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IN THE LINE OF BATTLE

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

The narratives in this volume, which is a companion to my *Soldiers' Stories of the War*, are told on exactly the same lines as those which were adopted for that collection. There was a personal interview to get the teller's own tale; then the writing, the object being to act as the soldier's other self; and finally the submission to him of the typescript, so that he could revise and become responsible for the completed work.

In dealing with these records I have tried to be a faithful interpreter or reproducer of a tale that has been told to me. I have invited a man to tell his story as it came into his mind, and to look upon me simply as a means of putting it into concrete and coherent form, and as a medium between himself and the reader. The greatest difficulty that had to be overcome was a narrator's reluctance to speak of his own achievements, though he never failed to wax enthusiastic when telling of the doings of his comrades. Nothing has left a deeper impression on my mind than the generous praise which a gunner, say, has bestowed upon the infantry, and the blessings that the infantry have invoked upon the gunners. Never in any of Great Britain's wars has there been such an exhibition of universal esprit de corps as we have witnessed in this stupendous conflict between civilisation and freedom and cultured barbarism and tyranny.

Nothing could have been more encouraging to me as compiler and editor of these true tales than the generous praise that was given to the companion volume. I am grateful to all my critics, who, without exception, so far as I know, welcomed and accepted the work for what it professed to be – an honest contribution on behalf of soldiers to the history of the war.

I set out to do a certain thing – to act as pilot to members of a wondrous band who found themselves in unknown waters, and I succeeded past my utmost expectations. I am proud to think that any act of mine has put on record the doings of patriotic men who have fought so nobly for their country; and thankful to feel that I have been the means of getting for his relatives and friends and all the rest of us the experiences of more than one fine fellow who since I saw him has answered the roll-call for the last time.

Walter Wood.

CHAPTER I
HOW TROOPER POTTS WON THE V.C. ON BURNT HILL

[As part of the operations in Gallipoli, it was decided to bombard and attack a very strongly fortified Turkish position near Suvla Bay – a sector stretching from Hill 70 to Hill 112. The frontal attack was a desperate enterprise, as the Turks had dug themselves in up to the neck in two lines of trenches of exceptional strength. The attack was made on the afternoon of August 21st, 1915, after a bombardment by battleships and heavy land batteries. It was in the course of this advance that the teller of this story, Trooper Frederick William Owen Potts, of the 1/1st Berkshire Yeomanry (Territorial Force), was struck down, and later performed the unparalleled act for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. For nearly fifty hours Trooper Potts remained under the Turkish trenches with a severely wounded and helpless comrade, "although he could himself have returned to safety," says the official record. Finally the trooper, in the extraordinary manner which he now describes, saved his comrade's life. Trooper Potts is only twenty-two years old, and is the first Yeoman to win the most coveted of all distinctions.]

I saw a good deal of the Turks before we came to grips with them near Suvla Bay. I had gone out to Egypt with my regiment, the Berkshire Yeomanry, and for about four months we were doing garrison work and escort work for Turks who had been captured in Gallipoli and the Dardanelles and sent as prisoners of war to Egypt. Our place was not far from Cairo. I was greatly struck by the size and physique of the Turks. There were some very fine big men amongst them – in fact, I should think the average height was close on six feet.

We had taken our horses out to Egypt with us, and all our work in that country was done with them; but as the weeks went by, and no call came to us for active service, we became disappointed, and got into the way of singing a song which the poet of the regiment had specially composed, and of which the finish of every verse was the line —

"The men that nobody wants,"

this meaning that there was no use for us as cavalry in the fighting area. But when the four months had gone, the order suddenly came for us to go to Gallipoli. By that time we had got acclimatised, a point we appreciated later, as the heat was intense and the flies were very troublesome.

From Alexandria we sailed in a transport, which occupied four days in reaching Gallipoli. Here we were transhipped to trawlers and barges, and immediately found ourselves in the thick of one of the most tremendous bombardments the world has ever known. Battleships were firing their big guns, which made a terrific noise, and there was other continual firing of every known sort. We were very lucky in our landing, because we escaped some of the heaviest of the gun-fire. The Turks could see us, though we had no sight of them, and whenever a cluster of us was spotted, a shell came crashing over. Thus we had our baptism of fire at the very start.

We were in an extraordinarily difficult country, and whatever we needed in the way of food and drink we had to carry with us – even the water. Immense numbers of tins had been filled from the Nile and taken to Gallipoli in barges, and this was the water we used for drinking purposes, as well as water which was condensed from the sea, and kept in big tanks on the shore. Every drop of water we needed had to be fetched from the shore, and this work proved about the hardest and most

dangerous of any we had to do after landing and taking up our position on a hill. Several of our chaps were knocked over in this water-fetching work.

While we were at this place we were employed in making roads from Suvla Bay to Anzac, and hard work it was, because the country was all rocks. We had landed light, without blankets or waterproofs, so that we felt the intense cold of the nights very much.

We had a week of this sort of thing, under fire all the time. I think it was on a Sunday we landed, and a week later we heard that we were to take part in the attack on Hill 70, or, as we called it, because of its appearance, Burnt Hill. There were immense quantities of a horrible sort of scrub on it, and a great deal of this stuff had been fired and charred by gun-fire. I little knew then how close and long an acquaintance I was to make with the scrub on Hill 70.

It was about five o'clock in the evening when the great news came. We were to be ready at seven, and ready we were, glad to be in it. We did not know much, but we understood that we were to take our places in some reserve trenches. Night comes quickly in those regions, and when the day had gone we moved round to Anzac, marching along the roads which we had partially made. We reached Anzac at about two o'clock in the morning, in pitch darkness.

We had a pick and two shovels to four men, and took it in turn to carry them. Each man also carried two hundred rounds of ammunition, so that we were pretty well laden. When we reached Anzac Cove we moved in right under the cliffs, which go sheer down to the sea; but there is practically no tide, so that the beach is safe. The only way to reach the shore was to go in single file down a narrow, twisting pathway.

We were on the beach till about two o'clock in the afternoon, when we were ordered to be ready with our packs, and we went up the cliff, again in single file, forming up when we reached the top. Then we went a mile or so along the road we had marched over the night before – all part of the scheme of operations, I take it. Then we cut across to our right and saw a plain called Salt Lake, where we watched a division going into action under heavy shrapnel fire.

We were now in the thick of the awful country which I was to know so well. The surface was all sand and shrubs, and the great peculiarity of the shrubs was that they were very much like our holly trees at home, though the leaves were not so big, but far more prickly. These shrubs were about three feet high, and they were everywhere; but they did not provide any real cover. There were also immense numbers of long creepers and grass, and a lot of dust and dirt. The heat was fearful, so that you can easily understand how hard it was to get along when we were on the move. These obstacles proved disastrous to many of our chaps when they got into the zone of fire, for the shrapnel set the shrubs ablaze. This meant that many a brave fellow who was hit during the fighting on Hill 70 fell among the burning furze and was burned to death where he lay.

As we were waiting for our turn, we could see the other chaps picking their way through this burning stuff, and charging on towards the Turkish trenches. When our own turn came, the scrub was burning less fiercely, and to some extent we were able to choose our way and avoid the blazing patches. We ran whenever we got the chance, making short rushes; but when we got into the real zone of fire, we never stopped until we were under the protection of Chocolate Hill.

For half an hour we rested at the foot of this hill. From our position we could not see the Turks, who were entrenched over the top; but their snipers were out and bothering us a good deal. It was impossible to see these snipers, because they hid themselves most cunningly in the bushes, and had their faces and rifles painted the same colour as the surrounding objects. However, we levelled up matters by sending out our own sniping parties.

We were on the move again as soon as we had got our breath back. We still understood, as we moved to the left of Chocolate Hill, that we were going to occupy reserve trenches. We went through a field of ripe wheat. About two yards in front of me was a mate of mine, Reginald West. I saw him struck in the thigh by a sniper's bullet, which went in as big as a pea, and came out the size of a five-shilling piece. It was an explosive bullet, one of many that were used against us by the Turks, under

their German masters. In a sense West was lucky, because when he was struck down he fell right on the edge of a dug-out, and I heard one of the men shout, “Roll over, mate! Roll over! You’ll drop right in here!” And he did.

The rest of us went on, though in the advance we lost a number of men. Some were killed outright; some were killed by shells and bullets after they had fallen wounded, and some had to lie where they had fallen and do the best they could. We pushed ahead till we struck Hill 70 again.

When we got to the reserve trenches I asked a chap how far away the Turks were, and he answered, “About a thousand yards,” but I don’t think it was as much as that.

Now we began to ascend Hill 70 in short spurts, halting from time to time. We had fairly good cover, because the scrub was not on fire, though several parts had been burnt out. During one of these halts we were ordered to fix bayonets.

