

PROUD HERITAGE

**The Story of the Highland
Light Infantry**

by
LT.-COL. L. B. OATTS, D.S.O.
Late H.L.I.

VOLUME THREE
The Regular, Militia, Volunteer, T.A.,
and Service Battalions H.L.I.
1882—1918

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FOREWORD
BY

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THE third Volume of Proud Heritage brings the history of the Highland Light Infantry down to living memory and introduces the 'Citizen Soldier,'.

After the two 'Professional Soldiers' wars of 1897—98 and 1898, the South African war brought in the 'Volunteers' of which five battalions, four from Glasgow and one from Lanark, were affiliated to the Regiment. Many volunteered Active Service but since Higher Command decided on one company attached to Regular Infantry Battalions, only a relatively small number were privileged to share the hardship and glory with their Regular comrades.

The lessons of the South African war led to Lord Haldane's Army reforms one of which was the creation of the Territorial Force organised on Regular Army lines; and voluntary service became a more serious commitment. Recruited for Home Defence it was ready for any emergency.

In 1913 Field Marshal Lord Roberts said in a speech in Glasgow: 'I seem to see the gleam in the near distance of the weapons and accoutrements of this Army of the future, this Citizen Army, the warder of these islands, and the pledge of the peace and of the continued greatness of this Empire.' The following year his prophecy was fulfilled for in 1914 all the Territorial Battalions were soon at full strength; had volunteered almost to a man for Imperial Service and raised second line units. Within two months one Glasgow Battalion was on active service in France and three more were soon to be with the 52nd Lowland Division on Gallipoli.

In 1914 too 'Kitchener's Army' was formed and the response of the City of Glasgow was immediate and overwhelming. Six 'Service' Battalions were raised before the end of that year including 'Tramways', 'Boys Brigade', 'Chamber of Commerce', and two more by the middle of 1915; all volunteers, who soon took their place in the 9th and 15th Scottish Divisions and other 'New Army' formations.

As was to be expected, the two regular Battalions were in the struggle from the outset. In all 26 Battalions were raised of which 14 served abroad, mainly recruited from Glasgow and inspired by the glorious traditions of the 71st and 74th.

The Decorations won, the Battle Honours awarded and the Toll taken are here in the story of the 'First World War' which rightly fills more than half this Volume. The unparalleled record of Service to the Crown and of loyalty to the Regiment must be of special interest to the thousands who served in it between 1914 and 1918.

The overwhelming proportion of Glaswegians in the Regiment knit more firmly the bond which had existed since its raising, between the Highland Light Infantry and the City. It is a record of which the Regiment and the City can be proud and as such we welcome and commend it to Soldiers and Citizens alike who will read with lasting satisfaction of the deeds and treasure the memory of these men—Regular, Territorial and New Army—who added such a glorious page to History.

A. R. CROSS, *Colonel*
D. CARNEGIE, *Colonel*

GLASGOW
JANUARY, 1961

Chapter I

FORMATION OF THE HIGHLAND LIGHT INFANTRY

The Cardwell Reforms—linking of the 71st and 74th—Militia and Volunteers—laying up of the first Assaye Colour—the 74th on the Frontier—bravery of Captain Scrase-Dickens—first issue of the H.L.I. Chronicle, January 1893—the 74th leave Cawnpore for the Malakand Field Force, August 1897.

Lord CARDWELL, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1873, is chiefly remembered for his 'system,' whereby infantry of the line was organised into two-battalion regiments; one battalion to serve abroad and the other at home, with the latter providing drafts of trained men for the overseas battalion. His reforms of course, went far farther than this and included the more important innovation of linking regiments with territorial districts in the United Kingdom. Previously, a regiment could beat up for recruits more or less wherever it wished or rather, wherever recruits were likely to be found. The efforts of the 71st and 74th in recruiting up to establishment in bygone days have already been described and it will be remembered how, although each regiment first combed the area in which it had first originated, neither hesitated to beat up both in England and Ireland when necessary; while the 71st, before sailing for Buenos Ayres in 1806, made up its losses in action by the enlistment of various Dutch-Germans and Irish Roman Catholics recruited in the Cape.

The 'Territorial System,' by associating each regiment with a particular district, now confined its recruiting to that district. Like practically every so-called innovation there was nothing new about the idea. The fact that a man is likely to prefer joining a corps recruited from his own birthplace, rather than serve among strangers with whom he might have little in common had struck others before Lord Cardwell. Long ago, when the archers were called out, they attended on the King in Companies assembled in their own counties and led by their own gentry; and a comparison between the names on many a village war memorial and those in the parish records will disclose the startling and moving fact that a muster-roll of men leaving the parish for the wars in 1414 is extraordinarily similar to that of one in 1914. When examining the problem of recruiting the Secretary for War, Lord Palmerston, stated in 1828:

I believe there is a great disinclination on the part of the lower orders to enlist for general service; they like to know that they are to be in a certain regiment, connected, perhaps, with their own county, and their own friends and with officers who have established a connection with that district. There is a preference frequently on the part of the people for one regiment as compared with another, and I should think there will be found a great disinclination in men to enlist for general service, and to be liable to be drafted and sent to any corps and station.

The theoretical advantages of the 'Territorial System,' are indeed so obvious that they are not worth labouring, except to point out that there is a grave danger of exaggerating them. It must be emphasised, that at a time when general service was the rule, the British Infantry was justly regarded as being the best in the world. There was, as has been already demonstrated, never any lack of volunteers to join another regiment when their own was ordered home from India. Today, the various Corps of the Army, which recruit from all over the country, do not seem to have any more difficulty in attracting men than do the Infantry of the Line based on the 'Territorial

System,' with their own recruiting areas which are not, in any case, rigidly adhered to. The advantages of the 'Territorial System,' therefore, in spite of the lengthy time in which it has been in operation, are still not proven.

As for the two-battalion system, that also had been thought of, long before Lord Cardwell, by that unjustly ridiculed character the Duke of York, when Commander-in-Chief. Again, its advantages were more theoretical than actual and, although it lasted some sixty years it never actually worked. It depended for its efficiency on not more than half the infantry of the line being abroad at the same time, but this proportion was constantly exceeded. By reducing the status of the home battalion to that of a cadre any realistic training became impossible and so, whenever a field force had to be hurriedly scraped together at the outbreak of war, initial reverses accompanied by much suffering and hardship became the rule rather than the exception. Responsibility for such set-backs were, of course, laid at the door of the Generals, with the result that high rank in the British Army became much discredited and, indeed, still remains so. One has however, only to study the small wars and the opening stages of the large ones, to realise the magnitude of the problems faced by the Commanders and to wonder at the manner in which complete disaster was so often avoided by skill, courage and resolution.

The first phase of the Army's reforms ' led to the establishment of territorial 'Brigades,' in which two regiments were linked together as a Brigade in a particular district. As these initial linkings bore no relation whatever to the final organisation, the experiences of many regiments between 1873 and 1881 were peculiar. As far as the Highland Light Infantry was concerned, the 71st was brigaded in the 56th Brigade with the 78th Highlanders, and the Depot companies of both regiments were at Fort George. The 74th, on the other hand, was brigaded with the 26th Regiment in the 59th Brigade. The 71st then became the 1st Battalion of the 56th Brigade, while the 74th became the 2nd battalion of the 59th Brigade, of which the 1st battalion, the 26th, (Cameronians) was stationed at Hamilton. The Depot companies of the 74th were however, linked to the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment at Portsmouth. Why they should have been there is difficult now to understand, but it was evidently thought a good idea at the time. Thereafter the Depot companies of the 74th were transferred to the 99th (Lanarkshire) Regiment at Shorncliffe, and finally to the 23rd (Royal Welch Fusiliers), at the same station. The 99th incidentally, though at this time a Scots Lowland regiment as its name implied, had previously been an Irish regiment (The Prince of Wales' Tipperary) and under the new 'reforms' was shortly to become the 2nd Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. It seems a pity that it never succeeded in being taken on to the Welsh establishment, but perhaps some future Secretary of State will one day rectify this omission. When the final linkings took place it was stated that 'infinite pains,' had been taken to find some historic or sentimental link between the regiments amalgamated, but when one considers that these infinite pains should have resulted in the amalgamation of a Lanarkshire regiment with the Wiltshires—and other equally singular results could be quoted—the link between the 71st and 74th can only be regarded with considerable relief and satisfaction.

It is said, that in some official quarters it was hoped that the territorial system would put an end to the regimental exclusiveness which hindered the re-organisation of the Army. In other words the regimental soldier was being blamed for the lack of organisation in the Army, which had first thrust itself on the public notice in the Crimean War. In fact, numerous attempts have been made since the time of King Charles II to organise the British Army and no one has succeeded yet. The reasons for failure have nothing whatever to do with regimental officers. How does one organise the Army, and for what purpose? In 1871 the Secretary of State said that his intention was ' . . . to lay the firm foundation of a defensive force which may be a perfect security to the country not merely against danger but to that which is scarcely less intolerable to the spirit

and independence of Englishmen—the perpetually recurring apprehension of danger.’ It is all very well, to stand up in the House of Commons and with one’s hand thrust between the buttons of one’s frock coat roll out these impressive periods, but how to translate intention into action? What was the use of basing reorganisation on the ‘hope’ that fifty per cent of the infantry will always be at home? It never has been. The British Army has, and has always had, three main roles, (a) that of Military Police, (b) to provide small formations for expeditions of a punitive or preventive character, (c) to provide an expeditionary force capable of bearing the first shock of a major war. Can an efficient organisation be devised which would cover all three? Certainly it could, but it would involve a greater expenditure in peacetime than this country is, or has ever been, prepared to pay. That is the problem, and it is one which it can scarcely be hoped will ever be solved—certainly not by knocking the infantry about in the hope of destroying ‘regimental exclusiveness.’

At the time of Lord Cardwell’s reforms there were, besides the regular Army, the Militia and Volunteers. The former, which was of ancient origin, formed the reserve or second line and was equivalent to the Territorial Army of today. There was a link between the regular Army and the Militia, for both officers and other ranks transferred from one to the other and certain regular officers, warrant and non-commissioned officers were attached to the Militia to assist in its training. The Militia however, had no obligation to serve overseas. The Volunteers owed their origin to Napoleon’s grievous mistake in threatening invasion of this country. So long as the Emperor confined his activities to the far side of the English Channel the citizens of this country could see little profit in interfering with them. But when he paraded on the Pas de Calais and started to build invasion craft, that was another matter. In his later years the Emperor in moments of self-pity was inclined to ponder on the implacable enmity of the British and wonder what he had done to deserve it. The answer was quite simple—he should not have threatened them. However, the resultant patriotic frenzy produced the Volunteers in their magnificent uniforms. Their efforts in the maintenance of law and order during the Industrial Revolution sent them out of favour with the populace, and they were disbanded. In 1858 however, when these hospitable shores were affording shelter to a number of conspirators against the life of the Emperor Napoleon III, ‘the intemperate boasts and menaces of French Officers and journalists,’ started another wave of patriotic frenzy throughout the country and the Volunteers again emerged from limbo. They were a kind of beautifully dressed Home Guard of little or no military value at this date. Having been embodied in 1858 on the unrepealed Act of George III by which they had been legally recognised during the Napoleonic Wars, they now received further official recognition by being incorporated in the ‘Territorial System.’ Under the new two-battalion organisation, the two regular battalions were to be numbered the 1st and 2nd, the two Militia battalions the 3rd and 4th, and the Volunteer battalions the 1st, etc., Volunteers of the regiment. This conception did not altogether work out as planned, until the formation of the Territorial Army from the Volunteers in 1906 which will be described later.

Although the 71st was quite happy to accept its link with the 78th, the 74th was by no means happy about its link with the 26th with which, of course, it had nothing in common. Presumably the 26th had no objection, for it was the senior regiment, and the link would therefore merely mean that it took on a second battalion which it would have to do in any case. The 74th, however, protested with some vigour at being linked with a Lowland regiment, and the authorities endeavoured to placate it by suggesting that the amalgamated regiment should be named ‘The Cameronian Highlanders.’ The 74th replied that they would prefer to be named ‘The Lowland Highlanders,’ and this mild sarcasm apparently for the first time conveyed to the authorities that an actual anomaly had been planned. The offer was therefore made that the 74th should be linked to the 71st and, as neither regiment had the least objection to this, so it was arranged. The

authorities had not however, explained that the territorial district of the regiment would remain in Lanarkshire and the Depot combined with the Cameronians in the Lowland District. When this was discovered another row started which continued, off and on, for the next seventy years. Its commencement has been described in the story of the 71st. The Regiment understandably became extremely touchy on the matter of its Highland status and, in upholding this, caused so much trouble from time to time that one cannot help feeling that the authorities heaved a sigh of relief when they at last succeeded in expunging the old honoured name from the list of regular regiments of the British Army. In thus struggling to retain what Colonel Pack in 1810 described as 'the honourable characteristics' of the Regiment, the Highland Light Infantry had nothing to be ashamed of, for in Luther's words, it 'could do no other,' and it is difficult to see how the British Army can have been improved by the disappearance of a regiment which, though with only a hundred and sixty years service, still carried fifty-two Battle Honours on its colours.

The preceding volume of this history ended with the return of the 74th or 2nd H.L.I., from combined the 74th, having returned from overseas a few months before the 71st, became, under the new system, the first battalion of the Highland Light Infantry for foreign service. Accordingly it was the 74th which marched against Arabi Pasha and, as soon as the battalion arrived home after this adventure had been satisfactorily concluded, it was quickly placed under orders for India, the land of its earliest glorious achievements. Before leaving, however, it took part in a memorable ceremony consisting of the laying up of its colours in Glasgow Cathedral, where they were hung over the War Memorial for the Egyptian Campaign, which commemorated three officers and eighteen rank and file killed in action and three died of wounds. The ceremony was memorable because the colours included the original Assaye Colour. This had not been burnt with the others at Fermoy in 1818, partly because it was of course, too unique to be destroyed in such a manner, but also because, having been presented later than the others and not, as far as is known, carried in action, it had been in a good state of repair. It is very unfortunate, that when it was thus finally laid up some special arrangements were not made for its preservation.

The 74th sailed for India in October 1884, leaving its so-called 'Home Battalion' in Ireland, where the 71st served from 1882 till 1890 chiefly in the Curragh but also in Belfast and Dublin. Although Ireland presumably came under the official description of a home station, the demands on a battalion stationed there were every bit as exacting as those on one on the Indian service. It was certainly no place for training up raw recruits for drafting to the overseas battalion, and one wonders whether the authorities, when tidying up the British Army, had taken into consideration the problem of trying to keep the peace in that unhappy country.

The 74th had no sooner arrived in Ambala than it was sent off, just as the hot weather was starting, to Rawalpindi in order to join a force of sixty thousand men awaiting an invasion by the Russians. In spite of the heat and the fact that it was in no way acclimatised, the journey was performed by march route with the band playing in front and a long tail of elephants, camels and bullock waggons straggling along behind.

The Russian scare, known as the 'Russian Pendgeh menace' was no figment of the imagination and for a while war was imminent. The 74th was brigaded for the expected campaign with the Seaforth, 15th Sikhs and the Guides Infantry, under the command of General Channer, V.C. The fighting potential of a formation so composed and led might almost be described as unique, and from a historical point of view it is a great pity that the Russians thought twice, and as a result refrained from pursuing their sinister designs against the peace and prosperity of India. Acting with firm determination the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, invited—if such is the correct term—the Amir of Afghanistan to a Durbar at Rawalpindi. The Amir arrived accordingly and, having inspected the force at Lord Dufferin's disposal, returned through the Khyber with no doubts in

his mind regarding which horse it would be prudent to back. The crisis thus passed, providing the political lesson that evidence of a determination to fight, if necessary, is no bad way of avoiding having to fight.

Returning to Ambala the 74th settled down to the ordinary life of the soldier on the Indian service, being stationed successively at Peshawar, Fyzabad and Cawnpore during ten years which were noteworthy only from the sporting point of view. The achievements of the battalion on the field of sport were as outstanding as those on the field of battle and embraced all forms—cricket, football, polo, and athletics. For example, in 1886 at Ambala, where sixty thousand men, British and Indian, were concentrated for manoeuvres, the 74th won ten first and eleven seconds out of twenty-one field and track events in the games held at the end of training. It must have been a very fine battalion, which is not to be wondered at, for during this period it was blessed with a particularly fine corps of officers. Of these, the Adjutant, Captain S. W. Scrase-Dickens, having contracted dysentery at Fyzabad had eventually to be invalided home as a very sick man. During the afternoon of the 27th April 1893, while his ship, the S.S. *Peshawar*, was rolling up the Red Sea with the usual following wind, Captain Scrase-Dickens was lying on deck in a long chair, wrapped in an ulster in spite of the heat, for besides being very weak from his illness, he was also suffering from sea-sickness and had eaten nothing for nearly two days. One of the lascars, cleaning a boat in the after davits slipped and fell overboard. Roused by the cries of the others, Captain Scrase-Dickens threw off his ulster and dived over the after bulwarks ignoring the danger both from the screws and the sharks. By the time the *Peshawur* had put about he was a mile astern, but had found the lascar. When picked up he was immediately given what the Master described as ‘a strong internal application,’ after which so far from being any the worse for his adventure, he appeared to have been cured both of his dysentery and sea-sickness.

As an act of gallantry, this one was by no means out of the way, for lascars have long had a habit of falling overboard into shark-infested seas, and many British officers have dived in after them. It takes considerable resolution however, to do so when one is feeling weak and far from well. The story is in that way removed from the mundane, and is therefore related in order to give an indication of the character of the officer of the period—for it is quite certain that any one of Captain Scrase-Dickens’ brother officers would have done the same in similar circumstances; having been brought up that way. Captain Scrase-Dickens was awarded the Royal Humane Society’s Silver Medal.

January 1893, saw the first issue of the *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle*. Among the oldest, if not the oldest of regimental journals in the British Army, it was published regularly without a break for sixty-five years; recording during that time the life of the Regiment in peace and, as far as security permitted, in war.

HIGHLAND LIGHT INFANTRY!

This day our little paper will be published, giving us all an account of the doings and sayings of both battalions, interesting at least to ourselves, and which will, I trust, draw us closer and closer together. Have we not just reason to be proud that no two battalions in the service can show such a splendid record of battles on their colours as ours can?

Officers, non-commissioned officers and men, I greet you and wish you one and all a Happy New Year.

W.

D. PATTON-BETHUNE, Colonel.

Originally published twice-yearly at the modest price of twopence a copy, it ended as a quarterly publication at a cost which had reluctantly but steadily risen like that of all other

commodities. Its contributors were limited at first, as the Colonel says, to the two regular battalions, but the Militia came in due course; followed by the Territorial Army, the Service Battalions of the Great War, and finally by our affiliated regiment, the H.L.I. of Canada. When it first started, it was sold by the 'Sergeant in charge of Liquor Bar,' in the 71st at Aldershot, the 74th at Fyzabad, the Depot at Hamilton, and by the recruiting officers or sergeants at Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. Later on, all ranks of the regular battalions were expected to buy a copy—and when a regular soldier is expected to do a thing, he does it. Not that they had any objection, for the *Chronicle* was good value, faithfully recording the life of the Regiment both in the past and in the present, and, however humble one's position in the Regiment might be, there was always the chance of seeing one's name mentioned therein, even if it was only in connection with some humorous incident related by the company 'scribe.' A claim that it was among the best, as well as the oldest of the regimental journals would not be far out. Containing as it did, letters and anecdotes concerning the Indian campaigns of the eighteenth century, the Napoleonic wars, the Crimea and Kaffir wars, the South African and the two world wars, as well as countless small affairs long forgotten; but in which the Regiment fought and suffered in the name of honour and duty, this history could scarcely have been written without it.

In 1896, as a result of Pathan raids into the plains, a force had been moved into the Malakand to enforce good behaviour among the tribes. So far from succeeding in this object it had roused the Pathans into one of their periodical fits of bellicosity, so that they had combined and attacked it in strength. This being a very serious matter, a considerable British force was assembled on what was then known as 'the Punjaub Frontier,' under a Commander with the inspiring name of Sir Bindon Blood. Based on Peshawar, it was designed to operate in the three directions of the Tochi, the Tirah and the Malakand. It thus came under the description of a full-scale campaign, rather than the usual 'expedition.'

These Frontier affairs were usually dealt with by the Punjab Irregular Force—the 'Piffers'—supported by whatever regular troops happened to be stationed along the Frontier at the time. Therefore the news that the Frontier was ablaze did not particularly interest the 74th at Cawnpore, where the battalion carried on as usual with its various detachments, filling in time with all kinds of sporting activities and most of its officers on leave. As the Acting Adjutant put it, 'the few heroes who kept the flag flying in Cawnpore were afflicted with boils, and war was far from their thoughts.' He himself Lieutenant Armstrong, having done his duty by going to church—it being Sunday, 3rd July 1897—was about to board a boat on the Ganges in order to shoot some pigeons he had seen hovering about a cliff up-river, when a native arrived with the General's compliments. Much alarmed, he mounted his horse and galloped off to headquarters. Many years afterwards he remembered that he had forgotten to give any directions to his boatmen who, 'from what I know of natives, may be waiting there yet.'

Armstrong did not see the General at Headquarters, but was shown a telegram to the effect that the Pathans were invading the Nowshera district and that the 74th was to mobilise immediately and leave Cawnpore at noon on the following day—it then being seven o'clock in the evening. At a loss to know what to do—for there was no officer senior to him in the battalion at Cawnpore at that time, Armstrong galloped off to seek advice from the Orderly Room Colour-Sergeant—that indispensable functionary who, one is glad to see, still remains at his post even in these days when so much else has gone; though now described as a 'Chief Clerk.' To his dismay, the Colour-Sergeant was sick, but he remembered there were other Colour-Sergeants, no doubt equally knowledgeable. 'I had remembered seeing in Barracks at intervals, when they were not out shooting or driving about in dog-carts, some most able and energetic people called Company Colour Sergeants.'⁽¹⁾ He dashed to the Guard Room, awoke the Bugler from his slumbers and ordered him to sound for Colour-Sergeants, which the Bugler, after a couple of false starts,

succeeded in doing. As expected, they knew exactly what to do, and returned to their companies with orders to parade for medical inspection, packing of kits and sharpening of bayonets. 'Immediately a wild yell broke out, and some men so far forgot themselves as to dance outside their barrack-rooms.' There is no kindlier man on earth than the British soldier, in whom the tolerant characteristics of his race have been developed by comradeship and sport. The fact remains, however, that he is a soldier and as such, having been highly trained in arms, is always anxious for an opportunity to prove himself against some suitable opponent;

*Why should I 'ate my country's foes,
'oom I am paid to kill?*

is a most uncharacteristic remark, and not Kipling at his best. It implies that a soldier is nothing but a hired assassin or akin rather, to the public hangman. He is nothing of the sort of course, but a man deserving of considerable respect as one prepared at all times to undergo intolerable hardships and forfeit his life at the last resort, whenever his services are called upon. Being thus trained and ready to fight, he is naturally impatient of any weakness in policy. He would be of little use, were he otherwise.

Having got in touch with the Commanding-Officer, who was on leave at Lucknow, Lieutenant Armstrong sat up all night with the Regimental Sergeant-Major, Donald Barrie. In fact, it was impossible for anyone in the battalion to get any sleep when under orders to move to a theatre of war the following morning. All officers and others on leave were recalled, all belongings packed up and all detachments, the largest of which was at Fatehgarh, either called in or ordered to be ready to be picked up on the way through the Punjab. 'Haggard but triumphant,' Armstrong was able, at 11.45 next day to report to headquarters that the 74th was ready to move. It was really not at all a bad effort. The battalion set off by train, several hours late owing to the confusion on the line, and on the way through the Punjab picked up its detachments. One of these, patiently waiting for the troop train on a small wayside station, proved to be 'the sick from Fatehgarh,' who, it appeared, had left hospital without orders, being determined not to be left behind when the 74th was on the war trail. Armstrong was apparently greatly annoyed at this breach of discipline, and clapped them up in the guard's van under arrest. He remarked that 'one could not be very angry with them, as it at least showed a good spirit.' One wonders what he would have done with them had he been 'very angry.'

On arrival at Rawalpindi, the battalion camped with the Gordons and King's Own Scottish Borders, meeting many old acquaintances and celebrating accordingly in spite of the intense heat. This latter proved too much for the Bugle Major, Pollock, who hastened in with the military band from Simla. On arrival he 'dropped dead from heat apoplexy and was buried same day,' as one of the soldiers wrote. Here the troops were issued with field kit and the service scale of ammunition, which included a proportion of dum-dums, as was customary in those realistic days when fighting savages who, it had been discovered by bitter experience, could not always be stopped by sharp-nosed bullets; while the bayonet cannot compete with an efficiently-wielded sword at close quarters. The battalion left for tribal territory in August, crossing the Kabul River by a pontoon bridge with the pipers playing 'Blue Bonnets.' All ranks were wearing Wellesley helmets, khaki drill tunics and Mackenzie trews secured by khaki puttees below the knee.

⁽¹⁾ *In those days they combined the functions of C.S.M. and C.Q.M.S.*

Chapter II

WITH THE MALAKAND FIELD FORCE

Old soldier's 'wrinkles'—the 74th march from Mardan to Malakand—in action against the Mohmands—Hogmanay—the 74th march against the Bunerwals—the forcing of the Tanga Pass, 7 January 1898—end of the Campaign—respects to the Crag Piquet.

SINCE 1863, when the 71st marched against the Bunerwals with the Yusufzai Field Force, a great deal more had naturally been learnt about the Pathan. In due course the Indian Army learned everything about him, and campaigns in the tribal territory began to be conducted in accordance with certain set rules understood and obeyed by both sides—which turned a frontier campaign into a hard, grisly kind of game, for which, to find a parallel, one must go back to the age of chivalry. This stage had not been reached in 1897; in which year a British soldier was still expected to be capable of fighting anybody, and the idea that any special training might be needed did not occur to the authorities. In fact the British soldier, whose training was largely carried out on the barrack-square, while his officers did theirs in the hunting (*the h' image of war*) and other sporting fields, did not do at all badly in these circumstances. Such disasters as took place from time to time, in the Crimea, in Zululand and in South Africa were never irretrievable and were principally occasioned either by mal-administration or by setting the soldier a hopeless task.

The British soldier in those days, both officer and man, led an extremely hard and robust life and was, as a consequence, a person to be feared by any enemy in the field. The 74th, having left Cawnpore in such haste and enthusiasm to fight the 'niggers,' as the troops gaily and irreverently called the Pathans, were thoroughly disgusted at being kept hanging about on the Frontier for months without firing a shot. In spite of the fact that the battalion had come from Cawnpore and had had no experience of mountain warfare no opportunity was taken of this respite to make up any deficiencies in training. Thus, although the first letters from the theatre of operations repeatedly emphasised the startling fact that 'its always the same, our shooting is terrible bad,' it was the forwards at football who were thus criticised, and not the standard of musketry which, it went without saying, was adequate to see off any 'nigger.'

Once having crossed the Kabul, although there was no fighting there was a great deal of marching about, and one or two men died from 'heat apoplexy,' like the poor Bugle-Major. Whenever anyone died in this or some other manner the Colonel, R. D. B. Rutherford, always came along and punctiliously saluted the corpse; an act which was much appreciated by the rank and file. 'He (the Colonel) took a great interest in the welfare of his men and was respected by them for his worth,' one of them wrote. 'The best of good feeling existed between all ranks, all were kind, agreeable and familiar towards each other without the necessary discipline being lost. . . there was no drink, and,' he goes on to say, 'of course there is little or no crime committed.'

This particular old soldier (Pte. Boyle) is, like all his kind, fond of giving advice and tips—'wrinkles' he called them—to the young soldier. '*Patience,*' is his continual cry. '*Remember Job.*' Soldiers had to look after themselves in his day. After explaining exactly how to make a bivouac, he concludes, 'and if you are not comfortable you must be hard to please, but here is another wrinkle only mind you aren't found out. Go to the Commissariat Sergeant and ask for a

couple of sacks. Don't take sugar bags or the ants will trouble you. If he says he has none give one of the native labourers a couple of annas and he'll soon find you some. Rip up the sides, make a hole half-way up and put it on your uprights, fasten the bottoms to the strings of your guy-pegs, make friends with the Cook and Bakery wallahs, and if you don't spend a pretty good time of it, well, you want your nurse again.' He is speaking, it will be remembered, of campaigning on the North-West Frontier of India towards the end of the hot weather. It was the camel transport which taught him the virtues of patience. 'You leave camp with say, 5 comrades and 9 camel drivers. Camels know a few wrinkles by which to get a rest. They can throw their load off if it is not put on the proper way. Failing this they can cause it to become unevenly balanced, and this makes a halt necessary in order to right it. If foiled in this way they kneel down and no amount of persuasion will make it go on. You coax it, kick it, twist its tail and use up your stock of swear-words. After that see if you have not got a little more patience somewhere (though Job was never on transport duty) sit down and light your pipe. Then when the *unt* sees you are fed up he slowly raises himself up, looks round and jogs on as if nothing has happened.'

The 74th left for Malakand on 19 September 1897, marching from Mardan through Jallala and Dargai. All ranks were in the highest spirits at the thought of getting to grips with the Pathans at last. The bayonets, which were of the long, triangular variety, secured to the muzzle of the rifle by a couple of rings, had been periodically sharpened ever since the battalion had first mustered at Cawnpore and now had points like needles. This type of bayonet went in too easily and too far and, as the 71st had found during the Mutiny, was by no means reliable against fanatics or savages, for a thrust did not drop them. Many a British soldier during the Indian wars accordingly had the unpleasant experience of being slashed at by a tulwar, by the victim impaled on the end of his bayonet. It was not unusual to lose one's head in this manner, and it will be remembered how Private Park of the 74th had his throat cut by an impaled Moplah in 1855. 'The bayonet is of little use against these desperate men,' wrote Private John Watt, of the 71st, after the action at Morar, 'When it is drove into them they seize it and cut at you with tulwars until shot down by somebody. Some severe wounds were caused this way.'

The 74th first went into action against the Pathans on 6 October 1897, when in camp at Inayat Killah. The Mohmands began concentrating in the foothills about four miles from the camp and Sir Bindon Blood sent out a small force under command of Colonel Rutherford to deal with them. It is interesting to note, that neither Colonel Rutherford nor more than half his troops had fought on the Frontier before. The composition of the force was also a bit peculiar:

- Half battalion, 2nd H.L.I., half battalion Guides Infantry,
- Half battalion, 1st R.W. Kents, half battalion, 38th Dogras.
- Two guns, 8 Bengal Mountain Battery, R.A.
- One squadron, Guides Cavalry.
- Two sections, Bengal Sappers and Miners.

But it proved quite adequate however. The cavalry trotted out to find the Mohmands; the Guides Infantry formed the advanced guard, being followed by the 74th with the guns, while the Royal West Kents and Dogras provided flank guards. Some seventeen hundred yards from the enemy sangars the 74th were halted and watched the Mohmands 'slithering about' on the hillsides engaging the cavalry. Gradually the standards appeared and the Pathans gathered round them. The 74th then advanced and opened fire by company volleys at a range of about fourteen hundred yards. This long-range volley-firing in the British Army at that date was extremely accurate, and effective against any good target. The Pathans hastily disappeared and, as the cavalry were unable to find them again, the force withdrew. The enemy then reappeared in half-hearted attempts against the rear-guard, but were

easily driven off. The Mohmands surrendered that evening having had, they said, 'enough fighting to last them for some time.' They had only taken up arms, they explained, as the result of rumours that the *Sirkar* intended to annex their country. 'If ever a battalion was disgusted at the turn of affairs it was the 2nd H.L.I. ' wrote Sergeant Baird, 'but we live in hopes it won't be the last chance the old 74th will have up here. We have a good chance of getting an engagement with the Bunerwals, and it is to be hoped they will show fight.' There is no doubt that it was the high standard of shooting which settled this affair so easily. This had become very remarkable in the British Army since the Crimea, and the enemy could be effectively engaged at ranges which would never be dreamt of today. At Omdurman, for example, the British troops opened fire at seventeen hundred yards, and it will be remembered how in the affair at Kalpi in 1856, the 71st were dropping their advancing enemy at eight hundred yards and over by single shots.

After the capitulation of the Mohmands, Sir Bindon Blood advanced up the Salazai Valley to the east and reached and crossed the Durand Line. A sketch by Major Carteret Carey of the 74th shows him at the village of Pushat, some miles inside Afghanistan. He had only cavalry with him on this occasion, and while he was gone the 74th, like the other infantry, spent its time marching about on convoy and foraging expeditions—also in making threatening motions against the Utman Khels who had not yet paid their fines. The men continued to be thoroughly disgusted with the Pathans for not showing more fight and blamed the political officers with the force for being too soft. The battalion was living very hard, as was of course, inevitable, and was subject to heavy sniping every night. After a hard day's march there is nothing more irritating, for there is little that can be done about it. It was extremely annoying therefore, that the Pathans never gave them an opportunity to get their own back in the daytime. The tribesmen were not wholly dependent, even in those days, on the '*ten rupee jezail*,' but possessed a fair number of modern rifles such as Lee-Metfords and Remingtons, with which they could make life in a bivouac at night very unpleasant. When things got too bad, the 74th would send out small parties under sergeants, who would watch for the enemy rifle-flashes and fire volleys in their direction. This proved very effective, and many enemy casualties were caused in this way.

Eventually, on 16 November 1897, the 74th moved with the rest of the force into a tented camp at Kuna on the banks of the Swat River Canal, some fifteen miles to the north-west of Mardan. All the tribes with the exception of the Buners having submitted, the latter were now to be given another month in which to come to terms. This they seemed unlikely to do and so, with the prospect of a hard campaign in the new year, Colonel Rutherford kept his battalion in hard training. 'Running drill in shirt sleeves for an hour before breakfast every morning, two or three route marches a week in marching order, with parties found for grazing transport, water-pickets, line or company pickets, camp patrols commissariat, hospital and camp guards—our time was pretty well taken up.' Still, it was not a bad life at all. The 74th took turns with the East and West Kents in giving concert parties, vendors came out from Mardan selling comforts of various kinds, and each man got three pints of beer a day and a tot of rum—which was sufficient to sugar a far worse pill than that which the troops had to swallow at Kunda, on the banks of the Swat River Canal, in 1897.

Christmas came with the usual festivities staged by the English regiments, in which the 74th took no part other than as guests and spectators. Their show came at Hogmanay when, their duties having been taken over by the sympathetic and interested Englishmen they all got drunk in accordance with their usual custom and showed, while under the influence, 'their true feelings towards their superiors.' Exactly when this annual debauch first became customary in Scottish regiments is difficult to say; but this is the first mention of it in the annals of the 71st and 74th. It was no different then from what it is today. The troops showed their true feelings towards their

officers by hoisting them shoulder high, staggering aimlessly about with them in this manner and every so often giving them three cheers. If they did not like an officer they felt themselves entitled to tell him so at Hogmanay, but they never seem to have done so yet.

The Bunerwals had made no attempt to come to terms, but had called out the Lashkars, sent to the Afghans for aid, and made ready to defend the passes. Sir Bindon Blood therefore marched against them, giving the 74th inadequate time to sober-up, for tents were struck shortly after midnight on 2 January, 1898. The first day's march was to Katleng -only thirteen miles; but a terrible thirteen miles. The battalion went straight across country, ignoring such tracks as there were, but 'fetching a compass' over mountains, rivers and ravines, including the Kot River which ran swift and deep. The cavalry and horse-drawn artillery and transport were obliged to go by a different route, but the Mountain Batteries with their mules were able to accompany the infantry. The temperature was almost at freezing point and a strong wind and heavy rain continued all day and all night. It is astonishing how the troops stood it, for they were most inadequately clad, but their only complaint was that they were not allowed to leave camp to inspect some ancient ruins nearby. During the campaign the troops had made quite a good thing out of archaeology, for many remains of an old Buddhist culture had been discovered, and the idols and pottery picked up had found a ready market among the officers. To be fair to the soldiers however, they appear to have been genuinely interested in these relics of a bygone civilisation and went out of their way to learn from their officers the story of Alexander, the Moghuls, and other invaders of the past.

From Katleng the force moved up the Gaddar River to Sangao, some five or six miles from the Tanga Pass. Here the troops were 'agreeably surprised,' to see the enemy in large numbers waiting along the Tanga heights with their standards waving. After their previous experiences the 74th were still apprehensive lest the Buners would 'cave in at the last moment,' but a camp bulletin was issued reporting that they had finally refused terms, and this again put everyone into high spirits.

The force assembled by Sir Bindon Blood for the forthcoming operations consisted of three brigades, two of which were to force the Tanga Pass and the other, which contained all the mounted troops, the Pirsai Pass, further to the east. The 74th were in the 2nd Brigade now lying before Tanga, in which the other units were a Mountain Battery, a Company of Sappers and Miners, the Buffs and the 21st Punjabis. What was described as a 'Stage Depot,' consisting of British and Indian Field Hospitals and a 'Commissariat Godown,' had been established at Katleng. Before the assault on the Tanga, the 2nd Brigade was reinforced by a squadron of Bengal Lancers, a Field Battery and five companies of the 3rd Bombay Light Infantry.

Practically the only resemblance between operations on the Frontier in 1898 and those in 1936 lay in the British encampments and the Pathan sangars. The former were arranged within the well-known defended perimeter, along which all troops in the camp except the camp guards and the reserve had a place to man when the alarm sounded. The Pathan was always watching for an opportunity to charge. When such occurred, and he was enabled to assemble within charging distance with his sword out, he was very difficult to stop, hence the issue—in 1898—of dum-dum bullets. His predilection for the charge however, spoilt his capacity as a guerrilla, for he was always trying to concentrate instead of disperse and thus offered easy targets. Still, it is unlikely that he ever expected to emerge victorious from any campaign— he was usually only out for a little excitement, and when all was over knew that the *Sirkar* would not be too hard on him. After all, most of the tribesmen had relatives serving the Queen. A typical Frontier incident occurred when Sir Bindon Blood was cantering up the Nahakki Pass at the head of the Guides Cavalry and surprised some armed Mohmands in a village. Knowing the game was up their leader, an old

gentleman wearing two British war medals pinned to his ragged shirt, stood to attention and saluted smartly. ‘Good morning, Sir,’ he said to the General. ‘Mornin’;’ answered Sir Bindon, automatically returning the salute. ‘Hi!’ he bellowed, reining back, ‘what the hell do you think you’re doing?’ But the Pathan had fled.

Sir Bindon Blood rode out with the Brigade and battalion commanders to reconnoitre the Tanga on the afternoon of 6 January. He led the reconnaissance to the top of an eminence close to the entrance to the Pass and there gave out his orders, saying that it was his intention to direct the action from that spot on the following day. His plan was to make a direct attack with the Royal West Kents, 74th and 21st Punjabis, supported by the 16th Bengal Infantry, while the 29th Punjabis—with an hour’s start—made a turning movement round the enemy’s right flank. While he was speaking the standards of the Bunerwals appeared along the heights flanking the Pass. Twenty-eight of them could be counted, indicating a force of at least two thousand men. Although Sir Bindon Blood had at least double this number of infantry for the assault, it should be remembered that a predominance of three to one was the accepted requirement when storming any position of strength. True, in the British Army it has often been departed from, as has been described in the earlier volumes of this history. In many a siege and assault courage and skill have successfully compensated for lack of numbers. Nevertheless, the old tried rule still held good—and indeed still does.

The Buffs were ordered to hold the camp and follow up after the capture of the heights. It was as well that this role did not fall to the 74th, for the soldiers would certainly not have accepted it in any cheerful frame of mind, after their many disappointments. As things were, they looked forward to the morrow with every intention of showing both the Bunerwals and everyone else who happened to be looking on, that the 74th knew a ‘wrinkle ‘or two about battle-fighting. Preparations for the advance went on up to a late hour, after which volley-firing parties had to be continually sent out to deal with snipers. The effectiveness of these parties was proved on this occasion, for many dead Buners were found lying about near the camp on the following morning. However, all this activity meant that the troops, with a hard day ahead, got little rest. They were to go into action carrying their cardigans and mess tins on their backs; a couple of tins of *bully*; a spare pair of socks (carried one on each shoulder, under the equipment braces); 165 rounds of ammunition, with rifle, bayonet and equipment. It was a very light order for those days but, while carrying it, the troops were to be required to fight their way up a precipitous, rocky mountain whose summit was a good fifteen hundred feet above the starting line. They were not in the least dismayed at this prospect and spent what was left of the night after all preparations were complete, in singing topical parodies of music-hall songs written by their ‘bards,’ as they still called them, although the old Highlanders, such as Corporal John Mackay of the 71st, would no doubt have been able to think out a more appropriate name

*Tell us have you seen them, anywhere at all,
The Mahmuds, or Afridis, or Johnny Boneywal?
Oh-h-h, Holy Moses! when we meet there’ll be a sight,
For we’re lookin’ for the BONEYWALS tae finish aff the fecht!*

On the morning of 7 January 1898, the bugles sounded the advance at 8.30 a.m. and the 74th, with all pipers playing, marched off for the Tanga behind the 21st Punjabis; the Brigade being led by the Royal West Kents. The Buners, who were evidently not feeling at their best, commenced to beat their drums and call loudly on Allah. As the 74th entered the narrow Pass, the echoes turned these sounds into ‘a perfect babel,’ which was soon enhanced by the roar of the supporting

artillery and the heavy rifle-fire from the left flank, as the 20th Punjabis, during their outflanking movement along the ridge, came within range of the enemy sangars. The Buffs then came up in rear, deployed along the front of the Commander's battle headquarters, and opened heavy covering fire as the Royal West Kents on the right; the 21st Punjabis in the centre; and the 74th on the left, were ordered to scale the heights along whose summit the standards were gathered. This was a most formidable operation, for the line of advance was so steep that over much of it rifles had to be slung, in order that both hands might be used. 'The hill was steep,' says Private Boyle, 'and our progress necessarily slow. The enemy did not waste their ammunition; they reserved their fire till we were well up. We advanced as ordered, our Colonel showing very prominently at the head of our regiment and well in front.' The pipers were also showing up very prominently, and somehow managed to scramble up without ever ceasing to play *The Camp bells are Coming*; although the 74th were now in the Mackenzie tartan, the colour of which had last been seen by the Bunerwals in '63, when the 71st 'sorted them,' on the Crag Picquet. It is more than likely that many of them remembered it. As the 74th neared the sangars they passed several obvious ranging-marks, such as ancient ruins and clusters of trees. The bullets came like hail; so that the advance had to be carried on in rushes—which was no joke after so steep a climb. Like Piper McLauchlan on the ramparts of Badajoz, Piper Sutherland's music was stopped by a shot through the bag,' but unlike his famous predecessor he did not succeed in mending it. There were many shots through clothing and equipment, but, miraculously, only one through the body—Private John McMasters, who received a two-ounce ball through his right breast which carried with it into his lung two cartridges from his bandolier. The poor fellow kicked up a fearful row at being taken downhill to the rear, which he seemed to think was a great indignity, and forcefully demanded to be helped in among the enemy. It was a pity that his wish was not granted, for with such a terrible wound he had no hope anyway.

As the distance narrowed several Buners made gallant charges against the advancing 74th, but they were not supported by their friends and were killed. One, who was taken prisoner surrendered his sword with an air that would not have disgraced a French aristocrat and cheerfully informed his captors that now they had him they were welcome to keep him, for he had always wanted to be a soldier. The remaining Buners did not wait for the 74th to get in amongst them with the bayonet, and when the bugles sounded the charge and the battalion at last reached the summit, the enemy were seen running down the hill and along the valley. 'Our pipers played, we gave a cheer, then we fell out to eat our bully beef and biscuits and have a good drink from our water bottles.' The Boneywals had been duly 'sorted,' and a man could now relax.

All the other passes into their habitat having been forced in the same manner the Buners, having made their gesture surrendered, and there is no more to tell. The 74th were quartered for some time in various Pathan villages, 'and if the Buners had shown half so much perseverance as the bugs they might have driven us out of the country.' 'Showing the flag,' the battalion marched all over the land, 'greatly disappointed at not getting a fight,' but compensated to some extent by 'finds.' 'I found a pair of ram's horns, richly carved, also a Koran stand richly carved and ingeniously cut out of one piece of wood, also a grain shovel about two feet long, the blade consisting of the upper part of a thistle; the handle forming the stem. I also found a condensed milk tin, two pages of the *New York World* and a pair of boots belonging to the Royal Irish Rifles.' By 17 January the battalion, on its way out of tribal territory, reached the village of Ambeyla. 'We looted the village, numerous articles being found which had belonged to the 71st and had fallen into the hands of the Boners in 1863. I found a native with an old army watch cloak. I took it from him; he said he had given two goats for it ten years before; it was numbered 71, so I burned it as I did not like the idea of leaving it in his possession, seeing it belonged to

one of the 71st H.L.I.’

The 74th marched down through the Ambeyla Pass and halted by the Crag Picquet to present arms, while the Pipers played *The Flowers of the Forest* and *Mackenzie Highlanders* and ‘all felt proud to be on this spot, and to have avenged the losses of our First Battalion who had suffered so severely in 1863.’ Thus it is shown how the two old regiments, though still retaining their several characteristics, were now indeed one, so that henceforth whosoever harmed the one harmed both—though, with regard to this particular incident it must be emphasised, in justice to the 71st, that the regiment had proved to be perfectly competent to avenge its own losses.

Chapter III

THE INSURRECTION AT CRETE

The Durand Trophy—the 71st sail for Malta 1895, and to Crete 1898—adventures of the 71st during the Insurrection—the H.L.I. Militia win their first V.C.— the 71st leave Plymouth for South Africa, 1899—causes of the South African War.

RETURNING through Rustam to Mardan, the 74th buried Privates McMasters and Trainnie alongside the graves of those of the 71st who had fallen in the Frontier Campaign of ‘63. Here they certainly rest in noble company, for the graveyard was later appropriated by the Guides, and all their British officers killed on the Frontier are buried there and include the mortal remains of many V.C.s The Guides used to go to considerable lengths to recover their dead after their endless affairs on the Frontier and so, in the graveyard at Mardan there are none missing, as far as is known. The men of the Highland Light Infantry are the only strangers and the only rank and file, whose dust mingles with that of these fine officers of the Guides.

At Mardan the Field Force was disbanded and, after receiving many compliments for their efforts during the campaign the 74th entrained for Karachi, and left for Ceylon in the following year, 1899. For the time being their active service was at an end, and so we must leave them, and return to the 71st. Before doing so—although this is not a history of sporting triumphs for which there is no space—the winning outright of the Durand Football Trophy must be briefly mentioned as an outstanding achievement. The Trophy, consisting of a silver football resting on a plinth was presented by Sir Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, in 1888. Thereafter the Durand became the premier football tournament in India. It was open to all corners; civilian teams, both British and Indian competed, and there were over thirty entries on an average. The 74th performed the remarkable feat of winning the trophy five times—in, 1889, 1890, 1893, 1894 and 1895—the last three forming the ‘hat-trick,’ which left the trophy in the permanent possession of the 74th. In view of the amalgamation of the Highland Light Infantry with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, it is interesting to note that in 1888, the first year for which it was played, the latter regiment beat the Highland Light Infantry in the finals and won the tournament three times in all.

