use against barbed wire. The Germans shot the Middlesex men down. It is said that one platoon found a gap and got into the German trench. But there were no survivors of the platoon to confirm the story. The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders went over too, on their left. Two companies, instead of charging at once, rushed back to the support line out of the gas-filled front trench and attacked from there. It will be recalled that the front line had been pushed forward in preparation for the battle; these companies were therefore attacking from the old front line. The barbed wire entanglements in front of this trench had not been removed, so that they were caught and machine-gunned between their own front and support lines. The leading companies were equally unsuccessful. When the attack started, the German N.C.O.'s had jumped up on the parapet to encourage their men. It was a Jaeger regiment and their musketry was good.

The survivors of the first two companies of the Middlesex were lying in shell-craters close to the German wire, sniping and making the Germans keep their heads down. They had bombs to throw, but these were nearly all of a new type issued for the battle; the fuses were lit on the match-and-matchbox principle and the rain had made them useless. The other two companies of the Middlesex soon followed in support. Machine-gun fire stopped them half-way. Only one German machine-gun was now in action, the others had

been knocked out by rifle or trench-mortar fire. Why the single gun remained in action is a story in itself.

It starts like this. British colonial governors and high-commissioners had the privilege of nominating one or two officers from their countries to be attached in war-time to the regular British forces. Under this scheme the officers appointed began as full lieutenants. The Governor-General of Jamaica (or whatever his proper style may be) nominated the eighteen-year-old son of a rich Jamaica planter. He was sent straight from Jamaica to the First Middlesex. He was good-hearted enough but of little use in the trenches. He had never been out of the island in his life and, except for a short service with the West Indian militia, knew nothing of soldiering. His company commander took a fatherly interest in Young Jamaica, as he was called, and tried to teach him his duties. This company commander was known as The Boy. He had twenty years' service in the Middlesex, and the unusual boast of having held every rank from 'boy' to captain in the same company. His father, I believe, had been the regimental sergeant-major. The difficulty was that Jamaica was a full lieutenant and so senior to the other experienced subalterns in the company who were only second-lieutenants. The colonel decided to shift Jamaica off on some course or extra-regimental appointment at the earliest opportunity. Somewhere about May or June he had been asked to supply an officer for the brigade trench-mortar company, and he had sent Jamaica. Trench-mortars at that time were dangerous and ineffective; so the appointment seemed suitable. At the same time the Royal Welch Fusiliers had also been asked to detail an officer, and the colonel had sent Tiley, an ex-planter from Malay, who was what is called a fine natural

soldier. He had been chosen because he was attached from another regiment and had showed his resentment at the manner of his welcome somewhat too plainly. By September mortars had improved in design and become an important infantry arm; Jamaica was senior to Tiley and was therefore in the responsible position of commanding the company.

When the Middlesex made the charge, The Boy was mortally wounded as he climbed over the parapet. He fell back and began crawling down the trench to the stretcher-bearers' dug-out. He passed Jamaica's trench-mortar emplacement. Jamaica had lost his gun-team and was serving the trench-mortars himself. When he saw The Boy he forgot about his guns and ran off to get a stretcher-party. Tiley meanwhile, on the other flank, opposite Mine Point, had knocked out the machine-guns within range. He went on until his gun burst. The machine-gun in the Pope's Nose, a small salient opposite Jamaica, remained in action.

It was at this point that the Royal Welch Fusiliers came up in support. Maison Rouge Alley was a nightmare; the Germans were shelling it with five-nines bursting with a black smoke and with lachrymatory shells. This caused a continual scramble backwards and forwards. There were cries and counter-cries: 'Come on!' 'Get back!' 'Gas turning on us!' 'Keep your heads, you men!' 'Back like hell, boys.' 'Whose orders?' 'What's happening?' 'Gas!' 'Back!' 'Come on!' 'Gas!' 'Back!' Wounded men and stretcher-bearers were still trying to squeeze past. We were alternately putting on and taking off our gas-helmets and that made things worse. In many places the trench was filled in and we had to scramble over the top. Childe-Freeman got up to the front line with only fifty

men of B Company; the rest had lost their way in some abandoned trenches half-way up. The adjutant met him in the support line. 'You ready to go over, Freeman?' he asked. Freeman had to admit that he had lost most of his company. He felt this keenly as a disgrace; it was the first time that he had commanded a company in battle. He decided to go over with his fifty men in support of the Middlesex. He blew his whistle and the company charged. They were stopped by machine-gun fire before they had passed our own entanglements. Freeman himself died, but of heart-failure, as he stood on the parapet. After a few minutes C Company and the remainder of B reached the front line. The gas-cylinders were still whistling and the trench full of dying men. Samson decided to go over, he would not have it said that the Royal Welch had let down the Middlesex. There was a strong comradely feeling between the Middlesex and the Royal Welch. So Samson with C and the rest of B Company charged. One of the officers told me later what happened to himself. It had been agreed to advance by platoon rushes with supporting fire. When his platoon had run about twenty yards he signalled them to lie down and open covering fire. The din was tremendous. He saw the platoon on the left flopping down too, so he whistled the advance again. Nobody seemed to hear. He jumped up from his shell-hole and waved and signalled 'Forward.' Nobody stirred. He shouted: 'You —— cowards, are you leaving me to go alone?' His platoon sergeant, groaning with a broken shoulder, gasped out: 'Not cowards, sir. Willing enough. But they're all —— dead.' A machine-gun traversing had caught them as they rose to the whistle.

Our company too had become separated by the shelling. The Surrey-man got a touch of gas and

went coughing back. The Actor said he was skrim-shanking and didn't want the battle. This was unfair. The Surrey-man looked properly sick. I do not know what happened to him, but I heard that the gas was not much and that he managed, a few months later, to get back to his own regiment in France. I found myself with The Actor in a narrow trench between the front and support lines. This trench had not been built wide enough for a stretcher to pass the bends. We came on The Boy lying on his stretcher wounded in the lungs and the stomach. Jamaica was standing over him in tears, blubbering: 'Poor old Boy, poor old Boy, he's going to die; I'm sure he is. He's the only one who was decent to me.' The Actor found we could not get by. He said to Jamaica: ' Take that poor devil out of the way, will you ? I've got to get my company up. Put him into a dug-out or somewhere.' Jamaica made no answer; he seemed paralysed by the horror of the occasion. He could only repeat: 'Poor old Boy, poor old Boy.' 'Look here,' said The Actor, 'if you can't shift him into a dug-out we'll have to lift him on top of the trench. He can't live now and we're late getting up.' 'No, no,' Jamaica shouted wildly. The Actor lost his temper and shook Jamaica roughly by the shoulders. 'You're the —— trench-mortar wallah, aren't you?' he asked fiercely. Jamaica nodded miserably. 'Well, your battery is a hundred yards from here. Why the hell aren't you using your gas-pipes on that machine-gun in the Pope's Nose? Buzz off back to them.' And he kicked him down the trench. Then he called over his shoulder: 'Sergeant Rose and Corporal Jennings, lift this stretcher up across the top of the trench. We've got to pass.' Jamaica leaned against a traverse. 'I do think you're the most heartless beast I've ever met,' he said weakly.

We went on up to the front line. It was full of dead and dying. The captain of the gas-company, who had kept his head and had a special oxygen respirator, had by now turned off the gas. Vermorel-sprayers had cleared out most of the gas, but we still had to wear our masks. We climbed up and crouched on the fire-step, where the gas was not so thick – gas was heavy stuff and kept low. Then Thomas arrived with the remainder of A Company and, with D, we waited for the whistle to follow the other two companies over. Fortunately at this moment the adjutant appeared. He told Thomas that he was now in command of the battalion and he didn't care a damn about orders; he was going to cut his losses. He said he would not send A and D over until he got definite orders from brigade. He had sent a runner back because telephone communication was cut, and we must wait. Meanwhile the intense bombardment that was to follow the forty minutes' discharge of gas began. It concentrated on the German front trench and wire. A good deal of it was short and we had further casualties in our trenches. The survivors of the Middlesex and of our B and C Companies in craters in No Man's Land suffered heavily.

My mouth was dry, my eyes out of focus, and my legs quaking under me. I found a water-bottle full of rum and drank about half a pint; it quieted me and my head remained clear. Samson was lying wounded about twenty yards away from the front trench. Several attempts were made to get him in. He was very badly hit and groaning. Three men were killed in these attempts and two officers and two men wounded. Finally his own orderly managed to crawl out to him. Samson ordered him back, saying that he was riddled and not worth rescuing; he sent his apologies to the company for making such a noise. We waited for about a couple

of hours for the order to charge. The men were silent and depressed. Sergeant Townsend was making feeble, bitter jokes about the good old British army muddling through and how he thanked God we still had a navy. I shared the rest of the rum with him and he cheered up a little. Finally a runner came with a message that the attack was off for the present.

Rumours came down the trenches of a disaster similar to our own in the brick-stack area, where the Fifth Brigade had gone over, and again at Givenchy, where it was said that men of the Sixth Brigade at the Duck's Bill salient had fought their way into the enemy trenches, but had been bombed out, their own supply of bombs failing. It was said, however, that things were better on the right, where there had been a slight wind to take the gas over. There was a rumour that the First, Seventh, and Forty-seventh Divisions had broken through. My memory of that day is hazy. We spent it getting the wounded down to the dressing-station, spraying the trenches and dug-outs to get rid of the gas, and clearing away the earth where trenches were blocked. The trenches stank with a gas-blood-lyddite-latrine smell. Late in the afternoon we watched through our field-glasses the advance of the reserves towards Loos and Hill 70; it looked like a real break through. They were being heavily shelled. They were troops of the new-army division whose staff we had messed with the night before. Immediately to the right of us was the Highland Division, whose exploits on that day Ian Hay has celebrated in *The First Hundred Thousand*; I suppose that we were 'the flat caps on the left' who 'let down' his comrades-in-arms.

As soon as it was dusk we all went out to get in the wounded. Only sentries were left in the line. The first dead body I came upon was Samson's. I found that

he had forced his knuckles into his mouth to stop him self crying out and attracting any more men to their death. He had been hit in seventeen places. Major Swainson, the second-in-command of the Middlesex, came crawling in from the German wire. He seemed to be wounded in the lungs, the stomach and a leg. Choate, a Middlesex second-lieutenant, appeared; he was unhurt, and together we bandaged Swainson and got him into the trench and on a stretcher. He begged me to loosen his belt; I cut it with a bowie-knife that I had bought in Béthune for use in the fighting. He said: 'I'm about done for.'[1] We spent all that night getting in the wounded of the Royal Welch, the Middlesex and those of the Argyll and Sutherland who had attacked from the front trench. The Germans behaved generously. I do not remember hearing a shot fired that night, and we kept on until it was nearly dawn and we could be plainly seen, then they fired a few shots in warning and we gave it up. By this time we had got in all the wounded and most of the Royal Welch dead. I was surprised at some of the attitudes in which the dead had stiffened – in the act of bandaging friends' wounds, crawling, cutting wire. The Argyll and Sutherland had seven hundred casualties, including fourteen officers killed out of the sixteen that went over; the Middlesex five hundred and fifty casualties, including eleven officers killed.

Two other Middlesex officers besides Choate were unwounded; their names were Henry and Hill, second-lieutenants who had recently come with commissions

[1]Major Swainson recovered quickly and was back at the Middlesex Depot after a few weeks. On the other hand, Lawrie, a Royal Welch company quartermaster-sergeant back at Cambrin, was hit in the neck that day by a spent machine-gun bullet which just pierced the skin, and died of shock a few hours later.

from, I think, the Artists' Rifles; their welcome in the Middlesex had been something like mine in the Royal Welch. They had been lying out in shell-holes in the rain all day, sniping and being sniped at. Henry, according to Hill, had dragged five wounded men into his shell-hole and thrown up a sort of parapet with his hands and a bowie-knife that he was carrying. Hill had his platoon sergeant with him, screaming for hours with a stomach wound, begging for morphia; he was dying, so Hill gave him five pellets. We always carried morphia with us for emergencies like this. When Choate, Henry and Hill arrived back in the trenches with a few stragglers they reported at the Middlesex headquarters. Hill told me the story. The colonel and the adjutant were sitting down to a meat pie when he and Henry arrived. Henry said: 'Come to report, sir. Ourselves and about ninety men of all companies. Mr. Choate is back, unwounded, too.' They looked up dully. The colonel said: 'So you've come back, have you? Well, all the rest are dead. I suppose Mr. Choate had better command what's left of A Company, the bombing officer will command what's left of B (the bombing officer had not gone over but remained with headquarters), Mr. Henry goes to C Company, Mr. Hill to D. The Royal Welch are holding the front line. We are here in support. Let me know where to find you if I want you. Good night.' There was no offer to have a piece of meat pie or a drink of whisky, so they saluted and went miserably out. They were called back by the adjutant. 'Mr. Hill! Mr. Henry!' 'Sir!' Hill said that he expected a change of mind as to the propriety with which hospitality could be offered by a regular colonel and adjutant to temporary second-lieutenants in distress. But it was only to say: 'Mr. Hill, Mr. Henry, I saw some men in the trench just

now with their shoulder-straps unbuttoned and their equipment fastened anyhow. See that this practice does not occur in future. That's all.' Henry heard the colonel from his bunk complaining that he had only two blankets and that it was a deucedly cold night. Choate arrived a few minutes later and reported; the others had told him of their reception. After he had saluted and reported that Major Swainson, who had been thought killed, was wounded and on the way down to the dressing-station, he leaned over the table, cut a large piece of meat pie and began eating it. This caused such surprise that nothing further was said. He finished his meat pie and drank a glass of whisky, saluted, and joined the others.

6

BROADCHALK

JOHN EASTON

¶ The following narrative forms part of one of *Three Personal Records of the War* (Eric Partridge Ltd.), of which the other two were written by R. H. Mottram and Eric Partridge (an extract from the latter of these being included in this volume). The author was with the 12th Royal Fusiliers at the Battle of Loos: he describes how we were driven from the great slag-heap, called the Dump or Fosse 8, near La Bassée, by a German attack on September 26, 1915, and how we counter-attacked in the early morning two days later. The extract given is the record of this counter-attack. The impression of extreme weariness resulting from prolonged and unrelieved strain is excellently conveyed; and the description of the hallucinations by which the writer was tormented makes us feel that we are indeed reading 'a true and exact narrative.'

THERE was little that could be done: the great task was to keep awake, to keep the body moving and the brain alive. If Broadchalk stood still for a moment his eyes closed and his brain stopped working: he felt the sudden gap as his thoughts slid away into an unconsciousness, clutched at them in the distance, held on to them and, just as he felt them sliding from his grasp, came to his senses with a jerk that half dislocated his neck.

This happened a dozen times or more. 'Here I am with a job at last, and I can't keep awake,' he muttered. He looked about him and picked out the least weary of the men under his command.

'You keep by my side,' he said. 'Every time you see me falling asleep give me a jab in the ribs.' The man did not smile: there was nothing funny in the command.

They started to clean their rifles, for many of the bolts had been jammed by the mud freezing over them.

Two o'clock. Two-thirty.

A sudden thought came to him that they themselves might attack at dawn, and forestall the Germans: a kind of second sight, for he felt eerie and strange, as if he were not seeing all things clearly. He brought up his reserves and packed them tightly in the communication trench. 'As soon as we leave the trenches you must occupy them, give us a minute or two's start, and then follow,' he said. He put a sergeant in charge of them and returned to spend those last two hours before daylight, with his newly appointed orderly at his side, nudging his arm every few minutes.

It happened very suddenly, just as he was clutching at consciousness and fighting the black mists that descended upon his brain. A cheer from behind sent him spinning round, and simultaneously to his right a line of British dashed up cheering to the trenches, jumped them and sped on towards the Dump. We were attacking then, as his instinct had forewarned him!

The Sussex major blew his whistle and waved his arm.

'Come on,' Broadchalk shouted, and scrambled out of the trench. He had much ground to make up, for the company of the Berkshires – who had been pushed up to recapture the Dump – had a good start. He was only conscious that at last the tide had turned, that those hours of indecision were over: he must dash on and get in front: that was his place. He drew his revolver as he ran.

He saw the Sussex captain pitch forward on to his face and lie still: then he too pitched forward, and landed full on his stomach. For a moment he thought he was hit, but it was only a strand of wire that had coiled round his ankle. He had lost more ground, but he made it up and got into the front of the charge about twenty yards from the Dump. Where were they going? where would they stop? The thought never came to him: he was just one of those three hundred men who had been chucked at the enemy and could only come to rest with their bayonets in their targets' bellies. There is no thought of repulse or successful opposition in the minds of a line of charging infantry: only a roar from each throat – parched and unparched – as they swept up the precipitous side of the slag heap.

Over the edge they found the machine-guns playing breast high and felt the sing of the bullets about their ears. The men each side of Broadchalk flung up their arms and toppled backwards like stormers in an old print, thrust down from a castle rampart.

They rallied on the slag-heap and pushed forward again.

'Where are you, Sergeant-Major?'

'Here I am, sir!' These were regulars, who had fought since the tail-end of the Aisne.

Wraiths in spiked helmets – the cloth covers shining white in the moonlight – were dashing for safety on all sides before them, like disturbed earwigs under a rotten tree stump.

A roar went up from every throat; some fired their rifles, others shouted curses, called to the enemy to stand and face the music. There was a pause while they shouted in derision, then the whole line swept forward with a shout.

Broadchalk heard Trevor's voice to his left, saw the

Berkshires' sergeant-major running forward on his right; shouted himself and ran forward too for a few paces, until he was brought to a halt by a figment of his worn-out brain.

He saw it in a flash, as clearly as if he stood in broad daylight, and he knew that he was wide-awake, heard the sound of his own voice, saw the Webley revolver clutched in his own hands.

On his right an arc light stood, burning from the top of a green iron pole. In front of him, on two lines of rails, stood two strings of closed goods-wagons, stretching unbroken across his front – he could see the smoke-begrimed couplings, the rusty brake-bars, the white letters 'G.N.' shining in the light of the arc lamp. And as he watched he realised that he was in Wood Green goods yard! He stopped dead in amazement and stared about him; it was true, the trucks were there, a solid barrier to his advance. A couple of men ran forward on his right, ran straight through the trucks and were swallowed up by the wooden walls, as if they had passed through a curtain. He looked wildly about him: 'Sergeant Hall,' he shouted. 'Make those men go between and not through the trucks!

The sergeant stared at him stupefied, and as suddenly as it had had birth the vision disappeared; he was left to stare at the sergeant blankly.

'My God, I'm seeing things,' he muttered softly, hushed by the sense of his own incompetence. He rushed forward again, leaving the sergeant to imagine what he would, and as he moved the sergeant pitched forward dead.

'Half right, half left!' shouted the Berkshire subaltern, 'and line the edge of the Dump.'

They split into two parties and wheeled, Trevor going to the left and Broadchalk to the right.

'Where are those bombers? ——! Where are those bombers?'

It was the sergeant-major: there was a catch in his voice as he realised that his bombers had been caught by the machine-guns, that the attack was doomed to failure.

The German guns had opened, the top of the Dump was one roaring furnace of bursting shrapnel and high explosive; snakes of smoke and coal writhed into the air as the gunners found their range; the machine-guns mowed the ground like scythes, raked it from side to side: men were falling fast; that band of three hundred men was reduced to a hundred in as many seconds – and still no further sign of the Germans.

They dashed forward to the edge of the Dump and flung themselves down in a firing-line. The sergeant-major doubled back in quest of his bombers.

In the trench running round the bottom of the Dump stood the Germans, firing from the shoulder at a target twenty feet above them: and no bombs! Four bombers could have cleared those trenches in a few seconds; now the infantry lay helpless, and, as a man thrust forward his head and shoulders to take aim at the enemy below, a bullet found him, fired at twenty feet. The hundred men were already fifty.

Over their heads, the height of a standing man's breast, the machine-gun bullets chattered; in front and below lay certain death.

Broadchalk watched, fascinated. He kept his head over the edge, gazing at the Germans, firing with his revolver whenever he saw one take aim. He emptied all six chambers, and waited.

'Can't we charge them, sir?'

'Lie still!' shouted the Berkshire subaltern. He rose to his feet and a bullet hit him: Broadchalk heard the

gurgle of blood in his throat, heard the drumming of his heels and the last choke – then silence.

The fury burst out once more. The man next to Broadchalk was shot through the head, and rolled over on top of him: the man on his left was hit in the leg and started to whimper.

Broadchalk sat up, waiting for the shot that should end it all: there were only ten men alive.

A succession of crashes and bursts of flame in the line heralded a new danger: this was a new kind of shell to Broadchalk and at first his benumbed brain did not take in its significance.

'They're bombing us !' shouted one of the survivors.

Broadchalk looked quickly over the edge: the Germans were thicker than ever and were shouting in excitement. He saw them lobbing bombs gently up towards him. A German shouted at the sight of him and threw a bomb. Broadchalk lay flat and it burst behind him.

'Get back twenty yards !' he shouted. 'Get into shell-holes.'

They scurried back beyond range and lay in the shell-holes. There were four men with Broadchalk and they took it in turns to watch.

The shelling had died down, and the bombing had ceased: the Germans were waiting for dawn before they should collect their trophies. A long line of dead men hung like a fringe along the edge of the Dump.

The man who had been hit in the leg – a Scots corporal who had joined in the attack – lay at Broadchalk's side and started to whimper. 'Oh, sir. Oh, sir !'

'Hold on, boys,' shouted Broadchalk. 'The supports will be here in a jiffy.' He turned to the Scotsman. 'Let's have a look at that leg,' he said.

He started to unwind the puttee: then stopped. 'Take off the puttee yourself,' he said kindly, for the man was frightened and wanted a job of work badly. The corporal obeyed.

'Why, it's – it's nothing. Where's your field dressing?' He felt strangely calm, as if he were inspecting kit.

The man tore away his dressing. 'Put some iodine on it, and then we'll tie it up. That's better. How do you feel now?'

'Fine, thank you, sir!'

'Good. We've only got to hold on a little longer.'

Broadchalk sat up and looked around.

The simple action of tieing up the man's leg had helped him too; he could see the heads of a couple of men in a shell-hole a few yards away. 'It's all right,' he called. 'Sit tight and watch the edge: let them have it if they come over.'

In the undisturbed silence of that vigil Broadchalk felt his eyes grow heavy, heavier than ever before: his body ached and his head throbbed. He recognised once more that consciousness was slowly deserting him: he grunted, and came to life with a sudden and painful jerk.

He could hardly believe his eyes! Behind them, in perfect alignment, their bayonets gleaming, their legs moving in perfect time, first right then left, shoulder to shoulder across the full width of the Dump, came a line of British infantry, slowly, inexorably, each man staring at him. He felt the hypnotism of their stare, saw that they were fresh, clean men, without the smoke and grime of battle upon them. He swallowed hard, moistened his swollen throat and pointed at them with his empty revolver. 'There they are!' he shouted. 'Look, there they are!'

The men in the shell-hole looked round in bewilderment – followed the direction of his arm and saw – nothing.

Broadchalk watched amazement creep over their faces, heard a muffled oath, caught a new whimper from the wounded man, and turned in terror to see what new mockery his brain had contrived for him.

The Dump was empty, but for the dead!

He sat quietly, trembling: not a word was spoken. Desire for sleep, sleep at all costs, seized him once more: he struggled to evade it, but hadn't the power to resist any longer.

A shout at his side awoke him. 'They're coming, sir!' He opened his eyes wearily, and saw that the Dump was grey with the first streaks of dawn.

Men were shouting in German one to another beyond the edge of the slag-heap. 'Stand by!' he called out, and loaded his revolver with the reserve six rounds from his pouch.

They waited in silence, their rifles trained on that edge of slag, that stood out black against the grey mist.

The shouts increased: spread from side to side, ran like a flame on a bonfire soaked in paraffin.

A burst of shouting in their rear and the clatter of running men. They turned and found a body of Germans not ten yards away, who had raised a yell at the sight of them.

Broadchalk saw a man rushing at him, saw his bayonet pointed full at his throat, lashed out with his ash stick and felt a crash on his head. Then a German from behind seized him by the arm and ran him down the slope.

7

ALL FOR PEACE AND QUIET

C. E. MONTAGUE

If a modern instance were needed to prove that it is possible to be a journalist and yet 'leave something so written to after-times, as they should not willingly let it die,' no better name could be quoted than that of C. E. Montague. Montague left Oxford to join the staff of the *Manchester Guardian* (1890) and, except for the War years, spent his whole life in its service. The pick of the dramatic criticism he wrote for that journal is brought together in *Dramatic Values*. In the collections entitled *The Right Place* and *Fiery Particles*, the modern essay and short story respectively are seen at their best. In the former he expresses his 'full satisfaction with certain contents of life on the earth': he loves the open air, vigorous exercise, travel, freedom, varied and intense sensations of every kind. His work is characterised by an extraordinary richness of allusion, an imaginative splendour of phrase and a clarity of vision which put him in the forefront of contemporary masters of English prose. He died in 1928.

The War plays a part in his fine novel *Rough Justice*; provides a setting for numerous short stories; and is directly described in *The Western Front* and similar sketches. *Disenchantment* is a general survey of his war-time impressions, both at home and in France, and of what they revealed about human nature and the English character in particular. He warns us that, though war has gone out of fashion, it may come into fashion again and indicates the League of Nations as our most practical safeguard.

The following story from *Fiery Particles* (Chatto & Windus) reveals not only his mastery of witty, rapid-moving dialogue in dialect, but also that unique combination of sympathy and humour which enables him to create such likeable characters. 'Quinshy' is Cuinchy, in the same neighbourhood as that in which the fighting described in the two preceding extracts took place.

AS the sister went out of the ward she paused to look back, with the knob of the door in her hand.

'Boys,' she said, in the voice that made babes of us all, 'five minutes to get into bed.' We knew that five minutes, no more and no less, it would be. The door closed behind her, the little pat noise of it putting a kind of full stop to her words.

Of thirty wounded men in the ward, twenty-two had been up for the day. We were the blest. But bliss was precarious. If we were not good, the sister might keep us in bed in the morning. So we eagerly slipped off and folded our socks and red ties and blue tunics and slacks. The shirt did not have to come off. A shirt by day, it was a nighty by night – a good plan, I can tell you, when any delay may cost dear. In five minutes, dead, the door opened; the sister looked down the long ward.

I lay next but one to the door, so I saw what she saw. There were twenty-nine faces duly laid on their pillows. Some seven looked dull and bed-weary. Twenty-one others – I throw myself in, for I felt like it too – looked shiny and young with the glee that you feel when the life in you has taken heart to go on with a will, after a check. A twenty-ninth face, in the bed on my right, was a model in wax, awaiting only some one final touch of rigidity and refinement. Into the thirtieth bed, at the dim far end of the ward, a vast bulk, in a white shirt less vast, flew through the air from afar with astonishing momentum and dived in fear and shame under the blankets.

The sister took it all in. A sergeant-major had been lost to the world when she turned out a girl. But not one to rule wholly by terror. She went first to the wax-faced man on my right, that always lay on his back with his eyes open, scrutinizing the ceiling. He turned his face a few degrees at the touch of her hand on his

wrist and smiled a little. He had a great dignity then: the austere prestige of the dying, who are an esoteric patriciate, lifted above desire and fear and all quarrels.

The sister went on to the far end of the ward, where the meteoric giant had gone to earth under his blankets. His great shafts of limbs were convulsing them now, in his efforts to settle down for the night; the bed looked like a small linen bag with a large and terrified cat imprisoned in it and plunging. The plunging instantly stopped when the sister began tucking in the disarranged elements of the bed.

'Late! A corporal late!' In the stillness I heard her gently upbraid, while she reconstructed. Then a big bony face, like a knee, came to the bed's surface. The face looked sheepishly grateful for these so great mercies.

> We must perish if Thy rod
> Justly should requite us.

That was the visible feeling. No doubt Lance-Corporal Martin was vowing, within, that he would be first man in bed, from that night onward, for ever.

Her tour of inspection finished, the sister was passing the foot of my bed, on her way to the door, when another huge frame of a man, Lance-Corporal Toomey, a rug-headed Rufus, half rose from the bed on my left – the end bed on our side of the ward.

'Sister,' he hailed her. She looked.

'Ye'd do right, sister,' he said, with a clarion distinctness that seemed to me purposeful, 'to be firm with that man beyant at th' end of the room, or ye'll not have a moment of peace.' He paused for a second. Somehow I thought of an angler expecting a rise. He went on in tones of virtuous indignation. 'Flyin' into his bed like a Toc Emma bomb!' Another momentary pause. No rise. 'Aye, or an eagle itself,' he appended.

A low thunderous noise came from the far end of the ward. The first chaos of this mass of sound was just beginning to receive form in the words 'Is it faultin' me that he is, the contrary toad ?' when the sister raised a reprehensive finger.

Speech, divinest work of man, relapsed into its raw material of booming sound. This sank by degrees. Lance-Corporal Martin was still out to be good.

The sister looked down at Toomey, reining him in. In him, too, mighty reservoirs of formless sound were straining against sluices. 'Why don't you corporals screen one another,' she said, with the voice of the dove and the serpent's wisdom, 'like sergeants ?'

'If anny sergeant,' Toomey impressively opened, 'in all the wide world, had lived with the Martins of County Fermanagh these twinty years back, the way I've had to enjure——'

'We won't tell any tales,' the sister decided, and Toomey's conditional sentence never achieved its apodosis. 'Good night, all,' the sister said at the door. 'Don't talk too long.'

She gone, the ward, for a while, was all in a buzz. It is always the way at first, in night nurseries. Not for long, though. Sleep swiftly invaded one simple organism after another. Soon a few specialists only were riding their hobbies on into the night. In the bed opposite to me the ward grouser was manfully keeping it up. 'Call them ole dishwashin's supper ! Well, roll on, breakfus' ! 's all I 'ave to say.' Three beds away on my right – two beds beyond the moribund man – the ward braggart, like Alexander the Great at the feast, was still routing his foes. 'An Austrylian 'e was, an' 'e come powkin' 'is conk in me fice, aht in Ahmenteers. "More'n twelve thahsand mile ah've come," 'e says, "to sive you ticks," 'e says. "Well," ah says, "you down't come a

—— inch further," ah says, an' knocks 'im dahn. That's wot ah done. Fair on 'is boko. Knocked 'im silly, ah did. 'Struth !'

To these shrill melodies a fortifying bass was furnished by my neighbour Toomey. Cowed, but not changed in heart, by the sister, he still rumbled on in his bed like a distant bombardment. Like Martin's last share in debate, it was mainly a deep rolling or heaving sound, not chopped up into words; in its vague impressiveness it affected my ear somewhat as a distant range of undulating hills affects the eye. But now and then a short passage of firm, articulate commination lifted itself into clearness, as tiny islands of coral, emergent morsels of vast unexplored structures, stick out into daylight. 'No peace an' quiet at all to be had !' 'Lettin' on to be wounded, an' he leppin' the width of the world into his bed !' And I used to think once that soliloquies in plays were unnatural ! 'He' an' his Bloody Hand of Ulster ! Let him put it in his pockut, th' owld miser !' 'Boundin' into his bed wid a thraject'ry on him the like of a grasshopper !'

Toomey always seemed to return to that vision of Martin's retirement for the night as if it were fuel wherewith to stoke important fires. I cannot think that Martin's jump was intrinsically offensive to Toomey. All jumping, by man or beast, is highly valued in Ireland. Was it that any salient gesture of a foe's helped to make the whole abhorred image of him more provocatively vivid ? I leave it to you; I am not a psychologist, only a reporter.

'The both'ration I've had wi' the Martins, the whole of the pack !' 'If Our Lady of Seven Sorrows cud set eyes upon them she'd know what it is to be vexed !' You have heard the low seismic swallowings, pantings, and gulps of a big locomotive held in leash at a station.

Toomey, making a good recovery from gunshot wounds and wrestling in spirit with a friend, was rather like that – a volcano tied down with string. Then reverie fell back on the old refrain. 'An' he descindin' into his bed the match for an airiplane landin'!' 'The spit of some owld hivvinly body bruk loose an' traversin' a very big share of the firmamint!' The obsession of Toomey by this haunting spectacle was becoming ungovernable. He had to communicate it.

'Did y'ever see the like of it – ever?' he said across to my bed.

'No,' said I, feeling my diction somewhat jejune where so much picturesque figuration was going.

''Faith, then, *I* have,' said Toomey, 'the time that I seen his mother's starved hens flyin' in at me own mother's door, the vulchures, fit to grab all the nourishment out of me plate, an' I a young child.'

'Bit of a war on,' I asked, 'over there?' I wanted to sleep. I am only an Englishman. I do not hold two turbulent quarts of tireless life in the modest pint pot of my body. It seemed the shorter way to sleep – just to open the dykes and let the whole narrative flood escape and be done with, rather than lie there all night being splashed with these interjectional spurts from the damned seething waters. 'Bit of a war on?' I asked.

'Ye'd not know,' he impressively said, 'what war is till ye'd visit the County Fermanagh. Talk of this little unpleasantness wi' the Germans! Ach, nothin' at all! Here wan day an', mebbe, gone in the mornin'! The 'owld wars of Troy'd be hard set to match what we have in Dromore, where the Martins are nex'-door neighbours to us, an' not respected by anny except black Prod'stants the like of themselves. To crown all, Jawn Martin beyant had no sooner grown up than nothin'd do him but join the police. Mind, there's manny a

decent lad in the force, the way ye'd pity them on a summer night in Dromore – we in the licensed prem'ses, all at our ease, an' they walkin' this way an' that in the street, wi' the tongues hangin' out of their mouths, till the hour'd come they'd be free to lep in at the door and tell the boys they must shout or come out of it. Martin beyant would not give ye the choice. He'd liefer lose drink than not cause human mis'ry. A narra-spirited man an' a bigoted peeler!

'I thanked God for this tiff wi' the Germans. Ye see, in a sense, it gev Martin, bound and gagged, into me hand. "Jawn," I said – I was just after enlistin' – "Jawn, I'll be back before long. I'm only steppin' over to France, to destroy," says I, "the greatest Prod'stant Pow'r in Europe."

'"I might be at him before ye," says he, pensive-like; an' that made me unaisy. Ye'll understand, I'd always taken me own part the best way I could in this chat that we had, wan day an' the next, an' yet I'd the wish in me mind to have peace an' quiet awhile, away out of Dromore, leavin' that plague of the world confined where he was. An' so I'd thanked God for th' affair wi' the Germans. But now I was not aisy at all.

'"Ye wouldn't sneak off," says I, "out of the country, an' leave all the poor German bands in the street unprotected from popular voylence – an' they nivver safe in Irelan' yet since eighteen and siventy?" If I'd had more diplom'cy, God help me! I wouldn't have said it. But I had me quarrel to mind. I've paid for it since.

'Says Jawn, "There's a sowl of good, as they say, in annything evil. I see be the papers these Germans are smashing every Romish cathedral they'd meet on the road." Half thinkin' it out, he seemed to be, for an' against, an' half stickin' the knife into me bowels. The

same as meself "Don't fear to speak," says I, "of '98, an' of all that the Hessians done for ye then." Madness it was to say that. I was drivin' him into the army, that might have been a haven of rest for meself for the whole of the war with him out of it. Leavin' all was I, an' baffl'n' meself, to have the wan dig at him.

'Jawn looked at me quarely. "An' so ye'll fight for th' English," he says, "afther all? Ye're penitent, are ye?"

'However, I knew me facts there.

' "Th' English are givin' free transport," says I, "to this Wipers beyant, to see th' owld flag hangin' up in a church that th' French and th' Irish tuk off them in Malbury's wars. There's the fine penitence for ye," says I.

' "Oh, ye'll see Waterloo yet, me fine touris'," says he, jus' to howld me in play, an' he puzzlin' it out what to do.

' "I may that," says I, "if it's annyways near Fontenoy."

' "Dad!" says he irrel'vantly, scratchin' the back of his head in the ag'ny an' sweat of his thinkin' about somethin' else, "haven't I got a better right not to be friends wi' the English than you, an' they just after passin' Home Rule?"

' "What way'd ye be friends," says I in me anger an' folly, "wid English or Irish, an' you after lookin' away with the whole force of your eyes while th' Orangeys landed their Mausers from Hamburg, to slaughter the wan as lief as th' other?"