We had found shelter in a bit of a gulley, and were pretty well mixed up with other regiments – the Borders, Dorsets, and so on. We first got the idea that we were going to charge from an officer near us; but he was knocked out – with a broken arm, I believe – before the charge came off. He was just giving us the wheeze about the coming charge when a bullet struck him.

How did the charge begin? Well, an officer shouted, as far as I can recollect, “Come on, lads! We’ll give ‘em beans!” That is not exactly according to drill-books and regulations as I know them; but it was enough. It let the boys loose, and they simply leapt forward and went for the Turkish trenches. It was not to be my good fortune to get into them, however; in fact, I did not get very far after the order to charge was given.

I had gone perhaps twenty or thirty yards when I was knocked off my feet. I knew I was hit. I had a sort of burning sensation; but whether I was hit in the act of jumping, or whether I jumped because I was hit, I do not know. What I *do* know is that I went up in the air, came down again, and lay where I fell. I knew that I had been shot at the top of the left thigh, the bullet going clean through and just missing the artery and the groin by an eighth of an inch, as the doctor told me later.

Utterly helpless, I lay there for about three-quarters of an hour, while the boys rushed round me and scattered in the charge. This happened about a quarter of a mile from the top of the hill. I propped myself up on my arm and watched the boys charging.

I heard later, from a man who was with me in hospital at Malta – he had been struck deaf and dumb, for the time being, amongst other things – that the boys got into the Turkish third trench and that the Turks bolted. He told me that when they reached this third trench there were only seventeen Berkshire boys left to hold it. The enemy seemed to get wind of this; then it looked as if all the Turkish army was going for the seventeen, and they had no alternative but to clear out.

After the charge I saw this handful come back down the hill, quite close to where I was lying. I had fallen in a sort of little thicket, a cluster of the awful scrub which was like holly, but much worse. I was thankful for it, however, because it gave me a bit of shelter and hid me from view.

I had been lying there about half an hour when I heard a noise near me and saw that a poor wounded chap, a trooper of the Berkshires, was crawling towards me. I recognised him as a fellow-townsman.

“Is that you, Andrews?” I asked.

He simply answered “Yes.” That was all he could get out.

“I’m jolly pleased you’ve come,” I said, and Andrews crawled as close as he could get, and we lay there, perfectly still, for about ten minutes. Andrews had been shot through the groin, a very dangerous wound, and he was suffering terribly and losing a great deal of blood.

We had been together for a few minutes when another trooper – a stranger to me – crawled up to our hiding-place. He had a wound in the leg. We were so cramped for space under the thicket, that Andrews had to shift as best he could, to make room for the newcomer. That simple act of mercy saved his life, for the stranger had not been with us more than ten minutes when a bullet went through

both his legs and mortally wounded him. He kept on crying for water; but we had not a drop amongst the three of us, and could not do anything to quench his awful thirst.

That fearful afternoon passed slowly, with its grizzling heat and constant fighting, and the night came quickly. The night hours brought us neither comfort nor security, for a full moon shone, making the countryside as light as day. The cold was intense. The stranger was practically unconscious and kept moving about, which made our position worse, because every time he moved the Turks banged at us.

I was lying absolutely as flat as I could, with my face buried in the dirt, for the bullets were peppering the ground all around us, and one of them actually grazed my left ear – you can see the scar it has made, just over the top. This wound covered my face with blood. Was I scared or frightened? I can honestly say that I was not. I had got beyond that stage, and almost as a matter of course I calmly noted the details of everything that happened.

Throughout the whole of that unspeakable night this poor Bucks Hussar chap hung on. He kept muttering, "Water! Water!" But we could not give him any. When the end came he simply lay down and died right away, and his dead body stayed with us, for we could neither get away nor move him.

During the whole of the next day we lay in our hiding-place, suffering indescribably. The sun, thirst, hunger, and our wounds, all added to our pain. In our desperation we picked bits off the stalks of the shrubs and tried to suck them; but we got no relief in that way.

The whole of the day went somehow – with such slowness that it seemed as if it would never end. It was impossible to sleep – fighting was going on all the time, and the noise was terrific. We could not see anything of our boys, and we knew that it was impossible for any stretcher-bearers to get through to us, because we were a long way up the hill and no stretcher-bearers could venture out under such a terrible fire.

Night came again at last, and Andrews and myself decided to shift, if it was humanly possible to do so, because it was certain death from thirst and hunger to remain where we were, even if we escaped from bullets. So I began to move away by crawling, and Andrews followed as best he could. I would crawl a little way and wait till Andrews, poor fellow, could crawl up to me again. We wriggled like snakes, absolutely flat on the ground and with our faces buried in the stifling dirt.

We managed to wriggle about three hundred yards that night – as near as I can judge. Starting at about a quarter past six, as soon as the day was done, it was about three in the morning when we decided to rest, so that if we had really done three hundred yards we had crawled at the rate of only thirty-three yards an hour!

A great number of rifles were lying about – weapons which had been cast aside in the charge, or had belonged to fallen soldiers; but most of them were quite out of working order, because they were clogged up with dust and dirt. I tried many of them, and at last found one that seemed to be in good working order, and to my joy I came across about fifty rounds of ammunition. Another serviceable rifle was found, so that Andrews and myself were filled with a new hope.

"We'll die like Britons, at any rate!" said Andrews. "We'll give a good account of ourselves before we go!" And I agreed with him.

We were now some distance from the Turks, and I was terribly anxious to shoot at them; but Andrews was more cautious. "If you fire they'll discover us, and we shall be done for!" he said. Then we shook hands fervently, because we both believed that this was the last of us, and I know that in thought we both went back to our very early days and offered up our silent prayers to God.

We had managed to crawl to a bit of shelter which was given by some burnt-out scrub, and here we tried to snatch some sleep, for we were both worn out. We went to sleep, for the simple reason that we could not keep awake; but I suddenly awoke, because the cold was intense and I was nearly frozen. Luckily there were a lot of empty sandbags lying about, and I got two or three of these and put them on top of us; but they were really no protection from the bitter air.

When the morning came we made a move, and for the first time we were able to get some water; but only by taking the water-bottles from the poor chaps who had been knocked out.

Then we crept back to our shelter, finding immense relief from drinking the water we had got, though it was quite warm and was, I fancy, from the Nile.

We slept, or tried to sleep, there for the rest of that night, and stayed in the place till next morning. We must have been in what is called “dead ground,” a region which cannot be seen or touched by either side, and so it proved to be, for in the early morning there was a real battle and the bullets were singing right over our heads.

“There’s more lead flying about than there was yesterday,” said Andrews; and really some of the bullets were splashing quite close to us – within six feet, I think, though there were not many that came so near.

Andrews was bleeding terribly – every time he moved he bled; but I did the best I could for him with my iodine – I dressed him with mine, and he dressed me with his, and splendid stuff it is. Though we had nothing to eat we did not really feel hungry now – we were past the eating stage. I was very lucky in having four cigarettes and some matches and I risked a smoke, the sweetest I ever had in my life.

Again we stuck the awful day through.

I was terribly anxious to move and get out of it all at any cost; but still Andrews was very cautious. “No, we won’t try till it gets dark,” he said. I felt that he was right, and so we waited, as patiently as we could, for the night. Three or four yards from us was an inviting-looking bush, and we crawled towards it, thinking it would help us to get away and give us shelter; but at the end of our adventure we discovered that we had done no more than crawl to the bush, crawl round it, and get back to our original hiding-place; so we decided to give up the attempt to get away just then.

When the third night on the hill came we were fairly desperate, knowing that something would have to be done if we meant to live, and that certain death awaited us where we were. We had nothing to eat, and the only drink was the water, which was frightful stuff – I believe it was Nile water which had been brought. But though it was, we were thankful to have it. The water was warm, because of the heat, and was about the colour of wine.

We did not for a moment suppose that we should live to reach the British lines, which we believed to be not far away; but we risked everything on the effort, and in the moonlight we began to wriggle off. We had managed to get no more than half a dozen yards when Andrews had to give it up. I myself, though I was the stronger and better of the two, could scarcely crawl. Every movement was a torture and a misery, because of the thorns that stuck into us from the horrible scrub.

We had kept the sandbags, and with my help Andrews managed to get them over his arms and up to his shoulders. I fastened them with the pieces of string they have, and these gave him a good deal of protection, though the thorns got through and punished us cruelly. I was picking them out of my hands for three weeks afterwards.

Having crawled these half-dozen yards, we gave up the attempt altogether, and did not know what to do. We could see a cluster of trees not far away, about a hundred yards, and there was one that looked fairly tall.

“If we can get to that tree,” said Andrews, “I could lie there, if I had some water, and perhaps you could strike some of our chaps and bring help.” I had little hope from such an effort as that. Then Andrews unselfishly urged me to look after myself; but, of course, I would not dream of leaving him. I offered to carry him, and I tried, but I was far too weak.