In the three successive matches through which the 74th won the trophy outright, the finals were as follows 1893— The Highland Light Infantry beat the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders by two goals to one after a highly exciting game; 1894—The Highland Light Infantry beat the Royal Scots Fusiliers in an even more exciting game by one goal to nil; 1895—The Highland Light Infantry beat the Somersetshire Light Infantry by six goals to one, and carried the trophy off the field with the pipers playing ahead.

There is a common belief that the cry ‘H.L.I.—keep it on the island!’ had its origin in the

Durand, owing to a supposed habit of the regimental team in playing for time after establishing a lead, by kicking into touch. One can only say that nothing so unsporting is disclosed in any of the reports on the matches. It is noticeable however, that in nearly every game tribute is paid to the magnificent kicking of the backs whereas, it will be remembered, Private Boyle complained that the shooting of the forwards was always 'terrible bad.' Therefore it appears that the regimental successes on the football field were mainly due to superlative back play. If, in a hard fought game the backs are constantly putting in mighty kicks presumably in the direction of the wing forwards the ball will naturally go out of play on many occasions—which might appear deliberate to excited supporters of the opposition. Still, it is odd to say the least of it that an opprobrious epithet should have become associated with the name of the regiment as a result of a sporting fixture. It really seems highly improbable that there was anything in it, other than the fact that at a football match when some spectators are shouting 'H.L.I!' and others 'keep it on the island! 'the two might well become linked to one another and so a legend born. As is well known, a popular explanation for the fact that the Highland Light Infantry though Highland did not wear the kilt was that the regiment had 'lost its kilts for running away at Waterloo.' As the Duke of Wellington would have said, people who will believe that sort of thing will believe anything, and there is nothing one can do about it. (1)

In 1882, the same year in which the 74th, the 'overseas battalion,' left for the Egyptian Campaign, the 71st, 'the home service battalion,' left Glasgow for Ireland. Although that country was then of course, part of the United Kingdom and therefore 'home,' the ingrained dislike of the natives for English government meant that soldiers stationed there were in the position of an army of occupation far more so indeed, than those on the Indian service. A battalion in Ireland, therefore, had to be kept at more than cadre establishment and had to be continually ready to take the field. The 71st remained there for over seven years, being constantly on the move—1882, the Curragh; 1883, Dublin; 1884—1886, Belfast; 1887—1889, the Curragh. The natives being more or less friendly at this time, the period passed without any incident worth recording, except that in 1884 the battalion won the Army inter-regimental football challenge cup. In 1890 the battalion was transferred to Dover, where it won the Chatham Charity, Kent County and Junior Football challenge cups and reached the semi-final of the Army Cup in the following year. In addition to this prowess on the football field, which on the whole equalled that of the 74th, the battalion maintained the very high standard of shooting always associated with it, winning the Army inter-regimental rifle match in 1884 with the highest score ever made by any army team. Another sport at which both battalions were constantly above average was tug-of-war—an event requiring strength, courage, endurance and team-work.

From 1893—1894 the 71st was stationed at Aldershot which by this time had been wholly transformed and offered a high standard of military accommodation for those days. Here Colour-Sergeant Stevens won the Army Cup at the Army Rifle Meeting and so became the champion shot of the Army, while the football team won the 'Aldershot News' Challenge Cup.

In 1895 the 71st sailed for Malta, so that both the 'home service and 'overseas' battalions of the Highland Light Infantry were in fact abroad at the same time—by no means an unusual occurrence. At Malta the battalion won the tug-of-war challenge cup for three years in succession and achieved many other sporting successes—but one must now leave the field of sport and return to that of war.

The decay of the Turkish Empire which had led to the occupation of Egypt by British forces in 1882 caused much unrest in Europe. At a time when the German Empire was being formed and various independent States were arising in the Balkans, the Saracen was losing his grip on the Mediterranean and the Middle East, resulting in a situation which the European Powers, and

especially Great Britain, were observing with much anxiety. Having secured Egypt and being in occupation of Malta, and at the same time in possession of the largest fleet in the world, Great Britain was in a paramount position in the Mediterranean and intended to remain so, for the security of the short route to the east was to her a vital interest. The government of the Turkish island of Cyprus had been taken over by Great Britain in 1878. That of Crete remained under Turkish rule—or misrule rather, for it was described as ‘the worst governed province of the Turkish Empire,’ which was saying a lot. Like Cyprus it had a mixed Christian and Mahomedan population, the former being descendants of the Venetians and the latter of Turkish pirates. Quarrels between the two were being fomented by Greece with a view to creating an opportunity for annexing the island, but these designs were viewed unfavourably by the ‘Concert of Europe,’ a loose confederation of the ‘Great Powers,’ which, Germany having withdrawn as she did later from the League of Nations, consisted of Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy. The Concert agreed to preserve the neutrality of Crete and keep the peace therein by means of an international armed force, while an international Board of Admirals (why Admirals should have been chosen is not clear) sat permanently at Candia, endeavouring to come to some agreement regarding the future of the island. Meanwhile the Turkish garrison remained, and was supported in the exploitation of the inhabitants by large numbers of armed Moslem irregulars known as ‘Bashi Bazooks.’ The situation, as none of the Powers trusted one another for a moment, was highly explosive.

The British contribution to the international force consisted of a battalion of infantry and one or two small warships. At the end of July 1898, the 71st left Malta for Crete to relieve the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The strength of the battalion, after leaving a detachment at Malta, was about seven hundred and fifty all ranks. The battalion headquarters was at Candia in a tented camp, but a detachment of a hundred and eighty all ranks was left at Kania, seventy miles away; while nearly two hundred others occupied three outpost positions outside Candia; the nearest being about eight miles away. Intercommunication was nearly all by visual signalling provided by the battalion signallers.

The troops at headquarters were employed on guard duties and patrols throughout the town, which was in a state of considerable unrest so much so that Lt.-Colonel F. M. Reid, the Commanding Officer of the 71st, felt obliged to apply for a reinforcement of three hundred men, as he was unable to make the dispositions required with the numbers at his disposal. Militarily speaking, his camp, about three-quarters of a mile from the harbour, was in an impossible position, being overlooked on all sides by the ramparts and outlying buildings of the town; but the possibility of an attack against any of the international force had been discounted by the authorities. The 71st at first greatly preferred the Moslems to the Christians, getting on very well with the Turkish garrison and enjoying several international parties of the smoking concert variety at which, although there was nothing to drink but coffee, the sergeants drew loud applause from the Turks for such solo renderings as *Ye Banks and Braes*. All ranks were consequently greatly put-out when they discovered in due course that ‘the unspeakable Turk’ had been actively plotting their massacre for some time.

On Tuesday, 6 September 1898, Colonel Reid received orders from the Admirals to take possession of the tax office on the quay, which the Turks used for the collection of tithes. The Admirals now decided to collect this tax themselves and use it for the upkeep of a Christian police force. This action was naturally resented by the Turks, and Colonel Reid was visited by a deputation of Bashi Bazooks. Having promised to forward their grievances to the proper quarter he set out for the tax office with an officer and twenty men. Lieutenant Haldane with another twenty had left previously to take over the guard on the gate leading to the quay. At another gate

on the sea wall, Second-Lieutenant Segrave was on duty with forty men guarding the telegraph station. While Colonel Reid was in the office forcibly removing the keys from one of the Turks, firing broke out in the street and he was told that the Bashi Bazooks were attacking the gate guarded by Lieutenant Haldane. He accordingly sent ten seamen under Sub-Lieutenant Nicholson, R.N. to reinforce the gate.

Meanwhile Haldane, who had received orders not to open fire, had drawn up his twenty men in front of the gate and there they stood, with fixed bayonets in the 'on guard' position, facing three thousand armed Bashi Bazooks. The air of grim determination which the British soldier displays on such occasions goes a long way towards making up for lack of numbers. For a while the Bashi Bazooks were daunted by it, as many better men than they had been, on the battle-fields of long ago. At last, however, they rushed forward with loud yells and bore the guard back within the gate but, though overwhelmed, the guard used their bayonets with effect. The Bashi Bazooks fell back leaving a number on the ground, and the gate was shut, one man of the 71st having been mortally wounded. The Bashi Bazooks then occupied the neighbouring buildings and opened fire from all sides, killing Lieutenant Haldane and wounding several others. The remaining soldiers and seamen under Sub-Lieutenant Nicholson then withdrew towards the sea front, carrying their dead and wounded, in the hope of boarding the *Turquoise*, a small steamer lying alongside and used for distilling water for the troops.

Second-Lieutenant Segrave and the Telegraph guard were also hard-pressed, being under heavy fire from all sides, while the Bashi Bazooks endeavoured to work forward to the gate. Making no headway against a very accurate fire from the guard, the Bashi's then worked round to the rear which had been thought to be secure, as it was held by Turkish regular troops. These however, made no attempt to interfere and so the guard was surrounded; Lieutenant Segrave and two men being wounded. The party then withdrew on to a narrow ledge along the sea wall. Working along this they reached the beach across which they could see the Custom House with its Royal Marine guard. The beach being under heavy fire could only be traversed by section rushes, during which two more men were wounded but were carried into cover by their comrades. The party was only just in time to save the Colonel who, with Captain Begbie, two N.C.O.s and seven Marines, was being very hard-pressed at the Custom House behind a barricade formed out of boxes of raisins. Just as Lieutenant Segrave's party arrived the Bashi's set fire to the adjoining houses, smoking out the Christians who crowded in upon the Custom House. Lloyd's Office nearby was also set on fire but was saved at great personal risk by Lieutenant Segrave who, it will be remembered, had been wounded sometime previously. The fire however, continued to spread and the Custom House itself caught, while the defenders were still pinned to their barricades by the hail of bullets which went on without ceasing. It seems likely that soldiers, marines and Christian refugees would all have been exterminated, but they were rescued in the nick of time by the Turkish Governor who, having been persuaded, it is believed, by the guns of the warships, belatedly arrived to apologise to the Colonel for the trouble and inconvenience to which he had been put. It is to be hoped that the Colonel made a suitable reply, but what with one thing and another there is no doubt that he was a badly shaken man by this time. 'By the mercy of Providence,' he wrote home on the 8 September, 'I am alive to write to you, but it was touch and go for a long time, and the most of us thought we must be massacred.'

While the Colonel was going through these adventures the troops at battalion headquarters had been almost completely surprised. Owing to the direction of the wind the shots in the town could not be heard, and most of the troops not on duty were watching a football game. A signal was however, received from H.M. Gunboat *Hazard*, which was apparently under the Colonel's orders, asking if she should get up steam. This intimated to Major Conway Gordon, who was in

command, that some trouble was afoot. Having replied ordering steam, he sent Captain Gowan to the quarter guard to have the alarm sounded and this had scarcely been done when fire was opened on the camp. The riot had evidently been very carefully planned, for it was afterwards discovered that the buildings overlooking the camp had been loopholed, and in no haphazard manner, for the fire from them divided the camp into three portions making it impossible for the troops to move from one to the other without heavy casualties. Many men were killed or wounded while sitting in their tents, including two Pipers, Campbell and Macdonald who had been peacefully doodling away on their practice chanters. Thanks to the discipline and training of the battalion, the situation was soon got under control and the Bashi's driven out of cover both by bullet and bayonet. The individual deeds of gallantry reported during the affair are too numerous to mention, but a typical example is that of Private Cassidy who was carrying a message to the Kania bastion guard for transmission by telegraph. He was under heavy fire the whole way, getting first a shot through his helmet and then one through the liver—a dangerous and painful wound such as would drop most men. But he was carrying dispatches upon the safe delivery of which lives might depend, for all he knew. He therefore struggled on and delivered them. Space is again too short to describe the soldier-like conduct of the many guards on duty throughout the city, who were responsible for the saving of innumerable lives. It is enough to say, that although taken by surprise, out-numbered and in many cases very hard put to it, there was no instance of any detachment being content merely to defend itself. All remembered their duty of defending lives and property and more than one effort to do so bordered on the heroic.

Once order had been restored the reaction of the Powers was rapid and effective. The Turkish garrison was evacuated and the leaders of the revolt and those caught red-handed in murder were tried by an international court and immediately executed. A gallows was erected outside the city and another on the walls, upon which the culprits were hanged in public. Contemporary drawings show men of the 71st acting as executioners. Others were ceremoniously shot by international firing squads of twelve men each, three from every contingent—British, French, Italian and Russian. The troops were drawn up in hollow square for these performances, at which, the firing squads being multi-lingual, the officers in command had to signal the order to fire with their swords. In order to impress on the culprits and spectators that it was no martyrdom of heroes, the victims were shot in the back, and so died in dishonour. In addition to exacting these retributions the Powers sent in large reinforcements of troops but, once the Turks had departed, there were no further outbreaks and the island was in the end handed over to Greece after the Great War.

In the outbreak in Crete, the 71st lost one officer and nine soldiers killed and had one officer, two sergeants, one corporal, two pipers and nineteen soldiers wounded. 'The infantry called upon to defend themselves against this sudden, general and treacherous attack,' wrote the Commander of the British troops in Crete in his dispatch, 'all belonged to the 1st H.L.I. and behaved in a manner worthy of the traditions of this distinguished corps.' Eight officers and fifteen rank and file were mentioned in dispatches, two officers were appointed to the Distinguished Service Order and four received Brevet promotions, while three other ranks were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Considering that the whole affair lasted only a few hours and was a matter of internal security, the issue of so many awards was unusual to say the least. The scale in fact, was more appropriate to a whole campaign in those days, and at least one letter to *The Times* pointed out that the battalion had been in action only for one afternoon whereas the 2nd H.L.I. had been over six months in the field and had received nothing. Still, a study of the events proves beyond all doubt that the conduct of the 71st was indeed quite outstanding, especially for a battalion of young soldiers who had never been in action before. For that reason it has been described at greater length than so minor an incident would normally merit, for it is an example

which should be borne in mind by all soldiers. The story may be fittingly concluded with one which will doubtless appear to be intolerably sentimental to the reader of today—but it happens to be true. While dying of his wounds, Private John Bell was asked if he had any last message. ‘Its come to that, has it ?’ he asked, and was silent for a while, ‘ well, just tell ma mither I deed doing my duty.’ Duty! was that really what inspired the soldiers of those days ? It would certainly seem so, also that a mother of those days was considerably comforted at the thought that her son had died doing it.

The commanding officer of the 71st, ‘Old Sammy Reid,’ as his brother officers called him, had no business to leave his battalion and wander off with twenty men to secure the tax office. He should have sent the Major or one of the company commanders to do it. By placing himself in a position in which he could not exercise command he came badly out of the affair. Therefore in justice to Old Sammy’s memory as well as from a matter of interest, it should be noted that he immediately reported for duty on the outbreak of war in 1914, although he was then sixty-five. He commanded the 17th Lincolns, 13th Worcesters and 34th Royal Fusiliers in turn ; being wounded, twice mentioned in despatches and gaining the D.S.O. at the age of sixty-seven. This fine effort was evidently a bit too much for him, for he died at the comparatively early age—for a man like him—of seventy-two. He had joined the 71st as an Ensign by purchase, in 1868.

It was not only in Crete and the Malakand, that the mustachioed Soldiers of the Queen, in their khaki drill tunics and Wolseley helmets were dying ‘doing their duty,’ during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. While the events described were taking place, Kitchener with the Anglo-Egyptian army was moving up the Nile to Omdurman. On 22 September 1898, when the Dervishes were charging the British squares at Gedarif, Captain the Hon. A. G. A. Hore-Ruthven of the 3rd (Militia) Bn., H.L.I., serving with the Egyptian Army, left his square and picked up a wounded Egyptian officer lying within fifty yards of the enemy. Pursued by the Dervishes he laid his burden down three times to drive them off single-handed with sword and pistol, finally reaching the safety of the square and becoming the second Militia officer in the history of the British Army to be awarded the Victoria Cross. ⁽²⁾ ‘All hope,’ wrote his battalion, ‘that it may be followed by a line commission, although we should be sorry to lose so popular an officer.’

On 16 December 1898, the 71st left Crete in the *S.S. Verona*, disembarking at Plymouth in a furious storm of wind and rain, on the 27th. It was the first time that the 71st had been in Plymouth for a hundred and twenty years—since in fact, Macleod’s Highlanders had watched the French fleet manoeuvring off the Sound, from their encampment on Makers Heights in 1778. The battalion was well content to be home where it belonged—it after all, being the ‘home service’ battalion—but, Cardwell or no Cardwell it was expecting rather too much that soldiers should stay long at home in those days—or in any other days for that matter. On 23 October 1899, in the presence of a large crowd of spectators headed by the Mayors of Plymouth, Stonehouse and Devon-port, and with the band of the 43rd playing *Auld Lang Syne* as the *Aurania* got up her anchor, the 71st left Southampton for South Africa and the theatre of war.

During the period of the ‘small wars,’ the activities of the British Army had been receiving the close and sympathetic attention of the German General Staff. The band of professional soldiers who comprised this remarkable corps had one interest in life only—the study of war—and from the errors and successes of the British Army they learned much. For the individual British soldier they had the greatest admiration; while of his training and leadership they were constructively critical. The reason for the sluggishness and apparent undue caution of the commanders, was ascribed to the constant difficulty of getting up supplies owing to a faulty administrative organisation. As for the defects in training, that was explained ‘by the peculiar

conditions under which the English Army is called upon to fight; it must be ready to meet an enemy, trained and armed in Europe, or, in the border mountains of India, an adversary most skilful in taking cover and who, even with antiquated firearms makes remarkably good practice. In the Sudan it had to expect an assault by fanatics, who saw their salvation in the use of cold steel ; at one time skirmishing is necessary ; at another, troops must be massed together. It is, therefore, conceivable that the experiences of one war could hardly be assimilated for the general military good; it had therefore, been left to the troops to find out the most suitable formation, and this knowledge was almost invariably very dearly purchased.³

While strongly objecting to any form of central government, even their own, the Boers had been obliged to put up with it so long as their homesteads had been threatened by the Kaffirs and Zulus, against whom they were unable to defend themselves without British help. Even after the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, which united them against the British supremacy, they had still fought alongside the British troops against the Zulus in the war of 1879—1880. In December of that year however they rose and declared their independence. The first Boer War ensued, at a time when the majority of the British Army was on active service either in Afghanistan or Egypt, and there were few troops to spare for South Africa. The disasters of Laing's Nek and Majuba followed, and a weak British Government concluded terms in March 1881, by which the internal independence of the Boer States was recognised. The Boers, however, were quite incapable of developing the country, which was and is, very rich in mineral wealth, but refused to grant the normal rights of citizenship to those, mostly British subjects, who came in to do it for them, and who were scornfully referred to by the Boers as '*Uitlanders*.' Relations between the Boer Republic and British South Africa grew steadily worse owing to the oppression of the *Uitlanders*, many of whom were employed by British companies, and to the restrictive trade practices of President Kruger.

Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of the Cape, whose solution for ending the unhappy state of affairs was a South African Federation under the British flag, thought he saw an opportunity for attaining his ideal in the discontent of the *Uitlanders*. At the end of 1895 this discontent had reached the stage at which a revolutionary conspiracy had been formed and Rhodes promised support. A plan was made for the *Uitlanders* to rise up and seize Johannesburg. Dr Jameson, the administrator of Rhodesia, was to ride over the border with an irregular force in support of the revolutionaries, who would then await British mediation. At the last minute it transpired that Rhodes and the *Uitlanders* had different ideas. The latter apparently, had some notion of setting up an independent state of their own. Having ridden over the border as planned, Dr Jameson accordingly found himself without support and was obliged to surrender—a man with the best of motives who had nonetheless committed an unauthorised act of war. Although, as the Boers were not ready for war this crisis was smoothed over, the evidence it gave of the hostile attitude of the British settlers gave the Boers a bad fright and they accordingly began to arm for a war a *l'outrance*.

Although the behaviour of the *Uitlanders* had not been such as to gain them much sympathy they were still British subjects, and British policy had consequently to be continued to be directed towards obtaining some amelioration of their unhappy position. No success was achieved and the situation gradually worsened. In September 1899, a large exodus started of the *Uitlanders* in the Transvaal. In October there was reason to believe that the Boers meditated an attack on the weak British forces in South Africa. These were consequently reinforced and a partial mobilisation declared. This led to an ultimatum from President Kruger that all British forces were to be withdrawn from the frontiers by the 11th of the month and no more landed. The ultimatum was naturally ignored, and war was consequently declared by the Boer Republics on 11 October 1899.

⁽¹⁾ *H.L.I. — keep it on the island! was a well-known admonition heard at football matches up to 1914. Shortly after the Great War it was discontinued by Army Order.*

⁽²⁾ *The author believes him to have been the first Militia V.C., but there is some doubt.*

⁽³⁾ *German Official Account of the War in South Africa.*

Chapter IV

THE HIGHLAND BRIGADE AT MAGERSFONTEIN

The situation in the field—the 71st at Victoria East—arrival on the Modder River—the Boer positions and the plans for attack—the Battle of Magersfontein, 11 December 1899.

THE 71st embarked for the South African War somewhat over a thousand strong, but a good three-quarters of the men were reservists, for since its return from Crete the battalion had been heavily milked for the ‘Overseas Battalion,’ and few recruits had come in. There was therefore not quite the same spirit of enthusiasm with which the 74th had set off from Cawnpore to the Malakand. In Cawnpore the troops were fully-trained and bored. In Plymouth they were only semi-trained and not at all bored. The point is mentioned as presenting a perennial problem in the British Army. Overseas it has always been difficult to know what to do with the troops, for one cannot always be training. On home service it is impossible to train them at all, for there is nowhere to do it. The second point, though not the first, was fully appreciated by the German General Staff, who were obviously at a loss to understand how troops with so low a standard of training were able to fight at all. They could not grasp the fact, for it was beyond their comprehension, how much leeway was made up by the British Army on the field of sport. Considering indeed, that the officers and men of the British Army were, after all, professional soldiers, their preoccupation with sport bordered at times on the ludicrous. For example, letters from the 71st from Crete were nearly all full of accounts of football, athletics, shooting, and the hunting of pariah dogs on horseback; the riots being mentioned as a kind of afterthought, in order to express regret for those killed in them. Similarly at Plymouth, although the cloud of war had been steadily darkening for many months, the talk, right up to embarkation, was all of football and cricket. As for the officers; presumably owing to the fascination of the beautiful sporting weapons coming on the market in the late nineteenth century, their diaries are nothing but game-books; in which all other activities, including war, are mentioned briefly and in a manner showing some irritation at the upset to the diarist’s pathological desire to exterminate the entire animal and bird population of whatever country he happened to be serving in.

The great Cunarder, *Aurania*, in which the 71st sailed for the Cape, had only themselves and some detachments on board. Like all other transports sailing to the war she was escorted by ships of the Channel Fleet. Her rapid colonial expansion, attended by such events as the seizure of the Suez Canal and the Fashoda incident, had not made Great Britain exactly popular on the Continent and so, in addition to the escorts, the transports were protected by warships lying off the French coast at five-mile intervals—for Great Britain was taking no chances with her ancient

enemy. Also on board was General Wauchope, commander of the Highland Brigade. An old friend of Colonel Kelham, commanding the 71st, the two spent hours together in the General's cabin, working out field formations with matches. News of the war was received at St Vincent; and that of the surrender of Colonel Carleton's force of Gloucesters and Royal Irish Fusiliers at Nicholson's Nek 'set us wondering a bit,' one of the officers wrote—and high time too, one cannot help thinking.

Immediately on the expiry of President Kruger's ultimatum the Boers invaded Natal and at the same time moved against Kimberley, Mafeking and Cape Colony. Although their rapid advance took the small British force by surprise, and they had the advantages of numbers and mobility, they suffered initial set-backs at Talana Hill, outside Dundee, and at Elandslaagte fourteen miles from Ladysmith. The British force however, having a vast area to watch, was widely scattered and so, having now learnt the directions of the enemy advance, the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir George White, was obliged to retreat, with the Boers following closely. This he did in the direction of Ladysmith, while pushing out various small columns to disrupt the enemy's communications. It was one of these which had been surrounded and captured at Nicholson's Nek, having run out of ammunition. Like most other reverses during the South African War the news of it was greatly exaggerated, for in fact Colonel Carleton's force consisted of a bare nine hundred men and fought gallantly to the last round, inflicting heavy casualties. Meanwhile Sir George White was invested at Ladysmith, a key position which he refused to surrender, and about ten thousand Boers moved south against Durban. Sir George White had in fact done all he could under the circumstances, having gained sufficient time for the reinforcements to disembark and deploy into the field.

Sir Redvers Buller, the new Commander-in-Chief, landed at Cape Town on 31 October. From then onwards the Boers had no hope whatever of winning the war, and very likely fully realised that fact. This was not because of the genius of Sir Redvers Buller, for he had none, but because he had a whole Army Corps of British Regular Troops at his back, not actually present but hastening towards him across the high seas. Meanwhile however, the situation was far from pleasant, for the Boers were investing both Kimberley and Ladysmith, and were showing signs of crossing the Tugela into Natal. Considerable enemy forces were also assembling on the right bank of the Orange River and threatening to invade the Colony, in which they had many sympathisers. Before he could seize the initiative Sir Redvers Buller was therefore obliged to look to the defence of Natal and Cape Colony, and so to divide his force.

The units of the 1st Army Corps had been hurriedly embarked and sent off both from the United Kingdom and India without any regard to the Order of Battle and with their supplies and transport in a muddle. Sir Redvers Buller was presumably expected to sort them out when they landed before taking the field, but with the Boers advancing in all directions this was obviously impracticable. To add to his difficulties he was also under considerable political pressure, for the investments of Ladysmith and Kimberley had caused an outcry at home. Sir Redvers was a good theoretical general, with many sound ideas, but in the military sphere it is one thing to know how an operation should be carried out and quite a different thing actually to carry it out. 'I have fought,' said the Duke of Wellington, 'in a sufficient number of battles to know that the result is never certain, even with the best arrangements.' In other words in war, things seldom if ever go as planned, and a Commander is constantly faced with the necessity of revising his ideas—often in considerable haste. Some can do this with success, others cannot. Sir Redvers was one of the others, but still, he did his best which, under the very difficult circumstances in which he was placed, was not nearly as bad as has been represented.

As a result of the troopships being diverted to the threatened points as they arrived, the Order

of Battle could not be adhered to, so that the Highland Brigade, consisting of the Black Watch, Highland Light Infantry, Seaforth and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, which belonged to the Ninth Division under Sir H. Colville, found itself guarding the Lines of Communication between Cape Town and part of the First Division under Lord Methuen, who had been ordered to relieve Kimberley. The 71st landed at Cape Town on 11 November, being the first troops to do so, and were immediately hurried off by train to Victoria West where they remained, watching with much disgust the Guards' Brigade moving up to the front. However, being like all the Line regiments from home, mostly composed of reservists who had not got any fitter during the long sea voyage, this detention on the Lines of Communication was in fact a stroke of luck for the 71st. Colonel Kelham, who knew what he was about, kept the battalion out on constant route marching and training. While it was so engaged, he rode out and observed it from various ranges, as a result of which he abandoned the trews and ordered all ranks into the khaki drill trousers generally worn. He also noted that when judging distance on the veldt one should add one third to one's estimate. For example a group of men apparently 1500 yards off was probably nearer 2000.' His order regarding the trews upset his officers and men, but it and the thorough manner in which he trained his battalion, unquestionably saved many lives.

The following extract from an article in *The Victoria West Messenger* is felt to be worth repeating:

Drilling and skirmishing (of the H.L.I.) was the order of the day. Across the veldt, far out of sight they were taken daily for exercise and training yet for all this it did not seem to tire them for every afternoon a general run-about could be witnessed, with an Association football the object of their attention.

Some fine cricketers could be found among the officers and men, as the Victoria West team found by receiving a downright thrashing, the Military scoring 123 runs to 47 in a match. Captain Wolfe-Murray was in charge of the soldier team and having scored 44 he retired, being followed by Colonel Kelham, the officer commanding the Highlanders, who by his tremendous strokes on the offside shewed unmistakable signs of great strength in his arms —being probably accustomed to the use of a heavy sword.

During all the time of their stay here the men seemed to have only one complaint, and that was the disappointment at not having been ordered to the Front without delay in guarding the line of communication, and as they, one and all, spoke so highly of their officers they seemed sore on the point.

The 71st were not kept waiting long, for they received orders to entrain for the front on 27 November which they did with the greatest alacrity; singing *Soldiers of the Queen*, accompanied by the military band, and cheered by all the inhabitants of Victoria West. Lord Methuen had crossed the frontier into the Orange Free State five days before and inflicted sharp defeats on the Boers at Belmont and Graspan. Unfortunately he could not make good these successes, for the only mounted troops he had were the 9th Lancers, a couple of hundred irregular horse and some mounted infantry. As it was however, the fact that he had twice got the better of the highly mobile Boer marksmen with two exhausted infantry brigades, was a very creditable performance and greatly upset the Commandos, many of whose members began to slip off home. By the time the 71st caught up with him he had reached the Modder River ; the Boers had blown the bridge, and were taking up positions in considerable strength along the foot of the hills on the far side. Up till then, they had always kept to the hill-tops, being naturally anxious to avoid close combat in which they would have stood little chance against regular troops. Having lost heavily from the British shrapnel however, they now decided to change their tactics.

The 71st reached railhead, about three miles from the Modder River, at 4 o'clock on the afternoon of the 28 November, and as they marched forward could see shells bursting among the hills on the far bank of the river. Lord Methuen had pushed his troops over that morning by a ford or 'drift,' and although they had been surprised by the new Boer tactics they had none the less once again got the enemy on the run. Owing once more to the lack of cavalry, the fact that the Boers had left was not discovered for a while and so, when the 71st arrived, Colonel Kelham was handed a message designed to put the battalion in by night on the enemy flank, and let it drive them out with the bayonet at daybreak. Scrawled in pencil by a staff-officer on horseback it reads

O/C

H.L.I.

Please be ready at 2 a.m. tomorrow paraded for marching off—An officer will meet & guide you

By Order

M. Read, Major,

DAAG

28/11/99

The 71st did as directed, and were met by Read himself who led them off towards the river. As they approached it, Read pointed out to Colonel Kelham a man sound asleep on a camp cot. 'There is Sir Henry Colville,' said he, 'if there is anything you want ask him.' But the Colonel averted his eyes, 'I did not consider it discreet,' he wrote in his diary, 'to disturb the General.' It did not matter anyway, for when the 71st reached their position they found the enemy gone.

There is little doubt that had Lord Methuen pushed on after his success on the Modder River, he could have relieved Kimberley with small difficulty, for the Boers were greatly disheartened and in full retreat. They perked up again however, when they were not pursued, and after various councils of war decided to take up a position at Magersfontein to the south-east of Kimberley. Lord Methuen, being unaware of the extent of the enemy's demoralisation, and being obliged to exercise caution with a small force in enemy country at the end of a Line of Communication six hundred miles long, determined to advance no further until all his troops were up, and he had built up his supplies. He had been in touch with Kimberley by heliograph and had been informed by the Commander that he could hold out for forty days. There was therefore no apparent need to hurry. The movement of the Boers to the Magersfontein position was soon detected by his cavalry, but they were unable to gain any precise information.

The enemy positions at Magersfontein ran along the hills east of the Kimberley railway and facing south towards the Modder River, which they overlooked. For some reason Lord Methuen appeared to have forgotten the recent change in the Boer tactics, and to imagine that they were lurking, in accordance with their previous custom, among the boulders on the top of the kopjies. He therefore subjected the summit of the Magersfontein heights to an intense artillery bombardment, and sent forward an infantry reconnaissance in force. When the infantry failed to draw fire from the enemy he assumed that the Boers had been too hard hit by the guns. In fact, it was because they were disposed in shelter trenches along the foot of the hills, where the shrapnel never reached them.

Lord Methuen's plan was to attack the Boer centre with the Highland Brigade at dawn on 11 December 1899. The Highland bivouac was on a hill, known as Headquarters Hill, about four thousand yards from the enemy, from which Lord Methuen intended to direct the attack. The Guards Brigade, in immediate reserve, was to take up its position on the Highland bivouac after

the Highland Brigade had marched— which meant, of course, that in the forthcoming battle the reserve would be four thousand yards behind the attacking troops. The general reserve was the Ninth Brigade and the Gordons, but two battalions of the Brigade had been pushed forward along the railway to distract the enemy's attention. The cavalry was to protect the right flank of the Highland Brigade and march at dawn, while the artillery was to open fire on its previous targets—the summits of the kopjies—at the same hour. The precautions for ensuring secrecy—so essential for the success of a dawn attack—were slipshod and inadequate. Very little effort was made to hide the concentration, and the Boers could see the troops crossing the Modder River; while the Highland Brigade paraded on its starting line in broad daylight. Yet fires and lights were forbidden, so that the troops had no hot food or drink—not that this was anything out of the ordinary and indeed, history would seem to show that the British soldier fights best with a tot of rum on an empty stomach. At any rate, the Boers would have had to be far stupider than they were not to know that they would be attacked at dawn and so, when the moment came they were ready and waiting. Apart from this carelessness, Lord Methuen was attacking an enemy's centre without first locating his flanks, which is a very grave error for a Commander to make. As has been previously pointed out, however, there is nothing so easy to criticise as a military operation, even a successful one, whereas there are few things more difficult than actually to carry one out. This philosophical reflection would not, one fears, have occurred to console the Highland Brigade during the day of misery that lay ahead.

As may have been noticed in the previous volumes, when in action the Highland Brigade was always drawn up in strict order of precedence. That is to say, when in line the Black Watch held the right flank and the Highland Light Infantry the left, with the two junior regiments—in this case the Sea-forth and Argylls—in the centre. This meant that when the Brigade was on the line of march the Black Watch led and the H.L.I. brought up the rear, or if, as at Magersfontein, the Brigade advanced on a three-battalion front, the Seaforth and Argylls would deploy to the right and left of the Black Watch while the H.L.I. marched behind the Black Watch in reserve. A similar fussiness over precedence was, as is well known, a feature in the Highland Army whenever the clans could be induced to fight together on the same side, but whether there was any connection between these two circumstances is dubious.

Colonel Kelham and the other Commanding-Officers were called to General Wauchope's tent on the morning of Sunday 10 December and received orders for the attack. Judging from Colonel Kelham's personal account they were just as brief and to the point as those of Colonel Abel Straghan's had been, on the eve of Tel-el-Kebir. The objective being already known, the General announced that:

The Highland Brigade will advance in mass of quarter-column in the following order—Black Watch, Seaforth, Argyll and Sutherland and Highland Light Infantry. It will be timed to arrive within assaulting distance of the enemy just before daybreak. The Brigade will then deploy on the Black Watch which will deploy outwards, the H.L.I. in support in rear of the centre.

Major Benson, R.A., will guide the Brigade by compass, marching on the left of the leading battalion, as I will myself.

The attack will be with the bayonet.

The Brigade, less the Seaforth who were on outpost, paraded at 2 p.m. in broad daylight as has been said, and in full view of the Boers—at any rate with the telescope. The officers had laid aside their broadswords—for the first time in history—and were armed with rifles. Therefore, as all ranks wore the same pattern of tunic and nearly all had big moustaches there was no way of telling one from the other. This proved so great a disadvantage that, as the war progressed, all

sorts of ideas were laboriously delivered for enabling the rank and file to recognise their officers in action. One was to sew a piece of black cloth on the back of the officer's tunic—which would seem to be going a bit far, even in war.

General Wauchope rode round the Brigade and then dismounted, for no horses were to be taken. Lord Methuen, whose father had served in the 71st, complimented Colonel Kelham on the fine appearance of the battalion; by which he referred to the carriage and physique of the men, for there was nothing else fine about their appearance which was in fact very tumbledown indeed. As the Brigade moved off about 2.30 p.m. the rain started and later developed into a thunderstorm, continuing most of the night. Had it not been for the fact that the advance had already been observed by the enemy the storm would of course have been a great help. As things were, it merely added to the misery. The Boer scouts appear to have ridden round the outpost line, for some of them opened fire from some sandhills on the right almost as soon as the advance started and then galloped off. One would have thought that General Wauchope would have been warned by this that his chances of surprise were lost.

Passing through the outpost line the Brigade halted to enable the Seaforth to form quarter column behind the Black Watch. The Brigade then moved on to a point about two and a half miles from the starting line and lay down in formation, in great discomfort owing to the pouring rain. The kilted battalions had also suffered severely from the thorns on the mimosa bushes which were very thick on the ground. The march was resumed at about two in the morning; the storm being so severe, and the night so dark, that frequent halts were necessary for Major Benson to check his bearings. The quarter-column formation is a very awkward one to keep, across broken ground on a dark, stormy night. Orders had been given that the company left guides were to be roped together, but this apparently was not done and a good deal of confusion resulted. The rain ceased at about 4 o'clock and the outline of the kopjies became visible. Glancing back towards the east, Colonel Kelham noticed that the stars were paling in the first grey light of dawn. 'It will soon be light,' he remarked to the Brigade Major, who was marching at his side, 'it's time we deployed.'

Major Benson had in fact several times urged the Commander to deploy, but he still delayed. Then, when at last he was about to give the order the leading companies entered some thick prickly bush, in which it would have been difficult to carry out the movement. Therefore the General again delayed, until the Brigade got through this obstacle, but as the sky lightened fast he gave the order while the Argylls and the 71st were still marching through the bush.

To deploy in the dark when in close range of the enemy is a practically impossible feat. While the Seaforth and Argylls were making their way to left and right of the Black Watch in some confusion and by no means silently, Colonel Kelham saw a signal lamp flash from about three hundred yards away on his left. Immediately a sheet of flame blazed a few hundred yards in front and a hail of bullets swept through the Highland Brigade. Bunched together as they were, the leading battalions did not at first suffer loss, as the Boers were firing a trifle high. Already in the process of a difficult manoeuvre they were however, thrown into confusion and the regiments and companies began to get mixed up.

Moving up to the leading companies of the Black Watch to gauge the distance from the enemy, General Wauchope ordered an extension to the right, and the Commanding Officer of the Black Watch led off a mixed bunch of Black Watch, Seaforth and Argylls in that direction. The Boers then saw their enemy in the growing light and lowered their sights. General Wauchope ordered the charge, but was killed. Some men got to within a hundred yards of the enemy before being shot down while trying to negotiate the Boer wire. Then all was confusion. Colonel Kelham had just had time to shout 'H.L.I. lie down !' and to see his order complied with, when a

disorganised mass of men swept over the battalion. The Colonel lost his helmet and, like many of the H.L.I., was badly kicked on the head before being carried away in the rush. The bullets came by like a venomous hail, *phitt! phitt! phitt!* and the Colonel was slightly wounded, but he kept shouting 'H.L.I. halt ! H.L.I. ! lie down!' It was not however, a matter of *sauve qui peut*, and the Highland Brigade, though all mixed up, halted on its own within a couple of hundred yards.

Colonel Kelham collected two hundred men, mostly H.L.I. and Argylls, with a few Black Watch, and led them back against the enemy, capturing two Boers on the way whom, in spite of the hot fire he solemnly searched and, finding nothing but personal belongings, politely returned them. The enemy then got behind him and he and his party had a hard time. Cowan, the Adjutant and the only officer with him, was killed, and he was obliged to withdraw his party through the sand dunes, ant-hills and scrub. 'A burly bearded fellow,' Private Gaynor of the Black Watch, 'came up and laughingly remarked, "My bloody old mule is shot Sir, I'll help you ! "' and a moment later leaped into the air, " _____ it !" he yelled, and pulling up his kilt displayed a bullet wound on his thigh, a bare half-inch below a certain important part of the anatomy. "Look at that Sir ! did ye ever see a closer shave ?" Private Gaynor was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal on Colonel Kelham's recommendation—apparently as an acknowledgment for cheering him up.

At this moment Lord Airlie, commanding the 12th Lancers, came up with a dismounted squadron. Leaning nonchalantly on his sword, and blandly ignoring the bullets whistling past his head, he enquired if he could be of any use. 'It's not really my sort of game, my dear fellow,' he explained. The Colonel pointed out the Boers creeping through the bushes round his right, and said that if his lordship could stop them he would try another advance. 'Oh very good Leading troop right-wheel, remainder form line on the left!' 'All right Sir !' shouted the leading troop sergeant to Colonel Kelham, 'we'll soon have 'em out of it!' The words were scarcely out of his mouth before he dropped dead, shot through the head. His helmet came off at Colonel Kelham's feet. Having lost his own and feeling the want of it in the hot sun, he picked it up, and before putting it on glanced at the name inside—Sergeant Black, 12th Lancers.

Meanwhile the other officers of the Highland Brigade were likewise leading mixed parties against the enemy, getting within four hundred yards of the Boer positions, but time and again being outflanked and driven back, until the ground was covered with their dead and wounded. A striking feature of the battle was the gallantry and initiative shown as individuals by the rank and file of all the regiments, many private soldiers—like Gaynor—coming to the aid of their officers in this crisis and advancing on their own without orders. Corporal Shaul of the 71st, who was in charge of the stretcher-bearers, not only saved many lives by dressing wounds under fire, but at one time led an advance across the open. He was awarded the Victoria Cross. Sergeant-Piper Ross and Piper McLellan also led parties forward on their own—playing their pipes as they did so. Private Stewart was specially mentioned by his company commander 'for assisting to form up and lead forward a portion of the line,' and Privates Peat and Richmond were similarly mentioned. Sergeant McDowall volunteered to take a message back to the guns under heavy fire, and having completed his mission returned to the firing line, afterwards again making the dangerous journey to get a medical officer. Lance-Corporal Fraser was also conspicuous and many others.

Lord Methuen, from his position on Headquarters Hill, could see that the Highland attack had failed, but was unaware of the true position. He sent forward the Gordons to reinforce the Highland Brigade and the Guards Brigade to protect the right flank. The Gordons' gallant effort failed and they suffered severe casualties, including their Colonel killed. The battle then came to a standstill until, late in the afternoon, word was passed down the Highland line for a retirement.

This order was immediately cancelled by Major Ewart, the Brigade Major, having apparently been a mistake. Before it could be stopped the line had gone back several hundred yards. The battalions—or the 71st at least—had by then been reorganised and all men were back with their own units. Lord Methuen apparently contemplated renewing the attack that night, for the Brigade Major asked Colonel Kelham and presumably the other Commanding Officers of the Highland Brigade if the men could do it. The Colonel said that he doubted it, as they had had no meal since the previous day, had marched all night in a storm and fought all day under a blazing sun so that they were in fact, exhausted. The idea at any rate was abandoned, and Lord Methuen withdrew the next day across the Modder River without interference from the Boers.

During the twelve hours fighting the Highland Brigade lost 47 officers and 728 rank and file in killed, wounded and missing, of whom the 71st lost 2 officers killed (Captain A. F. Lambton and Captain and Adjutant J. W. A. Cowan, D.S.O.) and 7 wounded, 14 rank and file killed and 67 wounded. Awards to the 71st were one Victoria Cross, one Distinguished Service Order, and four Distinguished Conduct Medals.

Chapter V

THE OPERATIONS OF FIELD-MARSHAL LORD ROBERTS

On the Modder River—the Relief of Kimberley—the 71st leave the Highland Brigade—the 71st at Klip Drift—the 71st march to rejoin the Highland Brigade—the Highland Brigade at Heilbron—Praise from Hector MacDonald—Relief of Heilbron.

LORD METHUEN having established himself on the Modder River, the lumbering Red Cross waggons were sent forward to the battlefield—two days after the battle—to collect the dead and wounded. No flag of truce was required, for the Red Cross was by now fully established and respected by the troops of all civilised nations. In this case the Boers came out of their positions to assist. They were often accused of firing on stretcher bearers, and other enormities, but it is doubtful if there was much in it—tending the wounded under fire has always been a very dangerous game. The dead were buried in one large grave, close to Modder River station. Apart from their casualties the kilted battalions of the Highland Brigade had suffered severely from the thorns, the effect of the sun on the backs of their legs, and the chafing of their legs by their kilts when wet. The kilts were then made of hard tartan and evidently on the long side (perhaps to satisfy Victorian notions of decency) so that when wet they rubbed the skin off the backs of the knees. The fact also that the khaki kilt-aprons only covered the fronts of the kilts undoubtedly caused many avoidable casualties, for in the sandy veldt the wearers were very conspicuous when lying down or retiring. The H.L.I. therefore were a good deal the better off.

Hard on the repulse at Magersfontein came the news of General Gatacre's reverse at Stormberg and General Buller's at Colenso. 'Black Week' it was called. In Scotland Magersfontein was regarded as another Flodden, and the country practically went into mourning. Great Britain was for some reason inclined to go into hysterics over the Boer War. Far worse tragedies had happened in her history before, and were certainly to occur again; for it would be a strange war indeed, that could be fought without tragedy. The depression at home did not

apparently spread to the troops at the front, and the Highland Brigade, for example, spent Christmas cheerfully bathing and fishing in the Modder River. A new Brigadier arrived from Ceylon—Hector MacDonald, known in the Army as 'Fighting Mac.' He was a most formidable character who had risen from the ranks of the 92nd; fearless, of great strength of character and very brusque manners, who spoke with a broad Aberdeenshire accent. He was certainly a man to respect, but his evident ignorance of tactics, and his oft-repeated contempt for casualties, did not inspire much confidence in the Highland Brigade, whose officers began to wonder what they were 'in for.'

Lord Methuen did not lose touch with the enemy at Magersfontein, but while awaiting cavalry and infantry reinforcements, sent out his field artillery daily to make the Boers as uncomfortable as possible. As the guns had to go out into the open they required an infantry escort. The 71st was several times engaged on this duty and seemed to enjoy it in spite of a few casualties, for guns going into action in the days of horses was always a sight worth watching. Meanwhile Field-Marshal Lord Roberts had arrived as Commander-in Chief with Lord Kitchener as his Chief-of-Staff—a combination which might be described as having no nonsense about it, although Lord Roberts was then sixty-eight years old.

When Lord Roberts arrived, the British forces were divided into four separate groups on a front of nearly five hundred miles. On the right, General Buller was encamped at Freer, after his failure at Colenso to relieve Ladysmith. On the left, Lord Methuen was encamped on the Modder River, having failed at Magersfontein to relieve Kimberley. In the centre, Generals French at Ransburg and Gatacre at Sterkstroom, were having their work cut out with their very weak forces to keep the Boer commandos out of Natal, and at the same time check the swelling tide of rebellion in that province.