'We bruk away then, he to – Hellin' the reel Pope, an' I doin' the like be every weeny black Pope in his wrinkly tin Vaticun all over Ulster. It was a kind of salute we had always, meetin' an' partin'.

'Me word, if the nex' Monday mornin' he didn't come shankin' on to parade on the wan barrack-square with

meself! We were formin' B Comp'ny that day, an' th' owld sergeant-major, Yorke, was expoundin': "Sixteen men I'll have now, for Number Wan Section. Who-iver they are, they'll work together, eat together, sleep together, an' fight together, from this out to th' end of the war. So anny man wishful to be with his pal, let him look to it now, or howld his peace after. Men off'rin' for Number Wan Section, two paces step forrud."

'Jawn gev me wan vinegar glance an' stepped out. "Good!" thinks I, "the sky's clearin' wance more. Number Sixteen Section's the boys for me money." I sted where I was.

'A big man on me right was gazin' melancholy at Jawn standin' out there be himself. "Be the grace of Gawd," says the big man under his breath, "he may not be lousy," an' then he steps forrud.

'Another tall man on me lef' flank was a big grazier from Antrim. "The two of them's evenly fed," he says, soft an' low, an' he steps forrud too.

' "Three hefty merchants," says Yorke. "Anny more welter weights? Come, men; th' enemy's waitin'."

'Ye'll notice big men herd together. The lads of six foot an' a bit began steppin' out in their pride.

' "Anny more Tiny Tims?" says Yorke, sizin' up wid his eye the ten giants that he'd collected be now. A good man he was, an' had his joke always. Killed in attackin' the Railway Triangle, east of Arras, an' the las' thing he said was, "Get on wid ye, men! I'm makin' a separate peace."

'Be now he had fifteen ver'table monsters. "Wan more Little Tich is required," he says; "gran' feather-weight boxin' we'll have in this section."

'You'll think me an ijjut. Me that had the chance to be shut of him then, for the duration, be the whole len'th of a comp'ny! I dunno. Was it the wicked

conceit of me stachure? Was it the shame of me bein' left there stickin' out of the ranks like a lamp-pos' surrounded be childer? Was it that word of the boxin', an' all the good it might bring? Dear knows. We're the quare creatures. I stepped out, be some divvil's guidance.

'I'll not trouble ye with a report on our trainin'. Ye've had it yourself. It was six months for all, an' six years for th' unfort'nates condemned to the wan hut wi' Jawn. We came out to the trenches above be the Brickstacks, opposite Quinshy, a good place in itself, wi' the makin's in it of quiet an' peace – the dug-outs more Christianable than manny; some derelic' trucks on a line pretty handy with coal ye cud pinch; our quartermaster-sergeant had genius – he gev us the first plum-duff that ever was et be British troops in a firin' trench. Nothin' to trouble at all, only Jawn's clapper tongue, would deafen a miller, murd'rin' the life of the home.

'Wan night he beat all. He went beyant the beyants. In the depths of the perishin' spring it was that they have in those parts, an' a nasty thin evenin' – mist at the time an' a cowld rain, an' the moon not risin' over La Bassy till later – a night the monkeys ye'd see in a zoo would be huggin' each other to keep off the chill. An' Jawn there in the dug-out, settin' a little apart, hottin' his nose wid a short pipe ye'd be sick an' tired of seein' before ye all day, an' all th' off-duty men around him good practical Cath'lics, an' he just gabbin' an' gabbin' on about the wil' doin's of some wicked medjeeval Pope he'd invented.

'Of course I was settin' him right. Why wuddent I, knowin' me facts? But not enjoyin' it rightly? Weary I was of it all. I'd liefest have had the man dead, an' all the worl' tranquil.

'Near direct action we were when Shane, our platoon sergeant then – he was killed at Dickybush after – came into the homestead. "Gawd save," he says, "all in this place. Two volunteers to go wirin' !"

'We had been out for a while, so there wasn' th'ugly rush that there was in the wild early days at anny word of this kind – every man for some sport for himself before they'd have a peace signed on him. Everywan knew be now he'd be killed in his turn, widout leppin' out of his place in the queue. Everywan knew it except a few lads jus' come out on a draft. I had to spake quickly be reason of them. But I'd have given me sowl for an hour's quiet that minute, out of range of that Orangeman's endless haranguin'. An' so I let a yell that won be a head: "Ye promised me, sergeant, the time that I misbehaved in the lorry."

'The same instiant minute Shane nodded at me an' Martin's owld creak of a voice came in a good second. "Here's wan, sergeant," he said. The boys from the draft also ran. A Jock that was wan of them had a very good argyment nearly ready why he should go, but they hadn't an old soljer's rapid rayaction under a schimulus. So I stepped down before them into the pool. An' they hadn't enjured gen'rations of livin' nex' door to the Martins. An' now, Gawd help me! Martin was in for it too, an' me quiet day in the country rooned before it had started.

'Dad, if he hadn' been an' actin' lance-corp'ral, unpaid, I'd have been in command of the party, me bein' th' oldest soljer be four days. Then I'd have put him through it, be cripes. As it was, I had only me tongue to come to me succour.

' "Why was it," said I, when Shane had tuk leave of us, "why was it, corp., that I got in before ye? Aye, in a canter."

'"Ye're a liar," says he, with his teejus habit of missin' the point of annythin' that a person would say. "I was as wishful to go as yourself."

'"Ye were that," says I. "Your only trouble was, when the time came for a good burst of speed, ye were thinkin' in English, a foreign language insthinctively quare to your mind, an' you a son of the Gael, however unworthy."

'"An how long would ye be, your own self, ye fantastic owld antiquarium," says Martin, "in gobbin' out even as much as 'Here, sergeant' itself in the Gaelic? From this out till to-morra, mebbe, an' then needin' a pencil an' slate brought to ye before ye'd compose it."

'Very fortunate was it that I knew me fac's. "The mere gabbin'," says I, "is nothin' at all. It's the thinkin' that matters. Learn your own native language, that's hangin' about at the back of your mind, an' think in it bowldly. There's no other way ye'll escape from this habit of strikin' in late in th' hour of trial – the way a hen would be in, an' she attemptin' to neigh or to bark it all out in her mind, instead of cluckin', before she'd quit out of the way of a cart. She'd be swif'ly run over."

'He didn' answer me then.

'At eleven that night we p'raded for orders, relatin' to th' enemy's wire. The captain himself – he was killed at High Wood – was out an' about in the trench when we quitted for Germ'ny. Be that we knew we'd be safe from behin'. The *m'ral* of the men was that high they'd be loosin' off all night at anny owld clod they'd perceive, in the hope it might be a good action. As for annythin' movin', Gawd help it! An' so we were glad. If annythin' human could hol' back our sentries from makin' good groups on our sterns, Shane and the cap. were the men.

'Th' enemy's wire was seventy paces away, an', as you know, seventy paces route-march on your belly, the way of the snake in the garden, is no good to anny-wan, ever. An' we went about an' about. An' not a good motorin' road. An' Martin never stopped but wance to take breath. Mebbe ye've observed, when takin' a walk with a friend, there are men that go faster an' faster the more they're intent, in their secret insides, on inventin' the divvil's own repartees, all ready to fire, an' when they're gettin' on grandly within, forgin' all the munitions they'd want, they're fit to gallop itself. Jawn was wan of that breed.

' "Th' only time he tuk ever a pull, he turned on me sudden an' ven'mous.

' "Ye an' yer preestoric owld Gaelic," he whispers. "A match for th' owld women that won't use a ha'porth of linen that's made with anny machine that was new since the Flood !"

' "For a man," says I, "tryin' to marshal his thoughts in an outlandish tongue, ye've not dawdled at all," says I, "in devisin' that smashin' retort. Very barely four hours."

' "An' why stop at the Gaelic ?" he says, pantin'. "Why not go back to the reel startin' gate while ye're at it, an' think in Persian or Greek or some owld yappin' noise your forefawthers made, an' they monkeys leppin' about in the trees ?"

'I was beginnin' at "What are the fac's ?" when Martin adjourned th' altercaysh'n be boltin' again. It had done no good to our tempers – to Martin's, at all events. Well he knew I'd have put it across him on that new quistion he'd raised, before settin' off, about sci'nce an' religion. So nothin' would do him but plunge on ahead – I'll engage he was sharp'nin' already the nex' dart he'd plant in me vitals – an' not mind at

all where he went till he'd slung himself head over heels into wan of th' owld flooded bog-holes left be the shells. It was cammiflaged well, I'll admit, be the grass an' weeds growin' out long from th' edges.

'I made sure th' en'my would hear. How wouldn't he hear a rhinoc'rus, the like of that, ent'rin' his bath? An', the nex' thing, I knew it. Aye, be dint of a weeny clickin' noise from his trench. "It's the cock of a Verey pistol," thinks I, "an' the light's comin' on – that or some godless breed of an Emma G that they have," an' it bein' called to attention before it'd start the good work. An' be now the mist was liftin' like smoke, and a clear half-moon was drawin' itself away up the sky, informin' upon us.

'Jawn's head was stickin' out of the deep. I'll engage he was cold. But his body was sheltered from solids at anny rate, under th' eastern wall of the hole, an' he could submerge for short inthervals, too, if the en'my should menace his per'scope. I was the victim, out in the wide world. An' Jawn saw it. "Flatten yourself," he whispers, over the face of the waters. "Flatter be far, for the love of Gawd. Rowl yourself out into pasthry before they put the light on ye."

'As if I hadn't been as flat as a plaice from that diaboluc click onward! Breadth had I been from that out – no thickness at all. I hadn't stopped to tilliphone to the Corps. An' when I was plast'rin the ground the like of a poultice I found a hole the size of a thimble an' put me nose in it.

'Then came the trouble. Th' en'my was damnin' expense. Pourin' out money. Three, four, five Verey lights at wan instiant. Wan great beast of a moon of an arc light that'd illum'nate half Waterloo Station went on loitherin' over me head; I'd enjured a twelvemonth, be what I could judge, of invijjus public'ty

before it went out. An' me there thinkin' slowly an' caref'lly, the way ye'll remember ye do at these crit'cal times. Thinkin' of all the blisth'rin' force of the chat I'd be givin' to Martin after lights-out. I that had come to that remote place for a season of quiet, away from the janglin' an' strafes of the world !

'In due course the fireworks expired. It was amazin' – the bats hadn't seen me at all. I'll own that the firs' thing I done with me new start in life was to spend a few seconds in grinnin' an' shiv'rin' with chuckles, alone with meself in the kin', friendly dark, the way I'd not done since the time that I was a boy an' successfully hid in the loft from me fawther.

'Me nex' thought was of others. Jawn had crep' forth from the bed of the hole an' lay on the shelvin' foreshore like a newt.

' "Shall we shank on wid us, corp'ral ?" I whispered. "Or have ye come out," I added, "to this rugged spot to enjoy adult baptism only ?" I knew me fac's, an' the pestilint sect of the man.

' "The game is quared on us," he mutters discontentedly – more to himself than to annywan.

' "It's developed," says I, "be what I can see. Aye, into ruthless subm'rine warfare."

' "Mebbe I'd do right," says he, "to go back for fresh orders. Th' en'my'll watch an' pray from this out."

' "That will he," says I – "the prayer of all sentries on earth – to rest unmolisted, them an' their wire, to th' end of their watch. An' shall we," says I, "grant their request ? Isn't it carryin' gratichude altogether too far for the Reformaysh'n itself an' the lunch that the Kaiser gev Carson ?" I'd have said more, but you know the neciss'ty of keepin' concise in the field.

'In the moon comin' up I could see the whites of his

eyes very quare-shaped, an' vicious at that, the like of a horse that'd offer to bite ye. "Carry on workin'," he says, an' he was off on the top gear agen, lettin' her rip for th' en'my's wire, the way I was out of me breath, beltin' after him on me intistines, before he let up all of a sudden. An' then I saw why.

'He'd his head lifted up from the ground an' pressed back, same as "Heads backward – bend" at phys'cal drill, only frozen. Starin' rijjid he was, to his front – ye could tell be the back of his neck, an' it dark night, how he had the eyes bulgin' out of him, starin' at somethin' ahead. And then I saw it too.

'It was a man, lyin' full on his belly, the like of ourselves. He was facin' at us, an' he had his head a weeny shade lower than Martin's – a better posish'n. Crouchin' outside th' en'my's wire he was, ten feet away from us.

'Wan thing I knew. Jawn would do right. A quar'lsome man an' a bigot, an' yet a good soljer, the way he'd do best the time all before him'd be goin' its worst. He'd earned his stripe well. Put him in anny old sort of fix without notice – he'd do right, the like of a cat knockin' into a dog an' she walking about in her sleep – she'd have th' eyes of him out before lettin' a yawn, an' Jawn was her aqual.

'There was clouds now stravadin' over the moon, so I couldn't see all. But me heart told me Jawn was sof'ly extractin' a bomb from his right tunic-pocket, an' pickin' the pin of it out an' howldin' it ready to throw. An' so I conformed to his movements.

'He didn' throw yet. An' then he set off crawlin' precautiously on towards the man, an' the man keepin' still, the two of them there like a dog reconnoitrin' a strange dog, an' movin' gradjal an' stiff an' collected for action. Jawn crep' an' he crep' till he'd crep' right

up to the man, an' then he put out a hand an' felt the face of the man, an' the man didn't mind it at all. And then Jawn signalled me on.

'Ye'll have guessed how it was. Fritz had been dead a great while. He'll have gone on some little errand or other, the same as ourselves. There'd been no battle there, at the time, an' dead men in the open not plentiful yet.

'I got me head level to Jawn's. Grand cover we had, behin' the dead German. "How soon did you know ?" I whispered.

' "Know what ?" says he, sourly.

' "That Fritz," says I, "had gone west ?"

' "From the moment," says he, "that he came in me presence !"

' "How'd ye see it ?" says I.

' "I didn'," says he, "I smelt it. The man was a Papist. Wouldn't I know a dead Papist at ten feet away in the good scentin' weather we're havin' ?"

'Thinks I, "Ye can score yourself wan, me fine lad, but the night isn't over." I left it at that for the moment. "An' so," says I, "the pin is not out of your bomb ?"

' "It is not," says he. "Why'd I stir it at all, an' it apt not to go back to juty when wance demob'lized, an' have me there holdin' a mad trigger down for the rest of th' excursion ?"

' "Ye're lucky," says I. "Me own pin's out an' lost on me wholly, beyant in the grass."

' "Hand me over the bomb," says Martin.

'I may have hesitated a second.

' "Hand it across," he repeated. "We're not holdin' the first session after Home Rule."

'I handed it over. Strainin' it seemed to be, under me hand, to be off an' at work in its station in life.

'"I'll give it a home," he says, "now, and a chance in life afther."

'How Jawn kep' it still in his pocket I will not conjicture – whether he made a new pin of the wire he'd always have somewhere about him for snarin' a hare, or tuk out the detonator itself, or what all. Annyway, we went on wid our own work, an' a long hour it tuk, th' en'my not bein' aisy about it at all. Constantly sendin' up flares an' bringin' about unemployment. We'd have had little done if the cap. hadn' worked the lights for us the grand way he did, makin' it black where we were be the force of contrast. We saw his hand in that an' thanked Hivven for a good off'cer.

'At las' we were through with our job on the wire, an' then we assimbled behind a good sizable mole-hill. We tuk the bearin's of home. Then Martin, that hadn' seemed to be troubled till then, says low in me ear, "A nice way I'm in with this ingine of death that ye gev me rampin' roun' in me pockut."

'Says I, "Apt we'll both of us be to be killed be a primmature burst before we'd see home."

'"We'd do right," says he, "to be quit of it early!"

'"Ay, an' wan or two more," says I, "be way of support. It's not twenty paces," I says, "to th' en'my's trench."

'"An aisy throw," he says, "an' we'd be protectin' ourselves."

'"Aye, an' wearin' down also," says I, "th' en'my's man power."

'"They're affordin' the best mark," he says, "that we've had in the war. They're as thick in that trench as a p'lit'cal meetin'. Lay your ear to the groun' and——"

'"Have I ever laid it annywhere else," says I, "durin' the whole of this outin'?"

'He had an offensive way of goin' on from the las' word he'd said, f'r all the world as though you'd not spoken at all – "Ye'll hear," he says, "the deep hummin' sound of scores of guthral voices."

'I was incinsed be that trick that he had of scornin' me little irrel'vance.

' "Guthral, indeed!" says I. "Worse than the English, bedad! A good slam of the Gaelic I'll want, to clean me ears after it."

' "Are ye faultin' th' English again," says he, "an' you helpin' them now?"

' "Aye, to come to their senses!" says I. "They that set up the Prooshans in life, at th' expinse of the French, when the Honezolluns hadn't the stren'th of the Great Joyces in Galway. They that went to the Germans for fiddlers an' waiters and kings, an' a cap for their troops, an' a new religion itself, an' whatever they'd want. An' why not at all, an' they all cousins an' Chewtons together?"

' "Aye, an' fightin' like cousins," says he. "Keep your head down," he says. But he didn' say "Keep your mouth shut." A quar'lsome man, wild to be at an argyment always. An' there we lay, he on his right cheek and me on me left, nuzzlin' the wet ground while I told him the facts, subjuing me voice because of th' en'my. The two front lines were sendin' up lights all along, an' they intersictin' wan another above us, the way we seemed to be lyin' out on the floor of a church with a great arch over our heads an' the lines of it all drawn be the thracks of the lights.

' "I give th' English all credit," says I, "for comin' at length to themselves, the same as Friday, the black, that turned friendly at last an' assisted the traveller, Robinson Crusoe, against the man-eating scuts that he had in his fam'ly."

'"Downright fawnin' ye are on th' Englishry now," says Martin. "Ye'd do right to get a good Blighty, the first wan that offers, an' off with ye home, an' preach your new gospel to haythens like Casement."

'"Such bein's are more than half English," says I, "be descint, or they'd see the gran' laugh we have now at th' English, an' they comin' roun' at last to detist all that's German as much as ourselves. It's th' English are well entered now to the vermin they had for their cousins, an', please God! they'll never return to their vommut."

'I could have gone on a great while, bein' up in me fac's, but ye'll understand I was speakin' in that place under some disadvantage. Still, I'd got me word in, an' I felt aisier after. But, if you'll believe me, he wasn't convinced, not a tittle. He took out the bomb from his pockut. "Before ye have me desthroyed," he says, "screechin' an' hullabalooin' across to your fellow-en'mies of Englan', we'll bring an event into those quiet lives."

'Wishful I was for it too, after the teejum we'd had, and yet frikened to think of Shane and the cap., that had ordered us not to draw fire. "Have we author'ty for it?" says I.

'"Gawd help ye! Author'ty!" says he. "If ye hadn't turned the Reformaysh'n away from the door ye'd have had some indivijjal judgment to-day and a modern soljer's inish'tive in an emergency."

'"Reformaysh'n be damned!" says I. "We'll have the cap. up on his hind legs, tellin' us off for self-actin' mules."

'"Ye're a child of author'ty," says he. "So strike out for the comforts of home, the while I'll be leavin' me card on our friends an' then comin' after you."

'It was an order. I set out and squirmed a good four paces westward. Then I thought: hadn' I a good right

to disobey Jawn, an' he disobeyin' a comp'ny commander? So I checked in me course an 'tuk the pin out of the second bomb that I had, an' lay on me back, with me feet to the foe an' me head illevated, to see what Jawn could be at. Black agin the full shine of the moon I saw his long arm, an' it swingin' back for the throw. Then I loosed me own trigger an' held on for two seconds good, to make sure of a burst before Fritz'd return the ball to the bowler.

'Jawn was a natty bomber, no quistion. His cracker had burst fair in th' en'my's trench be the time I had sent mine speedin' after its collaigue. The cries that there were in that trench! An' then Martin came west wrigglin' headlong, the back of him ripplin' the like of a caterpiller tryin' to gallop.

'"Canter," says he, "canter along on your bowels." There was a great seren'ty, for wance, in his voice. An' I was the same way meself – at peace with mankin'. Ye know how ye are, after prosp'rin' at hom'cide. "Canter," says he, almost civ'lly. I cantered. An' reason enough. The entire concern was lookin' apt to degen'rate into a war of attrish'n. Fritz was dead tired of havin' the night that he'd had. Dead set agin anny more secret diplom'cy. The hivvens above and th' earth beneath, he illum'nated them all. 'Twas as though he'd tuk Paris. If he'd have done it in London he'd have been fined.

'All the way Martin behin' me was gruntin' out steerin' directions. "Half-right," he'd never done sayin', "ye owld Maryolather – anny patch of dead ground in this wicked world is half-right." O "Gallop," he'd say, an' we close on our wire, "nivver mind yer owld vitals. Gallop before they put the lantern on our posteriors."

'Then it came on us. Aye, like the judgment of God fallin' down. There was but the wan lane through the

wire, an' straight an' narrow the way, an' that fi'ry sword flamin' down on the gate. No use shammin' dead, like the beetles ye'd bring into the light with your spade. We'd ha' been filled as full of holes as a net. Fritz had got the addhress, an' already the stuff was not bein' far mis-delivered.

'I lep in at the op'nin' an' on towards the par-pet. "Rowl yourself over it! Bowl yourself over it, anny old way," yells Martin behin' me, an' then I knew he was hit, be the traces of voylent effort there were in the voice of him.

'Now, I'll engage ye'll think me a fool – I that had got, be the act of God an' the King's en'mies, a chance to be shut of him wholly, for ever, relievin' th' entire platoon of the curse of Hivven that Martin was never done callin' down be his godlessness on us all. A man's a quare thing. I'm told be a firs'-class dentist beyant at Dromore, if a tooth hasn't got a tooth the match of itself for to bite on it's apt to grow weaker an' weaker, an' fall out eventsh'ly. Mebbe it's like that. An' Jawn was as bad. "Off wid ye to Hell!" he says, houndin, me on into safety, th' instiant I halted. Mebbe it was just me resentment at him givin' orders an' curses an' business as usu'l wid all the pride of a corp'ral expirin' on juty. "Be damned," thinks I, "if ye're goin' to stay out there actin' hayroes an' martyrs all night." So I went back an' gev him a fireman's lift an' away with me lovely burden. He was the weight of the world. Be cripes, it's a good horse wins the Grand Nashnal!

'All the damage I felt on the road was a sting in me unemployed arrum. Then I took wan flyin' lep, the like of his own way of goin' to bed, an' the two of us landed, in wan knot of arrums an' legs, into the trench, alightin' first on the firin' step an' then in th' stable-

washin's of water there was in the fairway below, an' savin' the life of an inexpairienced sentry be knockin' him down off the step accident'ly an' out of the way of the muck that was flippin' iverywhere into the parodus, quiet an' vicious.

'"Glory," says I, as we rowled in the sewage together, "be to the saints!"

'"The saints!" says he, scornful.

'The cap. saw us before we went down the C.T. on two stretchers. He said we done right. "But why all the bombin'?" he says.

'"We found wan of our bombs, sir, was in a dang'rous condition."

'"Yes?" says the cap. "An' the other?"

'"Mebbe, sir," says Jawn, pensive-like, "'twas a kind of infection."

'"Hum," says the cap. "I feared you'd be re-unitin' the Churches." A good off'cer. He knew all about the two of us. Knew every man's trade in the comp'ny, an' married or single, an' how manny in family.

'"Gawd forbid it!" the two of us said in a breath. "An' that ended the talk."

'And what brought the two of you here?' I sleepily asked.

'I was brought,' Toomey said, 'be a bullet woun' in the liver, an' he be an insincaire action, a match for me own. Wait an' I'll tell ye.'

No doubt the story would have been good. But I am only English. I am given life on terms. I have to take sore labour's bath now and again.

'We'll go on to-morrow,' I said. 'A bit of shut-eye for me now.'

'Ye'll do right,' he said. 'Good night, an' the blessin' of God be wid ye an' stay wid ye.'

I turned over on to my right side, and snuggled in for my sleep. The only thing I could see was the horizontal profile in the next bed. Wasted, etherealized, abstract, the man who had finished joy and moan had now all but attained the remote and awful repose of a marble effigy on a tomb in a Florentine church, seen by one who lies, like itself, on the floor. The only thing to be heard was a faint tap on a window above him, the delicate whipping of some loose end of a climbing rose-tree on the glass. And then, sudden, cruptive, winged with intention and gusto, there came from afar the rush of a huge bass stage-whisper: 'Are ye wakin', Toomey?'

Deep called unto deep. 'Is that Cor'pral Martin makin' night hijjus, disturbin' the ward?'

'It is – an' good night to ye now, an' to hell wi' the Pope.'

'An' the Divvil take William the Second an' William the Third, an High Dutch an' Low, an' every Martin that's in it, from Luther out, blasphemin' the whole of the day an' then late into bed, kickin' the stars of God wi' the back of your heels. So go now to your rest.'

My own eyes were set on the fugitive fineness of that moribund face. It just moved, turning ever so little to right and to left as the gusts of contention blew over it. Then it settled again, the eyes always fixed on the ceiling. I thought of a water-weed on a deep pond, fluctuating minutely when gales race overhead, but soon dead-still again at its moorings.

But now the gale was abating. At each end of the ward a sequence of snorts of disdain were passing into a dying fall. Through a murmurous grumble it sank into the silent breathing of healthy infants asleep. Thus does high-handed nature interfere with the efforts of man to seek peace and ensue it.

8

A BRIGADE AFFAIR

R. H. MOTTRAM

¶ Among the many War novels, none surpasses R. H. Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy* in intensity and in the power of fixing a scene clearly before the mind's eye. Unless the War taught the world the futility of 'wholesale slaughter by machinery,' Mottram sees it as a 'Nightmare of Waste': to prevent that nightmare from again becoming a reality he wrote his Trilogy. His hope is that the witness it bears to the true nature of war will help future generations to imagine a more intelligent way of settling disputes.

A Brigade Affair took place towards the end of 1915, after the Battle of Loos – it forms part of the second section of the Trilogy, *Sixty-Four, Ninety-Four* (Chatto & Windus). The title is a regimental number used in a soldier's song to indicate a dead comrade. The last few words admirably sum up the impression of futility and waste conveyed by the whole novel.

Mottram is a remarkable example of an author who started to write comparatively late in life – he was born in 1883, and is by profession a banker. His first book, *The Spanish Farm*, appeared in 1924. He has since published a steady succession of novels, in addition to a history of banking.

HIS orderly was not to wake him till tea-time, but the sun had just set when Long Thomas stirred him up with one of those broomsticks then in vogue among officers for sounding the impossibilities of the trenches they were supposed to use, and invited him to come and have a look at the scene of the night's operations. Crossing the canal by a pontoon bridge to the rear, they climbed the left wall of the lock-keeper's ruined cottage, and, lying flat on charred rafters,

peered out through the shell-torn thatch. At their feet was the canal; beyond its further bank an ever-increasing desolation, where communication trenches ran out among the weeds and self-sewn crops of fifteen months' desertion, the mud lagoons of undrained ponds, the gaunt scarecrows of splintered trees and ruined fragments of walls and gateways gleaming like bleaching bones in the dying light. Right on the sloe-coloured horizon, always on the highest visible ground, the first star-shells of the evening vaguely marked the enemy entrenchments. To Skene it seemed flatly impossible that human beings should make their way in darkness across so many sloughs and pitfalls, but the cheery voice of Long Thomas giving him his orders, precisely in the tone in which he would have told him to go in first wicket and hit the bowling, was incredibly reassuring. 'Two trees, and some brickwork, just there,' and Thomas pointed; 'you're second wave ! If you're stuck, you stay there !' Skene said: 'Yes, I see !'

Climbing down, they went to the dug-out which served for mess-room and Company Headquarters, where Thomas was to meet the other officers of his and the adjacent companies, for a last word. Years after, Skene used to shudder when he remembered that moment. The amateurishness of it all, that tiny concentration in plain sight of the Bosche, the utter lack of preparation or reserves – the, afterwards, patent fact that General Devlin, scornful of others' failures, was just experimenting, with a view to the command of a division. On the sweating walls of the candle-lighted den hung belts and rainproofs, between posted-up cartoons from 'Le Rire,' showing the Kaiser with a withered arm; its improvised table was covered with maps and signal forms, little pools of wine, little smears of grease and cigarette ends. Outside, the N.C.O.s

were 'falling-in' the men under shelter of the embankment, in the gathering dusk. Within, one heard: 'I see . . . here and then here . . . good enough. . . . I suppose we shall – what's your watch !' and then an awkward silence, as if they were wondering.

From without came a North-country voice growling: 'If Aaa catches 'em a'll slog 'em, bah gom !' and a Cockney: 'Mind the barrow, please ! The Sergeant said I was to have my little spade, but 'e won't let me take me little pail, no'ow, Gawd 'elp 'em !'

And Skene prayed from the bottom of his heart: 'Pray God, don't smash me up this time. I didn't start this silly show. It's not fair I should be killed !'

A tall high-shouldered form came splashing along the slippery pathway and stopped beside him. It was Captain Castle.

'Hallo, Skene ! Thomas in ? Let's see him !' Bending nearly double under the low opening he passed into the dug-out, with a word for every one, a fixed time here, a definite place there, making sure that everybody knew where to look for him, and which way the walking wounded were to come. Skene ceased to pray. To trust in Castle seemed more effectual.

That fine day had ended in a clear sunset, but with darkness a light rain began to fall. Skene, with his Sergeant, passed slowly up the line of his platoon, feeling for himself that the extra shovels, bombs, and bundles of sandbags were in place; then, glancing at the luminous dial of his watch, he led his party along the steep embankment to the bridge. At the top, two tall figures stood, motionless, and as Skene passed, the Colonel's voice said: 'All right, Skene ? '

'All right, sir.'

'Good luck to you.'

Then began the slow and tiring journey to where

they would 'jump-off.' The rain fell steadily; the mud rose above their ankles; there was constant hesitation in the pitchy quagmire to make sure of the right trench, constant halts to let those in front draw ahead, or close up the tailing-out which no amount of discipline or forethought ever entirely prevented among men marching in file. Of the enemy no sign save an occasional greenish star-shell that soared up into the downpour, hung glaring for a moment and went out; a few rifle-shots and a couple of long-distance shrapnel bursting far back over the transport routes. Then, before they had reached their shelter trench, the western horizon suddenly flared brick red, and, with a nerve-racking hiss, the first English shells passed over their heads and burst with dry crashes amid the darkness of the enemy trenches. From their left came a sudden, rapid, continuous, almost purring roll of gunfire. It was Skene's French friend letting loose 'the forty thousand devils.' By the time they had reached the jumping-off place, where the water rose halfway to their thighs, the bombardment was continuous. Skene leant against the low parapet in front of him. His head was singing and drowsy with the uproar – he squeezed down the line of his men to make sure they had each found proper foothold. Before he reached the end of his line, he was stopped in the narrow trench by some one coming from the opposite direction. It was Long Thomas.

'All right, Skene?'

'All right, Thomas.'

'They aren't half getting hell, are they?'

'It sounds like it.'

'It's nothing to what we'll give them presently.'

'Rath-er!'

'Cheerio! I'll come and see you as soon as you're settled in.' He passed, and Skene thought: 'Will

you? I wonder.' At last his watch marked the minute, and he gave the signal. Every one scrambled or hauled himself on to the parapet. In an instant the lucky and sure-footed were yards ahead of those whose foothold had slipped in the dissolving mud, or, too eagerly, had slid forward on to their faces. Skene, in an incredibly puny voice, as it seemed to him, kept shouting: 'Keep together – keep together!' Then he was walking on nothing, immersed in evil-smelling mud. A crash that seemed inside his head deafened and bewildered him. Struggling to his feet he ran his knees into a kneeling figure.

'There's a man hit, sir!'

'Never mind, go on!' And on they slid and stumbled together.

The uproar was now continuous, behind, above, before them; and beneath them the marsh quaked. Mud and iron flew through the air in what seemed solid masses; it had become as light as day. Skene could only think of one thing, to keep on cawing hoarsely, 'Go on, go on!' The Cockney catchword he had heard in the dusk had caught on, and all about him, shopmen and clerks, labourers, mill hands, miners were bellowing at the top of their voices, 'Mind the barrow, please!' as they skidded and waded, fell and died.

With a sort of dismay he was brought up sharp by the inky line of a trench. The voice of the Sergeant-major shouted to him from the darkness: 'Half left, sir, half left. There's a plank across, and keep half left, sir. You're too far to the right!' He realized then that he was crossing their own front-line trench.

When he was over it he seemed to have before him a field of oats, 'All a-blowing, all a-growing,' but it was a thick bank of wire and they must grope their way to the opening. With demon hands scratching his face,

rending his clothes, tearing his water bottle from his hip, his cap from his head, he plunged through that devil's garden, and blundered at last into a group of men, digging, grubbing, tugging asunder the tortured soil. They were the next platoon. Thrusting before him to the left such of his own men as he could find, he reached the mound of splintered brick and the two elm stumps, with their ragged fans of bough allotted as his position. The German trench was beyond, but shells were still falling into it, making of it a quaking line of light, a continuous eruption. Of the first wave, no sign. By chance, the right thought was uppermost in his mind, 'Dig. Get cover.' He passed from man to man, speaking a word here, giving a hand there, and praying in vain that the third wave would bring the reels of wire that alone could make them safe. The filthy mud splashed back in clods into the miserable gully that was beginning to appear, the air was alive with hurtling metal; the score or so of men were dropping one by one; a sort of dull frenzy settled down on Skene. He could hear a small voice calling, 'Is that you, sir! Is that you?' 'The fool!' he thought, crawling backwards and forwards amongst his men, 'Who does he think it is!' Some one was pulling at his arms, a Cockney voice said: 'I've brought Mr. Mansfield, sir.' Suddenly around him appeared his own Sergeant, Mansfield's Sergeant nursing a Maxim gun, another of Mansfield's men with a tripod over his shoulder, and then a shrill mocking voice, as of some parrot from the underworld, said: 'I say, Skene, do tell the band to stop! I want to reverse,' and out skipped Mansfield's little figure in a smeary raincoat, mud-clotted from head to foot. The enemy's fire had slackened, and his voice chirruped above it: 'Where have you been? I've been looking for you all over the

infernal room. And here you are, sitting out by yourself – you know the next is ours !'

In the Operation Orders had occurred the sentence, 'Immediate provision will be made for adequate machine-gun protection against counter-attack.' Skene began to laugh. He held his head in his hands and a sort of dizziness overcame him. He sat down in a puddle. His Sergeant, kneeling beside him, was telling him how the rear section had got separated by a patch of impassable wire; they had been picked up by Mansfield and brought on to the old German trench which had been the first wave's objective. 'But there's nothing to be done with that, sir, it's all to bits. There's no one in front. and nothing has come up from support. And what shall we do with these wounded, sir ?'

What, indeed !

After setting up his gun, Mansfield passed with a jest, making his way further along. By the first glimmer of a feeble dawn Skene could see that they had scratched out some dozen yards of trench waist-deep behind the two tree stumps. Then the hurricane burst out afresh. Some one shouted: 'Here they come !' Mansfield's machine-gun set up an unceasing gibber. Skene saw that his Sergeant was passing up and down behind his men, tearing open boxes of small arms ammunition. There was no need to order rapid fire. With one long yell, 'a-a-a-a,' the men were beginning to work the bolts of their rifles as if frantic. Nothing else to be done ! It was instinctive, the one poor outlet for what all had been feeling. The men were behaving well, after what they'd been through ! Pulling himself up behind a jutting ledge of brickwork, Skene stared into the greenish-white vapour, where the British barrage was bursting, and into which his men were emptying their rifles. For several minutes, it seemed, he watched.

Nothing emerged from that belt of vapour. The firing slackened. The counter-attack was not maturing.

Instead, as the sullen November day came up, Skene found himself chained by a network of machine-gun fire. Two of his men were hit at once, he told the others to lie close. He himself peered out from time to time. Nothing to be seen but vapour – freshly torn earth – broken pickets – shredded wire – bodies and water – and all visible surface whipped with vicious bullets. No message could reach him, no ammunition, no medical aid.

About midday he let his men eat what they had on them. There was no hope of cooking anything. By two o'clock the enemy were enfilading the little trench. Skene crawled along, literally over his men, some sleeping the sleep of exhaustion, some grim and pale, shivering as they clutched their rifles. The wounded were quiet, very white, either dead or collapsed. At the end of the line, Skene found his Sergeant lying on his back. his cap over his face. Skene pulled him by the arm, but the arm came away in his hands. The Sergeant was cut limb from limb by a shell that had landed beneath him.