What in the world was to be done? How were we to get out of this deadly place? There seemed no earthly hope of escape, when, literally like an inspiration, we thought we saw a way out.

Just near us was an ordinary entrenching shovel, which had been dropped, or had belonged to some poor chap who had fallen – I can’t say which, but there it was. I crawled up and got hold of

it, and before we quite knew what was happening, Andrews was resting on it, and I was doing my best to drag him out of danger.

I cannot say whose idea this was, but it is quite likely that Andrews thought of it first. He sat on the shovel as best he could – he was not fastened to it – with his legs crossed, the wounded leg over the sound one, and he put his hands back and clasped my wrists as I sat on the ground behind and hauled away at the handle. Several times he came off, or the shovel fetched away, and I soon saw that it would be impossible to get him away in this fashion.

When we began to move the Turks opened fire on us; but I hardly cared now about the risk of being shot, and for the first time since I had been wounded I stood up and dragged desperately at the shovel, with Andrews on it. I managed to get over half a dozen yards, then I was forced to lie down and rest. Andrews needed a rest just as badly as I did, for he was utterly shaken and suffered greatly.

We started again at about a quarter past six, as soon as the night came, and for more than three mortal hours we made this strange journey down the hillside; and at last, with real thankfulness, we reached the bottom and came to a bit of a wood. Sweet beyond expression it was to feel that I could walk upright, and that I was near the British lines. This knowledge came to me suddenly when there rang through the night the command: “Halt!”

I obeyed – glorious it was to hear that challenge in my native tongue, after what we had gone through. Then this good English sentry said, “Come up and be recognised!” not quite according to the regulation challenge, but good enough – and he had seen us quite clearly in the moonshine.

Up I went, and found myself face to face with the sentry, whose rifle was presented ready for use, and whose bayonet gleamed in the cold light.

“What are you doing?” said the sentry. “Are you burying the dead?”

I saw that he was sentry over a trench, and I went to the top of it and leaned over the parapet and said, “Can you give me a hand?”

“What’s up?” said the sentry, who did not seem to realise what had actually happened – and how could he, in such a strange affair?

“I’ve got a chap out here wounded,” I told him, “and I’ve dragged him down the hill on a shovel.”

The sentry seemed to understand like a flash. He walked up to the trench, and when I had made myself clear, three or four chaps bustled round and got a blanket, and I led them to the spot where I had left Andrews lying on the ground. We lifted him off the shovel, put him on the blanket, and carried him to the trench. These men were, I think, Inniskilling Fusiliers, and they did everything for us that human kindness could suggest. They gave me some rum and bully beef and biscuit, and it was about the most delightful meal I ever had in my life, because I was famishing and I was safe, with Andrews, after those dreadful hours on the hillside, which seemed as if they would never end.

When we had rested and pulled round a bit, we were put on stretchers and carried to the nearest dressing-station. Afterwards we were sent to Malta, where Andrews is, I believe, still in hospital.

The granting of the Victoria Cross for what I had done came as a complete surprise to me, because it never struck me that I had done more than any other British soldier would have done for a comrade.

I never lost heart during the time I was lying on Hill 70. All the old things came clearly up in my mind, and many an old prayer was uttered, Andrews joining in. We never lost hope that some way out of our peril would be found – and it seemed as if our prayers had been answered by giving us this inspiration of the shovel.

CHAPTER II
A PRISONER OF WAR IN GERMANY

[For nine weary months, including the whole of an uncommonly bitter winter, the teller of this story, Corporal Oliver H. Blaze, 1st Battalion Scots Guards, was a prisoner of war in Germany. Corporal Blaze was on outpost when he was severely wounded and captured, and his subsequent experiences give proof that in this momentous struggle we are fighting a people who are incapable of understanding the laws of honourable combat, and who, in the interests of humanity and civilisation, must be crushed. Corporal Blaze is a fine type of the splendid Guardsmen who have done so much in this great war to add to their own glory and the noble reputation of the British Army.]

I hardly know where to begin my story, but perhaps I might start with a little tale of an air fight, because a night or two ago I happened to be in the streets when German airships raided London, and I could not help recalling the difficulty of hitting even a huge object like a Zeppelin in the night-time.

In the early days of September 1914, when we had got used to fighting, the battalion was on the march when a German aeroplane, decorated with two Iron Crosses, was sighted. At that time we were more than a thousand strong, and the lot of us opened fire with our rifles, rattling away with rapid fire, so that we soon accounted for about fifteen thousand rounds. At the same time another battalion not far away was on the job, so that a perfect fusillade was going on. The firing was tremendous, but it seemed as if the machine would not be touched. At last, however, the aeroplane was brought down, the observer being dead and the other man severely burnt and wounded. I do not know whether it was our battalion or the other which got the machine; but I called to mind the great difficulty of hitting an aircraft when I watched the raid on London. I was walking along, too pleasantly occupied to be thinking of war, and did not know of the affair until I reached a street corner and saw the people craning their necks skywards, watching the airship and the shells that were bursting under it.

Mons, Cambrai, the Marne and the like make an old, old story by this time, so I will get on to the tale of my nine months' captivity in Germany, as a prisoner of war.

It is common knowledge now that the Germans never lost a chance of trying to do something by treachery and trickery and not playing the game. Killed and wounded English soldiers were robbed of their coats by the Germans, who took them for their own use; and dressed in these coats the enemy on several occasions tried to get near us, to their heavy cost, when we got accustomed to the dodge.

One day, early in September, not long after we had gone out with the Expeditionary Force, a German machine-gun brigade came along, dressed in our uniform. We thought they were reinforcements, so we let them get very close and they occupied a ridge on our left. Ten minutes afterwards they opened fire on us; but our garrison artillery soon shifted them with sixty-pounders. The Germans killed a lot of the Coldstreams that day by this trick.

It was not long after this that we had one of those experiences which have been so often known in this great war. We were marching along in brigade column, with the Black Watch or Coldstreams, I am not sure which, leading. We were going through an area which had been reported all clear, and had got to a bend in the road, when the Germans started shelling us. It was one of those swift happenings which cannot be avoided in such a war as this, and before we fully realised what was taking place, a shell had burst and killed four stretcher-bearers of the Coldstreams, the N.C.O. who was in charge, and a wounded man who was being carried on a stretcher; and the same shell wounded a man in our front section of fours. That one shell did a fair lot of havoc, and it was quickly followed by several more; but these did not do much mischief.

What struck me most in this little affair was the coolness of our C.O., Colonel Lowther, now a brigadier-general. He personally conducted every company from the left of the road into a ditch on the right of the road.

"Keep cool, men," he said, "and come this way." And we did keep cool, for the colonel took the direction of everything, in spite of the shelling, just as calmly as if he was carrying out a battalion parade at home – a really wonderful performance at a time like that, and one which completely steadied the lot of us, though we had got pretty well used to things.

But the Germans did not have a look in for long, for the Kilties got hold of the gunners and chased them off. I did not see much of it, except in the distance; but we heard the shouting as the Jocks got to work with their bayonets.

As we were going along the road we saw where the Germans had put out of action a whole battery of our artillery which was standing at the side of the road. The weather was dull and it started to drizzle, so that it was not easy to distinguish troops. While the battery was being knocked out some of our fellows – the Loyal North Lancashire, I think – were advancing across a field. To protect themselves from the rain they had covered themselves with their waterproof sheets. Seeing them, and not being able to tell who they were, but believing them to be Germans, our gunners opened fire on them; but what damage they did I don't know. That was another of those things that will happen in war, and it could hardly be helped, for about this time it was a common dodge of the Germans to disguise themselves in British uniforms and attack us before we could tumble to the trick.

When we had crossed the Aisne and had got into the hills we had grown wary, and in crossing fields and open spaces we went in artillery formation, or "blobbing," as it is called. This "blobbing" was a splendid way of saving the lives of men when we were under fire, for it kept us in platoons closed, but 200 yards between each platoon, and so enabled us to escape a good many of the bursting shells.

We went along a whole stretch of country till we reached a small village and billeted there. In the morning we were on the move again, driving the Germans from one crest to another, but their position was too strong for us to shift them any farther, and then it was a long monotonous job of hanging on and waiting. They are practically in the same place now.

We did a lot of bayonet work from time to time; but I can't say much about it. I know that in one affair I saw a German. I stuck and he stuck – and I don't remember any more – one goes insane. I got a bang on the back of the head from somebody, though I thought at the time that a stone had been thrown and had struck me. I remember that day well – September 14th – because in addition to the charge I saw a Jack Johnson for the first time, though we christened them Black Marias and Coal-boxes then. This monster burst amongst some French Algerian troops, and shot a lot of them up into the air, literally blowing the poor devils to pieces.