With extraordinary rapidity Lord Roberts reorganised the forces in South Africa on a horsed basis. By mounting a company from each infantry battalion he formed six new regiments of mounted infantry, while many other regiments of what might be described as irregular horse were raised from the adventurers whom the war attracted to South Africa from all over the world—Robert's Horse, Kitchener's Horse, Nesbitt's Horse, and so on. Having formed a cavalry division and being reinforced by two infantry divisions, he then concentrated in the west for an advance on Bloemfontein. The Boers did not discover this change of front from east to west and, in order to keep them guessing, Lord Methuen was ordered to make a feint attack on the Boer positions at Koodoesburg, west of the Kimberley railway line. The result, he hoped, would be to make the Boers think that he intended to outflank Magersfontein and relieve Kimberley—and so they did.

'Here are orders for you,' said Lord Methuen's A.D.C., shaking Colonel Kelham awake in the middle of the night of 2 February. 'Highland Brigade, 9th Lancers, and 62nd Battery R.F.A. will parade at 5 a.m. Men to carry rolled great-coats and 150 rounds of ammunition.' A long and very severe march followed, during which the point of carrying rolled greatcoats in the blazing sun was not apparent. Then the Boer scouts were seen galloping back across the veldt and a very brisk action followed. The Boers were soon reinforced by those at Magersfontein, as Lord Roberts had expected, while General MacDonald's idea of a feint proved to be the same as that of General Picton, described in the preceding volume. A fight for the possession of the Koodoesburg, a high, steep ridge about a mile and a half long by five hundred yards wide, continued without ceasing for the next twenty-four hours. At last the Boers, heavily shelled by the 62nd Battery and with their rear threatened by the cavalry brigade which then arrived, abandoned the fight and took to their horses. The Highland Brigade remained in the vicinity until the evening of the 9th February and then marched back to the Modder River. During this action the Highland Brigade lost ten killed and sixty-five wounded, of whom one killed and five

wounded belonged to the 71st.

During the march back to the Modder River, the 71st provided the rear-guard but was not attacked. Lord Roberts had arrived, and rode round the Highland Brigade before breakfast on 10 February, saying a few complimentary words to each battalion. A small man, he had a very considerable presence, especially when mounted, for he was an expert horseman. He and his somewhat sinister-looking Chief-of-Staff certainly made a good team, for there was little that they did not know about war. Lord Roberts had lost his only son in an attempt to save the guns at Colenso, when he had gained the Victoria Cross like his father, but posthumously.

Two days later his advance commenced, and the Highland Brigade was railed to Enslin in open trucks. Long and tiring marches over the high veldt followed, and while the Brigade bivouacked at Wegdrai an attack could be seen in progress against Jacobsdaal—a very awkward operation for the town was full of women and children, so that the British troops were unable to fire on it; for war was not ‘total,’ in those days. The advance went forward however, although the Boers fought skilfully and well. Riding in upon the flanks they succeeded in cutting out one of the supply trains of two hundred waggons, which resulted in the troops being reduced to half-rations. Leading the advance Sir John French with the Cavalry Division found the Boers in strength at Klip Drift, guarding the road to Kimberley. He deployed his three brigades in open column with a horse’s length between each man ; and supported by the horse artillery batteries, charged the enemy centre, with himself riding at the head of the second brigade. To be charged by six thousand horsemen at once is very trying for the nerves, especially for irregulars like the Boers; who made no pretence of being heroes, or of being in the field in search of honour and glory. Many of them ran for their horses, while those who stuck it out neglected the well-tried principle of firing at the horses and not the men. The cavalry galloped through them with a meagre loss of fifteen men and twenty horses, pulling up a mile and a half on, with the road to Kimberley open before them.

RELIEF OF KIMBERLEY! London went wild, although in fact the magnitude of this triumph was as much exaggerated as had been the ‘disasters’ which had preceded it. The fortunes of the British Army in South Africa were being followed in much the same way as the followers of a football team follow its fortunes in the League—with the difference that the football supporters do, as a rule, understand something about the game. The British Army had a long way to go yet.

Meanwhile the Boers had been greatly shaken by the British advance, and De Wet suggested to Cronje an evacuation of the Magersfontein position lest they should be cut off ‘Are you again possessed by this damnable fear of the English’ shouted Cronje in a fury, ‘Come on ! shoot them dead and capture the others when they run away !’ A moment later however, he panicked himself, when the survivors arrived from Klip Drift with their stories of the cavalry charge. He then ordered a general retreat along the Modder River on Bloemfontein.

The Highland Brigade, being ordered to Paardeberg, followed up the enemy retreat and occasionally exchanged shots with their rear-guard. While the Brigade was in bivouac on the banks of the river Lord Kitchener arrived and walked up and down in consultation with General Hector MacDonald. A moment later Colonel Kelham was called over by General MacDonald who said, ‘Lord Kitchener has ordered me to send a battalion to hold Klip Drift, yours will be for it.’ Colonel Kelham ‘ respectfully pointed out,’ that it was the turn of the Argylls for detached duty, but was told to get on with it. Returning to Klip Drift was a retrograde step, and furthermore, ‘since we had lost General Wauchope,’ wrote Colonel Kelham, ‘ there had been a very strong feeling, shared by officers, N.C.O.s and men, that efforts were being made to oust the trew-clad H.L.I. and bring a kilted regiment into the Brigade in its place, and it certainly looked as if such was the case.’ The fact appears to have been, that General MacDonald wanted his own

regiment, the Gordons, into the Brigade, and used the question of the kilt as a lever on the authorities.

The 71st arrived at Klip Drift in a sulky frame of mind, finding it littered with the corpses of men and horses. 'The stench was terrible. . . . Horace Kays and I slept side by side next to the body of a sergeant of the 3 3rd, wrapped in a curtain awaiting burial.' Lord Roberts rode in from Jacobsdaal at daybreak. 'In all my service,' he shouted at Colonel Kelham, 'I don't think I ever smelt such a horrible stench. Have the place cleaned up.'

'We only marched in after dark,' replied the Colonel, who was still in no sort of mood to stand any insults from Field-Marschals, 'and are about to clean it up, for we don't like the smell any better than you do. But I would like to know, my lord, why we have been sent here in any case, when the Highland Brigade is advancing. I hope that it is not intended as a reflection on the conduct of my regiment?'

'No, no indeed,' Lord Roberts assured him, 'I have not the least fault to find with your regiment. It has done well, very well, and I am very pleased with it. It was just thought that it would be better to brigade the kilted regiments together, and so I would like the H.L.I. to join Colonel Douglas for Mafeking.'

Oh! the sentiment attached to the kilt! Over a century before, its suitability as a practicable dress for soldiers in the field had been in doubt. The miseries caused to the kilted regiments in South Africa have been described, and now it has finally disappeared from the battlefield. Yet still the kilt, or the lack of it, has caused endless trouble and embarrassment to the Highland Light Infantry, and may be suspected to have played no mean part in the final removal of the Regiment from the Highland Brigade.

Owing therefore to the want of the kilt, the 71st after all its efforts was denied the satisfaction of seeing the Boers hoist the white flag at Paardeberg. It was little consolation to the regiment when Cronje and his wife, 'a quaint old couple,' arrived a few days later at Klip Drift with some four thousand prisoners of war. The old Boer was received with a Guard of Honour, but as he did not appear to appreciate the compliment the courtesy was painstakingly explained to him. His reply was 'a surly grunt.' No doubt he was not feeling his best, but one would have expected better manners. The others spent the night sitting round the camp fires singing hymns, so that what with one thing and another, the 71st were thankful to see the back of them on the following day, when a mounted escort arrived to take them over.

The Boers fell back all along the front and the danger to Natal and Cape Colony was ended. General Gatacre reoccupied Stormberg and Sir Redvers Buller once again crossed the Tugela.

RELIEF OF LADYSMITH!

OCCUPATION OF BLOEMFONTEIN!

At home—in Scotland at any rate—second only to the exciting tidings from the front, the removal of the H.L.I. from the Highland Brigade had caused considerable interest and sparked off a first-class row. Somewhat taken aback, Lord Roberts remarked to his Chief of Staff that they seemed to have offended 'national sentiment,' and it had better be put right. Consequently on 14 March the 71st received orders to evacuate Jacobsdaal and rejoin the Highland Brigade at Bloemfontein. The battalion left by train the following day, but got only as far as Bethany, where it was joined by the H.L.I. Volunteer Company from Glasgow and where, owing to the course of operations, it was detrained and pushed off to the Reit River, where the Boers were expected under their General, Olivier.

A period of marching, countermarching and skirmishing followed, through Reddersburgh, Rosendal, Orlogspoort, Wakerstroom, Dewetsdorp, Stilfontein, Eerste-Gulik, and Noodhulp, halting every so often to deal with various parties of Boers, who would open fire from the kopjies

and run for their horses as soon as the battalion deployed. At last the 71st marched into Bloemfontein, expecting to find the Highland Brigade; but it had left the previous week. Lord Kitchener had established headquarters in the Town Hall, and Colonel Kelham reported to him direct. Lord Kitchener was working hard at a desk, but he put down his pen at once, removed an enormous cigar which was smouldering under his formidable moustache, rose to his feet and offered his hand. While engaged in this courtesy, he took in every detail of the Colonel's dishevelled appearance; for he never missed anything.

'I suppose you want to refit your battalion?'

'Yes, Sir, the men are in tatters and their boots very worn.'

'You can do it during the night. I want you to march at Division under Sir Henry Colville—it's a twenty-six mile dawn and overtake the Highland Brigade, now with the 9th march, but you can do it all right. Let's go and have some lunch.'

After lunch Lord Kitchener lit another cigar, but he had hardly got it going when General Nicholson, the Director of Transport, came in. 'I'm afraid, Sir,' he said, 'we can't send the H.L.I. on tomorrow; all our transport went on with the 9th Division two days ago.' Lord Kitchener put his cigar carefully down on the edge of the table, rose to his feet and put his arm 'round General Nicholson's shoulder. 'My dear fellow, THERE IS NO SUCH WORD AS CAN'T; the H.L.I. will march at dawn and you must find the transport.'

The 71st accordingly marched at dawn as ordered; after working all night being refitted, and having been joined by a draft of a hundred men from the 4th Militia battalion. It would not have done, for Lord Kitchener to have found the battalion still in Bloemfontein after the hour of march and so, as the transport had not arrived, the 71st sat down out of sight of the town to wait for it. General Nicholson had also been busy during the night. It was all very well for the Chief of Staff to say that transport must be found, but in fact there was none within miles of Bloemfontein. Mounted patrols galloped through the night, rousing outlying farmers from their beds and forcing them to harness-up and in-span; and, as a result of their efforts' a collection of all the worn-out animals and broken-down carts in the country,' crawled up to the 71st at about mid-day, having already marched a considerable distance.

Then followed the 'twenty-six mile march, but you can do it all right.' Many of the unfortunate Militiamen could not, but were reluctant to give in. When they eventually did so, it was evident that 'they would be of no use for sometime,' and arrangements were accordingly made to send them back to Bloemfontein as soon as possible. The battalion itself of course 'did it,' and marched into Watervaal in the evening. The Highland Brigade had left, and so after only three hours sleep, the 71st set out once more for Rietfontein, eighteen miles distant, where it at last caught up with the Brigade. Colonel Kelham at once reported to General MacDonald and, unable to repress a certain jauntiness of manner informed him that 'the H.L.I. have rejoined, Sir.' Unlike Lord Kitchener, the General offered no courtesies but regarded the Colonel over the rim of his tea-cup with the severity of manner only achieved by an Aberdonian and an Elder of the Kirk.

'Umph! A fair pack o' trouble ye've caused me! Telegraphs frae every dammed beesybody i' Scotland! 'He slammed down his cup, 'Hell and Damnation!'

'It has not been my doing, Sir. As a matter of discipline I have done nothing I ought not to do.'

'UMPH!'

'He might at least,' reflected Colonel Kelham, as he walked away, 'have offered me a cup of tea.'

Matters had again taken a turn for the worse. The British Army had reached Bloemfontein at

the end of its tether, and Lord Roberts had been unable to resume the advance for six weeks. The Boer Commander-in-Chief, Joubert, died and Lord Roberts sent a polite message of sympathy to his family. His place had been taken by Louis Botha who, as soon as he gathered that Lord Roberts was temporarily pinned to Bloemfontein, at once seized the initiative and several minor 'disasters' ensued; as a result of one of which the unfortunate General Gatacre was sent home. Lord Roberts took immediate steps, first to secure his communications and second, to gain back the initiative. Having gained the capital of the Orange Free State—which was forthwith annexed and redesignated the Orange River Colony—his next objectives were necessarily Pretoria, capital of the Transvaal, and the relief of Mafeking.

His advance northward from Bloemfontein was planned in two columns. The left, under his direct command, was to march directly on Kroonstadt; while the right, composed of the Ninth Division under Sir Henry Colville and covered by a mixed force, mostly mounted, led by Major-General Ian Hamilton, was to protect the flank of the main advance. The fact was correctly appreciated by Lord Roberts that the guerrilla tactics of the enemy could not prevent his advance in force and, at the worst, could only be a considerable nuisance. Therefore he concentrated on the gaining of strategic objectives and refrained from dissipating his efforts in an attempt to inflict a decisive defeat on the Commandos in the field. His advance was accordingly arranged on a carefully timed programme, one of the features of which, was that the Highland Brigade should reach Heilbron on 29 May 1900.

The distance which the Highland Brigade had to cover between Winburgh and Heilbron was a hundred and thirty miles; and it had to be done in eight days. Thirteen or fourteen miles a day may not seem very much, but this was no peace march. The Brigade was in action on five out of the eight days; was on half-rations, and greatly hampered by the lack of cavalry. The Boers were exceedingly active, and the regiment of Imperial Yeomanry which had been allotted to Sir Henry Colville, was encircled by the enemy and eventually captured, for the Divisional Commander could not delay his advance in order to go to their help. The Highland Brigade therefore had to carry out its march, through hostile country teaming with Boers, assisted only by a troop of the Eastern Provinces Horse of which, as it was under divisional command it did not see much. This meant that the Brigade had to march in wide deployment and in fact, do its own cavalry work. As may be imagined, this was extremely exhausting, especially in action. The 71st was a good deal stronger than the other regiments in the Brigade, having the Volunteer Company from the Militia as a ninth company. The battalion was consequently almost continuously employed as advanced guard, without either cavalry or guns other than a couple of naval 4.7S, whose remarkable efficiency however, made up for a lot. They were commanded by no less than a Captain, R.N., who had presumably given himself the job in order to lay himself alongside the enemy, which he could not do aboard—the Boers having no navy. He did not understand guns himself but had brought his gunner, Mr. Ball, and his method of bringing his guns into action greatly fascinated the 71st. It seems to have been always the same:

'What d'ye call it, Mr. Ball?'

'3,700, Sir.'

'Make it so'

'Aye aye, Sir! —*Bang!*

'Very good, Mr Ball—steady so'

'Aye aye, Sir! —*Bang!*

The worst days were the two last, for the Boers were determined to keep the Brigade off Heilbron, and the 71st, as the advanced guard, came upon them in considerable force. As the Brigade attack developed the 71st came under heavy fire from the enemy guns in position on

Spitz Kop, some 7,000 yards on their right. ‘They (the H.L.I.),’ wrote Sir Henry Colville, ‘at the same moment came under heavy fire from the enemy guns on Spitz Kop. This must have been quite a surprise for the Highlanders, but they certainly did not show it. Even at the first shell not a man changed his steady pace to the front and while shot after shot swept along the ranks, or struck the ground a few yards ahead of them there was never the faintest sign of hesitation, and the line pressed steadily forward without a check till the crest was gained.’ After this attack, during which the battalion lost about seventy killed and wounded, General MacDonald rode up and ‘was most complimentary, speaking very highly of the fine behaviour of the men, their steadiness and good work during the day. I published this in Orders,’ wrote Colonel Kelham, ‘as our Brigadier was not over lavish with praise !’

Exactly on the date ordered, 29 May 1900, the 71st had the honour of leading the Highland Brigade into Heilbron, marching with bayonets fixed and all pipes playing. The 71st had given up the ridiculous Wolesley helmet and wore the broad-brimmed Australian hat turned up on one side and fastened with a tartan patch into which was thrust a plume of dark-green cock’s feathers. Although all the other regiments were bearded, the 71st, in accordance with its ancient custom was shaven—except for the inevitable moustache of those days. How they had managed to shave on the high veldt, with water scarce and nothing but ‘cut-throat’ razors, and while constantly in action is a mystery. But a custom is a custom; once formed not readily departed from. The 71st, it will be remembered, had kept themselves shaved while marching and fighting night and day through Central India during the hot weather of 1858. ⁽¹⁾

A very unusual event occurred on the morning after the 71st arrived in Heilbron. Not content with having complimented the battalion in action, General Hector MacDonald rode over to it on parade. Having sat in silence for several minutes, glowering at the men as if they had done him some personal injury, he at last came out with ‘Umph ! I canna help saying that ye’ve done weel—verra weel. Dinna forget. Mind your feet ! I’ll mind your bellies ! Umph !’ He turned and rode off ignoring the Colonel’s salute. ‘The Brigadier,’ Colonel Kelham explained to his somewhat disconcerted officers, ‘is grudging in his praise—but he’s quite right, feet and food—most important things for an army—ahem !’

ROBERTS IN PRETORIA!

RELIEF OF MAFEKING!

Some of the London papers were confidently asserting that the war was over which, of course, was far from being the case. Once the British forces were established in the Transvaal however, organised resistance began to come to an end and those Boers remaining in the field increasingly took on the aspect of troops of bandits—many of whom acknowledged no superior authority. Having a vast field in which to operate and being highly mobile they were in a position to be able to continue hostilities almost indefinitely and their suppression became a problem of the first magnitude.

Meanwhile the Highland Brigade at Heilbron, with ammunition running low and sufficient supplies to last a bare five days on half rations, was entirely cutoff; being completely surrounded by large enemy forces, and having the telegraph line cut. A big convoy of stores approaching from Roodeval and accompanied by a small draft for the 71st, was captured by the Boers, and things began to look very black indeed; with General MacDonald’s promise to ‘mind,’ the troops’ bellies taking on a hollow ring. The Brigade had not been forgotten however. Distant firing at daybreak on 7 June was followed by the appearance of Lord Methuen’s divisional cavalry and then by his advanced guard, the 5th Fusiliers. Lord Methuen had had a word on the way with the Boer Commander, De Wet, with a view to terms of peace, but nothing came of it.

Lord Methuen brought no rations, nor did he halt, but turned immediately towards the

Kroonstadt—Pretoria railway, accompanied by the Black Watch, to clear the area of Boers and bring back supplies. While he was gone the 71st were continually on outpost duty, listening to the roars of high explosive in the far distance, as the Boers blew up the railway line and culverts between Kroonstadt and the Vaal. They were now down to two biscuits and a little meat for each man a day, and suffering much from the cold. In spite of the short rations and hardship however, the 71st 'marched well, fought well and were well-behaved,' while out of a total strength of a thousand men, only seven were sick. At last on the 19 June, far-off gun-fire heralded the return of Lord Methuen. The Highland Brigade marched out to meet him, and as a result large numbers of Boers were caught between the two forces and an exciting action developed. 'A swarm of Yeomen, full of zeal and uttering weird hunting cries, galloped full tilt for the enemy,' while the naval 4.7s under Captain Fraser, R.N. and Mr Ball made good practice, 'a shot fine across her bows, if you please, Mr Ball,' said the Captain, as one of the Boer guns bolted out from cover and headed north, 'aye aye, Sir !' *Bang!* The onlookers raised a cheer as the leaders crumpled, the rest piled up and the gun overturned. From over a mile away one could not see the agony of the stricken horses, or the lead driver with his face blown off.

A draft of over a hundred men for the 71st arrived with Lord Methuen, bringing the strength of the battalion to over eleven hundred. The draft was led by 2nd Lieutenant H. M. Craigie Halkett, whose brother had been killed on convoy duty in February. He commanded the 71st in the nineteen-twenties.

*⁽¹⁾ The pipe-tune *The Highland Brigade's March to Heilbron* was composed by Sgt.-Piper Ross to commemorate this event. The same tune is also known as *The Burning Sands of Egypt*, having apparently been 'pirated' by another piper. The melody was also adapted for the song *Road to the Isles*. Its original name was always used in the Regiment.*

The green cock's feathers continued to be worn by the Bugle-Major of the 71st in the front of his shako.

Chapter VI

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Colonel Kelham and the Blesbok —the action at Retiefs Nek, 23 July 1900—more praise from Hector—Naauwpoort Nek—the Highland Brigade enters Harrismith— the affair on the Klein Vet River—at Bloemfontein—break-up of the Highland Brigade—the loss of Dewetsdorp.

‘NEARLY every town in Orange River Colony,’ wrote Colonel Kelham at the beginning of July, ‘has heard the pipes of the H.L.I.’ It now seemed likely that the towns of the Transvaal would hear them also, as the 71st, making immense tacks to east and west like a square-rigged ship, gradually made northing towards the Vaal River. There were no battles, or even skirmishes, but when on the line of march the battalion was sniped almost continuously. The cavalry and mounted infantry were having the best of it now. There were no dreary marches over the veldt for them; and if they were sniped, there was a cry of ‘Hark Holloa !’ and they rode straight for the kopjie, nearly always having the satisfaction of seeing the Boers galloping off on the far side. De Lisle, the famous polo player, who was in command of a column of mounted infantry, dined one night with the officers of the 71st, and was asked how long he thought the war would last. ‘I don’t know,’ he replied cheerfully, ‘but as far as I’m concerned I hope it goes on for years and years !’ The Boer War was the last to be enlivened by the presence of the gentleman volunteer who, from a variety of motives, had fought in the ranks of the British Army ever since it had become established in the reign of Charles II. Many of them had marched with Macleod’s Highlanders in 1778, and two had been killed in the ranks of the 74th at Assaye. The demand for horsemen in the Boer War brought them out in large numbers. As of old, they provided their own horse and equipment and drew no pay. Being expert horsemen and rifle-shots they rendered most effective service against the Boers, but the system nevertheless, was a terrible waste of fine leaders. Furthermore, owing to the preference of the British public for the amateur soldier as opposed to the professional, the services of the volunteers received unduly favourable publicity at the expense of the regulars.

Although in occupation of Johannesburg and Pretoria, Lord Roberts' operations in the Transvaal were seriously hampered by the constant Boer threats to his communications, both in the Transvaal itself and the Orange River Colony as it was now called. At one moment indeed, it seemed as if Pretoria would become completely cut-off and be a second Mafeking. A force under Sir Archibald Hunter was accordingly set in motion to clear the communications, drive the Boers southward and attempt to pin them up against the Basuto Mountains. The Highland Brigade formed part of this force and marched for Frankfurt on 1 July 1900. The Argylls however, were left to garrison Heilbron and never rejoined the Brigade, which from then on was composed only of the Black Watch, H.L.I., and Seaforth. It was still commanded by Hector MacDonald, whom one commanding officer at least, would have considered dispensable. During one of the never-ending skirmishes, Colonel Kelham's attention was diverted from the Boers to a herd of blesbok, and the military situation being in hand so that 'there was nothing to detain me,' he galloped in pursuit and after an exciting one-man hunt brought down two of them, laboriously severed their heads with a hunting-knife and attached them to his saddle. He had hardly mounted when he found himself face to face with General MacDonald, 'a man with not an atom of sport nor any sympathy for a sportsman in his composition.' Caught red-handed leaving his battalion in action to go in search of game, Colonel Kelham lost something of his customary aplomb. 'Here it comes,' he said to himself, as the General, after observing him in silence for several minutes at last marshalled his thoughts, 'Humph!' ('a rude grunt characteristic of the man') 'Ye've been shooting?'

'Yes, Sir, and I've got two heads.'

'Tae hell wi your heids Sir ! A gr-r-rave breach o' discipline is whit I ca it, r-r-rejoin your battalion at once

'In a few minutes,' wrote Colonel Kelham, 'I was back with the troops, feeling a trifle "small" perhaps, but that glorious gallop over the open veldt and those two fine trophies were worth anything, and quite atoned for my reprimand.'

Accounts of such incidents make it difficult to realise that an army was in fact in close contact, and that men, not antelope, were falling to the well-aimed rifle. Nevertheless, the history of the British Army in general and of the Regiment in particular furnishes innumerable equivalent examples of the Colonel's eccentric behaviour, and it is impossible to imagine a British Army cured of that preoccupation for sport which puzzles and irritates allied troops. It is evident from Colonel Kelham's writings that he prized his two trophies of the chase a great deal more than his decoration and campaign medal.

With the operations going very much according to plan, the Highland Brigade on 10 July arrived at Bethlehem, which had been captured from the Boers a few days previously. The Brigade remained here about a week, while the envelopment of the Boers proceeded. When it marched southeastwards from Bethlehem towards the Caledon River, it was on the left of the British line—a highly important position, for the Pass at Naauwpoort for which it was heading was the only remaining outlet for escape left to the beleaguered Boers. The enemy, naturally being well aware of the vital importance to them of this Pass, were covering it in a strong position on Retiefs Nek.

On 23 July the 71st, which was rear-guard to the Brigade, got under arms at daybreak and moved up to the Highland bivouac about three miles from the Nek. Orders for the attack were received at 9 a.m. and the 71st came under fire at noon, having by then deployed within two thousand yards of the enemy positions. The Nek was a broken ridge, precipitous in places, very rocky and bare of vegetation. It was in fact, a favourite Boer position. Pressing forward under very heavy fire, two companies of the 71st managed to establish themselves on a spur leading up

the Nek, while the others worked forward in rushes. The advanced company on the spur then came up against wire. While the company was exchanging fire with the enemy at close range, Private W. Burnett ran forward and cut the wire, being the whole time under very heavy fire from the Boers a hundred yards off. His survival was miraculous and he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. It might well have been the Victoria Cross, but the company did not profit by his gallantry, for orders then arrived from General MacDonald to hold the positions reached and retire at dusk.

A patrol of the Lovat Scouts reporting to Colonel Kelham in bivouac at midnight, were sent to reconnoitre the highest point of the Nek. It returned two hours later to say that it was unoccupied. The Colonel accordingly sent up the volunteer company, which was on outpost, and got the remainder under arms. The volunteer company reached the summit just ahead of the Boers and was soon reinforced by the remainder of the battalion. The position was then shelled by the enemy all morning, but little damage was done, for the 71st was deployed on the reverse slope. The Seaforth then arrived and an advance was made along the Nek, but the Boers would not stand and were soon seen galloping off from the far end.

As far as can be discovered from the dispatches and contemporary accounts of this action, its success and the capture of the Pass was very largely due to the initiative of Colonel Kelham and the skill and gallantry of his battalion. The losses suffered were six killed and twenty-three wounded, while one officer and three other ranks were mentioned in dispatches of whom one was decorated as already described. When General MacDonald rode up to congratulate the battalion he unfortunately came upon Colonel Kelham in hot pursuit (on foot) of a small sucking pig whose pink chubbiness had made the Colonel's mouth water. It speaks volumes for the performance of the 71st that the General ignored this second 'breach o' discipline,' and did not even emit his customary 'rude grunt.' Instead he was 'full of praise for the regiment's doings,' and specially asked for his compliments to be sent to Major Garland, who had defended the hill-top.

News arriving that the Boers hemmed in along the Brand-water Basin were attempting to escape northward by the Naauwpoort Nek, the Highland Brigade marched immediately to seize that feature. In view of the customary reports which were circulated during the Boer War about the brutality of the British troops, the behaviour of the 71st while bivouacked at its first halt at Middle Vlei is worth recording; it being very typical of the British Army. A number of Boer families were living in the vicinity including the widows and children of men killed in the war. They were so poor as to be on the verge of starvation. The 71st were on half rations, and more than a little hungry after their constant marching and fighting. Yet before the battalion marched arrangements were made for 'a good supply of tinned meat and ration biscuits to be left for these poor people.'

General MacDonald now left to command the force and handed over the Highland Brigade to General Bruce-Hamilton, to whom he introduced Colonel Kelham as 'The Officer Commanding the H.L.I. who are like goats among the rocks and hills.' He then went on to praise the Regiment at some length. 'Unusual for him,' wrote the Colonel, 'but at this date I was on very different terms with him to those of earlier days, in fact very friendly.' After such an unlucky start owing to the matter of the kilt, it was something to have earned the regard of so tough a character as Hector MacDonald, who seems to have been a kind of mixture of Baird and Picton.

The Boers on the Naauwpoort had their eyes on their bolt-holes and were in no mood to stand and fight. Although the 71st were in action almost continuously, no casualties were suffered and the Pass was occupied by the Highland Brigade without difficulty, and no losses except a few to the Black Watch. The Pass was no sooner secured than a heliograph message arrived to say that

the Boer commander, Prinsloo, had surrendered, and that operations were suspended for the time being. While the 71st was on the line of march just after sunset, a vast number of dogs of all shapes and sizes which had attached themselves to the battalion careered along at its head. Passing a battery a gunner could be heard shouting 'Why, what the 'ell is this little lot? There's bin a coursing match somewhere!' 'Gain!' replied his chum, 'them's the H.L.I., the b_____s wot took the big kopjie at Retiefs Nek!'

A week later the Highland Brigade marched into Harrismith whose population was nearly all British, but which had been occupied by the Boers for over a year. The town was festooned with Union Jacks, kept in hiding for the day of liberation, and the sound of the pipes, the singing of *God save the Queen* and *Auld Lang Syne*, coupled with the wild yells of delight of the inhabitants made the whole affair very reminiscent of a celebration at Hogmanay, and was a very pleasant and satisfactory ending to a phase of the campaign. The war however, was still far from being over and there could be no lingering for the Highland Brigade, which immediately took the road back to Kroonstadt.

During the operations which led to the surrender of Prinsloo and the occupation of Harrismith, Lord Roberts had been having a hard time of it in the Transvaal. As the annexation of the Orange Free State and the occupation of Pretoria had failed to bring the war to an end, he was obliged to distribute a large part of his considerable army on garrison duties, and in guarding the hundreds of miles of railway line upon which his supplies depended. It was found that captured Boers, who had been allowed to return to their farms on the usual gentlemen's agreement, were rejoining the Commandos; which were therefore as strong as ever and nearly succeeded in regaining the initiative, even surrounding General Baden-Powell at Commando Nek and demanding his surrender. The future Chief Scout, who had already held Mafeking for seven months without any great worries, seemed to be slightly amused at the request. He was a soldier who never made any mistakes in his dispositions, and was quite willing for the flag of truce to inspect them—after which the Boers drew off and sensibly left him to his own devices. Lord Kitchener on the other hand, who had marched out against De Wet and endeavoured to surround *him*, had been given the slip by that agile guerrilla leader, who had thereupon carried out a fantastic march, during which he crossed the Vaal and wandered about all over the Orange River Colony, with practically every general in the field force frantically but unsuccessfully trying to catch him. It therefore being obviously impossible to force a decisive battle on the Boers, Lord Roberts decided to march against Louis Botha who was protecting President Kruger's country capital of Machadadorp, a hundred and fifty miles east of Pretoria. There was indeed, nothing else to be done.

In order to take part in the operations against Louis Botha, the Highland Brigade was ordered to the Transvaal; but its march to Kroonstadt was not interrupted, for the Brigade badly needed a re-fit especially after the Black Watch set fire to the veldt and nearly burned out the Highland bivouac. While on the line of march the Brigade was closely watched by Boer scouts, who turned out later to belong to Olivier's Commando which had succeeded in escaping north through the Naauwpoort Pass; but which had been headed back by General Hunter's column. At the time however, the Brigade had no notion that a whole Commando was in the vicinity. Then, on 15 August while the Brigade was approaching Wittpoort Farm, with Spitz Kop on its right flank it was suddenly heavily shelled. Spitz Kop had been reported clear of enemy, but Olivier had evidently waited for the Brigade to approach before galloping up to it, dismounting his men and opening up with his guns—which found the range to a yard. The Brigade, which was escorting a long convoy of bullock-and-horsed-waggons made an immediate detour to the left, while the 71st with a field battery and some of the Lovat Scouts were ordered to attack and capture Spitz Kop.

The ground over which the battalion had to advance was flat and bare, but a slight fold in the ground provided a forming-up place. Under cover of shrapnel-fire from the battery the 71st then advanced widely-extended, with the Lovat Scouts on the left. The Boer fire was fortunately very wild, possibly from the effect of the shrapnel, and as the attack neared Spitz Kop the Boers could be seen bolting out of their cover. The hillside was exceedingly steep, but the ascent was unopposed. As soon as the battalion reached the summit however, it was exposed to a concentrated fire from six guns and a pom-pom (a light, quick-firing weapon) and lay down in a long extended line on the crest. Orders were then received by heliograph for the 71st to sweep the crest to the left, which meant a change of direction. Colonel Kelham mounted in order to pass the necessary instructions down the line, but he was unhorsed almost immediately by a shrapnel bullet through his arm, while Gibson, a newly-joined subaltern, was hit by a fragment in the shoulder which tore his arm right off. He and the Colonel were placed under cover and the latter given a dose of sal volatile which enabled him to pass on the orders to Major Garland, his second-in-command—and a very good officer. The 71st then cleared the ridge as directed, against heavy opposition, and returned to the Brigade, having lost five killed and thirty-five wounded, some mortally. The names of four officers and four other ranks were mentioned for gallantry. The following Regimental Order was published:

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In camp near Heilbron,
Orange River Colony.
15th August, 1900.

The Commanding Officer wishes to place on record his appreciation of the gallant behaviour and steadiness of the Highland Light Infantry during the Action near Heilbron on Tuesday the 14th August, also his regret at the losses sustained by the Battalion.

Both General Sir Archibald Hunter and General Hector MacDonald have been highly

complimentary on the doings of the Battalion ; General Hunter saying ‘As usual your regiment did splendidly. It always does. With a magnificent regiment like that you can do anything.’

The Highland Brigade remained at Heilbron until 25 August, when the Black Watch and H.L.I. marched for Kroonstadt, leaving the Seaforth behind as garrison. On the same day Lord Roberts marched for Belfast, a small town on the railway line about thirty miles from President Kruger’s headquarters at Machadadorp. Lord Roberts had with him four cavalry brigades under Sir John French and two Infantry Divisions under Generals Buller and Pole-Carew, but they were all much under strength. Louis Botha was in position guarding the approaches with six thousand men, who were skilfully disposed among the kopjies in an area difficult for cavalry. Under the circumstances he might have been expected to present a problem difficult of quick solution, but he was no match at all for Lord Roberts, who broke him up and pushed on to Machadadorp. President Kruger then fled to Europe, evidently having been misled by the anti-British attitude of the European Powers into thinking he might get some help from them. Travelling in state in a Dutch warship he was rapturously welcomed in France—as all enemies of perfidious Albion always were; until the day came when they proved to be enemies of France as well. However, the old Boer would hardly have appreciated the amenities of Paris, which were all that was offered him, for no European Power at that time had any intention of crossing swords with a country which possessed the greatest fleet in the world. The defeat of Louis Botha and President Kruger’s emigration gave Lord Roberts a favourable opportunity of annexing the Transvaal to Her Majesty, in a lengthy proclamation the last paragraph of which stated:

I take this opportunity of pointing out that, excepting in the small area occupied by the Boer Army under the personal command of Commandant-General Botha, the war is degenerating, and has degenerated into operations carried on in an irregular and irresponsible manner, and in very many cases by insignificant bodies of men. I should be failing in my duty to Her Majesty’s Government and to Her Majesty’s Army in South Africa if I neglected to use every means in my power to bring such irregular warfare to an early conclusion. The means which I am compelled to adopt are those which the customs of war prescribe as being applicable to such cases; they are ruinous to the country, entail endless suffering on the burghers and their families, and the longer this guerrilla warfare continues the more vigorously must they be enforced.

The ‘customs of war’ to which Lord Roberts referred and which, after eight centuries and more have now become, alas! a dead letter, related to the continuance of a hopeless struggle. By the customs of war, a nation was not considered to be justified in continuing resistance once its armed forces had been broken and were no longer under central control. An exception might be made if it could be shown that there was hope of aid from an ally—as was the case with the Spanish guerrillas in the Peninsular War, or the French Resistance Movement in the Second World War. Otherwise, individuals and guerrilla bands who persisted in resisting after their cause was lost customarily forfeited the privileges of combatants and could be regarded as murderers. It will be recognised that there was much to be said for these ancient customs, which prevented war from degenerating into anarchy, and the fact that they led from time to time to the martyrdom of patriots of high character and principles—such as Sir William Wallace—proves nothing against them, for, war or no war the maintenance or restoration of law and order is a principle which must be obeyed.

The few weeks following the departure of the 71st and Black Watch for Kroonstadt were spent in endless marching over the veldt in an endeavour to round up the Boer guerrillas in the vicinity. Heilbron was again evacuated and the three battalions of the Highland Brigade, with the

Lovat Scouts and a field battery, passed through Winburgh on 11 September and crossed the Klein Vet River. Two days later near the farm of Tafelkop the Lovat Scouts came upon a large Boer convoy in the act of crossing the river. The Brigade at once attacked and in the subsequent action captured forty Boer waggons, while the Scouts, riding hard in pursuit, took several more. The waggons were loaded with supplies and ammunition and were a severe loss to the Boers, and this successful action was a great encouragement to the Highland Brigade after its long and fruitless marches. The success was largely due of course, to the Lovat Scouts, who were regarded in the Highland Brigade as the best of the Yeomanry. This view will of course be considered biased, but it was not without justification. Nearly all native-born Highlanders of the guile type, they could not have been bettered in a scouting role, being long-sighted and quick to detect movement. Adept at the silent stalk, whether by day or night, they could creep up a kopjie to see whether there were any 'pluddy Poers,' on the top without troubling to remove their spurs, and they proved on innumerable occasions that when it came to action they could both out-ride and out-shoot their opponents. The capture of the Boer convoy earned the Highland Brigade a special message of congratulation from Lord Roberts, who added that he was pleased 'that the Lovat Scouts had done so well.' ⁽¹⁾

When bivouacked at Grootdam on 16 September, the Highland Brigade was reinforced by some three hundred mounted troops, in addition to the Lovat Scouts—a squadron each of Driscoll's Scouts and Imperial Yeomanry, and a company of Mounted Infantry. After that, the Brigade marched without a halt for over a fortnight, combing the countryside round Heilbron for Boers. Several parties were found but only the mounted troops could make contact. The Boers were now avoiding action, and concentrating on sabotage and raids into towns from which the British garrisons had been withdrawn. Although Lord Roberts now had two hundred thousand men in South Africa, it was still not enough to protect every town in that vast country, while, so long as the Boers avoided action, even mounted troops were of little use against them. Nevertheless, Lord Roberts was so confident that the war was over that he allowed some of his troops to return home. Buller and one or two other Generals went with them, and the Field-Marshal actually made preparations to follow.

It transpired however, that during this period Louis Botha was busy reorganising the Boer forces. When President Kruger left for Europe, his deputy set up the seat of government at Pietersburgh, three hundred miles north of Pretoria, at the end of the railway line. Here Louis Botha established his military headquarters and, with government authority, made several revolutionary changes in the Commando system. Whereas, for instance, the Commandos had previously been composed of unpaid volunteers who could—and did—leave the field whenever they chose, the Boers were in future to be paid, and compensation given to their families. This in effect turned them into regulars, who were bound to obey the orders of their Field Comets. Having thus established his authority over all Boer forces, Louis Botha then put into force his plans for continuing the campaign.

On 4 October 1900 the Highland Brigade was ordered to Bloemfontein ; H.L.I. and Black Watch by train, and the Lovat Scouts and Seaforth by road. Minor actions were now continuous in both the former Boer Republics, causing some wit to remark that when Lord Roberts announced that the war was over, he presumably meant 'all over the place.'

On arrival at Bloemfontein the Highland Brigade was broken up, and the regiments thereafter acted on their own in independent flying columns, with detachments of cavalry and guns attached. The 71st, having set out from Bloemfontein to Slangfontein and Dewetsdorp accompanied by a troop of Imperial Yeomanry, was gradually split up itself; leaving a company at Dewetsdorp, while other companies and even platoons went off on independent missions,

either as escorts to convoys or for the protection of vulnerable points. By the middle of October however, the battalion had more or less settled down with its headquarters and three companies at Wepener, two companies at Dewetsdorp—one of which however, was the volunteer company which soon left on its way home, the war having been supposed to have ended—one company at Smithfield, one at Rouxville and a detachment at Commissie Drift, over the Caledon River. De Wet had arrived back in the Orange River Colony, and although he had suffered a severe defeat at Bothaville on 6 November, he soon recovered.

The garrisons manned by the 71st were constantly alerted by news of impending Boer attacks which often arrived through official channels, while rumours and false information never ceased 'to circulate. The Boers had in fact completely regained the initiative—if that is not too strong a term to use when referring to gangs of mounted guerrillas. Dewetsdorp, though twenty-four miles away, was in direct heliograph contact with Wepener, and Colonel Kelham was expecting a Boer attack on one or both places at any moment. On 18 November he received a telegram from Pretoria reporting that 'over 1000 Boers under Christian De Wet and Botha with guns and waggons laagered last night at Salisbury (18 miles north of Wepener) and left this morning towards Dewetsdorp; that the Boers were closing round the town, and the guns could be heard that evening.'

The garrison of Dewetsdorp consisted of about five hundred men made up of two troops of Mounted Infantry, two guns Field Artillery, three companies of the Gloucestershire Regiment and 'A' Company of the Highland Light Infantry commanded by Major the Hon. H. T. Anson. The garrison was commanded by Major Massey, R.A. The Boers attacked in relays and, as they greatly outnumbered the defenders soon wore them down. Nevertheless they held out for six days, when being without water, and under continuous fire from all sides, Major Massey surrendered. By that time only two men out of the twenty belonging to the section, Royal Artillery, were on their feet; one of them being the Farrier Sergeant, who fired the last shot himself. It had happened that the position held by 'A' Company was the first to be attacked, and the Boers established themselves on three sides, in some cases being as close as fifty yards, and cut the water supply. The company retired on orders from the Garrison Commander during the night of 22 November, having held it during an unceasing battle at close range for nearly five days, during the last three of which the men had been without water in the hot sun. Their tongues had swollen, so that most were unable to speak. The losses of 'A' Company were three rank and file killed, an officer and twenty-three rank and file wounded, some mortally, out of a total strength of eighty all ranks. Private C. Kennedy was awarded the Victoria Cross for rescuing a wounded comrade on one day and volunteering to take a message through heavy fire on the next day. He did not deliver the message, being seriously wounded after twenty yards. Corporal Black then went out and took the message from him, and succeeded in delivering it to the Garrison Commander who, however, returned no answer, being too hard pressed. Three other private soldiers were mentioned in dispatches for acts of gallantry.

All the officers except one who had newly joined succeeded in escaping, taking with them some of the rank and file. It afterwards transpired that the Boers were of a strength of two thousand eight hundred, led by Botha, De Wet and Wessels. The Boer leaders were 'very civil,' and congratulated the garrison on its stand, mentioning when they visited the wounded that the Boers had lost more in dead than the British in wounded. It seems in fact, to have been a by no means discreditable affair—but it was a pity that Major Massey did not hold out for one more day.

⁽¹⁾ The regiment was then known as 'Lovat's Scouts' after the name of its Colonel. It seems a pity that a designation, so soundly based on military tradition, should have been changed.

Chapter VII

ROUNDING UP THE COMMANDOS

The 71st at Wepener—activities of Dc Wet—the defence of Commissie Drift—achievements of Dc Wet—the Mounted Infantry—the Volunteer Companies—the 71st march through Basutoland, February 1901—a couple of incorrigibles—H.L.I Mounted Infantry in action.

DURING the first week of November 1900, Lord Roberts moved his headquarters from Pretoria to Johannesburg. Then, at the end of the month he handed over command to Lord Kitchener and, after visiting his son's grave at Colenso, returned home, being still of the opinion that the war was over to all intents and purposes. It was certainly true, that from that time onwards the operations scarcely justified the description of a war. The British Army was now in possession of the whole territory which had formerly comprised the Boer Republics. It was impossible for the Boers to drive it out again but, as they still refused to accept the inevitable, Lord Kitchener was obliged to face the difficult and unenviable task of restricting their activities and gradually mopping them up.

So long as the Boers had been fighting under a central authority, they had been treated with exceptional consideration. It will be remembered that even the prisoners of war were allowed back to their farms. When it was found later that they were rejoining the Commandos this practice was stopped, and they were transported to India and Ceylon. Then, when the Boer operations degenerated into raids and sabotage by guerrilla bands, reprisals were taken which at first consisted of the burning of farms and confiscation of livestock within the area covered by each such incident. As the Boer guerrillas however, did not belong to the district in which they operated but were continually on the move, they cared little for such punishments, while making the most of them for propaganda. Sterner measures were then instituted, which included the rounding up of the non-combatant population—old men, women and children—and putting them

behind barbed-wire, where many fell sick and died. These measures were of course represented as British 'atrocities' in the European Press. They still receive adverse comment by writers on the Boer War, who seldom, if ever, consider it from the soldier's point of view.

'Reprisals' is an ugly word, which can be applied to almost any activity involving the non-combatants in an enemy country. There is a difference however, between reprisals undertaken for revenge and those devised to frustrate the enemy's schemes and weaken his power to resist. In the Boer War, so long as the farms were left intact with their people and livestock, it would have been impossible ever to bring the guerrilla operations to an end. There is no way of dealing with guerrillas other than by laying their country waste and depriving them of their sources of supply and intelligence. The Kaffirs, it will be remembered, could only be defeated in a similar manner.

In addition to these measures against the Boer farms and non-combatants, Lord Kitchener also instituted a system of block-houses designed for the protection of the railways and other vital objectives and also to restrict the freedom of movement of the Commandos. The system, which was instrumental in bringing the Boers to terms, took a year to complete. It consisted of numerous strong-points built of earth and corrugated iron, at intervals of six hundred yards and linked by barbed-wire. Each block-house had a small garrison of six or seven men provided by the infantry, while the cavalry chased after the Boers. Many of the Yeomanry regiments having gone home, Lord Kitchener was again short of mounted troops and was obliged to ask for the return of some of the Australian Light Horse, and other colonial regiments. Having asked Botha to meet him, he represented to the Boer commander the futility of continued resistance. The Boer was inclined to agree with him, and terms acceptable to both were discussed. Botha however, was subordinate to President Kruger and Acting President Steyn, neither of whom would agree to terms; while Lord Kitchener of course, had no authority to make any, and the British Government insisted on unconditional surrender. Hostilities therefore continued until ended a year later, with terms almost exactly similar to those agreed by Kitchener and Botha.

Meanwhile Hector MacDonald was still in command of the Highland Brigade, with his headquarters at Aliwal North, on the Orange River, and with Major Stockwell, H.L.I., as his Brigade Major. He could exercise little influence over the affairs of the Brigade, for it was scattered all over the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal. As far as the 71st was concerned—and the battalion was no doubt typical of the others—it is not clear who the higher authority was, for Colonel Kelham was receiving direct orders and instructions from Lord Kitchener and General Hunter, as well as from General MacDonald. Whoever it was, the higher authority had been considerably upset by the affair at Dewetsdorp; not because of the loss of five hundred men, which, especially in view of the casualties inflicted on the Boers, was a trifling matter in a war of this size, but because the surrender, when the relieving columns were within a day's march, had ruined an opportunity of inflicting a severe defeat on De Wet. Colonel Kelham was thereafter plagued by advice and instructions from above, and told that if he had to retire from Wepener he should do so into Basutoland. He replied that he had no intention of retiring anywhere, and it is evident that he meant what he said.