Next, a long-distance bombardment was opened on them. Their machine-gun, the brickwork and the tree stumps were first smashed piecemeal and finally blown away. But the Flemish winter day is short, and with dusk came a runner, worming his way in on his stomach, with a written order from Thomas, 'Bring in your men.'

Under cover of darkness, twenty-three men, dragging and carrying two wounded, who still appeared alive, all of them soaked and starved, scratched, torn and plastered with mud, made their way back in darkness to the old front line.

Skene went to see Thomas. The companies were all

mixed up. The first wave had been held up by uncut wire and blotted out, leaving Skene's party uncovered. It was not even possible to know how far the artillery had helped or hindered.

So ended that Brigade affair. Skene had lost half his men, had not seen a German, and had come back to his starting-point.

9

THE FIGHTING AT JUTLAND

NARRATIVE OF A MIDSHIPMAN STATIONED IN THE FORE-TOP OF H.M.S. *NEPTUNE*

(19*th Ship in the Battle Line*, 6*th Ship from the Rear*)

¶ The Battle of Jutland was the only occasion during the War on which the main English and German Fleets engaged one another. The result was indecisive, but the Germans never again made a serious attempt to break our blockade, other than by submarine warfare. The battle was fought on May 31, 1916, and this description is taken from a collection of personal experiences, narrated by survivors, entitled *The Fighting at Jutland*, edited by H. W. Fawcett and G. W. C. Hooper (Hutchinson & Co. Ltd.). The narrator's position in the control-top of a battleship enabled him to see as much of the battle as is possible under modern conditions: his plain unadorned narrative gives a clearer idea of the stupendous spectacle than any more elaborate account could do.

MY action station was in the control top, some 60 or 70 feet above the upper deck, access to which could be gained either by ascending an interminably long iron ladder running up the interior of the mast, or by climbing up outside the tripod by means of iron rungs riveted on the struts. Experience of the difficulties of ascent had induced me some time ago to have made a blue jean bag, in whose capacious interior I always kept the thousand and one gadgets so essential for the proper and comfortable fighting of an action – ear protectors, binoculars, a stop watch, a pistol, a camera, a respirator, sundry scarves, woollen helmet, and so forth. It was armed with this weighty 'battle-bag' that I clambered

up the starboard strut of the foremast, past the steam siren (which sizzled ominously as one approached it; it is an abominable experience to have a siren actually siren when you are near to it !), through a belt of hot acrid funnel smoke, and finally into the top through the 'lubber's' hole.

The fleet was steaming in six columns of four ships each, and with the attendant destroyers, stretched as far as the eye could see. The course was approximately south-east. The sea was fairly smooth, and the visibility about 17,000 yards. The arrival of the gunnery officer completed our crew, the manholes were shut down, and after the preliminary testing of communications had been done, the turrets were trained out on the beam, and we settled down to a long wait. If the powers that be knew that there was anything in the wind, I must say they kept it to themselves very well. The first inkling that I received that there might soon be something doing was when I noticed that some of the older ships of the 1st Battle Squadron were finding it difficult to keep up with their younger sisters in the other squadrons. Messages of encouragement and regret were passed to them, but still the fleet swept on. Shortly afterwards I noticed that several ships were flying, instead of the customary one ensign, three or four ensigns from various parts of the rigging, and, sure enough, the squeak of our halliard blocks announced that we were following suit. I don't know who started it, but in about ten minutes the air seemed to be thick with white ensigns, large and small, silk and bunting, hoisted wherever halliards could be rove.

By about 5.30 p.m. we had still seen nothing of the enemy, although we had received, and eagerly read, messages from the battle cruiser force telling us that the Germans were out and were in close action with

our battle cruisers and with the 5th B.S. Soon afterwards all hands were sent to tea, and I was left alone in the fore-top as look-out, but five minutes after the last man had left, the sound of gunfire, heavy gunfire, came from the south. A minute later five columns of smoke appeared on the starboard bow and the flashes of guns became visible. All hands came running back to their stations; meanwhile, the situation developed with startling rapidity.

Beatty's battle cruisers, for such the five columns of smoke proved to be, came into sight steaming at high speed to the north-east, and firing heavily towards the southward at an enemy which was out of our sight. Hood's squadron of *Invincible*, *Indomitable*, and *Inflexible* had gone on ahead to join Beatty. The leading ship of Beatty's squadron, *Lion* it was I suppose, seemed to be on fire forward, and the other ships all appeared to have received some damage. The noise rapidly became almost deafening. The *Lion* was leading her squadron across the front of the battle squadrons within 3 miles of the leading battleships, and accordingly the battle fleet reduced to 12 knots to allow them to cross and drive aside the German battle cruisers. The High Seas Fleet had not yet sighted the Grand Fleet, and were still steaming towards us.

Shortly after 6 o'clock the flashes of the guns of the High Seas Fleet became visible, and the Grand Fleet commenced to deploy to port, turning to north-east and then to east-south-east, so bringing our starboard broadsides to bear on the enemy. The *Marlborough* was the battleship leading the starboard wing column of the fleet, and was, therefore, the nearest battleship to the enemy, and the first to open fire. The remainder of the fleet followed suit as soon as they had deployed. I shall not easily forget the dramatic atmosphere of

the initial phase of the battle. The effect of the order 'Load' was to create a sort of stupor, everything was happening so suddenly, it all seemed too good to be true. The opening salvo of the *Marlborough* brought an end to that unpleasant period of comparative inactivity, and thereafter our hands were full. My impressions of the following hour were naturally somewhat vague, there was so much to do, and so much to see. I remember the dreary monotone of the range-finder operator calling out the ranges, I remember the gunnery officer and the Captain discussing through the voice-pipe the advisability of withholding fire until the ammunition could be most effectively used. I remember training my Dumaresq [1] on to the target – a battle cruiser of the *Lutzow* class – and working out the 'rate,' which was probably much in error. I remember the ecstatic comments of the director layer in the tower below us when we had found the target and later saw that we were hitting, and I well remember the opening salvo from our guns, in earnest at last.

A few minutes after we opened fire, the *Defence* and *Warrior* appeared on our engaged side, steaming on an opposite course. The ships were practically continuously hidden by splashes, were being repeatedly hit by heavy shells, and must have been going through hell on earth. The *Defence*, which was leading, was just about abeam of the *Neptune* and barely a mile away, when she was hit heavily and blew up in one fearful cloud of smoke and debris. The fore-top fell with a sickening splash into the water and then the *Warrior*, herself damaged, listing to starboard and in places on fire, raced over the spot where the *Defence*

[1] An instrument for calculating the rate at which two ships are opening or closing each other.

had been only a moment before, through the smoke cloud of *Defence's* explosion.

The two fleets were now heavily engaged, but the enemy were rapidly becoming more indistinct in the gathering haze, which was so soon to end the action. Whether this failure of visibility was just North Sea cussedness, or whether it was due to the heavy and continual gunfire I cannot say, but if it had not been for the flashes of the enemy's guns we should have had difficulty in picking out any target.

It is a curious sensation being under heavy fire at a long range. The time of flight seems more like 30 minutes than the 30 or so seconds that it actually is. A great rippling gush of flame breaks out from the enemy's guns some miles away, and then follows a pause, during which one can reflect that somewhere in that great 'no man's land' 2 or 3 tons of metal and explosive are hurtling towards one. The mountainous splashes which announce the arrival of each successive salvo rise simultaneously in bunches of four or five to an immense height. One or two salvoes fell short of us early in the action, and the remainder, I suppose, must have gone over as I did not see them. The *Hercules*, four ships astern of us, had been straddled on deployment, a feat which had greatly impressed me with the capabilities of the German gunnery, but, with the exception of the *Colossus*, which received a 12-inch shell in the fore-superstructure and sundry small stuff round about her fo'c'sle, no single battleship suffered any real damage from the German's gunfire. The enemy, however, clearly received some punishment as two battle cruisers, which were rather closer than were their other ships, were engaged by us and by most ships of the rear squadron at one time or another, and we saw at least two of our salvoes hit, after which the two

enemy battle cruisers dropped astern, to all appearances badly damaged. The warm, red glow of a 'hit' is easily distinguishable from the flash of a salvo, and is extremely pleasant to look upon.

Our fleet was stretched out in one long, single line, and presented a marvellously impressive spectacle as salvo after salvo rolled out along the line, adding to the fearful din which the enemy's shells and various other battle factors were already making. At 6.20 we were firing at 12,000 yards with common and lyddite shells. About this time the *Invincible*, which was leading the whole line, was struck by a salvo, turned nearly 180 degrees to starboard in her death agony, and lay burning and helpless. Her back was broken and her fore part was twisted round and upside down, giving her, when shortly afterwards we passed her 150 yards distant on our disengaged side, the appearance of having a swan bow. At the time we couldn't identify what ship it was. [6.32 p.m.]

German Torpedo Attacks

German destroyers were now observed ahead of the German battle cruiser, *Lutzow*, and soon afterwards they turned towards us to attack. Our secondary armament opened fire and scored a hit or two, but their attack was successfully made, and a number of torpedoes were fired, which gave us a few anxious minutes. We observed a great number of tracks of torpedoes, some as far away as 2½ miles. One torpedo crossed the line immediately under *Neptune's* stern, and directly afterwards another track was spotted which seemed to be coming straight for us. But apparently the officers on the bridge below had not seen it, and were in blissful

ignorance of the danger that the ship was in. There was no time to explain, and a stentorian "hard-a-starboard" shouted down the voice pipe by the Gunnery Lieutenant was fortunately accepted without question and put on by the helmsman. The bridge then sighted the torpedo, and emergency full speed was ordered. We began to turn rapidly, but I vividly remember how the torpedo got closer and closer. From the fore-top we were craning our necks over the metal side, while the whole top was groaning and vibrating under the strain of the ship turning at full speed with full helm on. We looked down on the tops of the turrets and the decks below and could see our shipmates working down there quite unconscious of the immediate peril. I personally had been torpedoed once before – in the *Formidable* – and had no delusions about the situation. The ship had turned a right angle, 8 points, and the torpedo was now dead astern following exactly in our course, but going faster than our fastest speed, and coming closer and closer, until our view in the fore-top was blanketed by the mainmast and after platforms. *We* could do nothing, of course, but wait and wait, mouths open, like when one is expecting a gun to fire. Nothing happened. The time passed when it should have reached our stern and there should have been a big explosion, but still nothing happened. An enemy salvo splashed down close on our starboard bow, but nobody heeded it. Then somebody laughed, and breaking the spell, we knew that after all it was somehow all right. The miracle, for it really seemed miraculous, was accounted for in *Neptune's* report: "Torpedo was either deflected by the wash from *Neptune's* propellers or ran its range out. The latter is more likely."

About this time several other battleships besides

the *Neptune* were hauling out of the line dodging torpedoes, with the result that the line became considerably lengthened, and was irregular in places where ships were trying to regain their station. We had dropped astern, and for some seven minutes the *St. Vincent* was directly between us and the enemy and we were unable to fire. Just after we had successfully dodged the torpedo, we heard, or more exactly perhaps felt, a dull concussion, and saw the *Marlborough* haul out of the line to port listing heavily. She had been hit by a torpedo, but a few minutes later she regained her position in the line with now only a slight list, and we saw her firing again strongly.

I remember several small events which happened about now, but I cannot give the exact time of them. We fired a few rounds at a German light cruiser which was lying disabled between the lines, a target for a number of our battleships that were unable to see the enemy big ships clearly. She was in a sorry condition, minus her foremast and one funnel, blazing fore and aft and apparently almost sinking. She must have been no more than a floating shambles, and we only fired two salvoes at her. They said afterwards that she was probably the *Rostock*.[1]

We passed a disabled destroyer on our starboard bow, very close to us, but she was one of ours – the *Acasta*. She was badly holed forward and aft, and was much down by the bows, but the crew were clustered aft cheering us and the other ships as we passed, and then she disappeared astern rolling heavily in the wash of the battle fleet but with her ensign still flying, apparently not 'done for' yet.

[1] *Rostock* was sunk during the night. Probably was the *Wiesbaden*.—ED.

End of the Action

The visibility was now fast going from bad to worse. A few fires in the enemy ships and an occasional burst of firing pointed out what was presumably the German Fleet, now to the *westward* of us; but I suppose that about this time it was decided that it was impossible to continue the big ship action in the twilight and dark and, as we were between the enemy and Germany, that we should wait until the next morning. The Grand Fleet must have been practically invisible to the German ships for some little time now, for as we worked round to the eastward of them they were silhouetted against the light of the sunset whilst our background was a mass of dark cloud.

At 11.0 p.m. I got down from the top for a spell. There was an awful litter of stuff everywhere between decks, chiefly made by the shock of our broadsides dislodging loosely stowed gear. I found the gunnery lieutenant gazing into his cabin, speechless, for the electric radiator had been overwhelmed by the tin bath landing on it from above, all the drawers had shaken out, and his clothes were in a mêlée on the floor with much other odd matter. Moreover, the fire brigade party, zealous to guard against the chance of the cabin catching fire, had played their hose into the midst, thoughtfully filling the bath at the same time.

We had a comic supper in the gun-room, everybody talking at once and trying to eat at the same time. The inevitable gramophone was recovered from a temporary stowage which it had found on the deck, and well-worn tunes were once more played. About ten minutes to midnight a messenger came in, looking as dirty and weird as a traveller from the infernal regions, to report that all hands would go to action

stations again at 2 a.m. Till then we tried to sleep, but thoughts of that torpedo almost hitting us, of the *Acasta*, of the *Marlborough*, of the shapeless hump of the *Invincible*, and all the other incidents of the action, made any sleep difficult. And there was always the question paramount in our thoughts, 'When should we renew the action? Would it be at any moment now during the night, at point-blank range in the darkness, or at daylight to-morrow?'

At 2 a.m. we were all back at our action stations, the same lot of us in the top as yesterday, but we met no enemy ships, only a Zeppelin airship. Soon after noon, 1st June, the ship's company were dispersed from action stations, and I descended with my 'battle-bag,' having been seventeen hours in the top. I was obsessed with a sudden desire for sleep, and lots of it, but on arrival in the gun-room I found that the same idea had apparently occurred to the others, for all the settees and chairs were full of sleepers, unshaved, unkempt, and unwashed. So I took a place on the deck.

When we got back to Scapa we had a long coaling, then had to get in ammunition, and also there was some oil fuel to see about. The papers next morning said nothing about any naval activity, and we were not allowed to mention anything of it in our letters, but three days later we received the papers of the 3rd June, and were horrified to read the Admiralty statement of our losses and the incomplete list of the German losses. When we heard that our seamen going to hospital had been jeered at and 'boo'ed' by some shore folk, it was almost too much – but to talk about that is perhaps not within my province.

10

UNDERTONES OF WAR

EDMUND BLUNDEN

¶ Edmund Blunden is best known as a writer of quiet, meditative verse, a lover of nature and something of a mystic. Some of his poems were inspired by the War, but his memories are most completely set out in *Undertones of War* (Cobden-Sanderson), a book unsurpassed for the skill with which it recaptures the atmosphere of daily life in the trenches, and conveys the strange effects of battle-line scenery.

This passage describes a 'quiet life' at Festubert in May, 1916.

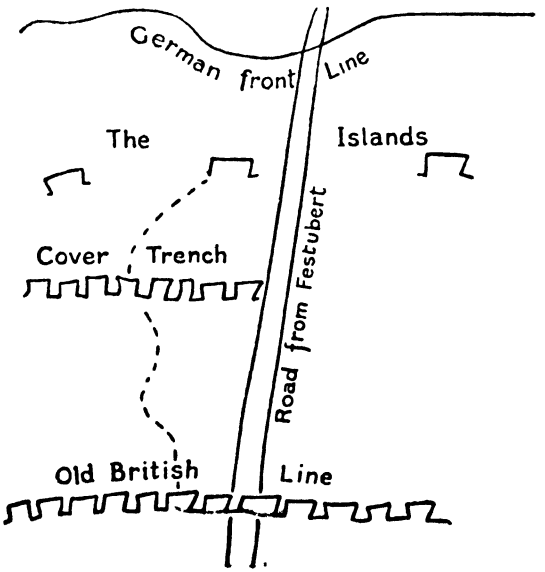
ALTHOUGH May had come, the day was dull and the clouds trailed sadly. In the hooded cart, we sat listening to the strong Sussex of the driver and looking out on the cultivated fields and the colonnades of trim trees. Here, explained the transport man, turning a corner, a night or two before, the Germans had dropped several very large shells almost on top of the quartermaster and his horse. Blew his horse one-sided. This information sat heavily on me. The roar of a heavy battery, soon following, also troubled me, for as yet I did not know that sound from the crash of arriving shells. "Tis only some 'eavies our party brought up yesterday.' The heavy battery was firing at the German area over the farmhouse, chickens, children and all, which ended this stage of our progress. Rustic le Touret was apparently making no such heavy weather of the war. In the farm we found the Quartermaster, Swain, and the Padre. It was a cool, shady, swept and garnished interior in which Swain first came into our view, a man whose warmth of heart often

cheers me in these later times, a plain, brave, affectionate man. Swain had come from Canada to the battalion, his hair already gone grey, his cheeks bright, and his eyes gleaming purpose. I well remember him crossing the flagged floor of the farmer's parlour to welcome and accustom two boys. He did it well, for he had a boyish readiness about him, such as gave confidence – and he knew what danger was and what duty was. Fear he respected, and he exemplified self-conquest.

Swain told us that the Colonel wished us to go up to the battalion in the front line that evening 'with the rations.' He gave us tea. He gave us anecdotes, even rallying the Padre on a visit to a bootshop in Béthune. The howitzer loosing off occasionally outside punctuated these amenities. The Padre, a Catholic, selected Doogan as his affinity, Doogan also being a Catholic, and I felt that he repulsed me. Speak, any relic of honesty that may be in Blunden – was it not this slight and natural inequality, at this time, which caused you afterwards to spread satirical parodies of the Padre's voice, remarks and habits? Walking up and down the road after tea, the new-comers fell in with friends who had been until lately in training with them. One of these was a doubtful blessing; he was noted for hairy raggedness and the desire to borrow a little money; he now appeared stumping along as though with a millstone about his neck, and, questioned, did not comfort us. The line was hell, he said, and flung his arms heavenward as some explosions dully shook the silence. It was a likely description with him. In the huts at Shoreham, months before, he had been wont to quote soulfully the wild-west verses of one Robert Service, then read by thousands, cantering rhetoric about huskies and hoboes on icy trails; at length he had said,

with the modest yet authoritative tone suitable to such a disclosure, 'I AM – Robert Service.' Some believed. He never retreated from the claim; we heard it again in France; and the poor fellow was at last killed at Richebourg on June 30th in a hell more sardonic and sunnily devilish than ten thousand Robert Services could evolve, or wolves and grizzlies inhabit.

The other acquaintance was F. Prior, whose reputation was that of dryness and common sense. He, too, objected to the line. It was not a line at all, he said. I put in something about 'trenches?' 'Trenches be damned,' he said, 'look here, I went up the *road* to the front line two nights ago and had to lie in the ditch every two minutes. There's only one road and Fritz puts machine-guns on it through the night. Same on the duckboard track. Lend us your notebook.' He drew a sketch something like this:



So the scattered breastwork posts called the Islands were our front line: no communication trench sheltered the approach to them. What, at this stage of the war? Yes, shamelessly. But, the newspaper correspondents? F. Prior told us to expect nothing, and went his ways.

In the shallow ditch outside that le Touret farm, among the black mud now nearly dry, were to be seen a variety of old grenades brown with rust. I looked at them with suspicion; and later on, returning on some errand, I saw them again. Why did no one see to it that these relics were duly destroyed? For that same summer they brought death to some sauntering Tommy whose curiosity led him to disturb the heap, seeming safe because of its antiquity. This was a characteristic of the war – that long talon reaching for its victim at its pleasure.

When dark had fallen, 'the rations' went up, a jolting, clattering series of waggons and limbers; Doogan and myself crept along somewhere in the middle, with the mules behind us nosing forward in a kindly manner, as if wishing to impart some experience to the novices. It seemed a great way, but it cannot have been so, before this column, passing cellars from which lights yellowed through chinks hung with canvas or blankets, halted. The rations were unloaded and packed in trolleys waiting at the edge of a field by several soldiers who had met the transport there with a bantering exchange of family remarks and criticism. With this ration party Doogan and I went awkwardly up the tram-lines, often helping to push the trolleys, which fell off their wooden railway now and then.

It was both profoundly dark and still. In the afternoon, looking eastward from le Touret, I had seen nothing but green fields and plumy grey-green trees and intervening tall roofs; it was as though in this part the

line could only be a trifling interruption of a happy landscape. I thought, the Vicarage must lie among those sheltering boughs. Now at night, following a trolley along a track which needed watching, I as yet made out little more about the fighting man's zone, except the occasional lights flying on a curve and sinking away on the horizon. When at last the trolleys were at their terminus, and Doogan and myself went with a guide to report to battalion headquarters, several furious insect-like zips went past my ear, and slowly enough I connected these noises with the loud hollow popping of rifles ahead, and knew that the fear of my infancy, to be among flying bullets, was now realized. The sense of being exposed suddenly predominated. We crossed a narrow wooden bridge, and came under the shelter of a sandbag rampart, which to eyes striving through the darkness appeared vast and safe.

Battalion headquarters was in this rampart, the Old British Line. It was a simple little cave, with a plain table and candle-light, and earth walls concealed with canvas. In it sat the commanding officer, W. L. Grisewood, dark-eyed and thoughtful, his brother, F. Grisewood, and his adjutant, T. Wallace. A somewhat severe air prevailed and not much was said, except that the colonel was glad to see us, remarking that we were the first officer reinforcements to reach the 11th Royal Sussex. Of Colonel Grisewood I cannot say much, for I seldom rose to the eminence of conversation with him. Once, presently, as we marched back to billets, he corrected me for carrying an untrimmed and sizable stick which I had found in the line, ordering me to respect society and 'get an ash plant.' He was very grave and conscientious; there is an admiring view of him in Nevile Lytton's *The Press and the General Staff*.

Doogan was sent to A Company, I believe, then in

the front trench; and luckier I, as I felt, to C Company in the Old British Line, along which on a greasy wooden track a guide soon led me past solemn sentries and strings of men with shovels and other burdens. The dugout in which C Company officers were was smaller and blacker and much more humane than that where the dark-eyed Grisewoods and austere Wallace sat. I had, of course, more introductions at once. In charge of C Company was the boyish Captain Penruddock, perhaps one-and-twenty years old, rosy-faced, slender, argumentative. Second in command, Edmond Xavier Kapp appeared, ready with scribbles and charcoal drawings not unworthy of his reputation as a satirical artist. Charlwood, inclined to stammer, who as I soon found out had played cricket for Sussex, and Limbery-Buse, the 'Lumbering Bus,' who did stammer, made up the headquarters. These I saw in the dugout. A call, 'Mess,' produced a young soldier like Mr. Pickwick's Fat Boy in khaki, who went away with his orders, and soon I was given a large enamel plate full of meat and vegetable rations; not long after, Penruddock told me to 'get down to it.' At this early stage unused to going without sleep, I felt very weary, and gladly crawled into a kind of low recess in the dugout, where with sandbags below, above, around, and my British Warm coat, it was easy to sleep and sleep deeply, too.

I am ashamed to remember that I was accused of sleeping ten hours. The morning when I emerged was high and blue and inspiriting, but the landscape somewhat tattered and dingy. I washed ungrudgingly in a biscuit-tin, and Limbery-Buse took me for a walk along the reserve line, explaining as we went the system of sentries and trench duty. At some points in the trench, bones pierced through their shallow burial, and skulls appeared like mushrooms. The men with whom I was

now consorted instantly appeared good men, shy, quiet, humorous, and neat. The sandbag walls did not look so mighty as the night before, but still I thought that they must be able to withstand a great deal. Limbery-Buse thought not. As I look back on those breastworks, very often single walls, with no protection at all against the 'back-blast' of shells, with their wooden fire-steps, their roofings of corrugated iron or old doors, I am of his opinion; and even that first morning I might have known; for the howling and whooping of shells suddenly began, and a small brick outbuilding between our trench and Festubert village behind began to jump away in explosions of dusty yellow smoke. The sight was attractive, until Limbery-Buse mentioned that Fritz might drop a shell or two short of his ruin, and in that event we were standing in the probable point of impact.

One of the first things that I was asked in C Company dugout was, 'Got any peace talk?' It was a rhetorical question. One of the first ideas that established themselves in my enquiring mind was the prevailing sense of the endlessness of the war. No one here appeared to conceive any end to it. I soon knew that

> Day succeeded unto day,
> Night to pensive night.

Such as it was, the Old British Line at Festubert had the appearance of great age and perpetuity; its weather-beaten sandbag wall was already venerable. It shared the past with the defences of Troy. The skulls which spades disturbed about it were in a manner coeval with those of the most distant wars; there is little but remoteness about a skull. And, as for the future, one of the first hints that came home to me was implied in a

machine-gun emplacement stubbornly built in brick and cement, as one might build a house.

We were well off in this reserve trench, though my blood ran high in the excitement of novelty. In the evenings, while some of the men were amusing themselves in digging out a colony of rats, for which sport they had enlisted a stray terrier, there would suddenly begin a tremendous upheaval two or three miles to the south. The officers not on definite duty would leave their dinner to stand and terrify their eyes with this violence. On the blue and lulling mist of evening, proper to the nightingale, the sheepbell and falling waters, the strangest phenomena of fire inflicted themselves. The red sparks of German trench mortars described their seeming-slow arcs, shrapnel shells clanged in crimson, burning, momentary cloudlets, smoke billowed into a tidal wave, and the powdery glare of many a signal-light showed its rolling folds. The roarings and cracklings of the contest between artilleries and small-arms sometimes seemed to lessen as one gigantic burst was heard. We watched, with murmured astonishment; and often Charlwood would say, 'Hope to God we don't go south of the Canal.' The Canal was that which runs from Béthune to La Bassée, and south of it festered that shattered and shattering length of battlefield of which Loos was the centre. Need I note that Charlwood's sensible petition was to be rejected?

My trench education advanced, and I learned of sentry groups and trench stores, dispositions and defence schemes. I attached the requisite importance to the Vermoral Sprayers for counteracting gas – simple machines such as were used in Kent to wash cherry trees with insect-killer – and to the clearance of match-sticks illegally thrown into the gutters under the duckboards. Above all the needs of the fighting man, except his

pay-book, a rifle-rack now appeared to be paramount. There was a wonderful tidiness in trench housekeeping at that period. One night, something a little more adventurous in suggestion befell me. Penruddock went up to the front line by the 'overland route,' and he thought it would be for my good if I went with him. The moon was high and clear. We worked our way over old farmlands, and crossed the Old German Line, attacked and passed by the British a year before, in that typically wasteful experiment or audacity, the Aubers Ridge battle. The old trench lay silent and formidable, a broad gully, like a rough sunk lane rather than a firing-trench. It was strewn with remains and pitiful evidences. The whole region of Festubert, being marshy and undrainable, smelt ill enough, but this trench was peculiar in that way. I cared little to stop in the soft drying mud at the bottom of it; I saw old uniforms, and a great many bones. One uniform identified a German officer; the skeleton seemed less coherent than most, and an unexploded shell lay on the edge of the fragments. What an age since 1914! Meanwhile, so many bullets cracked with whip-like loudness just over our heads that it seemed we were being actually aimed at, though it was night, and the enemy at half a mile's distance. We went on, through straggling wire and wet grass, and then by a wooden track, until the lee of Cover Trench rose in view: we entered it by an opening known in that time and district as a 'sally port,' a term readily connecting us with Marlborough's wars.

In Cover Trench night life was much more vigorous than where I had been so far. The Islands, each with its small contingent of infantry, lay yet ahead: but Cover Trench was the real front line. Doogan, my old companion, was here in the narrow hole which was

company headquarters, talkative and cheerful, looking as if he liked it. Another officer who had been trained with me, Vorley by name, showed me where the sentries were posted, and how to fire a flare. This was very simple: he had with him a cumbrous brass gun, called a duck-gun; from this he fired a Vérey cartridge. But the effect was one of ejaculation rather than illumination; two or three deafening cartridges provided a thin whirl of sparks that died on their early way into the sightless sky; meanwhile the Germans were sending up fine confident lights, which soared and sank in beautiful curves, or, suspended on parachutes, delayed their spiral fall and sought out all nooks and corners. The superiority of their flares was mortifying, and may have been the original reason why British trench practice was to put up Vérey lights at the rarest moments. The abstention came to be defined as 'a point of honour,' and it certainly was no disadvantage in the long run, for the Germans mostly supplied an excellent profusion of illuminants. It was the dream of our rank and file that the capture of one of their signal-light cartridges would be rewarded with ten days' leave. Several bold optimists went into danger pursuing this dream.

I was put in charge of No. 11 Platoon, but in the trenches a subaltern's business was rather general than particular. He took his turns of trench watch with the others, which meant responsibility for the company's whole front at those times. Soon enough we relieved the forward company, and new excitements came my way. The nights were certainly a strange experience, which in retrospect largely defines itself as the mystery of finding where people and places were. The Cover Trench lay at the head of a salient, and darkness emphasizes the precariousness of such places; puzzling flares, evidently the enemy's, would soar up as it were

behind one's back, and not only would these mislead one's strained polarity, but bullets would smack into our parapet from the wrong side – a dismal thing to do. One night while Doogan was sitting in the headquarters dugout with 'La Vie Parisienne' as a *memento vivere*, a shot arrived in the earth wall just above him by way of *memento mori*. The Islands in front were lonely places, and at first, as I followed a guide through the blackness, much like a hen, among old tins and holes and diggings and wreckage, it seemed to me likely that one would miss them altogether and end up in the German line. Some were regularly manned by us, others not; and the circuit of them always hinted the fancy that a German ambush *might* be encountered in the derelicts. Our men were very quiet, but very watchful and fearless in these outposts. A strong group looked out on Canadian Orchard, with its naked historic trees: it was their habit to annoy the Germans opposite with a Lewis gun, and at their invitation I also caused the weapon to speak. The answers were bullets, that flayed the sandbags in awkward nearness to one's head, and brought from our good Sergeant-Major Lee as he leaned there most violent phrases of contempt, as if he were being worried by street arabs.

Two German machine guns were famous, 'almost legendary monsters' here. Blighty Albert and Quinque Jimmy fired across a road called Kinky-Roo, which our ration parties and others used: and I have dropped with the rest in its insufficient gutter while the sprays of bullets rushed as though endlessly just above, or sometimes struck fire from the cobbles, and while the long pallor and malice of the flares whitened the broken trees, the masses of brickwork, and the hummocks of old defences. The subtle whiteness sometimes contoured the enemy's parapet; then

they fell, and darkness rushed up to meet the weary sky.

Want of sleep soon impressed me. There was always some interruption when one lay down. In the day time, Cover Trench was not to be reached from the Old British Line; but what with domestic details, reporting and mapping, the censoring of the letters scrawled in copying pencil by our home-yearning stalwarts, the inspection of stores and rifles and so forth, one was busy. At night, higher ranks appeared in our midst, and, chief of all, one whose approach caused the bravest to quail – the Brigadier-General. I was reading in the headquarters shelter when the great man suddenly drew aside the sacking of the entrance, and gleamed stupendously in our candlelight. I had not been round the company's wire. Why not? I was to go. Authority was at this time persistent that all officers should take their nightly constitutional in No Man's Land, and it was ungainsayable that such as myself should so exercise ourselves; but the rule did not except company commanders. They could only murmur and go forth. Shortly afterwards a valued captain in another battalion, generally known because he had played cricket for Surrey, was obeying the expensive mandate, when he was hit and killed.

Many harsh and even maledictory notes on the General passed among us. I still remember that brooding discontent. The wild look in his eye at this period used to accompany wild orders. Where the line was being held with some degree of contentment, mutual contact and pride, he was liable to set people off on cross purposes. He rejoiced in inventing new Army Forms, which he called 'pro forma's.' There were 'pro forma's' for everything; had they been good 'pro forma's' criticism would be foolish, but some of

them were such that one's best information could not find a heading in them. A patrol went out, returned, and its officer had then to struggle with the composition of a report under such heads as 'Enemy Activity,' 'Enemy Dispositions,' and so on, the result being strained and parcelled out of all value. One night, Kapp went out to study a suspected sniper's post in a ruin. He stayed out too long, and when at last he scrambled back from the hurrying light of day to the Island where I awaited him, one of his men had been badly wounded. Poor Corporal Mills was carried down, and died later. But (at this cost) Kapp's patrol had been remarkable, and he sent back a long precise report, full of suggestive information. The Olympian comment was, 'Too flowery for a military report.' Our chieftain could not encourage anything that bore the semblance of the mental method of a world before the war. That temperaments vary was a conception doggedly cancelled by his singular man, whom we all found difficult, and whom we honour.

As yet my notion of modern war was infinitesimal. Of the possibilities of artillery there was no example at Festubert; the spectacular outbursts round Givenchy seemed to be the extreme of mechanised fury, while for ourselves in the front trench the guns were quiet. A few rounds might occasionally go whizzing over our heads, and I was alarmed by the report that one had burst almost exactly over the doorway of battalion headquarters, a thousand yards behind! Was there no safety anywhere? The shortened, quietened cough of anti-aircraft shells often came down from the blue morning sky, and it was fashionable to stand watching these pretty explosions, and counting up the waste of public money on the part of our 'Archies' shell by shell, the rumoured cost of these shells being then half a

guinea each. Sometimes this cynical mathematics was brought to an end as the air round us began to buzz and drone with falling fragments; large and jagged shards of steel would plunge murderously into the sandbags, and one discreetly got into the dugout.

Let me take you back now from the imbecile, narrow, but tranquil front line into the stand-to billets in Festubert village. And let me say here that, whereas to my mind the order of events may be confused, no doubt a reference to the battalion records would right it; yet does it matter greatly ? or are not pictures and evocations better than horology ? What says Tristram ? – 'It was some time in the summer of that year.'

Festubert village was an interesting contortion of whimsically balanced bricks and beams, and on the whole friendly to the fighting man. The Brewery was shelled, being prominent and used as an observation post; if any other place received a salvo, the local public preferred to think that some mistake had been made. In ancient days, perhaps in 1914, the village had been bombarded with serious intention, by guns of horrid weight, and one gazed wonderingly into several enormous holes. Our company headquarters in the hulk of a once pretty house could show two or three magnificent examples at its threshold, round the marble steps, and in one of these pits lay a monstrous rusty shell, which, it was said, our engineers would not attempt to explode. (That remark shows the innocence and serenity of this period.) Apart from this, our garden was lovely, with flowering shrubs, streaked and painted blooms, gooseberry bushes, convenient new gaps and paths, and walks between evergreen hedges – 'unsafe by day,' as the notice boards said. Not far down the road was a wooden bath-house, where one splashed in cold water agreeably, yet with a listening ear. Not far, again, was

a red brick wall, to which fruit-trees reached their covert; this red wall was an instance of man's duplicity, for part of it, being but painted wood, presently opened, and a field battery glaring brutally out would 'poop off.' The contrivance was universally admired; was it not the work of our own Divisional Artillery? Yet at this time I was more afraid of our own guns than of the enemy's. Here and there, stretched from tree to tree, one saw wire netting, intended, we heard, to interrupt the roar of firing and so to hinder the German's sound-ranging.

C Company officers were very amicable, though Penruddock was reckoned rather too young for the command; and, as I see him in the pool of time gone by, he appears as a boy, fair-haired, fine-eyed and independent of experience. Our lodging was an 'elephant dugout,' an arched iron framework, built into the house which I mentioned, and called advanced brigade headquarters. Here we were amused by the skill of Kapp, who made charcoal drawings, no doubt scarcely proper, but as clever as anything he has done; nor was he artist alone; he also tried to popularize rounds and catches, as 'Great Tom is cast,' 'A Southerly Wind and a Cloudy Sky,' 'Go to Joan Glover.' The intellects of the others scarcely rose to his magazines from home, among which was *The Gypsy*, a frolic in decadent irreverences published in Dublin; it was a most unexpected visitor to a table meant for Army note-books, compasses, fuse-caps, aluminium mugs of lime juice and plates of variegated bully beef. Kapp was a lively hand to have in a dugout; his probably imaginary autobiography, peeping out at intervals, and enriched by other versions, was also a diversion; but one day he was called away to an interview with the colonel, and soon he disappeared into the irrelevant

air of G.H.Q., far beyond the stars. He was a shrewd critic, and on the spot demonstrated the weakness of some verses which I wrote on a beautiful seventeenth-century shrine in Festubert, still peeping out its innocent assurance between its sycamore trees.