On October 19th we marched away and moved by train, finally getting to Ypres. We dug trenches in a ditch on the night of the 22nd and occupied them, and on the morning of the 23rd I went on outpost duty, little dreaming of the fate that was in store for me. At that time shells were dropping very heavily between our line of trenches and a village not far away which was supposed to be occupied by the French.

It was about six o'clock in the morning when I went out with my patrol, of which I was corporal in charge. There were four of us altogether, and we were put on outpost duty in what proved to be a very warm corner. The shelling went on all day, and we were looking forward to our relief; but it did not happen to come, and so we had to hold on. The day passed and the night came, and it was not long after darkness that we knew that a strong rush was being made on us by the enemy – they proved to be the 213th Landwehr Battalion of Prussian Infantry.

I saw that we were being rushed, and I knew that our chance of escape was hopeless. I thought very swiftly just then, and my thought was, "We can't get away, so we may as well stick it. If we bolt we shall be shot in the back – and we might just as well be shot in the front; it looks better."

They were on us before we knew where we were, and to make matters worse, they rushed upon us from the direction of the village where we supposed the French to be.

There was a scrap, short and sweet, between our outpost and the Germans, and almost in the twinkling of an eye, it seemed, two of my men were killed, one got away, and I was wounded and captured.

A bullet struck me in the right arm and I fell down, and the Germans were on me before I knew what was happening. I still had my equipment on, and to this fact and the prompt kind act of a wounded German – let us be fair and say that not all Germans are brutes: there are a few exceptions – I owe my life, for as soon as I fell a Prussian rushed at me and made a drive with his bayonet. Just as he did so, a wounded German who was lying on the ground near me grabbed me and gave me a lug towards him. At this instant the bayonet jabbed at me and struck between the equipment and my wounded arm, just touching my side. The equipment and the wounded German's pull had prevented the bayonet from plunging plump into me and killing me on the spot, for the steel, driven with such force, would have gone clean through my chest. That was the sort of tonic to buck you up, and I didn't need a second prick to make me spring to my feet.

I jumped up, and had no sooner done so than a second bullet struck me on the wounded arm and made a fair mess of it, and I knew that this time I was properly bowled out.

I had fallen down again and was lying on the ground, bleeding badly; and the next thing I knew was that I was being stripped. Everything I had on me, my equipment and my clothing, was taken away; not for the purpose of letting a doctor examine me, as one did later, but as part of a system of battlefield plunder which the Germans have organised.

The very first thing the doctor said when he saw the wounds was "Donnerwetter!" I was taken to a barn and left there till morning. I had treatment, then I was moved into another barn. The Germans were decent over the business, and there was no brutality or anything of that kind. I had been taken from the second barn, and was being carried across a field, when the ambulance was stopped by a German doctor who was on horseback. He looked at my arm, and instantly said that it would have to be amputated right away, as mortification had set in; and so, lying on the stretcher, which had been put down in the field, and round which a small green tarpaulin had been rigged to keep the wind and cold out, my arm was taken off. Injections had been made in the arm, and I felt no pain during the operation, which I watched with great interest. The doctor who performed it had studied at Guy's Hospital and spoke English well. When I had been removed to a German hospital in Belgium he saw me every morning, noon, and night, and I had exactly the same food as the Germans, while the old inspector of the hospital used to give me custard and fruit now and again, when he thought no one was looking; and I had cigarettes and cigars issued to me just the same as to their own men.

I was in this hospital in Belgium for a fortnight, and was then moved into Germany, being sent to Münster, in Westphalia, with a lot of wounded Germans. It seemed as if, in leaving Belgium, I had said good-bye to civilisation, in view of what happened during my imprisonment in Germany.

I very soon made acquaintance with German brutality to British prisoners of war – brutality and cowardice, of which I saw constant signs in my captivity; I say cowardice advisedly, because only a coward will hit and bully a man who can't hit back. On that point, however, there is some consolation. It was practically a death matter to strike a German soldier, even under great provocation; but if you were struck first, you had your remedy, and nothing pleased a British soldier more than to be struck, because that gave him his chance, and many a hard British fist got home on a fat German jowl. I shall always be thankful to know that I got one or two in on my own account, though I had only my left arm to work with. I did not, of course, strike until I had been struck first; but when I did hit out I got my own back, with a lot of interest.

That is getting off the track a bit, so I will go back. At Münster I was taken into a disused circus which had been turned into a hospital for prisoners, and when I got there the doctor examined my wound. It was all raw, but he messed about to that extent that I fainted. Two mornings afterwards

– they only dressed us every two mornings – I was lying on a table, to be dressed. The job was to be done by a young German student, a born brute, for I tell only the plain truth when I say that he deliberately cut the flesh of my only arm with his lancet and scissors.

"English swine!" he said. "He's had one arm off, and he ought to have the other off, too!"

This was the type of fellow who was let loose on wounded helpless British prisoners of war.

Those dressings were horrible experiences, as a rule, for I was held down on the table by German orderlies, who had about as much feeling and compassion as the table itself.

Let me give another illustration of the German way of treating wounded British soldiers. Just after Christmas I was moved into an open camp at Münster, and the only covering I had was a tarpaulin, the result being that I caught cold in my wound, and on January 2nd I was moved back into another hospital. I knew nothing whatever about the regulations of the place, so that I saw nothing wrong in walking along an ordinary looking passage. As I did this there came towards me a man who corresponds in rank to our regimental sergeant-major. I was suffering greatly from my stump, and was quite helpless; yet this fellow seized me by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the trousers and threw me out of the passage – and it was not till later that I learned that the passage led to the operating-room, and that patients were not allowed to use it. Such a thing could not possibly happen in a British military hospital containing wounded German soldiers. It is only fair to say that the food we got in hospital was good.

Though my wound was not healed, I was sent away from the hospital and back to the camp. That was bad in some ways, but it had a fine compensation, for I was attended by two of our own medical officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps who were also prisoners – Captain Rose and Captain Croker. I believe they have been exchanged now. I need not say what a joy it was to be looked after by our own splendid doctors, after my experience of German brutality and callousness.

Time passed slowly and very wearily, and the monotony became deadly. It was bitterly cold, and snow fell heavily and constantly till about April. We did our best to keep cheerful and fit, and were always thankful when we could get a chance of playing games. Sometimes we played football with our sentries; but they were sorry sportsmen, and could not endure being beaten, even in fair football. There were some Royal Welsh Fusiliers amongst the prisoners, and three footballs had been sent out to them. These footballs reached the camp safely, and everybody was hugely pleased with them. We got up a match between a British team and the German sentries, and beat them six to one. It was a straightforward, honest match, and a fair and square win; but the Germans could not stomach it, and for three days our smoking was stopped. No reason for the stoppage was given; but we knew well enough what the cause was, especially as the order applied only to the British prisoners of war.

I will give another instance of the utter smallness of the German spirit. On the night of the day when Italy declared war on Austria we were sitting outside our wooden huts singing our own National Anthem, the "Marseillaise," "Rule, Britannia," and lighter compositions such as "Hi! Tiddley hi ti!" – in fact, anything that came to mind, just to keep things moving and cheerful. Then the news of Italy's decision came and fairly struck the Germans dumb. No reason was given for the steps they took against us – though we knew perfectly well what the cause was – but our smoking was stopped for seven days. Some of us were locked in the lavatories for twenty-four hours, and for twenty days our meat was stopped, so that we were almost starved. And on top of all this, two Englishmen and a Belgian were sent to a punishment camp. God knows what happened to them.

During all this bitter winter weather we were accommodated in wooden huts, which we had been put to build ourselves. We did not mind that in the least, because we were thankful to be employed. But it was almost impossible to keep warm in the huts, owing to our scanty clothing and the small number of stoves. There were two stoves in each room, but we were only allowed one small box of coal – sometimes coke – daily for each. Generally speaking, the British prisoners could not get near the stoves because of the foreign prisoners who crowded around them, all day long, swathed in a pair of blankets. To add to the misery of the life, the bedding was horribly verminous, and we

were only allowed to have one wash a day. That solitary wash was early in the morning, and we could not get any more, because the wash-house was closed after 7 a.m.

The food was very poor, and there was not enough of it. There was plenty of soup of a sort – and well there might be, for it was mostly water – and there were solids of a kind for which an Englishman has no liking – chestnuts, potatoes and horse beans – poor stuff after the splendid rations we had had as British soldiers from our own Army Service Corps. The drinks were as bad as the solids. We had what was called coffee given to us; but there was not much difference between the coffee and the soup. As for clothing, no real attempt was made to supply us, though in so many cases we had been stripped naked when captured. When I went out of camp, just after Christmas, I had only a pair of trousers and a pair of sabots, wooden shoes, and I should have fared badly if I had not been lucky enough to receive an old cycling jacket which my mother had sent out to me.