A peculiarity of the Boer War—for which one would have to go back to the Middle Ages to find a counterpart—was the frequency with which the white flag was used by both sides as an indication of surrender. The operations, it is true, were unusual, in that small bodies or garrisons were often surrounded without any means of communication with their formation headquarters, but nevertheless the readiness with which the commanders appear to have displayed the white flag as soon as they decided that they had had enough, was distinctly odd. The justification for this action was of course, held to be the wish to prevent unnecessary death and suffering; and this was often skilfully exploited by the Boers whose practice it was, when they came up against

strong opposition, to send over a flag of truce carried by some well-spoken and agreeable fellow who, even if he did not succeed in negotiating an immediate surrender, would at least sow the seeds of doubt and indecision in the commander's mind; while his very appearance was bound to have some adverse effect on the morale of the troops.

Once this sort of thing starts it is of course, liable to become a habit—and wars cannot be fought in such a manner if they are ever to be terminated. In the case of Dewetsdorp, the surrender may have stopped death and suffering in the garrison and its attackers, but if the commander had held out another day or until indeed, he was over-run, a great deal of death and suffering would have been spared to others. However, it was not altogether the fault of the commander of the garrison. A detachment of the 71st was holding a key position under the command of a subaltern who was wounded but still in action. During the afternoon of the last day, when the Boers were pressing closely and the defences beginning to crumble, a demoralised party of infantry and gunners who had been driven out of their position by cross-fire which had killed their leaders, rushed headlong into the trench manned by the 71st party. This trench was then outflanked and as the enfilade took effect the troops, it appears, persuaded the officer to put up a white flag. The loss of this position so prejudiced the defence that the commander of the garrison then also surrendered. The subaltern concerned was court-martialled and cashiered, but on appealing after the war to King Edward VII, an enquiry was held which exonerated and reinstated him. After the Boer War the principle was somewhat forcefully laid down in Infantry Training that, failing orders to withdraw, a position would be held 'to the last man and the last round,' and that 'a final effort will be made with the bayonet, rather than surrender.' It is indeed a sound principle, for it cannot be left to subordinate commanders to surrender or not as they choose.

In December 1900, De Wet was turned back from the Orange River and driven north again. Colonel Kelham at Wepener received a telegram from Lord Kitchener, saying that De Wet's Commando was trekking hard up the Caledon with the cavalry on his heels, and that the bridge three miles west of Wepener was to be blocked immediately. 'Let me know what you can do,' the Commander-in-Chief ended, anxiously. Colonel Kelham replied that he would block the bridge with a company, H.L.I. fifty Mounted Infantry and a gun, but that he thought De Wet would make for Bastard's Drift, fourteen miles south. Lord Kitchener then said that he was sending troops to block Bastard's Drift and 'keep me informed of situation.' Kelham rode over to the bridge with the Mounted Infantry and gun, worked out the position and had the defences started. While he was doing so, the pipes of 'K' Company could be heard approaching from miles away. He also looked to his own defences at Wepener and, in a manner typical of him, 'arranged for sorties, etc.' There is no doubt that De Wet would have found his head in a hornets' nest had he come that way, but unfortunately he did not. Instead he made for Commissie Drift near Smithfield, some fifty miles south of Wepener.

Comissie Drift was held by Second-Lieutenant D. A. Blair, an excellent young man who was stoutly supported by his Sergeant, Davidson, and platoon of forty strong—the 71st had over twelve hundred rank and file at this time, so that companies were between a hundred and thirty and a hundred and fifty in strength and platoons accordingly. Blair had fortunately not been required to work out the defences himself—that had been most efficiently done by one of the Majors, Richardson—and all he had to do was to hold them. When he had been ordered to do so however, the possibility that De Wet himself would come that way with two thousand men behind him had not been envisaged by Blair's seniors. The Drift was a crossing over the Caledon, at a point where the river ran between two steep banks, making a gorge fifty feet in depth which was crossed by an iron bridge. The defences consisted of four trenches covering either end of the

bridge and four more from which fire could be directed up or down the gorge. Although Blair had been left all alone with his platoon in this remote spot for some weeks, he was evidently keeping a sharp look-out, so that when the scouts of De Wet's advanced guard arrived they were immediately spotted.

The Boer scouts having reported the bridge held, the advanced guard of some three hundred men attempted to cross at a point where the gorge levelled out lower down, but were frustrated by the enfilade fire which Blair opened on them and withdrew out of range. The usual flag of truce then arrived, and was halted some distance away and then brought in blindfolded. He handed Blair a written order from De Wet to surrender within ten minutes, but was sent back with a reply which was, the Cape Times stated, 'a sarcastic one.'

The Boers then brought up two of the guns which they had captured at Dewetsdorp and bombarded the defences at either side of the bridge, while their riflemen dismounted and endeavoured to work forward from three sides. Unable to make any headway, they then desisted for a while and finally renewed the attack from in front in considerable force, but could get no closer than three hundred yards. Finally they drew off discomfited, having been held up by Blair and his forty men for over twenty-four hours. Hector MacDonald in his official report of this incident stated that '2nd Lieut. Blair's presence of mind and resolution are in the General's opinion worthy of all praise.' De Wet of course, was hard-pressed at the time and could not afford to stay too long. He had evidently succeeded in shaking off his pursuers, or Blair's defence of Comissie Drift might well have been disastrous to him. Obviously he had no idea that he was being held up by only forty men. It was a very small affair, in which Blair and his platoon did no more than their plain duty but still, it was something for a Second-Lieutenant to have beaten De Wet.

In January 1901, Major Garland was holding Smithfield with two companies and Major Richardson was at Rouxville with a company and a half and two guns. The remainder of the 71st, less numerous small detachments such as that at Comissie Drift, was at Wepener. De Wet was still at large in Cape Colony and the cavalry could not find him, which was causing Lord Kitchener great uneasiness. He signalled Colonel Kelham to keep a sharp lookout during the full moon, as Fourie's Commando was in the neighbourhood—with the result that the 71st was permanently stood-to during this period and no one took off his clothes or equipment. A signal then came from General Hunter saying that De Wet with five thousand men had turned east towards Wepener, and another from General MacDonald asking him for the position at Bastard's Drift. 'I seem to be in the position,' wrote Colonel Kelham, 'of the man who had to serve many masters.' However, he did his best to please them all and seems to have succeeded not too badly. A fighting patrol to Bastard's Drift found it held by fifteen hundred Boers who had told the locals that they were waiting for reinforcements before attacking Wepener. All available information therefore pointed to an attack on Wepener at an early date, but the attack never came, being merely a ruse of the Boers for distracting the attention of the hunters. On the 22 January 1901, Queen Victoria died, giving the British Empire a shock from which it never recovered. The Editor of the H.L.I. Chronicle comforted himself with the reflection that 'King Edward has repeatedly expressed his intention of following in the footsteps of his loved and revered mother.'

For the soldiers in the field however, the death even of so great a monarch was of secondary importance to the fact that De Wet was still under arms, and Colonel Kelham's comments on this outstanding leader are worth repeating at this stage:

He was originally a potato-farmer near Kroonstadt in the Orange River Colony. On the 16th February 1899 he captured Lord Roberts' huge and valuable convoy at Wegdrai, on the Riet River. He defeated Broadwood, capturing his guns and convoy at Sannas Post, 26 miles East

of Bloemfontein.

He fought and severely tried the Highland Brigade during three days of its march from Lindley to Heilbron. On 26th May 1900 he captured Colonel Spragge and the Imperial Yeomanry outside Lindley.

On one occasion he captured the 4th Derby Militia and killed their Colonel at Honning Spruit Station.

In June, 1900 he took the Highland Brigade Convoy and its escort on its way to Heilbron.

On 23rd November, 1900 he captured the town and garrison of Dewetsdorp with their guns and stores, to say nothing of other successes.

What a record

It must however be remembered that De Wet had most exceptional advantages. He and all his men were good horse-masters, mounted on lightly-weighted horses encumbered by no wheeled-transport, spare kit being on led animals. Every farm house was a source of help and information as to our movements and he had a vast open country to move about.

While we, anyhow until very late in the war, were slowly moving infantry foot-slogging mile after mile and hampered by long and very vulnerable convoys.

From the very beginning our forces ought to have been light cavalry with guns and a certain number of infantry to hold important posts.

In repeating these interesting comments it must be emphasised that the British Army was not designed especially to fight Boers, and its organisation was accordingly based upon the infantry. It would have been impossible to have put a sufficient force of light cavalry into the field to defeat the Boers on its own—nor would regular cavalry have been able to compete with the Boer tactics. The fault lay in not mounting the British infantry sooner, but this was easier said than done. It was all very well for the Boers, who all had their own horses and one or two spares. To mount the British infantry meant that a vast number of horses had to be found from somewhere, with their saddlery and equipment. Also the proportion of infantrymen who could ride was not more than about ten per cent, so that the remainder would have had to be trained. Mounted infantry have to be capable of galloping into action under fire; dismounting in close range and flinging their reins to the horse-holders, who then have to control at least four excited animals while shells burst close by and the air is thick with bullets. It seems extraordinary that the infantry so often managed this feat, especially as their horses were mostly only semi-trained remounts. It is another proof of the fact that the British Infantryman can do anything.

It will be remembered that on his arrival in South Africa Lord Roberts had ordered a company to be mounted from each infantry battalion. This order could not be carried out in its entirety at that time, apparently owing to lack of horses. The lack was not to be wondered at, for the wastage in the mounted arms on active service was considerable, while most of the available remounts were taken by the multitude of units of irregular horse raised in the country, many of which were of extremely doubtful value. The 71st had only provided one section of fifty men up to 1901, but a detachment of a hundred and fifty under Captain Purvis arrived from the 74th in January of that year. The 74th had arrived home from Ceylon in April 1900, and were stationed at Aldershot. The battalion had been ordered to commence training in mounted infantry work immediately on its return to the United Kingdom; and the necessary instruction in mounted drill and horse management had been provided by the Army Service Corps.

Another Volunteer Company also arrived for the 71st to replace the one sent home. These companies were formed of Glasgow businessmen who signed on for one year. That period apparently, was the limit for which they were prepared to let their businesses run themselves while they were away soldiering. It seems a curious arrangement and could hardly have been

very satisfactory, meaning as it did, that as soon as a man had become fit enough to be of some use in the field he rushed back to his office desk. Still, it showed a robust spirit.

At the end of January 1901, Colonel Kelham received orders to evacuate Wepener and march through Basutoland to Aliwal North. At least, he understood such to be his orders although no actual direction appears to have been given. He was still in almost daily receipt of a multitude of telegrams from various authorities, to whom was now added the Military Governor of Bloemfontein who ordered him to 'remove all inhabitants' from Wepener, without explaining how or where to. 'The thing is impossible ! ' cried the Colonel, 'These orders or counter-orders from two or three different Generals, apparently without reference to each other will qualify me for a lunatic asylum in a week!' In despair he wired to Hector MacDonald 'I can take orders from one person only who is it to be ?' The answer, as he expected, was 'Me,' but it scarcely eased his position, for direct orders from Lord Kitchener and General Hunter, which he could hardly ignore, continued to arrive. So also did hordes of native fugitives from the Boers, making for Basutoland—for the Boers did not hesitate to shoot any native whom they suspected of loyalty to the British. That the British were unable to protect these people was sad evidence of the state of affairs at this time, but the situation had necessarily deteriorated for a while, until Lord Kitchener's block-house system had time to come into effect.

The 71st marched into Basutoland on 31 January 1901, and were given a hearty welcome by the Basutos who had remained loyal ever since the 74th had visited them in '52.

'A very fat black lady, quite overcome by her admiration of Bugle-Major Faulkner, rushed at him, seized him by the arm and insisted on marching at the head of the regiment. Faulkner being an eminently respectable man with a wife at home.' Four other 'robust and scantily-clad young ladies' linked arms and danced along in front of the Colonel singing God Save the Queen, for, like all the other primitive races in the British Empire the Basuto firmly refused to believe that the Queen was dead. Although not exactly on forced march, the 71st could not afford to dawdle, for the usual sheaf of telegrams awaited the Colonel at every halt where there was a post-office. 'Why the delay ? ' wired Lord Kitchener. 'No delay,' replied Kelham a little irritably, cutting out a couple of stages on the march-route. Nevertheless, it was a great relief to march through friendly country and the brief halts at the larger villages were most pleasant. As he rode round one in the evening, the Colonel's attention would be distracted by that curious high-pitched shriek signifying that H. M. Craigie Halkett was in a rage, and would find that officer in the middle of a crowd of Basutos, unsuccessfully trying to swindle one of them over a horse; while nearby, his sardonic friend Pollok-Morris stroked his nose, and bamboozled another Basuto into parting with his horse and throwing in a couple of his wives as well. 'A couple of damned incorrigibles,' their Colonel called them.

On the 6 February the march-route led back along the border and numerous Boers were seen riding almost within range but they made no attempt to engage. The battalion finally crossed the Orange River on 7 February and the Basuto Chiefs, who had accompanied it all the way, performed a war-dance and saluted the Colonel with a loud yell of Haa! morana—Hail! Great Chief! as it marched out of Basutoland.

The battalion had just paraded on 11 February, ready to move off, when Pollok-Morris arrived riding a new purchase over which he had lost control. Missing the Colonel by a hair's breadth he careered up the left flank of the battalion in a series of violent bucks and bounds, which finally sent him flying through the air to land on his back in front of the leading company. The Colonel's exclamation of annoyance was no doubt extremely alarming although, as he never used any expletive stronger than damn, it would not appear so in print. 'I noticed' he observed significantly, 'the usually sedate Sergeant-Major Stevens shaking with suppressed emotion and

felt sure that it was only their sense of discipline that kept the battalion from roaring with laughter. . . these little incidents much enliven life.’ Most officers have experienced similar enlivening incidents and will equally have marvelled at the iron self-control of the rank and file.

The 71st arrived at Aliwal on 14 February, after a march lasting a fortnight. ‘I lunched and dined with MacDonald and George Stockwell; they were comfortably housed in Aliwal. The Staff, as usual, had a far better time than the Regimental Officer who gets the kicks and curses but not too many of the honours and awards. Memo: Be a Staff Officer.’ The ancient grudge.

The 71st had to march at once, leaving the Staff to their comforts. Colonel Kelham was ordered to take out the following column and guard the fords over the Orange River in the sixty miles between Aliwal and Bethuli:

- 4 Guns, R.F.A.
- One squadron 19th Hussars.
- 50 men District Mounted Rifles.
- 130 men Lovat Scouts.
- 120 men South African Constabulary.
- 1st Bn. H.L.I. (950 men)

Colonel Kelham divided his sixty miles of front into two sectors, one under himself with headquarters at Commissie, the other under his second-in-command, Major Garland, with headquarters at Jakalsfontein, fifteen miles off. The various Drifts or fords over the Orange River which he had to hold were Krassipoort, Zand, Odendaalstroom, and Rhenoster; at each of which he posted small mixed forces of H.L.I. and mounted troops, while retaining the bulk of his force in reserve at the two headquarters. Minor incidents were soon forthcoming; as when Lord Lovat and his Scouts crossed at Odendaalstroom to clear some farms and bring in locals suspected of helping the enemy. He was followed up by a superior force as far as the Drift, but the Boers contented themselves with firing at long range. Other posts were repeatedly visited by the Boers, but no important action developed. De Wet, Hertzog, Kritzinger, Van Renan and Scheeper all had their Commandos in the Colony and moved about constantly pursued by mounted columns. At Commissie, things were so peaceful that the 71st commenced football and other sports. Pollok-Morris, who had no liking for orthodox sport but preferred, to the end of his days, to invent his own, was a sore trial to a succession of Commanding-Officers, starting with Colonel Kelham. . . . ‘It would have been more pleasing if he had confined his amateur efforts to a Government mule-cart or other substantial vehicle instead of using my nearly new buggy which, at an early hour one morning, with unbroken refractory horses in the harness and Lieutenant Pollok handling the ribbons, I saw careering at full gallop over the veldt, shaving past ant-hills, leaping ruts and nullahs in a manner which fore-told inevitable destruction—and it came. . . .’ Colonel Kelham’s benign, paternal attitude towards his young officers, customary among most Commanding-Officers until it began to die out in the nineteen-twenties, is pleasing to contemplate. He regarded himself as being very much in loco parentis and, even in the field, was constantly communicating with their real fathers, from whom he had a lot to put up with. The father of the unfortunate Blair, for example, wrote indignantly asking to be informed why his son had not been decorated for his defence of Comissie Drift. Understanding a man’s pride in his son, and well knowing that Blair would have been more than horrified if he had heard of his father’s gaffe, the Colonel wrote a patient and tactful reply—at a time when he was expecting a visit from De Wet at any moment. ⁽¹⁾

In April 1901, Hector MacDonald handed over command of the Highland Brigade to

General Fitzroy Hart and returned to India, having issued a long and moving farewell Order to the Highland Brigade. During the same month the H.L.I. Mounted Infantry, serving with the 12th Mounted Infantry Battalion, had a brush with the Boers near Rietfontein, about twenty miles west of Pretoria. The action was unusual in that it was fought mounted, and Captain A. N. E. Browne was severely wounded in the mêlée, getting one bullet in his stomach and another through his arm, which later had to be amputated. In spite of this he got the better of the Boers and brought his men away safely. In his later years he wrote a book on the dress of the 71st, illustrating it himself in spite of his one arm.

At the end of May, the 71st was hurriedly moved to Queenstown, in anticipation of an attack in force; but none materialised, and the battalion was again split up in detachments around the country, in which the Boers were very active. After a month however, the battalion returned to the Orange River, where the defences had been improved and a line of block-houses constructed which the 71st occupied, its headquarters being at Aliwal. Brushes with the Boers became a frequent occurrence but none was of any moment. 'About this time,' wrote Colonel Kelham, 'there were so many little fights along the Orange River that it is impossible to relate them.' The block-house system in fact, was beginning to take effect and the Boer's days were numbered.

(1) Blair does seem to have been a little unlucky; but this was no fault of the Colonel

Chapter VIII

END OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

The block-house line—the Peace of Vereenigen, 35 May 1902—H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught appointed Colonel-in-Chief—the 71st in Egypt, the Sudan and India—the 74th in the Channel Islands, Edinburgh and Aldershot—the Militia—the formation of the Territorial Army, 1908—Pigsticking.

FROM the time that the 71st took up position in the blockhouses along the Orange River in June 1901, until the end of the war, there are no further incidents worth recording. Active operations during that period were carried out almost entirely by the mounted troops, who roamed about in columns accompanied by field artillery, endeavouring to drive the Boers in upon the block-house line held by the infantry. Right up to the end 'those two imposters,' as Kipling rightly called them—triumph and disaster—continued to take turn about, so that although the war, as a war, was undoubtedly over, men continued to be killed and wounded all over the place, sometimes up to five hundred at a time. It had become useless and purposeless slaughter, accomplishing nothing, and is distressing to contemplate.

The 71st was not altogether content to remain inactive in the block-house line, waiting for the Boers. Up to about two hundred of the battalion mounted and were led out by the subalterns in patrols which ranged far and wide across the veldt. 'The two incorrigibles,' Craigie Halkett and Pollok Morris, took readily to this work as may be imagined. The latter, whose troop was known as 'Pollok's Dragoons,' usually accompanied the Colonel on his reconnaissances—probably so that the Colonel could keep an eye on him. They were ambushed by the Boers during one expedition, but galloping round the enemy's flank they sighted his horses. Immediately the Boers realised that their horses had been discovered they abandoned their position, mounted and galloped off, although they were much stronger than the Colonel's party. He observed that the Boers were so sensitive about the safety of their horses—which afforded them their only means

of retreat— that they would always abandon a position rather than risk losing them. It seems unfortunate that this weakness does not seem to have been properly appreciated by the British cavalry.

Although the 74th did not take part in the Boer War as a battalion, it sent considerable drafts of both officers and men to the 71st, so that at the beginning of 1902 the 71st was fourteen hundred strong—and there was also the 74th Mounted Infantry detachment in the field. In view of the large amount of sickness in the British Army in South Africa it is interesting to note that out of this large total there were only fifty-seven in hospital in January—and of these many were battle-casualties and many others recovering from accidents. This was in spite of the dreary life led in the blockhouses; in each of which seven men lived together in a small space, the only entry to which was a man-hole. There was one officer to every four block-houses, whose duty it was to keep the small garrisons continually at work—improving the defences, keeping the field of fire clear of undergrowth, and repairing the roads and drifts. In addition each man had to walk to the neighbouring block-house twice a week. The Colonel rode round continually, to ensure that all this was being done. The war nevertheless had become boring and difficult to take seriously, especially as rumours of peace were prevalent. It is therefore surprising that when the battalion was ordered to send home an officer's party to represent it at the Coronation of King Edward VII no one would willingly join it, and had to be ordered to do so.

Thus the Boer War dragged along to its close, news of which arrived on Sunday 1 June 1902. Those of the 71st at Aliwal were in church and the sermon was being preached, when a staff-officer entered and handed a note up to the pulpit. The clergyman read it out, 'Peace was signed at Vereenigen on the night of Saturday, the 31st of May.' There was a moment's pause, and the congregation rose unprompted and sang *God Save the King*.

The honours won by the 71st in South Africa were two Victoria Crosses, one Companion of the Order of the Bath and three of the Distinguished Service Order, nine Distinguished Conduct Medals and thirty-two Mentions in Despatches. Many other awards were received by officers and other ranks serving in the Mounted Infantry, on special service or on the Staff, and with other arms.

Since the return of the 74th from Ceylon the activities of the battalion had been confined to the trying out of new weapons and formations at Hythe and the training of drafts for the 71st. Colonel John Grahame, the well-known commanding-officer of the 74th, who was then a Captain, did not, it is interesting to note, join any draft for the 71st but preferred to try his luck with the Ashanti Field Force, which was carrying on a small war with the Ashanti's at the same time as the Boer War. 'It is a unique experience fighting in the bush,' he wrote, 'and is perhaps more of a strain on the nerves than any other kind of warfare, especially if one happens to belong to the leading company.' His nerves however stood up to it well, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Although the 71st and 74th now formed one regiment and were quite amiably disposed towards one another, the officers did not readily transfer between the two battalions, and the Boer War provided the first occasion for a great number of years on which there was any large interchange. Many officers in fact, of whom John Grahame was one, would almost sooner have resigned than change their battalion. This is particularly curious in view of the fact that in the days before the Cardwell reforms, when regiments kept their numbers, there was nothing unusual about officers transferring from one regiment to another.

In addition to these more serious duties the 74th while at Aldershot gained a reputation at cricket, a game to which at that time all ranks were extraordinarily addicted. The battalion went to London on 3 January 1901, to line the streets on the occasion of the return of Lord Roberts from South Africa. The 74th were dressed in white helmets, scarlet coats and trows, with the

Band in feather bonnets and red hackles. Lord Roberts was observed to eye the troops closely as he rode past. When he came to the Band, the fact that he was riding at the head of a ceremonial procession did not stop him from reining back sharply and shouting for the Bugle-Major. 'Is this a Highland Regiment?' he asked, 'Which?' The Bugle-Major told him. 'Ah !' said Lord Roberts, nodding his head understandingly, as he rode on. The interminable controversy over the Highland Light Infantry and the kilt, sparked off by its removal from the Highland Brigade was at that time in full swing and a petition signed by the Lord Provost of Glasgow was before the Secretary of State, asking that the kilt should be restored and the Highland Light Infantry designated *The City of Glasgow Regiment*. The granting of this petition took very nearly fifty years, which must surely be a record. The 74th again went up to London for the King's Coronation on 23 January, but that time escaped any comments upon its dress.

On 4 September 1901, the Regiment was honoured by the appointment of H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, K.G., to be its Colonel-in-Chief. H.R.H. had already been appointed Honorary Colonel of the two Militia Battalions in 1892. H.R.H. replied to a letter of congratulation from Colonel Rutherford, commanding the 74th, who forwarded the parade state as follows:

Bagnoles,
September 11th, 1901.

My Dear Colonel—I thank you very much for your letter of congratulation on my appointment as Colonel-in-Chief of the Highland Light Infantry. I can assure you that I very much appreciate the high honour of being now personally associated with two such distinguished Regiments as the 71st and 74th. I have worn the uniform of the Highland Light Infantry as Honorary Colonel of the 3rd and 4th Battalions for the last five years, and am now very proud at being at the head of the whole Regiment

—Regulars, Militia and Volunteers. It will be my great object to promote a true feeling of comradeship throughout all units of the Highland Light Infantry, and to get the Militia and Volunteers to feel the same *esprit tie corps* which is so great a characteristic of the 71st and 74th Regiments.

I thank you for the State you sent me, and hope you will instruct the 1st and 2nd Battalions to forward me a monthly State, and the 3rd and 4th when embodied, and I should also much like to have an annual State of the Volunteer Battalions.

Believe me, my dear Colonel,
Yours sincerely,
ARTHUR, General,
Colonel-in-Chief Highland Light Infantry.

In August 1902, the 74th received new colours from H.M. Queen Alexandra on Laffan's Plain, Aldershot. The presentation was somewhat unusual in that it was attended by the whole of the troops in Aldershot, a considerable number, who watched the 74th troop the old colours and receive the new. The new colours were received by Lieutenants Bryant and Pringle who were created members of the Victorian Order in honour of the occasion. The Queen presented each colour with the words, 'In the King's name I confide to you this colour. May God bless it and your gallant regiment.' The Duke and Duchess of Connaught were present at the parade, and afterwards lunched with the officers.

In June 1902, the 71st left the Orange River for Port Elizabeth where, it will be remembered, the 74th had disembarked for the Kaffir War fifty years ago. The 74th, after again going up to London to line the streets, this time for the return of Lord Kitchener from South Africa, moved to

St Helier, Jersey, in October, being ordered immediately on arrival to prepare a strong draft for the 71st, which was due in Egypt early in 1903. The Cardwell System had thus temporarily reasserted itself with the 74th—the 'home' battalion—in the Channel Islands and the 71st—the 'overseas' battalion—in Cairo. It seems a little hard that the 71st, after fighting for three years in a major war should have been sent elsewhere overseas immediately on its termination, instead of coming home to enjoy the fruits of victory but that was, and still is, a soldier's life. The battalion was stationed in the Kasr-el-Nil barracks, not, within living memory, one of the world's most salubrious spots but of which the comment of the 71st in 1903 was 'hard to please must be the man who finds fault with our quarters here.' It was certainly a change, of course, from life in the block-house line.

The 71st was not permitted to enjoy this life of luxury long, and in July 1904 was ordered to Khartoum. The prospect was viewed philosophically—'There is always a fascination about a journey to a new land. Man is always looking for his Eldorado. Who knows? Some of us might find it in the inhospitable Soudan.' This particular journey was indeed fascinating. The battalion chugged away across an antique land in an antique train, 'something like the twopenny tube, with a gangway up the middle and seats for two on each side.' In the seats the soldiers sat and smoked their pipes, looking their last on the Pyramids. They observed with their usual pungent comments the varied spectacle which unfolded itself—the queer shapes of the boats on the Nile, the *fellahin* at work in the date groves, 'working their way up the branchless stems with climbing irons whose extraordinary clumsiness betrayed the fact that that only an Egyptian could have invented them,' the sugar plantations and the clouds of snipe rising from the marshes. The train stopped at various oases for the troops to cook and eat their meals, but they had to sleep in their seats—no particular hardship for a British soldier—for it puffed slowly along all night. Through Luxor and Assouan to Shellal; where the 71st detrained and embarked in 'one of Messrs. Cooke's Nile steamboats.' *The Prince Abbas*, as this vessel was named, could not of course accommodate a whole infantry battalion with its baggage. In fact only a company and a half could squeeze on board. The remainder sat huddled together in a string of barges which she towed behind or had lashed alongside. This slowed her down to walking pace and, as the weather was very hot was an extremely uncomfortable mode of progression, especially as she only stopped at night. At Wady Haifa the battalion again entrained, this time in open cattle-trucks which however, they greatly preferred to the previous carriages; and also to the accommodation arranged by Messrs. Cooke, for in a cattle-truck a man could stretch himself and even, with a little give-and-take on the part of his comrades, lie down occasionally for a brief nap.

Shortly after the arrival of the 71st at Khartoum the King's South African Medals, 1901-02, were presented by the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, Major-General Sir F. R. Wingate. The total number of the 71st entitled to this medal was nineteen officers and nine hundred and seventy-four rank and file. Out of this number only eleven officers and two hundred and fifty-six were still serving and on parade to receive it, although it was only eighteen months since the end of the war. This is an indication of how quickly the personnel of a regiment changes, even in those days of comparatively long service. The change, as has been remarked before, is scarcely perceptible to those serving and it requires an occasion such as this to bring it to their notice. It came as quite a shock to the 71st when it was realised that only a bare third of those who had fought in the Boer War were still left in the ranks.

In 1904 the 71st paraded for the visit to Khartoum of Princess Beatrice, youngest daughter of Queen Victoria, who was now Princess Henry of Battenberg. For these ceremonial parades the battalion wore the same dress that the 74th had done during the Coronation and other parades in London—the scarlet coat and trews, with white helmets. It was an extremely smart turnout, and

there is little doubt that the ceremonial dress of the British Army at this period was more impressive than at any other time in its history up to date. The white helmet, which was an improved pattern of the Wolesley, was ornamented by a gold spike and, as far as the Regiment was concerned, was a great improvement on the shako. The dress of the officers, including as it did, the sash, sword-belt, dirk-belt and full plaid, was however far too complicated and looked at its best when, as on this occasion, the plaid was discarded and the helmet replaced the shako.

In addition to a full parade the battalion furnished a Guard of Honour when Her Royal Highness laid the foundation stone of the English Church at Khartoum. The Guard, as a photograph shows, was composed of men selected from those with Boer War medals, and a finer looking lot of fighting soldiers would be impossible to find the world over.

As an example of what soldiers should look like, one can also turn to a photograph taken at about the same date of 'A' Company of the 74th, winners of the Evelyn Wood Cup for marksmanship in 1900, 1901, 1902 and 1904 out of an average of ninety-five teams competing. In this photograph the men are in the khaki service dress of the period with no tartan or other adornment and wearing Glengarries. Their equipment consists of web belts and leather bandoliers, with haversack and water bottle slung. Instead of puttees they are wearing short leather gaiters. It is quite evident from both these photographs that the men of the Highland Light Infantry were soldiers first and footballers afterwards. ⁽¹⁾

In October 1904 the 71st left the Sudan for Meerut, via Egypt and Bombay, with nothing particularly unusual about the journey which followed the routine pattern of trooping east of Suez which has not varied a great deal since the arrival of the steamship. About the same time the 74th left the Channel Islands for Edinburgh Castle, relieving the Black Watch. Scotland having by this time developed a perfect passion for the kilt—although it was not then generally worn except by soldiers and the landed gentry—the citizens of Edinburgh were disappointed that the Black Watch was not relieved by another 'kilted corps.' However, they concealed this disappointment manfully and flocked in considerable numbers to see the regiment arrive; many people waiting several hours, for the train in which the 74th had travelled all night was very late. On the platform to welcome the regiment to the capital of Scotland were the Lord Provost; a judge representing the Scottish Bench; and several baillies and councillors. On arrival, the regiment detrained and marched off with very little delay, with the Band and Pipes leading it across Waverley Bridge, through Market Street and Ramsay Lane to the Castle. The soldiers' families had meanwhile set off for their new quarters in 'two four-in-hands.'

The battalion, a little over six hundred strong, had spent over fifteen hours in the train, sitting bolt upright, eight men to a compartment with their rifles and equipment. Yet the onlookers were highly impressed by their turn-out and bearing, and the crowds grew so large that the police, under the direction of the Chief Constable himself had great difficulty in keeping the route clear. The battalion was dressed in the buff shell jacket, Glengarries, trows and leggings and was in light marching order—carrying everything except greatcoats. All its horses and waggons were unloaded at the same time as it detrained, and accompanied it up to the Castle. The officers, who were wearing their gold epaulettes, excited particularly favourable comment—and no wonder, for they were a very striking-looking lot at that time. They included such outstanding athletes as Balfour-Bryant, Bramwell Davis and Pringle, while most of the others were fine horsemen, cricketers and golfers—the Colonel, Carteret Carey, Scrase-Dickens, Sandys-Lumsdaine and John Grahame to name only a few.

It will be appreciated, that to take part immediately on arrival after such a journey, in an official reception and a ceremonial march with Band, Pipes, colours and transport, officers mounted and everyone looking clean and smart was

—although no one evidently thought so at the time—a feat somewhat out of the ordinary and accordingly worth noting.

Since the Crimea the outlook of the civilian population towards the Army had gradually changed, and the succession of small wars which followed had further enhanced the regard in which it was held. The British Army in fact, had probably never been more highly regarded in its whole history than it was at this time; in the early years of the twentieth century. Naturally this had its due effect upon the soldier, who became proud of himself and his uniform. He seldom misconducted himself except when he was drunk, and this fact led commanding officers into the belief—erroneous as it turned out—that the burden of command would be greatly eased if only they could stop their men from drinking. It was an old problem. Back in the eighteen-thirties Colonel Mein of the 74th thought that ‘an allowance of watered grog twice a day might help,’ while Colonel Crabbe instituted a ‘supper mess for drunkards which has a good effect; the men expending their surplus pay daily on provisions for this mess.’ By the turn of the century the temperance societies were hard at work and received every encouragement from the Army. The *H.L.I. Chronicle* of the period is full of moral tales in the Victorian tradition, in which the good soldier tries to persuade his weak and loose-living chum to ‘sign.’ Drunkenness however, has now gone out of fashion without any noticeable improvement of discipline—human nature being what it is. In 1905 the controversy over the Regiment, the kilt and the Highland Brigade again came to the boil. Correspondence in the newspapers; petitions, debates and resolutions by Highland societies, and questions in the House all went on for months, although as far as can be discovered the Regiment itself took no part in any of it, apart from the Colonel-in-Chief, who was evidently doing his best—as he always did—behind the scenes. It is quite extraordinary that all these efforts should have failed, with so strong a force of public opinion behind them. The Regiment was very highly esteemed at that time; more so than at any time in its history before or since, for it had gained an outstanding reputation both on recent battlefields and in contemporary sport; its traditions none could surpass and its colours were even then encrusted with battle honours. Furthermore it had very powerful friends and connections, for a number of the officers were wealthy men and lavish in their hospitality. On 16 February 1906, for example, the officers gave a Ball in the Assembly Rooms for no fewer than twelve hundred guests ‘representative of the nobility and county families and nearly every branch of the services.’ The Assembly Rooms had been specially decorated at what must have been vast expense, so that the guests appeared to be dancing on the esplanade of Edinburgh Castle, complete with sentry-boxes and sentries; had supper with Arthur’s Seat looming over them on one side and ‘an old Edinburgh House’ on the other, and sat out ‘in the withdrawing room of an old mansion house with beautiful tapestry picture panels.’ Other effects were a tented field; displaying the colours, pipe-banners and other trophies of the Regiment; and gardens with deck-chairs and wicker seats. Mrs. Scrase-Dickens ‘received,’ in a gown which required fourteen lines of print to describe, and there were thirty-seven items on the supper menu.

In the same month Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Balfour, afterwards Colonel of the Regiment, left it after twenty-seven years service and presented it with the Assaye Colour which now hangs in the War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle. It had been worked entirely by his wife, taking her many years. ‘I have taken particular care,’ wrote Colonel Balfour, ‘that the colour should be an exact copy in material, work and mounting of the original, and the silk and bullion fringe, etc., have been specially made.’

The 3rd and 4th Militia Battalions of the Highland Light Infantry, which had been an integral part of the Regiment since 1881, had a history going back to the days of King Charles I, although the early records are too scanty to be relied on. Since 1796 the Militia had been embodied for

home service on five occasions, the last of which was the Boer War. Originally the Royal Lanark Militia, wearing the Highland Dress with the Royal Stuart tartan (by permission of Queen Victoria) they were constantly merging with one another, sometimes forming only one battalion and at others two. As already related, they became the 3rd—and later the 3rd and 4th—battalions of the Highland Light Infantry in 1881, and thereafter wore the same uniform and tartan as the Regiment. When the Militia was embodied on the outbreak of war in 1899, the 3rd and 4th H.L.I. took over from the 71st at Devonport as one battalion, which was afterwards moved to Athlone, arriving there ‘without a single man the worse for liquor,’ as the records proudly state. In 1902, towards the end of the war, volunteers were called for to go to South Africa. Practically all volunteered and the battalion, thirty-one officers and nine hundred and eighty-seven rank and file, disembarked at Cape Town in January and took over thirty miles of the block-house line, on the Vaal River. There was little in the way of fighting to do at that stage of the war, and the Only battle-casualties suffered were an officer and five men wounded. Fourteen others however, died of disease in South Africa. The Militia did not in fact see as much of the war as some of the Volunteers who, it will be remembered, provided companies which fought in the ranks of the regular battalion and shared the hardships and danger of some of the worst periods.

Even before the Boer War ended, the might and hostility of the German Empire made it quite clear that the British Empire would have another war on its hands before long, and so would have to look to its defences. The idea that in such an event France and Russia could face Germany on land while Great Britain kept the seas just would not do, though there were many in this country who could see no fault in this arrangement. The small expeditionary force which Great Britain could find from the Regular Army for a continental war would require reinforcements before long, and these would necessarily have to be found from the reserves. The experiences of the Boer War having demonstrated the weakness of the Militia and Volunteer systems, these were subjected to a major overhaul in 1906. By 1908 a ‘second line’ had been formed and the Territorial Army had arrived. The Militia battalions were re-designated ‘Special Reserve’ battalions, (extra-special; the 4th H.L.I. called themselves) while the old Volunteer battalions became the Territorial battalions of the Regiment. Although the system was now reasonably efficient (it did not stand up to the demands of 1914) it was a pity to abolish the old and honoured name of Volunteer. The description ‘Territorial’ was presumably derived from the ‘Territorial System’ of associating regular regiments with particular districts and localities. Applied to the volunteer second line, it does not really mean anything.

After leaving the Sudan the 71st had started its Indian tour at Meerut, changing station during the following years to Dinapore and Calcutta. They were quiet years, for India was at peace under the British *Raj*, with no nationalistic aspirations, and the Pathans caused no trouble which could not be adequately dealt with by their old friends, the Punjab Frontier Force. In India as at home, life was never so good as during that calm before the storm which ended in 1914. In those days there was no country in the world to equal India for sport, a fact of which the 71st, like all other British regiments, took full advantage and continued to excel in all fields. Meerut of course, was the great pigsticking centre in India, and the officers became very addicted to this extraordinary pastime. Since the days of the Mahratta Wars it had greatly changed. Some busybody during the ‘sixties had organised’ it, and as a result it had become a very serious affair. Each ‘Tent Club’ arranged regular meets lasting ten days or so, usually during Christmas, Easter and the Mahommedan festival of the Mohurrum. The members rode in heats of three or four, and an army of beaters was employed to drive the boar out of cover. To catch up with a running boar, it was necessary to ride at full gallop across country in which various hazards, such as wells, ditches and ravines were hidden in the long Kadir grass. The peculiar build of the boar made it

difficult to kill him with one thrust of the spear—the throwing spear went out of fashion in the ‘fifties—and several would as a rule be necessary. The knowledge that he was about to die would drive the boar frantic with a desire to take someone with him, and as he is a very formidable animal indeed, the end of a hunt was seldom without its excitement. Pigstickers were for some reason inclined to boast of the dangers of their sport in terrible verse, which they would sing to the tune of some old melody while in their cups. The *H.L.I. Chronicle* of the period is full of it

THE BOAR

Tune: ‘ M’y love is like the red, red rose.’

Youth’s daring spirit, manhood’s fire,
Firm hand and eagle eye,
Must they acquire who do aspire,
To see the grey boar die.

Painful as the above extract may be to read it is not, as it happens, greatly exaggerated. The horsemanship, strength, courage and determination required to ride down and kill a wild boar were above the ordinary and a man who could do so was unlikely to prove an indifferent leader in war.

In January 1905 His Royal Highness the Colonel-in-Chief presented his Pipe Banner to the Regiment with instructions that it was to be held by the ‘home’ battalion and carried by the Pipe-Corporal, (the Pipe-Major carried the regimental banner). The other Pipe Banners in the Regiment belonged to the Field Officers and Captains of companies. All banners except the regimental banner carried the coat armour of the owner on one side, and the regimental monogram and battle honours on the other. They were elaborate and beautiful examples of needlework, especially that of His Royal Highness whose arms were of course, those of the Royal House with appropriate difference.

⁽¹⁾ The conditions for the Evelyn Wood Cup were designed to afford a test of military efficiency, as well as of marksmanship. They were very severe, and the teams had to carry out a forced march before shooting. The consistent high standard maintained by ‘A’ Company was most remarkable, but the other companies were not far behind. In 1901, for instance, seven companies of the 74th finished in the first eight.

Chapter IX

PRELUDE TO WAR

Athletics—the Transvaal Flag—Light Infantry Drill—the Castle and Key—the Delhi Durbar and presentation of new colours to the 71st—the 74th back in Aldershot—events leading to war—the King’s Birthday Parade of 1914.

AFTER providing the King’s Guard at Balmoral in 1905, the 74th laid up its old Assaye Colour in St Giles and departed to Fort George in 1907, leaving many friends behind in Edinburgh. The officers’ prowess at sport has already been referred to, and one could wish that there was space to record their successes in detail, but a whole chapter would be required. Mention must however be made of the great athlete, Lieutenant W. Halswell, champion both of Scotland and England in the quarter-mile. Running at Powderhall in the Scottish Championship Meeting in June, 1906, he accomplished the astonishing feat of winning the 100 yards, 220 yards, quarter-mile and half-mile in one afternoon; a thing that has never been done before or since. Chosen to represent Great Britain in the Olympic Games of that year he reached the finals of the 400 and 800 metres. It appears to have been the general opinion that he should have won both these events and probably set up world records, but he was too great a sportsman to be able to compete with the new technique of the Americans who beat him off the mark and thereafter crowded him out.

As may be imagined, with such officers the sporting record of both 71st and 74th continued impressive, and it is doubtful indeed whether any other regiment could show so consistently high a standard over so many years. There were a surprising number of excellent cricketers among the private soldiers in those days, and as one looks through the old photographs and sees them standing or sitting with their officers ; in cricket cap and flannels and holding bat or ball, one wonders what became of them, and why they never seem to have been promoted—for they look of the type that an officer in action would be glad to have at his back and a soldier to have in front of him. A surprising feature of regimental sport during those years was that in the officers

versus sergeants football matches, which were held far more frequently than now-a-days, the officers usually won.

In 1906, while at Dinapore, the 71st was inspected by Lord Kitchener, then Commander-in-Chief in India. Although he was not the stern martinet of popular belief; neither was he the sort of man who is easily pleased, and it is therefore a sufficient indication of the efficiency of the battalion at that time, that he promised to send it one of his trophies of the Boer War—a Transvaal Flag—which duly arrived accompanied by the following letter:

Fort William,
Calcutta, 22nd Dec. 1906.

My Dear Stockwell—Lord Kitchener has asked me to send you the Transvaal Flag, which goes to you by parcel post, and which he promised you when he lately saw the Regiment at Dinapore. He asks me to say that it gives him the greatest pleasure to be able to give this present to the Mess of your Regiment, which did such excellent work throughout the whole war in South Africa.

Yours sincerely,
L. R. BIRDWOOD.

In 1907 the 71st won the Indian Football Association's Shield, while the 74th cricket team were winners of the Northern League. Both battalions were still among the top flight on the rifle range. Although the standard of rifle shooting in the British Army was at its height at that time, the successes of the Highland Light Infantry were too numerous to mention. The 74th was about five hundred strong; showing a steady decline from year to year, as drafts went out to the 71st while insufficient recruits came in to replace them. The period being one of peace and prosperity was a bad one for recruiting, but although the menace of war loomed ever nearer, the authorities did nothing about it and a regiment still had to send out its own recruiting sergeants and beat up as best it could.

The 71st and 74th had been linked together now for nearly thirty years, but still retained their individual identities, calling themselves 'The 71st H.L.I.' and 'The 74th H.L.I.' In 1908 the Adjutant of the 71st wrote to his colleague of the 74th complaining—after all these years—that the drafts sent out were trained in a drill different to that used in the 71st. It was far harder, he said, to teach these men a new drill than it was to train a recruit. Although the 71st, during the old, Light Infantry days, had been accustomed to double-past on ceremonial occasions—to the tune of *Monymusk*—it had never used the Light Infantry drill in its entirety, presumably because it was inappropriate to a Highland Regiment. A modified form was used, which was further modified in deference to the 74th. The final word in this matter was not said until another twenty years had passed, as will be related in the last volume of this history.

In 1908 Lieutenant H. Balfour-Bryant, M.V.O. died of typhoid shortly after taking up the appointment of A.D.C. to the Governor of Bombay. While serving with the 74th he had established a record which is never likely to be equalled, of winning the Army Racquets Championship seven years in succession, being partnered on each of the last six occasions by Lieutenant P. Bramwell Davis.

A War Office letter, dated 2 March 1908, contained the following authority:

His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the H.L.I. being permitted to bear the distinction

The Castle and Key, superscribed 'Gibraltar', and with the motto 'Montis Insignia Calpe,' underneath, upon the Regimental colours, in recognition of services rendered during the

Siege of Gibraltar, 1780—83.

The Siege of Gibraltar, which was the first service upon which the Regiment was engaged, has been described in the first volume of this history. Thus, although not granted until a hundred and twenty-five years after the ending of the siege, *Gibraltar* is in fact the senior of the fifty-three Battle Honours inscribed upon the colours of the Highland Light Infantry.

While at Dinapore the 71st had to provide several detachments—at Dum Dum, Barrackpore and Jalaphar. None of these Indian stations was popular, being exceedingly hot and lacking in any form of amenity. Since the Mutiny the small British army in India had been scattered all over the country with a view to internal security, although there was little need for it in those days. A British Regiment however, directly and indirectly gave employment to a vast number of Indians and was liked and respected by the inhabitants; so keeping the peace without much in the way of exertion. The battalion moved thankfully to Lucknow early in 1909, having to march out on a Divisional exercise almost as soon as it had got out of the train. Not having done much in the soldiering line while at Dinapore, it appears to have been rather at a loss on these manoeuvres; having forgotten how to bivouac and marching for sixteen hours on end with nothing to eat or drink because ‘no one had told us to bring anything.’ These faults in administration were kept strictly under the regimental hat, and if the General had remarked upon the fact that the battalion was without its haversacks, water bottles and first-line transport, it would certainly have been pointed out to him that the 71st were at the right place at the right time, and how they had got there was no one’s business but their own—tactfully of course.