Our men lived in the 'keeps' which guarded the village line. East Keep in particular was a murky sandbagged cellar and emplacement. To go from keep to keep alone in the hour before dawn, by way of supervising the 'stand to arms,' was an eccentric journey. Then, the white mist (with the wafting perfume of cankering funeral wreaths) was moving with slow, cold currents above the pale grass; the frogs in their fens were uttering their long-drawn *co-aash, co-aash*; and from the line the popping of rifles grew more and more threatening, and more and more bullets flew past the white summer path. Festubert was a great place for bullets. They made a peculiar anthem, some swinging past with a full cry, some cracking loudly like a child's burst bag, some in ricochet from the wire or the edge of ruins groaning as in agony or whizzing like gnats. Giving such things their full value, I took my road with no little pride and fear; one morning I feared very sharply, as I saw what looked like a rising shroud over a wooden cross in the clustering mist. Horror! but on a closer study I realized that the apparition was only a flannel gas helmet spread out over the memorial.

The quiet life here yet had its casualties, for we were sent up as working-parties in the night-time to dig a new communication trench. The procession groped dispassionately past the church with its toppling crucifix, and the brewery's sentinel in the shadow ('That you, Dick?' 'Ow's business, Dick?') along the Old British Line, and so to the place of work. All trenches hereabouts were merely cast-up ridges of earth held in

places by stakes, wire, hurdles, and wooden framework. Underneath their floors of boards and slats, water welled and stagnated, and an indescribable nocturnal smell, mortal, greenweedy, ratty, accompanied the tramp of our boots to and fro. The process of thickening the trench walls meant working in the open, and the enemy laid his machine guns accurately enough on the new job which could not be concealed from him, letting drive when he chose. So we lost men. The company worked well, though not in very good temper: the continued want of rest was naturally resented; but they were men who knew how to use spades, and I was ashamed of my puny, hasty efforts in comparison with their long and easy stroke. After work, there was a glow of satisfaction among us. The nights being cold as yet, a soup-kitchen was still kept open in Festubert, and we were glad of it.

Over all our night activities the various German lights tossed their wild incoherence. Three blue lights, it was half-humorously said, were the signal for peace; as time went on the definition was revised – four black lights. But superstition could not be altogether thrust back in this district of miasma and mist, and when one evening a wisp of vapour was seen by my working party to glide over the whole sky from west to east, preserving all the time a strange luminous whiteness and an obvious shape, as some said, that of a cross, as others antipathetically held, of a sword, then there was a subdued conversation about it, which spread from man to man. My batman Shearing, whose characteristic attitude was 'It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good,' told me that he read coming disaster in this sword.

11

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

H. M. TOMLINSON

H. M. Tomlinson is worthy to be placed beside C. E. Montague in the line of great journalists who write not only for their age but also for future ages. Until recently he was best known as a writer of fine descriptive essays, many of them dealing with ships and rivers, and in particular with life in London's dock-land. Representative titles are *The Sea and the Jungle, London River,* and a collection containing several War articles named *Waiting for Daylight.* In 1927 he published a novel, *Gallions Reach,* in which office-life, shipwreck, and adventure in the Malayan jungle all play a part. In 1930 appeared *All Our Yesterdays* (William Heinemann Ltd.), described by Hugh Walpole as 'one of the finest books in modern English' on account of its 'lovely English, its nobility, its reality.' This book also opens with a fine picture of Dockland in 1900; we again swelter in the Malayan forests; and by way of a London newspaper office and the Ulster rebellion we finally reach the War and France.

From 1914 to 1917 Tomlinson was a War Correspondent, during part of the time at the British Headquarters in France. His imagination moves on a lofty plane and his descriptions have something of the same breadth of vision as Thomas Hardy displayed in *The Dynasts.* He has the magic gift of choosing just the word which reveals a completely new aspect of reality and etches it into the mind. This fine passage describes the ironically named *Happy Valley* at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme. Here life must indeed have seemed 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,' justifying Macbeth's bitter conclusion that

> 'all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death.'

The Battle of the Somme was one of the most important and critical of the War: it lasted from June 1916 to the end of

November, and resulted in the capture by our troops of the strongly fortified heights north of the River Somme, between Bapaume and Albert. The British casualties numbered 410,000.

THE two new subalterns found themselves in a valley. It was known as Happy Valley. They were at once lost amid the activities of a monstrous fair ground. Everybody was going to the fair. There was no mistake about the guns now. Their shocks displaced the air. It was not gun-fire; it was a continuous eruption. The blasts blew down that exit from the valley towards the north-east. That led to the unknown land, to the woods and villages, not so distant, whose names were new and dreadful – Montauban, Longueval, High Wood, Devil's Wood, Bernafay Wood, Lousy Wood, Guillemont, Ginchy, Combles. Those names were the gossip of the fair. They were the acute points on the fluctuating line where the earth was blowing up, and the flames consumed more men than could be sent to feed them. Sausage balloons hung in rows in the sky; as if they'd got up there to see the show, and their big behinds sat where there was no gallery.

Happy Valley was a desert. Its surface was pulverised by myriads of feet, hooves, and wheels. Restless brown lakes could be seen in it; they were congestions of horses. All the trees of the valley were dead or dying because the horses had gnawed off their bark. A great carnival was being held in the valley; excitement and energy stirred its life, without joy. Its slopes were blotched with the discoloured canvas dwellings of the hands in the new industry of war, surgeons, and craftsmen with rifles and cannon, and their hosts of qualified attendants. The broad valley crawled with humans, cattle and machinery, and distance merged horses, men and engines into a ceaseless stirring on the

hairless hide of the planet. The interest of man had settled on the valley, and had worn it as dead as an ash-pit. From a distance, it was not an army of men you saw there, but merely an eddying of clusters and streams of loose stuff. It was not men, but man-power, which moved into that valley without ceasing, and the power was pumped into it from the reservoirs of distant cities to keep revolving the machinery of war. If life clotted, it was deflected into those hospital tents. The streams had to be constant and free. The flies of all the plagues were in the valley, more flies than men and horses, because every dead man and horse bred an army of flies; the flies darkened the food, shimmered over the ordure, and swarmed on the clotted life in the hospital tents.

The land around was terraced with massed batteries and howitzers. Their crews laboured at the ranks of glistening steel barrels, stripped to the waist. They fed them glumly and methodically, as in a universal factory where overtime was compulsory for a greater output of death, which nobody wanted. The machinery had been set going, and the men were its slaves. They could not stop. The engines compelled them to continue as they had begun. They were being broken on the wheels they had started. The wheels and cogs of the age of machines had taken charge of their inventors, and were grinding them and their earth into powder, for the increase of the flies. Work did not finish at sunset. Night was in abeyance. Darkness was an intermittent day; it was tremulous with an incessant flaring and glittering, and the very clouds flushed phantom-like with the red reflections of earth's sinister activities. It was the Battle of the Somme. Giant automata hammered ponderously on the old horizon, breaking it up. The earth sparked and flashed under

their poundings. They hammered with a violence so rapid that you knew only soulless bodies of steel could be so powerful and tireless, so blind to ruin, so unheeding of the dismay of listeners. You had a dread that evil had been freed. It was beyond control now, leaping huge malignant rapine over cornlands, orchards, and altars, turning the ancient establishment of prudent peace into dust and corruption.

As for Jack Bolt, he was a new officer, and his thought took no such turn in Happy Valley. The noise and the impersonal movements only subdued him. In the transport lines after dark the flaring and crashing beyond, through which he must pass, awed him a little. This was the limit. Golly, this was something like! Now we shan't be long! He felt even a little grimly sorry for poor old Jerry. Jerry was being blown to hell. Stuff to give him! Now he knew what it was like. Jerry was getting a bit more than his own back.

'Where's your pal?' demanded the transport officer. 'We're off.'

Jack was taken then by a momentary panic. In that pandemonium of darkness, flashes, shocks, and confused activity, a fellow could be lost, and never found again, and nobody would ever know. Worse than the Hohenzollern Redoubt!

Good! There was Webb, brought back by a gun-flash! Jack did not want to go up into that sort of night without a pal. This was the end. It was stepping off the edge. In those other raids and shake-ups he had been somebody, if only a number; now he knew he did not matter. A fellow could be missing, and nobody would bother because it would be no good bothering about anybody.

That journey gave him the impression that it was

good-bye to all. He could never find his way back, even if he had the chance. He was going beyond the limit, and maps could not help. There was no way back. He blinked at loud lights bursting out of nowhere. The earth existed only here and there. You didn't know how long its pieces would last, either. The chunks of the blessed old busted world jolted and sank and upended under your feet. The sky was bursting and tumbling and the ground was broken darkness. He saw in a bright instantaneous heaven the head of a terrified horse thrown up for a second, and a man's head in a tin hat. Then they were blotted out. There were angry voices and no men. There was a long flame and a roar alongside which made him fall over the belly of a dead mule. The belly was tight as a drum. He was thrown about among panic-stricken horses. A cooker went into a hole; it toppled over. He heard the grief of the cook: 'It ain't 'arf a stew now.' Somebody caught his arm and began to laugh. That was Webb. Webb couldn't stop laughing.

Daylight came thinly, as though reluctant to show what it must. The things about Jack had no substance, and he was glad of that. They were better that way. He didn't want to think. He didn't want to believe. He had shrunk within himself to a mere point, and had no fear, only a still and alert doubt. He watched. He held himself in. Only his eyes were there; he did not want to be sure that he was any more real than the shapes he could faintly make out about him. There was, around him, only a vision of the last day, which a wind could disperse, it was so grey and thin. It was not a surprise that the scene trembled in the blasts of the British guns. Their light was brighter than the faint daylight.

A vivid flame burst beside a gun a little ahead and to

the right. One of the gunners spun a cart-wheel in the air and flopped on the track and stayed there. Jack passed that object as though it were at a great distance. He was apart from it. Well, those gunners were asking for it. There they were, in the open, all over the shop, and going it so hard that Jerry had no time to find them. It was an audacious scene, new to the war, and Jack was cheered. One shell at all those guns! A battery of field pieces stood blatantly amid the rubbish of broken walls and slammed away into the morning; those guns might have had nothing to fire at, but were merely emptying their dumps into the sunrise. Tiny aeroplanes, meteors in the upper light, passed leisurely eastward to the dawn. Anyhow, that proves right one of the fairy tales, Jack supposed; our fliers really have got the German airmen cold. He was pleased with any promising sign.

He tripped over wire, while eyeing those shining birds in easy flight. The ground was an awful mess; a confusion of silly wreckage, brickbats and beams, lathes and plaster, huddles of grey sandbags, flattened trenches, the entrances to old dug-outs blown cock-eyed, craters, and red thickets of wire; broken rifles, helmets and shell-cases stuck out of the piles of grey muck like fossils.

My God, Jack was glad he was out of this when it was going on! This job hadn't been easy. Frightful! Could a man live through it? Had Charley been here?

They were met, in the empty world beyond the batteries, by men of their own battalion. It was a comfort, it was like a miracle, to find the right sign, in that chaos. But Webb and Bolt were hardly observed. These men were in a hurry. They carried petrol tins. They were there for water. They were

very dirty, quiet, abrupt and quick. Jack was ashamed of his new uniform.

No time to lose. Jack saw he was on the edge of it. The land beyond was dead and waiting for the next thing to happen. It was a tumbled sea of brown earth, shockingly bare to the hot sun, thrown up into waves by an infernal storm, which had destroyed all life there and had passed, and the waves were fixed in their last crests and troughs. These fellows perhaps had been in it, and were afraid the storm was coming back. Nothing moved in that world ahead – yes, fountains of earth! The damned sea was trying to get going again. Little clouds with claps of thunder and sparks in their hearts appeared over the ridge beyond them. The officer in charge looked that way keenly. He was shabby, grey, unshaved and nervy. 'No shelling?' he blustered to Webb. 'They've no time for people at the back. We get it all. Keep low – they'll have a sight of us up there.'

Jack would not have called that a trench. It was a raw brown furrow. In some places it had no sides. It ascended the shoulder of a low rise, and that horrid bright sky at the top would give them away, he knew, to whatever power brooded over that landscape. They had to go into that light. A geyser banged ahead of them, and rained clods. Any more? He crouched. A clean beetle scurried under his nose in the loose earth. In that pause he heard the blood pulse in his ears. Overhead passed the tearing rush and wailing of shells. His back was too big for that gulley. The sun could see him easily – it made his back hot. His back was as big as a barn.

They got over the bright horizon, and crawled through a corroding waste, a poisonous welter of drains and stinking shell-holes, some of them still smoking.

In a recess a number of men were cast down, in careless attitudes, as though they had been caught by sleep, and friends had covered their faces. Jack hardly glanced at them. He was not thinking now. He had arrived. Nothing had happened, after all. Jack felt suddenly a little jocular because of that. 'I'll never learn this patch,' he said to the guide.

'You won't have to, my son. You're supposed to take another.'

The officer pointed then to a spacious distance which could be seen when he peeped over an edge of muck. 'Over there.' Men stood leaning against that slope of raw earth, clothes and faces the colour of it. Only their steel was bright. They gave Jack the impression that they had lost something and were hopeless about finding it. They did not look at him, but they must have known he was passing them, for they squeezed into the dirt as he went by.

He was sure he had forgotten all he had learned, but he was pushed into his job at once. His captain, Gillow, was a comfort, if there was anything in the signs. Gillow was tall, slow, solid, and wise to it. He was covered with rusty earth, and had a cut on his forehead. 'I'm not always like this. We've had a bit of shelling. They've just dug me out.' He blew his nose. 'What is London doing?'

Sergeant Worswick accompanied him to a post. He peeped over the land beyond, and heard the names of it from Worswick. They were near the bottom of a shallow valley. It was fallow, dead, and still, like the rest of the world, and the opposite rise was crested by a line of black jags. That had been a wood. On their right was a leprous patch of grey and red in the brown waves; that was what was left of a village.

'Jerry's still in the village. The Downshires are

trying to take it.' Worswick stated that, his eyes fixed. Machine guns were stuttering down there. Nothing moved, except spurts of dust from the ruins. Jack heard the clanging of metal where nothing could be seen, and the earth was jolted and rocked.

'They're off, sir. Our guns are at it – that ought to stop their reinforcements.'

Jack felt it under his feet. It started the clods rolling. It was as if the cranks and cogs of the earth's guts had broken loose, and were banging about. The tree stumps on the ridge before them disappeared instantly within a long ominous cloud. It billowed, rocked, and throbbed. The wrong sort of cloud. Jack, in his interest, slipped and struck his face on the parapet. He wiped the filth from his mouth. He watched the scene again, but slipped. Damn! Greasy ground. He looked to his boots. He was standing on the pale breast of a man, which formed the bottom of the trench just there; young Bolt side-stepped for a firmer foothold.

Where the tree stumps had been on the opposite ridge a volcano had burst. The earth was rent. Flames and smoke jetted and bulged from internal fires. The venomous cloud increased and mounted, black sulphur, and dirty green. It did not lift. It was fixed to the hill, but it was convulsive, leaping and ballooning as if trying to burst. It was threshed within by incandescent flails. Sometimes in places the cloud thinned; it became translucent, and the tree stumps appeared again in a bluish fog. Then the raving cloud and the darting flashes rolled back over them, and some of the stumps shot revolving out of the smoke. One end of the eruption rolled down the hill to the ruined village in desperate bounds. The ruins vanished. Where they had been was a cruel storm with fire jumping in its belly.

'Made a muck of it, sir, I'm afraid,' said Worswick. 'That'll mean that we'll have to have some more.'

That night Jack's battalion advanced its line slightly and without hindrance, into a worse place. It was said the Downshires had taken the village after all; they had been strafed by their own guns while they were in it. Jack was told he had better get a sleep in, while there was time for it.

Gillow had a good heart. If ever a man seemed to want a rest, it was Gillow. He was worn out, Jack could see. His eyes were red, his skin was papery and wrinkled. He might have been deliberately standing back a little from them, the better to see everybody properly, to see how they shaped. His glance was quick but his movements were cautious. Nothing hurried him. He had quiet words for the men. It was a relief to see him coming along. How was Webb getting on?

Jack felt all in; he curled up in a corner Worswick found for him. Just five minutes.

That was a nasty bump somewhere in the line. He sat up again. There was no sign and no sound for a spell, and then a yowling. Like a cat. Funny noise for a man to make. The fellow kept it up, quite calmly; he was imitating a cat. Jack wished he would stop it. A creepy noise; no cats there.

He drowsed. He sank out of it. He was sinking out of it. It was easier than he thought. Right out of it. There was nobody to stop him now. It was all over. He could go. He was stumping out of that trench. Nobody was there, except the dead. It wasn't day, but he could see them, curled up, and sprawled on their bellies, and on their backs, knees up, helmets rolled off, yellow hands and faces, with

their black mouths open, and eyes open, soddened with weather. Nothing moved. Poor devils, they would have to stay. But he was off, he was getting out of it. He hurried on. He must get out of this.

He wished there was a better light. It was only an evening light. Everything finished, everybody gone. It wasn't light, but he could see the dead. It would be morning after this. This trench led out to morning, and people, and the grass, where you were not alone. He must meet someone soon. He looked for a pal on the move. Nothing moved. Round and round the corners, always the same trench, and the men huddled on the bottom of it, and nobody there. He must hurry on. He must keep going. It was the only way out. Nobody was there, all was over. The end of the trench must be somewhere. It must let him out. He began to run – round the traverses – he must get out – but it was the same trench everywhere, with the dead whose eyes were open. Nobody but himself. Everybody had gone – they'd left him behind. He fell.

Oh Lord ! Just slipped on the earth. Here he was, in the trench all right. He looked at his watch. He had been asleep no time. He listened. That cat ! There it was, yowling again. It was worse than the guns, that noise. It would take the stuffing out of you. It was the only sound now. What on earth ! Like a horrible wild beast ! It filled the night.

Some feet pushed near him. He heard voices. That was Gillow. 'That you, Worswick ? Poor young devil. He's unconscious . . . got him in the crutch. Can't do anything . . . can't last. Unnerving for the men, that noise. It'd be a mercy . . .'

There was a muttering by Worswick. Then Gillow again. 'Yes, only just joined . . . yes. Webb . . . must put up with it, I suppose. Bad for the men.'

Jack sprang up, but the captain and the sergeant had gone. There was no yowling now. Webb! Which way was it? It was all dark. He ran a little way. Steady; wait. This won't do. A figure rustled near him – one of the men – the sentry shifted his rifle on the parapet, and spat. Jack returned to his funk-hole, and tried to get his thoughts lined up. Steady does it! Webb. Bill Webb. Old Bill!

Jack waited, listening in fear for the yowling again. He must stay where he was. He must stay where he had been put.

There was a droning overhead and then flashes beyond. The parapet danced in and out of the night. He looked out over it. Machine guns were jabbering away on the right. A screaming came at them out of the darkness, and livid clouds began to flash and clang along their front. Shrapnel! Now and then there was a heavy shock and a burst of flame. The trench went slithering under him. The night split open wide in brilliance before him, and swallowed all the noises. It was dark – an iron shutter had dropped. Buried! He gave way to it.

More stuff was falling on him. He wouldn't stay. He heaved, and presently stood out of it. It was loose. His ears were ringing, but he heard no other sound. The trench was a line of bright smoke, a luminous surf of fire breaking over them, a high bluish surf darting with crimson jabs.

Men stumbled along the trench, bringing something. Gillow was with them. They had a Lewis gun. Gillow put his mouth to Jack's ear. 'Bolt . . . good. You're the man. Here . . . here . . . sit tight. Look to it. They're coming back. Mustn't come back.'

The men humped themselves. Nobody came back.

The shelling died down. That was the dawn beginning over there. Time the blessed sun did come. He didn't care now. He could begin to see things.

Jack felt he was no good. His name was Mud. He wanted to see things. He wanted to see them plain. They were taking shape now. He stood over the men, head above the parapet, a faint light on his face, quite still, watching.

A boy of the crew looked up at the officer. Young Gladwish, squatting below, looking up at the officer, wanted to be sick. He kept his eyes on his officer. He hoped nothing would come. He wanted to be sick. Could the officer see anything ? There was nothing to show on his face, no sign, only the morning on steady eyes, and an easy sort of mouth. Young Gladwish began to feel better. This officer was no older than himself.

Jack gave a start, and slipped. He was up again in a hurry, and peered out with a frown. He turned and gave a range and an order. He held up one hand, keeping them as they were with little movements of it. In the murk of daybreak, figures like men bobbed about before them, loosely scattered, bobbing about slowly. Here they come !

'Now !' shouted Jack. The gun became agitated. It spoke in a skipping falsetto, like the heartless titter of a mechanical man of brass. The approaching shapes, which had grown to big-headed Jerries, fell aside limply, suddenly tired, for no evident reason. In twos and threes they sank languidly out of sight. Some came on, bobbing along, growing still larger. Then there was only one of them. He was near, striding at them over the heavy ground, an officer with a baby face lost under a big green helmet. Must be mad ! He carried nothing but a stick. He stared up

at Jack openly and gravely. His head dropped forward and his knees gave way. He was down. His helmet lived a little longer. It wobbled when he was a heap.

12

AN ADVENTURE ON THE SOMME

'CHARLES EDMONDS'

¶. The experiences of a young officer in the flank attacks made against the village of Ovillers by the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Territorial battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment during the First Battle of the Somme, July 1916. Every incident occurred as described, but the names of the characters have been disguised. This extract is taken from a book entitled *A Subaltern's War* (Peter Davies Ltd.)

IN the evening Bickersteth and I were summoned to headquarters and I began to feel afraid again. We were the last to come, and found the C.O.[1] already poring over a map, and talking to the ring of officers clustered round, their faces alone illumined by the light of a candle on the dugout table.

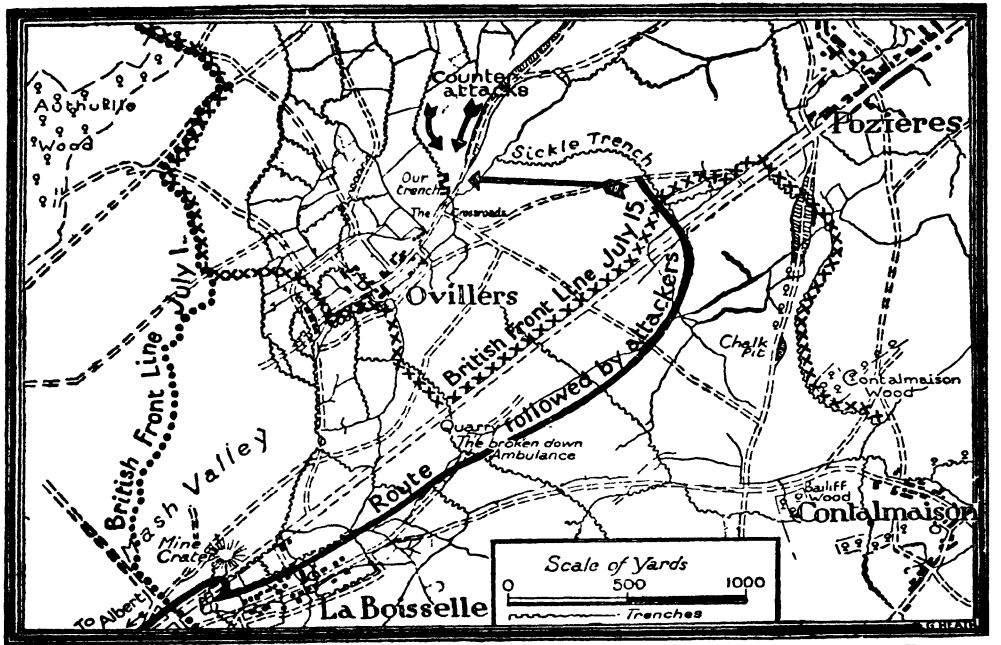
'Is that everyone, Heywood ?' asked the C.O.

'Yes, sir.'

'Right. We're going to do a little attack to-night. Our objective is the cross-roads behind Ovillers. Better look at it on my map – it's the best. Can you see, Suckling ? Right. We've got to get there at 1 a.m. It'll be difficult. Jumping-off place is a line drawn from point 66 at right angles to the main road.' He talked on as quietly as if he were giving operation orders for manœuvres.

I could hardly listen. A tremendous sense of realisation came over me – I hardly know if it were fear or excitement. I knew just what to do. Attacks I was

[1] The Lieutenant-Colonel commanding an Infantry battalion is generally referred to as 'the Colonel' or 'the C.O.' (commanding officer).



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familiar with, but they were attacks over known ground against imaginary enemies. Fighting I knew, but it was fighting dream battles with visionary foes. That had been a favourite game since I had played at 'fighting the Boers' in the nursery. For the very first time I thought what it meant, to struggle for life with a man of equal wit and training. Not all the strain of six months' trench warfare, of the last two days of preparation, had told me what was the meaning of war, the 'ultima ratio.' In a dream I heard, and in a dream I wrote notes of the plan. The battalion would form here in two waves, would wheel half-left here, would march by this line on the left and would extend and assault here. Our right was guarded by the Seventh battalion; from the left the Irish would converge and join us. B company would take the left front.

'What officer are you going to leave behind, Bickersteth ?' said the C.O. suddenly.

A wild hope seized me. The second in command was usually left behind. That was myself. Was it a hope or was it a fear ? Something in me wished to go with the battalion.

Bickersteth eyed me almost guiltily. 'Well, sir,' he said slowly, as if it were the basest treachery, 'I thought of leaving Richardson behind.'

'Good,' said the Colonel smartly, 'we'll put Edmonds to watch the directing flank.'

For a second I was smitten helpless with fear. Then as quickly it vanished, and I found myself, to my own amazement, taking orders in detail as impassively as the Colonel gave them. I was to lead the left flank along an old cable-trench. I was to cross the first trench I came to, and take, hold and fortify, with No. 8 Platoon, the trench junction on the cross-roads. Corporal Turner of C Company, with six chosen 'stout

fellows,' was attached to me with orders to strafe a suspected machine-gun post which lay on the left outside our area. Absolute silence was ordered.

The Colonel finished with a stony look. 'There will be no retiring,' he said. 'On no conditions whatsoever is any man to turn back. Let them all understand that.'

When the others left I was held back while the C.O. explained my part in detail, drawing me a little sketch of it.

Then I went back to a hurried supper. Wells and the serjeants were summoned to a meeting and their parts explained. Rations, water, ammunition, rum, were attended to; the Lewis-guns were brought out and the clumsy ammunition-buckets served out to carriers.

In less than two hours we were on the move. When the time came for the assembly of the companies along the lines of hollows in the chalk, I was surprised how little I felt afraid. One little incident reassured me still more. An N.C.O. came up and said that Private Eliot wished to speak to me. The man was a mere boy, whom I had known in England, and I felt flattered that he should apply to me rather than to Bickersteth for whatever help I could give. I found him crouched against a chalk-heap almost in tears, and looking younger than ever.

'I don't want to go over the plonk,' he flung at me in the shamelessness of terror, 'I'm only seventeen, I want to go home.'

The other men standing round avoided my eye and looked rather sympathetic than disgusted.

'Can't help that now, my lad,' said I in my martinet voice,[1] 'you should have thought of that when you enlisted. Didn't you give your age as nineteen then?'

[1] I was nineteen years and three months old myself.

'Yes, sir. But I'm not, I'm only – well, I'm not quite seventeen really, sir.'

'Well, it's too late now,' I said, 'you'll have to see it through and I'll do what I can for you when we come out.' I slapped him on the shoulder. 'You go with the others. You'll be all right when you get started. This is the worst part of it – this waiting, and we're none of us enjoying it. Come along, now, jump to it.'

And he seemed to take heart again.

This incident served to restore my spirits at least, and I found the numb spot in my midriff almost gone. It was about half-past nine, and I was almost enjoying the feeling of responsibility when the long column began to file over the shell-holes through the dusk.

But that walk became a nightmare. I was at the tail of the company, which moved for hours through broken trenches in single file. Just before me the two Lewis-gun teams stumbled along hopelessly overloaded with guns and clumsy ammunition-buckets, swearing and tripping over broken ground and trailing wires. Presently we climbed out of the trench and hurried over a grassy slope that had been little shelled, where there was a light railway. Now and then we passed salvaged equipment and once or twice a corpse lying sprawled by the way. The battalion was already straggling out in the effort to reach that hopeless rendezvous in time. It became harder and harder to keep up the pace with these tired and heavy-laden men. Then we came out on a road that ran along the top of a spur. The high bank on its further side was honeycombed with little shelters dug in the mud, where snoring figures slept huddled under muddy groundsheets. Though the night was clear there was a suspicion of damp drizzle in the air. I rushed forward to try to halt the front of the column for a moment. Bickersteth

was nowhere to be found. I pressed on again, but only at the centre of A company could I find an officer. Evers, a subaltern I knew well. He thought vaguely, that the company commanders had gone ahead to find the way. At the head of the battalion there was no officer, and I ordered a halt.

'Where is Captain Suckling?' I whispered angrily, not knowing how near we were to the enemy.

'Gone ahead, sir,' said a voice, 'told us to follow on, and I think we're lost, sir.'

'Hell!' said I. 'Haven't they left an officer at the head of the column?'

'I dunno, sir,' said the voice as if it were quite resigned to its fate and very tired of me. 'There's a guide somewheres, sir.'

Soon the situation straightened out and the column moved on. As I dropped back to my place I sent Evers, who was my junior, to take the head of his company with the guide. So the weary march continued through dark winding ways. Climbing over obstacles, squeezing past narrow places, stumbling over fallen wires and *débris*, passing now and again shrouded bundles by the way that sometimes turned with a weary stare, or woke cursing, and sometimes lay still with death. At one point we came out on the main road, wide and clear and empty, flanked with shattered trees, and then went down again into the longest trench of all where the few occupants were men of the Seventh battalion. Here, though we never knew it, we were right among the enemy and in danger of counter-attack from almost any side. This, Sickle Trench, was a long curving line that led in the direction of Ovillers from the furthest point of our advanced line.

The pace was now quicker than ever; the companies in rear had dropped right out of hearing, and I was

feeling desperate, when suddenly I came, round a traverse, face to face with Thorne of D company, who was pushing and lifting the last man before me, gun, ammunition and all, out on to the parapet.

'Hullo, laddie,' he said cheerily enough, and I felt among friends again. But before there was time for explanation he hustled me too out into No Man's Land with a clap on the back and his blessing.

I found myself now in a long slope of rough grass, knee high and tangled, in sight, after all, of what looked like the battalion. Here was the serjeant-major, stumping about on his game leg blarneying the sections into place with his stick, using all the gestures, if not the noise, of the parade ground. But the men were so tired that I found some, waiting in their places, who had fallen asleep here in No Man's Land. Order came out of chaos and I found my place on the left, and Bickersteth not so flustered as I expected. But then we had a severe blow: the pipe line[1] which was to guide our left flank was nowhere to be seen. Bickersteth sent me along the front to Suckling to change the directing flank, and warn everyone to go by the right. There went one big responsibility from my shoulder. When I got back to the left I looked with my serjeant across the valley and saw a shrapnel barrage beating right across our path five or six hundred yards ahead.

We were gloomily discussing this when with a surge on our right the line went forward. We were 'over the top.' We went on in the dark, breaking now and then into the double. The exhilaration of that rush of men was wonderful. The two first waves, barely fifteen yards apart, bunched until the sections were almost shoulder to shoulder. The bayonets gleamed in the

[1] The line of a straight ditch dug and filled in again, in which telephone wires were buried for protection.

flashes of the barrage that crashed in front of us. It seemed unbelievable that this torrent of men could sweep upon the enemy unseen.

Down the hill. On. On.

Not a shot was fired.

Now, where the ground sloped up again over broken ground the ranks were breaking into irregular groups.

Someone cried 'Extend' and the men threw themselves forward, running now over shell-holes ever closer together. I was no more afraid than if it were all a game. Only where the village was looming up, a black line of ruins and hedges against the dark sky, I glanced nervously, looking for the opening of that flanking machine-gun fire. Surely they must have seen us.

The ground was now torn and furrowed, ploughed into powdery chaos by the bombardment. A battered trench could only just be distinguished in the general ruin.

We broke into a charge and someone behind me tried to cheer. We silenced him, but still no sign came from the enemy.

Over the empty trench, and on. So much for the first objective.

We struggled over mound and crater of spongy soil and reached the road. No sign from the enemy.

Beyond was a high bank, and over that I could see the Verey lights go up from the next German line. But the road was now filled with crowds of panting men. Where was my objective? The cross-roads were blasted out of existence. If that flattened ditch over which I had jumped was my trench, then heaven help us when the machine-guns fired down from the village on our left.

'Get your sections in hand,' I shout to every N.C.O.

I can see, 'and keep quiet, for God's sake.' Now to find Bickersteth. I rush madly about in the road and find no officer but Wells – vague and flurried.

'What are we to do ?' whispers he, clutching me.

'Go on !'

'No, we've gone far enough.'

'Can't stop here,' say I.

Then the expected happened. Crack, crack, crack, went the Boche machine-gun, shooting uneasily at this noise from a strange direction, shooting wildly, but showing he had heard us.

I thought frenziedly. Bickersteth must be hit or lost. Had we gone too far or not far enough ? The soldier's motto: 'When in doubt go forward.' At least we could not stay here and be shot down in the cutting. In this supreme moment I was inspired. More and more men crowded on to the road, and half a dozen orders and warnings were bandied about. I drew my revolver and scrambled up the bank.

'Come on, lads,' I shouted, 'over the top.'

For one ghastly moment I stood there alone.

It seemed that I was lifted out of myself, and something in me that was cynical and cowardly looked down in a detached way at this capering little figure posing and shouting unrepeatable heroics at the men below. Through the cracking of the machine-gun, and the barrage, at last I made myself heard.

'Forward ! and we'll have the next trench, too.'

Then I became aware of a little fat man standing beside me brandishing a rifle and bayonet. With a common impulse we turned and ran on towards the enemy.

'Who are you ?' I shouted. 'I can't see you.'

'Don't cher know me, sir ?' he said; 'I'm the serjeant-major's batman.'[1]

[1] Batman, a soldier-servant. An Anglo-Indian word.

'Good man,' said I, 'I'll remember you for this.'

As we raced across the short fifty yards of grass a trickle of men and then a rush followed us over the bank. Before us we felt vaguely that there was commotion in the enemy's trench and the Verey lights went up no more.

We were now in the barrage which had seemed to go before us across the valley. I reached the edge of the trench wondering vaguely what I should do if I found a German bayonet-man poised in it to catch me as I jumped.

But the bay was empty, and I landed on the firm floor of the trench just as a shell burst with a metallic bang ten or fifteen yards on my right. This was as good fun as playing soldiers in the garden at home. In a minute there were twenty or thirty men behind me, shouting and laughing as they skylarked round the traverses.

Of course there was no officer or N.C.O. handy. I began to think I was winning the Battle of the Somme alone. Then behind me I noticed the grey head of Corporal Turner, who always reminded me of Baloo in 'The Jungle Book.'

'I've got my six men here,' he said rather plaintively. 'We can't go for that machine-gun over there, sir. It's miles away. The Colonel told me to stick to you, sir, if we couldn't get at it.'

'Good for C company,' I shouted, 'you're the only section that has stuck together. Take your men down the trench as far as you can to the left and make a bomb-stop and hold that side.'

'Right oh, sir,' and he went.

Then I rushed along to the right, the way the garrison had retired, but there was no N.C.O. to send to that flank. I put Griffin, an old hand whom I knew to

have a head on his shoulders, in charge of two or three men to block the trench by cutting a firing position in a big traverse. The trench was deep and wide, with sheer sides and a firm floor of clay. The traverses were seven or eight feet high and ten feet thick.

I found Serjeant Broad, an old ginger-whiskered fellow, who had served in the regular army.