The following statement will show exactly how and when we were fed each day: – In the morning, at six o'clock, we had "coffee," made from burnt rye, but nothing to eat; at twelve noon, soup, with a plentiful supply of water in it and any one of the following ingredients: chestnuts, potatoes, horse beans, sauerkraut, acorns. At 12.30 to 1 p.m. there was an issue of bread, the loaves being about 2½ in. by 6 in. by 2 in. At 3 p.m. there was "coffee," as at 6 a.m., but nothing to eat; and at 6 p.m. there was soup, as for dinner, but no meat, fish or cheese. By this you will see that we had nothing to eat from 6 p.m. till noon the following day – a period of eighteen hours. We had a small piece of meat three times a fortnight, cheese once a week, and two raw herrings a week.

As for passing the time, it was one long dreary "roll on, night." Cards, draughts, football, and causing as much trouble as we dared to the Germans, with a little singing, formed our only means of keeping sane. Nearly everybody had to work at something or other, the hours of work being 7 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. (empty stomachs), and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

There was only one occasion when we had a little change from the bad treatment, and that was when a batch of German prisoners of war, who had been in England and exchanged, returned. They must have told how splendidly they were treated in English hospitals – which, as I know, are paradise compared with German hospitals – for we were better fed and looked after for a time. This improvement did not last long, however, and we went back to the old ways. Germans can't keep a good thing going.

German cunning and lying soon made themselves evident, for under the guise of voluntary work a lot of the prisoners of war were obliged to work in mines and ironworks, and by being forced to do these things they were really helping to fight their own people.

The way the trick was done was this – Germans came round and asked prisoners to volunteer to act as waiters, and a lot of us readily agreed, because any sort of employment was better than awful idleness. But the "waiters" soon learned that they had been shamefully deceived, for they were sent into mines and ironworks and on to farms. It was no use to protest, because it was a case of work or no food. There was so little to eat in the ordinary way that poor fellows could not face actual starvation, and so they worked unwillingly. I was asked to go and work in the fields, but I was quite incapable of doing this, and so I told the camp commandant, who put me into the office.

I had had experience of orderly-room work with the Guards, and felt quite at home at this job – and it was interesting, too, for I was in the extraordinary position of being a sort of censor!

My duty was to handle letters from England for the prisoners, and see that no news, or cuttings from newspapers, or other forbidden things got through. There were three of us doing this work – two sergeants and myself, one sergeant being in charge of the parcels. I naturally did the best I could for the prisoners. This office work was both interesting and exciting, and helped to get the time along.

As for our privations generally, there was nothing for it but to make the best of them and grin and bear it. The American Consul at Münster paid two visits to the camp while I was there, but no good came of them. Again the crafty German was prepared. It was known on each occasion that the Consul was coming – known two days before he arrived – so things were ready for him. He inspected

only a few of the rooms, and the principal result of the first visit was that our dinner was two hours late. We made complaints, but nothing came of them, so when the Consul visited us for the second time and asked if there were any complaints to make, we bluntly answered, “No, it’s no good making them, for nothing’s done.” The Germans instantly published in the local paper the statement, “The English are satisfied. They have no complaints.”

Constant attempts were made to escape, and I fancy that some of the prisoners gave up the whole of their time to plotting and planning ways of clearing out. The chance of getting away was small, because at night the camp, buildings as well as compounds, was brilliantly lighted by big electric arc lamps, and there were sentries and barbed wire entanglements everywhere. But in spite of all precautions several Belgians and a few Englishmen and Frenchmen escaped, and we were immensely pleased when we heard that one Belgian had got away by stealing the commandant’s motor-car and bolting in it. I did not hear what became of him.

Brutal punishments were inflicted for the most trivial offences, such as smoking in forbidden places, and a common method was to tie a prisoner to a post, with his feet deep in snow, and leave him there for two hours, with an armed sentry over him. The poor wretch dare not move, if he did the brave warrior with the gun kicked him – the German is a fine hand at hitting when the other chap can’t hit back. This savage cruelty had a terrible effect on some of the victims, and helped to make them the life-long wrecks that they now are.

From Münster I was sent to Brussels for exchange. We were quartered in the Royal Academy, and naturally enough the Belgian women and children tried to give us things. When this was seen, the German wounded who were in the building were ordered to turn the hose on, and they did. It was a great laugh, though, for it took them four hours to fix the hose – and then it would not work properly.

The authorities suddenly decided that I should not be exchanged, because I was a non-commissioned officer, and I was sent to Wesel on the Rhine, where I stayed six weeks. I had to go into hospital again, because my wound would not heal – it never got a sporting chance. Ill treatment continued, and for reasons, mostly revenge, which Britishers would scorn. The chief of this hospital was an old man whose only son had been lost in a submarine that had been sunk by the British. I saw that something was wrong as soon as he appeared in the morning, and I felt that we should get it hot, though I did not know how.

The old doctor had all the English prisoners sent for, and incredible as it may seem, every wound that was healed was deliberately reopened and plugged, while wounds that were not healed were probed inside and all the newly-formed flesh was destroyed. Many of us suffered terribly for a long time as the result of the visit to us of the old man who had lost his son in fair fight.

My wound was finally healed on July 25th, exactly nine months from the day on which my arm was taken off.

My sole object now was to get away from the horrible country and the more horrible people, and, thank God, I managed to do it. The refusal to exchange me was a bitter blow, but I soon pulled up and set to work to get away. Accordingly, when I reached Wesel, I reported myself as a private, and I was reckoned as a private and put in the list for exchange. I was sent to Aix-la-Chapelle.

Soon after this I came away with other prisoners of war, and one of the most glorious moments of my life was when I set eyes again on Old England.

There is one strange incident that I have kept to the last.

I have said that when I was shot on outpost I was stripped. My jacket must have been thrown aside, for next day a chum of mine picked it up and put it in his pack, thinking I had been killed, and meaning to bring it home, if he lived, as a relic. During many a long day and hard fight he carried that extra burden in his pack – no little thing to do – then he himself was wounded and sent home. He brought my jacket with him, and now I have it, and shall always treasure it as a memento of my war-days. The jacket is smothered in blood.

There are about 28,000 Britishers still in Germany, suffering as I suffered – some worse. They want releasing. The only way to release them is to end the war, and the only way to end the war is the cooperation of every man and woman, old and young, rich and poor, working for one object – Victory.

CHAPTER III
GASSED NEAR HILL 60

[When the Germans plunged the civilised world into this appalling war, one of their big hopes was that the sons of the Motherland would desert her in the hour of her greatest need. Never was a greater miscalculation made, even in a war which has become notorious for enemy miscalculations, for her Colonies rallied round Great Britain in a manner that has covered them with lasting glory. A particularly splendid contingent hurried over from Canada to our shores, and went into the most severe training, lasting through an uncommonly bad winter. In due course it left England, and entered almost at once into some of the hardest and most deadly fighting of the whole campaign – the conflict at the village of St. Julien, in the region of the famous Hill 60, where many troops fell gloriously in repelling the attempts of the Germans to hack their way through to Calais. In their determination to succeed, the Germans deliberately adopted the devilish device of poison-gas. How even that cowardly expedient failed is told in this story by Lance-Corporal R. G. Simmins, of the 8th Battalion Canadian Infantry, 90th Winnipeg Rifles.]

When I recall my experiences at the front, I am particularly struck by the circumstance that the thing which stands out most clearly in my mind is not the actual campaigning, not the long and weary times in the trenches, not even artillery, rifle, or bayonet work, but the coming of the poison-gas. I myself was gassed in the furious fighting at St. Julien.

I will get right at things quickly. Towards the end of April the Canadian Division was holding a line near Ypres, which was not far short of three miles in extent. That line ran north-west from Poelcapelle-Paschendaile Road, and at the end joined up with the French. Three infantry brigades with artillery comprised the division, the first being in reserve, the second on the right of the third, and the third connecting with the French.

We were in the salient of Ypres which was known to be weak, but the holding of which was of vast importance. I am proud to think that I am one of the Canadian Contingent to whom the big task of keeping back the German hosts at that point was given, and that I fought with men who gave their lives in stopping the German attempt to hack a way through to Calais, so as to have a very near blow at England. Placed as we were placed, it was possible to see the battle being fought on three sides, and this was uncommonly interesting.

We were, of course, in trenches, quite near the Germans, but between us there ran a ridge which is known as a hogback, so that there was a somewhat formidable natural barrier between the opposing forces. We were so near to the famous Hill 60 that we heard the explosion there and the subsequent battle when we were in billets at Ypres. The hill had been mined with six or seven tons of dynamite, the explosion of which was enough to change even the appearance of the hill.

There was a fine smart affair on the night of April 17th, when about a mile of German trenches was taken, and I saw about 2000 German prisoners being escorted away. Their uniforms were shabby, and their equipment was not what it ought to have been, but the men themselves appeared to be remarkably fit and well cared for.