The Bugle-Major of the 71st was Shaul, who left at the end of 1909 on appointment to the Yeomen of the Guard. He had served twenty-five years in the 71st with an unblemished record, never having had a single entry in his conduct sheets and winning the Victoria Cross on the sombre field of Magersfontein. Above the average as a cricketer he had captained a team of rank and file which had beaten both the officers of the Regiment and the officers and civilians at Dinapore. As may be imagined he was highly respected in the regiment which must have been proud indeed, to have such a man marching at its head. ‘No soldier of the King could wish for a better record, and his example will not be forgotten by the Regiment he served so long and so well.’

For several years both battalions had been training by companies in Mounted Infantry work, a fact which seems to lend some colour to the often-expressed criticism that the Army always trains for the last war and not for the next. The Army however, like the civilian population, was still dependent on the railway and the horse, for the motor-car could not yet be relied on. A photograph of 1909, when the 74th again furnished the Guard at Balmoral shows King Edward VII doffing his homburg to the colours as he steps into a car of such primitive construction that it is wonderful how it got him as far as Balmoral station. Although Mounted Infantry was not used in the Great War—it might have been of great value in Palestine and Mesopotamia—the training was hardly wasted, for there could be none better for an infantryman. Both 71st and 74th were also training cyclists, with an emphasis on scouting, and this was certainly to prove its value in the war fast approaching.

Two unusual features of dress at this time were the tartan shorts invented by the 71st, which were eventually worn by both battalions when in the East, and the wide-awake hat worn by the 71st in South Africa and which the 74th now wore on manoeuvres at home. This was presumably because the Scottish regiments had no khaki headdress to wear with service dress, and was no doubt an experiment. It did not last long, and the battalion soon returned to the Glengarry.

At the same time that the 71st moved to Lucknow the 74th moved to Ireland, being stationed first at Cork and later at Mullingar. Life in Ireland being for once in a way almost as peaceful as

that in India, the 74th passed the next few years very pleasantly, being troubled by nothing more than a few strikes—a strike in Ireland is, or was, a militant affair necessitating the presence of troops. Detachments attended the funeral of King Edward VII and the Coronation of King George V, while in India the 71st attended the Coronation Durbar of 1911, receiving new colours at the hands of the King Emperor in person, whose address to the battalion was as follows

Lieutenant-Colonel Ronaldson, Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and men of the 1st Battalion the Highland Light Infantry.

I am very glad to have this opportunity of giving new Colours to your Battalion.

The presentation of Colours is a solemn occasion in the history of a Regiment. For you then bid farewell to the old Flag, which bears upon it the records of past achievements, receiving in turn a new Flag, upon which it lies with you to inscribe the names of future victories.

Recalling with pride the deeds of those who have gone before, you look forward with hope into the coming days.

Remember that this is no common Flag which I am committing to your keeping. A Colour is a sacred Ensign—ever, by its inspiration, though no Longer by its presence, a rallying point in battle. It is the emblem of duty; the outward sign of your allegiance to God, your Sovereign, and country to be Looked up to, to be venerated, and to be passed down untarnished by succeeding generations.

Gibraltar recalled you to my memory when I passed it a few weeks ago ; and today I cannot but remember that if you had not been with Sir Eyre Coote at Porto Novo one hundred and thirty years ago I might not now be addressing you as Emperor of India. Since then you have distinguished yourselves upon many fields. Show that you can still be counted upon as Coote and Wellington counted on you long ago.

In February 1911, Mr Winston Churchill, after persistent clamours for the right of free speech, visited Belfast in order to address a meeting on the subject of Home Rule. Thoroughly alarmed, the authorities strengthened the garrison of the city by a cavalry regiment and four battalions of infantry. The 74th actually had to call all men back from leave for the occasion, but a shipping strike on the Clyde prevented most of them from answering the summons, and the battalion could only parade four hundred strong, which was not bad, however, for a battalion on home service. Belfast was covered in posters announcing that WE WILL NOT HAVE HOME RULE and, a riot by the Orangemen being hourly expected, the battalion spent an uncomfortable day hidden away out of sight like the rest of the reinforcements, but ready to spring out to the assistance of the authorities when required. Presumably finding however, that the fact of Mr Churchill addressing a meeting on Home Rule did not actually mean that he intended them to have it, the Orangemen remained quiet, and the battalion returned to Mullingar not at all put out, for there is nothing the soldier likes better than a little excitement.

It is interesting to note that Captain Robin Alston of the 71st, who was a fine horseman and whose name frequently occurs in connection with the Mounted Infantry, was also one of the pioneer aviators, and in 1912 left the Regiment on attachment to the newly-formed Flying Corps. The potentialities of aircraft as a means of finding out what went on' on the other side of the hill had not, of course, escaped the High Command. Encouragement was given to officers to learn flying under military instructors, and one or two other officers of the Regiment, such as Fairie of the 74th, also took up this highly dangerous calling.

In September, 1913, the 74th left Ireland for Aldershot, receiving the following farewell address from Brigadier-General the Count Gleichen, commanding the 15th Infantry Brigade:

I cannot tell you how sorry I am that you are leaving the Brigade. Your discipline and

handling of arms have been excellent, while your marching powers, spirit and dash in the field, and your general smartness have been universally commented on. I congratulate you, Colonel Wolfe-Murray, on having such a well-trained and smart battalion. I am sorry you are taking the Brigade Football Cup away from Ireland, but I congratulate you heartily on winning it yesterday ; it was a very good performance.

The Commander of the 5th Division, Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, wrote

There is no Battalion with which I would sooner be associated with on service, and no Battalion which I would more confidently put in front if I wanted a particular job carried out. I can't say more. Their spirit has been excellent, their discipline all that could be wanted, and their handling by the officers a pleasure to see.

On arrival at Aldershot the 74th was put into Maida Barracks, and all ranks were astounded by what appeared to them the luxurious comfort of their new surroundings. Aldershot had indeed come a long way in recent years and offered the soldier, for the first time in the history of the British Army, what might be described as civilised accommodation—judged by the standards of the time.

A month or two later the 71st left Lucknow and changed station to Ambala by march-route, up the Grand Trunk Road in the time-honoured manner, followed by bullock-waggons, elephants and camels, and with four and twenty pipers playing at its head.

All this time, from the date at which the first chapter of this volume of the Regimental History opens—and indeed before that—events were taking place whose cumulative effect inevitably caused the fearful tragedy of the Great War. Ever since Waterloo, Great Britain had stood somewhat aloof from Continental affairs, being prepared to intervene only when her own vital interests were threatened. It has been shown, that during the hundred years following the defeat of Napoleon the British Army had seen plenty of active service, but except for the strange affair of the Crimea it had been in wars of consolidation, undertaken with a view to the establishment of law and order in the various territories for which Great Britain had responsibility. No really national war, in which the whole resources of the country were involved had either been undertaken or even contemplated, and, as far as the average citizen was concerned, real war had ended for ever at Waterloo.

In Europe Great Britain had no natural ally, except it may be Germany, whose soldiers had fought in the ranks of the British Army in many wars. France was the ancient enemy, met upon countless battlefields, and whose interests and ambitions were still directly opposed to those of this country. That times were changing was only slowly and reluctantly appreciated by British statesmen. The indiscretions of the German Emperor, starting at the time of the Jameson Raid, appear to have been regarded as due to his personal stupidity and desire for self-aggrandisement. In fact, as a constitutional monarch he had to do as his advisers told him, and was not at all a bad fellow personally.

The century had turned, before the event occurred which forced Great Britain into alliance with France and made war with Germany inevitable. This event was the announced policy of Germany to increase her fleet to parity with Great Britain. While this country, having no intention of fighting in Europe, was indifferent regarding the size of the armies of the Continental Powers, it could not be indifferent to the size of their fleets. If Germany, the greatest military Power in the world, built a fleet to match, then it was obviously time for Great Britain to look to her defences. Rather than materially increase her own armaments however, she preferred to arrange treaties of alliance with countries having similar interests in order to secure a balance of power.

The first treaty of alliance was made with Japan, a naval power, which soon proved her value as an ally by her spectacular victory over Russia. French activities in Morocco then led to a

public threat of war by the German Emperor, and placed France in a highly embarrassing and dangerous position, from which she was rescued only by the firm though tactful intervention of Great Britain. Realising the peril in which she stood, England's old enemy turned at long last to seek aid across the Channel. An enmity dating back to the Crusades could not of course, be patched up in a hurry—indeed, it has not altogether been patched up yet—but the two countries came together in the shadow of the menace from the north, in which they found common ground. Staff talks began and a friendly atmosphere was created which was fostered by King Edward VII who, having greatly endeared himself to his own subjects soon became almost equally popular with the French; who are traditionally susceptible to advances from any monarch other than their own.

Great Britain had thus allied herself to the strongest military power next to Germany and to a naval power whose fleet, combined with her own, could never be equalled by the Germans. The French Army however, came a very poor second to the German Army; while France herself had never really recovered from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Nor was her ally, Russia, likely to prove to be of much assistance on the battlefield. These facts were not fully appreciated by British statesmen who persisted in thinking of war as an affair which could be conducted entirely on defensive lines. Should it come, France was to defend herself with her army and Great Britain with her navy. The necessity to land troops on the Continent was accepted only with the greatest reluctance as a result of the talks between the British and French General Staffs.

The birth of the Territorial Army in 1909 has already been mentioned. It was envisaged as a 'Second Line of Defence' (always defence). It was planned on mobilisation to provide fourteen Infantry Divisions and thirteen cavalry Brigades for Home Defence. It was expected to be able to take the field six months after the declaration of war. While it was training in order to do so, responsibility for the defence of the country in the event of invasion would rest on the troops of the Regular Army on home service; which would provide, when mobilized, one Cavalry Division and six Infantry Divisions. When it became clear that troops would have to be sent to the continent immediately on the outbreak of war, this force was organised into an Expeditionary Force, of which the Cavalry and four Infantry Divisions would march at once, followed by the remaining two Divisions, and later by four other Infantry Divisions scraped together from the overseas garrisons and Indian Army. This was the force which the German Emperor described as 'a contemptible little army.' Arguments have been going on ever since, as to whether he was referring to its size or its prowess, or if he ever in fact made the remark at all. Commonsense would seem to indicate that he was referring to its size, and by that standard the remark was by no means unjustified. That the mighty and vast British Empire was only able to put four Divisions into the field at the outbreak of a major war; whereas the under populated France—defeated in 1870—was able to muster eighty-six, is not exactly a thing to be proud of. As to whether he said it or not, the B.E.F. Routine Orders of 24 September, 1914 reproduced a translation of a German Order of the Day captured by the French which was published in *The Times* in October:

It is my Royal and Imperial command that you concentrate your energies for the immediate present upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate, first, the treacherous English, walk over General French's contemptible little army....

The Kaiser's Order, which of course was not meant to be seen by the British, was nothing out of the way in battlefield rhetoric, but it made excellent propaganda. Whatever effect it may have had on the morale of the German soldiers, it certainly greatly encouraged the British soldiers, while the British people—in those days mightily proud of their country and its achievements—

were extremely annoyed, and never forgot the insult.

Germany's natural ally was the Dual-Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and the two together became known as the 'Central Powers.' As the weaker member of this alliance the Dual-Monarchy was subject to considerable pressure, and pushed along the path of folly. In the Balkans she had a common sphere of interest with Russia and Turkey, but annexed the States of Bosnia and Herzegovina after having agreed to preserve the *status quo*. Crises such as this, any one of which could have touched off a major war, were provoked every two years or so, either by Germany or Austria-Hungary. It being obvious that such a state of affairs could not go on indefinitely, war between the Central Powers and the British, French and Russian Allies gradually became a certainty. Although it was logically a certainty, no one, unfortunately, could actually believe it. There was some excuse for this, for there was no real precedent for a war starting between two such mighty confederations. Wars up till then had been local affairs between two States or, when they developed into something bigger, such as the Napoleonic Wars, had done so gradually, with the protagonists taking their time. It is still difficult to believe that a civilised nation such as Germany should actually have worked to bring such a contest about—and with no better excuse than that she had the feeling of being 'encircled.' Still, there it was, bringing home the lessons that human nature is such as to be unpredictable, and that it is no use expecting everyone to think alike, even people of the same nationality, let alone those of different races.

Meanwhile, outside the Cabinet, Admiralty and War Office, the approaching catastrophe was causing no concern and life and business went on as usual. Public feeling however had become more and more inflamed against Germany, being channelled into a popular dislike of the Kaiser as the mouthpiece of his country. His personal habits of turning up his moustaches and wearing a warrior's helmet with the figure of an aggressive-looking eagle as a crest, were fastened upon as indicative of a primitive outlook, and desire for military aggrandisement. There was a certain amount of truth in this, for although our own Monarch could look equally impressive when dressed as a Field-Marshal or Admiral of the Fleet on a ceremonial occasion, no one could suspect him of any sinister ambitions. The Hohenzollern was a weak man who had to appear strong—partly in order to bolster himself up, and partly in order to keep some sort of control—whereas his cousin King George was a strong man who was not faced with either necessity.

During the long hot summer of '94 the 74th played cricket and practised for the annual regimental games. The officers congratulated those in authority for having arranged that the manoeuvres should terminate in time to enable them to attend Ascot. Those officers who had not yet been able to exercise their privilege of presentation to the Sovereign on first appointment, attended a Levee—a brilliant, exclusively male function at St James's Palace, now discontinued. Far away in India the 71st was still at Ambala, but half the battalion marched up to Solon in the Simla Hills at the beginning of the hot weather in April, being soaked in the process by a torrential rain which continued for several days, 'most extraordinary weather for the time of the year.' Both battalions were now organised into four companies instead of the former eight.

On the King's Birthday the 74th marched out from Maida Barracks for Laffan's Plain for the annual ceremonial parade. It was the last affair of its kind, and the like of it will never be seen again. The 74th marched in column of fours, dressed in scarlet doublets, trows and shakos, while their officers wore their full plaids and the Band their feather bonnets. To turn out like this required a good deal of polish, pipe clay and hard work but no one minded; for he would be a poor soldier indeed, who failed to feel uplifted by taking part in a ceremonial parade. There were very many thousands of scarlet coats on this parade, and the standards, guidons and colours of regiments which had fought under Marlborough, Cumberland, George II, Wolfe, Clive,

Wellington, Wolesley and Roberts, to name but a few of those Captains whose names are enshrined in the history of the British Army. The regiments themselves had marched all over Europe and Africa, through Egypt, Persia and India to the gates of Peking itself. They had secured Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and sailed up the Irrawaddy to Mandalay. They had fought against black, white, yellow, red and coffee-coloured races under every conceivable condition; in Europe, in the vast open spaces of America, in the deserts, mountains and forests, and even on the high seas.

The regiments drew up in line in order of seniority, cavalry, artillery and infantry, with the guns of the Royal Horse Artillery on the right of the line. They presented an astonishing kaleidoscope of red, blue, green and gold; their magnificent horses in matched regiments and squadrons of greys, bays, browns and blacks; and with their swords, lances and bayonets twinkling in the sun. When all was ready the General galloped on to parade, as was his privilege. Preceded by two mounted orderlies, followed by his standard-bearer and trumpeter, and with his Staff behind and on either flank, he wheeled round in front of the flagstaff and pulled up facing the troops—Sir Douglas Haig.

It has become customary to refer to this parade in a spirit of sour disapproval, in which the magnificent uniforms and glittering pageantry are held to be evidence that the British Army was quite out of touch with reality, fit only for this toy-soldier business and thinking of war in terms of sentimental and spurious glamour. The British Army however was not belied by its splendid appearance. It was indeed splendid—the best-trained, best equipped and best-led army in the world, with a spirit to match. It had only two drawbacks. The first was that it was too small—not so small as to be insignificant, for that it could never be, but too small to take on half the German Army—the second was that it was an army of sportsmen and as such, apt to be disconcerted by an opponent who did not stick to the rules.

A few short weeks after the parade on Laffan's Plain the scarlet coats were packed away, and before the close of the year half their wearers were dead; but they took many with them, of the enemies of their country.

Chapter X

THE RETREAT FROM MONS

The outbreak of the Great War—the 74th mobilise and leave Aldershot for France—Recruits and Reservists—in action at Paturages—the Retreat from Mons—the commencement of the advance.

1914!—it has as grim a sound as that of Badajoz. Yet up to July life was very pleasant in this country and there was nothing to indicate, even to the government, that the eve of war had arrived. The Balkans were in a state of chaos—but they had been so for many years. There was grave trouble in Ireland over the Home Rule Bill, and every likelihood of civil war—but trouble in Ireland was certainly nothing new. Germany however, happened to have reached the stage, which she knew could not last for ever, of being far better prepared for war than any of her rivals.

While on a visit to Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia, in June, the Austrian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, and his wife were assassinated in circumstances which seemed to show that the Government of Serbia was involved. Although the murder appears to have been arranged by a secret society, the fact that its members included Serbian officers, and that an unexploded bomb was found which had been made in the Serbian arsenals, made it difficult for the Government to prove that it had nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, this scarcely justified the dispatch of an ultimatum by Austria containing terms which it was obvious Serbia could not possibly accept.

The murder of the Archduke did not cause any particular perturbation in this country, but the Austrian ultimatum was another matter. It instantly produced a situation which the British Government recognised as being so serious, that on 27 July it countermanded the orders for the dispersal of the Home Fleets, which had just returned to port after a test mobilisation. This of course warned the country that war was imminent, and so it proved. On 28 July Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and on the 29th the British First Fleet—which when at sea stretched for eighteen miles—moved secretly up the Channel to the north. On the same day all officers and men of the Regular Army were recalled from leave. On 30 July Russia ordered the mobilisation of her Southern Armies in support of Serbia, and in consequence received an ultimatum from Germany. Russia and Austria then ordered general mobilisation, and on the x August, France and Germany followed suit. Thus in the space of a few days the situation got completely beyond control, in spite of the most desperate efforts made by the British Government.

Although France was bound by Treaty to stand by Russia, Great Britain was in no way bound to either. She was however, one of the guarantor Powers (which included France and Germany) of the neutrality of Belgium. In accordance with its obligations, the Government therefore presented notes to both France and Germany requesting their assurance that the integrity of Belgium would be respected. The reply from Germany was evasive; on 3 August she declared war on France and on the following day on Belgium, whose frontier was crossed by the German cavalry immediately, followed by the infantry that afternoon.

The Bank Holiday in England on 4 August, which in its own way was just as much a period piece as the parade on Laffan's Plain, accordingly passed in an atmosphere of tension. As far as the Army was concerned, although the troops were not confined to barracks they were all back from leave, and all ranks were awaiting events in some excitement. In Stanhope Lines—now the quarters of the 74th, the sentries paced up and down in their scarlet doublets and shakos, while their comrades in buff shell jackets, trews and Glengarries and carrying 'swagger canes,' presented their passes at the Guard Room and headed out for the pubs in Aldershot. Most of the

officers were in the Mess, thinking of getting changed for dinner, when the Adjutant was handed a signal from the Headquarters of the 5th Infantry Brigade

MOBILIZE

Please acknowledge.

It was not of course, unexpected, and flag signals had been arranged to notify troops on pass to return to barracks. The troops were eagerly on the look-out, and the signals of recall were greeted with loud cheers and the waving of pint pots.

On the morning of the 5 August the following statement was issued by the Foreign Office:

Owing to the summary rejection by the German Government of the request made by His Majesty's Government that the neutrality of Belgium will be respected, His Majesty's Ambassador at Berlin has received his passports and His Majesty's Government have declared to the German Government that a state of war exists between Great Britain and Germany as from 11 a.m. on the 4th August.

The British Expeditionary Force was to be commanded by Field-Marshal Sir John French—the cavalry leader in the Boer War. Its six infantry divisions were divided into three army corps, of which two only, with the cavalry division, were to be sent immediately to France. The 74th was in the 5th Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General R. C. B. Haking, C.B., which was composed as follows:

- 2nd Bn. The Worcestershire Regt.
- 2nd Bn. The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire L.I.
- 2nd Bn. The Highland L.I.
- 2nd Bn. The Connaught Rangers.

The last-named Regiment though now of course, exclusively Irish, was originally the Scotch Brigade and as such, it will be remembered, fought alongside the 74th at Malavelly, Seringapatam and Argaum. The Irish claim to have given so many things to Scotland—the *clarsach*, the bagpipe, the Stone of Scone, the ancestors of many of the population—that it is satisfactory to find, in the Scotch Brigade, something that Scotland has given to Ireland.

The 5th Infantry Brigade was in the 2nd Division, commanded by Major-General C. C. Monro, C.B., which was composed of the 4th (Guards) Brigade and the 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades.

The 2nd Division was in the 1st Corps, consisting of the 1st and 2nd Divisions, which was commanded by Lieut General Sir Douglas Haig, K.C.B.

There was no attempt, in the British Expeditionary Force, to brigade regiments in accordance with any traditional association, forming Highland, Fusilier, Light Infantry etc., Brigades as had been customary whenever possible up to and including the Boer War. Any such concession to tradition and sentiment would have been out of the question in 1914, for the Divisions and Brigades had trained as such, under their wartime commanders. It was this fact indeed, which enabled the mobilisation to be carried out with such smooth efficiency, and which contributed much to the tremendous influence which, in spite of its paucity in numbers, the British Expeditionary Force exerted in the field. The Guards of course were an exception, being brigaded together as usual.

Since the Boer War a good deal of thought had been given to the question of making the British Army as invisible as possible in the field. The 'Service Dress' of khaki serge had been introduced, kilt aprons now went all the way round, and the only colour displayed in the Expeditionary Force was the Glengarries of the Scottish regiments which were soon replaced by the khaki Tam-o-Shanter. Even the horses of the Greys were dyed khaki—an indignity which

they strongly resented. Unlike the Boer War however, in 1914 the officers made no attempt to pass themselves off as rank and file. Their service dress was both smart and practicable, being made of whipcord or barathea and consisting of 'marching breeches' and puttees, tunic with collar and tie, and Sam Browne belt. They were armed with swords and Webley .45 revolvers. Neither of these weapons was of sound practical value. The swords were of the ceremonial type, clumsy to carry and handle and impossible to sharpen. The revolvers had tremendous stopping-power at close quarters but were also very clumsy. On the other hand the short Lee-Enfield with its long sword bayonet carried by the rank and file was a very excellent weapon indeed. The machine-guns, of which each battalion had four, were still the Maxims of the Boer War, but they were soon replaced by the Vickers, which like the Lee Enfield rifle was an excellent weapon and the best of its kind in the field.

Mobilisation having been ordered on 4 August it is remarkable to note that the majority of reservists reported to the Depot on the 5 August and that three hundred were clothed and equipped and on their way to Aldershot the same day. Four hundred more were sent down on 6 August bringing the 74th up to war establishment. Many of these reservists wore the ribbons of the South African War and had been out of the Army for many years. Yet it was noted that they took their place in the ranks with as much assurance as if they had never been away. Apart from a tendency to look sideways at the junior N.C.O.s, thereby making them feel slightly uncomfortable, they obeyed orders automatically and presented no disciplinary problem.

The business of mobilising was carried out with the efficiency to be expected of an operation planned to the last detail, and in the 74th there was even time to send off the colours with appropriate ceremony. The colour-party paraded in full-dress—for the last time in the history of the Regiment. The King's Colour was carried by Second Lieut. James Fergusson, younger, of Spitalhaugh, the Regimental Colour by Second Lieut. Campbell Ffolliot Powell, and the Assaye Colour by Second Lieut. Cohn Landseer Mackenzie. All three were young men of great promise, and all were killed in action within a few weeks. By 9 August the battalion was completely mobilised and ready for the field, and on that day was inspected by the King and Queen.

The 74th left for the front at 3.30 a.m. on the morning of 13 August. The battalion had marched through the silent streets of Aldershot with the pipers playing at its head, but otherwise there was no music or crowds to see it off, as it entrained at this grisly hour. It landed at Boulogne on the following day and gradually approached the German Frontier by train and march-route. On 23 August after a long night march it arrived on the historic field of Malplaquet, and on the 24 August, with the cool deliberation born of long training and experience, fired its first shots in anger near Paturages.

'The Cabinet,' wrote Sir Winston Churchill, 'was overwhelmingly pacific.' It was so pacific in fact, that on 4 August 1914, it had not even bothered to appoint a Secretary of State for War—the Prime Minister included the War Office among his ordinary duties—and at least three quarters of its members considered that Great Britain's only justification for going to war would be if she herself were attacked. This of course is nothing out of the way. It would be difficult to accuse any British Cabinet in peacetime of having been other than pacific. Cabinet pacificism however, though undoubtedly sincere, has not unfortunately hitherto prevented war, but has merely ensured that this country should invariably enter upon it indifferently prepared. It has also had the grave disadvantage of misleading other Powers, thereby becoming one of the actual causes of war. As an ingrained British characteristic it seems there is nothing that can be done about it.

The factor which turned the Cabinet from its endless struggles to find a peaceful solution to the Irish problem into a mood of extreme belligerency towards Germany, was the invasion of

Belgium in defiance of Treaty. As it would be very All three were young men of great promise, and all were killed in action within a few weeks. By 9 August the battalion was completely mobilised and ready for the field, and on that day was inspected by the King and Queen.

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The factor which turned the Cabinet from its endless struggles to find a peaceful solution to the Irish problem into a mood of extreme belligerency towards Germany, was the invasion of Belgium in defiance of Treaty. As it would be very difficult to wage war in Europe on any scale without invading Belgium—at least, it has never been done yet—the value of any Treaty which purports to guarantee its neutrality is doubtful indeed. Its violation however ensured that Great Britain went to war as a united nation, for the occupation of Belgium by a hostile Power—especially one with a large fleet—could under no circumstances be tolerated.

The Prime Minister having handed over his War Office commitments to Lord Kitchener, the Field Marshal presented his ideas to the Cabinet. He had the fortunate gift, unusual in soldiers, of being able to explain military matters to civilians in a lucid and comprehensible manner. It is a great pity that he did not live long enough to match himself against Mr Lloyd George. For some reason which is not at all apparent, he was also very popular in the country, being generally regarded as a kind of national figurehead representing valour, determination, and the certainty of eventual victory. His views on the conduct of the war were startling. It could not, he explained, be won by the Royal Navy. Millions of soldiers would be required, and they might well have to fight for several years. He proposed to start immediately by raising six new regular divisions—a modest start, but there were insufficient arms and equipment even for so many. ‘The Cabinet,’ said Sir Winston Churchill, heard him in silent assent.’ Had he asked for national service—conscription—it would probably have been granted. But he preferred to rely on volunteers, and of these there was certainly no lack, for they were clamouring at recruiting offices and regimental depots in the hundred thousand. The H.L.I. Depot at Hamilton, already worked off its feet dealing with the reservists, was thrown into a complete state of chaos lasting four days, by ‘a howling rabble arriving from Glasgow to enlist.’ These stout hearts declined to leave, and the majority slept in the open in and around the barracks until they could be dealt with—when two of them were found to have only one leg apiece, one tried to get away with ‘a wooden foot,’ and several others had glass eyes.

It is indeed difficult to understand how the Depot functioned at all during the early days of the war, with its small staff. The regimental reservists numbered 1154, out of whom 1050 reported within the first three days. 1087 had mobilised by the beginning of October, the late arrivals being seamen and men settled in Canada. Thus nearly 95% of H.L.I. reservists answered the call to the colours, even returning from overseas to do so. It seems likely that the few who failed were either dead or in the Antipodes.

Both the Special Reserve and the Territorial Army had of course, been embodied on General Mobilisation. The 3rd (S.R.) Battalion, which held three hundred and fifty reservists on call as reinforcements for the 74th, went to Portsmouth and the 4th (S.R.) to Exeter. The Depot sent out an appeal to former N.C.O.s of the Regiment to rejoin and help in dealing with the mass of recruits. Over a hundred retired N.C.O.s immediately responded, abandoning their homes and businesses. Civilian contractors had to be called in to feed the men. Within a week after mobilisation, order had been restored and the recruits were actually drilling. No sooner had this result been achieved when the order came that the Highland Light Infantry was to raise two battalions of eleven hundred men apiece for 'the First Hundred Thousand' of Kitchener's armies. The Royal Scots and the Highland Light Infantry were the only two Scottish regiments ordered to raise two new battalions at this time. The expansion of the Regiment did not stop here however. Within two months from the outbreak of war there were no fewer than seventeen battalions of the Regiment on a war footing—the 71st and 74th both in the field ; four Special Reserve Battalions (the 3rd and 4th had each given birth to a new battalion, known as the 13th and 14th) ; five Territorial Battalions and six battalions of the new Army. There may be some other regiment which can prove a better response to the call to arms, but there cannot surely be many examples to equal this.

According to French calculations the British Expeditionary Force was five days late into the field. In the pre-war Staff talks it had been decided that the B.E.F. should operate on the left of the French line, but as no treaty of alliance had been concluded there was in fact no obligation for it to take the field at all, and up to the last minute the British Government was undecided as to its employment. The French indeed, seem to have taken a good deal for granted, and had made no arrangements for extending their line from Maubeuge westwards to the sea other than by calling out some local Territorials of doubtful value. Presumably they did not expect the Germans to penetrate in that direction. If five days were lost by the British however, these were more than made up by the unexpectedly strong resistance put up by the Belgians. Nevertheless, by the time the B.E.F. reached its concentration areas on the left of the French line the majority of the Belgian Army had withdrawn to Antwerp, while the French Army, heavily outnumbered, was already falling back before the relentless pressure of the enormous German Army.

The French left flank thus being in mortal danger Sir John French hastened northward to ease the pressure, so that when his cavalry gained touch with the enemy, the British Army was advancing while the French on the right were withdrawing. Sir John accordingly found himself committed to an encounter battle some nine miles in advance of the French line—a distance which was hourly increasing. He did not of course, care for this situation at all, especially as cavalry and air reconnaissance had by then given him some idea of the strength of the advancing enemy, who was in process of wheeling eastward in a vast out-flanking movement. Plans were accordingly made for an immediate withdrawal, but on representations from the French, Sir John agreed to stand his ground for twenty-four hours, being encouraged to take the risk by the uniform success of his cavalry which had routed the Germans in many small engagements.

The line reached was that of the Mons-Conde canal, which was held by the 2nd Corps. The 1st Corps, coming up on the right, had no time to prolong the line which therefore fell away

south-eastwardly, making a salient at Mons. When the enemy advanced against the 2nd Corps and were firmly held, a gap developed east of Mons, and the 5th Infantry Brigade, less the Connaught Rangers, was sent forward to fill it. Thus the 74th, after continuous long and hard marching by night and day in very hot weather, took up a position covering the mining town of Paturages, through which the Germans were attempting to outflank the 2nd Corps. Making use of the superlative marksmanship common in the British Army at that time, and of which the like had never been seen since Agincourt, the 74th had no difficulty in holding its ground, but suffered some fifty casualties from the heavy enemy shell-fire, for it was not dug-in. 'Them that burrst i' the air wis the wurrst,' a wounded 74th man reported to his relatives in Glasgow. The officers as usual were astonished by the steadfastness of their men. Certainly at Mons they required no reminders of Assaye, like their forebears at Busaco—but then, it will be remembered, the 74th could make no reply to the cannon-fire, whereas at Mons they were glaring along their sights at 'the lowest centre portion of the mark,' and watching the results with the feeling that they were the better men.

Having thus fought the enemy to a standstill, Sir John French was able to disengage and commence his retirement with a view to establishing a position alongside the French. The 74th marched south-easterly and east, through Bavais, La Groise, Servais and Meaux, at an average pace of two miles an hour kept up continuously. There were several brushes with the enemy and many prisoners were taken, including an Uhlan patrol with its horses. There were also many false alarms caused, according to Colonel Wolfe-Murray, by enemy officers dressed in French uniforms who tried to stampede—and once succeeded—the Brigade transport which was moving ahead of their battalion. 'The behaviour of the Germans is *disgraceful*' he wrote home angrily. Deuced unsporting, in fact! The spirits of the battalion were in no way downcast by the retreat—for it was, of course, a tactical one and not due to a defeat. The reservists however, were feeling the effort too much for them. They had had no time to toughen up; the skin had worn off their feet and their crutches, while their shoulders ached under the weight of their arms and equipment. Dragging their feet they shuffled along with their backs bent, in a sour humour, *shuffle, shuffle, shuffle*. Every so often some of them fell out and sat down by the side of the road. To the N.C.O.s who ordered them back into the ranks they made rude and insubordinate replies, but they were not prepared to answer officers back, and when their platoon commanders intervened they struggled to their feet again and went on, *shuffle, shuffle, shuffle*.

The rigours of the retreat were greatly increased by the fact that the movements of the Fifth French Army limited the whole of the 1st Corps to one road, necessitating the double-banking of transport. In addition a whole French Cavalry Corps crossed the march route on its way to the British left flank; and at the same time the enemy followed up closely. Pressure on the 1st Corps was light however, compared with that on the 2nd Corps which was obliged to stand and fight at the immortal battle of Le Cateau; in which many regiments of the British Army held their ground to the last man and the last round against overwhelming odds, enabling by their self-sacrifice an orderly retreat to be continued. It would indeed have been impossible, for the fighting withdrawal known as the Retreat from Mons to have been carried out by troops who were not of the most Corps was more fortunate than the 2nd in that it did not become seriously involved, the feats of endurance carried out by the troops were certainly spectacular. On 27 August, for example, the 74th, after over a week's heavy continuous marching and fighting were working before dawn repairing roads. Thereafter the battalion tramped thirty miles in the one day, arriving at its halting-place long after dark. Yet all were in good heart, listening to the sound of the guns and ready at any minute to turn and advance again as soon as the withdrawal should be ended, which was hourly expected. A considerable gap had opened between the two British Corps, but all

enemy attempts to penetrate it were foiled by the cavalry which was of the same high quality as the rest of the British Army at this time. The 5th Cavalry Brigade for example, manoeuvring on the St Quentin road protecting the left flank of the 1st Corps and which consisted of the Greys, 12th Lancers and 20th Hussars, came upon a German Dragoon Brigade and completely routed it in a most excellently conducted action which culminated in a charge by 'C' Squadron of the 12th, during which eighty of the enemy were speared. As there is a silly tendency to ridicule the efforts of the British cavalry with its swords and lances during the Great War, it may be appropriate to mention that the enemy showed no disposition to laugh at it in 1914.

Although the morale of the B.E.F. was unimpaired, that of Sir John French was not. Badly shaken by the narrow escape of his army from its highly vulnerable position at Mons and distrustful of the French, his one idea was to get off the field, reorganise in peace and advance again with caution. His capabilities as a commander are not in doubt, but he was lacking in that strength of character which a commander-in chief must have, if he is successfully to deal with enemy, political, and allied pressure at the same time; and by his expressed determination to make 'a definite and prolonged retreat due south, passing Paris to the East or West,' was now defying both his own government and the French High Command, and at the same time abandoning all initiative to the enemy.

The retreat accordingly continued, and the enemy dismissed the B.E.F. as a beaten army. By swinging his First Army westwards away from the British line of retreat the enemy then created the immense gap between his First and Second Armies, which was later to cost him dear. Meanwhile the 5th and 6th Infantry Divisions had joined the B.E.F., making three Corps, and the 74th had received both first and second reinforcements. Sir Douglas Haig began to get increasingly impatient with the constant retreat and made one or two attempts to stand and fight, but was thwarted on each occasion by Sir John French. Each time the 74th was ready in position, but was withdrawn before the enemy appeared. Sir John it seems, was continually worried about the danger of being cut off, for the German First Army had swung eastwards again and was heading his way. Where he would have eventually stopped, had he been left entirely to his own devices, is difficult to say, but the personal pressure of Lord Kitchener and the representations of the French, who pointed out that the German First Army was presenting its flank, eventually halted him south-east of Paris. On Sunday 6 September, the 74th, in position near Marles, found itself moving forward instead of back. 'I assume,' wrote Lieutenant Keith-Macdonald, 'the general advance has now begun. A beautiful day.'

In the Retreat from Mons the B.E.F. had marched two hundred miles in thirteen days, in intolerable conditions during which Le Cateau had been fought, and the enemy constantly warded off. Yet it was still in good order and good heart, able at a moment's notice to return to the offensive, although, wrote an officer, 'I would never have believed that men could be so tired and so hungry and yet live.' The point has been well made in the *Official History of the War* that the three previous notable Retreats in the history of the British Army—to Corunna in 1808, from Talavera in 1809 and from Burgos to Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812—were all marred by serious indiscipline. There was no such stigma in the Retreat from Mons in 1914.

With the war but a month old, things had indeed gone ill for the Allies, who had been driven back upon the gates of Paris in the west, while in the east the Russians had been decisively defeated at Tannenburg. Valuable time had been gained however. Further French Armies had been raised and reinforcements were on their way to the B.E.F. The enemy, flinging his vast hordes about the Continent like a blundering lot of hippopotami, had not only failed to make good his position and profit from his numerical superiority, but had actually got himself into a distinctly awkward position, with his flank exposed and the garrisons of several by-passed

fortresses in his rear. True, he could not be defeated as yet, but time was not on his side and he could ill afford such set-backs as were presently to fall upon him.

Chapter XI

THE AISNE AND THE FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES

The 74th on the Aisne—the first V.C.—digging in—the transfer to Flanders—first action in Flanders, 21 October 1914—how the 'Old Contemptibles' held the line—the affair in Polygon Wood—the second V.C.—the enemy halted before Ypres.

So far, the bulk of the fighting by the B.E.F. had been carried out by the 2nd Corps, and the 74th in the 1st Corps had got off lightly. Following the end of the retreat there is a different tale to tell. The sudden change from retreat to advance was somewhat remarkable. On 5 September the B.E.F. was still heading south, and on the 6th it was marching back north again. Sir John French did not receive the French intentions to resume the offensive until early on 5 September, by which time it was too late to stop the further retirement. Although he had determined to take part in the offensive, having been visited both by General Manoury, commanding the Sixth French Army, and by General Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief, he did not think it practicable to stop the B.E.F. while it was actually on the line of march. Therefore when the advance started on the following day the B.E.F. was some twelve miles south of the positions which the French had calculated it to be holding. However, it more than made up for this lapse by its indomitable courage and endurance, and the high standard of its leadership and training.

Sir John's operation order wheeled the B.E.F. to the east, pivoting on the 1st Corps moving through Rozoy and Vaudoy. Still with the 5th Infantry Brigade, the 74th marched through St Simeon and La Tetroix hard on the German heels. They crossed the Petit Morin on 8 September, and were soon in action, capturing fourteen prisoners at a cost of two men wounded; and bivouacking at Bassville. Caught on the wrong foot, the enemy was making no serious resistance at this stage and on 9 September the 74th, advancing through Pavant, halted for a while on the crest overlooking the valley of the Maine. 'It is quite a picture,' wrote Lieutenant Keith-Macdonald in his diary, 'most beautiful. Continued again at 4 p.m. down through this magnificent valley. It is really a large basin, with beautiful cultivated slopes and wooded spurs all round. Bivouacked on the hill above Domptin. Very fine again, with a burning sun, but inclined to rain at night.' Writing in his bivouac on 11 September he said 'To-day for general discomfort and sheer misery has been quite exceptional., however, it's all in the game.... Feeling a little seedy.'

On 13 September the 74th crossed the Oise by a pontoon bridge, and on the following day were in action. This was the fight for the Chemin des Dames, towards the end of the Battle of the Aisne. 14 September 1914 was, it turned out, the beginning of trench warfare. From that date onwards, neither side would lightly withdraw. The enemy was holding the Verneuil Ridge in considerable strength with guns and machine-guns in position, and in driving him out the 1st Corps had an uphill task in thick heavy weather which caused much confusion. Desperate fighting drove the Germans back to the Chemin des Dames, but their counter-attacks forced the 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades to give ground as far as the Verneuil Spur, which they held. During this fighting 'D' Company of the 74th was enfiladed by a machine-gun hidden in a wood. Lieutenant Sir Archibald Gibson-Craig having located its position asked the company commander for permission to attack it with his platoon. This being granted he led his platoon uphill by a covered approach, but as they closed on the gun they found themselves unexpectedly

face to face with a large number of Germans. Gibson-Craig shouted the order to fire, then drawing his sword, he rushed in front of his platoon calling to them 'Charge, men! At 'em!' He was killed just as he reached the enemy, who hastily held up their hands—but they were too late in making this gesture, for Gibson-Craig's platoon was no longer in a mood to accept surrender. In fact, no platoon in the British Army would stand for seeing its officer shot down without doing something about it, when it was possible. In this case the Germans had not in any case laid down their arms, and they were bayoneted to a man by Gibson-Craig's infuriated soldiers who killed about fifty on the spot and silenced the gun, at a cost to themselves of three wounded and two killed, besides their officer.

On this same day the first Victoria Cross for the 74th in the Great War was won by Private George Wilson, a miner from Edinburgh who had been called back from the Reserve on the outbreak of war. He was a cocky fighting man; devoid of fear, modesty, and other such feeble inhibitions. The day after being called up he stopped a runaway horse with great courage and agility. 'Man! *said* an admiring old lady, 'ye suld hae the V.C.! 'Jist bide till I get back frae the front! *replied* Wilson, slapping his chest, 'an' I'll hae it right here! '—and he had, sure enough. During the same action in which Gibson-Craig's platoon captured a machine-gun, Wilson got one on his own. The 74th at the time was mixed up with the 60th Rifles, and Wilson, having located the gun, persuaded a Rifleman to stalk it with him. The Rifleman was soon killed, but Wilson went on alone, shot and bayoneted the entire gun-team of an officer and six soldiers and captured the gun and two and a half cases of ammunition. His feat therefore equalled that of Private Rogers of the 71st who, it will be remembered, also defeated seven men single-handed to win the first V.C. in the Regiment.

Sir A. Gibson-Craig was the first subaltern to fall, but others now followed fast. In the desperate fighting for the Chemin des Dames, often at close quarters, every fighting man of the 1st Corps was constantly in action. The troops were spread out on a very wide front and there was no reserve, yet the offensive was continued against heavy odds; and while the tide of battle ebbed and flowed, ground was steadily gained and none relinquished. The 2nd and 3rd Corps on the left were as heavily engaged and, being weakened by earlier losses, were hard put to it to hold their own. A gap of over two miles opened between the 1st and 2nd Corps, which meant that the left flank of the 5th Infantry Brigade was exposed and a position of grave danger developed, of which the enemy was only prevented from taking advantage by the constant pressure exerted on him by his numerically inferior opponents. The open tactics and superb marksmanship of the British Army were new to him, and he was suffering heavy losses to no purpose.

The weather had now broken and there was a constant drizzle, sometimes developing into heavy rain. Keith-Macdonald in his diary constantly refers to the misery suffered by those in the field, and complains of feeling 'seedy,' which is not to be wondered at. The wonder is that men were able to keep going at all under such conditions; soaking wet, famished and exhausted. As far as the British soldier is capable of hating anybody, he had now begun to hate the German, believing him capable of all sorts of atrocities. The wounded had frequently to be left where they lay, during the many temporary retirements, and the 74th would often find them bayoneted when they advanced again. It is in fact doubtful whether the German soldier of that date would have bayoneted wounded men in cold blood. It seems more likely that the wounded were shooting it out, or else that the enemy had come upon them suddenly while under fire.

The Ensigns of the last Colour Party, Fergusson, Powell and Mackenzie were all killed in September, and many other splendid young officers who were quite irreplaceable. The realisation that the B.E.F. contained the potential leaders and staff officers of the new armies had indeed, dictated Sir John French's previous policy of caution and endeavour to avoid casualties. If the

B.E.F. was to fight at all however, such a policy could not be long sustained under the conditions on the Western Front, and the time was now rapidly approaching when the British Regular Army would be no more, except in name. On Sunday 20 September Keith-Macdonald made his last entry in his diary 'We were attacked at dawn and went out to the trenches to support the Connaughts. Retired shortly however, on account of shell fire, to the base of the hill. Arrived there about 6 a.m.' He was killed on the following day. He was a *Sgianach*—a native of Skye, a fine athlete and piper, who played the *Piobaireachd* for his own pleasure and that of others; giving to the melody that sensitive expression only to be found in the music of pipers from the Isles.

By mid-September it became apparent that the Germans intended to hold their line north of the Aisne at all costs, for they dug themselves deep. The B.E.F. followed their example, linking up their advanced posts with lines of trenches, which they protected with posts and barbed-wire collected from the countryside, for they had no engineer stores with them of this nature. The French also dug in and operations came to a standstill, but this did not mean that either the Allies or the Germans had any intention of accepting a stalemate. Both sides made immediate preparations for resuming the offensive, while the security of the coastline and the Channel ports became the first objective of the Allies. Although both sides were entrenched, there was no pause in the fighting and no stagnation. On the British front the enemy made frequent attempts to drive the B.E.F. back across the Aisne but achieved nothing. During this time however, he held the great advantage of being able to out-range the British artillery. Unlike the B.E.F. the Germans were equipped with siege artillery, forcing the British guns into defiladed positions far back from the front line. In their un-revetted, makeshift trenches, the infantry accordingly suffered severely, and the 74th alone had sixty casualties in one day. The enemy fire was extremely accurate, and it was some time before it was discovered that his observation officers were not infrequently hidden in trees or haystacks, often in disguise, close up to the British lines and even within them. The Germans also tried many less reputable tricks, such as advancing in strength with their rifles slung and their hands up, then firing from the hip at close quarters. But such unworthy behaviour did not pay, and indeed cost them dear, for they were no match for the British soldiers with either rifle or bayonet.

The B.E.F. in its positions along the Aisne was now no longer on the left of the Allied line as originally intended, and the Sixth French Army was between it and the coast upon which its supplies depended. Sir John French accordingly requested that it should be moved into Flanders. To withdraw three Army Corps from close contact, and move them across the French lines of communication to a new position in the west, was a complicated and dangerous operation, but General Joffre at once agreed. Although the relations between Sir John French and his neighbouring army commanders had been far from happy, there is no doubt that the French Commander-in-Chief could hardly have been more considerate, and his generous tributes to the efforts of the B.E.F. were greatly appreciated by the troops. It was a sad day for the British Army when he was finally relieved.

On 13 October 1914, the 74th were relieved by the 48th French Regiment of the Line and left the Aisne, travelling by rail and march-rout& in a long circular journey to the west. Before marching the battalion was visited by Sir John French, who spoke heartening and congratulatory words; decorating Sergeant Nicholson and Lance-Corporal Webber with the Distinguished Conduct Medal in the field. Arriving in the west, the battalion was inspected at Godesverheld by Sir Douglas Haig, and marched to Poperinghe where it was quartered in billets for the last time for several weeks. On the 20th October it crossed the Yser Canal by the Steenstraate Bridge and on the following day was in action in the neighbourhood of Poelcapelle.