'Well, serjeant,' I said, 'you are the only one here who has been over the plonk before. What do you think of things ?'

'Well, sir,' he answered deferentially, 'I think you're doin' very well, sir. But what about these here dug-outs ?'

There was a dugout shaft right before us.

'Will I throw a bomb down, sir ?'

'No,' said I, feeling full of beans, 'I'm going down to have a look. Don't let anyone throw a bomb down after me.'

The serjeant didn't approve, but I called to Lee, a smart-looking lad who was close by, and we started down the shaft. Lee giggled.

'Lee,' said I, 'have you got an electric torch ?'

'No, sir, but I've got a match somewheres.'

So I lit a match and held it well away from me. We crept down the stairway, I with a match and a revolver, he with a bayonet and the giggles.

The dugout opened to the left at the foot of some twenty steps. I slid my revolver muzzle round the corner, gingerly showing the light. Six inches from my hand was the corner of a table on which stood half a loaf of bread, some tinned meat – and there just by my hand a German electric torch.

I grabbed it and illuminated the dugout.

Thank God there was no one there. It was bigger, cleaner and more comfortable than the one at La

Boisselle, and consisted of a corridor about twenty feet long, joining two small square chambers from each of which a shaft led up to the trench. The walls were all panelled and lined with a double row of bunks, on which lay blankets, ruffled from recent use. A great-coat or two hung on the walls, and (joy !) there were five 'pickelhaubes'[1] lying about. Evidently the Boches had been surprised and run, leaving food, blankets and equipment behind. And no wonder, if they had heard the battalion yelling and swarming over their trenches from the rear.

I called down Serjeant Broad for a council of war. He thought the next thing was to get in touch with the battalion again. So we sat down and composed a message with all due military form, saying that we had missed our objective but gone on till we found a safe deep trench with dugouts, quite beyond any of our instructions, and all we knew about it was that by my compass it faced north-east. I sent off Lance-Corporal Vinter with this message to Bickersteth or the Colonel, or any other senior officer he could find.

We were by this time pretty comfortable and altogether pleased with ourselves. The sections were getting together again. I had in the trench with me Wells and about half of the company, a section of A company, and Corporal Turner's party of stalwarts. One of our Lewis-guns had turned up, but only Corporal Matthews and two men with it. The flanking parties had not gone far. On the right they had come to a trench junction where they decided to stop; on the left Turner had come almost at once to a blank wilderness of shell-holes, where our cross-roads must once have been. So we were crowded into this short section, sixty men in as many

[1] German full-dress helmets of patent leather with brass badges and spikes, souvenirs very much sought after.

yards of trench. Someone had found another dugout on the right, but this I had no time to explore myself.

The night was now far advanced. It was perhaps four o'clock when Bickersteth arrived, full of questions. What was I doing? Why had I overrun my objective? Where on earth had I taken the company off to? We must get ready to go back to our objective, since this was our own barrage firing perilously near to our right flank. He had been left with a Lewis-gun and a handful of men whom he had placed in a shell-hole at the obliterated cross-roads. When he saw the deep trench and the good dugouts, he too wished to stay. Presently the Colonel came over the top from A company, who had settled in that battered ditch behind the road.

'Gone too far, Edmonds,' he snapped. 'Have to get back to the cross-roads.'

'Yes, sir,' said I, sorry for the loss of my new playground.

While Bickersteth showed him the good points of the trench, and made a case for staying there, I ran back to the dugout determined at least to find a souvenir. In the shaft I met Wells, and together we seized on the last remaining 'pickelhaube.' We must have been very overwought, for we stood and wrangled over it, like sparrows over a worm, blocking the trench and holding up the retreat of my little army. In those few moments Bickersteth convinced the C.O. of the advantages of the position, and we were ordered to stay. In the early morning a staff officer appeared over the top confirming the decision.

So darkness faded into dawn, and dawn into damp and misty daylight.

As it was getting light I happened to be on the right,

where Griffin's party was struggling with a huge traverse. A man beyond me said excitedly:

'There's someone coming along the trench. I can hear 'em talking.'

'Hurrah,' I said, 'this'll be the Seventh.' So I jumped on to the traverse and shouted, 'Hullo there! Who the devil are you? Are you the Seventh?'

Somebody along the trench stopped, and I heard whispering.

'Who are you?' I shouted again, with less confidence.

There was a sound as of someone scuttling up the trench.

'Why, it must have been the jolly old Boches.'

We had sent the A company men back to their own trench and organised our own men with sentries on the flanks and a reserve platoon in the dugout, and were feeling safe and happy, when again I heard talk and bustle on the right.

'Stand to,' there was a shout; 'they're coming!'

My servant and another man who had been hanging about beyond the sentry-post came flying round the traverse.

'Allemans,' they said; 'they're coming!'

This was a very different matter from running about in noise and darkness. I suddenly thought of Prussian Guardsmen, burly and brutal, and bursting bombs, and hand-to-hand struggles with cold steel. My first impulse was to tell Bickersteth. It was his responsibility now.

'Thud!' went a loud noise along the trench, and the air shook and whined with flying fragments.

I felt myself turning pale.

I found I was walking slowly away from the danger-point. 'I must go and tell Bickersteth,' I excused myself. I passed the word down the dugout. Then I

pulled myself together and got up to the front somehow making an effort to be steadier than my men. Poor devils, they hadn't had a good sleep or a square meal for three days.

'Thud' went a bomb three bays up the trench. I licked my lips and felt for my revolver.

'Thud' went a bomb two bays away.

I was standing at our extreme right flank where we had posted a sentry two bays beyond the half-finished bomb-stop.

'Come along, let's get back to the bomb-stop,' said I not very bravely. Just then round the traverse from the dugout came Serjeant Adams,[1] an old volunteer of many years' service in England. He was smoking a pipe and had a thin smile on his face.

'What's that, sir,' he said pleasantly, 'go back? No, sir, let's go forward,' and he tucked his rifle under his arm and strolled along the trench alone – still smiling. A bomb burst in the bay beyond him. He climbed the traverse and took a snapshot with his rifle at some person beyond. A group of men stood wavering, and then I went and took my place beside him on the traverse.

Thirty or forty yards away I saw a hand and a grey sleeve come up out of the trench and throw a cylinder on the end of a wooden rod. It turned over and over in the air and seemed to take hours to approach. It fell just at the foot of the traverse where we stood, and burst with a shattering shock.

'The next one will get us,' I thought.

Serjeant Adams pulled a bomb out of his pocket and threw it. I did the same, and immediately felt better. A young Lance-Corporal, Houghton, did the same. The next German bomb fell short. Then someone

[1] Serjeant Adams was given the Military Medal after this battle.

threw without remembering to pull the pin, and in a moment the bomb was caught up and thrown back at us by the enemy.

I fired my revolver once or twice at glimpses of the enemy. A little of last night's feeling was returning. Adams and Houghton were moving forward now, and I was watching them over the traverse, when I had the impression that someone was throwing stones. Suddenly I saw lying in the middle of the trench a small black object, about the shape and size of a large duck's egg. There was a red band round it and a tube fixed in one end of it. What could this be?

I guessed it must be some new sort of bomb.[1]

It was lying less than a yard from my foot; I was right in a corner of the trench. What was I to do? In an instant of time I thought: Had I the nerve to pick it up and throw it away? Should I step over it and run? Or stay where I was? There was no room to lie down. But too late. The bomb burst with a roar at my feet. My eyes and nose were full of dust and pungent fumes. Not knowing if I was wounded or not, I found myself stumbling down the trench with a group of groaning men. One of them was swearing and shouting in a high-pitched voice and bleeding in the leg. All the nerve was blasted out of us.

I fetched up almost in tears, shaken out of my senses, at Bickersteth's feet. My clothes were a little torn and my hand was bleeding, but that was all.

Bickersteth was very cool. He was watching the fight through a periscope and organising relays of bomb carriers.

[1] This is, I believe, the first recorded use in action of the German egg-bomb which could be thrown to a greater distance than their ordinary stick-bomb. It was, however, far less dangerous when it exploded.

'You must get these men together, Edmonds,' he was saying, 'and make a counter-attack.'

'I'm dashed if I will,' said I; 'I'm done for,' and I lay and panted.

He looked at me and saw I was useless. I hadn't an ounce of grit left in me.

It was Wells who rallied the survivors and went up again to find my revolver, 'shamefully cast away in the presence of the enemy,' and Serjeant Adams still holding his own.

'Come along, Edmonds,' said Bickersteth, and in a minute or two I felt better and went up. We got the Lewis-gun out and the whole party moved forward. Houghton was throwing well. We rushed a bay, and Houghton, who was leading, found himself face to face with a German unteroffizier, the length of the next bay between them. He threw a lucky bomb which burst right in the German's face.[1] Their leader fallen, the heart went out of the enemy's attack. At the same moment there were two diversions, An 8-inch shell, one of those which had been falling occasionally on our right, landed right in the bay behind the German bomber, and his supporters fled. So ended their attack. But as we moved forward a sniper fired almost from behind us. The bullet seemed to crack in my ear, and Corporal Matthews, who was walking beside me, preoccupied and intent, fell dead in the twinkling of an eye. I was looking straight at him as the bullet struck him and was profoundly affected by the remembrance of his face, though at the time I hardly thought of it.

[1] I don't know how a Mills bomb could do this, but I saw it happen. Lance-Corporal Houghton knew nothing of the technique of bombing, and failed in the simple bomb-throwing tests out of the line. He probably let the lever fly, out of ignorance, and held the bomb. He received the Military Medal after this battle and was killed in our next.

He was alive, and then he was dead, and there was nothing human left in him. He fell with a neat round hole in his forehead and the back of his head blown out.

Other big shells followed the first, so we decided not to hold that part of the trench. We propped up the dead Boche as a warning to his friends against the furthest traverse, and set to work on a better bomb-stop behind, just where Corporal Matthews was hit.

It was now clear that we must set a definite limit to our fortress and make a strong bomb-stop on this most dangerous flank. The casual shelling seemed to have settled down into a regular slow bombardment of our extreme right with 8-inch shells, which fell at two-minute intervals just where we had killed the German N.C.O. Bickersteth decided to abandon the right-hand bay, even though it had a good dug-out, and to concentrate on the three bays below my earliest limit. Where I had set Griffin to work on a bomb-stop, he set about a larger and sounder plan. We must level one traverse flat and have a field of fire longer than the range of the German stick-bomb. He organised the work and left me in charge. We started to dig away the ten-foot cube of clay constituting the traverse by which Corporal Matthews had been shot. Almost as we approached and cut into it with pickaxes, the same sniper fired again from the village on our left, and a man called Pratt dropped like a stone just where the corporal had fallen.

No one seemed very anxious to take his place on the bomb-stop. The body was moved down the trench and we stood around cutting gingerly into the pile of earth. I myself stood opposite the parapet gap through which the sniper fired and took care not to expose myself too much. We seemed to do very little good.

'Aw, give me that pick! Let me get at it!' suddenly roared one man, and he sprang up the traverse all exposed, striking giant blows that loosened the top of the mound where no one had dared to work. It was Jimmy Mills, and his time was short: for fifteen seconds, perhaps, he panted and drove his pick mightily, loosening the stiff clay, before the sniper fired again. Mills flung wide his pick and collapsed with a loud cry, inarticulate with rage and pain. The bullet had struck him in the left hip and pierced him from side to side, emerging from the right.

'That's a third man dead,' thought I. There were now two men dying on the trench floor, Pratt, and now Mills, the old soldier, conscious and groaning, thrilled with agony by every touch, by every movement. The other men, wounded earlier in the counter-attack, had been taken down into the dugout. These two more I brought to die in comfort in the deep safe fire-bay above it. Pratt was beyond hope. Hit in the same place as Corporal Matthews, his head was shattered: but, though he had never been conscious since the shot was fired, he refused to die. An old Corporal looked after him, and it was over two hours before he died, hours of July sunshine in a crowded space where perhaps a dozen men sat in a ditch ten yards long and five feet wide.

Old Mills, tough, bronzed, ginger-moustached and forty-one years old, lay beside this text 'that taught the rustic moralist to die.' No stretcher-bearers had come on with my wild adventure last night, but the old soldiers thought it best to leave him roughly bandaged until the inward wounds should close. Then he might have a chance. He was little, but hardened by fourteen years' soldiering and two previous wars. His work had not been in vain. The men at the traverse would be

fully occupied in digging away the soil which he had loosened, till dusk, when someone could climb on top again.

The day wore on. No more Germans came, but squalls of shrapnel swept the valley behind us, and bombs thudded in the rear where we thought A company should be. I got some sleep in the afternoon. There was no bunk empty, but I flung myself on a stretcher by the side of Lee, my fellow-explorer of last night, and rested democratically.

That evening I began to understand our predicament. We had no good map, but Bickersteth made our situation clear. The village of Ovillers had been twice attacked from in front and twice successfully defended by the Prussian Guard. Further to the south at La Boisselle the British had advanced and driven the Germans back, which made it possible to take Ovillers in the flank. We had done more than this. We had advanced and placed ourselves in a trench behind the German stronghold, cutting it off from support and almost surrounding it; but at the same time we had now isolated ourselves, with Germans in front of us and behind us, the garrison of Ovillers in front, and those who were trying to relieve it behind. Consequently we were exposed to fire from almost any direction. On the other hand, to look for help we must turn back across the 1,000 yards of rough grass, impassable by day, which we had rushed across by night. This was actually looking for help in the direction of Germany. Bickersteth surprised me with the news that the heavy gun which persistently dropped shells near our right flank was an English gun, ignorantly trying to protect us, not a German gun ignorantly trying to destroy us. We had to be thankful for this protective fire, though the shell-splinters fell unpleasantly close. Since I had

advanced too far in the night attack I had run into our own artillery fire, and the gunners still did not know exactly where we were.

We had little more cause for worry that day. The long silence came to Pratt at last; Mills, game and grumbling, got a little maudlin and was less in pain. We all began to suffer from thirst. Our water bottles, of course, had been filled at starting; but fighting is dry work. It was a muggy day and fear parches the throat. Most of us managed to hoard a few drops of water in case the ration-parties should not reach us early in the night. Work went on well at the bomb-stop, but the thousand cubic feet of clay were not easy to move. Before dark the Lewis-gun mounted on the next traverse could see at least the head and shoulders of a man two bays away. But now I found that the gun team had dispersed and only Bailey and Robinson, two good gunners, were with us. Bailey, who eventually became a serjeant, was a pale, square-jawed boy, whose firm mouth had impressed me as he stood to his gun during the attack. I always preferred the steadiness of the man who was afraid and yet carried on, to the lack of perspicacity that was the secret of most 'brave' men's firmness. 'Granny' Robinson, was a thin, spectacled young man, a very devoted husband with the manners of a gentleman. He was a Salvationist and the only 'pious' soldier I ever met. Two of the best men in the trench, these two manned the gun in turn.

Nerves were tense that evening. The slight bomb casualties had one end of the dugout, where they lay uneasily under charge of a man whom we made a stretcher-bearer for the day; and good work he did. It always recurs to me that as we sat in the dugout, the wounded stirring uneasily, the officers feigning stolidity, a mat of men sleeping thick on bunks and floor, in the

dusk of this rat-hole, one of the N.C.O.'s, a loud-mouthed Sam Weller in khaki, broke into song with a Latin hymn, while the dugout listened in astonished silence.

With dusk came a renewal of activities. We arranged reliefs from the dugout and put new life into the work on the bomb-stop. But a shower of rain, darkness, the flash of explosions before and behind, and the uncertainty of night, made strained nerves even less reliable. There was a disposition to panic. Every time I dozed off, when I was below, I was roused in a few moments by the hoarse staccato whisper down the shaft:

'Stand to! They're coming!'

No need to ask who was coming. Up the steps we ran, heart in mouth and weapons in hand, time after time, to find that a sentry had mistaken bursting shells for another bombing attack, or that a party of men was approaching from the other companies, for under the cloak of darkness we had regained touch with the world.

'Stand to, sir, they're coming!'

No! This time it is a thrice welcome ration party, with jars of rum and bully and biscuit for to-morrow.

'But water?' we ask, 'where is the water, man?'

'Coming, sir, the serjeant-major is bringing it, and bombs and ammunition.'

So to sleep again.

'Stand to! They're coming!'

Again I fling myself up the shaft, for it is death to be trapped in the cellars by an enemy with bombs on the surface.

'Who the hell are you?' the sentry gasps, his finger on the trigger, and his aim on an approaching shadow.

'All right, my man,' says the Colonel's well-known voice, low and firm, but a little petulant.

'Hullo! There's Edmonds! How are you getting on?'

'Not so badly, sir, but I'd give my next leave for a whisky and soda.'

'Done!' says the Colonel, groping in his side pocket, and producing a Perrier bottle which he hands to me. 'Your next leave is mine, Edmonds.'

He has taken the precaution to bring a pint of that mixture with him over the top. The little joke and the spirits restore my nerve and I feel ten times more confident that the Colonel should merely be in the trench with us.

They've had a bad time back there, he tells me.

It has not occurred to me that any but we have had bad, let alone worse, times.

'Suckling's gone, and Mayhew too, I'm afraid. They've been bombing all day.' He doesn't mention that he, the Colonel, has been in the thick of it where Colonels have no business to be.

'How's Evers, sir?' I burst in.

'I think he's killed too,' says the Colonel absently. 'A company have no trench at all: it's all destroyed. I've withdrawn most of them, and the Sixth are relieving them to-night.'

'What about us, sir? Will they relieve us?'

'I don't think they'll be able to come up to-night. But you're all right here. This is a good trench – good dugouts. I wish I'd stayed here last night.'

Presently comes the panic-stricken whisper again.

'Stand to! Stand to! They're coming again.'

'What is it? What is it?' asks the Colonel. 'They're all alike. Half-gotten weaklings. What's this panic about?' He gives orders. 'This nonsense must stop.

We must have some sleep down here. Edmonds, don't let them disturb me and Captain Bickersteth. Oh Lord, what's this?' Unknowingly in the dark he has stepped on Mills, who gives a loud groan.

'Wounded man, sir,' say I, 'name's Mills.'

'Well, get him out of the way, Edmonds. Are you badly hurt, Mills? I'm sorry, but they shouldn't have put you here.'

'Oh, it's awright, sir. I'm done for. Fourteen years' soldierin' and they got me this time. Wasn't you as hurt me, sir. Back seems all numb, sir. Can't get warm.' He maunders on as the Colonel moves away.

'Put a stout fellah on the top here as sentry, and then get some sleep yourself.'

I can never reproduce on paper all that it meant to me to have the Colonel with us in the trench. He was my hero. I admired his clothes, his horsemanship and his incisive speech, his former adventures in Africa, and his masterly way of handling troublesome superior officers; and I would yet think as highly of him again when I heard of his doings a few hours previously in the next trench, when the Germans attacked C Company with bombs and all officers were hit. Bickersteth had been as steady as a rock when I gave way; his calmness had held the trench, but now things were different. Now Cæsar had snatched up a shield and stood in the ranks of the Tenth Legion. Now the Little Corporal stood to a gun on the bridge of Arcola. Calm was restored and we had no more alarms. The night of terror ended soon, but the cry, 'Stand to! They're coming!' and the stumbling climb in the darkness have not ceased to haunt my dreams.

No relieving company came that night, and at dawn we resigned ourselves to another day of misery and probably heavier attacks. I caught myself at one moment

even discussing with a serjeant whether we could hold out against an 'over the top' attack, and whether we should be justified in surrendering if a large force rushed us, but that thought I managed to suppress.

We were certainly beginning to suffer badly from thirst. No water party ever arrived. The night before when I had gone to the corpses to take their water-bottles for the wounded, I had found that someone else had forestalled me and emptied them. Thirty-six hours ago we had each started with a quart in our bottles, but we had never expected to be left so long. Those men whose water was only finished this morning felt that they had been sufficiently cautious. Well, it was daylight now, and no considerable help could be expected till the darkness came again.

There were plenty of small things to be done. We were still struggling to move the mountain of traverse and had made such progress that we felt tolerably secure. I found a kind of repeating German rifle which the Colonel mounted in reserve to the Lewis-gun on the bomb-stop. Then the dugout sentry, looking over the top, saw Germans moving in a trench on the skyline near the sniper's post. We decided to watch them and not fire, to the Colonel's disgust when we reported. It seemed to be a relief moving away towards Thiepval. Then again further to the left I saw a man with a white flag standing and signalling in Morse code from a hedge near the entrance to the village. We saved this man from being shot by zealots and found a signaller of sorts who read the message, while I wrote it down. But nothing could be done with it; there only came a code[1] word of some kind repeated again and again, an arrangement of letters meaningless in any language we knew. I wandered up the trench and noticed Eliot, the

[1] Isetmhseetsee isaetie ngend.

boy who had wanted to stay behind. He was sitting on the fire-step joking with his neighbour, with his fears forgotten. He agreed with me that things weren't so bad, after all.

I spent some time walking about the trench talking to different men. They were thirsty and tired but in wonderful spirits and ready for another fight. I brought out my reserve packet of De Reszkes and passed them round, duly receiving gratitude, though Woodbines would have been more popular. Some men grumbled at there being no rum ration, but we had decided that it would increase thirst.

Stanley, my servant, drew me into conversation out beyond our right flank now that the shelling had lifted and it was safe to explore that end of the trench. We looked at the dead 'unteroffizier' and into the shaft of the abandoned dugout, of which I was rather frightened, for one shaft of it rose in another trench not in our possession. He told me that he had been inside the dugout when yesterday's counter-attack began, and had run up the shaft, heavy-eyed, to find a huge Boche towering over him with upraised bomb. I asked him what he did. Stanley replied:

'I put me skates on.' Probably the Boche did likewise.

Reader, before you condemn Stanley as a coward (for he was one of the bravest men I have known) reflect what you would do, if half-wake and half-asleep you were confronted with a man twice your size and a weapon that could blow seven men like you to rags in an instant. When two enemies meet in war, each surprising the other, both generally dodge back into cover and devise a plan.

But Stanley soon came to the point. Furtively he produced a water-bottle, nearly half-full, and thrust it into my hands.

'Take it, sir,' he said. 'I've saved all this. I had plenty.'

'Stanley, you're a sportsman, but I can't take it off you. I've drunk up all my own.'

'You'd better have it, sir.'

'If you're sure you can spare some, give it to the wounded. They're wanting it pretty badly.'

He did so, but looked disappointed about it.

Water for the wounded was getting a serious problem, so we decided to send a message. A man volunteered at once to take it over the top. Lance-Corporal Vinter went to show him the way out of the trench, but the man had hardly got clear when he was shot dead. In a few minutes Vinter and Corporal Goodbody came to me and offered to try again. They went out carefully and dashed over the bank safely to the trench in the rear, where the Sixth had taken the place of A company. Only a bottle or two of water could be spared, for the present.

It was another muggy grey day, and steadily growing drier and thirstier.

A buzz of excitement down on the left brought me there again to find the sentry and others exposing themselves over the parapet. They could see Germans surrendering – hundreds of them – to somebody on our flank. Later we learnt they were the last 120 men of the garrison of Ovillers, the 3rd Prussian Guard, the 'Cockchafers,' two days cut off from supplies by us who were planted in their rear.

The success of Corporal Vinter and the combined effects of thirst and boredom produced several volunteers to go and fetch water. Bickersteth would not let me go. A tall, thin, raw-boned man made the next trip, with a tactical report from the Colonel. This runner came back safe and panting, and inspired several

more. But water was scarce in the trench behind as well as in ours.

Towards noon, old Mills, lying on the fire-step, groaning only when jolted unavoidably in the narrow way, began to give up hope. He thought he was dying and turned sentimental. Plucking feebly at my arms as I passed, he tried to give me his blessing. I was a fine young gentleman, and had always been a good officer to him, and if it hadn't been for me they would have all been done for. I was most embarrassed and only with difficulty told him not to talk like that, as he was good for another fourteen years' soldiering. Neither of us believed what I was saying.[1] I quieted him at last with a dash of brandy from my flask, for which the doctor cursed me handsomely later, for it might have killed him instead of sending him to sleep. One of the wounded men below lost his nerve a little and moaned for water, till we thought we had better send another volunteer. A man whom I had always thought unsociable, offered to go. He took several water-bottles and came back with enough for the wounded, making a second journey safely with a companion.

The wounded were now satisfied, but most of the trench licked their dry lips and prayed for nightfall, still many hours away. It was specially aggravating to possess those two jars of useless rum, all of which we would have willingly exchanged for half a gallon of water.

Looking up from the dugout mouth in the sullen dry mid-afternoon, I saw a stranger strolling over the top towards us, though we had no volunteers at work just then. Soon I saw the Sixth badge on his arm.

'Come down!' said I, 'jump to it! They're sniping across here!'

[1] But we were wrong. He made a rapid recovery.

'I'm all right, sir,' said he, looking round casually enough, and indeed no shot had been fired at him.

'What have you come for?'

'Captain Moore sent me to find out where you were.'

'Well, you're the first man who's come over without being fired at. Come down the dugout. The Colonel will see you.'

He sat on the dugout steps and told the Colonel what he knew, which was not much. We gave him some rum and sent him back with a message reporting more movement in that skyline trench.

The Colonel had been feeling uneasy all day about the situation, thinking that we were not controlling our own destinies enough. We looked over the tactical position. On the right I showed him the dugout which opened into the other trench. Flaring up with interest at once, he began to threaten me with all kinds of horrors, fighting patrols, general advances till we met resistance, extensions of the position to the right. It seemed to me that we had already bitten off as much as we could chew, but inaction never suited him. Before long I found myself under orders, with Corporal Houghton and any men I wanted, to explore the loop trench leading round the dugout. If we met no enemy we should have plenty of fun with our own barrage. Pleased to be singled out for the Colonel's confidence, and chosen without question before Wells, who had all along been in the background, I hardly remembered to be afraid. So the Corporal and I decided to start alone and work round from the left.

Corporal Houghton stripped off his equipment, put a bomb in each pocket and stood ready with another in his hand. I drew my revolver and felt confident again, finding moral support in being the chosen one

again, to stand in the limelight at the post of danger. I slid gently over the shoulder-high bomb-stop on the left, keeping low to escape our old friend, the sniper, and I crept along the trench followed by the corporal. One bay we had to pass, and one ruined traverse, till where the trench faded out of existence among the shell-holes the switch trench should turn off to the right. The parapet was low and made me stoop. I went stealthily round the traverse and poked the muzzle of my revolver into the meditations of a British subaltern who was sitting quietly on the fire-step playing with the pin of a bomb.

'Good Lord!' I said, leaning against the traverse. I saw by his badges he was of the Sixth. 'How did you get here?'

'All the battalion's here. Boches have evacuated the village. Our men are right ahead there, look!'

Now I could see men in khaki moving across the low ground on the left and the figures in the skyline trench were revealed as Englishmen too.

'Have you got any water?' said I.

'Sure.' He gave up his water-bottle, which we emptied in a moment. 'There's a party coming through with water in a minute.'

Before long we were back at the dugout explaining to the Colonel. The subaltern of the Sixth, a swarthy young man, rather supercilious and sceptical of our heroisms, was followed by a group of Tommies bringing petrol tins full of water, which we swallowed in huge draughts. It tasted of petrol, but it was damp and cool. After half a pint from the subaltern's bottle, I drank at least a quart from the can, and was thirsty again in a moment. The joy of relief had lifted any fear of present danger, and we all drank and talked and drank again. Everyone was happy but poor old

Mills, who was still prevented from disturbing his stomach with more than a little water.

The grassy slope about the village was covered with men. A bombing party pressed on beyond our defences to the right, where the barrage had lifted. Other parties were mopping up the area behind and on the left. One group under Colonel Cornwall, newly commanding his battalion, after bombing and surrounding an enemy post right in our rear in the valley, came on and established their headquarters in our trench. Colonel Cornwall came up and greeted me with the enthusiasm of a boy who meets a friend at a very exciting football match.

We all found ourselves standing about carelessly on the top, for the snipers were cleared off the Ovillers Crest and we were only visible from the Pozières Ridge far away to the right – not that we cared if we were visible from Berlin. But Pozières was developing troubles of its own. The Australians were going in the line there to attack it, and as we stood and talked, the skyline heaved and smoked, throwing up fountains and jets of soil and smoke as if it were a dark grey sea breaking heavily on a reef. The bombardment grew thicker and thicker: clouds of smoke sprang up and drifted across its torn groups of trees; the spurts of high explosive rose close together, till it seemed that the very contour of the hill must be changed.

Our thoughts were recalled two miles by the loud crash of shrapnel almost overhead. A 'mad minute' of shells rained from the air and burst above Ovillers. The shrapnel banged like dinner gongs dropped downstairs, and a black pall hung along the ridge. Like so many German shells, they burst too high, and their line of fire threw the danger-zone on to the village two hundred yards away.

As we had now been relieved Bickersteth was keen to get the company away as soon as possible, back to camp on the Albert Road where we had left our packs. The wounded were to be left in charge of the Sixth Battalion; we should have a big enough job getting ourselves down the line. Before we left we buried our dead men in a shell-hole in front of the trench. We made rough wooden crosses to mark the graves, but no one seemed inclined to say a prayer. I was much too shy to suggest it, being only an officer, while the burial was carried out by the friends of the dead men.

Casualties to the battalion in this battle:

Killed..	.. 3 officers,	45 other ranks.
Wounded	.. 5 officers,	76 other ranks.
Total	.. 8	121

One hundred and twenty-nine: that is about a quarter of those who took part in the battle, a small proportion considering the rashness of the enterprise.

[British Official Communiqué – July 17th, 1916, 2.15 p.m. – gave this report: 'On our left flank in Ovillers-la-Boisselle where there has been continuous hand to hand fighting since July 7th, we captured the remaining strongholds of the enemy together with 2 officers and 124 guardsmen who formed the remnants of its brave garrison. The whole village is now in our hands.']

13

FRANK HONYWOOD, PRIVATE

ERIC PARTRIDGE

¶ *Frank Honywood, Private* is one of *Three Personal Records of the War* (Eric Partridge, Ltd.). It is the war-autobiography of a young Australian undergraduate who found a life of study intolerable when many of his friends had sacrificed their careers in order to join up: 'In time of war student life was, except for the unfit or the indispensable, little less blameworthy than Nero fiddling while Rome burned.' From Australia the scene shifts to the transport which took Honywood to Egypt: here we are given a vivid picture of 'communal life seen at its healthiest' and learn how 'the War introduced to the pleasures of reading many a man who, otherwise, would never have read anything better than a newspaper.' Thence we pass to Gallipoli and finally to France.

The passage chosen describes an attack by the Seventh Australian Infantry Brigade during the Battle of the Somme: the actual horror of the struggle and the impression of 'fantastic unreality' left on Honywood's sensitive mind are conveyed so powerfully as to produce the effect of authentic tragedy.

AT about eight o'clock on the warm, clear evening of July 28th, 1916, the battalion left the bivouac for the front line. They set off in fours, single file being adopted a little before they came to the first communication-sap; at the beginning, there were intervals of fifty yards between platoons, two hundred yards between companies, but these spaces were much reduced when the approach in single file commenced. At first they passed through a seemingly quite innocuous area, but soon they entered Sausage Gully, where, since the First

Australian Division's successful attacks of a week before, cannon had been massed. Every night there was a short artillery duel, but the present attack would not be preceded or accompanied by any special activity; the guns were to play, not too significantly, on the front trench for a minute or so. Apparently it was thought at headquarters that the attack would come as a surprise. The men fortunately did not realise what was ahead of them: they knew that they were to attack and they assumed that there would be an adequate artillery preparation and support; this was just as well, for if they had heard that they were an experiment, they would obviously have had something to say. It was their first really serious affair and they went in with a high heart, not joyously, not sadly, not arrogantly nor slightingly, not timorously nor misgivingly. They felt that the batteries in Sausage Gully were a good augury, as they passed first the imposing, deadly-looking six-inches, then the sixty-pounders with their slim beauty of line, their exquisite poise, and finally the rearward eighteen-pounders (the forward batteries were not visible); beside the faint gleam of the barrels, and the heavy mass of the bodies of these guns, the artillerymen, stationary, appeared somehow symbolic in the deepening obscurity as the infantry passed. And as they passed, the gunners, wishing them luck, thought: 'Poor devils, going over the top; if they fail, we'll get hell; in fact, we'll get hell anyway,' and the infantrymen said to themselves: 'I hope they'll put it in hot and strong,' adding, with a grim smile, 'We'll need it all.' While one's spirit remained good, one always, whether in attack or ordinary trench-warfare, approved of the violent activities of one's artillery, but later, in trench-warfare at least, one's attitude was, 'I wish our chaps would keep quiet! They'll bring Fritz's guns

down on us for sure'; the men knew that this was unreasonable, but much can be forgiven those whose nerves are so bad that even a few shells call for all their reserves of will-power.