We had gone into the trenches after marching through Ypres, where the chimney-pots were tumbling about our ears, and we were expecting very hot times; but the hogback prevented us from seeing the Germans, and of course kept us out of their sight. But there were German snipers everywhere, and they took good care to harass us.

I had charge of a section of bomb-throwers, and we did our best to hurl these strange but quite legitimate weapons at the enemy. At first the bombs were homely contrivances, made of jam-tins

filled with explosives; but later they were made under War Office control, and were far superior to the primitive articles which we manufactured ourselves.

In such a war and in such a place it is not easy to tell of what was done by individuals, because so many splendid acts are unobserved; but I call to mind the coolness and resource of my own platoon officer, Lieutenant McLeod. He was dashing all over the place, encouraging his men at every point, and doing things all round in fine style. I was talking to him quite a lot in the thick of things, and was specially struck by his calmness and the wonderful effect his example had upon the men.

One outstanding performance of his was to run, in broad daylight, from battalion headquarters to the trenches – a pretty brave achievement, when you bear in mind that a running man presents an almost certain target to snipers.

In this connection, I call to mind the case of a section commander who was in a trench. He wished that a certain thing should be done, and by way of indicating his desire he held up his hand, with palm extended. That must have been a small enough target, in all conscience, but it was no sooner in the air than it was pierced by five German bullets. If a hand can be so effectively fired at, what chance to escape has the body of a man?

This trench warfare was uncommonly exhausting. You never knew what was going to happen, or what you would be called upon to do; but it was astonishing to find how soon you could adapt yourself to circumstances.

I recall an occasion when we had been forced to retire at one point and get into a communication trench; we were taken aback by the discovery that it was not deep enough. We had to dig ourselves in. That was not a hard matter for the boys who had their entrenching-tools, but I had lost mine, and the only thing left to do was to try rabbit tactics. So I began to dig myself in with my fingers, and I have a distinct recollection of tearing and scooping at the ground like an animal scuttling for shelter. Luckily the ground was soft and yielding, or I should not have had a chance with such poor tools. As it was, my fingers were torn and bleeding long before the digging-in process was completed.

I have given you a general understanding of the task that fell to the Canadian Contingent to accomplish; but as I have said, it is not the actual fighting that dwells in one's memory.

We soon settled down to the ordinary ways of war, and took them as a matter of course. While in training in England we had heard and read a good deal about the fighting, and had become accustomed to it; while as for any such discomforts as heavy rain and sodden ground, they did not trouble us. Not even Flanders could give us worse trials of this sort than we had known while wintering on Salisbury Plain.

The boys took the fighting and the hardships as part of the day's work, and there was neither grumbling nor protesting; but that state of things was changed like magic when there was sprung upon us the most cowardly, dastardly, and dirty means of fighting that the world has ever known. This was the use of poison-gas by the Germans – a device which instantly put them out of consideration as civilised combatants, and stamped them for ever as dishonourable soldiers of a dishonoured country.

This poison-gas came upon us unseen, insidiously, and without the slightest warning in the one case; and in the other it rolled down upon us literally as a cloud.

It is hard to speak calmly of this unprecedented form of warfare, but I will try to tell exactly what happened, and I think I can do that, because when I was a medical student I particularly interested myself in chemistry.

It was on Saturday, the 24th, that our Brigade had their first experience of gas. We had been shelling the German trenches all day, and were standing to, expecting an attack by the enemy. We naturally looked for the employment of the usual methods, and were ready to receive the Germans when they showed themselves. We were strongly entrenched, and many a keen eye was kept on the hostile ground, watching for the appearance of the enemy. But not a sight of a German was to be had; there was no commotion, no excitement, no appearance of anything uncanny or uncommon, yet

there was coming towards us a German weapon which was neither honest artillery nor small arms – poison-gas.

There was nothing to be seen in the air, yet suddenly, and without any apparent cause, we were overpowered by a smell exactly like nasturtium, but infinitely stronger and more pungent. The similarity noticed is remarkable, for doesn't nasturtium come from Latin words which really mean a nose-twister? Anyway, there we were in our trenches, unexpectedly overpowered by a horrible acrid smell and an invisible gas.

A lot of the boys – fine, splendid, honest fellows, who did not understand the meaning of any kind of warfare that is not honourable and aboveboard, were utterly unable to fathom the mystery, and they seemed to think that it was the kind of pest that had to be taken with the other discomforts of campaigning in the Low Country.

"What the deuce is it?" they asked.

It was not until the whole unspeakable visitation was over that most of the men realised what had happened, and that the Germans had tried to blind us as a preliminary to annihilation. Like so many more of the German hopes, this did not develop on the lines that had been planned.

This was the first poison-gas attack that we experienced, and I am thankful to say that on the whole it was a failure; but when you remember that we were utterly unready for such a filthy form of fighting, and that we had no means of combating it or nullifying its effects, you will realise the extreme disadvantage of the contest from the point of view of the Canadians.

I have said that it was about four o'clock in the afternoon when we had our first experience of the poison-gas. Now that I am talking of the thing it strikes me as a strange coincidence that it was at about four o'clock in the morning when we had our second visitation.

We had got into our stride and settled down to hard hammering and what you might call routine campaigning. Then came the morning of Saturday, April 24th, when the sun rose ten minutes before five o'clock, which means that at about four o'clock day was breaking.

Most of us were asleep; but in war time there is no such thing as universal rest for men, and our sentries were posted and keeping watchful eyes upon the German lines. It is said that the darkest hour comes just before the dawn, and I think there is no doubt that man's lowest vitality is reached at that particular period. At any rate, the Germans probably thought so, for they planned a specially fatal attack upon us in the grey hours of this April morning.

While looking round in the cheerless dawn one or two of our sentries saw a yellowish kind of cloud coming towards us, over the hogback, and travelling pretty fast. The sight was unusual enough to be noticed, but no one who saw it had the slightest idea what it really was, until we were enveloped in the filthy folds; then we knew that it was poison-gas.

The cloud rolled on, and as it got quite close to us I noticed that it was about eight feet or twelve feet high, a deep, dense yellow at the bottom, and becoming lighter towards the top, so diffuse, indeed, that it was almost indistinguishable from the atmosphere. It is not easy exactly to convey an understanding of what the cloud really was, because few men have ever seen anything like it; but it might well be described as a moving mass of yellow, fat filth, insufferably loathsome. The poison-gas, the chief constituent of which I took to be chlorine, was about twice as heavy as air, and, consequently, it travelled along the surface of the ground.

I saw the yellow cloud come, I watched it as it enveloped us, and I observed it as it rolled away behind us and went towards Ypres, gradually losing force as it was absorbed in the air. In addition to being so favourably situated, we had just had a rum ration – and plenty of it. I do not know whether the spirit did us any good, but it certainly did not do us the least harm, and may have helped to nullify the effects of the poison-gas.

Our salient, vulnerable and undoubtedly attractive to the Germans, was rushed by them, and they succeeded in breaking through and occupying a trench about a hundred yards away from our own and parallel with it. They came on with wonderful steadiness, advancing just as if they were

on parade, scarcely breaking step at all. They came out of their trenches about a dozen at a time, formed two long lines, and literally seemed to walk over into the trench, though we were peppering at them all the time. They kept up an excellent covering fire, with the result that a good many of our own men were shot.

This was fair, open fighting, the sort of thing that a soldier expects, and into the spirit of which he can enter. It gave opportunities, too, for the display of the best qualities of warfare, and these were shown by a man I knew very well, Company Sergeant-Major F. W. Hall, of my company. In spite of a very heavy and at that time fatal fire, the sergeant-major rushed out from the shelter of his trench to bring in a wounded man who was lying in the open. He seemed to bear a charmed life, for he got clear of the trench and was untouched by the fire of the enemy.

The sergeant-major managed, by good fortune which seemed miraculous, to get as far as the wounded man; he seized him and started with his burden for safety. In fact he actually got him as far as the trench, then, when the worst seemed over and security was just within his reach, when he was getting over the parapet and men were loudly cheering him because of his success, he was shot and killed. But the uncommon courage of the action had been noticed, and later on, to the real gratification of all the Canadians, and especially those who knew him, the announcement was made that the dead hero had been awarded the Victoria Cross. Hall's men were terribly shattered by the enemy's rifle and machine-gun fire; but in spite of it all they held their ground, and the living remnant won great glory.

It was not long before I dropped. I did not recover till the fight had swept away to my right. Then I reported to an artillery officer who was near, and he showed me the way to Ypres, telling me also to go into the city for hospital treatment.

I cannot close my yarn without mention of Captain Northwood's Company – No. 4. The company was not relieved – it could not be, because of the heavy call on troops – but it fought on doggedly till two platoons were captured. Yet there were no prisoners made except at a bitter cost to the Germans.