In the 'Race to the Sea' which followed the stalemate on the Aisne the Germans, deploying new formations and those transferred from the Russian Front after their victory at Tannenburg, laid siege to Antwerp. After a determined resistance aided by the Royal Naval Division, the Belgian Army evacuated the fortress and took the field again between Ostend and Dunkirk, on a line between Dixmude and Nieuport. On its right, separated by French Territorial formations, was the B.E.F., now consisting of four Army Corps and a Cavalry Corps. The 1st Corps was the last to move from the Aisne, and when it arrived in its new concentration area at Poperinghe, the remainder of the B.E.F. was in action along the general line La Bassée to Ypres, in front of which a salient was held by the 4th Corps. Both sides were attacking and the fighting was of the most desperate nature, but the Allies were getting slightly the best of it, a fact which encouraged General Joffre and Sir John French to endeavour to roll up the German line from the right with the B.E.F. The 1st Corps was accordingly put in on the left of the 4th Corps with a view to extending the Ypres Salient, and consequently wheeling inwards. In calculating the chances of this movement succeeding, the fact that the German 4th Army, which faced the 1st and 4th Corps and the Belgians, consisted of reserve formations, was taken into account. Events were to show that the fighting quality of this Army had been underestimated. This is not to say that the movement was a mistake. If the German line could not be turned at least the advance had to be halted, and it was only by hard fighting that this could be done. On 21 October 1914, the 1st Corps accordingly attacked north and north-east of Ypres. In the 2nd Division which was leading, the 5th Infantry Brigade advanced on Poelcapelle.

The Brigade formed up in the Steenbeek depression a mile north of St Julien; the 74th being in the centre of the first line between the 2nd Worcestershire and the 53rd Light Infantry, with the Connaught Rangers in reserve. The advance went well except for the 5th Infantry Brigade, which came under heavy enfilade and suffered severely, the 74th losing 14 rank and file killed; 2 officers and 80 rank and file wounded; and 8 missing. After this initial misfortune to the one Brigade the operation as a whole failed to develop, and owing to the numerical superiority of the enemy, who outnumbered the Allies on this part of the Front by some five to one, came at last to a standstill. As darkness fell the B.E.F. entrenched—not in a continuous line, but in groups—with the 5th Infantry Brigade about a mile short of Poelcapelle.

Now took place the decisive series of actions known as the First Battle of Ypres—the last effort of the British Regular Army as such and, it might be said, its most magnificent. The entrenchments which the B.E.F. had been able to construct with its meagre tools in the darkness, were only un-revetted holes about three feet deep, with no sandbags or wire. They provided some cover from fire and view, but no obstacle to the enemy's advance, which had to be halted by fire alone. The enemy attacked in vast numbers during the forty-eight hours of the 22 and 23 October, but nowhere could they penetrate the thinly-held line of the B.E.F. On each day the 5th Infantry Brigade was under continuous shell and rifle-fire, and on each evening at dusk the enemy attacked. He came forward in masses, and was mown down as such; only a few men getting as close as twenty-five yards. During the hours of darkness he could be heard collecting his dead and wounded, but substantial numbers were still lying on the field in the morning. The British positions, as has been pointed out, were in the nature of a series of posts, with large gaps between, but they were so skilfully sited to afford mutual support, and the controlled fire of their resolute defenders was so accurate, that no unarmoured troops could possibly approach them unscathed. During the battle the Connaughts were brought up into the front line of the 5th Infantry Brigade, while the 74th was moved to the left flank. This movement was necessary in order to extend the front, as was being done all along the line leaving no reserves, for the attenuated B.E.F. was committed to holding a frontage far in excess of that normal in defence.

‘To give a true picture of the long hours of patient and stubborn resistance there should be some mention on almost every page of bursting shells, blow-in trenches, hunger, fatigue and death and wounds.’⁽¹⁾

Behind the line the transport waggons rumbled to and fro through Ypres all night long ; the drivers coaxing their uneasy, gallant horses closer to the sound of the guns. The fatigued men crawled out of the trenches and went back to meet those unloading the limbers behind the company headquarters, carrying back seven-pound tins of bully-beef and boxes of ammunition through the darkness, while the guns roared, the shells burst and hails of bullets cracked round their heads. In the trenches there was no wild ‘brassing-off.’ All fire-orders were scrupulously given, and as scrupulously obeyed—’ *half right! two hundred! enemy in front! two rounds ! fire! repeat! repeat! repeat! stop!* ‘1 By exactly the same method used by the 71st to stop seven cavalry charges on its square at Waterloo, so, a century later, the 74th stopped the *Landwehr* before Ypres. It was not as easy as it sounds. It is a method which calls for superlative training, iron nerves, and a spirit which enables a man to keep going until he drops unconscious with fatigue.

After beating off the German attack in the evening of 23 October, the 2nd Division was relieved in its trenches around Langemarck before Poelcapelle, and assembled at ‘Hellfire Corner,’ a mile east of Ypres, as a preliminary to the concentration of the 1st Corps for a further attack.

The enemy having been held all along the front, and his attacks brought to a standstill with very heavy losses, the 1st, 4th and Cavalry Corps (dismounted) were ordered to attack on 25 October in concert with the French 9th Corps. At the commencement of this offensive the 74th with the 5th Brigade was entrenched in front of Polygon Wood, covering the concentration of the 2nd Division. The attack passed through the position, and the Brigade was then withdrawn into Divisional reserve. A good example of the fighting spirit of the B.E.F. after two months in the field under the conditions hitherto described, is afforded by a burial party of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the 21st Infantry Brigade on the left of the 2nd Division. While at work this party was fired on from a house. Having piled arms the party was armed with nothing but shovels, but nonetheless immediately attacked the enemy with these implements and captured twenty, including an officer.

Both sides being reinforced the battle continued to rage without intermission, day after day. Both sides had the same object—to break through and turn the other’s flank. An encounter battle so prolonged was indeed unique, and which of the opponents held the initiative would be hard to say; one can only say that neither would surrender it. The Germans however, fighting on interior lines with vast reserves, certainly held the advantage. On the British side the Lahore Division arrived, first of the Indian Contingent, but it was matched by six on the German side. Superior numbers being equalled by superior fighting quality the British line miraculously held, and no ground of consequence was lost or gained.

The 74th still held its position in the line of the 5th Infantry Brigade before Polygon Wood, being mostly on the defensive with no chance of improving its entrenchments, which were under a constant heavy shell-fire interrupted by periodical infantry attacks. A curious phase had been reached in which, it being suicide to attack across the open for any distance, the opposing sides were sapping towards each other. In some parts of the line the trenches were only some fifty yards apart, and even occasionally linked to each other by communication trenches, up and down which would rush the raiding parties with bayonet and hand-grenade. On 7 November, ‘B’ Company of the 74th, commanded by Captain K. L. Buist, whose trenches at one point closed on the Germans to fifteen yards, was rushed by three hundred of the enemy at 4.30 in the morning.

There was of course, no time at this close range to rely upon the bullet. In accordance with a pre-arranged plan, the moment the alarm was sounded the company left its trenches and sheltered behind the parapets. Immediately the enemy reached and entered the trenches, the 74th jumped down on top of them and, having secured this initial advantage, set to work with the bayonet. 'I was in a trench on the left of all this,' wrote Lieut. C. L. Cornish, who was killed a few days later, 'and could hear a fearful din going on, but could not see anything owing to the mist.'

A fearful din there certainly was, as may well be imagined, with four hundred desperate men in close combat in a narrow trench and the 74th fighting it out, one against three and each man for himself. The trench in the morning light was discovered to be 'a perfect shambles.' There were eighty, dead Germans in it, mostly killed with the bayonet but some by Lieut. W. L. Brodie's Maxim. The trenches nearest the enemy had been lightly held by night, and covered by two machine-guns in Brodie's charge. The guns were swamped by Germans before he could get them into action, but he seized a rifle, bayoneted four of them and shot five others. Then, with the help of his gunners who had also been busy with their bayonets, he mounted one of the guns on a traverse and fired down the trench killing all enemy in it as far as the next traverse. In addition to the 80 enemy killed, 54 were taken prisoner; a number of whom had black eyes and broken noses for butts, boots and fists as well as bayonets, had been used in this desperate affair. The 74th lost 16 rank and file killed, and an officer and 25 wounded, with 3 missing.

Although illustrating the nature of the fighting on the Ypres Salient at this time this effort was still an epic in its way, and was rewarded by complimentary messages from all Commanders up to and including Sir John French himself. Although 'B' Company had had the honour, it is safe to say that any other Company in the Regiment would have behaved as stoutly had the attack fallen upon it—any other Company in any other regiment in the B.E.F. indeed, for there was undoubted truth in the proud boast of the British Army in 1914 that it had 'no bad regiments.' Lieut. Brodie was awarded the Victoria Cross for his part in what he described in his letters home as 'a bit of a scrap.' Two other officers and six rank and file of 'B' Company were also decorated. Like Private Wilson, Brodie was an Edinburgh man, and it had therefore so happened that the first two Victoria Crosses gained by the Regiment in the Great War were won by sons of Edinburgh—a fact which *The Scotsman* was quick to notice. Until the outbreak of the Great War, the regular battalions of the Regiment did not in fact recruit only in Glasgow, but from all over Scotland.

In the First Battle of Ypres the B.E.F. disintegrated. Many battalions had been completely wiped out, others were reduced to company strength, while Infantry Brigades could scarcely parade a battalion. By the beginning of November the front had lost cohesion and had to be continually 'puttied up,' as the General Staff (with its inventive love for apt metaphors) described the process of rushing units and sub-units from one place to another to fill gaps in the line. Yet it still held and did hold, and would have done so to the last man. It was no longer possible for it to put in any concerted attack, but the French could do so, so long as the B.E.F. held its ground:

Thus three French counter-attacks were to be made the next day (1 November) but it was a question whether the line of battered and ever-diminishing British battalions and squadrons, patched in places by French reinforcements, could continue to hold on. In hastily dug trenches they had to stand punishment from over two hundred German heavy guns; and at the same time, without any obstacles to cover them except on the 2nd Division front, to keep back the ever increasing weight of the German infantry. With infantry brigades reduced below the establishment of battalions, and cavalry regiments below that of squadrons, with only some thirty medium heavy guns—some of which were obsolete—and with the imminent danger of lack of gun ammunition, the future looked gloomy and doubtful. The sin of unpreparedness for war of the British nation was indeed being visited on its children, the men and officers of the British Expeditionary Force. Should what remained of them, war-worn and hungry, fall

back even a few miles, it was difficult to see how the Channel ports could be saved. (*British Official History*)

In the 5th Brigade only the 74th and Connaughts now held the line, with the Guard's Brigade on the right of the 74th at the south-west corner of Polygon Wood, now a small salient within the Ypres Salient and as such highly vulnerable. Had the Battle of Ypres resulted in the abdication of the Kaiser and the allied entry into Berlin, no doubt the stand made by the British Army would have received the same recognition in prose and poem as that which it made at Waterloo—only part of one day, as opposed to several weeks. Cruel fate the British Expeditionary Force died where it stood; the memory of its heroic deeds faded out in the larger issues of the war, and its steadfast courage, endurance, sacrifice and skill at arms is now remembered, not as a national epic to be honoured and sung but merely as part of the 'beastliness of war.' Although no large-scale offensive could be carried out, the units in the line were by no means passive. Local attacks sometimes with only a few men, were carried out continuously. On 11 November the 74th carried out an attack on the northeast corner of Polygon Wood and drove the Germans from their trenches, which the battalion was then obliged to evacuate owing to French artillery-fire from the rear. During the operation 'C' Company 'did some excellent practice at some Germans crossing an open space between the woods and accounted for about 20. They lost 2nd Lieut. Mears (who had only been promoted from Colour-Sergeant the previous day) and 4 men killed; 9 N.C.O.s, and men wounded.' On 13 November 'the battalion trenches were very heavily shelled, large shells bursting on them. "A" Company stuck well to their trenches after both their officers had been killed. The battalion's losses were Captain Chichester, Lieut. Cornish, Lieut. Hall, C.S.M. McPhail and 8 N.C.O.s and men killed; 2nd Lieut. McLellan and 22 N.C.O.s and men wounded. On the same day 2nd Lieut. Aston and 233 N.C.O.s and men joined.' (2)

On the following day the 74th lost 2nd Lieut. Dickson and seventeen rank and file killed ; thirty-one rank and file wounded. On 16 November the battalion was relieved by the French and at last came out of the line, marching through Ypres to Bailleul and losing an officer and four men by shell fire on the way. Out of all the officers and men mobilised at Aldershot a bare three months before, there were now scarcely thirty left.

The Battle of Ypres was over—and it was a victory. Not a victory unfortunately, which it was possible to exploit. The allies had neither the men nor the munitions to do so. But the Germans had undoubtedly been defeated, their master plan thwarted and the safety of the Channel Ports secured. There is no historical precedent with which it is possible to compare this battle. Many an example has been given in the previous volumes of this history of the physical powers of endurance of the British soldier; his determination in attack, his tenacity in defence, his scorn of odds and his steadfast refusal to admit defeat. All these attributes were possessed in full measure by the soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force, as they demonstrated indeed and proved furthermore, that provided he is well-trained and led the British soldier is impossible to break. Never before had a British Force been so sorely tried, and for so long, as at Ypres in 1914. One would not have thought it could have been done.

A unique feature of the battle also, was the manner in which the Allies co-operated in a time of extreme stress and danger, and the success of their combined operations in a divided command. As, for example, the British General Staff began to run out of 'putty' when 'puttying up' the line towards the end, and the French did not hesitate to send in their units to fight under British commanders, so that at times British, Frenchmen and Zouaves were all mixed up and fighting shoulder to shoulder. Finally, when the Germans had at length been decisively repulsed, and Sir John French desired to withdraw the 1st Corps into reserve, the French willingly relieved it. Thus, having been relieved by a French regiment, the 74th at last got some rest and on 20

November half the officers and a number of the rank and file went home on leave.

⁽¹⁾ *Official History.*

⁽²⁾ *War Diary.*

Chapter XII

NEUVE CHAPELLE AND THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES

Arrival of the Glasgow Highlanders (9th H.L.I.)—travels of the 71st—conditions at Festubert—71st and 74th together—the 71st at Neuve Chapelle, 12 March 1915—the German offensive at Ypres.

ON 23 November 1914, the 5th Infantry Brigade at Bailleul was joined by the Glasgow Highlanders, 9th H.L.I., one of the first battalions of the Territorial Army to arrive in France. As the battalion marched in, with its pipes playing, the 74th turned out to cheer it. Originally a Volunteer regiment raised in Glasgow before the Highland Light Infantry became associated with that City, the Glasgow Highlanders—formed, as their name implies, from Highlanders in Glasgow—wore by permission of Queen Victoria the tartan and other insignia of the Black Watch. Becoming the 9th H.L.I. on the formation of the Territorial Army in 1908, it continued to dress in a similar manner to the Black Watch but incorporating certain features of the H.L.I. in its badge.

From this date until the end of the year, both H.L.I. battalions took their turns in the trenches before Ypres but the enemy, having had more than enough of the British Army, left it alone for some time, and the only casualties were two men killed and nine wounded. On 3 December His Majesty visited the 74th, and on the following day decorated Private Wilson with the Victoria Cross. On 23 December, while at Givenchy, the 74th met the 71st, newly arrived in the field with the Indian Expeditionary Force. It was an historic meeting—the first time 71st and 74th had met within the sound of the guns since the advance on Seringapatam in 1787.

The 71st, which at the outbreak of war were at Solon in the Simla Hills with various company detachments, received orders to mobilise on 8 August, 1914. As in the case of the 74th, the battalion was ready very quickly and ten days later was on its way to Bombay. Passing through Baroda the 71st halted for a day in order to be entertained by His Highness the Gaekwar who, like all the Indian Princes, never lost an opportunity of demonstrating his loyalty to the King Emperor, his allegiance to whom he contemplated with pride.

The 71st was in the 9th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Indian Division, and embarked 21 Officers and 894 Rank and File in S.S. *Sumatra* bound for Marseilles. While the Division was on the high seas, the behaviour of Turkey was causing some uneasiness to His Majesty's Government, to whom it had become evident that she would enter the war on the side of the Central Powers at an early date. Had the extent to which the fighting quality of the Turkish soldier been developed under German tuition been fully appreciated, it seems likely that the Government would have been considerably more uneasy than it was, but Turkey as an opponent was not at that time regarded very seriously, except in so far as her strategic position enabled her to close the Dardanelles to Russia and to threaten the Suez Canal. This last threat naturally concerned the British Government more closely, and as a temporary measure the 9th Brigade was disembarked in Egypt for the defence of the Canal. The 71st was disposed with its headquarters and half the battalion at Port Said and the other half-battalion at Suez—a very inefficient arrangement which clearly demonstrates both the lack of British resources and a contempt for the Turk. The voyage to Marseilles was resumed however on 23 November, in the Hired Transport *Sardinia* out from Alexandria. The battalion disembarked on 1 December, and having been

rearmed ⁽¹⁾ and equipped travelled through Orleans to the front. After a few days in billets at Vielle Chapelle the 71st went into action near Festubert on 12 December, receiving a few casualties. Presumably to avoid confusion the 3rd Indian Division was known in France as the Lahore Division, and the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade was known as the Sirhind Brigade. The Sirhind Brigade was commanded by Major-General J.M.S. Brunner, and consisted of the 71st, 125th Napier's Rifles, 1/1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles and the 1/4th Gurkha Rifles. The Indian Army at this time was of an exceedingly high standard. It may not have reached that of the British Army but it was not far short. It was naturally at its best however, in Eastern climates. To expect it to hold the trenches on the Western Front in mid-winter was asking a lot—though no more indeed, than was expected of the British Army in the deserts, mountains and forests of the East.

During the initial stages of the trench warfare proper, which developed after the Battle of Ypres, and which might be described as the lowest form of the military art, the British Army maintained its offensive policy. Since, owing to shortage of manpower and artillery it was impossible to undertake any large-scale operation, its activities were restricted to continuous local offensives with very limited objectives. Whole battalions were seldom employed in these adventures, for it was most difficult to concentrate them for the purpose. While in the trenches at Festubert the 71st was continually engaged in small assaults, but by companies only, or companies supported by those of a neighbouring unit. To describe them in detail would be tedious and serve little purpose. It must however be remembered that from the time it fired its first shots in action on 12 December, the 71st were engaged almost daily in most desperate engagements fought out at close range, and usually terminating at the bayonet point. Meanwhile the German artillery bombardment continued without ceasing, lines of trenches were exploded by mines, positions were enfiladed by snipers and machine-guns, and raiding-parties with hand grenades rushed in at all times of the day and night.

The trench system was being elaborated on both sides. In the British Army, Pioneer battalions were raised with the object of relieving the infantry of as much digging as possible—for it was too busy with the bayonet and too exhausted to do much. In fact the Pioneers were constantly having to drop their spades and take up their rifles and bayonets, but as they had been specially trained in digging, whereas the infantryman preferred to take his chance rather than take up the spade, the idea was on the whole a good one. The whole battlefield consequently now became a maze of trenches, linked together by communication trenches which were used by both sides as the front lines changed hands.

It is hardly possible to describe the achievements of the 71st and 74th during this type of fighting in any detail or with accuracy. The situation before Festubert was fantastic beyond description or belief. It was one in which the 71st lost its separate identity; its ranks containing Gurkhas, Sikhs, Punjabi cavalymen from Hodson's Horse and some of the Black Watch. These friends did not even belong to the same Division as the 71st, let alone the same Brigade. However, they were quite welcome as long as they were prepared to fight indefinitely without expecting their meals at the usual times. This they were very ready to do, and so the line still held.

On more than one occasion companies were isolated and cut-off, but continued to hold out while surrounded. After an attack on Le Bassée, for example, 'B' Company was thus isolated during the counter-attack but held out for four days; the last two being spent without food, water or sleep. Its forward trench (taken from the enemy) was mined and blown up, a disaster immediately followed by a German assault with the bayonet, while its other trenches were under constant bombardment. Lieutenant Pitts-Tucker was killed while attempting to take support to the

survivors in the mined trench. The position was finally secured by a Brigade attack and 'B' Company was rescued after a defence which had saved the whole line. The 71st were relieved on 23 December and on their way back to billets in Verdun met the 74th at Givenchy as described. Its casualties during its last four days in the trenches amounted to 2 officers and 54 rank and file killed; 63 rank and file wounded, and 8 officers and 226 rank and file missing. It had captured a considerable number of Germans—the total is not recorded, but 80 were taken in one day and others daily—and as it had brought all counter-attacks against it to a standstill it is safe to say that the other casualties inflicted on the enemy must have far exceeded its own.

During the initial phases of the prolonged period of trench warfare which now commenced, the British Army, besides being outnumbered, suffered from the disadvantage of a serious lack of such stores as are essential to trench warfare. Not only was there a grave shortage of picks and shovels, wire and the like, but the type of grenade then in use was much inferior to that used by the enemy. A further severe handicap was imposed by the chronic dislike of the British soldier for digging which was, and is, extraordinarily pronounced. Various cures for this unfortunate disability have been attempted without success—the organisation of work into 'tasks' and 'man-hours'; the invention of a copybook and impracticable method of using the pick and shovel by numbers as a drill movement; and so on—the fact still remains that, while the British soldier is as ready to take cover in a trench as any other, he prefers that someone else should have dug it for him.

The matter of digging however, was not one of first importance in a large part of the British front during the first weeks of 1915. The country was flat and highly cultivated; owing to the peculiar nature of the soil it had become waterlogged in the constant heavy rain, and so the digging of real trenches became impossible. In front of Festubert, where the line was held by the 74th, the defences consisted of short lengths of breastwork which were lightly held by day but fully manned by night. The ground between the front and rear lines was intersected by the wide ditches, filled with running water, which provided drainage for the fields. They were impassable by infantry and small footbridges had to be constructed by which to cross them. The British defences were under constant observation by the enemy and movement to and from the front line breastworks was only possible by night. Behind the front line numerous strong points were constructed, and wired-in for all-round defence. Supports and reserves were located in these strong points, and also in the various farm buildings in the area. Thus, for the first time in the war it had become possible to adhere to the principle of defence in depth, making the line—when held by troops of such quality—impregnable against all except major attacks, and enabling the troops to get some rest by day.

Although the heavy fighting of the preceding months had died down, this first winter 'in the trenches' was a most miserable experience. Before the winter rains had filled the dykes these ditches had often been used for cover by the troops holding the line. Consequently in many parts they had become an integral part of the defence system, linking up the breastworks and communications. Attempts at drainage and other improvements were of little use in such a country, so that the troops in the line were always soaking wet and covered in mud; their only relief being during the occasional hard frost. Such conditions can be endured and even forgotten during action, but there was no such excitement during this first winter, only the constant threat of it the continual though intermittent artillery fire, and the daily casualties from snipers and machine-guns. Still, exactly one hundred years before, both 71st and 74th had endured even worse conditions on the heights of the Pyrenees, and the 71st again in the trenches before Sebastopol. It is not physical hardship which breaks a soldier, but those often intangible factors which effect his spirit and morale. In the Great War these factors broke the Russians, the

Austrians, the French, and finally the Germans. Never the British.

By the turn of the year neither the 71st nor the 74th was any longer a Regular Army battalion except in name. Their first and second reinforcements had been long since used up and their officers and men dead, disabled or captive. Some few remained, to pass on the regimental spirit and traditions to the half-trained Special Reservists, the time-expired reenlisted soldiers past military age, the raw recruits from the Depot, enlisted since the out-break of war. They would therefore continue to give a good account of themselves but, lacking the skill-at-arms which had enabled their immediate predecessors to halt and then drive back the German hordes, their fighting value was henceforth no greater than that of the Territorial or New Army battalions. At home, in a Great Britain at last awakened to her peril, recruits were enlisting at the rate of 125,000 a month and being formed into fighting formations designed to take the field within six months. It was a noble response and a noble effort, but the New Army never met the Old—it was too late.

During this horrible winter the 71st and 74th found themselves alongside one another in the front-line trenches near Festubert for a few days in February, at a time when the reserve companies spent the nights carrying forward the refuse of demolished farms and other buildings—chairs, tables, doors and planks, for the troops to stand on in the waterlogged trenches. Little took place in the way of operations, but the High Command was at work on the plans for a spring offensive. This, the fore-runner of the great offensives which raged to and fro across the Western Front during the whole remainder of the war, and which gained a mile or so at the cost of countless lives, was not launched for any trivial reason. It might perhaps have paid the Allies to have been a little more patient, since time was on their side, but in the east the Russians were hard-pressed and it was soon apparent that they would be knocked out of the war unless a strong enough effort was made on the Western Front to relieve the pressure bearing upon them.

The position of the British Expeditionary Force was also extremely awkward. Its professional element having been finally extinguished at Ypres it had been unable to do much to assist the French offensives during December 1914, and as a result was now regarded by General Joffre and his Commanders as being no longer capable of anything other than holding the line. Great Britain being by far the stronger of the two Allies it simply would not do, if amity was to be preserved, to allow this idea to remain and fester undisturbed.

Apart from these two prime motives for attempting an offensive, designed in the long run towards a break-through, a further two were present in the mind of Sir John French which convinced him of the dangers of a passive defence. The first was the British tactical position, which lay in the low ground of the Lys Valley onwards; being overlooked in the 1st Army by the Aubers Ridge and in the 2nd Army by Messines Ridge. The second concerned the morale of the British Army. Although this showed no signs of weakening, the dreadful experiences undergone during the first six months of war, nightmares of slaughter ending in a winter spent in freezing trenches waist-deep in water and covered in mud and vermin, certainly pointed to the necessity of a tonic of some sort. Inappropriate as it may seem, to describe the renewal of the offensive under such circumstances as prevailed by the name of ‘tonic,’ the excitement engendered by the preparations, and the consequent forgetfulness of self in battle undoubtedly did have a certain uplifting effect. Sir John French’s dispatch emphasises, a little inadequately, ‘the need of fostering the offensive spirit in our troops after the trying and possibly enervating experiences which they had gone through of a severe winter in the trenches.’ The troops, no doubt, could have expressed their opinion of these experiences in more suitable and telling phrases, but their opinion was not, of course, asked.

The projected British offensive was planned with the capture of the Aubers Ridge by Sir

Douglas Haig's 1st Army as the first objective. In carrying out this task Sir Douglas Haig determined first to capture the town of Neuve Chapelle, which lay in the centre of his front, and then immediately to enlarge the gap thus created in the enemy line by attacking on either side of it, advancing on to the Aubers Ridge. Owing to the weakening of the German line in this area by the drafting of enemy divisions to the Eastern Front, conditions were undoubtedly favourable. The danger lay in the fact that the British troops were now only half-trained; and in the shortage of artillery ammunition, and the difficulty of assembling adequate reserves. The operation however, was very thoroughly planned and the utmost secrecy was observed. In order to give the necessary depth to the attack, considerable regrouping was carried out in the 1st Army, which entailed a vast amount of marching and counter-marching by the infantry; while the uncomplaining horses of the gun-teams, most of whom, like their drivers, had been on the farm only a month or two ago, heaved and strained through the hours of darkness across the sea of mud towards the selected positions for their batteries. It was of course impossible to keep all this movement unobserved by the enemy, who could not help but be aware that an attack was imminent, but its direction and scope was successfully concealed from him.

The offensive was launched on 10 March 1915, and the depth of the attack was such that the Indian Corps, immediately opposite Neuve Chapelle, advanced on a Brigade front with only two battalions up. Such an affair, consisting from the outset of direct assaults with the bayonet on heavily wired entrenchments, depended very greatly on artillery preparation for success. Being the first thing of its kind the effect of artillery fire on a large scale against barbed wire could not be judged from previous experience, and much therefore had to be left to chance. In the event, the assaulting troops found the enemy wire still a formidable obstacle, and although the impetus of an attack in such depth carried them through, the timetable was upset and the enemy given time to react, which he did very quickly. Nevertheless, Neuve Chapelle was taken, and the enemy counter-attack brought to a standstill.

At the commencement of the battle the Lahore Division was in Corps Reserve and the 71st with the Sirhind Brigade was at Richebourg St Vaast. On 11 March, following the capture of Neuve Chapelle, the battalion took up a position to the east of the town behind the Garhwal Brigade which was in touch with the enemy. The battalion went into action on 12 March, when two Companies were sent forward in support of the Garhwal Brigade which was hard-pressed. Immediately afterwards the remainder of the battalion was ordered to attack with the Jullundur Brigade on its left. The Jullundur Brigade however, had not made touch with the 71st when zero hour arrived, so that the battalion, advancing with its left flank exposed, suffered heavily. The battalion reached the line of the rivulet De Layes, which Captain Halswell, commanding the right company, succeeded in crossing. Here the 71st halted, with its left flank still exposed, to await the arrival of the Jullundur Brigade. All along the front the battle raged and there was much confusion. The day wore on with no sign of the Jullundur Brigade, and during the afternoon orders came that the 25th Brigade was organising an attack on the left of the battalion, which was ordered to conform to it. Darkness fell however, with no sign of the attack and the 71st was then ordered to strengthen and hold its present position. On this one day, 12 March 1915, the 71st lost eight officers killed and four wounded, and nearly two hundred and fifty rank and file.

From then until the end of the month the dreary routine of trench warfare returned to the 71st, which suffered a few casualties daily, losing, on the last day, their great athlete Captain Halswell, who was shot through the head by a sniper while still in bandages from a shrapnel wound received when crossing the De Layes. The battalion was relieved on 5 April and went into billets at Calonne where, on the 18th, it was inspected by Sir John French. It gave him great pleasure, he said,

To vet this opportunity of seeing the Regiment and expressing the deep gratitude and admiration which I personally owe to you for the part you played in the recent action at Neuve Chapelle. I wish to express my thanks to each officer, N.C.O., and man for what he did on those days. I have had constant good accounts of the Highland Light Infantry since you arrived with the Sirhind Brigade in November last. There is no more distinguished Regiment in the Army than the Highland Light Infantry, and you bear a long list of honours on your colours. In years to come you will have reason to be as proud of your doings at Neuve Chapelle as of any honour on that list.

I remember that you were one of the regiments that advanced and tried to cross the River De Laves under a withering fire and in spite of every adverse circumstance. But it is at such times that the British soldier shows at his best, and you hung on with that tenacity and doggedness which is the characteristic of our infantry. I am sure that you are prepared to do the same in the future.

I am glad to see that, in spite of all you have gone through, you can still show such a splendid front as you do today. I repeat that I am glad to have had the opportunity of seeing you and telling you how pleased I am with you.

The 74th and the Glasgow Highlanders did not take part in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle but were, as one might say, 'around and about.' The 2nd Division had been ordered to carry out a holding attack in the 'Givenchy Sector in order to prevent the enemy sending reserves to Neuve Chapelle. The attack was carried out by the 6th Infantry Brigade with the 5th in support. The attack failed owing to the meagre artillery barrage leaving the German wire uncut, and as it was not pressed home, being only a holding attack, the H.L.I. supported it by fire only, afterwards taking over trenches in the Cuinchy Sector.

The Battle of Neuve Chapelle was a magnificent effort whose results were far-reaching. It impressed the French and gave the Germans a considerable shock. From then onwards the new British armies were respected both by friend and foe, and thus, even though its tactical objectives had not been entirely achieved it proved, nonetheless, an important stepping-stone to final victory.

At the beginning of April 1915, the British Expeditionary Force took over the Ypres Salient from the French and thus prolonged its front to thirty miles, at a time when Sir Douglas Haig was planning an attack with the 1st Army, and the enemy was planning one against the highly vulnerable Salient. The enemy, perhaps fortunately, got his blow in first and the Second Battle of Ypres developed in which, during the most desperate fighting and with the help, for the first time, of poison gas, the enemy gradually forced back the line—but failed to break it. Although the 2nd Army was thus hard-pressed, Sir John French hesitated to call the 1st Army reserves to its assistance, being unwilling to interrupt Sir Douglas Haig's plans. The battle had raged for a week before the Lahore Division was ordered up from reserve at Vlamertinghe.

The Lahore Division attacked at 2 p.m. on 26 April, having its left on the Ypres-Langemark road, which was the boundary between the British and French and a point, accordingly, to which the enemy was devoting particular attention. The Division attacked with two Brigades up and the Sirhind Brigade in reserve, while the French co-operated on the left. The 71st, forming up outside St Jean, came under heavy shell-fire while doing so, but by deploying at the double and lying down immediately, escaped with a few wounded. The battalion ended the day by taking over the forward trenches of the Manchesters in the Jullundur Brigade, having lost twenty-three rank and file in killed and wounded.

The offensive was renewed on the following morning, and the 71st with two Gurkha regiments advanced between the Ferozepur Brigade on the right and the French on the left. Neither the 71st nor the Gurkhas were easily stopped in an attack at close range, but when the troops on either flank were held up, leaving the Sirhind Brigade forward and unsupported, the

advance was halted. Only a few hundred yards had been gained, but the 71st retook several French guns, which were manhandled to the rear during the night. On this day the 71st lost an officer killed and another wounded, with one hundred and ten rank and file killed, wounded and missing.

This forward position was held throughout the next two days at a cost of an officer and fourteen rank and file wounded. During these two days the battalion position formed an awkward salient, and ‘ the continued tension of being prepared to attack at any moment was very trying for all-ranks ‘—the battalion was expecting the French and the rest of the Division to advance, but they did not. ⁽²⁾

While the 71st was thus isolated almost within charging distance of the enemy, a draft of one hundred and thirty-nine men arrived from home led by a couple of 2nd-Lieutenants and, remarkable as it may seem, actually succeeded in joining the battalion, losing four men in the process. The senior 2nd-Lieutenant had been given the location of the battalion on a map by a staff-officer and told to report to it. In spite of the fact that neither he nor any of his men had ever heard a shot fired in anger before, while their military knowledge was certainly rudimentary, he carried out his order to the letter.

During the night of the 29—30 April the Canadian Division came up on the left and the position became easier. At 2.30 p.m. on 1 May 1915, the Sirhind Brigade attacked in support of the French Moroccan Brigade, and advanced astride the Ypres-Langemark road with the two Gurkha battalions up and the 71st and 4th King’s in support—which seems rather an unfortunate arrangement, but very typical in Indian Brigades commanded by Indian Army officers. The Brigade reached a line within a couple of hundred yards from the enemy, where the wire was found intact with a considerable glacis to be surmounted. As the Moroccans showed no signs of pressing their attack, the Sirhind Brigadier ordered a withdrawal during the night. During this withdrawal, the 71st marched about twelve miles to Ouderon, which it reached at daybreak having lost during the day one officer killed and another wounded, 63 rank and file killed and wounded and 41 missing.

From Ouderon, the 71st marched through Méteren and Calonne to L’Epinette, where the battalion was inspected by the Divisional Commander, who read out the following order from the Commander, 2nd Army:

Having read the very complete and excellent report on the work of the Lahore Division in the heavy fighting near Ypres on the 26th and 27th April, 1915, the Commander of the 2nd Army is confirmed in the views he had formed at the time that the Division had been handled with great skill and determination by Major-General Keary.

Sir Horace Smith-Dorien fully realises the disadvantages under which the attack was made—insufficient artillery preparation on our side and an open, glacis-like slope to advance over in the face of overwhelming shell, rifle and machine-gun fire, and the employment of poisonous gases on the enemy’s side—and that in spite of these disadvantages the troops, although only partially successful in wrenching ground from the enemy, effectually prevented his further advance, and thus ensured the safety of the town of Ypres.

Sir Horace, whilst deploring the heavy losses, wishes to thank the Divisional General, Brigadiers, Commanding-Officers and all ranks of the several arms employed, for the great service they performed for the 2nd Army on these eventful days.

In this respect he would especially mention the following 1st Battalion Highland Light Infantry. Six other regiments were also named; there being seventeen in the Division.

⁽¹⁾ *With the short Lee-Enfield.*

⁽²⁾ *War Diary.*

Chapter XIII

THE BATTLES OF AUBERS RIDGE AND FESTUBERT

Offensive by the 1st Army, 9 May 1915—the 71st relieve the 74th—Inter-Allied relations—the offensive renewed—74th and Glasgow Highlanders relieve the 52nd—the 74th at Ferme du Bois—the 71st at Ferme du Bois.

THE Second Battle of Ypres had by no means ended, when the 71st marched South from Ouderon. The fighting indeed, went on for another week, and in view of the ferocious German attacks on the Salient, the heavy casualties and the apparent chaos on the battlefield, the freedom of manoeuvre which enabled the British Commanders to continue to move whole Divisions in and out of the line is very remarkable. Sir John French had been pinning his hopes on the projected offensive by the 1st Army, and would have been content to remain entirely on the defensive before Ypres, but to help his neighbour, General Foch, had launched his own counter to the enemy assault. This, as of course he well knew, is not good tactics and is indeed, highly dangerous. It was about this time that Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, the 2nd Army Commander, was relieved of his command, and it seems likely—for no explanation was given—that Sir Horace did not like the way things were being arranged. Communications in those days were still very primitive by modern standards, and as it was not so easy as it is now for a Commander-in-Chief to keep his subordinates fully informed of the background, a mutual trust between them was essential—a difficult thing to achieve under such appalling conditions.

It was no doubt therefore with considerable relief that Sir John French acceded to General Joffre's request for the co-operation of the British 1st Army with the French 10th Army in an attack north of Arras. As already stated, the 1st Army was already preparing for an advance, and so the plans of the French High Command were in accordance with those of the British. The line in the Ypres Salient was accordingly shortened, and went on to the defensive except for local assaults ; as many troops as possible were withdrawn, and the Lahore Division returned to the 1st Army where the 74th and Glasgow Highlanders were entrenched near Festubert, a few miles north of La Bassée Canal, and not far from the right of the British line.

For a successful offensive against an entrenched enemy the Allies were far too thin on the ground. Earlier in this history, in describing siege warfare, a preponderance of three to one in favour of the attackers over the garrison is mentioned as being the recognised requirement for the capture of a fortress. This still holds good, for the principles of war are generally unaffected by the invention of new methods and weapons—for, after all, the enemy has them too. General Joffre and Sir John French however, were reluctant to miss the opportunity offered by the German commitments in the east. After his initial successes in East Prussia the enemy still failed to break the Russian line, and in a fresh attempt to do so had withdrawn units from the Western Front to raise new Divisions. An Allied offensive in the West was therefore undoubtedly desirable. The doubt lay in whether the resources available made it feasible. The Allied Commanders thought that they did and so, on Sunday morning, 9 May 1915, the 1st Army attacked between Festubert and Neuve Chapelle.

The attack was launched by the 1st Division with the 2nd Division in support, and by the Meerut Division with the Lahore Division in support. The 5th Infantry Brigade, containing both the 74th and the Glasgow Highlanders, was in reserve to the 1st Division, while the Sirhind Brigade, containing the 71st, was in Divisional reserve. Thus all three battalions of the Highland

Light Infantry were spared the initial assault, which was extremely fortunate for them. Although some progress was made by the 1st Division, it was generally found that the artillery preparation had been ineffective, having failed either to cut the enemy wire, or to find the machine-gun posts which were sited along the front in enfilade. Thus the stormers were launched against a mighty, though almost invisible fortress, before the breaches had been made practicable, and in consequence were mown down in their thousands.

The assault of the 1st Division from the Rue du Bois failed after three separate desperate and gallant attacks. Orders then came for the 5th Infantry Brigade which was manning the breastworks at Loisne, to relieve certain of the more badly stricken units in the front line. 'The Brigade,' says the laconic contemporary account in the *Chronicle*, 'marched all night and relieved the 1st Division South of Rue du Bois. "C" and "D" Companies in the front line. Headquarters and "A" and "B" Companies in the second line.' It sounds quite easy—a matter of routine. It was not. As the battle raged in front of them throughout the whole of Sunday, orders and counter-orders had kept the 74th continually standing-to. The approach march started well after dark, and although it was but a mile or two to the firing-line it lasted as stated, all night. The whole area was in a state of unimaginable chaos. Troops were stumbling about in all directions across the march-route—units of the 6th Infantry Brigade attempting to relieve others on the right of the battalion's destination, units of the Indian Corps trying to relieve the Lahore Division, transport, guns, ambulances, stretcher-parties, walking-wounded—all in the path of the 74th which, to make matters worse, was not at all clear as to its destination, or which units it was to relieve. On arrival at the foot of the communication trenches—which were not trenches at all, but narrow paths between breastworks—they found them blocked with dead and wounded ; with stretchers, ammunition-boxes, revetting material and other debris flung down on top of them. Along this turgid way the 74th had to struggle in the darkness, in single file and endeavouring not to trample on the bodies of the wounded men dying scurvily in a welter of mud and confusion. The ground shook with the bursting of high explosive shells ; the shrapnel banged and whined, and the constant rattle of machine-gun and rifle fire came from the front line ahead, towards which they struggled as quickly as they could, in fear lest they might be too late to relieve the friends who were hard-pressed.

For many of the 74th, officers and men, this was their first experience of war, and they could hardly have imagined it to be anything like this. Yet, so long as someone led them forward, they followed with their spirits in no way damped, but fully prepared to take their own chances in the line undaunted by the evidence before them, of how slender those chances were likely to be. Like all the other regiments on the Western Front, the 74th was by this time very short of experienced N.C.O.s, so that all the leading had to be done by the officers, the rate of whose fatalities consequently vastly increased beyond the normal proportion. Paradoxically, officers were easier to replace than N.C.O.s. They came from the Officers' Training Corps of the public and secondary schools, commissioned after a few weeks as Gentlemen Cadets; also from the ranks of some of the Yeomanry and Territorial Regiments. There were no such sources of supply of N.C.O.s, who are difficult to find even in peacetime, and who have to learn their important and essential job by experience—which takes years. Yet without experienced N.C.O.s the training and discipline of the soldiers suffer, and they cannot be deployed in action.

When the 74th at last arrived in the front line they found it held by a mixed collection of troops, mostly Coldstream Guards and Black Watch. It was still dark, and the front line trenches were in the same state of chaos as the communication trenches along which—except for the stretches which had been blown in—the battalion had just come. It was impossible to carry out any proper hand-over under such circumstances. The troops in the line merely staggered off to

the rear, having reached the stage of exhaustion at which they ceased to care whether they were relieved or not. The relief was still being carried out when an order came for the 74th, who had had no rest for thirty-six hours, to attack at dawn. This order, which could only have resulted in the extermination of the 74th, was fortunately cancelled before the time came—not because of the adverse conditions before the Rue du Bois but because the attack of the Indian Corps had also failed.

The 71st, in the Indian Corps, spent the first few days of the Battle of Aubers Ridge, as these operations were afterwards called, marching to and fro in support first of the Bareilly Brigade and then the Garhwal Brigade, both of whose attacks proved abortive. During these marches, carried out close behind the front line with great difficulty and hardship, the battalion lost seventeen killed and twenty-three wounded without firing a shot. At about 5 p.m. on 17 May, after the battalion had been standing under arms all day in heavy rain at La Couture, the C.O. and Company Commanders were ordered to reconnoitre the trenches held by the 74th, and three hours later the 71st marched to relieve the 74th. Although the march did not take as long as that just previously undertaken by the 74th, it was otherwise similar, with the additional discomforts of heavy rain and a pitch-dark night. The front line trenches held by the 74th were completely waterlogged and filled with their dead and wounded, with which they had been unable to cope, being constantly in close action with the enemy, whose trenches were in places only thirty yards away. Therefore the 71st had great difficulty in relieving them, and by daylight only the two companies in the support line and one platoon in the front line had been relieved. The complete relief did not finish until 3.30 a.m. on 19 May, by which time to the dead and wounded of the 74th were added five officers and seventy rank and file of the 71st.

Thus for the first time since the Siege of Seringapatam the 71st and 74th were in action together, their dead intermingled and lying about the trenches and no-man's land; their wounded in far worse case than at Seringapatam, down in the reeking mud and noisome water with the rain pouring on them and no one with time to give them help. Many still lay there after the 74th had gone, and the trenches were under heavy shell-fire the whole of 19 May. During the following night the 71st, while taking over further trenches held by the 15th Sikhs, managed also to bury 104 of the dead in no-man's land, losing an officer and 45 rank and file killed and wounded in the process. There was no question of flags of truce to bury the dead and succour the wounded in this war. It was fought out at too close quarters, and on too vast a scale to allow of any such chivalrous and humane touches to relieve the horror. When both sides watch each other from a few yards away, fearing treachery and constantly expecting an attack, there can be no intercourse except at the point of the bayonet.

The Battle of Aubers Ridge was therefore a failure—a miserable failure, for the Germans had not even had to call on their reserves. It had failed because the Germans, in obedience to their admirable doctrine that 'sweat saves blood' had constructed defences so formidable that they were impossible to storm by infantry until they had been breached by heavy artillery, and the British had neither the guns nor the ammunition to do so. From a strictly military angle the attempt should never have been made—Wellington might as well have attempted to batter his way into Badajoz with 13-pounders. From Sir John French's point of view however, the strictly military angle was almost of secondary consideration. The failure left him in a most unhappy predicament. He had withdrawn Divisions from the Ypres Salient on an undertaking from the effervescent General Foch on his southern flank to make that flank secure by an attack in force. This had not matured, and the position at Ypres had become precarious. The attack by the 1st Army had been ordered in the expectation of reinforcements arriving from home, but these had failed to arrive because Lord Kitchener read into the strategical situation an opportunity for the Germans to attack the United

Kingdom itself, and so he hesitated to send the New Army across the Channel. On the Eastern Front the Central Powers had broken through the Russian line in Galicia, and it seemed possible that Germany would soon be able to bring back troops to the West. On the British right flank, the French 10th Army had achieved some initial success and the fact that he was unable to exploit it was due, said General Joffre, to the failure of Sir John French to employ his whole resources in the attack from fear of an enemy break-through at Ypres.

Relations between the Allied Commanders had in fact, become very severely strained, and at the conferences between them, at which General Joffre showed none of his customary benignity, it is remarkable that Sir John managed to keep his temper after all the efforts he had made, and the losses which his army had suffered in loyally supporting the French. Although fortunately not at that time under French command he was however, the junior partner, and under constant political pressure to prove to the French that the British were pulling their weight. Consequently, although his troubles were increased by an order to deliver up some of his scanty stock of poor quality howitzer ammunition for the Dardanelles Campaign, he felt obliged to reinforce Sir Douglas Haig with a Division or two and order him to continue the attack. The Battle of Aubers Ridge therefore developed, almost without a break, into the Battle of Festubert. Having learnt from the unhappy experience of Aubers Ridge that it was hopeless to attempt to assault the German entrenchments until a practicable breach had been made, Sir Douglas Haig in his plans for a renewal of the offensive made provision for concentrated bombardments lasting two or three days if necessary. This was certainly a move in the right direction, but he was still tied down to a more-or-less fixed programme, and still linked the infantry assaults with the artillery bombardments in defiance of the military lessons of centuries of experience of siege warfare. Unfortunately the British Commanders had never studied siege warfare, presumably supposing it to be out-of-date. Encountered with it on the Western Front they failed to recognise it as such supposing trench warfare to be something new, requiring new technique which had to be discovered by trial and error. As the *Official History of the War* points out, the fortifications were even given new names as if such defensive works as trenches and breastworks had never been heard of before. It must however be remembered that war is, above all, subject to expediency and any dogmatic criticism of its conduct is therefore out of place. It has been shown in the preceding volumes that there are more ways than one of assaulting a fortress, and that the Duke of Wellington himself did not hesitate to take a chance if time or other factors did not allow him to stick to the rules. Sir Douglas Haig did not have either the time or the resources to be able to stick to them, even had he known them, but had to do the best he could.