On leaving Sausage Gully, they entered a main communication-sap, which, for some distance, was high, comfortably wide, and level underfoot. But, inevitably, it became rough and difficult, what with fallen clumps of earth, pieces of wire, the darkness. Here the sap was ridiculously low, more like a ditch than anything else; there the parapet – if the complete absence of sandbags permits the use for this reassuring word – had been widely gapped by shells; elsewhere the parados[1] was now a mere low mass of powdered soil. Except during the last half-mile, where the sap became a bitter jest, a few men from another brigade rested out of the way in small cavities on the forward side: they watched with interest the passage of these fresher troops, but they said little, for they doubtless felt that there was little to say. The going was arduous. In places the ground sank flabbily and strangely beneath one's feet, and it was only when this had happened several times that one realised that men lay hastily buried where they had been killed, perhaps smothered. The roaring of the guns became louder and much more continuous, Very and other lights appeared near-by. The last half-mile was along what served the triple purpose of a line of direction, a haphazard communication, and of a front line, alternately

[1] The parapet is, of course, the mound at the front of a trench, the parados that at the back; but the terms can be used in connection with saps running approximately parallel to the front-line. *Front*, *support* and *reserve trenches* are used of the 'lines' facing the enemy; *saps* are the 'lines' of communication, or the short offshoots from a trench.

held and abandoned: it was little more than a low, dry and broken ditch. The trees, vague in the gloom, stood out, in the intermittent flashes of light, just like huge skeletons. Of this small wood, the leaves were withering fast, the trunks and branches torn and gashed by shells. And shells now began to fall, mostly among the trees on either side, and Honywood had an ominous feeling that this surprise attack might not be catching the enemy unawares. Just before they reached the final halting-place, his section passed a tragic group of four N.C.O.'s, of whom one was temporarily dazed by the shell that, exploding several yards away, had severely wounded two and killed the fourth. All of B Company, and all good fellows. The men left the front line to lie, waiting, some fifty yards out in No Man's Land. They did this none too soon, for shells began to pour into the wood, roaring overhead if they were five-nines, whizzing close if seventy-sevens, while sometimes one distinguished the whine of a heavy shell travelling towards the British batteries in the Gully. Behind them the shells crashed uncomfortably close, though safely distant; shrapnel pellets made a tearing sound as they ripped through the foliage, a sharp crack as they hit a branch, a duller smack against a trunk; fragments ricocheted here and there. The big shells lit momentary, noisy bonfires as they met the earth. At last, though actually they could not have waited more than ten minutes, midnight came; midnight was 'zero' time. Glad to escape from a state of suspension between the two worlds of their own familiar area and the unknown German trenches, at which they wanted to get (the attack must be made, then let it be done with ! They couldn't easily go back through that curtain of fire, and all had been pretty quiet in front of them), they set off towards the German line. A few of

the officers, who had been up to our front beforehand to ascertain the lie of the land, knew where that line was, but the men had only the faintest idea beyond the fact that it was more or less straight ahead of them; they were told that, on the average, it was roughly nine hundred yards. The ground was level except for slight undulations; the shell holes were few; the British batteries opened fire when they were perhaps a hundred yards from the jumping-off line, which had been taped. While this bombardment indicated to the silently-moving attackers the approximate goal, it also warned the Germans that perhaps an attack was making. Some advance-posts, lying far out in No Man's Land, gave the alarm as the Australians swept down on them; they died gamely, those outposts in their tiny saps, and they it was who foiled the attack. On coming to one of these pits, Frank put a bullet into one who stood against the side, but even at the time he suspected that the man was already dead; looking back on that ghastly night, which seemed less real then than now, he knows that the man must have been dead, so still he stood, or, rather, half reclined, against the back of that hole in the ground which was his own height and length and little more than his width. The only man that Honywood *knows* he shot was already dead, yet it did not strike him as other than a perfectly natural thing to do at the time. He and his companions seemed to be gliding rather than doubling solidly, everything was so silent; silent because they could not hear their own steps, could hardly hear their own voices, for there was a constant deep thunder of sound: the British shells bursting ahead of them, the German shrapnel beginning to fall among them, and the German shells bursting to their rear. The night was clear, but as the fiery trails of the rockets sank down, the attackers were

momentarily at a loss in the seeming darkness. So unreal; yet one saw spurts of flame ahead and tiny clouds of dust where pellets impinged on the earth; men were falling, some to rise, some to lie there for hours, some to lie there for ever. When the Germans perceived that their outposts must have been overcome and passed, they opened fire with machine-guns, and though the Australians increased their pace over the last three hundred yards, many dropped by the way. On reaching the objective they found to their horror and fury that the barbed-wire entanglements were impassable, the bombardment having killed but few of the enemy and left his protection almost intact. They made for the openings, exposed all the while to machine-gun and rifle fire: in scattered groups and rapidly lessening numbers they rushed the trench. Nearly every man that reached so far then perished; the survivors managed to crawl away, if they were not made prisoners. Amongst those who died at the final assault was Captain Hewitt. Through one of the gaps in the barbed wire he led a party; he shot several of the enemy before he fell on the parapet, shot in the very act of waving on his men. But perhaps a quarter of the attackers had not managed to get so far. Small blame to them since the guiding officers had either been shot down or had, with the most active of the men, gone so far ahead that they were out of sight; the objective was difficult to gauge, for there seemed to be (and, in point of fact, there was) a semi-circle of flashing rifles and machine-guns almost hemming them in. Many of them had stopped in a very slightly-sunken third-class road, now covered with grass; this they proposed to defend. At a dangerous bend, swept by machine-gun fire, they built a sand-bag wall. Every few minutes, someone pitched forward with a bullet in his head or throat,

the latter with a horrible gurgle, and had to be pulled off the sand-bags and set on one side so that he should not impede the movement of those who were not yet killed. On the forward side of the road, a small party had dug a short sap, which they manned with a machine-gun; they belonged to another brigade, and, as they were not included in the Seventh Brigade's orders to retreat, they most gallantly remained there the whole of the next day; word was somehow got through to them finally that they were to escape from an untenable position. (That brigade used afterwards to reproach the Seventh with having deserted them: an understandable reproach, but hardly fair.) Among the defenders building the sand-bag wall was Frank, who had halted to see if he could do anything for a very fine up-country Queenslander named Hamilton, who lay mortally wounded. Despite the order that forbade anyone to stop, during an attack, to assist the wounded,– the stretcher-bearers would pick them up later, that is, as often as not, the following night. There was nothing to be done for the wounded man, whose brother, curiously enough, was killed by a shell in Sausage Gully ten days later. Frank found himself somewhat isolated, but he continued to advance at the double; he came to the sunken road, and there he saw several men moving along it to the left as to a rallying-point; they soon met with the party that had begun to defend what appeared to them to be an important turn in the road, a strategic position. They remained there for some time, anxious as to the fate of those who had gone ahead, for the enemy's machine-gun fire continued unabated. Then they were recalled. Many fell before they regained the deep communication-sap, for No Man's Land whistled with bullets, their own front line was being pelted with shrapnel and

damaged by five-nines, and the sunken road, which fortunately led back to their own area, was swept by the pitiless machine-guns. They retired in various directions, for either no definite order was given as to the point of assembly or, if given, it reached very few, but as they all had a sound general idea of the direction to take, there was no likelihood of their being dangerously scattered. Just as the day was breaking (it seemed hours since he had seen daylight, for even though the night had passed in a fantastic unreality, yet it was the unreality of a terrible nerve-racking nightmare), Frank found himself skirting the wood from which his battalion had emerged so thankfully; the path was rough until it joined with the main sap. Just where this sap ended, Frank, who had fallen in with two others, found a large group of the survivors gathered by the roadside. They waited about an hour for the rest; stragglers continued to arrive during the day. While waiting, they saw approaching a small fatigue party of B Company, men who had cursed because they were not to take part in the attack: those regretful curses had been comprehensible twelve hours before, the survivors would themselves have cursed likewise; how ignorant, how mad, how appallingly laughable that attitude appeared now to those who had been over the top and seen that it was not good. Among the cursers was Felipé, who, meeting Frank, gazed long at him, gripped him hard by the hand, and exclaimed, almost brokenly, with a dawning wonder in his face, 'My God, old man, you look as if you had escaped from hell!'

'Not so bad as that, Felipé; but it was a horrible business.'

Frank had gone through the night as though thrust forward, willy-nilly, by some power that impelled all his fellows equally. He had seen one friend killed,

several others badly wounded, yet their very helplessness, and his, had dulled the pain of it,– and inexplicably these friends had appeared to be the particular point on which his general pity could focus itself even while they elicited from him a diluted personal regard that was wondrously sweetened and mercifully deflected by his outraged humanity stirred to something deeper than a selfish grief. Perhaps one might describe his experience by saying that he stalked, all that night, through a chamber of horrors which, though they were always gibbering at the doors opening on that dark and lurid passage and did not actually step out into it, might at any moment assume reality and mutilate or slay him. That night was a grievously-conscious somnambulism and when he woke up, he at first rejoiced to be awake; that night, however, had changed his whole moral composition, though it took him a day or two to realise it. At the time, the figures of his mates, moving in the strange half-light, wreathed in smoke at one moment, clear-cut in the rocket-flares at another, were pathetically significant puppets in a huge phantasmagoria controlled from without; the hurtling fragments, the whistle of bullets, the deafening though not oppressive din that enveloped all those men and gave them uniformity of surrounding, uniformity of fate, were the natural, the inevitable setting to a witches' sabbath where all were victims. But afterwards the tragedy of that attack, which had been noted with an almost photographic unconsciousness and which had been potentially grasped during the succession of incidents, came to the surface of his mind and, in an hour of leisure, unrolled itself in its full physical and emotional detail. When he learnt that only five or six hundred men were left unkilled or unwounded out of the two thousand five hundred who had set forth from the

bivouac, he grieved for the loss of the many and regretted the absence of a few, yet at the same time he was unreasonably comforted to know that the tragedy had been actual, not foisted on his imagination by an utterly new set of circumstances.

14

HER PRIVATES WE

PRIVATE 19022

¶ The anonymous author of this extract, which is taken from the book entitled *Her Privates We* (Peter Davies, Ltd.), served as a private soldier, and describes his book as 'a record of experience on the Somme and Ancre fronts . . . during the latter half of the year 1916 . . . my concern has been mainly with the anonymous ranks.' His book is a peculiarly vivid account of a large number of actual experiences seen through a Tommy's eyes; but his realistic method is so tempered with sympathy that, although it leaves an impression of extreme fidelity, it never appears crude.

This description of an identification raid gives us a glimpse, all the more touching because so free from sentimentality, of the devotion of individual soldiers to one another which makes us feel that the War revealed in human nature a splendour we scarcely suspected; and also of the terrible solitude of spirit that descends on men when they are brought face to face with the mystery of life:

'Yes; in the sea of life enisled . . .
We mortal millions live *alone*.'

THE mist was luminous in the moonlight, but very variable, clouding and clearing, hurrying away on the wind, which was not strong enough to dissipate it entirely. One question was, would it last long enough? They had daubed their faces with mud. Starting at a walk, they dropped after a little while, and crawled slowly and cautiously forward. The mud had become moderately firm under the frost, which was not hard enough to coat the puddles with ice to crack under their weight with the sound of splintering

glass. There were a few pauses, when Sergeant Morgan whispered to the officer; and once again Bourne felt inclined to laugh, for some of the men breathed heavily, like oxen in the night. At last there was a definite pause; and Whitfield wriggled forward with another man. They waited, listening intently. It was very silent now. Suddenly a machine-gun started to chatter, but it was only an admonition. Once they heard the vibration of a wire, and a rattle, and, listening intently, they ceased to breathe. Bourne and Weeper were next to a man with a mace, some of the men called it a kosher-stick, and Bourne looked at it curiously. He felt very cool; but it seemed a long time to wait there. At last Whitfield came back. Then he led the way forward again, the sergeant following immediately afterwards, then came Mr. Cross, and the men with maces, and the rest of the party. Bourne found himself crawling over a mat of wire, rusty in the mud, loose strands of it tore his trousers to tatters, and it was slow work getting through; he was mortally afraid of setting some of the strands singing along the line. Every sound he made seemed extraordinarily magnified. Every sense seemed to be stretched to an exquisite apprehension. He was through. He saw Whitfield and the other man slip into the trench, and out the other side. Sergeant Morgan gave him the direction with his hand. Weeper passed him, and he followed, trying to memorize the direction, so that he would be able to find his way back to the gap in the wire. They crossed almost together, Weeper taking his hand and pulling him up the other side without apparent effort. The man was as strong as an ape. Then they wormed their way forward again, until they found their position, where the communication-trench formed a rather sharp angle with the fire-trench. The fire-trench itself still showed the effects of

their bombardment; after passing the communication-trench it changed its direction in a rather pronounced way, running forward as though to converge more closely on the British line. They were now in a shell-hole, or rather two shell-holes which had formed one: Weeper looking down the communication-trench, and Bourne along the fire-trench. The mist was very light now, it looked as though it might almost clear. Bourne shifted his position slightly, to get more comfortable. He already had a bomb ready, with his finger in the ring of the safety-pin. As he moved, he saw, not ten yards away, a faint gleam of yellowish light, that had none of the spectral pallor of moonlight. He kicked Weeper, and pointed silently. The gleam came again. It came from a large shell-hole curtained over, probably by a camouflaged tarpaulin; and something moving inside pressed against the slit by which men entered, displacing it almost imperceptibly, so that there came from it, every now and then, a winking gleam of light. He heard Weeper mutter something no louder than a sigh. Farther, much farther, away, a starshell shot up into the sky. Suddenly they heard a shout, a scream, faint sounds of struggle, and some muffled explosions from underground. Almost immediately the machine-gun in front of them broke into stuttering barks; they could see the quick spurting flashes in front of it; and Bourne threw his bomb, which went straight for the crack in the curtain. Ducking, he had another ready and threw that, but Weeper had already thrown. The three explosions followed in rapid succession. They heard a whistle. The machine-gun was out of action, but Weeper, leaping towards its wreckage, gave them another, and rushed Bourne into the trench. They saw through the mist their own party already by the gap, and Weeper's parting bomb exploded.

The party under Mr. Cross had made a slight encircling movement, and then, after creeping forward until within striking distance, rushed the trench. As the sentry turned, one of the maces crashed into his temple, and another man finished him with a bayonet. There were two other Huns in the same bay, and one had his arm broken with a mace, and screamed. Simultaneously the dug-out was bombed, and a couple of men hurled themselves on the third Hun, a Prussian sergeant, who put up a fight, but was overmastered, and lifted, booted, hustled out of the trench. They killed any survivors in the dug-out, and another Prussian had been killed in the next bay. While they were forcing the sergeant and the man with the broken arm towards the wire, they heard Weeper and Bourne bombing the machine-gun post, and Mr. Cross blow his whistle. Almost immediately a starshell went up, and there was some blind desultory rifle fire. They had got their men through the wire. Suddenly the Hun sergeant, with a desperate effort, wrenched himself free, and faced them with lifted hand:

'*Halt!*' he shouted, and flung himself on Sergeant Morgan. They went down together. Mr. Cross fired, and fortunately killed the Prussian.

'I hope you'll never do that again, sir!' said Sergeant Morgan, rising.

'Get his helmet off.'

The chain was tight in the thick fat under the chin. Taking his bayonet, the sergeant tried to prise it off, and cut through all the soft part of the neck so that the head fell back. The helmet came away in the end, and they pushed on, with their other moaning prisoner.

Weeper was ahead when he and Bourne reached the

gap in the wire. Starshell after starshell was going up now, and the whole line had woken up. Machine-guns were talking; but there was one that would not talk. The rattle of musketry continued, but the mist was kindly to them, and had thickened again. As they got beyond the trammelling, clutching wire, Bourne saw Weeper a couple of paces ahead of him, and what he thought was the last of their party disappearing into the mist about twenty yards away. He was glad to be clear of the wire. Another starshell went up, and they both froze into stillness under its glare. Then they moved again, hurrying for all they were worth. Bourne felt a sense of triumph and escape thrill in him. Anyway the Hun couldn't see them now. Something kicked him in the upper part of the chest, rending its way through him, and his agonized cry was scarcely audible in the rush of blood from his mouth, as he collapsed and fell.

Weeper turned his head over his shoulder, listened, stopped, and went back. He found Bourne trying to lift himself; and Bourne spoke, gasping, suffocating.

'Go on. I'm scuppered.'

'A'll not leave thee,' said Weeper.

He stooped and lifted the other in his huge, ungainly arms, carrying him as tenderly as though he were a child. Bourne struggled wearily to speak, and the blood, filling his mouth, prevented him. Sometimes his head fell on Weeper's shoulder. At last, barely articulate, a few words came.

'I'm finished. Le' me in peace, for God's sake. You can't . . .'

'A'll not leave thee,' said Weeper in an infuriate rage.

He felt Bourne stretch himself in a convulsive shudder, and relax, becoming suddenly heavier in his arms. He struggled on, stumbling over the

shell-ploughed ground through that fantastic mist, which moved like an army of wraiths, hurrying away from him. Then he stopped, and, taking the body by the waist with his left arm, flung it over his shoulder, steadying it with his right. He could see their wire now, and presently he was challenged, and replied. He found the way through the wire, and staggered into the trench with his burden. Then he turned down the short stretch of Delaunay to Monk Trench, and came on the rest of the party outside A Company's dug-out.

'A've brought 'im back,' he cried desperately, and collapsed with the body on the duck-boards. Picking himself up again, he told his story incoherently, mixed with raving curses.

'What are you gibbering about?' said Sergeant Morgan, ''aven't you ever seen a dead man before?'

Sergeant-major Tozer, who was standing outside the dug-out, looked at Morgan with a dangerous eye. Then he put a hand on Weeper's shoulder.

'Go down an' get some 'ot tea and rum, ol' man. That'll do you good. I'd like to 'ave a talk with you when you're feelin' better.'

'We had better move on, Sergeant,' said Mr. Cross, quietly.

'Very good, sir.'

The party moved off, and for a moment Sergeant-major Tozer was alone in the trench with Sergeant Morgan.

'I saw him this side of their wire, Sergeant-major, and thought everything would be all right. 'pon my word, I would 'ave gone back for 'im myself, if I'd known.'

'It was hard luck,' said Sergeant-major Tozer with a quiet fatalism.

Sergeant Morgan left him; and the sergeant-major

looked at the dead body propped against the side of the trench. He would have to have it moved; it wasn't a pleasant sight, and he bared his teeth in the pitiful repulsion with which it filled him. Bourne was sitting: his head back, his face plastered with mud, and blood drying thickly about his mouth and chin, while the glazed eyes stared up at the moon. Tozer moved away, with a quiet acceptance of the fact. It was finished. He was sorry about Bourne, he thought, more sorry than he could say. He was a queer chap, he said to himself, as he felt for the dug-out steps. There was a bit of a mystery about him; but then, when you come to think of it, there's a bit of a mystery about all of us. He pushed aside the blanket screening the entrance, and in the murky light he saw all the men lift their faces, and look at him with patient, almost animal eyes.

Then they all bowed over their own thoughts again, listening to the shells bumping heavily outside, as Fritz began to send a lot of stuff over in retaliation for the raid. They sat there silently: each man keeping his own secret.

15

THESE MEN, THY FRIENDS

EDWARD THOMPSON

¶ Edward Thompson's work is characterised by an unusual insight into the subtler workings of the mind, enabling him to create characters who establish an immediate hold upon our sympathies and never lose it; and by a sensitiveness to the charm of scenery, and to the beauty of birds and flowers, that stars his prose with passages of lyric beauty. *These Men, Thy Friends* (Alfred A. Knopf, Ltd.) tells the story of the second part of the campaign in Mesopotamia, after Kut had fallen and Maude had assumed command. The raid described in this extract took place in January 1917, and formed part of the clearing-up of the right bank of the Tigris, preparatory to the renewal of the attacks on Kut and Sannaiyat which paved the way to the capture of Baghdad.

Of his other works, *Crusaders' Coast* gives a splendid account of Palestine during the War, and *An Indian Day* is his best-known novel. Edward Thompson is also a poet and critic of distinction.

AFTER a week of bluffing, shifting bombardments, Maude set to work to annihilate an isolated pocket of two thousand Turks in Abdul Hassan Mounds, on the right bank. The process took over a week, and the extirpated exacted life for life.

Atkinson called with Fletcher to say farewell to Kenrick. 'There's some straight-ahead butchery planned somewhere, some job that only sheep would carry through,' he announced blithely. 'So we're going to the other side. The Leicesters are coming here in our place. We vanish, and are gone. The

Loamshires were here, the Loamshires are gone. *Si monumentum quaeris*, seek for our bones in the desert.

'Prithee, sweet shepherd, think on me awhile.'

Under the mask of his foolery, his excitement was showing. Kenrick guessed that his friend was well pleased at the prospect of action. One need not worry now at the way the show was going in Flanders – need not even read the absurd daily *communiqués* telling of another five yards gained at frantic cost – if one was doing things here.

Atkinson continued, in his delight. 'But Stanley Maude's a bad artist in taking us away. There's no denying it, we added a bucolic touch to these sands of Elam. "Shall us take us haversacks and us water-bottles?" Where'll you hear our blithe Midland Doric again? These plains, sir,' he addressed Hart, 'will be less pastoral than they were.'

'But the Leicesters,' said Hart, 'are reasonably stolid and pastoral, from what I remember of them.'

'They are, sir, they are. They'll do a lot to console you for our loss. The good old genuine English clay, the right chawbacon breed – nothing like it, the world over.

'Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Leicester Loamshire.'

A fortnight later, he was dead. In the hand-to-hand fighting of the Mounds, when the Highland Light Infantry were wiped out, his battalion endured losses hardly less. It was fighting that suited the Loamshires. Brains mattered nothing here, general decency mattered very little. On either side was the valour of despair. It would be the death-knell of civilisation

if either Turk or Loamshire dominated the world. But no braver breeds have ever fought hopeless battles. Atkinson through a week of sleepless days and nights ran his aid-post skilfully and coolly, confronting death with jesting face and tongue. A Turkish counter-attack swept the Loamshires out of their trenches, and Atkinson, standing by his wounded, was bayoneted. His last words were, 'You utter fool! I've got a score of your own wounded that I haven't had a chance to bandage yet.'

Hart's brigade took over Sannaiyat trenches three days before their time. The brigadier called his commanding officers together, and explained that, the day Abdul Hassan Mounds were first attacked, there was to be a sympathetic raid this side, carried out by two officers and twenty-four men from each of his battalions. Darkness was to pass to the accompaniment of half an hour's intense bombardment of the Turkish trenches, by guns both frontal and enfilading, and from the monitors massed in the river. The raiders would lie up close under cover of it, in the low scrub of No Man's Land; they were to go in when it lifted, and for ten minutes to shoot, bomb, stab, do all the mischief they could, observe all they could. Then their officers would sound the klaxons for return. The utmost secrecy was to be maintained.

At this time there were two schools of thought where these lines of Sannaiyat were concerned. One held that they were already practically evacuated, and that we could go through them at any time; but the dominant school believed they were still the old death-trap. Hart's brigadier was an enthusiastic adherent of the former school. He was always chafing at the silly red tape that prevented him from bringing on a general action when he held the forward

area, and there was a certain diffused nervousness in the whole division when the 120th brigade were in the front line, and until they had finished their fortnight and returned. He considered now that a practically bloodless victory was in prospect, that the Turkish lines would be found so lightly held that the raid could be followed up by a rushing of the position. It was with a cheerful heart that he dismissed his officers to use the intervening two days in practising their selected raiders on the dummy position that had been dug behind their own lines, in the vast levels by the marsh.

But Hart knew that the brigadier whose troops would normally have held the trenches at the time when the raid was to take place belonged to the more cautious school of thought – he was heartily sick of war and regarded it with virulent hatred as a long-drawn-out folly run by imbeciles. Why were his men not billed to carry out the raid? Hart's brigadier had told them that it was because two sepoys had deserted to the Turk, who therefore knew on what night the trenches were due to be relieved. Let him put his barrage down on empty communication trenches and a deserted open space leading up to them. The relief would have been carried out in safety and secrecy five days earlier.

Hart did not believe the story. He had occasion to phone to the brigadier now in the forward area; when his business was finished he asked casually about the desertions. There had been no desertions, General Mason said. What desertions? No, his fellows didn't desert. He was annoyed, and Hart apologised.

It was a lie, then. And they hadn't even bothered to tell Mason about the lie. Damned bad staff-work again. Obviously Mason had refused point-blank to

let his brigade chuck away their lives. He was the senior brigadier, and since his one wish was to get out of the whole show he was quite reckless what he said. He *must* have refused. And their own 'cheerful Conrad' had accepted with alacrity.

Hart had to select his raiders. And one name rose unbidden from the indeterminate background of the battalion – Hugh Mackay. He could not do it. The boy's brother had been killed at Hanna – wasn't that enough ?

Hart had arranged to spend the hour before tea fishing with Hugh. It gave him an excuse for silence while he worked things out. To him there could be no choice as between subaltern and subaltern, where a life was demanded. He might keep Mackay out on the grounds that he was too valuable an officer to be risked. But this show needed his best, if there was anything in it at all – and you could not be *dead* sure there was nothing. It was no use sending a fool over, to surprise and slay and observe. The only chance of a decent proportion of his men returning was in their having a cool brain with them.

He sent Mackay off to the cook with their spoil. The mess-tent was sending out the strains of 'Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm.' Hart entered, and found Sinclair alone and manipulating the gramophone. Sinclair was neither bacchanalian nor devoted to music; he drank his regular pegs at regular times with Scotch thoroughness of routine, he put on the handiest record when there were a few minutes to spare.

He took off the record, and Hart told him of the raid. He listened silently, then said, 'There's nothing in it – except a butcher's bill. But someone decent has got to be sent across, for the sake of the fellows

that go with him. A fool will lose the lot of them, let alone never see a damned thing in the Turco lines.'

'I know. Whom would you send.'

Sinclair thought. 'Spencer wouldn't do, he's too scatter-brained. Nor would Williams; nor Doggett. And Jones is only a little fool. Farquharson might do at a pinch. But no – it'll have to be Mackay and Dowson.'

'They're both too good to lose.'

'They are. But we'll lose the whole bunch if we send Jones or Spencer. If Mackay and Dowson go, with luck we'll get back one of them – and half his command. And if we don't send Mackay now' – he had read Hart's thought and was thinking alongside of it, in sympathy with his friend's fears – 'we'll have to put him into one of the next shows. If he goes now, and comes back, it'll be his turn to stand down. And the next show may be worse than this one.'

'It won't be so damned silly.'

'No. But it may be worse. We've got to carry these lines some day soon.'

In the silence it was tacitly accepted that Mackay and Dowson went. Then Sinclair asked, 'Why are *we* doing this stunt, and not the 125th brigade? They've no call to put us in five days before our time.'

Hart told him. 'They've had desertions, and the Turk will have a barrage down the day we go in.'

Sinclair was wrathful. 'I'm damned if I see how that'll touch a show that's to take place three days *before* the time when he expects us to get busy.'

'Conrad says there's nothing against us. He believes we'll find we can go through Johnny like a knife through butter.'

'He *would* do. It's just the sort of nightmare stuff

he would believe.' Sinclair moved to the telephone.

'What are you going to do?'

'Phone up the 125th brigade-major. I want to know about these desertions. I saw the quarter-master of the Nagpurs yesterday, in the canteen, and he said nothing about them.'

'Save your labour. I've phoned already.'

'It's all a damned lie, then?'

Hart nodded.

Next day Kenrick, wandering marshward, went past the duplicate of the enemy position that had been dug there. To his surprise, Hart's battalion were in it. The officers glanced at him with queer, strained look, as if he had no business to see what they were doing; Hart answered his salute, and turned away. But his friend that evening phoned through a request to see him, and explained to him in vague and general terms that they were taking over the trenches five days before their time, and expected some 'liveliness.' He anticipated nothing much; but if anything went wrong—— He finished the sentence with a smile and pressure of Kenrick's hand. Kenrick had to get back to hold his evening parade.

Kenrick awoke in the crash and thunder of a world ending, while sheets of lightning quivered and wavered through his forty-pounder without intermission. The air about him was aflame without heat. He lifted the flap, and heard rather than saw that the monitors in the river, scarcely a quarter of a mile away, were firing with all their guns. He was slightly in front of two of them; the air overhead was being ripped by their shells.

Knowing no more than Hart had told him, he thought it must be a Turkish attack. We should

repulse it, of course; but there would be forms lying out afterwards. One might be his friend; he was there now, in the walpurgis dance which these invisible demons in the darkness above him were hastening to join – Hart, cool, watchful, with the experience of despair and the reckless valour of his breed, holding his men on the beach of death.

Suddenly, out of the quiet sky of the night trembling to the first hint of dawn, the barrage had fallen, and the Turkish parapets and wire-hung trellises were spouting craters of earth and wood. Under the very eyebrows of that terror a hundred men were lying, with bombs and bayonets gripped. Those shells were wrenching limbs and bodies apart, they were smashing more than earth and wire, more than flesh and blood even. The hope for the waiting figures in the low-curling scrub was that when the tempest lifted and they raced in, they would find themselves confronted by gibbering, nerveless forms who could be slain unresistingly.

Jagged scraps of iron flung back as well as forward, and spun over the heads of the prostrate raiders. From a sound to his left, Hugh Mackay knew that one of his men was a casualty; if he could not return unaided, he must be left here – those were the instructions. Presently Dowson crawled up to him. 'I say,' he shouted (for only so could he be heard in that wild storm), 'two of our fellows are pipped; and what's worse, the same burst of h.e. has finished my watch. You'll have to give the time to all of us.' Hugh glued his eyes the closer to the luminous dial on his wrist.

'It's *beastly* cold,' Dowson added.

Hugh nodded. Had it been colder even at Hanna, he wondered. It hardly could have been, for the year was nearly three weeks younger. There had been a chill drizzle through the night, and the ground

was a clammy, slippery surface. Hugh remembered how at Hanna the rifles were mud-clogged; the Turks had bombed the few defenceless Jats and Black Watch who reached their trenches out again.

They were waiting in that corridor of death through which so many passed in those years of suffering. If the ghosts of those who perished in such raids as this looked back from the calm security of death, what did they remember? Waiting for the lifting of the barrage – the quick, fierce minutes, or, as here, the long-drawn-out fury of half an hour – did they think of next day, and see, as though their very selves were standing by, filled with distress and pity but forbidden speech with the living, the messenger bringing to their lovers in England the word that they were dead? In the soft evening glow of memory, did they see the lawns that they knew and the gardens where they had walked? *Cedes coemptis saltibus et domo.* You must leave your room where you have read and rested and talked, where your eyes have rejoiced in flowers and vases and the neat friendliness of books.

If any memory remained of the last actions and themselves moving destined through the fast-running minutes, there would be quick passions of fear and sudden exultation. There would be the recollected thrill of the colonel's colourless tones stating in unemotional phrasing the task to be undertaken, and the information possessed of the enemy's resources at the point of attack. Then the deeper thrill of your own name, and the knowledge of other minds swiftly envisaging your lot and glad that their fate had deflected them beside it. But for these men lying out in that space between the two Sannaiyats there could be no sensation now but physical ones – cold and the earth's damp pressure. And knowledge

of time inexorably racing to its plunge and the roar and madness of the cataract.

The barrage lifted; Hugh's wrist-watch told him that their work was due. They rose, and rushed forward. The bombardment had moved the trellises, but the wire was still an entanglement; it held them for a few seconds, but the enemy – if he was there – was too dazed to recover instantaneously. As Hugh topped the confused sand where the parapet had been, he saw Dowson trip on a strand of wire, which tossed him into the trench headlong.

Hugh was in the Turkish front line; his Sikhs, shouting wildly, had leapt in with him. Some of them had found an enemy; he saw men stabbing, men running forward, men trying to escape. In a bay was a Turkish soldier confronting him; he was sitting back, regarding him, Hugh Mackay, with an expressionless calm, that for a fraction of time held the ready revolver's fire. The dust-coloured face held so passionless a contempt that it seemed as impossible to put a bullet through it as it seemed impossible to Horatio to strike at the royal ghost. But as his conscious self took control again, Hugh would have fired – he did not, because in that moment he saw that his enemy was dead.

From an old sap-head, now a bay, to his right, came a sudden rush of several Turks, shouting 'Allah!' And Hugh became aware that his revolver was firing; a man fell back, there was a gush of blood from the forehead as the skull cracked across. Two Sikhs beside him were at work with their bayonets. There were three dead bodies clogging their way, and the rest of the enemy huddled back into the sap-head. He followed, intoxicated with a madness that had taken from him all power of thought; he winged

another, and yet another, the latter as he was delayed by the first man falling.

There was the rush of an express train, drawing swiftly nearer with thunder gathering in its wheels; then the roar of a shell bursting behind him. Our damned guns were falling short! But a sharper burst, followed by a lone whine in the air, undeceived him. They were trapped! The enemy had held his front line lightly, and all except a handful and those that our sudden barrage had caught had escaped to pits and pockets in its rear. Now he was aware of what had happened, and his own guns were registering on his front line; his infantry were bombing them from invisible dips in the earth. It was Hanna over again. Hugh ducked by instinct, and another bomb flew over his shoulder. He knew, rather than saw, that one of his men was killed. That whine again! and one of his Sikhs was holding a hand to his eyes, blood trickling through the fingers. They must get out of this sap-head, to the front line; but the Turkish gunners were blowing that to blazes. Still, he must have a try to get his men across No Man's Land. And he must notice, even in flight – his orders were to take stock of the position, to bring back information, as well as to kill. He had forgotten that. The time? He must look at his watch.

Somewhere along the line a klaxon rang out. The ten minutes were up. He lifted his own horn, when something shattered his right hand, so that his revolver fell. He lifted his hand, and it was numb and limp at the wrist; the veins were burst, blood was pumping out furiously. In that moment, figures leapt the trench wall and faced him. His own men, he saw, had gone, except for two tumbled forms. With back to the wall he stood, with useless, weaponless hand. Those figures closed in upon him, bayonets thrust forward.

Later in the day, Lieutenant Jones brought the authentic news to the 171st. 'Fifty of our fellows were scuppered,' he reported at lunch. 'Only one of the seven officers got back.'

'What about the 95th ?' asked Abell.

'They got three chaps back. Dowson was shot through the head as he was sounding his klaxon; and Mackay got trapped somewhere in the front line.'

Dawn next morning showed two naked bodies strung on the repaired wire opposite the 95th. Their hands were outspread, and their buttocks turned to the British lines. General Conrad, furious, would have sent a rescue party to bring them in under cover of night. But Hart dissuaded him.

'That's what he wants, sir. It's been done to drive us hopping mad. He'll have got a machine-gun on them. It would be best to send round orders that there are to be no reprisals and no attempts to bring them in.'

16

MY LAST JOB ON THE OLD TWO-SEATERS

CAPTAIN NORMAN MACMILLAN, M.C., A.F.C.

¶ *Into the Blue* (Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd.) gives a thrilling account of the training of an airman, and of the amazingly varied and exciting activities of a flying squadron in France and later in Italy. The chapter reprinted describes the author's experiences on the last occasions when the two-seater Sopwith machines were used: they were replaced by the nimbler and speedier single-seater (Sopwith) Camel Scout.

ON the 21st of August, 1917, we took off in a formation of six on a distant offensive patrol. I had a new observer with me, a stout London lad, named Morris. He had only recently joined the Squadron and had not done many jobs of work.

We crawled slowly southward at about eight thousand feet, well across the lines. Archie plastered the sky all round us, but we flew onward treating his familiar greeting with insolence. Archie put up a line barrage between our formation and the trenches. Still our leader flew south and ignored it. Archie redoubled his efforts by putting up another barrage on his own side. Still we flew due south, travelling along an aerial lane bordered by thorny hedges of bursting shells. Then Archie proceeded to be very clever. He gradually narrowed the width of the lane, narrower, narrower . . . then concentrated every gun within range on that little

area of sky where lay the apex of the long triangle, the dead end of the lane. But the two-seater leader knew the game too. Archie and he had played it often. And just as the shattering burst from the many gun-mouths deafened the ears of the gunners, he swept round in a swift half-circle and flew due north. The formation followed on his tail. Fifteen seconds later the dead end of the lane was black with shell bursts and curling smoke clouds that writhed despairingly in the empty air. Six hundred yards away the formation leader, looking back, laughed merrily.

After a minute's cessation Archie began again, following them northward. One of the machines next to the leader developed engine trouble and began to lag behind. Still the formation carried on. He had dropped about four hundred yards to the rear (he was a new man; an old hand would have gone underneath and in front of the leader, then made for the lines and been shepherded back) when a solitary Albatros Scout dived from nowhere on to the laggard's tail.

I had kept an eye on the trailer and saw the Hun come down on him. I was in the rear of the formation wedge and turned instantly to his help, and fired a burst at the diving Hun. When about a hundred yards off I swung round again and steadied as I shouted to my observer to open fire. Morris took steady aim while I held the Sopwith level. The observer in the new man's bus, taken more or less unawares, was wounded in the first burst. The new pilot simply flew straight on, with the Hun pouring lead into his machine. As luck would have it, the Hun was a very poor shot. In spite of his wound the observer opened fire on the Hun, who pulled up from the Sopwith and thus came nearer our plane. Morris put a long burst right into him. The new pilot made for the lines with his wounded observer,

while the Albatros disappeared below, going down out of control.

Two days later one of our two-seaters landed on a French aerodrome with engine trouble. A French scout pilot asked him if the circumstances detailed above had occurred to some machines of his squadron. Upon being assured that they had, the French pilot said that we had snatched the Hun out of his very gunsights because he had been stalking him and was just about to dive on him when he was shot down. And he saw more than we did for he saw the Albatros shed her wings in the air, and crash.

We watched the trailing plane go west then veered to join our own formation, which followed him and gave him escort some little way behind. When he crossed the lines we swung east by north to continue our patrol. A layer of cloud gathered above us and straddled the sky at about seven thousand feet. Although not thick, it was impossible to see through the cloud layer from below or above. Ten miles east and west of us the sky was clear right up to the roof. We flew about five hundred feet below the cloudbelt. Archie, for some reason, left us alone. Judging by the poor downward visibility which hid the earth in a misty blur we probably offered little more than the deep-throated purr of our engines for Archie to fire at.

Archie did often fire in the direction from which the sound of an invisible plane seemed to come. Sometimes when he did so he was wonderfully accurate; more often his aim was exceedingly poor. It was all a matter of luck. Archie accounted for some of our most wonderful pilots – Captains Thayre and Cubbon of 20 Squadron, and Captain Rhys-Davids of 56 Squadron, to mention but a few – men who were super-airmen in scraps, yet who came to an unfortunate juxtaposition

in time and space when Archie had fired, perhaps, his thirty thousandth shell. That was how Archie reckoned his score, averaging out so many shells to each aeroplane brought down. At the end of the war this worked out at something like thirty thousand shells fired for each German aeroplane brought down by gunfire by British guns in France.

It may have been, at the particular time of which I write, that the Hun Archie's shell consumption was above the average since his previous hit. That, coupled with the bad visibility making marksmanship difficult, may have been his reason for lying quiet. There was no other apparent reason. And the Hun usually loved to brass off as fast as he could load and fire.

One result of Archie's silence was to keep us constantly on the alert. The approach of our Sopwiths was usually the signal for all Archie batteries within range to open fire. This was partly because we usually flew at moderate heights, and partly because we always flew in formation, thus offering a good target. At the unusual absence of the familiar 'woof' and 'crack' around us we were naturally suspicious. We scanned the sky closely and keenly, ready for immediate action. Anything might come diving down out of that cloud-ceiling five hundred feet above us.