There were many heroes that day in No. 4 Company. I cannot name them all, but I must mention two of them who stand out pre-eminent – "Box-car" Kelly (now a King's Corporal), and Corporal Sandford. Kelly did everything in his power to rally some of the British troops who were near him, while Sandford, a section-commander, did as much by his example of splendid courage as any officer I know.

That is my story.

If space permitted I might tell of Corporal Degan and his gallant band of hand-grenaders; how they bravely fought when hemmed in by the enemy; of Lieutenant Owens, who stood with an automatic pistol in each hand, cheering and swearing in the same breath, defending his comrades and destroying the Germans; of Sergeant Nobel (now a captain), who repaired a telephone-wire under an annihilating cannonade from German guns, and a score of other splendid fellows who utterly forgot themselves and their extremity, and risked their all upon the hazard of the glorious common cause.

CHAPTER IV
A LINESMAN IN GALLIPOLI

[A vivid understanding of the work which our soldiers did in Gallipoli during the earlier stages of the operations in the Dardanelles, and of the strange happenings which were of daily occurrence in fighting the German-led Turks, is given by this story, which is told by Private John Frank Gray, 5th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment.]

Everybody knows how the transport *River Clyde*, with two thousand British soldiers packed in her, was deliberately run ashore on V Beach, at the southern point of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Great holes had been cut in her steel sides, to make doors through which the men could get ashore when she was hard and fast, without embarking in any sort of craft. Land they did, in the end, though they suffered heavily through the Turks' terrific fire. I did not see that famous and wonderful performance, but I disembarked, with my regiment, close to the transport while she was still aground. We had almost the same experience as the troops from the *River Clyde* had gone through. We forced a landing, in spite of barbed wire entanglements in the water, traps which had caught many a fine fellow and held him till the enemy's fire got him. It is odd to talk of wire entanglements in the sea, grabbing and tearing you as you plunge into the water, to wade ashore; but there they were, one more new feature in a war that has been full of strange and devilish things. Before we landed in Gallipoli we had experience of transport, trawler, barge and pinnace; and we were no sooner at the end of the voyage from England than we were under deadly fire and in the thick of it.

We went right into the firing-line, and the Turks gave us more than a warm reception – it was hot. We were under fire all the time we were landing, but we had the uncommon good luck to suffer no loss. As we forced our way ashore we saw plenty of evidence of the desperate nature of the adventure of the men of the *River Clyde*; but we were too much absorbed in our own affairs to pay much heed to what had happened to other fellows.

We had got ashore on July 16th at Seddul Bahr, and stayed there all night. So that we should be as comfortable as possible we made dug-outs in the face of the cliff. The cliff at that place is very hard, and we had plenty of blasting to do, as well as work with pick and shovel.

My mates and I had put plenty of elbow-grease into our own particular job, and had finished our dug-out and got into it, to be cosy for the night. It was very much like animals going to bed. We were worn out, and lost no time in going to sleep. I had gone off soundly and knew nothing till I was roughly roused by some fellows shouting, "Wake up! Wake up! Three of our chaps are buried alive!"

We did not need a second rousing. We all sprang up and rushed to a spot not far away, where we saw that there had been a fall of earth and rock, and we dug harder than we had ever dug before. At the end of it, having dug to a depth of three feet, and thrown the earth and rock away from us, we came across three poor chaps of my company who had been buried by a fall of earth, caused by them digging too far into the ground to give them shelter. They had undermined too much, and the earth-roof had collapsed and crushed them. We saw at once that there was no hope – the men looked as if they had been killed on the spot: they must have been dead an hour – but we put them on stretchers and the field ambulance men did all they could. But it was too late. Next day we dug graves for them and put crosses over. There are some fine graveyards out there, well cared for, and with barbed wire fences to preserve them. While we were burying our comrades the Turks fired on us continuously, and this had to serve as the last volleys over the fallen. That solemn and tragic beginning of my experiences after landing at Gallipoli will never fade from my mind.

Even at this early stage I noticed the extraordinary luck of war. Some of the King's Own Lancasters had been in the trenches for fourteen days, and during the whole of that time they had had only twenty casualties. They left the trenches and came right up alongside of us, on a little bit

of a mound. The Turks must have got wind that a lot of troops were on the move, for the shrapnel came bursting over the lot of us, especially the Lancasters, who in less than half an hour lost more than forty men, fourteen being killed and the rest wounded. Four or five of our own fellows were hit, so that we escaped lightly, and were able to send our stretcher-bearers to give a hand in getting the wounded soldiers to hospital.

The burying alive of men and the loss of men who had spent a fortnight in the trenches unscathed, were the things I saw when I was spending my first night in Gallipoli, so I can very fairly say that we landed right in the thick of it. It was a hot start, and it did not get cooler, for on the following morning, when we were on the way to the trenches at Achi Baba, we were under constant shrapnel fire. We crawled and crept up as best we could, using roads, or rather tracks, which had been made by the 29th Division. It was fearfully hot, we were heavily laden, and there was nothing but prickly scrub and rock and stifling dust about, and bursting shell all the time. But we forged slowly ahead, making the best of it, and thankful when we got into one of the little ravines which abound there, and make first-rate natural trenches – thankful because we got shelter without having to dig for it. In this advance some of our chaps fell, and the ravines formed their resting-places. The graves were filled in and crosses put over to tell how the soldiers had died. I might say here that whenever it was possible to do so, an Army chaplain read the Burial Service; but often enough a funeral had to take place with no chaplain near at hand.

An advance like this is a slow business. You go in single file, keeping your heads well down, because of the stray bullets from snipers. The Turkish snipers are dead shots – I will tell you more about them later. At the end of our dodging and ducking and crawling in single file we got into a support trench, and I began to breathe a bit more freely, because I thought that here at any rate I was safe. But we had no sooner reached the front-line trenches than the Turks started shelling us, and very quickly I thought that the very end of me had come. There was a tremendous crash just overhead, then a horrible rumbling, then I was knocked down in a heap, and all I knew was that a shell had burst in the trench and that I was buried in a mass of earth and rock. I was bruised and stunned – so were four of my chums who were near me; but we had had better luck than the three poor fellows who had been buried by the fall of earth above them, and pretty soon we had worried our way out of the heap of muck and were staring at each other – and I shall never forget that incident, if it is only because of the stupid way in which we stared at each other, and never said a word. We were making tea when the shell burst, and were looking forward to a cosy meal; but here we were, staring at each other in surprise, wondering what the dickens the matter was, till we looked around and saw what sorry objects we were, and that the tea gear had been scattered all over the place. When we had got over our fright – and what's the use of saying that we weren't scared? – we saw the grim humour of it, and laughed and pulled ourselves together, thankful that we were still in the land of the living.

That was part of our early introduction to shell fire, and we very soon learned that you never know what sort of a trick a shell is up to. Shells are very deceiving. You hear their peculiar and horrible whistle and think that they are going to burst anywhere except where they do.

When we had pulled ourselves together we left our shattered trench and went into another part of the trench, to pull round a bit and get out of the shrapnel bombardment. But within three hours we were back again and settled down, wondering what the coming night had in store for us. We were in for another surprise, though at that time, of course, we did not know it.

This surprise took the shape of an attack upon us by hand-grenades, or bombs. It was pitch dark; but the blackness was lit up near us in patches, caused by the explosion of the bombs. We got half a dozen of them, and as it was clear that some Turks had crept towards us from their firing-line, which was only about 200 yards away, we sent out a sergeant and five or six men to hunt the bomb-throwers. You might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack as try to find Turks who were hiding in the darkness in the shrubs or the ravines; at any rate, our chaps did not see or hear anything of the Turks, and they had to come back without doing anything. There was no doubt that

the Turks had crept up to us quite close and then hurled their bombs; but we were lucky to escape with only one man slightly wounded, though if the bombers had had any luck we should have been blown to pieces. These intensely dark nights were always very trying because of these attacks. It was an immense relief when the moonlight nights came, because then the Turks dared not try their tricks on. There was always the guard, of course, two hours on and two hours off. This gave a great sense of protection; but the guard work itself gave you the creeps. You were on the rack all the time, fancying that you saw some one approaching when as a matter of fact there was no one near. There was always the chance, too, of being picked off by a sniper who used horrible explosive bullets. One of our men was struck down, and when we went up to him and removed his helmet we saw at once that an explosive bullet had been used, for the skull was completely shattered. You could always tell when these awful things had been used, from the appearance of the sandbags. The bullets would strike and explode, and smash the sandbags so badly that it took us all our time to make the damage good. You dare not put even a periscope above the trench; if you did a sniper got a bullet through it before you knew where you were.