The plan involved the breaching of the German line in two places by prolonged bombardments followed by infantry assaults (but without first ensuring that the breaches were practicable) from the Rue du Bois and north of Festubert. That from the Rue du Bois was to be carried out by the 2nd Division, which attacked with the 6th Infantry Brigade on the right and the 5th on the left. The 7th Division was on the right of the 2nd, and the Garhwal Brigade of the Indian Corps, with the Sirhind Brigade in support, on the left. The 5th Infantry Brigade now consisted of five battalions, although they were not up to strength—the 74th had no Field Officers left and was commanded by a Captain—Gausson. They were the 52nd Light Infantry, the 2nd Worcesters, the 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, the 74th and the Glasgow Highlanders. On this occasion the infantry assault was to be made by night, and the 5th Infantry Brigade marched in the darkness to the line of breastworks in rear of the front line which was the forming-up place, on 15 May. The Brigade advanced at 11.30 p.m. on a two-battalion front, with the Glasgow Highlanders in the second line and the 74th in reserve.

As might be expected, this renewal of the offensive with a sounder policy met with better

fortune than had attended the Battle of Aubers Ridge. The 7th Division, which attacked at dawn, carried the enemy front-line trenches, as did the 6th Brigade on the right of the 5th. Unfortunately the general plan was spoilt by the introduction of various rather childish ruses designed to mislead the enemy as to the point of attack. Thus the Jullundur Brigade on the north of the line of advance had been ordered to fire in controlled bursts for some hours prior to the attack. This curious proceeding aroused the suspicions of the enemy, who sent up fireworks and so discovered the 5th and Garhwal Brigades bridging the dykes and forming up for the attack. Therefore as soon as the British field batteries lifted and the infantry advanced, the German machine-guns opened from enfilade on fixed lines; their infantry fired rapid from in front, and their field guns brought down a heavy defensive fire on no-man's land which, besides causing casualties, destroyed many of the bridges over the dykes and completely held up the advance in some places. Only the right half of the Inniskillings, which of course was on the far right of the Brigade, reached the enemy front line trench and dispatched the occupants thereof. The remainder of the Brigade and the Garhwalis on its left could make no headway, and the battlefield degenerated into the same bloody, muddy chaos as before.

The Commander of the 5th Infantry Brigade then very properly determined to exploit the success of the Inniskillings. A fatigue party of a hundred men was ordered from the 74th to dig a communication trench from the German front line, occupied by the Inniskillings, back to the British front line, and the attack was renewed at 3.30 a.m. It proved however, impossible to reorganise the Brigade for this further effort under such conditions. The Worcesters, who were to lead, could not form up in time and the 74th, sent to lead instead, could not get through the Worcesters. Supported by the 52nd, the Inniskillings however got through to the second line, in which they were at once relieved by the 52nd, having suffered very heavily in their gallant effort. The 52nd, in the German support trenches, were heavily shelled all through the next day and so, during the night of the 16—17 May and the 74th and the Glasgow Highlanders relieved them. The circumstances of this relief quite defeat the imagination. Apart from the usual horrid debris, corpses and wounded men blocking the few tumbledown communication trenches, and the ceaseless hail of shells and bullets, it must be realised that the 52nd were in fact in only part of the German line. The Germans were still very much alive in the neighbouring parts, and as it was impossible to reconnoitre in the darkness and turmoil there was a distinct danger, as an officer of the 74th half-jokingly remarked, that the H.L.I. might try to relieve the Germans instead of the 52nd! The lines taken over were, it turned out, only separated from the enemy by a hastily constructed barricade in the trenches. Which side built it is not recorded, but it is quite possible that both sides helped

Early in the morning of 17 May, the 74th were ordered to advance in conjunction with the 6th Infantry Brigade on the right and capture the fortified farmhouse of Ferme du Bois, some three hundred yards in front. The attack was timed for 10.30 a.m., but shortly after 8 a.m. a large number of Germans left their trenches with their hands up and surrendered to the 6th Infantry Brigade. As a result of this sign of weakness in the enemy's morale, a further order reached Captain Gausson at 9.15 a.m. that the attack was to be put in at 9.30. Captain Gausson was at the time with battalion headquarters and two companies in the former British front line trenches, and he was thus given no time to change the hour of attack. He was obliged to take battalion headquarters forward immediately, in order to get the two companies in the captured German trench into the attack on time. The only covered approach was however, the communication trench dug during the previous night; which for most of the way was only waist-deep, finally petering out completely before reaching the German line—the fatigue party having followed the usual British tradition with regard to digging. Captain Gausson therefore had to lead battalion

headquarters across the open, in the face of a withering fire at point blank range from the Germans in the trench immediately on the left of the 74th. He was instantly killed, and the Adjutant and survivors of battalion headquarters only managed to reach the forward companies by wading up to their waists in a ditch, which fortunately joined up with the captured German support line.

This was a very unlucky day for the 74th. Captain Gausson had been given his orders personally by the Brigadier, and had died before he could pass them on. There had been no time—and indeed it would have been impossible—to get the two rear companies forward. Therefore the two forward companies, ‘A’ and ‘C,’ advanced alone, commanded by Captain Hope, and on leaving the trenches encountered very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from front, flank and rear—for the enemy of course, was still in his support line behind them. They were accordingly shot to pieces; reached the enemy defences in insufficient strength to take and hold them, and so were forced back to where they started. Some few survivors returned to their former positions; their dead and wounded comrades lying out on the ground in front, many in great agony but with no possibility of any help for many hours, if not days. During the rest of the day the support companies of the 74th in the breastworks of the British front line, were subjected to a heavy bombardment from their own heavy artillery whose shells were bursting in their rear, on which there was no cover. The signal communications having broken down, they had no means of stopping this inaccurate fire which had accordingly to be endured with further casualties. That night, the 74th was relieved by the 71st, having lost in the Battle of Festubert 5 officers and 51 rank and file killed, and 6 officers and 320 rank and file wounded. Many decorations were awarded for gallant conduct—L/Cpl J. Christy, who led his platoon through after first his officer and then his Sergeant had fallen, and he himself had been badly wounded—L/Cpl J. Smith, who carried messages again and again across the open ground under terrific fire when the telephone lines were broken—many others.

The operations known as the Battle of Festubert continued until 25 May, with further local offensives undertaken in order to consolidate the ground gained. On the 21st the Sirhind Brigade attacked the Ferme du Bois with three battalions up ; the 71st being on the left on a front of three hundred yards with two Gurkha battalions on their right. The advance of the 71st went well, but the Gurkhas were held up by obstacles and machine-gun fire, which brought the whole line to a standstill. The Brigade was then withdrawn back to its starting-point during the night; the 71st having lost 7 officers and 120 rank and file killed, wounded and missing that day. The battalion was relieved on 23 May, but again entered the front line on the 25th, relieving the 41st Dogras of the Bareilly Brigade, in a line of trenches immediately south of Port Arthur.

The description of these operations so far given will no doubt convey the impression that the Battle of Festubert was a serious reverse, attended by much useless loss of life. This in fact, was very far from being the case. The offensive had been launched against exceedingly strong defensive works, with quite inadequate artillery support and with insufficient reserves to exploit success. It had nevertheless resulted in most important gains of ground; while the enemy morale on this battle-front had been shattered, causing the German troops to deliver themselves up in large numbers. Therefore while it would be inappropriate to describe Festubert as a victory, it was certainly a success, brought about by a sound artillery plan and by the astounding gallantry and resolution of the infantry. One may turn the pages of history in vain to find its equivalent. Seringapatam—Assaye—Fuentes d’Honor—Waterloo—all these and many others were won by the gallantry and resolution of the infantry, and it could have been no less unpleasant to be mown down by round shot and grape and charged by heavy cavalry, than to be mown down by shrapnel and machine-gun fire and charged by maddened Germans with bayonets and hand-grenades.

Soldiers have to face these things—but for how long is it possible to face them? The fearful carnage round Ypres and Festubert lasted for three weeks, during which the infantry, even when relieved from the front line, was still under constant shell-fire and at the same time subject to the constant strain of orders and counter-orders, as the fortunes of the battle waxed and waned. So frightful was the experience of carrying out reliefs, or of being relieved, that those in the front line would doubtless have preferred to stay there rather than go through it. Yet with their friends shot down on right and left, themselves waist-deep in mud and water, fighting amid a turmoil of bursting shells and whining bullets which baffles description, and with their lives not worth a moment's purchase they never faltered and never failed. They had to be fed and kept supplied with ammunition. Close behind the front line, in the shelter of some ruined farmhouse the Quartermaster established his dump, where the field cooks endlessly cooked stew, to be sent forward at night in the limbers, sometimes with six horses in them so heavy was the going. Up along the blocked and waterlogged communication trenches went the dixies full of hot stew, and the ammunition boxes, while the limbers returned for more, through the bursting shells. The signallers reeled out miles of telephone wire at the risk of their lives at every step, only to find, when they connected up, that the wire was broken somewhere, so that back they had to go to find and mend the break. The stretcher-bearers gave first-aid and argued between themselves as to whether it was worth-while trying to get a wounded man back. Was he likely to die on the way or not? The officers wandered ceaselessly among their men, telling them what they knew of the progress of the operations, examining minor injuries, asking them about their news from home, and marvelling at their cheerfulness and fortitude.

The British Army was now too low in ammunition to continue the offensive. The attack by the French 10th Army on the right had made no noteworthy progress, and so, to enable General Foch to make another attempt against Vimy Ridge, Sir John French agreed to take over a further section of the French line. The 2nd Division was accordingly ordered south to take over from the French 58th Division.

On its relief by the 71st the 74th had marched by Le Touret, Avelettes and Hinges to billets in Bellerive, and later to Burbure, where the battalion remained until 29 May reorganising and training, having received drafts amounting to nearly five hundred all-ranks. These drafts were not all composed of recruits. Many were men recovered from their wounds and returning to the field, so that the ribbons of the South African War again became prominent in the ranks of the 74th, where the stout old soldiers wearing them were naturally most welcome. On 29 May the 74th relieved a French regiment in the line near Vermelles, to which the communication trenches were nearly two miles long. The 71st, 74th and Glasgow Highlanders now entered a period of trench warfare which lasted throughout June with little of interest to record.

Chapter XIV

THE LANDING ON THE GALLIPOLI PENINSULA

Entry of Turkey into the war—failure of a naval attempt against the Dardanelles— an Expeditionary Force landed—arrival of the H.L.I. Brigade, 2 July 1915—the H.L.I. in the attack towards Achi Baba, 12 July 1915.

ON 29 October 1914, the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* accompanied by a Turkish squadron entered the Black Sea, and without prior warning bombarded the Russian port of Odessa and the fortress of Sebastopol, at the same time sinking all Russian merchant ships they could reach. This led to an almost immediate declaration of war on Turkey by the British, French and Russian Allies. The Turks then sent off two military expeditions, one to seize the Suez Canal and evict the British from Egypt, and the other against the Russians in the Caucasus. The first was so easily defeated as to be a fiasco, but the second gravely embarrassed the Russians, who were already hard put to it to avoid a complete defeat by the Germans and Austrians. In this extremity the Grand Duke Nicholas, Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Armies, asked Lord Kitchener if it would be possible for him to ‘arrange for a demonstration of some kind against the Turks,’ in order to persuade them to withdraw some of their forces from the Caucasus.

The advisability of ‘doing something about the Turks,’ had been present in the minds of the British War Council for sometime, and the idea of striking directly at Constantinople through the Dardanelles had naturally been considered. To provide troops for such an adventure meant however, the diversion of reinforcements promised to Sir John French, whose critical position on the Western Front has been described in the preceding chapter. After much argument it was decided to attempt a naval expedition against Constantinople ; it being no doubt correctly surmised that the effect of a bombardment of the Turkish capital would have a sufficiently devastating effect to cause the overthrow of the government, and the elimination of Turkey from the war.

No ship can pass up the Dardanelles out of range from the batteries on either shore and it is, and has been for a very long time, a principle of naval tactics that as warships are at a heavy disadvantage when engaging shore batteries they should generally avoid coming within range of them. On occasion, however, the risk must be accepted, and it has been successfully accepted many times. By Nelson for example, who turned his blind eye to the signal of recall when hard-pressed off Copenhagen, and by Admiral Seymour whose successful bombardment of the Egyptian Forts at Alexandria has been described in the events leading up to the Egyptian Campaign of 1882. Furthermore, as long ago as 1807 Sir John. Duckworth had forced the Dardanelles with seven sail of the line. This last exploit failed to achieve anything owing to the wind failing the British squadron when within eight miles of Constantinople, but warships in 1915 were not of course, any longer dependent on the wind. On the other hand there were many modern hazards such as submarines and mines which Sir John Duckworth had not had to worry about in 1807, but it might profitably have been remembered, that had he had troops with him his remarkable exploit would almost certainly have been crowned with success, wind or no wind.

Although the prospects of the success of a purely naval expedition against the Dardanelles were thus felt to be doubtful, the position on the Western Front, combined with Lord Kitchener’s fears regarding the adequacy of the home defences, decided the War Council against sending troops. An attempt was therefore made to penetrate to the Marmora with an allied squadron and

failed. The failure was particularly distressing in that it disclosed the weakness of the Turkish garrisons on the Gallipoli Peninsula, so that it was apparent that had a combined operation been launched it would almost certainly have succeeded. The failure to send troops with this first expedition has been blamed on 'the Generals,' whose alleged pre-occupation with 'killing Germans,' on the Western Front at the cost of a million allied casualties in a few months, prevented them from assessing the potentialities of a successful assault on the Dardanelles. It seems to be forgotten that the Western Front was held by allies, and that Great Britain the strongest partner was far weaker in the field than France. To imagine that France, or any ally would be content indefinitely to fight Great Britain's battles on land was, and is, a grave error. This fact was certainly appreciated by Sir John French, but accepted with extreme reluctance and a certain naive surprise by the British Government.

It is also alleged that 'the Generals' had little or nothing to show for the expenditure of a million casualties on the Western Front. This is incorrect. The decisive, and indeed remarkable result, achieved on the Western Front was the holding of the line against great odds in spite of the fact that a gross mis-appreciation of the fighting potential of Germany, France and Russia had led to the comfortable supposition, that a cavalry division and six infantry divisions would be an adequate British contribution to the war on the Continent, and sufficient to ensure the speedy defeat of the Central Powers. Furthermore, no soldier could be expected to agree with a form of strategy involving a dispersal of strength in the form of weak expeditions in no way related one to the other— for Germany, the main enemy before whom her allies paled into insignificance, could only be defeated in the West, and not even by a successful campaign in the East.

Once having embarked on the attempt to force the Dardanelles, the British War Council was unwilling to admit failure of the naval effort as final. An Expeditionary Force was concentrated at Alexandria and sailed for the Aegean in April 1915. It consisted of the 29th Division, the Royal Naval Division, the 1st Australian Division, the Anzac Division, the 42nd East Lancashire Division and the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade. It was commanded by General Sir Ian Hamilton and landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula at various points from 25 April onwards.

The threat to the Dardanelles having been disclosed by the action of the allied fleets, the Turk hastened to look to his land defences and appointed the Prussian Marshal, Liman von Sanders, to the command of the Turkish Army. Therefore by the time Sir Ian Hamilton was able to concentrate his force in the Aegean, he found himself faced with the awful problem of an opposed landing. It is true of course, that this was nothing new in the history of the British Army, which had successfully carried out opposed landings many times in the past. By 1915 however, it had become evident that the fire power of modern small-arms had placed the defence temporarily in the ascendant, and the fate which had attended the offensives on the Western Front, made the prospect of landing on the narrow beaches overlooked by the beetling cliffs of the Gallipoli Peninsula no enviable one. The only regular Division at Sir Ian Hamilton's disposal was the 29th. This Division was from India and represented the last of the old Regular Army, by now destroyed on the Western Front. It was not regarded as being up to the standard of the Old Contemptibles, for it had not had the same opportunities for training in modern and up-to-date warfare, but its individual officers and men were of course of the same type as those of the original B.E.F. and just as skilled as soldiers. Charged with the task of establishing the beach-head it went ashore from the grounded steamer *River Clyde* at Cape Helles, and from various naval cutters along the beaches, carrying out its task with heartrending gallantry.

Unlike their more fortunate comrades in the battles of Mons, the Aisne and Ypres the men of the 29th Division could not, when they first went into action, establish their superiority over the enemy with their skill with the rifle and bayonet. The initial landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula

could be accomplished only by sheer courage; by the exposure of unarmoured human bodies to a hail of lead which knocked them into the sea and felled them on the beaches; while they tore down the defences and poured with blood, but eventually got to the bayonet point and made good the landing. It is interesting that their officers, who had had no illusions of what lay ahead of them, encouraged them with appeals to regimental pride and tradition— ‘Fusiliers, our Brigade is to have the honour to be the first to land.... Our task will be no easy one. Let us carry it through in a way worthy of the traditions of the distinguished regiments of which the Fusilier Brigade is composed....’ Such appeals were not wasted on the regimental soldier of the Old Army. Whatever his views on the cause and justice of the war— supposing he had any—he was absolutely convinced that there was no regiment like his own, and was prepared to face without dismay the prospect of a lingering and painful ending to his service, rather than see its colours dishonoured.

Having no reserves of such men, Sir Ian Hamilton was unable to drive the enemy from his dominating positions at Krithia and Achi Baba and so, after fighting his way for a mile or two at great cost was obliged to report that he could do no more without reinforcements. The British War Council was then minded to abandon the venture, especially as Sir Ian Hamilton himself was by no means optimistic of final success. A considerable amount of what can only be described as dithering ensued, which was finally ended by Lord Kitchener insisting on the dispatch of reinforcements—probably against his better judgment, but in the realisation that someone would really have to make up his mind and give a firm ruling. The conduct of the war at this time was indeed quite deplorable, as might be expected with a pacifist government turned bellicose, and faced with a welter of blood as a consequence of the neglect of its duties in preparing for a war which had been advertising its arrival for many years.

As a result of the decision to continue the Dardanelles Campaign, the 52nd Lowland Division left Scotland in May. This Territorial Army Division consisted of the 155th, 156th and 157th Infantry Brigades and was commanded by Major-General G. G. A. Egerton, C.B., afterwards Colonel of the Highland Light Infantry. The 157th Infantry Brigade was known as the Highland Light Infantry Brigade and was composed of the 5th, 6th and 7th Territorial battalions H.L.I., and the 5th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The three H.L.I. battalions were squeezed into the same transport, the *Transylvania* out from Plymouth. After a brief stay at Alexandria the Brigade re-embarked and sailed north-about, but the ship put back into Alexandria after a few days at sea. A couple of weeks were then passed in the desert at Aboukir, in the grip of the *khamsin*. Finally, and this time knowing that it was bound for the Dardanelles, the Brigade embarked again on 28 June and sailed up to the Aegean. All ranks were in the highest spirits and enjoyed the voyage which was passed very agreeably. Concerts were held every evening— there being no lack of musical talent among the rank and file of those days when men still had to make their own music. Pipe-Major Thomson—killed ten days later—composed *The 5th H.L.I.’s Farewell to Aboukir*, which the pipers played on the fo’c’sle head. Nobody knew what the point was in trying to capture the Gallipoli Peninsula, and nobody cared. The campaign was regarded as an affair of the Cross versus the Crescent. The H.L.I. Brigade were anxious, as Christian men, for the chance of hammering the followers of Mahound, and to avenge the Crusaders by re-taking Jerusalem. The battalions of the H.L.I. Brigade, like all Territorial Army units at that time, were proud to wear the letter T under the regimental badges on their collars to denote their amateur status. They knew very little about military matters but were anxious to learn. Unfortunately the Regular Army, which should have provided their mentors had, as has already been shown, very little time or opportunity of doing so, and the Territorial and Service units had to pick up their knowledge of the military art by experience on the actual battlefield—which is an expensive way of doing it. The Regular Army itself had achieved its pitch of high efficiency largely by verbal instruction,

rather like the pipers of olden times before the system of notation had been invented which allowed the great music to be written down. Very few training manuals had been published, and those which had been were as hard to come by as artillery ammunition, besides being written in a military jargon inexplicable to an amateur, however keen. The officers had made 'repeated study,' of *Notes on trench warfare in France*, but it conveyed little to them except the advisability of shamming dead whenever the enemy sent up flares.

The harbour at Mudros was crammed with shipping, when the H.L.I. Brigade arrived soon after dawn on 1 July. Battleships, liners, cruisers and merchant ships; destroyers, trawlers and submarines. Flags fluttered from the mast-heads, White Ensigns, Blue Ensigns, Red Dusters, Union Jacks and Tricolours, Admirals' Flags, House Flags and Signal Flags. From the bridges of the warships the signallers kept up a never-ending exchange of semaphore and twinkling Morse, while naval picket boats and cutters under both oars and sail plied ceaselessly between ship and ship, and to the shore and back again. It was a sight to stir the blood, and also one to remember by troops hard-pressed on the Peninsula—as a sign that they were not as alone and forgotten as might appear. The H.L.I. Brigade was not allowed long to view it. After being issued with picks, shovels, rations and extra ammunition, they left their cramped comfort in the transport for destroyers and mine-sweepers in which, singing and cheering, they sailed down to the harbour mouth and disappeared into the darkness of the evening of the following day.

The 5th H.L.I., first of the Brigade to land, arrived off Cape Helles at about 8 p.m. in the Destroyer *Raccoon* and the Sweeper, *Whitby Abbey*. Nearing the beach they could hear the roar of the guns, and see the shells bursting among the Turkish positions on Achi Baba. It was the first glimpse of war that any of them had had. The *Raccoon* and *Whitby Abbey* slowed down and went alongside the *River Clyde*, whose battle-scarred hulk now formed a landing place connected with the beach by a narrow pontoon bridge, broken up by shell-fire but still practicable with care. Burdened with their packs and haversacks, their arms, their picks and shovels and many other miscellaneous items the troops clambered up a ladder to the deck of the *River Clyde*, picked their way in single file through her battered interior and descended another ladder from her fo'c'sle head, from which they scrambled ashore over the half-sunken pontoons, boats and planks which were all that was left of the bridge. So the good old ship with her nostalgic name at last provided a passage for Glasgow men.

The battalion was still forming up on the beach when a staff officer arrived, excited and out of breath, to tell the Colonel that he was forming up his battalion on a favourite enemy artillery target, and must move off it to 'No. I Area' at once. He would lead the way, and the battalion must deploy as soon as it passed the top of the cliffs in front.

A more experienced Commanding-Officer would doubtless have refused to let himself be hustled, and have insisted on seeing his battalion on shore and issuing proper orders before leading it off through the night to the sound of the guns; but as this was the first taste of real war that he or any of the 5th H.L.I. had had, the Colonel did not feel himself to be in any position to argue with a staff-officer who presumably knew what he was about, and so allowed himself to be marched off the beach without protest, and the battalion followed in a confused rabble as it came ashore. The night was pitch dark and there was a heavy drizzle, with the rumble of thunder competing with that of the guns and interspersed with the rattle of distant rifle-fire. The ground across which the battalion straggled was covered in shell-craters, dug-outs, blown-in trenches, dumps of stores and general debris. Rockets, star-shells and all manner of other fireworks went up from the enemy lines, and each time the battalion, in faithful obedience to the principles of *Trench Warfare in France*, flung itself on to its faces in the mud and shammed dead. The staff officer, who had only been over the ground in daylight, found that he had no idea where he was.

A gunner N.C.O. in charge of an ammunition dump 'with great good nature,' unrolled himself from his blankets and took charge of the battalion. After leading it through the darkness for another twenty minutes or so, he then made what was apparently to him the hilarious discovery, that on leaving the ammunition dump, he had turned right instead of left. With no thought of criticising—even mentally—two such experts as a Captain on the General Staff and a Bombardier, R.A., the battalion patiently retraced its steps. Suddenly the Colonel disappeared into a hole. His anxious followers hauled him out by the heels and cleaned some of the mud off him. The Staff Captain and Bombardier inspected the hole and announced that the trenches had been found. The H.L.I. had arrived.

Believing its trenches to be in the front line the battalion spent the night repairing them, and was still engaged on this work when daylight arrived and the Turks sent over a few rounds of shrapnel, which 'served to stimulate the flagging energies of the digging parties.' The last company to land did not in fact arrive until '8.30 a.m. when one of the Captains was wounded by shrapnel and immediately sent back again to Mudros in the *Whitby Abbey*.' It was then discovered that the trenches were not in the front line but were 'rest trenches,' to which troops were periodically sent back to recuperate after particularly arduous periods at the front.

The Gallipoli Peninsula was intersected by three great ravines ; that leading up to Achi Baba on the right, that known as the Krithia Nullah in the centre, and that known as The Gully on the left. The H.L.I. Brigade had its left on The Gully. The whole area was dominated by the Turkish positions on Achi Baba, a hill about 700 feet high and only 5½ miles from the beaches at Cape Helles. Over on the left at 'Anzac,' on the edge of the Aegean, the Australians and New Zealanders had established a precarious beach-head to which they had succeeded in clinging, in the face of every effort by the Turk to fling them into the sea. Unless Achi Baba could be taken the position was really quite impossible, militarily speaking, and as the Turk was no mean opponent in the field and had every possible military advantage over the Allies, the prospects of forcing him off this vital feature seemed remote.

The glorious though battered 29th Division held the line in front of the 52nd Division, and against it the Turk in-advisably launched an attack in considerable strength on 5 July. Fought to a standstill by the evening the enemy drew off discomfited and the H.L.I. Brigade was ordered forward to relieve the 87th Brigade in the trenches before 12-Tree Copse. In fact the 5th H.L.I. relieved the whole Brigade, for the Fusilier battalions had by this time been reduced to the strength of companies. When the H.L.I. arrived, never, it will be remembered, having been in action before, they were kept under heavy fire all night, for the Turk evidently expected a counter-attack, being apparently unaware of the straits to which his enemy had been reduced. In these front-line trenches, hitherto so stoutly held with no thought of withdrawal, though hammered into shapeless ditches by the gunfire and filled with corpses, the H.L.I. first encountered the realities of war, as fought on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915. Looking over what remained of the parapet, the Turkish casualties could be seen lying all over the ground in heaps, while further away, near the enemy lines, lay the bodies of the soldiers of the Scottish Rifles, mown down by machine-gun fire over a week before. By this time they were all certainly dead, but for how long had many of them had to lie there, shot through the lungs or stomach, untended under the blazing sun and covered in flies ? From time to time Sir Ian Hamilton and Liman von Sanders—both of them humane men and gentlemen—patched up a temporary truce to collect the casualties but, as on the Western Front, very little rescue work could be done under such conditions.

The H.L.I. viewed these sights with 'an emotion of inexpressible horror' which the discovery of legs and arms sticking out of the walls of their trenches did nothing to diminish. Such civilised

emotions however, do not last long in action and meanwhile, finding themselves holding the line, they were at a loss to know how best to arrange their routine, having had no previous experience of anything of the kind.

Fortunately:

‘Major Fisher, commanding the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, was good enough to let us have a perusal of his *Trench Standing Orders*. Afterwards he allowed Capt. Simson to make a copy of these, which we always referred to as ‘Napoleon’s Maxims’ ... they proved invaluable to us.

Meanwhile we were rapidly learning to adapt ourselves to circumstances ; to sleep soundly on the firestep of a trench ; to extemporise fuel and cooking appliances ; to endure the myriads of flies which swarmed over our food, pursuing it even into our mouths, bathed (and drowned) themselves in our drink, and clustered on our faces, waiting in queues to sip moisture from our eyes or lips ; to live with relish on bully-beef, Maconochie, tea, hard biscuit and jam ; in short, we were becoming able to fend for ourselves.’ ⁽¹⁾

As a preliminary to an all-out attempt against Achi Baba, an attack on a two-divisional front against the forward enemy trench system between the Nullah and the sea was planned for 12 July, with one British Division on the left and the French on the right. Sir Ian Hamilton had originally intended to use the Royal Naval Division for this attack, but as the date for it approached, it became apparent that the Royal Naval Division, like all the others after nine consecutive weeks in the trenches, was incapable of further effort without a preliminary period to rest and refit. There was therefore no alternative but to use the 52nd Division, in spite of the fact that it had only just arrived and that one of its Brigades—the 156th—had already suffered so heavily that its strength had been reduced to 1,400 men, organised into two composite battalions. To carry out so important an attack on first arrival in the field, was asking a lot from a Territorial Division without previous experience, but there was no alternative and Sir Ian Hamilton appeared to have a high opinion of the Division. On what he based this opinion is uncertain— unless it was simply that it was composed of Scotsmen like himself—for since its arrival in the field it had been impossible for either he or any other General to have a look at it, except its own Commander.

The attack by the 52nd Division was planned on a thousand yards front, with the 155th and H.L.I. Brigades up and the shattered 156th Brigade in reserve. Owing however to the scarcity of artillery, the unusual expedient was adopted of attacking in two phases—the 155th Brigade at 7.30 in the morning and the H.L.I. at 4.50 in the afternoon. This arrangement was a bit hard on the H.L.I. whose green troops would be subjected to ‘the long nervous strain . . . as they waited all day in their narrow departure trenches, with a tropical sun above them, no shade and very little water.’⁽²⁾ Being new to war however, the H.L.I. Brigade had no idea that they were being subjected to any unusual treatment, and waited patiently for their chance to have a bash at the Turk, in respectful acceptance of the plans of Higher Authority.

Both Brigades were to attack in four waves, corresponding to the four lines of trenches of which the British system was composed. All waves were to advance straight over the top together without firing, and penetrate to the enemy’s third line which was to be occupied by the first and second waves, while the succeeding waves occupied the second and first lines respectively. Ten per cent of the rank and file and all above three officers per company were held back as first reinforcements.

On the eve of battle the H.L.I. Brigade formed up in its attack formation with the 7th H.L.I. and 5th Argylls forward and the 5th and 6th H.L.I. in rear. As in the Egyptian Campaign of 1882, the troops were in thick serge tunics, (khaki, not scarlet, it is true) and the only concession to the Middle-Eastern sun was the battered old Wolseley helmet. Thus while awaiting the result of the 155th Brigade attack they suffered severely, but were naturally too excited to pay much attention

to their discomfort. The attack by the 155th went well, but owing to very inaccurate information of the Turkish trench system, became confused—very heavy casualties being suffered in searching for non-existent objectives. The artillery preparation switched to the front of the H.L.I. Brigade, who watched with astonished awe as the enemy trenches in front crumbled to pieces in dense clouds of dust which finally blotted them from sight. Then the barrage lifted and the 6th H.L.I. advanced in successive lines through the bursting shrapnel, and into the smoke and dust which hid their objectives. So fine and steady was their advance, as reported by onlookers, that it called to mind the 74th at Salamanca and Vittoria, and one may be excused for fancying the shade of Pakenham riding with them and crying out ‘beautifully done!’ But within the black inferno the enemy held out stubbornly. In desperate hand to hand fighting the objectives were all taken but with grievous casualties. The remnants of the leading wave were driven from the third line by a heavy counter-attack, but the battalion, being reinforced by a company of the 5th H.L.I., retook and this time held it with all other of its objectives secured. The 5th Argylls and the 7th H.L.I. met with less opposition and penetrated to the third line as planned, but the 7th H.L.I. found there was no third line except a spitlock a foot deep. Orders being orders the battalion first wave endeavoured to hold it, but having no cover suffered heavy casualties, until their Colonel discovered the situation and ordered them back.

Although the objectives had been gained and the enemy made no counter-attacks, the fighting went on when darkness arrived and the situation became very confused. The 7th H.L.I. calling for reinforcements, a company from the 5th Battalion was sent forward but found the trenches so crowded that it could not get into them, and was accordingly withdrawn. The company of the 5th sent forward to the 6th H.L.I. had more excitement, being ordered to re-take the third line after the Turkish counter-attack. Having done so it was subjected to a further counter-attack by Turkish bombing parties, who worked up on the flanks under cover. The H.L.I. had no bombs with which to reply, but the troops soon noticed that the Turkish grenades took a long time to go off, being fitted in fact, with 8-second fuses. Accordingly they gathered them up and returned them to the enemy, thus repelling him with his own bombs, although several of them blew themselves up while doing so.

⁽¹⁾ *History of the 5th H.L.I.*

⁽²⁾ *Official History.*

Chapter XV

EVACUATION OF THE GALLIPOLL PENINSULA AND THE BATTLE OF LOOS

Confusion in the front line—trench warfare on the Peninsula—H.L.I. Brigade in the Eski Line—evacuation, 9 January 1916—the Home Front—10th, 11th and 12th H.L.I. arrive on the Western Front—the 74th in the French line—experiences of the 71st—the H.L.I. at Loos, September 1915—grievous casualties to the 12th H.L.I.

DURING the morning of 13 July a part of the Turkish support -'line occupied by the H.L.I. Brigade was so overcrowded, that the senior officer in it passed down the message that a certain section or sections was to withdraw to the second line. The verbal message becoming garbled as usual, during its passage down the line, no notice was at first taken by the troops, who were considerably mixed up and in some places without N.C.O.s. The message was then repeated in peremptory terms ; this time resulting in a hundred or so of the troops leaving the line and falling back in a confused rabble, abandoning the position to the enemy. They were not however fired on, nor did the Turks take the opportunity of reoccupying their support line thus left empty. Before they could do so Captain John MacDonald, who was in position in rear with 'B' Company of the 5th H.L.I., having seen what was happening, telephoned back for instructions. Receiving no reply he took his company forward on his own initiative and re-occupied the trench without opposition—although he was killed in this trench later in the day.

During the afternoon, preceded by the usual artillery bombardment, a battalion of the Royal Naval Division attacked on the right of the 155th Brigade and suffered very heavy casualties for no apparent reason, and with nothing to show for it. It afterwards appeared that the incident described, in which some troops left the captured trench—incidentally taking their prisoners with them—under the impression that they were under orders, had been represented to Corps Headquarters as one in which two battalions of the H.L.I. Brigade had fled in panic. This news so shook the Corps Commander, General Hunter-Weston, that he relieved General Egerton of his command in the field, and sent in a Brigade of the Royal Naval Division which attacked across the open only to find its objective still occupied by the H.L.I. As the H.L.I. Brigade bitterly remarked, if the Naval Brigade really wanted to get to these trenches it could have gone up the communication trenches without loss. The unfortunate Marines however, had been misinformed and when they found their objectives occupied by friends and not enemies, supposed that they had come to the wrong place and suffered further heavy casualties while vainly looking for the Turks.

In Sir Ian Hamilton's dispatches this unfortunate affair was described in truer perspective, but even so, the account finally given in the *Official History of the War* still refers to a 'panic' which spread among a few troops of the 7th H.L.I. who were, it says, quickly rallied by the Adjutant, Captain Linton, and taken back again. Captain MacDonald, says the *History*, 'also helped to fill the gap.'

The truth is, that Sir Ian Hamilton's confidence in the 52nd Division was not shared by the Corps Commander and his Staff, who were exceedingly anxious and doubtful of the wisdom of using a new and untried Territorial Division in an attack of such scope and importance, and were therefore on the look-out for unfortunate incidents. Owing to the confusion following the capture of the objectives, news of the situation was hard to obtain, and on going forward to see for themselves the staff officers found that the forward troops of the Division were making no

attempt to reorganise the captured trenches for defence, but were milling about in them in a somewhat helpless manner. This was no doubt correct, for the military knowledge of the unfortunate Territorials was still very limited and, having got completely mixed up during the attack and lost many of their officers and N.C.O.s, they were now standing crowded in the Turkish trenches with no hand-grenades or entrenching tools, and at a loss to know what to do next. There was however certainly no panic among them, nor was there any reason for any, for the Turk had been decisively beaten, and could do nothing further than attempt a few local counter-attacks, which were stoutly repelled as already described. If there was any failure it was on the part of the Divisional Staff who might have issued clearer orders on the consolidation of the objectives—although even had they done so, it seems doubtful whether any such orders could have made up for the lack of training of the officers and men. An inspection of the front line was carried out in detail by two first-grade staff officers who reported the following morning that they had found them far from secure. In some places long stretches of front-line trenches were unoccupied. The losses in officers had been very heavy and few of those who remained had any idea of their whereabouts or of the situation on either flank. The men responded quickly to orders but were all nearly dead with fatigue. It is a sad, a moving and a stirring picture, and it is indeed tragic that so gallant an effort, in which all that the 52nd Division had been called upon to do was done—and at a cost of over 2,500 killed and wounded—should have been marred by inaccurate and misleading reports.

Commencing with the 155th Brigade, the 52nd Division was relieved during the next few days by the Royal Naval Division and taken into Corps reserve. Although the fact was not appreciated at British G.H.Q. at that time, in the action of Achi Baba Nullah the Turks had been heavily defeated, with casualties in excess of 9,000 exclusive of 600 prisoners of war.

Subsequent operations on the Peninsula being largely directed from the Anzac and Suvla Fronts, those of the 52nd Division on the Helles Front degenerated into the dreary routine of trench warfare, which in so confined a space, could not be relieved even by local offensives and amounted purely to holding the line. Disease, chiefly dysentery, became the chief enemy, and as there was nowhere for the troops to rest and recuperate the hardship suffered was considerable. Even when the H.L.I. Brigade was 'resting,' it was under constant shell-fire and could only parade at night. Church parades for example, which though voluntary attracted full turn-outs, were held in the dark and the only light allowed was the Padre's torch with which he read the lessons. Hymns and Psalms were sung *pianissimo*, but the National Anthem was invariably bellowed out defiantly, with a patriotic fervour which certainly seemed to show that the troops' spirits had become in no way damped by the hardship, danger and monotony of their existence. Indeed it was far otherwise difficult as it may be to believe, they actually got a good deal of fun out of it, one way and another. As is usually the case of course, under conditions in which life becomes so cheap as to be hardly worth considering, hearty laughter was caused by events which under normal conditions would be regarded most seriously. When General Egerton was going round the lines of the H.L.I. Brigade for instance, he passed an officer's servant cleaning his officer's revolver. There was a sudden bang and a bullet whistled past the General and knocked over his orderly, who was walking in front. 'Hey you!' bellowed the General, 'what the devil do you think you're doing? Shot my poor bloody orderly and damned nearly killed *me* ! Are you satisfied ?' 'No, Sir,' answered the soldier, to the great delight of his comrades.

By September 1915, both British and Turks were exhausted, and the position was one of complete stalemate in which the enemy still held all the advantage of position. It was then at last decided by the War Council to abandon the enterprise and, as Sir Ian Hamilton was dubious of the possibility of withdrawing from the Peninsula without disaster, he was replaced by Sir

Charles Monro. So momentous a decision as to evacuate was not, of course, arrived at without prolonged argument and discussion, but eventually the risks of losses amounting possibly to 50,000 men were accepted, and all Allied forces had been withdrawn from the Gallipoli Peninsula by 9 January 1916.

This successful withdrawal, from under the very noses of the enemy, was an even more astonishing performance than the successful initial landings, and may be justifiably claimed to be unique in military history. Considering that the Expeditionary Force was able to achieve two such apparent impossibilities as first to land and then to withdraw from a narrow peninsula held in force, it may seem strange that it should have been frustrated in action. This however was solely due to lack of resources and also apparently, to a failure of military intelligence which was likewise manifest in France. It is odd indeed, how inadequately informed all commanders were—allied and enemy—about what went on ‘on the other side of the hill.’ It was certainly not appreciated that the Turks at Gallipoli had been knocked about to such tune, that one more effort might well have sent them packing. However, to have attempted the capture of the Peninsula at all, in view of the situation on the Western Front, was certainly a wrong decision, and based upon faulty appreciation.

The last action fought by the H.L.I. Brigade in the Dardanelles Campaign was on 20 December 1915, when occupying the Eski Line near the Krithia Nullah. Its purpose was part of the general plan for covering the evacuation of Anzac. An attack upon certain Turkish trenches, without artillery preparation, was carried out during the night by the 5th H.L.I. supported by two Companies from the 7th, and grenade teams from the 6th H.L.I. and 5th Argylls. The attack, which was launched from two directions against the flanks of the enemy position was both well-planned and gallantly and efficiently executed, though at a heavy cost in officers. Very well-deserved congratulations were received by the 5th H.L.I. from the Brigade, Divisional and Corps Commanders. The Turkish trenches, which had been unsuccessfully attacked many times before captured, were held by the H.L.I. against all counter-attacks until they were relieved.

The H.L.I. Brigade spent Christmas in the Eski Line under heavy bombardment, and was relieved on 8 January 1916, which day was spent in the destruction of stores. That night the troops were organised into parties of fifty, and once more entered the *River Clyde*, from which they were taken off by lighters to the transports. The final evacuation was completed during the following night amid scenes reminiscent of Corunna, dumps being fired, transport destroyed, animals pistolled and magazines exploded. The fires and explosions woke up the Turks, but by then all troops were at sea, thankful to be quit of the inhospitable peninsula, in sorrow at the thought of their many comrades fallen in action upon it, and in regret that in spite of all their efforts they had not succeeded in overcoming the Turk. However, as Lord Allenby was to demonstrate in due course, there are more ways than one to Jerusalem.

At home all this time, the troubles of the Asquith Government had been steadily increasing, as the full magnitude of the effort required to carry such a conflict as this through to victory became more and more apparent. The criminal lack of preparation for it began to dawn on the public about the time of Aubers Ridge which had been lost, declared *The Times*, for lack of ammunition. It was not the only lack—practically everything was lacking necessary for waging war. The country was obliged to undergo the immense industrial upheaval required in putting its economy on a war footing, while at the same time the submarine menace imposed a partial blockade which looked as if it might well turn into a total one. The Kaiser at last gave his reluctant consent to the Zeppelins being sent over London—on the strict understanding that they were not to drop any bombs near Buckingham Palace. There was no way of preventing them coming whenever they wished, for the anti-aircraft gun had not been invented and the fighter aircraft was only just

emerging from the stage of circling slowly round an opponent while the observer endeavoured to bring him down with a rifle. Although the casualties caused by the bombs were trifling, this carrying of the war to his door-step greatly upset the citizen of London—for there was nothing he could do about it except blame the Government and shout ‘baby-killers !’ at the Germans.

These domestic worries were in no way eased by contemplation of the general war situation, which went from bad to worse. The repeated defeats suffered by the Russians eventually obliged the Tsar to relieve the Grand Duke Nicholas and take command himself—for he had no other soldier capable of doing so. As the Tsar had no military knowledge and a far from strong character, it was evident that this spelt the beginning of the end for the Russian effort in the field. From nearer home the Government continued to be embarrassed by French complaints that Great Britain was not pulling her weight on the Western Front. It was no use answering that Great Britain was making the major effort in the Dardanelles; had the defence of Egypt and the Imperial trade routes to consider, and was involved in campaigns in Mesopotamia and against the German possessions in Africa. The French had mighty German armies at their own front door, and could not pretend to be able to hold them back much longer without substantial aid, let alone drive them out.

‘Unfortunately sufficient numbers of heavy guns, of high explosive shell and of implements of trench warfare, were all Lacking owing to British unpreparedness for war; the B.E.F. was not in 1915 in a condition to make the effort that our French Allies expected of the British Empire in a Life and death struggle.’ ⁽¹⁾

As far as the provision of soldiers was concerned, the necessity for conscription in the near future was another unpleasant fact to be faced by the Government, for the country was nearing the end of its ‘volunteer potential’. Recruiting was falling off, not from any weakening of resolve but because those who had not so far enlisted were in good jobs and could see no reason for giving them up unless all did so. There is a definite limit to the number of those who, from patriotism, a sense of duty, or a robust inclination for adventure, are prepared to abandon everything and follow the drum, but in this country the number was fortunately very considerable—far more than could be armed, equipped and trained. Troops therefore continued to pour across the Channel and the constant rhythmic sound of marching feet inspired the lyric-writers, who turned out some of the best marching songs ever produced ; *Keep the Home Fires Burning—There’s a Long Long Trail a-Winding* and so on, although for some reason, *It’s a Long Way to Tipperary*, handed down by the Old Contemptibles, remained the favourite and became the signature tune, as it were, of the British Army during the Great War.

On the Western Front the Battles of Ypres and Festubert were succeeded by a period of comparative quiet, during which both sides repaired and improved their defences, and the B.E.F. took over more of the French line as a result of continued pressure from General Joffre. The 9th Scottish Division arrived in the field containing, in the 28th Infantry Brigade, the 10th and 11th Service battalions H.L.I., which were billeted near the 74th at Burbure. The 10th were commanded by Lt.-Col. J. C. Grahame, with Lieut. J. F. Anderson as his Adjutant—both of the 74th. At the end of May the 74th marched through the French mining district south of Bethune, and relieved a French battalion in the trenches south-east of Vermelles. The immaculate state of the French trenches came as a salutary shock to the 74th after its lengthy experience of the British trenches in Flanders. They were deep and dry, with dug-outs as comfortable as billets. The communication trenches provided complete cover to and from the line, and newspaper boys came up them from the nearby towns and villages to sell their papers to the troops. Instead of being within shouting distance, the German trenches were in some parts as far as a thousand yards away and, in deference to the French troops’ desire to be left in peace and quiet while there was no

actual battle going on, the occupants refrained from making any warlike demonstrations or noises. After a few days in this uncanny atmosphere the 74th could stand it no longer, and moved back to billets in the rear from which the front-line trenches could be kept under observation and re-occupied if necessary.

This difference between the British and French methods of waging war is most interesting and attracted much attention at the time. During the periods between the great offensives, when it was officially 'All quiet on the Western Front,' the British casualties continued to be a steady three hundred a day, caused in raids and other minor activities, and by the shell-fire resulting from the policy of keeping the enemy in a state of jumps. On the British front the enemy was continually being stirred up, whereas on the French front he was left alone. Which was right is difficult to determine. It was not a question of the difference in national temperament. Neither in the Lines of Torres Vedras nor in the trenches before Sebastopol had the British Army considered it its duty to be continually stirring the enemy up. In the Great War however, the fear always seems to have been present that the troops might become apathetic if not kept constantly in action. Possibly with a civilian, as opposed to a regular army, and one which there had been no time to train properly before it took the field, there may have been something in this. It did seem to be a bit overdone however, and resulted in the most junior commanders in the line ordering a little rifle practice to stir up the Hun and break any period of quiet. Still, if it was a fault, it was one in the right direction, and may well have had a good deal to do with the fact that the British Army retained its fighting spirit undiminished throughout four years of war, fought under the worst possible conditions.