An hour passed without incident, while the visibility gradually became worse. It was just possible to discern the main features of the groundscape below. Our vigilance began to relax a little as our patrol time passed and nothing happened. We decided that Archie's quietness was indeed due to the poor visibility and not to enemy planes outnumbering our formation; for when Archie saw his own planes closing to attack he stopped firing in case he hit the wrong bus. He knew that an

aeroplane with machine-guns was a far more efficient enemy strafer than he could ever hope to be. And so he left them to it, and turned from his guns to his glasses to watch with redoubled interest the progress of the battle up aloft. But, after an hour of constant patrolling over enemy ground, we decided definitely that Archie was not worrying about either glasses or guns. We did not know why and our ignorance tickled our curiosity. The air pilot likes to know the reason for each tiny detail that colours his aerial life. Gradually, as the minutes passed, our curiosity faded into a memory. Memory would one day awaken and raise a hot discussion in our mess. Meantime it rested, a subconscious impression that swallowed wonder and suspicion.

The patrol was almost finished. If anything, the cloudbelt overhead had thickened. Our leader turned in a wide sweep, making a last detour over the southern area of patrol before going home.

Suddenly, with the swiftness of the air, a machine dived headlong from the clouds. It rushed towards our formation and dived below it. A second after, another plane came hurtling down from cloudland. It, too, made for the underside of our formation. It was a British scout, a little fighting bus. Down from the clouds it rushed in a straightaway dive. Fifty feet behind it, squarely on its tail, entirely engrossed in the pursuit of its prey, came a big, ugly, heavy-shouldered, camouflaged Hun, pouring forth a deadly stream of bullets.

The British machine saw the friendly formation and dived for its protection even as his comrade had successfully done. But his straightaway dive proved his undoing. The Hun got in a raking fire on what amounted to a relatively stationary target. The Hun

did not see our formation below or, if he did, his blood was up, and in the heat of the chase he flung caution to the winds that rushed behind him.

All this took less time than it takes to read. One instant it was not, and the next it was !

As the first scout came down from the cloud ceiling our formation immediately swerved into a rotating circle. This was our 'line of battle.' It offered the maximum fire effect, and, at the same time, covered each individual machine front and rear by the rear and front guns of its immediate neighbours in the endless swirl of machines.

The first British scout got down below us safely, then climbed and joined in our formation. The second was harder pressed. He made his bid for it and, as he came, I saw his plight and dashed out of the swirl towards him, pulling my nose up at his Hun aggressor. I got in a few shots before my bus stalled and the nose flopped down again. As we stalled I kicked on rudder and shoved the joystick hard across in a skidding turn, and shouted down the speaking tube to Morris, 'Hun above us, shoot !'

Morris crouched low in his cockpit with his Lewis gun in sighting position. As I straightened from the skid he drew a bead just below the nose of the Hun plane. At the first whipping crack from Morris's gun I steadied out and held the Sopwith firm as a rock.

The British scout dived out of sight below our wings. The Hun bus followed close behind. Morris opened fire at a range of fifty yards with the target closing at a speed of a hundred miles an hour relative speed. The Hun's headlong dive after his quarry brought him almost to the muzzle of our crackling Lewis. He flew right through the stream of bullets, and they raked his fuselage from nose to tail. His forward impetus carried

him on underneath us, and we lost sight of him for the moment, just as we had lost sight of the British scout he hunted.

We were about four hundred yards from our formation. I circled round to rejoin the leader. As I banked over in the turn I glanced down. Some two thousand feet below us a camouflaged aeroplane was falling earthwards out of control. It fell almost vertically, nose down. And, as it fell, it developed a curious, uneven, flicking turn – the certain sign of an aeroplane absolutely out of control. I pointed him out to Morris.

We descended in a spiral, Morris and I watching the doomed machine. When it was quite close to the ground – how close it was impossible to tell from our height – a tiny, licking flame appeared from the middle of its fuselage, followed by a trail of smoke. Its end was sudden. It fell in a headlong dive and crashed sickeningly nose first into the ground. During his fall I felt a strange mixture of pity and triumph within me. I was thrilled to see him go down, but I would have liked him resurrected on the ground.

Somehow I felt a sense of danger. I looked up. A second Hun was diving on our bus – diving on our blind spot, quarter front. I swerved down and away just as the Hun got his sights on and opened fire, and his first burst missed us. I hoicked up in a fast climbing turn. As the old Sopwith answered her controls, I shouted down the 'phone to Morris, who was still intent on the crash and the ground below, and unaware of the danger above. We had almost been caught napping, and our formation was too far off to render immediate assistance.

'Fire on that damned Hun above!' I yelled.

Morris did not even answer. He spotted the Hun at once and swung his gun into position. He knew what

to do, exactly. And to give him time, even as I shouted down the 'phone I sighted the front gun while I shot upward with the speed gained in the downward swerve. As my sight centred with the necessary deflection I pulled the trigger.

Pop-pop-pop-pop ! stuttered the front Vickers.

The Hun zoomed upward, pulled by his big Mercedes engine. My few shots passed unpleasantly close underneath him, but I could not hold the Sopwith up at our big angle long before her nose dropped in a stall. Our engine was not powerful enough.

The instant our nose dropped I jammed the controls hard over in another skidding turn (turns which, in post-war flying days, have come to be known as the essence of crazy flying). I saw the angle of Morris's gun in my little mirror. I saw the Hun turning over at the top of his zoom for another dive and allowed for both. I steadied the bus.

'Fire !' I yelled in my excitement. But my words were cut short by the rapid staccato of our rear gun. Morris saw his tracer bullets smoke right into the fuselage a foot behind the pilot. Then, just as his gun got going, it stopped. He got five rounds off, one more than I.

' Damn !' he shouted.

The word was carried away in the slipstream and borne across the heavens. He cursed himself for a blinking fool as he removed the empty drum. In the excitement of watching the first Hun fall he had completely forgotten to refit a full drum. There were only five rounds left in the one on the gun. These five did not kill the Hun. The bullets very probably just missed a vital part of the enemy plane. A full drum would almost certainly have got him. But the chance was gone, for, as Morris's gun

ceased firing, the Hun dived. I turned and dived after him, but there was no comparison in our speeds. The heavy-shouldered Hun went down vertically at over two hundred miles an hour. I fired a few parting shots from my single Vickers then flattened out. A minute later the Hun plane flattened out thousands of feet below us, headed due east, nose down, engine full on, at a pace we could only envy but never equal, in the language of our Squadron, 'beetling for home, tail up, wind up.'

We turned west and fell in below the rest of the formation. A little way over our lines the leader fired the washout signal – a white Verey light. The formation broke up, each pilot choosing his own method of going home – some flying straight back to the aerodrome, others stunting on the way.

Morris and I glided slowly down with the engine shut off, so that we could talk with ease. And, as our bus glided smoothly, delightfully downwards, Morris spoke.

'I say, old man,' he said, 'I'm beastly sorry about losing the second Hun. I am a ruddy fool.'

'Oh ! it's all right, laddie,' I replied. 'It's a pity, but anyhow we did give him a thorough scare.'

And, as we neared the ground, I turned the petrol on and the engine roared again, and swallowed up our laughter at the thought of that German plane going home from an old One-and-a-half Strutter.

When we landed we went along to the Squadron Office to report. We naturally expected confirmation from the remaining members of the patrol, who were only some four hundred yards off at the time each Hun was shot down. I was certain then and I am certain to this day that each of the Huns fell to Morris's gun. I had never seen such a shot in the air as Morris. He had only to pull the trigger on a drum of ammunition to

shoot his target down. He was a natural shot and his aim was deadly. He was quite new to the Squadron, however, and his prowess was not known. And so it seemed that our luck was out. Captain Harris, who held temporary command of the Squadron, ruled that the credit for the destruction of the first Hun should go to the wounded observer of the lagging bus, while all the pilots and observers of the patrol swore that the machine that went down after diving from the clouds was British and had circles. They could not confirm having seen a Hun go down. They saw only one bus fall, as did Morris and I.

We protested that we would never shoot down one of our own machines and asked the Recording officer to ring up Archie and ask if they saw the scrap. In the meantime we got a Combat Report Form and retired to the Pilots' and Observers' Hut to fill it in.

The Recording Officer could not get through to Archie on the 'phone, but a message came from our Artillery that an aeroplane was down near the spot above which our scrap had taken place. Five minutes later I left for the lines in a tender with a sergeant and two mechanics to endeavour to get confirmation of the combat.

An hour after I left the Squadron a message was received that a new pilot of a British Scout Squadron had been shot down while our patrol was on the lines; did our Squadron know anything about it? The place where this had occurred was close to where we had our scrap.

All the pilots and observers who were on the patrol believed that this confirmed their idea that we had shot down a friendly plane. They only saw one go down and it had circles. Morris, who had not accompanied me, was badly chaffed. He was told that he should

learn to distinguish between friend and foe before pulling the trigger.

I drove as near to the lines as we were permitted, then went forward on foot. Pursuing our enquiries we came at length to the spot where the rumoured crash lay. Partly buried in soft earth, pitiable wreckage of a once proudly flying plane, lay a Sopwith triplane, crumpled just not beyond recognition. I felt a great wave of pity pass over me. I looked upward to the sky where the awning of cloud still stretched across the blue. From above it, down from the sunlight, through that very cloud, underneath our formation this plane was hunted, pursued by a merciless machine manned by one whose eyes gleamed along the gun-sights, one whose sole thought was centred in the destruction of this now crumpled plane. Could he have held one instant's thought for the youngster he was shooting down to earth? And I, standing beside the tangled mass of rubbish that had fallen from the sky, knew that he could not. For one instant's hesitation, one fleeting breath of pity, might have saved him from the avenging stream of lead that Morris poured into his plane. For I knew that it was no British triplane that we had shot and watched fall downward to the ground, but a camouflaged Hun biplane, wearing Maltese Crosses on his wings. Besides, this triplane had not crashed in flames, and we had seen the Hun in flames.

I pressed forward to make enquiries and in the front line trenches found my confirmation. Less than a minute after the triplane crashed behind our lines, the front line infantry saw our Hun bus fall. Down like an avalanche he plunged and broke into flames before crashing about an equal distance behind his own front line as his victim fell behind ours. The infantrymen suggested that I had better hurry back or else remain

with them for the night because methodical Jerry was just about due to commence his evening shelling of the roadway which we had to traverse back towards our tender. I told them I must go, because I had left two men beside the triplane crash and could not leave them there.

There was nothing for us to do but return. There was no salvage to collect and so we foot-slogged back along the pavé. The first shell came over as we started and burst to the right of the roadway well ahead. The 42 mm. shells came over at regular intervals. My old infantry experience of trench warfare enabled me to judge their distance. The sergeant had been wounded by shell-fire in the line and did not like the experience. He was jumpy and ready to drop into the roadside ditch. One shell came close overhead and he dropped flat on the roadway. The two mechanics, who had never tasted shell-fire, behaved like most rookies, walking along upright, half contemptuous of the shells, half ignorant what to do. There appeared to be little doubt but that the roadway was the target and that we were very near the spot they concentrated on. I turned left and circled round the barren field about two hundred yards from the roadway then rejoined it well beyond the target point and not far from the car.

I got back to the Squadron in the evening and told my story. As I did so a wire came in from Archie telling the same tale and regretting the delay.

The little triplane diving westward went down below our wings and passed out of our sight. The Hun got him then, a bare second or two before he went down under Morris's Lewis himself. The pilot of the triplane carried his plane on to fall to earth underneath our own formation and be seen by them to fall, while the Hun

went down beneath our plane some distance farther east. In watching the Hun go down we missed the fall of the British plane, while the formation missed the fall of the Hun by their concentration on the circled scout.

Which shows how quick was victory and defeat, life and death in the air. There was so much to be seen that much was missed. In the air was the biggest life in the war, yet, measured as flying time is tallied, in hours spent in the air, it was often the shortest.

17

THE LONG TRAIL

PAUL BEWSHER

¶ *Green Balls* (Wm. Blackwood & Sons Ltd.) records the experiences of 'a desk-bound London youth, pitchforked . . . into a hitherto unknown untried occupation – bombing at night from the air.' This chapter describes the destruction of two railway bridges, and conveys at the same time something of the splendour that night-flying reveals.

> Above the hostile lands I fly,
> And know, O Lord, that Thou art nigh,
> And with Thy ever-loving care
> Dost bear me safely through the air.
>
> Thou madest the twinkling Polar Star,
> Which guides me homeward from afar;
> And Thou hast made my greatest boon,
> The radiant visage of the moon.
>
> – *A Night Hymn.* Written sixty miles beyond the German lines.

EARLY in the war it became necessary to destroy a railway bridge some way behind the German lines. This structure was an important link in the enemy's lines of communication, and its destruction was of vital importance. The work was given to one of the very early squadrons to accomplish, and it was carried out in rather an unusual way.

From the moonlit aerodrome there rose into the quiet night a little two-seater B.E. 2 C. machine, with a pilot and an observer as the crew. Soon this humming-bird of the darkness was winging its steady way

across the German front lines, and met as opposition only the scattered and inaccurate firing of machine-gunners and riflemen on the ground.

The observer closely compared his lamplit chart, and the pale map of the moonlit country below him. With unerring certainty the airmen moved across field and forest, farm and village, till they saw some distance ahead of them the gleam of a silver streak of water. As they drew nearer they saw the shining curves of a river, across which, at one point, lay a straight black line. It was their bridge.

At once the noise of the engine ceased and the machine began to sink gently on softly singing wires towards the ground. Bigger grew the woods, wider the thin white roads, deeper the soft and velvety shadows. Over the tops of some trees they floated. The rolling expanse of a field rose up to them. The machine quivered and jerked, and soon was rolling softly along the grass. Before it had stopped the observer had jumped out, and he hurriedly lifted a bulky package from his cockpit. He waved to the pilot. He heard the sudden roar of the engine, and the machine slipped faster and faster across the field and rose up towards the stars, leaving him alone on the ground in the midst of his enemies, many long miles from his own lines.

Quickly he ran to the edge of the wood, and he was soon creeping silently through the dim lattice-work of moonlight and rippling shadows. In a little while he heard the soft murmur of rapid waters, and he came to the edge of the river. He followed its course for a time, threading his way through the trees near the bank. When he could see the bridge some two hundred yards away he slipped into the river, and wading waist-high in the water, with his precious packet

held well above the surface, he moved slowly and silently toward the moonlit arches of stone.

Above him he could now hear the hum of his machine, and he saw it sweep overhead quite low down. It turned rapidly and dived down straight towards the bridge, and he heard the *pok, pok, pok* of its machine-gun. With a great rush of sound it roared upwards again and banked steeply almost above him. Now he could hear the noise of an approaching train, and he saw the restless machine, whose pilot was deliberately distracting the attention of the sentries by his acrobatics and the noise of his engine, dive towards it. There was a sudden flash of light and a very loud detonation. The pilot had released one of his bombs. Then once more sounded the metallic hammering of his machine-gun.

Meanwhile the observer had reached the base of one of the stone piers which supported the bridge. The excited sentries had not noticed his presence, and now he was safely hidden in the gloom of the arch. With the water swirling round his waist he worked feverishly to remove one of the stones. At last it was loosened sufficiently to be withdrawn. In its place he put his precious packet, which was a charge of high explosive. This he secured firmly in position, and then, having set the fuse, he began to return, through the water, to his starting place. Another swift flash illuminated the leaves of the riverside bushes. It was followed by a second thundering explosion, as another bomb burst near the crowded troop train which still had not crossed the bridge.

In a few minutes he clambered up the bank and hurried through the magic beauty of the moonlit wood. He reached the edge of the field where he had landed and stood waiting. He looked at the luminous face of

his watch. The pilot was going to allow him fifteen minutes. Fourteen had passed. He knew his friend would not fail him whatever happened, so though he stood, soaking wet and alone, surrounded by the now angry enemy, he did not feel at all alarmed.

Overhead he heard the drone of the engine, which suddenly stopped, to be followed by the faint, scarcely-heard hiss of the wires as the machine began to glide downwards to the ground. Soon a shadowy shape moved swiftly across the ground and stopped. The observer ran over to it and climbed quickly into his seat. He shouted to the pilot of the success of his operation, and then with a roar and rush was borne upwards, and to his relief found himself flying swiftly once more through the friendly air.

Even as they turned to start on their long homeward journey a great sullen roar rose to them from below, and they saw that no more across the silver streak of the river lay a black line, for now it was obscured by a cloud of smoke, which slowly dissipated and revealed a great gap in the bridge, near which was the red glow of the locomotive that no longer could take forward its carriages loaded with troops destined for a now impossible railhead.

That happened in the early days of the war. Swiftly developed the powerful arm of the air. Great were the changes in thought. Mighty the new weapons of destruction. . . .

'C.O. wants to see you at once in the Mapping Office.'

It is four o'clock on September 29, 1917.

I hurry to the little hut by the mess and pass through the door. Over the long desk leans the grave-faced squadron commander, the great pioneer

of night-bombing. With a pencil and a ruler he carefully studies a map.

'Is that you, Bewsher?' he says. 'Look here. I want you to go to Namur to-night; do you think you can do it?'

'I think so, sir.'

'Well! Look! It is a hundred and twenty miles the other side of the lines. There is a big railway bridge there – the Luxembourg bridge – here – see! That is the only railway bridge for a hundred miles of the river. If it is put out of action the German lines of communication are badly broken. The Army H.Q. are very keen on it. It is a great chance for the squadron – and a great chance for you. Brackley will be the pilot. You had better go to see him. How are you going to find the way?'

'Know the way up to Ghent, sir; shall go by landmarks after that!'

'Hum! Take my advice and fly by the compass, and only use landmarks as a check! Well, you will see!'

Now ensues three frantic hours of activity. I hurry off to see Brackley, who had just returned from leave, and at twelve o'clock was in Dover. The time of preparation is one series of kaleidoscopic pictures – of crawling inside a machine unfamiliar to either of us: of being taught the operation of a new petrol pressure system: of watching the loading of the four huge 250-lb. bombs, fat and yellow, which I have never before had the opportunity of dropping: of drawing a line from Dunkerque to Ghent, from Ghent to Namur, across the long green-and-brown map: of pondering the patches of the forests, the blue veins of the river, and thinking how in a few hours they will appear for me in reality, lying below in the moonlight, etched in dim shades of black and dull silver: of a strange dinner in the

mess when semi-seriously, semi-facetiously I write out my will, leaving to one friend my books, to another friend my pictures: of having the document properly witnessed, and rushing out amidst cries of good luck: of the lonely dressing in leather and fur in my little hut: of the roar of the engines as we rise up at latest twilight towards the glittering companies of the stars.

It is a quarter to eight. Eight thousand feet above the coast near Dunkerque we move. My pilot is a senior officer, and I have never flown with him before, so I sit quietly and do not talk, as I watch carefully the dials of my petrol instruments, and also keep a careful eye on the country below. The pilot looks at the engines with a satisfied glance, and the machine swings round and points east.

Soon the dim pattern of the Dixmude floods lie below, reflecting the gleam of a quivering star-shell. In the sky above Thorout appears a dazzling Very's light which drifts and dies – German machines are abroad in the darkness also. Far below now lies Thorout, and for a minute or two its pale beam waves vainly and impotent in the moonlit sky, its strength so dissipated that it is useless. Soon south of Ghent we move, and see to our right the landing lights of the huge Gotha aerodrome of Gontrode.

I stand up and look across the pilot, and count the lights.

'Eight on each side – two red at the west!' I say.

'I make it more,' he comments. 'Count again!'

I make sure of my accuracy, and draw in my note-book a detailed sketch of the landing arrangements.

'Look!' cries suddenly the pilot. 'We've been heard!'

I peer down once more and see only the two red lights glowing on the ground. The two lines of white electric

lamps have been switched off, for the drone of our engines has been heard high above the aerodrome.

Suddenly I realise that we will be heard through the whole of our long journey. The absence of searchlights and shell fire in these undefended regions makes one forget that from town to town, from village to village, the report of our progress is sent to a thousand military centres in a vast radius. Already our passage into virgin territory (for not for years has country east of Ghent been bombed at night) must be causing a sensation. Brussels must be apprehensive: Aix-la-Chapelle is feeling anxiety: Cologne is uneasy.

Now ahead of us I can see what never before have I seen – the lights of villages shining clearly in scintillating groups here and there across the pale moonlit country. With my map on my knees I pick up and check every railway and crossroad and forest below me in turn, and manage to keep the machine exactly over the line marked on the map.

'We're all right, sir!' I say to the pilot. 'See this straight road on the map. There it is – there – see! See that forest crossing it – well – there it is! I am quite sure of our position. We come to a river soon . . . look! look! do you see it – that silver streak over there?'

The pilot nods, looks at my map, and turns on the bright engine lights in order to examine the dials. To my slight discomfort he leaves them on as he flies ahead, evidently feeling confident of our safety.

Far ahead I can see a light flashing and flashing in a regular code. I presume it to be near Brussels, and point it out to the pilot. In a few minutes through the slight haze of the distance appears a great number of twinkling lights, and soon to our left I see a vast sea of glittering, shimmering gems, with lines of lights

radiating outwards from it like the tentacles of an octopus. I suddenly realise that it is Brussels, and with a cry of utter delight stand up to look down more clearly at it. It is a wonderful spectacle. There, in one wide sweep before my eyes, lies the whole city, triumphantly blazing out into the night. I can see the long lines of the boulevards stretching through the mass of lights, on the outskirts of which glitter little villages, from which also radiate the lines of street lamps, as though illuminated starfish lay here and there across the country. *Brussels – Brussels*, beats through my brain as I see the Belgian capital, feeling safe in its remoteness from the lines flaming bravely in the darkness. I live through one of those rare moments of divinity which come to men when they see before them for the first time some sublime spectacle which perhaps has never been seen before.

In the middle of the town there flashes an aerial lighthouse. This is rather puzzling, as the German night-bombing aerodromes are many miles to the west, near the coast at Ghent and Bruges. I wonder for whom this light flashes and blinks. Then I suddenly realise that perhaps one of the infrequent Zeppelin raids is being carried out against England on this wonderfully clear night.

Brussels passes. Road and forest and village flow beneath us in a regular and expected stream. Slowly the minutes go by. Ten minutes to ten says the watch. For over two hours we have been in the air, and our engines show no signs of wavering. On them alone now depend our chances of return. Soon I see far ahead of me the silver ribbon of the Meuse shining in the haze of the horizon, and then the lights of Namur, cold and sparkling, appear by the side of the river. I examine every tiny landmark on the ground below, and check

it with my map. There is no doubt. There lie the lights of the town – there lies the forest on its outskirts – there lie the two bridges, from one of which the thin black line of the railway trails off into the distance.

'Namur !' I say to the pilot.

He looks down and flies round in a wide circle in order to examine every point, and to ensure for himself that no doubt whatever exists as to the identity of the place. He is quite satisfied, and turns the machine towards the south-east. We cross the river south of the town as I explain to him my intentions. I want him to turn north-west, against wind, and to throttle the engines. We will glide down parallel to the railway line, which will help me to get a good line. We will reach the bridge at a low altitude, and I will drop my bombs. We will turn quickly down wind to escape.

Before I crawl into the back I point out to him some very bright lights in the direction of the Namur Zeppelin sheds, which seem to confirm my supposition of the activity of German airships to-night. Then, with a final word of explanation, I stoop through the door behind my seat and lie on the floor of the machine. I slide open the little trapdoor beneath the pilot's seat, and see a small square picture of moonlit country. Ahead there is just visible the curve of the river, and the black line of the bridge across it. Beneath me runs the railway track which is to be my guide. To my joy I can see, at one place upon this thin dark line, the intermittent red glowing of an engine's fire-box. In a swift moment I realise the actuality of the country below. For a second it ceases to be a map and becomes peopled with busy human beings. Oh, Namur (think I), ablaze with lights, you enjoy this moonlight night of late September, far, far from the turmoil of war, little conscious that overhead this very moment lies a fur-clad

airman peering down at you, preparing to drop his terrific missiles, packed with fierce explosive! Laugh on in your cafés, you exquisitely-clad German *embusqués*! For me this moment is rich and ecstatic. Then the difficulty of the task absorbs my mind. The noise of the engines has ceased. Through the machine sounds the faint rush of wind hissing and sighing round the tight-strung wires and planes as we sink lower and lower. My bomb-sight draws nearer and nearer to the bridge. Pressing the buttons of the direction indicator I steer the machine to right and left, as green or red glow the lights before the eyes of the pilot. The direction bar touches the bridge and drifts off to the left. I swing the machine round quickly, again the bar crosses the bridge, again it drifts off. We are flying slightly side to wind, and I can scarce keep the head of the machine on a straight course. The pale-glowing range-bars draw nearer and nearer, with a slow progression, to the black edge of the silver river. Again I press the right button; again a green light glows; again the machine swings towards the bridge. The range-bars cross the base of it. I press over the bomb handle quickly, . . . and again. Clatter-click-clatter-click-click-clatter sound the opening and closing bomb doors behind me as bomb after bomb slides out into the moonlight depths below. For a moment I see the fat yellow shapes, clearlit in the pale light beneath me, go tumbling down and down towards the dim face of the country.

I hurry back to my seat beside the pilot.

'Half dropped, sir. 'Fraid they will not get it. Oh! I am sorry, sir! I am sorry! We drifted!'

One, two, three red flashes leap up in the water of the river some hundred yards to the south of the bridge. One, two more flashes, more rapid and brilliant, leap up

on the moonlight embankment, leaving large white clouds of smoke.

'Jolly good! You didn't miss by much!' he says encouragingly.

Boom – boom – BOOM – boom – BOOM! sound the five explosions as we turn. It is strange to look at Namur – still sparkling beautifully with a wealth of light under the stars – still unchanged, though we know that the thundering clamour of these five unexpected explosions must have stirred up the placid life of the little tranquil town till it is seething like an ant-hill upset by the wayside. In the squares and streets must run the alarmed population, rushing to and fro aimlessly, utterly terrified. In the military headquarters the telephones and telegraphs must have burst into a sudden activity. The vibrant roar of the explosions must have been heard for a great distance. Even in remote Aix-la-Chapelle the strolling Germans must have wondered at the far-away sound drifting to them under the stars.

Again we fly to the south: again we turn and start on our second 'run' over the target: again I crawl into the back, steeled this time by a great anxiety and a great determination, for I realise the enormous responsibility which is mine. With the five remaining bombs behind me I have, if possible, to destroy the great railway bridge, which to me will appear only a small black match laid across the silver ribbon of the river. If the bridge is destroyed or damaged the German communications will be vitally interfered with, the moving of their troops will be interrupted, the pressure on the British lines will be relieved. If I fail, that much-desired relief will not take place, and therefore many more British soldiers may be killed. That is not all, however – for failure means that this expensive raid

is wasted; the reputation of the squadron is tarnished; the official approval of Handley-Pages as long-distance night-bombers is adversely affected; and, least of all, though of great importance to myself, my splendid opportunity for a great achievement is lost. With this sense of responsibility weighing heavily on me I lie down, peering through the little square hole. My face is wet with perspiration of anxiety in spite of the intense cold of the biting wind: my hands shake with excitement. I decide to take the machine to the river along the railway line, and slightly to the east of it, and then to judge the wind drift so that the machine is turned by it to the left, when I will press the starboard signal button and swing the machine at an angle across the bridge, and then drop my bombs. It is a great risk, and unless I judge exactly I will not succeed.

In a fever of apprehension, and with my whole being concentrated on the relation of the fine wires and bars of my bomb-sight with the black thread of the railway far below me, I lie on the varnished strips of wood on the floor of the machine, my legs flung wide apart behind me, my bare hands and face frozen with the icy blast of wind, my uncovered eyes running with water. Nearer and nearer to the bridge draw the two range-bars. Gently and rarely do I touch the starboard signal button, to swing the machine again and again to the right as the wind drifts it to the left. We are near the bridge – we are almost over it. I press the starboard button determinedly, and I see the glow of green light illuminate the dashboard. To the right swings the machine. White glows a light as I press the central button. I look below quivering with anxiety. The machine ceases its leftward drift and swings to the right and the two luminous range-bars are in line with the bridge. I grasp the bomb-handle and once, twice,

press it over. I look behind – the bombs are all gone. It is all over! The irrevocable deed has been done! The failure or success of the long raid is sealed. I climb clumsily to my feet and look through the door beside the pilot.

'All gone, sir, I . . . Oh! look, *look*!'

Upon the thin black line of the bridge leap out two great flashes, leaving a cloud of moonlit smoke which entirely obscures one end of it.

'Oh – damn good – damn good!' yells out the pilot excitedly. 'Hit it! *Hit it!* You've hit it! Oh – priceless – priceless!'

'Good – oh, sir! I am glad. It is hit, isn't it, sir? Two of them. I *am* bucked!'

Almost crying with joy we shake hands, and he thumps me cheerfully on the back.

'Something for you for this when we get back!' he says. 'Oh! damn good – damn good, Paul. Priceless – priceless!'

I look round, and in the back of the machine I see a sight which left the clearest image of this raid in my mind. There stands the moonlit figure of the tall good-humoured gunlayer, and with a characteristic gesture I see him put out his arms with the thumbs pointing upwards – the most sincere expression of congratulation he can deliver. My heart goes out in gratitude to this solitary man who already, for nearly three hours, has stood alone on a thin platform in the back of the machine, watching and eager, knowing that he has no control over his destiny, that his life lies in the hands of the little figure whose black head he can see so far away from him in the nose of the machine.

Now we turn at once and start on our long homeward trail. Exhilarated with a glorious feeling of success, so contented and glowing with joy that I am not affected

by the fact of being over a hundred miles from friendly territory, I sit on my seat with legs gaily swinging, and read Dickens, write letters and verses, drink tea and eat sandwiches, and chatter incessantly to the pilot, who, in his satisfaction, does not mind.

'You'll get something for this – if we cross the lines all right!' he says with his usual restrained optimism.

Charleroi sparkles on our left. Near it at La Louvière flashes an aerial lighthouse, whose presence I record on my note-book. Having found our way to Namur by map, we seem to return by a curious kind of homing instinct. We know where we are as if by second nature. Indeed so little do I trouble that I mistake Courtrai for Roulers, but it makes but little difference. Such confidence have I in our safety, so lovely is the moon-drenched night, so friendly are the undefended skies, that we fly on and on as in a stupor of utter bliss. We know that if we return we are famous, and we know we will return. Song and laughter, and rich thoughts of far-distant London and its proffered glories when next comes leave, fill my drowsy brain. I hug the pilot's arm affectionately. At twelve o'clock he was at Dover, now scarcely eleven hours after he is coming back from Namur. How wonderful it is – how wonderful he is!

Ypres flickers to the left with its ever uneasy artillery fire. In our ease we do not even trouble to cross the lines as soon as possible, but fly on parallel to them, some five miles on the German side. At last we turn and cross slowly over the white blossoms of the ever-rising, ever-drooping star-shells.

Back towards Dunkerque we fly, and the pilot says over again to me –

'You did jolly well, old man. You'll get something for this – if we land safely!'

I wonder what his conditional clause will be when we are on the ground – 'if you live to get it' – probably!

Soon the welcome landing T glows far below us. We fire our white light: at once the white light rises from below. 'Charlie,' the raid officer, is faithfully on the watch, as he must have been now for long hours, awaiting our return.

We glide downwards, and in a moment of exultation the pilot, to my everlasting regard for him, sweeps a few feet over the aerodrome, yelling with me in utter excitement –

'*Horray! Horray! Horray! Horray!*'

I lean far over the side screaming out my joy in this mad whirling rush over the grass. On roar the engines: we sweep swiftly upwards again, and turn, and land.

As soon as the machine has stopped crowds press round us. A Ford car is waiting to take us over to the headquarters.

'Oh! Damn good,' says the pilot. 'We hit it – but I take no credit for it. It was this child's show – he did it!'

'Bilge! You were great, sir. I never saw such steering!'

In the jolting little car we whirl across a bridge, alongside the canal, and across a second bridge to my beloved camp, and our beloved C.O.

His words of congratulation at the news would be reward for a hundred such trips.

'Well!' he says at last, 'I suppose you did it by compass!'

'No, sir! By landmarks!'

When at last I walk back alone, under the starlit sky, to my cabin, it seems utterly impossible to believe that I *have* been actually to Namur – that I have actually travelled over three hundred miles since I last walked

along that path a few hours ago. It seems incredible that my soft right hand has actually this night caused damage and brought death to that far, far remote place, which even now is in a state of confusion. Vividly I realise the amazing wonder of flying; vividly I feel the strange fascination of night-bombing, with its long journeys and sense of domination – its sense of being almost divine.

Five weeks later, to the mapping office comes the intelligence report–

'A Rapatrié reports: – On the night of September 29th Allied aircraft successfully attacked the Luxembourg bridge at Namur, which was badly damaged. 17 *German civilians were killed.'*

18

IN RETREAT

A Journal of the Retreat of the Fifth Army from St. Quentin, March 1918

HERBERT READ

C. Herbert Read has so direct and forcible a style that his narrative compels our attention, without recourse to highly-coloured description or exaggerated metaphor.

The great German offensive on the Somme in March 1918, which he describes in *In Retreat* (Hogarth Press), was the opening of the enemy's last desperate effort to break the Allied line of defence and split off the French Army from the British. If it had succeeded in its object, the course of history might have been altered; as it was, we were driven back from St. Quentin almost to Amiens, losing ground not regained until the beginning of October after the Allied counter-offensive had forced upon the Germans that process of retreat which resulted in the Armistice on November 11.

I

WE received the warning order just before dinner, and for awhile talked excitedly round the mess fire, some scoffing at the idea of an imminent battle, others gravely saying that this time at any rate the warning was justified. Two deserters, with tales of massing guns and the night-movement of innumerable troops, had reached our lines the previous day. Of course, deserters usually had some such tale designed to tempt a captor's leniency, but this time it was likely to be the truth. What else could the enemy's long silence mean? To that question we had no answer. We went early to bed, expecting an early awakening. The harnessed horses stood in lowered shafts.

There was scarcely a wall standing in Fluquières: everywhere demolition and bombardment had reduced the village to irregular cairns of brick and plaster. Winding among these cairns were the cleared roadways. Men and horses rested in patched sheds and an occasional cellar. S. and I were in a small repaired stable, each with a bed-frame in a manger. I had livened the cleanly white-washed walls of the place with illustrations from a coloured magazine. That evening all save our trench-kit had been sent to the transport-waggons, and we were lying on the bare netting with only our trench coats thrown over us.

For some time I was too excited to sleep, and none too warm. But weariness did at length triumph, and when, a short while afterwards, I was roughly awakened, I had become unconscious enough to forget the continuity of things.

II

Yes: suddenly I was awake. A match was being applied to the candle stuck on the bed-frame above my head. With his excited face illumined in the near candlelight, an orderly bent over me and shook my shoulders. I heard confused shoutings, and the rumble of gunfire. I had hardly need to read the message-form held out to me: 'Man Battle Stations' – the code words I knew only too well, and all that they implied. I was shivering violently with the cold, but in the shaking candle-light I scribbled messages repeating the code to the company commanders, the transport officer, and to others. S. was moving on the other side of the wall that divided the mangers.

'We're in for it, my lad,' he yelled, above the increasing din.

Just then there was the sudden shrieking rush of a

descending shell and its riotous detonation very near. Our candles jumped out, and we were in darkness, with bricks and earth falling like a hail on the roof. My servant came in, and hastily helped me to gather my equipment together. He handled the two or three books I always carried with me, asking me if I would take one in my pocket. I took Thoreau's *Walden*, because I had not yet read it, and anticipated two or three weary days of passive defence. For even if now we realised the actuality of the enemy's attack, so confident were we of our defensive system that we contemplated nothing more than a short successful resistance. When in the front line, we had ceaselessly reconnoitred all approaches, and so fine were the sweeping fields of fire that stretched away towards St. Quentin, so skilfully placed were our machine-guns, that always we pitied the folly of the enemy should he assail a defence so deadly. We reckoned with one factor unseen.

I fixed my revolver and ammunition securely, and set out to the orderly room, some five hundred yards away. It was now about five o'clock and still dark. I picked my way along a path which led across the great heaps of rubble. Shells were falling in the village. I still shivered with cold. My electric torch was nearly exhausted, so that I kept falling as I went. When I reached the orderly room, which was in a restored cottage, I found everything in a great hubbub, orderlies coming and going, the sergeant-major shouting orders. Inside, the doctor was bandaging a wounded man.