It was all tremendously exciting, and there was never a chance of being dull or downhearted. The system of trenches was amazing, turning and twisting everywhere in the most wonderful manner. We made the most of these complications, too, by naming the trenches Oxford Street, Regent Street, and so on, with Clapham Junction and the like for important junctions of trenches. These names, which were chalked up or put on boards, were most useful in helping you to find your way about, and sometimes very amusing misunderstandings arose.

“Do you know where Oxford Circus is?” a chap asked me one day.

“Rather!” I told him, proud to throw light on his ignorance, and I began to tell him, till he cut me short by snapping that he wasn’t talking about London, but the trenches. We got many a good laugh out of these little misunderstandings; for out at the front you are always ready to make the most of the smallest joke. You needed all the cheerfulness you could get, too, because of the awful sights that constantly met you and the endless peril you were in. I shall never forget one of the very first things my eyes saw in those opening days of my campaigning in Gallipoli. We got to the spot at Achi Baba where the Munsters and the Dublin Fusiliers, during a gallant advance, had been enfiladed by machine-gun fire and literally mown down. From the trench we had occupied we could see the men lying just as they had fallen, while trying to take cover. There they were, on the open ground, absolutely riddled with bullets, and with their packs on, and their rifles and bayonets and everything else. They had been lying there for about a fortnight, because it was impossible to do anything in the way of burying them, owing to the enemy’s incessant fire and sniping.

Things hereabouts were particularly horrible. We went into a Turkish trench that had been taken, and started to make a fire-trench. We pulled away the old sandbags and dug away at the parapet with our picks. There was a horrible stench, but we were used to smells and did not take much notice of it till we found that the picks had a lot of foul stuff on them which we could not account for; but we soon discovered that the parapet was composed of the dead bodies of Turks which had been piled up and just covered with earth, the sandbags being placed on the top of the wall of corpses.

In this same trench there was a well which had been covered with planks. Naturally enough we began to explore it, not that we expected to get anything to drink from it, and when we had removed the planks we found that the well, which we calculated was ten or twelve feet deep, had a lot of dead Turks in it. We counted six of them, and had enough of the job, so we put the planks back, and felt that our curiosity had been satisfied.

When we had been there four or five days and were getting used to the appearance of the country, we saw a Turk just peeping over the top of a little mound, with his rifle pointing towards us and in the attitude of firing. We felt sure that we had caught a sniper, and two or three shots were promptly fired. The Turk was still there, and it was clear that he had been shot. Later on we were able to get near him, and then we saw that he was black with flies and had been shot through the eye

while sniping; but not shot by us, because when we shook him his head fell off, showing that he had been dead for some time. We saw another Turk who was sitting against a tree. We went up and found that he, too, was dead. He looked a mere skeleton; but he was swathed in clothing and equipment in the most extraordinary fashion. His trousers were all rags, and his tunic was all patches of differently coloured cloths; he had three shirts and two belts on, and we wondered how he had stuck so many clothes in such stifling weather.

I had an exciting adventure one day – a bit too exciting to be altogether pleasant. I and another chap had been sent out to an artillery position which was called Clapham Junction Station, to get some corrugated iron. We had a long way – two and a half miles – to go, and it was necessary to keep to the cover of the trenches whenever we could do so. We were able to do that for most of the way, going through the very trenches which had been dug by the poor chaps of the Munsters and Dublin Fusiliers who had fallen. We got to the end of our journey, quite near the French lines, and then started back with our corrugated iron. Burdened in this way, we found that one of the trenches was too narrow for us to get along, and we were forced to make our way across open country for about 500 yards. As soon as we left the shelter of the trench the sun shone on our galvanised metal and gave the Turks a good target. We promptly had three or four shells bursting near us, and we lost no time in doubling over the open ground, staggering along with the iron sheets, and thankful when we were under shelter again, with a farewell shell or two to show us what a narrow squeak we had had. I picked up one of these shells, which had not burst, and kept it a long time, meaning to bring it home as a souvenir, but I found it a nuisance and had to throw it away.

We were constantly seeing strange sights and learning how cunning the Turks were. One morning I saw some Australians bring in a Turk who was wearing one of our uniforms. The tunics had white patches on them, so that our artillery could distinguish us, and it was one of these that the fellow wore. He had no doubt taken it from a dead British soldier, and so dressed, he had joined a party of Australians who were drawing water at a well. He kept his mouth shut, and might have gone undiscovered, but he and an Australian began quarrelling, then fighting, and that gave him away, because he could not speak English. They shot him, as a spy, the following morning.

At the same place – I am now speaking of W Beach, where we were resting – we saw a Turkish sniper on the top of a hill. We sent out two or three times to try and get him, but failed; but at last he was caught while robbing one of our fellows who was dead. The sniper had shot him, and now he was out for plunder. When we had this sniper in hand we found that we had got hold of a very dangerous customer, a man who had done a lot of mischief amongst our fellows. He had gone about his sniping in a very business-like way, and had established himself in a spot which commanded points which had to be continually passed by our stretcher-bearers and working parties. A good many of the R.A.M.C. chaps were hit, and it was curious that most of the wounds were about the knee. We discovered that these wounds were the result of the sniper's low firing – he was very near the ground and had pretty nearly complete control of this particular spot. Our fellows used to double round it for all they were worth, but they were not fast enough to dodge the Turk's bullets. When we examined his dug-out we found three rifles fixed on tripods, which were always trained on the spots where our fellows had to pass. In addition to that he had a machine-gun, and this he used for firing on our men when he knew that it was meal-time and that they were in clusters. It was a great relief when his account was settled.

Aircraft fighting has developed enormously during the war, and I saw an exciting fight between three of our aeroplanes and two of the Turks. We had got a bit used to aeroplanes, for a Taube had swooped over us and dropped a chance bomb which blew up the quartermaster's stores. Three bombs fell about a hundred yards away, and I noticed that the noise they made when they came through the air was just like the whistle of a railway engine. In the fight I am talking about our fellows brought down one of the Turkish machines, and they made a hard chase after the other, but it got away. It was a really thrilling fight, and our chaps got tremendously excited over it. We had been warned of an attack from the air by three blasts on a whistle, and that was the signal to take shelter and to cover up

the guns with tarpaulins, to hide them. During these attacks you are supposed never to look up, but the fight was so splendid and our chaps got so excited that the warning was forgotten in many cases, and chaps were peeping over the parapets and some were actually standing up on the parapets. Poor fellows! Turkish snipers spotted them and got three with their bullets. I was only about a hundred yards away when they were killed. Their loss, which was a lesson to all of us, cast quite a gloom over our victory in the air.

After being in the trenches at Achi Baba for sixteen days we went back to Lemnos, a big naval base about four and a half hours' distant by transport. We were supposed to have a week's rest, but we were at Lemnos only three days. At the end of that time we went back to the Peninsula and landed at Anzac, and went straight up to the firing-line, which had been made at Chunuk Bahr – and our regiment got absolutely cut up. It was one of the things that *will* happen in a war like this.

We had gone up into the trenches and nothing much happened while we were there. After our spell in the trenches we were taken up into a gulley for twenty-four hours' rest and sleep. We were in high spirits at the prospect of such a change, and we took our equipment off and made a few dug-outs and got into them and settled down, and very comfortable and contented we were. But our rest and peace were smashed at dawn on the following morning, when we were thrown into confusion by a heavy Turkish attack. The Turks had advanced into the firing-line on the opposite side of the hill. There were plenty of them and they had machine-guns, while we were quite helpless, having no rifles nor equipment – indeed, many of us had not even our jackets on, as we were taking it easy.

There was quite a stampede for the time being, and some one passed the order, "Every man for himself!" It was a mistake, I am certain, but it added immensely to the confusion. That awful alarm caused some of our unarmed chaps to make a bolt for it, the result of temporary panic; and now came one of those splendid bits of work which are the pride of every regiment, and which no one can do better than British soldiers.

The adjutant, Captain Belcher, rallied about seventy of the men. He pulled them together, put heart of grace into them, and shouted to them to get their rifles and bayonets and follow him. There is nothing like an heroic example at such a time. The little band rallied round the adjutant, and with wild cheers and a gallant rush they hurled themselves upon the Turks, and such was the suddenness and fury of their attack that the Turks bolted like children – and big hefty chaps they were – with our fellows, some of them almost as small as dwarfs, tearing after them with the bayonet. In this furious affair one of our men got wounded and could not walk. The adjutant picked him up and began to carry him away. As he did so the Turks opened fire on him with a machine-gun, and he must have been riddled – I never saw anything more of him. At the same time Lieutenant Ratcliffe, who had been wounded, was being carried off on a stretcher. He seemed to think that the chance of escape was hopeless, and so he said to his bearers, "Put me down and look after yourselves, boys. I shall be all right." It was a hard thing to do, but the men obeyed, and all of us who could do so got away from that fatal spot, which we were far too weak to hold, in spite of the success of the adjutant's rally, and at last we got back to the beach.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.