S., who had been assembling the headquarter staff, came to say that something terrible had happened to the Lewis team (at that time a Lewis-gun team was attached to each battalion headquarters): would I come round with my torch.

They had been sleeping, some six men, beneath

tarpaulin sheets, stretched across a half-demolished outhouse. A shell had fallen in the middle of them. In the weak glare of my torch, we saw a mangled mass of red brick-dust and of red glistening blood. Here and there we distinguished a tousled head of hair. One man, pinned beneath beams and brickwork, was still groaning. We quickly began to extricate him, but he died whilst we worked.

I then joined the colonel, and with one or two orderlies and the sergeant-major we followed the companies along the back lane that led from Fluquières to Roupy, a distance of about a mile and a half. The morning was cold and a heavy dew lay on the ground. As we walked the light of dawn began to reveal a thick wet mist.

III

At 6.50 I sent a message to the brigade, informing them that the battalion was in position. We had been shelled all along the way, and when we neared Roupy, the cross-roads seemed to be under a continuous barrage. Nevertheless, we got into position with very few casualties. Safe in the bowels of the headquarter dugout, we thought the worst was over, and began casually to eat the tongue-sandwiches and drink the tea provided by the mess-corporal.

The dugout was new and spacious, and odorous of the fresh chalky earth. It was about thirty feet deep, and partitioned into three sections, of which the middle one was occupied by the headquarter officers. Because it was new it was unfurnished, and we had to squat on the bare floor, grouped round a few candles.

For me that cavern is a telephonic nightmare. The instrument, a 'D III converted,' was placed on the floor in a corner of the dugout. Two signallers sat with their

legs straddling round it. At first the companies, then the neighbouring battalions, and, finally, the brigade kept me there crouching on the floor, yelling till I was hoarse into the execrable instrument. When I was not speaking, the signallers were receiving or sending Morse messages.

Above the ground, the situation was disquieting. The thick mist of the early dawn persisted: a man ten yards away could not be distinguished. The gunfire, tremendous in its intensity, continued hour after hour to pound into the invisible foreground. The earth vibrated almost hysterically. An occasional shell crashed near us, but after the first three hours (at 7.30) the enemy's fire seemed to be concentrated on our front-line defences. No messages, telephonic or written, came to relieve our anxiety.

The gradual accumulation of our anxiety should be realised. Every minute seemed to add to its intensity. By ten o'clock or so, our hearts were like taut drum-skins beaten reverberantly by every little incident.

Then the skin smashed. Bodily action flickered like flame. The sense of duration was consumed away.

Shortly after eleven o'clock, a gun team galloped madly down the main road. Then two stragglers belonging to the Machine-Gun Corps were brought to headquarters. They informed us that the front line had been penetrated. Later, an officer from the front line battalion, with five or six men, came to us out of the mist. Most of the party were wounded, and as the officer's leg was being bandaged in the dugout, he told us his tale. He was haggard and incoherent, but the sequence was awfully clear to us. The enemy had attacked in great strength at 7.30. They had apparently reached the observation line unobserved, and overpowered the few men there before a warning could

be given or an escape made. Advancing under cover of a creeping barrage, they had approached the main line of defence. No fire met them there, or only fire directed vaguely into the fog. The fight at the main line had been short and bloody. Our men, dazed and quivering after three hours' hellish bombardment (I could see them cowering on the cold mist-wet earth), had been brave to the limits of heroism; but pitifully powerless. The ghastly job had been completed by 8.30. About nine o'clock fresh enemy battalions passed through their fellows and advanced towards the front-line redoubt (L'Épine de Dallon). Our artillery fire must have been useless by then, still falling on the old enemy front line. At any rate, the enemy quickly surrounded the redoubt, and then penetrated it. This officer himself had been captured, and later had made his escape in the mist. He thought it possible that the headquarters of his battalion were still holding out.

We were still questioning our informant when an excited voice yelled down the dugout shaft: 'Boches on the top of the dugout.' Our hearts thumped. There was no reason why the enemy shouldn't be on us. They might have been anywhere in that damned mist. We drew our revolvers and rushed to the shaft. We did not mean to be caught like rats in a hole.

I remember my emotion distinctly: a quiet despair. I *knew* I went up those stairs either to be shot or bayoneted as I emerged, or, perhaps, to be made prisoner and so plunge into a strange unknown existence.

Half-way up the stairs, and a voice cried down: 'It's all right: they're our fellows.' Some artillerymen in overcoats, straggling across the open, had looked sinister in the mist.

We turned to the dugout, the released tension leaving us exhausted.

Patrols from our front companies had been feeling outward all morning, at first without result. At 12.30 B. (commanding the left front company) reported: 'Machine-gun and rifle-fire on left and right can be heard. Shelling very hard. Can see nothing. Patrols are being sent out.' At 1 p.m. he reported: 'Boche are in quarry just in front of me. We are firing Lewis guns and rifles at him. He seems to be firing from our right flank too, with machine-guns.'

These and other messages all came by runner. The telephonic communications to the companies had broken down before noon, though I think we remained in touch with the brigade until late in the afternoon.

About midday the mist began to clear a little. At one o'clock the enemy, having massed in the valley five hundred yards immediately in front of us, attacked in mass strength. The fusillade that met them must have been terrific. They came on in good order, extending and manœuvring with precision. At 1.20 B. reported: 'No.5 Platoon report enemy on wire in front. Artillery assistance is asked for. We are firing rifle grenades into them.' And again at 1.30: 'Boche attacking in strength with sections in front. Front troops are in valley in front. They are also heading to my left flank.' Between 1.30 and 1.40 the attack reached its greatest intensity. By 1.45 it had withered completely before the hail of our fire.

At 1.45 B. reported: 'Boche running back like hell near Savy. They seem to be running from artillery as much as anything.' (Savy was one and a half miles to our left front: it was on the slope that rose away from the valley in front of us where the enemy had massed his forces before his attack.)

For a moment we became elated. There was cause enough. The mist had lifted, and a pale sun shone.

We had defeated a strong attack. We received a message from the Inniskillings on our right to say they still held their positions intact. And wider afield the co-ordination of the enemy's advance seemed to have broken down.

We made haste to distribute our reserve ammunition, to clear the dressing-station, and generally to make ourselves ready for the next happenings.

In reply to my inquiries B. sent this message, timed 2.15 p.m.: 'It is very difficult to tell numbers of enemy. I can see the ground north to Savy, and saw them scattered. The line advancing had about 30 men to every 100 yards. We do not require S.A.A. yet. Can you instruct Rose[1] to fire up Soup Valley, please? We will want Verey lights for the night. Will a supply be forthcoming? Can see no movement now. Boche is putting up white lights all along valley.'

IV

The lull was not of long duration. Either we had been deceived by the movements near Savy, or the enemy had made a miraculously swift recovery. At 2.45 I received another message from B.: 'Enemy movement at F. 12 at 4.0. They appear to be carrying in wounded. Enemy also advancing across valley on left on F. 5, in small parties. Estimated total strength seen, 50 men. Boche aeroplanes are flying about 300 feet above our lines, and have been for a short while past. There is still some machine-gun fire in front. Is a redoubt holding out?'

The aeroplanes were evidently making a preliminary reconnaissance, and I guessed the movement to be significant of a new attack.

[1] Code name for a company.

On the mists clearing, the aeroplanes were able to sight position, and soon the artillery on both sides became active. Our own artillery, alas, fired short, smashing our already weakened defences. The Germans brought up their light field guns with great skill and rapidity. Several batteries were observed coming over the ridge at L'Épine de Dallon – only a few hours ago the headquarters of the battalion we were supporting. We now realised our position in earnest, and I sent a detailed account of the situation to the brigade.

Towards four o'clock, the enemy shelling increased in intensity. The second attack was now imminent. B. sent the following message, timed 4.30 p.m.: 'Boche is attacking on right about 400 strong, and is massing in the valley right in front of Roupy. We want some more S.A.A. During the Boche retreat the riflemen and Lewis guns did good work, killing many. Shelling very heavy.'

The heavy shelling continued, and under cover of its intensity the enemy again massed in the valley in front of us. The men held on grimly. Thus B., timed 5.10 p.m.: 'Line holding still with some casualties. Reports not in. Line heavily shelled. S.A.A. received correct. Situation still the same. Touch is being kept with battalion on our right, and patrols go constantly. Our chloride of lime is missing and cannot be found. Machine-guns very active.' And again at 5.40 p.m.: 'The Boche is 50 yards or less from our line, and is also passing down the valley for another attack.'

Then suddenly those massed men leapt from cover, and came on in their grey, regular formations. At headquarters we were only aware of the angry surge of rifle and machine-gun fire, deadening even the detonations of shells. All this time I was spending tiring, exasperating hours at the telephone, striving to get in

communication with brigade and artillery headquarters. Again and again the wire was broken, and again and again the linesmen went out into the mist to mend it. Then it got disconnected irreparably. We were isolated in that chaos.

About 6.30 B. sent the following momentous message: 'Boche got inside our wire on right and left. No. 5 Platoon are all either wiped out or prisoners. No. 7 Platoon took up position on left of keep, but Boche were in it when I left. They also were in trench on right of road left by C. Company, and we killed several on road near camouflage. I am now in redoubt with 25 men.'

The climax had come. We had still one card to play – the counter-attack company. On receipt of B's message, the colonel decided to order C. to attack in accordance with the pre-conceived plan.

We only heard of this counter-attack from the mouths of a few survivors. It was one of the most heroic episodes in the retreat. The company gathered together in the shell-battered trench that they had occupied all day, and then took the open. No artillery covered their advance. It was hopeless, insane, suicidal. They had perhaps one hundred and fifty yards to cover. They advanced at a jog-trot, lumbering on the uneven ground. One by one they fell before the fusillade that met them. C. had reached the enemy with about a dozen men. These leapt in among the Boches, and a hand-to-hand struggle ensued for a few minutes. C. was last seen cursing, pinned to the trench wall by a little mob of Germans, in one hand his empty smoking revolver.

V

It was now dusk, and with dusk came peace and silence. And at dusk this was our position: – The front

rim of the redoubt was in the enemy's possession. The counter-attack company had disappeared. The company-keeps still held out with a few men in each. The inner ring of the redoubt was held by one company, and the remnants of three. B. had survived with one of his officers. But several officers in the three front companies had been either killed, wounded, or captured. There were probably two hundred men still surviving in the battalion.

In the darkness the colonel and I walked up to the line. As we went along the road, the stillness was abruptly broken by the sounds of three or four shots, screams and curses. We flung ourselves on the roadside, our revolvers ready. We shouted: 'Who goes there?' English voices answered, and the sergeant-major went to investigate. Two German privates had walked into a sentry on the road, *coming from behind us*. No one could understand what they said, and they were sent back to brigade headquarters. And I don't remember that any one of us was perturbed by the incident, eerie though it was.

Just after one o'clock in the day, we received long-awaited instructions from the brigade: The battalion in reserve was to deliver a counter-attack. The line of deployment was given, and the direction of attack. The battalion was to leave its position at 12.45, and the guns were to start a creeping barrage at 1.33 a.m.

The whole thing was a ghastly failure. The night was black, and the battalion attacking was unfamiliar with the ground it had to cover. We waited hours for a sign of their approach. About two o'clock a stray officer came to us, having lost his company. Eventually, about four o'clock, one company did appear. It went forward in the darkness, but got dispersed and

uncontrollable in the effort to deploy into attack formation. Dawn found us as dusk had found us, with the sole difference that some two hundred men of the counter-attack battalion had found refuge in our redoubt, and in the keeps in front.

I think by then we were past hope or despair. We regarded all events with an indifference of weariness, knowing that with the dawn would come another attack. We distributed ammunition, reorganised our Lewis guns, and waited dully, without apprehension.

Again the morning was thickly misty. Our own artillery fire was desultory and useless. Under cover of the mist, the enemy massed in battle formation, and the third attack commenced about 7 a.m. We only heard a babel in the mist. Now our artillery was firing short among our men in the redoubt. About ten o'clock the enemy penetrated our left flank, presumably in the gap between us and the battalion on our left, which was still in position. Machine-gun fire began to harass us from that direction, somewhere in the ruins of the village. We never heard from the battalion on our right, and a runner I sent there did not return. I think they must have withdrawn about ten o'clock.

This new attack petered out. I fancy it was only half-hearted on the part of the enemy – probably only a demonstration to see if we intended to make a determined resistance, or to fight only a rearguard action. Finding the resistance determined enough, they evidently retired to prepare the real thing.

This fourth attack was delivered about midday. The mist still persisted thinly. One could perhaps see objects fifty yards away. I don't know what resistance the platoon-keeps offered. They were in a hopeless position, and would easily have been swamped in a massed attack.

Shortly after midday, the enemy came in direct contact with the inner ring of the redoubt.

We fired like maniacs. Every round of ammunition had been distributed. The Lewis guns jammed; rifle bolts grew stiff and unworkable with the expansion of heat.

In the lull before noon, the colonel and I had left the dugout, in which we were beginning to feel like rats in a trap, and had found an old gun-pit about two hundred and fifty yards further back, and here we established our headquarters. An extraordinary thing happened.

The gun-pit was dug out of the bank on the roadside. About two o'clock one of our guns, evidently assuming that Roupy had been evacuated, began to pound the road between Roupy and Fluquières. One of these shells landed clean on the road edge of our pit. We were all hurled to the ground by the explosion, but, on recovering ourselves, found only one casualty: the colonel had received a nasty gash in the forearm. We then went two hundred to three hundred yards across the open, away from the road, and found a smaller overgrown pit. The colonel refused to regard his wound as serious; but he soon began to feel dizzy, and was compelled to go back to the dressing-station. I was then left in charge of the battalion.

It was now about 2.30. The attack still persisted in a guerilla fashion. But the enemy was massing troops in the trenches already taken. At 4 p.m. the intensity of the attack deepened suddenly. A new intention had come into the enemy's mind: he was directing his attack on the flanks of our position in an effort to close round us like pincers. On the left he made use of cover offered by the ruined village, and eventually brought machine-guns to bear against us from our left rear. On the right he made use of the trenches evacuated by the Inniskillings.

In the height of this attack, while my heart was heavy with anxiety, I received a message from the brigade. Surely reinforcements were coming to our aid! Or was I at length given permission to withdraw? Neither: it was a rhetorical appeal to hold on to the last man. I rather bitterly resolved to obey the command.

Another hour passed. The enemy pressed on relentlessly with a determined, insidious energy, reckless of cost. Our position was now appallingly precarious. I therefore resolved to act independently, and do as perhaps I should have done hours earlier. I ordered B. to organise a withdrawal. This message despatched, I lay on my belly in the grass and watched through my field-glasses every minute trickling of the enemy's progress. Gradually they made their way round the rim of the redoubt, bombing along the traverses. And now we only held it as lips might touch the rim of a saucer. I could see the heads of my men, very dense and in a little space. And on either side, incredibly active, gathered the grey helmets of the Germans. It was like a long bowstring along the horizon, and our diminished forces the arrow to be shot into a void. A great many hostile machine-guns had now been brought up, and the plain was sprayed with hissing bullets. They impinged and spluttered about the little pit in which I crouched.

I waited anxiously for B. to take the open. I saw men crawl out of the trenches, and lie flat on the parados, still firing at the enemy. Then, after a little while, the arrow was launched. I saw a piteous band of men rise from the ground, and run rapidly towards me. A great shout went up from the Germans: a cry of mingled triumph and horror. 'Halt, Eenglisch!' they cried, and for a moment were too amazed to fire; as though aghast at the folly of men who could plunge into such a storm of death. But the first silent gasp

of horror expended, then broke the crackling storm. I don't remember in the whole war an intenser taste of hell. My men came along spreading rapidly to a line of some two hundred yards length, but bunched here and there. On the left, by the main road, the enemy rushed out to cut them off. Bayonets clashed there. Along the line men were falling swiftly as the bullets hit them. Each second they fell, now one crumpling up, now two or three at once. I saw men stop to pick up their wounded mates, and as they carried them along, themselves get hit and fall with their inert burdens. Now they were near me, so I rushed out of my pit and ran with them to the line of trenches some three hundred yards behind.

It seemed to take a long time to race across those few hundred yards. My heart beat nervously, and I felt infinitely weary. The bullets hissed about me, and I thought: then this is the moment of death. But I had no emotions. I remembered having read how in battle men are hit, and never feel the hurt till later, and I wondered it I had yet been hit. Then I reached the line. I stood petrified, enormously aghast. *The trench had not been dug, and no reinforcements occupied it.* It was as we had passed it on the morning of the 21st, the sods dug off the surface, leaving an immaculately patterned 'mock' trench. A hundred yards on the right a machine-gun corps had taken up a position, and was already covering our retreat. I looked about me wildly, running along the line and signalling to the men to drop as they reached the slender parapet of sods. But the whole basis of my previous tactics had been destroyed. I should never have ordered my men to cross that plain of death, but for the expectation that we were falling back to reinforce a new line. We found an empty mockery, and I was in despair. But I must

steady the line. On the actual plain the men obeyed my signals, and crouched in the shallow trench. But even as they crouched, the bullets struck them. On the road, the straight white road leading to the western safety, there was something like a stampede. S. and the sergeant-major went and held it with pointed revolvers. But it was all useless – hopeless. On the right, I saw the enemy creeping round. They would soon enfilade us, and then our shallow defence would be a death-trap. I accordingly gave the signal to withdraw, bidding the two Lewis guns to cover us as long as possible. Once more we rose and scattered in retreat. It would be about seven hundred yards to the next trenches – the village line round Fluquières – and this we covered fairly well, sections occasionally halting to give covering fire. The enemy had not yet ventured from the redoubt, and our distance apart was now great enough to make his fire of little effect. And I think as we moved up the slope towards the village we must have been in 'dead' ground, so far as the enemy advancing on the right was concerned.

We reached Fluquières, which lay on the top of the slope, and found there some deep trenches on each side of the road at the entrance of the village. Further to the left, I found certain London troops commanded by a major. One of my Lewis guns still remained intact, and this I placed to fire down the straight road to Roupy. The enemy had now left the redoubt and were advancing in line formation.

We were at Fluquières about an hour. The enemy evidently did not intend to rest content with his capture of the redoubt. It was just beginning to get dusk. Earlier we had noticed sporadic contact lights go up. But now they shot into the sky from all along the plain. Low-flying aeroplanes hovered over the advancing line,

and their wireless messages soon put the German guns on to us. Big black high-explosive shells began to fall on our position, making our tired flesh shudder. I now began to be amazed at the advancing contact lights. They did not merely stretch in a line in front of us: *they encircled us like a horse-shoe, the points of which seemed* (and actually were) *miles behind us.* On the right the enemy was enfilading us with machine-gun fire.

I searched for the major commanding the troops on my left, but could not find him. By this time I was determined to act, and therefore gave the order to withdraw. The men filed through the village, gathering fresh ammunition from a dump at the cross-roads. From the village the road went up a slope leading to Aubigny. The enemy's fire soon followed us, and we proceeded along the ditches on each side of the road.

Three-quarters of the way up the slope I observed a trench running at right angles to the road on each side of it. I ordered the London men to go to the left, my own to the right, there to reorganise into companies. The twilight was now fairly deep, and I thought that with evening the enemy's advance would stay. The major I had seen in Fluquières now appeared again, and cursed me for giving the order to retire. I was too tired to argue, and even then a gust of machine-gun fire swept above our heads. They were going to attack again. We could hear them moving in the semi-darkness. Something else we could hear too – the throb of a motor-cycle behind us. It was a dispatch rider, and when he drew level to us, he stopped his machine and came towards me with a message. I opened it. It ordered all troops east of the Aubigny defences to retire through Ham.

I was glad. I believe I thought then that it was the end of our share in the battle. I went to the men, and

assembled them in companies, and in close artillery formation we retired across country due west. We came to the Aubigny defences, manned by fresh troops, about a mile further on, and then we gathered on the road again and marched wearily along. I remember coming to a water-tank, where we all drank our fill – our mouths were swollen with thirst. When we reached Ham, an officer met us and ordered us to proceed to Muille Villette, about two miles further on, and there billet for the night. Ham, as we walked through its cobbled streets, seemed very hollow and deserted. The last time we had seen it, it had been a busy market-town, full of civilians. Now only a few sinister looters went about the empty houses with candles. We saw one fellow come out of a door with a lady's reticule and other things over his arm. We should have been justified in shooting him, but we were far too tired. We just noticed him stupidly.

The road seemed long, and our pace was slow, but at last we reached the village of Muille Villette. We found it full of artillery men, and a few infantry. Every available shelter seemed to be occupied, but at length we got the men into a school. Our transport had been warned of our station for the night, and turned up with bully-beef and biscuits. These we served out.

I had four officers left with me. We could not find a billet for ourselves, but finally begged for shelter in a barn occupied by artillery men. They looked on us unsympathetically, not knowing our experiences. On a stove one of them was cooking a stew of potatoes and meat, and its savour made us lusting beasts. But the artillery men ate the slop unconcernedly, while we lay down too utterly weary to sleep, languidly chewing bully-beef.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EXERCISES

Mons

1. Write down your impressions of the nature of the country over which this part of the Retreat was carried out.

2. From the indications given in this extract, describe the state of mind of the English soldiers taking part in the Retreat. If you have read 'Henry V,' compare your description with that given by Shakespeare of 'the poor condemned English' before the Battle of Agincourt.

3. Write a brief character sketch of the C.O.

4. Give your opinion of the treatment received by Herbert after he fell into the hands of the Germans.

5. A German soldier who took part in the Advance from Mons sends an account of his experiences to his people. Write the letter.

6. Mention a few striking metaphors and similes in this extract.

The Way of Revelation

1. Illustrate from this extract some of the different ways in which self-control and devotion to duty are tested in modern warfare.

2. Give an account of the noises heard during a battle.

3. Show how the author has suggested a background of silence in this passage. What is his aim in doing so?

4. Indicate the distinct phases into which the attack is divided.

5. Which interest you most in this section: the descriptions or the events?

Gallipoli

1. In what way does Masefield bring out the heroic spirit of the attackers?

2. What were the main difficulties to be contended with in this landing?

3. The second half of the extract seems to stir the imagination more deeply than the first half. Account for this.

4. Compare this attack from the sea with any other of which you have read (whether in the Great War or earlier).

5. Is there anything in the style of this passage to suggest that the author is a poet?

The Battle of the Slag-Heaps

1. What unusual features have you noticed in the nature of this battlefield?

2. Ian Hay says of this episode that it would be 'hard to find a better illustration of the character of the men who took part' in the Big Push. What characteristics of the British Officer and the British Tommy respectively does this passage reveal?

3. Indicate some of the touches of humour that occur in this passage.

4. What indications are there in this narrative that it was written immediately after the attack described?

5. On what does the success of an attack depend, in addition to the efforts of the soldiers actually engaging the enemy?

Good-Bye to All That

1. What aspects of the fighting described in this extract impress you most?

2. Illustrate from this passage the 'dehumanising' effects of war.

3. Compare this extract with the 'Battle of the Slag-Heaps.

4. Write a short essay on 'Chemical Warfare.'

Broadchalk

1. Indicate a few of the vivid word-pictures scattered through this extract. Does the author get his effects mainly by direct description or does he rely on simile and metaphor?

2. How do you account for the peculiar 'atmosphere' of this passage.

3. How many men start on this attack? How many are left with Broadchalk at the end? Comment on the author's clever use of statements of number. (Can you think of any well-known passage in the Bible where artistic use is made of a diminishing series of numbers?)

4. Write a continuation relating Broadchalk's experiences after being captured.

All for Peace and Quiet

1. Tell the story of the wire-cutting expedition in your own words.

2. Compare the characters of Toomey and Martin.

3. Illustrate (*a*) Montague's gift of humorous phrasing and description, (*b*) the Irish sense of humour as exhibited by Montague.

4. Point out a few examples in this story of Montague's use of long or unusual words. How does their presence influence the effect of the passages concerned?

5. Discuss the appropriateness of the title.

6. Write a short essay on 'Dialect.'

A Brigade Affair

1. What particular difficulties facing attackers in trench-warfare are especially stressed in this passage?

2. Show how the grimness of the general effect is relieved by humorous touches.

3. What means does Mottram employ to produce the effect of waste and futility?

4. Write a character-sketch of Skene, and indicate briefly how Long Thomas, Captain Castle and Mansfield are used as contrasts to him.

The Fighting at Jutland

1. How does a modern naval battle differ from sea-fights in earlier times?

2. Discuss the consequences, supposing we had been badly defeated in the Battle of Jutland (cf. G. M. Trevelyan's 'If Napoleon had won the Battle of Waterloo').

3. Discuss the part played by the submarine during the Great War.

4. Write an essay on 'The Freedom of the Seas.'

5. Subject for debate: Submarines versus Battleships.

Undertones of War

1. Describe some of the humours of Blunden's experiences as a soldier.

2. Discuss the little character-sketches scattered through this passage. Try your hand at characterizing some of your own acquaintances in this way.

3. Illustrate from this passage Blunden's power of finding beauty even in the midst of horror (e.g. his descriptions of the 'strange phenomena of fire').

4. 'Superstition could not be altogether thrust back.' Mention some of the legends and superstitions occasioned by the War.

5. Pick out a few of the striking descriptive phrases in this extract and try to account for their effectiveness.

All Our Yesterdays

1. What symbols does Tomlinson use to describe the different aspects of warfare with which he deals at the beginning of this passage? What do these symbols reveal about Tomlinson's attitude towards the War?

2. Indicate some of the devices of style and treatment by which Tomlinson produces a 'nightmarish' effect.

3. What do you understand by 'realism'? Do you consider this passage more remarkable as an example of (*a*) realistic, or (*b*) imaginative, writing?

4. What light does this extract throw on Tomlinson's choice of a title for his book?

An Adventure on the Somme

1. This extract is a particularly complete account of an attack from the first idea until the return to camp of the soldiers concerned. Carefully distinguish the different phases of the movement.

2. Does any little incident in this passage remind you of one in *All Our Yesterdays*? What light do these incidents throw on the responsibilities of an officer?

3. Describe the effect on the soldiers in the exposed trench of the uncertainty of their situation.

4. There is an element of unexpectedness about many of the sights and incidents described in this passage. Illustrate this.

5. Indicate the author's views on '"brave" men's firmness,' and add your own comment.

6. This account seems to bring us very close to the events narrated. Can you discover in the author's method of dealing with his material any reasons for this 'actuality' of effect?

Frank Honywood, Private

1. Indicate Frank's feelings at each stage of the action.

2. How do Frank's immediate impressions compare with his later ones?

3. How does the attitude of the men as they start out differ from that of the survivors?

4. Which other attack does this most closely resemble with regard (*a*) to the action, (*b*) to the effect on the writer?

Her Privates We

1. In what other work inspired by the War does an identification raid play a big part?

2. Compare Weeper's heroism with any other heroic action described in these extracts.

3. Compare the attitude of the survivors with that of the survivors in other extracts.

4. What resemblances do you notice between this passage and *All for Peace and Quiet*?

5. What qualities does such a raid as this put to the test?

These Men, Thy Friends

1. Explain the purpose of the raid described in this passage. What were its results?

2. Compare the preparation for the attack with any similar passage in other extracts.

3. Write a brief appreciation of the character of Hugh Mackay.

4. What is Hart's view of war? Is it justified by the story of the raid?

My Last Job on the Old Two-seaters

1. Which is the most exciting moment in this narrative?

2. Supposing that one of the men in the 'British scout' (which

was shot down) escaped, give his version of the episode in letter form.

3. In what other spheres besides that of flying did the War lead to valuable additions to knowledge?

4. Write an essay on 'Aircraft in War.'

The Long Trail

1. Describe any other attack made on a railway during the War.

2. Imagine you were living in Namur at the time of this raid and describe your experiences.

3. What do you know of the part played by Zeppelins during the War?

4. Write a description of your own neighbourhood as it would appear from the air.

In Retreat

1. Indicate the various stages of the German advance as described in this passage.

2. What were the most critical moments in this episode?

3. In what ways did the British plans go wrong?

4. Explain what is meant by a 'war of attrition.' What do you suppose were the main causes responsible for the termination of the War?

5. Do you agree that in modern warfare neither side wins?

6. Write an essay on 'False Alarms.'

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION (ORAL OR WRITTEN) AND ESSAYS

'The War to End War.'

'Making the World safe for Democracy.'

'A Land Fit for Heroes to Live In.'

'A revelation of the spirit of man, and a strong argument for the future expression of heroism and self-sacrifice in better fields.' (E. Blunden on War Books.)

'War remains at best a nauseous blasphemy.' (H. Quigley.)

'War, which drives human nature to its last resources, is a great engine of education.' (Sir W. Raleigh.)

'A merely defensive attitude is a losing attitude.' (Sir W. Raleigh.)

The Results of the Great War.

War Propaganda.

Is democracy less warlike than other forms of government?

Scraps of Paper.

Si vis pacem. . . .

Disarmament.

The Conference Habit.

The League of Nations.

GLOSSARY

[My thanks are due to Capt. H. G. Barwood for valuable help in compiling this glossary. E. R.]

Accessory – poison-gas discharged before an attack.

Adjutant – officer who acts as channel of communication between C.O. of a battalion and other officers, whether of the same battalion or not.

Archie – abbreviation of 'Archibald,' a name in a song popular just before the War; facetiously applied to anti-aircraft guns and their shells.

Bank (of an aeroplane) – to turn so that one wing is higher than the other.

Barrage – a line or screen of concentrated gunfire intended to render a given position untenable, or clear the way for advancing troops.

Battalion – military unit nominally of 1,000 men, four battalions forming a brigade.

Bay (or fire-bay) – part of trench from which men fire.

Blighty – England, home, or a wound bad enough for the wounded man to be sent back to England (from a Hindustani word meaning 'foreign land').

Boche – slang word for 'German,' used first by the French: said to be derived from 'caboche' (slang for 'head,' from Latin 'caput'). An intermediate form 'Alboche' (by analogy with 'Allemand') is found. The transference of meaning may have arisen from the phrase 'tête de boche,' meaning a pig-headed person.

Bomb-stop – another name for 'traverse.'

British Warm – short military overcoat.

Bully-beef – corned beef in tins, hardly any other meat being available in the trenches. The 'iron' or emergency rations consisted of one tin of 'bully' and hard biscuits.

Bus – airmen's slang term for aeroplanes.

Cable-trench – trench in which telephone-wires were buried.

Camouflage – means used to conceal the position or nature of an object, e.g. a gun, by disguising it with boughs or covering it with wire-netting to which pieces of rag (often brown or green in colour) were tied; a ship or aeroplane, by painting stripes and splashes of colour on it.

Canteen – mess-tin, in which food was received and sometimes cooked; also, large tent behind the lines for recreation and for the purchase of food, cigarettes, etc.

C.O. – Commanding Officer.

C.T. – communication-trench.

Deploy – to change formation from column into line (of troops or of ships).

Division – army unit of about 20,000 men, including all branches of the service.

Duckboard – track made of two lengths of wood placed parallel to one another and joined by flat wooden cross-pieces; used to give a footing in the trenches and over muddy tracks.

Dug-out – an excavation in the side or floor of a trench to provide protection, especially from shell-fire.

Dum-dum – bullet with tip of nickel casing filed so as to expose lead core; this caused it to expand on impact and so inflict a horrible wound. (Dumdum is a town in India where bullets were made.)

Embusqué – man who shirked active fighting by getting a 'soft job' behind the lines or at home.

Emma – lengthened form of letter M, used by signallers when telephoning to avoid confusion (Toc for T was another common one which has survived in Toc H = Talbot House, the original headquarters of the society at Ypres).

Emma G – slang for Machine Gun from signallers' way of saying M.G.

Emplacement – gun-platform.

Enfilade – fire sweeping down a trench or line of men from a flank.

Fire-step – raised ledge in front wall of trench on which men could stand to observe or fire.

Fire-trench – front-line trench from which fire may be directed.

Five-point-nine – gun of 5.9 ins. calibre, or a shell from one.

Funk-hole – shallow dug-out.

Fuselage – tapering body or framework of aeroplane.

G.H.Q. – General Head-Quarters: the head-quarters of the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, the nerve-centre of the army.

Grenade – a kind of bomb, thrown by hand (or from a rifle), which exploded at a given interval after the pin was removed and the catch released (or on contact). One could be thrown about twenty or thirty yards.

H.E. – high explosive.

Howitzer – a piece of ordnance with a short barrel, firing heavy shells at a high angle and thus dropping them on the target.

Ikey – clever, cunning (from slang name for Jew = Isaac).

Jerry – familiar slang form of 'German.'

Joystick – airmen's slang for control-lever of aeroplane.

Keep – a position fortified to enable a few men to resist attack from all directions (cf. Redoubt).

Kiltie – jocular name for Highland soldier.

Lachrymous or lachrymatory shell – one which on exploding released tear-gas, thus temporarily blinding those affected by it.

Lewis-gun – light, air-cooled machine-gun, firing a drum of forty-seven rounds (named after inventor).

Lyddite – high explosive, manufactured from picric acid and used in shells (named from Lydd in Kent, where it was first tested).

Mace – sort of club with a spiked head.

Maxim-gun – machine-gun in use at the beginning of the War (named after inventor).

Monitor – a heavily gunned and armoured warship of shallow draught, used along the Belgian coast and on the Tigris.

No Man's Land – the waste area between the trenches of the two armies, belonging to neither.

Parados – mound along rear wall of trench.

Parapet – rampart in front of trench, formed of earth and sandbags.

Pavé – roadway formed of oblong stone blocks, common in France and very rough to walk or ride over.

Periscope – apparatus of tubes and mirrors used in submarines and in the trenches, for seeing above the surface or the parapet.

Platoon – infantry unit of about thirty men commanded by a subaltern.

Plonk – the mud of No Man's Land.

Pontoon bridge – bridge supported on hollow, water-tight metal cylinders.

R.A.M.C. – Royal Army Medical Corps.

Ration-party – men bringing up food to the trenches.

Redoubt – trench position strongly fortified for all-round defence.

Respirator – gas-mask; more particularly the part filled with chemicals to enable wearer to breathe during a gas-attack.

Revet – to face or support wall of trench with brushwood, props, wire-netting, etc.

Ricochet – skipping or bounding motion of bullet or shell.

Rookie – slang corruption of 'recruit.'

Salient – part of trench-system bulging or projecting in the direction of the enemy.

Salvo – simultaneous discharge of guns.

Sandbag – small sack filled with earth; sandbags were laid in courses like bricks.

Sap – short trench jutting forward from main trench.

Sapper – private in the Royal Engineers.

Shrapnel – shell timed to burst in the air and spray enemy position with the bullets contained in it and fragments of case.

S.A.A. – small arms ammunition (i.e. for rifles and machine-guns).

Squadron – division of cavalry regiment, or group of aeroplanes.

Stall (of aeroplane) – lose steadiness through loss of speed.

Stand-to – standing-to-arms for one hour at dawn and at dusk as preparation to meet a possible attack.

Star-shell – one which gave a bright light on bursting and thus lit up enemy's position.

Straddle – to drop shells on both sides of a given position or ship (frequent when finding range).

Strafe – from the German catch-phrase, 'Gott strafe (chastise, punish) England'; to punish or reprimand, and especially to bombard heavily. Also used as a noun.

Subaltern – officer below the rank of captain.

Sump-pit – pit dug to drain trench.

Toc – see Emma.

Toc Emma bomb – one fired from a trench-mortar (T.M.).

Tommy's cooker – small spirit-stove.

Traverse – bank of earth breaking line of trench and separating fire-bays, left to prevent enfilading and to localise effects of shell-fire; (verb) to sweep whole frontage of target with fire.

Trench-mortar – short-barrelled, high-angle gun throwing bombs at short range.

Turret – revolving gun-tower on warship.

Vermoral-sprayer – apparatus for spraying chemicals to counteract effects of gas.

Very (*Verey*) *-light* – a kind of flare fired from a pistol, to light up enemy position or for signalling purposes.

Vickers – standard water-cooled machine-gun in use during the War; fired from tripod-mounting and capable of long-sustained action and, like artillery, could be trained on invisible target. Range of 2,900 yards.

Whizz-bang – a light, short-range shell, which exploded as soon as it was heard.

Zero-time (Zero-hour) – the moment fixed for opening a bombardment or an attack.