The German penetration into France and Flanders had by May 1915 assumed the form of a vast salient, such as always offers the temptation to make an attack upon it, and General Joffre, still obsessed by the necessity for defeating the enemy before Russia was driven from the field, determined to do so. He required of course, the fullest co-operation of the B.E.F., not only to take over more of his line but to stage an offensive in support. Being still short of heavy artillery the British Commanders were by no means enthusiastic and Sir Douglas Haig—who certainly could never be accused of lacking the offensive spirit—said that he could see little use in staging an offensive under such conditions. Political considerations being paramount however, Sir John French was unable to resist the French pressure and gave way against his better judgment. Having endeavoured without success to have the offensive postponed until 1916, he proposed that the B.E.F. should take over the line in the north as far as the Channel Ports, and should put in its main attack north of La Bassée Canal where Sir Douglas Haig—on whose judgment Sir John increasingly relied—considered there would be the best chance of success if the thing had to be done. General Joffre would not agree to either of these conditions, and in the best compromise which Sir John could secure, the B.E.F. was committed to an offensive at Loos, and with its forces divided -one wing being on either side of the French 10th Army. There being no apparent tactical reason for this arrangement it would appear designed to ensure that the B.E.F. became heavily committed as far as possible away from the Channel Ports, so as to remove all temptation from the British to leave their friends in the lurch. A proposal by General Joffre that he should have the right to decide on the allied objectives and the dates of offensives appears to have been verbally agreed to by Lord Kitchener about this time, but as a temporary measure only.

The Allied offensive was finally planned for 25 September 1915. Meanwhile the New Army Divisions poured into France, bringing the total of Imperial troops to twenty-eight Divisions, organised into three armies and numbering 916,605 men. Among them was the 15th Scottish Division—a very fine one—which had been raised at Aldershot in September 1914, and included the 12th H.L.I. in its 46th Infantry Brigade. This brought the total battalions of the Highland

Light Infantry in the field up to eight—five in France and three in the Dardanelles. During the weeks preceding, the offensive trench warfare went on as usual. The following extracts from the 71st diaries are typical

From June 8th to 20th is a long record of trench warfare, bombing by both sides and artillery fire. The enemy appeared very 'jumpy.' On the 15th a minor operation in the shape of a bomb party was unsuccessful owing to lack of support from the 9.2 guns. The casualties during this period were 5 killed and 53 wounded.

On the night of July 9th—10th special precautions were taken, the enemy being reported massing in front. Lieut. Forster with a patrol got up to the German wire during the night and reported on its strength, etc. On the night of July 11th—12th the same officer with a patrol went up to the German wire and found the top wire removed and heard the sounds of loosening sticks. On the same night Lieut. Whiteside with a patrol discovered paths cut through the German wire. In consequence the battalion stood to arms all night and bursts of rapid fire were kept up on the German trenches until 1.0 a.m. On July 12th a memorial cross was erected just E. of Brewery, to the 8 officers and 106 N.C.O.s and men killed there on March 12, 1915.

16th (August) relieved the Connaught Rangers in trenches at Neuve Chapelle. On the 18th they began the construction of listening posts about 60 yards in front of the line, to be approached by covered ways. While inspecting the construction of this work Captain R. C. W. Alston was killed and 1 man wounded. On the night of the 19th there was a considerable increase of the enemy rifle and machine-gun fire which greatly hampered the working parties. Casualties—1 killed, 4 wounded.

In such close contact with the enemy things often got very mixed up. Sergeant Henderson, Scout Sergeant of the 71st, during some small affair was bayoneted through the shoulder, shot through the hip, and wounded in the head by a piece of shrapnel. He did not seem to notice any of these inconveniences at the time. Finding himself lying in the middle of the dark turmoil of no-man's land, he crawled painfully in what he took to be the direction of his own trenches, but arrived in rear of a German trench and in the darkness mistook the helmeted Germans for Sikhs. 'Help !' he called. What was obviously a German speaking English sharply demanded his identity. 'A wounded Englishman!' he replied, no doubt rightly judging that this was no moment for national pride. The Germans hauled him into the trench, picked his pockets of everything he possessed, attended to his wounds and left him at the bottom of the trench. They were in action, and several times a dead or wounded man fell off the fire-step on top of him. The man who had challenged him turned out to be a waiter from the Savoy Hotel—'the waiter Johnny,' he called him. Eventually he was carried off to the rear with the other wounded, and was much impressed by the nonchalant way in which the stretcher-bearers marched across the open instead of toiling up the communication trenches. Although very kindly treated himself he reported on his return—having been exchanged—that he had seen the Germans shooting the Gurkha wounded, and certainly his experience while in German hands did not seem to cause him to take any liking to them.

In the hope of making up to some extent for the scarcity of howitzer ammunition, the plans for the Battle of Loos included the use of the chlorine gas so effectively employed by the Germans at Ypres. It was brought into the front-line trenches in cylinders, which forty gas officers had been specially trained to let off at the appropriate moment. It was indeed a double-edged weapon, depending for its effect upon too many unforeseeable factors to be of any great value in the field. The chief of these factors was of course the wind, which was accordingly

studied by the Commanders on the eve of battle with every bit as much anxiety as the Lords of the Admiralty watched the weather-gauge off Brest in the days of sail. What appears to have been a very stupid mistake lay in allowing no initiative to the gas officers who, in accordance with orders, had to turn on the taps at zero hour regardless of local conditions—for communications were so indifferent that it was most difficult to change the orders for the front line within an hour of an attack.

Dawn on 25 September 1915, found the front line troops lying about on the fire-steps and in the mud of the trench bottoms endeavouring to snatch a little sleep before going into action. They required no orders to stand-to, for the terrific roar of the artillery bombardment which opened at 5.50 a.m. brought them to their feet. The gas hissed out of the cylinders, and its yellowish fumes mixed with the smokescreen to form a dense cloud all along the battle-front. The dixies of tea and stew were handed round, and the officers walked about with cheering words, chiefly speculations on how the Hun was enjoying the gas. At 6.15 they lined the parapets, waiting while the minutes ticked their way to zero hour. At 6.30 they went over the top, and with their rifles at the high port advanced across the open in extended lines with fifty paces interval between each line.

The 15th Scottish Division attacked with two Brigades up directly towards Loos. In the 46th Brigade the 12th H.L.I. sent two Companies with the first wave, who were to remain in the captured German trenches until the rest of the battalion passed through them. Although many men were suffering from the effects of our own gas, the advance went well and passed over the German trenches with no pause to collect prisoners. The 44th Brigade on the right reached and advanced through Loos, while the 46th Brigade took Hill 70 and the H.L.I. captured six guns (later exhibited on the Horse Guards Parade). The flank of the 44th Brigade was however exposed, and as the German third line came into enfilade on the left an attempt was made to halt the advance. But by this time so many officers and N.C.O.s had fallen that there was no way of stopping it. The leaderless troops pushed on. down the far side of Hill 70 towards Lens, finally disintegrating in front of the machine-gun fire which poured upon them from three sides. The remnants of the two attacking Brigades then dug themselves in below the crest of the hill. Orders came to withdraw the H.L.I. and Scottish Rifles, owing to their severe losses, but this could not be carried out. The exposed left flank was defended for twenty-four hours by Lieut. McNeil and part of 'C' Company in the face of repeated bombing attacks and continuous rifle and machine-gun fire.

During the battle 'A' and 'B' Companies of the H.L.I., entered the German front line with the leading wave as ordered. Once there, they separated and, in the task of clearing the trenches bombed their way towards each other. 'A' Company having lost all its officers was led by the Company Sergeant-Major—Bruce. The grenades issued to the B.E.F. at this time were extremely poor quality, requiring to be ignited after the manner of a safety match and most unreliable. Fortunately some stocks of German bombs were discovered in the dug-outs and with these—combined with a display of the utmost courage and initiative the two Companies cleared several hundred yards of trenches and at last joined hands.

The 12th H.L.I. came out of action during the evening of 27 September and, led by its one remaining piper, marched back to billets. Its losses in the Battle of Loos amounted to 21 officers and 532 rank and file, of whom there were killed 12 officers, 3 Company-Sergeant-Majors, 10 sergeants, 12 corporals and 38 privates. 182 were listed as 'missing,' but of these only 16 were later reported prisoners of war, so that the remaining 166 had all to be presumed killed in action or died of wounds.

(1) Official History.

Chapter XVI

THE EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN

The 74th and Glasgow Highlanders at Loos—Defences of the Suez Canal—the H.L.I. Brigade at Romani, May 1916—the advance to El Arish—the H.L.L Brigade cross into Palestine, 20 March 1917—at the Second Battle of Gaza, 17 April 1917.

THE 2nd Division attacked astride the railway line and canal to La Bassée, with the village of Auchy as one of its objectives. It met with misfortune from the start, owing to the wind changing and blowing the gas clouds back into the faces of the advance. The wind also cleared the smoke screen, so that the attacking troops were in full view. The 5th Infantry Brigade attacked with three battalions up, the 74th being in the centre of the first line. The Glasgow Highlanders were on the right of the Brigade, operating in conjunction with the left leading battalion of the 6th Brigade, and just north of the Canal. Owing to the huge mine craters which surrounded the objective of the 74th, that battalion was obliged to attack on a single-company front. In this manner it reached the German front line, which was heavily manned and elaborately constructed. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting ensued, during which the battalion became completely mixed up, and so passed on to the second line. Here they found themselves lost in a maze of trenches in which the German bombing parties held a considerable advantage, for their stick grenades could be thrown much further and with greater accuracy than the British bombs, which in any case could seldom be ignited. Thus the 74th became gradually forced back down the communication trenches, which became a complete shambles from the dead and wounded of both sides. The enemy artillery and machine-gun defensive fire made it impossible to leave them, while in many places the devastating effect of the bursting grenades in the narrow trenches was augmented by the fact that the filthy chlorine gas was hanging about the trench bottoms. The British respirators were canvas hoods, saturated with chemicals which irritated the skin when activated by sweat, which also clouded the talc eyepieces and blinded the wearers. Fighting in these desperate conditions step by step, the 74th at last regained its own trenches, having lost in the one day, eight officers and three hundred and twenty-one rank and file, killed, wounded and missing.

The Glasgow Highlanders had an even worse experience, being heavily gassed by the clouds of chlorine drifting northwards across their front from the cylinders of the 6th Infantry Brigade. The battalion advance was also on a very narrow, half-company front, and by the time the leading waves, using gas-sprayers, had struggled through the chlorine, the battalion came under heavy machine-gun fire. The attack was then halted by order and the battalion withdrawn, having suffered in casualties' one officer and one hundred and eighteen rank and file killed and wounded.

All other of its attacking battalions having been driven back in a similar manner, the 2nd Division therefore failed to make headway. The German defended localities at Givenchy and Cuinchy were however the strongest held between Ypres and Arras, forming a pivot for any advance which the enemy might have in mind against the coalfields south of Bethune or against the Channel Ports. It seems unlikely that the High Command could have expected one Division to prevail against them. In fact, although it had failed to hold its objectives, its Brigades were informed that they had succeeded in carrying out the role expected of them, which was to prevent the enemy from transferring reinforcements from opposite their front to support their line against the main attack further south.

Nevertheless, the failure of the 2nd Division to capture Auchy gravely prejudiced the attack of the 9th Scottish Division upon the Hohenzollern Redoubt and the Dump—a slag heap forming the main German observation post south of the village. The 9th Scottish Division advanced with two Brigades up, the left of which attacked along the Vermelles Road to Auchy. This was the 28th Infantry Brigade, in which the 10th H.L.I. was on the left of the first line and the 11th H.L.I. on the right of the second line.

Along the front of the 28th Brigade the wind dropped just before the attack, and the gas when released came back into the trenches and gassed the troops waiting to go over the parapets. No doubt seeing the gas clouds and knowing that an attack was about to be launched, the enemy then put down a heavy barrage on the trenches, which blew up the gas cylinders and caused many casualties. Advancing across the open with no smoke screen, the two leading battalions, 10th H.L.I. and 6th K.O.S.B., were mown down by machine-gun fire and could not make their objectives. The 10th H.L.I. lost 15 officers and 577 rank and file to no purpose, but got off more lightly than the unfortunate 6th K.O.S.B. which, at the end of the day could parade only a corporal and 46 men, having lost all its officers and 630 rank and file.

Disaster having thus overtaken the two attacking battalions the 11th H.L.I. was ordered to send forward two companies to support the K.O.S.B., and the 9th Scottish Rifles were similarly ordered to help the 10th H.L.I. This latter order was then cancelled, as none but dead and wounded could be seen in front, but the two 11th H.L.I. Companies went forward, and a few survivors joined an officer and about a hundred men of the K.O.S.B. which was all they had left at that time.

Orders were then received from the Corps Commander, who evidently did not realise the situation that the 28th Brigade was to make a further effort at 12.15 a.m. assisted by artillery fire. A direct attack by the one and a half battalions remaining was obviously so hopeless that Colonel Fergusson, commanding 11th H.L.I. asked to be allowed to take his two companies across Hohenzollern Redoubt, which had been captured by another Brigade, and attack the German positions from the rear. This was not thought to be feasible and the 9th Scottish Rifles and two Companies 11th H.L.I. advanced at 12.15 as ordered. Advancing by rushes, some of them reached the German wire, but as it had been untouched by the artillery at this point they could not get through, and were shot down while trying. Only on the extreme right, a half-company of the 11th H.L.I. occupied and held the German redoubt known as 'Little Willie' which they held until relieved two days later. Also on the 26 September a hundred assorted soldiers of the Brigade—H.L.I., K.O.S.B., and Scottish Rifles, were relieved from the German front line trench known as 'Madagascar,' which, under the command of Sergeant Cummings 11th H.L.I., they had spent the night in reversing and making ready against a counter-attack.

Of the five battalions of the Highland Light Infantry on the Western Front only the 71st was not in action on the first day of the Battle of Loos, for the Lahore Division was in Corps Reserve. In its shelters on the Rue Tilleloy the battalion was in fact under fire the whole day, but its casualties were slight. The other four battalions, as has been shown, were all destroyed, suffering casualties most distressing to contemplate, while the only one lucky enough to achieve any practical result from its gallantry and sacrifice was the 12th H.L.I. One must not however, consider any battle purely from a regimental point of view—if one were to do that, many an historic and brilliant action would assume the mantle of black tragedy. At Assaye, for example, the 74th lost 420 out of 500 in doing nothing but hold its ground. At Loos the Highland Light Infantry put a little over 4,000 into the field and lost only about half. Again, if one is to criticise Sir Douglas Haig for sending unarmoured men against machineguns it would be only fair to pour contemptuous scorn upon the Duke of Wellington, for sending 6,000 men against 60,000 and

eleven guns against a hundred. At Loos at any rate, as at Assaye, the day went better elsewhere.

Elsewhere, on the 25th September, aided by favourable local wind conditions which enabled the attack to be delivered under cover of clouds of gas and smoke, the German line had been pierced at many points and substantial and important gains had been made. The B.E.F. however, had taken over so much of the line from the French, that only three Divisions could be made available in general reserve and these, instead of being placed at the disposal of Sir Douglas Haig, whose 1st Army had made the attack, were held by the Commander-in-Chief too far back for Sir Douglas Haig to be able to use them to exploit success. When therefore the attack was resumed with their aid, the Germans had had time to rally and to patch up the holes in their front. The battle continued until 14 October after which, both sides being spent, the position again became one of stalemate. No battalion of the Regiment being again engaged after the initial assault the concluding stages of the battle, which led to no further results of importance need not be described.

At home, where ill-judged optimism had led to extravagant hopes of a general break-through, the failure of the Allied attacks caused great disappointment, in which the magnificent feats of the half-trained Divisions in a major offensive, undertaken against the considered advice of the high command did not attract the admiration which they undoubtedly deserved. Mistakes there had been, but they had been such as were only to be expected in an army possessing lamentably few trained staff officers. Indeed, the fact that the whole affair did not result in irretrievable disaster but in certain definite gains, was almost miraculous. The morale of the troops, who considered that given a little better fortune they could have been on their way to Berlin, was as high as ever. However, Sir John French was removed, appointed Commander-in-Chief Home Forces and rewarded for his services with a peerage which he certainly deserved. There was little argument over the appointment of his successor, for there was really only one man with the capacity for such a post—Sir Douglas Haig.

While these events were taking place on the Western Front, Sir John Nixon was struggling across the desert towards Baghdad with an Indian Expeditionary Force landed at Basra to prevent the Turks from seizing Mesopotamia and gaining control over the Persian Gulf. Like all the other British Commanders he had been entrusted with a major operation with quite inadequate resources to carry it out, and had modestly suggested that he should be reinforced by one of the Indian Divisions from France. It being considered doubtful in any case, whether the Indian troops could stand another winter on the Western Front, both the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were sent to him and in November 1915 the 71st accordingly left France for Mesopotamia.

Before the Indian Corps could reach Mesopotamia the advance on Baghdad had failed and General Townshend's force which led it was beleaguered in Kut. At the same time the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal was causing grave anxiety following the failure in the Dardanelles. Although the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was immediately transferred to Egypt after evacuation from Gallipoli, it had taken such severe punishment on the Peninsula that its units were not expected to be fit to repel a major assault on the Canal for some time; yet it was evident that the Turks, once freed from the Dardanelles, would lose no time in making one. Their previous effort, it will be remembered, was a fiasco, leading to large numbers of them coming to the undoubtedly fitting end of being drowned in the Canal. Their next attempt under the direction of Marshal Liman von Sanders was rightly expected to be more impressive and it was realised that the Canal must henceforth be defended, not on its banks but in prepared positions well clear of it. The task of constructing such defences was enormous, and it is very interesting to note that it was undertaken by the civilian engineers in Egypt, using Egyptian labour, while the army covered it from in front. It is a pity that a similar expedient could not have been adopted on the

Western Front. The Duke of Wellington's fortifications before Torres Vedras provided a sound precedent, and, when a tiger of the size provided by the Central Powers is at large it would appear sound policy to cage him first and destroy him later.

The Suez Canal defences consisted of a number of redoubts, defended localities and trench lines about eleven hundred yards east of the Canal and running from the Red Sea northward to the Mediterranean in the Bay of Tina. They were organised into four Sectors of which the most northerly, bordering on the Mediterranean, was held by the 52nd Lowland Division, the Anzac Mounted Division and the 158th Infantry Brigade. The H.L.I. Brigade arrived in its position by a circuitous route, which had afforded it every opportunity of recovering the high spirits necessary in order to be able to assist in the evacuation of the Saracen from Jerusalem—travelling by Mudros, Alexandria and Cairo. Meanwhile the romantic revival of the spirit of the Crusades had not been neglected by the Turk, who made every effort to unite all followers of the Prophet in a *jihad* against the Christian—that being the only possible way of uniting them. The Turk however, had not endeared himself to the inhabitants of Egypt and the Holy Land during his lengthy period as overlord of these provinces. Lawrence had little difficulty in stirring up the Arabs against him, while the Egyptians were only too ready to do anything in their power to keep him out of their country. Only the Senussi rose, in the Western Desert, and they were soon put down in a campaign conducted by Sir John Maxwell—although their rising caused considerable anxiety while it lasted.

Sir Archibald Murray, Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force—as the former Mediterranean Expeditionary Force was now named—had no intention of remaining long on the defensive, and with a view to an ultimate advance in strength the construction of several railways was commenced, leading across the desert to the Palestine Border. Transport was always, in those days, a tremendous problem in the planning of a desert campaign. Wheeled transport could not get over the sand, and water had to be provided for the horses if it was to move at all. In fact the only suitable transport was that provided by the railway or the camel—of which vast numbers were required to serve the needs of a whole army, and they were just not available. On arrival at Kantara on the Canal, the H.L.I. were highly amused to find the broad-gauge railway line under construction labelled 'Kantara—Jerusalem Railway.' They regarded this optimistic nomenclature in the same light as that which occasionally inspired the gunners to chalk 'to Kaiser Bill—with love' on a 9.2 shell. The time was not so far distant however, when many of them travelled to and from Jerusalem on this same railway.

In May 1916, the 52nd Lowland Division moved to Romani, which had been made into a strong defensive position with its left flank—held by the H.L.I. Brigade, resting on the sea. With the advent of the hot weather, in which the temperature inside a tent rose to 123° Fahrenheit, and the extreme scarcity of water which had to be brought in by camels, the troops had a very hard time of it. The Turks, however, were certainly no better off, in spite of their ability to exist on water which British horses would not touch. They had begun to move down along the coast, and thanks to air reconnaissance and information obtained from prisoners taken by the cavalry patrols, Sir Archibald Murray was very well informed of their numbers and whereabouts.

Thanks also, to the scarcity of water in the Sinai desert, Sir Archibald was furthermore enabled to make a very accurate forecast of their intentions. It appeared to him unlikely that they would concentrate their whole strength against Romani, but would divert most of it towards other parts of the Suez Canal defences. This would present him with a flank, and as he was much stronger in cavalry than they were he had little doubt as to the outcome.

In this event, a combined Turkish-German force, commanded by the Oberst Freiherr Kress von Kressenstein and amounting to about 16,000 men advanced against Romani at the end of

July. As its movements corresponded almost exactly with the Commander-in-Chief's forecast, his cavalry was enabled to go out against it and inflict a heavy and decisive defeat. The only thing that went wrong in this otherwise brilliantly-conducted affair, was that it was fought out at high speed too far away for the infantry to support the cavalry. Until the enemy withdrew, the infantry was unable to leave the defences. When they did so they were unable to catch up with the cavalry, in spite of superhuman efforts. The cavalry horses, having galloped about the desert for two days and more carrying anything up to twenty stone apiece and the majority unwatered for sixty hours, were unable to press the pursuit, and as Kress von Kressenstein had prudently arranged a series of defences in parallel he was able to fall back in good order with nearly two-thirds of his force. The H.L.I. Brigade whose troops, like all the infantry, were not in the best of condition after their hard time in the desert heat, were among those who—with their packs on their backs, their water-bottles filled with brackish, chlorinated water and their haversacks with tins of bully beef—set out across the desert by forced march to endeavour to support the cavalry. The battalions were greatly under-strength, and in the ranks were large numbers of middle-aged men and boys who had been far from truthful when the tolerant recruiting sergeant had enquired their ages. Also, apart from their advanced or tender years they were city men, unused to an active life. Toiling over the desert sand with empty water-bottles and empty bellies—for they could not eat their bully under such conditions—they could think of nothing except gushing water-taps and Glasgow on a wet Sunday evening. It would be impossible to describe the agonies of such a thirst to one who has not experienced it. R.S.M. Mathieson of the 5th H.L.I. who was nearing fifty years of age and had charged with the 74th at Tel-el-Kebir, said that even the thirst he had in '82 was nothing to it. Packs were discarded and left to be brought on later, but still the sweat ran down their eyes and dripped from their chins, soaked their uniforms and trickled from the ends of their fingers. Nobody fell out, but many passed out, and were left lying unconscious on the desert. The cavalry and the Bikanir Camel Corps were sent out for them and brought most in, but there must have been many overlooked, one fears.

The Battle of Romani, though little more than a skirmish in comparison with the vast offensives of the Western Front, had very far-reaching effects. The Turk was never again able to threaten the Suez Canal the initiative passed to the British, and a timely uplift was given to British prestige. During the following months, while Sir Archibald Murray was preparing for an advance into Palestine, his cavalry roamed the Sinai desert, while the 52nd Division marched eastwards with frequent halts in numerous obscure oases. Leisurely as this perambulation was, the troops continued to suffer considerable hardship, principally caused as the cold weather months drew closer, by hunger. Their rations were extremely poor, consisting of limited bully, tea, jam, sugar and bacon, and the weevily biscuits of Nelson's day. The old-time seaman acquired the knack of knocking out the weevils by tapping the biscuit on the mess-deck, but the troops did not understand this nautical art and so, the pangs of hunger overcoming their initial disgust, consumed the weevils along with the biscuit and were greatly relieved to find they suffered no harm as a result. Their usual breakfast, eaten before dawn and a stiff day's march, consisted of half a mess-tin of tea—sometimes with a little sugar in it—a minute scrap of bacon offered by the orderly between his thumb and forefinger, and a couple of these biscuits.

Being in the field the battalions never, of course, bivouacked other than in formation and with the usual precautions against discovery and surprise. Smoking and fires were not allowed after dark. The picquets of the H.L.I. Brigade were consequently not a little taken aback one evening, when an Australian Regiment of Light Horse swept in from the desert and bivouacked under their noses. They had a battery of Horse Artillery with them, whose gun-wheels had been broadened with pedrails for taking the sand. Their method of bivouacking in the field was definitely

Australian. Huge fires were built, round which the saddles were stacked to form beds and pillows for the troopers. Amid a din which might have been heard in Jerusalem the horses were watered, fed and picketed, the troopers drew their dinners and ate them round the fires with loud talking and laughter, succeeded —when the dinners were finished—by even louder songs. Their departure was quite a different matter. By dawn they were twenty miles off and the H.L.I. picquets hardly heard them go.

During their training at home the H.L.I. had been taught to leave their encampments tidy, and the habit had by now become so ingrained, that they even collected all their rubbish and buried it while in the open desert. Consequently, when the morning sun illuminated the Australian bivouac, they observed the fantastic litter with the gravest disapproval. Feelings changed however, when an investigation found that there were enough sides of bacon, ham, cheese, bread, Maconochie's (tins of stew), sacks of onion and dried vegetables to 'make us all certain of a full meal on Christmas Day —so long as we did not move in the interval.' Apart from food, the excited scrounging parties from the H.L.I. brought in 'folding benches and tables, matting and bivouac poles, frying pans and canvas buckets, books and tobacco, a watch and even a real live horse.' The Australians in fact, did not have to fight on a diet of bully, tea, milk and weevily biscuit. There was no reason why they should if they could do themselves better. But one wonders why the British Infantry, which at that time was still admitted to be 'the arm that in the end wins battles,' should—not for the first, nor the last time—have been treated so disgracefully. It did not however, seem to occur to the infantry to make any complaint— it never does, and perhaps that may be the reason.

The Australians on this occasion were on their way to El Arish and, as was their custom before going into action, had lightened their saddles of all the various impedimenta which they had picked up on their travels—for an Australian horseman was unable to keep his hands off anything he might find lying about. On arrival at El Arish however, they found the Turks gone. Following up hard, the 52nd Division entered the town on the next day, 22 December 1916. Here, new drafts arrived by sea for the H.L.I. Brigade, and those who had performed the desert march from Kantara watched their antics with a grim interest—pouring with sweat in their shirtsleeves and constantly reaching for their water-bottles; while the old hands wore their tunics and could hardly raise a thirst. The old hands were also able to show off their Arabic

—*saida, bint*—greetings, woman. It is very interesting to note that the diaries of the H.L.I. Brigade refer bitterly to a camel train which got mixed up with them, and caused much inconvenience and delay to the 52nd Division hastening through the night to El Arish. The *Official History* on the other hand, refers to the inconvenience and delay caused to the Mounted Division moving on Magdhaba, by the 52nd Division getting mixed up with its camels.

In two brilliant actions the Mounted Division destroyed the Turks at Magdhaba and Rafa, clearing the Sinai Peninsula and opening the way into Palestine. In this desert war the rate of advance could be measured, not by the pace of the infantryman but by the speed at which the pipe-line supplying the force with water could be extended—and this was not fast. The First Battle of Gaza, which was joined on 26 March 1917, was a forceful attempt at a *coup de main* by the bold use of mounted troops, and very nearly succeeded. The reasons for its failure have been the subject of much argument but in short, may be said to have been the result of lack of co-operation between the cavalry and infantry—the latter being unable to keep up and provide the necessary support at the right time. The 52nd Division took no part in the battle, being in reserve, and in fact on the line of march, while it was being fought. The Division had crossed the Palestine Frontier at dusk on 26 March, its pipers playing the customary *Blue Bonnets over the Border* and thereafter, in an endeavour to get to the guns, undertook a night march described by a

participant as 'a Marathon race in Hell.' Halted on 27 April, which was spent in the receipt of endless orders and counter-orders, the H.L.I. finally occupied an outpost position overlooking the Wadi Ghuzzeh, and that night the completely exhausted troops of the 54th Division retired through it. The 52nd then prepared for a Turkish counter-attack which did not materialise, for the Turks too, had had enough. The H.L.I. Brigade accordingly bivouacked at Inserrat.

The attempt at a *coup de main* having thus narrowly failed, Sir Archibald Murray at once commenced the preparations for a second attack. These took three weeks which the Turks, inspired by their German leaders, put to good account. The Second Battle of Gaza, which opened on 17 April 1917, accordingly took the form of a deliberate attack upon a strongly defended position, such as could only succeed—as had been proved on the Western Front—with very strong artillery support. The Egyptian Campaign was unusual, in that in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force the cavalry was the dominant arm, and indeed it was handled with great brilliance throughout; its scope being limited only by the question of water. Cavalry however, is not intended for attacking strongly defended localities, and therefore in the attack on Gaza the plan should have been based on the infantry. Instead, although it is true that the infantry made the main attack, they did it in such a manner as to help the cavalry— on a wide front, that is, designed to support the cavalry movement south of the objective.

In the Second Battle of Gaza the 52nd Division advanced on Gaza from the south on a two-Brigade front with the H.L.I. Brigade in reserve. The 53rd Division was on the left; the 54th, 74th, and Mounted Divisions on the right. The attack was supported by warships, artillery firing gas-shell, and eight tanks. The artillery available however, was nothing like sufficient to silence the Turkish batteries and machine-gun posts. Advancing up the Es Sire Ridge the 52nd Division was at first under cover, but as the leading Brigades came under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire both from the front and the left flank, the 155th Brigade on the left suffered heavily and delayed the advance, being finally held up by a Turkish lunette which changed hands several times.

The H.L.I. Brigade had formed line of battle at Burjaliye, advancing at 4.45 a.m. with the 6th H.L.I. on the right, the 5th H.L.I. on the left, the 7th H.L.I. in the centre and the 5th Argylls in reserve. The Brigade marched into action at this grisly hour on empty stomachs ; no tea, rum or cigarettes while standing under arms awaiting the signal to advance. Sir Garnet Wolesley even with his lack of transport had managed far better than this in '82. The Turks on the first objective—Tel el Ahmar—were however taken by surprise in the half-light, and after firing a few volleys hastily decamped when the H.L.I. got to charging distance. All at first went well and the Brigade advanced to the Mansura Ridge, having the satisfaction of sending both enemy outposts and cavalry vedettes flying. The tanks, which accompanied the infantry were either knocked out, fell into nullahs or seized up in the heat, and appear to have been regarded by the troops with a kind of sardonic amusement, coupled with admiration for their crews. The infantry had by now been issued with the Lewis gun which, though heavy and cumbersome, was an admirable weapon. They still however, carried the old long Lee-Enfield, which took a different cartridge to the Lewis gun; causing a not inconsiderable complication over the loading and distribution of ammunition.

The 155th Brigade having been shot to pieces, the 7th H.L.I. supported by the 5th Argylls were sent to reinforce it and eventually relieved it, and were finally joined by the rest of the H.L.I. Brigade. The 7th H.L.I. however, suffered very heavy casualties in attempting to push on where a whole Brigade had failed. The reinforcement of failure, rather than the exploitation of success appears indeed to have been a feature of the battles of that period, although well-known to be extremely unsound tactics. It would seem to have been due to the fact that communications

in battle were so poor that commanders seldom if ever could be fully informed of the situation.

Chapter XVII

THE PALESTINE CAMPAIGN

The H.L.I. Brigade at the Third Battle of Gaza, 25 October 1917—a creditable affair at the Wadi-el-Hesi—the pursuit—the Monastery of Emmaus—the Valley of Ajalon—the capture of Jerusalem, 9 December 1917—the H.L.I. Brigade at the Passage of the Auja—raising of the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I.

IT becoming apparent that there was no hope of breaking through the Turkish defences, the attack was gradually halted and the British troops dug in. Thus the second attempt on Gaza failed like the first, and the battle degenerated into a period of trench warfare. This did not happen without the Turks making every effort to drive the British off all commanding positions, but in this they generally failed. In beating off the repeated counter-attacks the H.L.I. Brigade had some exciting adventures. A Lewis gun section of the 5th H.L.I. was over-run and every man killed or wounded except the N.C.O., Corporal Maclean, a very powerful man, who drove off the enemy by picking up the gun and firing it from his shoulder. On another occasion an officer's patrol ran straight into the advancing Turks in the darkness, and in the resulting affray the officer found himself alone in the middle of the enemy third line. He had the wits to advance with it, a Turk on either side, until a favourable opportunity occurred to bayonet them both and make himself scarce. His brother officers considered that he had been able to carry out this exploit because he was wearing a Balmoral and 'looked like a Turk,' but in fact it was not an unusual expedient and often successful.

Following the Second Battle of Gaza, Sir Archibald Murray was relieved by Sir Edmund Allenby. He had performed most notable service in organising the advance from Egypt, and laying the foundations for a successful campaign in Palestine. He was however, more a Staff Officer than a leader. A leader was now required and—certainly at least for that particular campaign—there could have been no better choice than Sir Edmund Allenby.

What was known as the Third Battle of Gaza opened on the 25 October 1917? The Turkish lines ran from Gaza to Beersheba, and Sir Edmund Allenby, having been heavily reinforced, soon succeeded in breaking them, capturing Beersheba and driving the Turk from the outer defences of Gaza. The infantry assault on Gaza was launched on 1 November by the 21st Corps consisting of the 52nd, 54th and 75th Divisions. Having suffered heavily during the trench warfare following the second battle, the H.L.I. Brigade was in Corps reserve following up the advance; a position which was no sinecure, but required continual mopping-up attacks with the bayonet against enemy positions by-passed by the leading troops.

On evacuating Gaza the Turkish garrison had split into three detachments, of which one occupied a position along the north bank of the Wadi el Hesi, a watercourse—nearly dry at this time of the year—about six miles beyond Gaza. The 21st Corps had halted to reorganise, but as it was urgently necessary to prevent the Turks from consolidating on the Wadi, the H.L.I. Brigade, with a squadron and a battery under command, was sent forward to turn them out. The Brigade accordingly marched off along the shore, covered by the high cliffs on its right, with the 6th H.L.I. as advanced guard. When about a mile short of the Wadi, the 6th H.L.I. turned inland, and took up a position facing it. The 5th and 7th H.L.I. continued northwards, having orders to advance across the Wadi and attack eastwards on Ras Abu Ameire, an entrenched position on a high dune, which the cavalry squadron had reported to be strongly held.

By the time these orders were received it was dark, and the H.L.I. had been marching all day

through sand ankle deep in a blazing sun, wearing steel helmets and carrying packs. Nevertheless they set off immediately and crossed the Wadi, when it was still just light enough to enable a bearing to be taken on the objective, against which the advance was then continued by compass. While moving towards it the 5th H.L.I. was met by a cavalry troop which reported having just been driven off Ras Abu Ameire with the loss of its officer. A hill being reached the leading companies were fired on from in front, and an officer's patrol was sent forward to make sure of the objective. It returned with the information that the enemy were entrenched on a hill in front, and this was accordingly assaulted with the bayonet. Only two Turks were bayoneted however; the rest decamped. At dawn further trenches were discovered and cleared by the 5th and 7th H.L.I. and the position was consolidated—the H.L.I. having done all that was required of it. The great merit of the operation, states the *Official History*, 'lay not in the quality of the opposition it had overcome, but in the speed with which it had been sent on foot and in the advance over unreconnoitred ground in pitch darkness.'

Facing Ras el Ameire was another ridge running southerly from Burbera and known to the British troops as 'Sausage Ridge.' On it the Turks were still in strength, and the 155th Brigade was ordered to attack it from Ras el Ameire. To enable it to form up on the left of the H.L.I. Brigade, the 7th H.L.I. was ordered to clear the northern part of the Ras el Ameire, which it did at the bayonet point, and with great dash. Then, while the 155th Brigade was assembling on the Ras el Ameire in the darkness, the H.L.I. Brigade received orders—at 1.30 in the morning—to support its attack on the right. The Brigade Commander—Brigadier-General Hamilton Moore—accordingly assembled his battalion commanders on the Ras. The 6th H.L.I. which had remained south of the Wadi el Hesi protecting the Divisional artillery, was ordered to cross the Wadi south-west of Sausage Ridge and carry out a turning movement. The 5th H.L.I. and 5th Argylls were to advance directly upon the objective, while the 7th H.L.I. was to be in reserve. The whole affair was very hurried, for while these orders were being given, the 155th Brigade had already started its advance. For the first time since the Third Battle of Gaza started the men were allowed to discard their packs.

The 5th H.L.I., with the 5th Argylls on its right, moved down into Herbie during the afternoon of the following day and advanced through the orange groves, where the troops plucked the ripe fruit off the trees as they passed by. Before they could cross the flat ground in front of the objective darkness had set in, and under cover of it the two battalions carried the objective, at the bayonet-point. The Turks put in a strong counter-attack and forced them back again under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. But they returned to the attack without orders, for most officers had fallen and most N.C.O.s, so that private soldiers were organising themselves into parties and going in with the bayonet. It is said that the private men were enraged at seeing their wounded bayoneted by the Turks, but why seek for reasons for resolution and gallantry? It was a matter of fighting spirit and character.

It is certainly true, that any Turk they could catch got short shrift, and that they took no prisoners. In all, the 5th H.L.I. made four separate assaults, during which they lost twelve officers and about two hundred rank and file. The 7th H.L.I. then passed through them and, with the assistance of the 6th H.L.I. moving up from the south, and the remains of the 5th Argylls, finally took and held the position.

The effort of the H.L.I. Brigade at the Wadi el Hesi was sufficiently notable to attract official attention in a campaign distinguished by the brilliance and gallantry with which so many of its several actions were conducted. 'There were cases,' reported Brigadier-General Hamilton Moore, 'of companies and platoons forming themselves up and going forward to the attack without officers or N.C.O.s leading them. All ranks in the leading waves who survived took part

in all four attacks.’ This was the more remarkable, in that the action was fought out in pitch darkness, when a private man or men who found themselves alone and without leadership or orders might well have gone to the rear, or at most have taken cover and remained where they were without any blame being attached to them, or any reflections being cast upon their conduct. ‘This was the most severe of our night attacks and the most costly,’ wrote the 5th H.L.I. ‘There must have been many individual acts of gallantry but the most outstanding feature of the operations was the collective grit, determination and bravery of the Battalion. Looking at the position next day, with our dead lying where they fell, one wondered how any human valour could have sufficed to capture it, and that not once but four times. There was none of the glamour of leadership about this fight. In the pitch blackness every man had to lead himself and it says much that all led enemywards.’ When the 6th H.L.I. came in from the south and finally cleared the position of the enemy with the bayonet it took forward with it scores of men of the 5th H.L.I. and 5th Argylls who were still fighting it out with the Turk at close quarters, alone and in groups, and all leaderless.

Thus the Turk was prevented from consolidating north of Gaza and now, with his line broken and the British and Imperial cavalry riding hard round his left flank from Beersheba, his only hope was a hurried retirement on Jaffa and Jerusalem. In the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, with a man of Allenby’s capacity at its head he had met his match, being out-manoeuvred and out-fought; but he was no man to surrender tamely when the day went against him, and to the end of the campaign continued to resist in the fiercest manner with his morale unshaken. The men of Glasgow, surprised at his fatalism and his cries upon Allah—the Merciful, the Compassionate—said that he ‘gave them the creeps.’ Therefore when stalking him in the dark they had the fear of the unknown to contend with, as if the known dangers of battle were not enough. As has been shown, no coward fears ghostly or material, held them back, although in these night attacks it was rather as if Tam o’ Shanter, when he discovered the witches’ coven, had charged in amongst them instead of doing a bolt.

While the cavalry pressed the pursuit of the Turkish right wing beyond Jaffa and harried the enemy columns retiring on Jerusalem, the 52nd Division marched north through El Butani, Isdud and Yebnah to Ludd, hard on the heels of the Turkish rear-guards. The H.L.I. Brigade was constantly in action, usually at night, or if it was not in action would spend the night, more often than not under arms, deployed along the crests of the Judean Hills so close to the enemy that fires were forbidden and movement cut down to the minimum. The troops, wearing khaki drill tunic and shorts, were often so cold that by morning they would be almost speechless and could barely move. Occasionally they got a drink of hot tea at dawn, and sometimes rum—but this was rare. Seldom has the withdrawal of a beaten enemy been followed up so closely and so relentlessly. Not even Wellington had been able to keep so closely in touch with his enemy’s rear-guards as to ensure that they never stole so much as a day’s march—for it is no easy matter to keep touch with large forces retiring along their lines of communication. Both commanders and troops incline to ease off and give way to their fatigue—particularly British troops, never inclined to hurry themselves over the pursuit of a beaten foe. Allenby’s powerful personality, however, imposed itself upon all the ranks the moment he took over command and sent a driving force of such strength flowing through the arteries of the army, that not even the private soldier felt able to relax for a moment.

On 18 November, the H.L.I. Brigade bivouacked near Ludd, where orders were received for the 52nd Division to march north-easterly to cut the Turkish lines of communication from Jerusalem. It was a night of heavy rain, spent without cover in drenched drill uniforms. The H.L.I. Brigade was ordered to march against Beit Duqqu and had difficulty in finding its way in

the darkness, crawling along an execrable road often in single file. At daybreak the Brigadier, having been erroneously informed that there were no enemy in Beit Duqqu, sent only the 7th H.L.I. against it and ordered the remaining battalions to move against Beit 'Annan, a mile and a half to the south-west, along an old Roman road. This road proved to be by no means up to the usual Roman standard, being far from straight and often completely disappearing.

The 7th H.L.I. marching to Beit Duqqu by the track 'known locally as' the Ancient Road,' found it to be indeed so ancient that they were unable to distinguish it in broad daylight. The leading company turned south instead of north and so appeared on the Turkish right flank at Beit 'Annan, which was a great help to the 5th H.L.I. which was engaged in a frontal attack on the enemy position at the time. The Turks withdrew, Beit 'Annan was occupied and the 6th H.L.I. sent to help the 7th over Beit Duqqu.

Here the enemy was also dislodged after a sharp fight and the H.L.I. Brigade bivouacked on the ground won, spending another cold, wet night without rations and on the constant look-out for a counter-attack, for the enemy had not retired far and one of his companies was still holding out in a walled garden, which was part of the Franciscan Monastery of Emmaus. As day broke the soaked, starving troops could hear the Monastery bell ringing for Matins. A company of the 5th H.L.I., sent to find out if the Turks were still in the Monastery garden, climbed the wall and, having found that the enemy had left during the night took the opportunity of enquiring if there was anything to eat in the Monastery. They were hospitably received by the brethren who hastened to kill a pig for them. The 5th H.L.I. stayed three days in the Monastery, which was in a commanding position on a hill-top, and were succeeded by the Divisional Staff. The Monks were exceedingly friendly, and apparently quite unmoved by the tide of war which ebbed and flowed over their hospice. In the Palestine Campaign the manner in which the Religious Houses were able to carry on their usual routine respected and untouched by the combatants of both sides, is indeed remarkable. The Turks indeed, who were in far worse case than the British, might have been forgiven for looting them, as they did not subscribe to their beliefs. Those in Portugal and Spain had fared far worse at the hands of Christian men during the Peninsula War. But the Turk had been the custodian of the Religious Houses and Holy Places of three religions in Palestine for many centuries, and evidently could not now bring himself to molest them, in the hour of his defeat.

While the H.L.I. Brigade was engaged in this affair they could hear the guns of the 75th Division, far to the south-west, as it drove the Turks back on Jerusalem. The Holy City was not only of considerable tactical importance but its possession was naturally one of enormous prestige value. In a last endeavour to hold it, the Turk brought forward his whole reserves from Damascus to launch a counter-attack west of the city. The 7th Division had driven a deep wedge into the enemy's positions about Nebi Samwil, which, in the face of heavy Turkish counter-attacks the 52nd Division sought to extend across the Jerusalem-Jaffa Road. The H.L.I. Brigade was heavily shelled during this fighting, though in Divisional reserve, and ended holding an outpost line from Beit Izza to Khurbet Neda.

The enemy then directed his main effort against Beit Ur el Tahta, where the line was held by the Yeomanry who were unable to maintain it. The 4th Australian Light Horse rode in on foundered horses and temporarily plugged the gap, until the 52nd Division could be diverted to this post of danger, which it reached during the night of 29 November 1917. The H.L.I. Brigade occupied the ridge overlooking the Valley of Ajalon—in which the Amorites were slaughtered while Joshua stayed the setting sun. The Brigade had scarcely taken over from the Australians when the enemy attacked in force, coming up the ridge in short rushes, flinging bombs. They were driven back but reformed and came again, this time penetrating part of the line and having

to be evicted with the bayonet. The line thus held, although the Turk made a final effort during the following night, again penetrated the line and was again forced back at the bayonet-point. He then lost heart and gave up.

On 9 December 1917, the Westminster Dragoons, riding up the road from Bethlehem with the advanced guard of the 53rd Division, found that Jerusalem had been at last evacuated by the Turk. Thus Jerusalem once again fell to a conqueror—the thirty-fifth time in its turbulent history. Sir Edmund Allenby arrived before it on 11 December and entered on foot through the Jaffa Gate with a modest military ceremonial.

His proclamation, carefully drafted by H.M. Government to ensure that the last ounce of political capital was extracted from an historical event of such importance, was perhaps a little unnecessary. All the world knew that a country capable of entering a war of this magnitude completely unprepared and yet, while holding back the might of Germany and maintaining command of the seas, capture Baghdad and Jerusalem as sidelines, was highly unlikely to go down in defeat.

The capture of Jerusalem did not of course, mean that the campaign was ended, or even that the end was in sight. At the same time that the Turk withdrew from Jerusalem he came down upon the British line along the Auja, north of Jaffa, and drove it back across the river, bringing Jaffa itself again within range of his guns. The 52nd Division hastily marched north to restore the situation, with the battle-scarred H.L.I. Brigade looking, as one of its officers remarked, 'more like a gang of Russian refugees on the trek, than a part of the British Army. 'The passage of the Auja,' says the *Official History*, 'has always been regarded as one of the most remarkable feats of the Palestine Campaign.' To cross it against opposition was certainly a task to make any soldier think. The northern bank, held by the Turks, overlooked the southern bank which was flat and without cover. The river itself was fifty feet wide and ten in depth with its banks soft and muddy. The 52nd Division, charged with the duty of establishing a bridgehead on the far bank asked for twelve pontoons, which were sent up from Egypt remarkably quickly. Meanwhile the troops, as those under Wellesley had done when he crossed the Godavery in 1803, constructed coracles. Lieutenant-Colonel J. Anderson, commanding the 6th H.L.I., and Lieutenant J. Hills of the same battalion, swam out to sea, landed on the north bank and inspected the Turkish defences—by night of course. They returned with adequate information and the depth of water at the bar—three feet.

The H.L.I. Brigade, preparatory to 'one of the most complicated plans of operations we have ever had the pleasure of carrying through,' assembled during the night of 19 December in the orange groves near Summeil. As the whole operation depended on complete surprise they had to keep very quiet during the remainder of the night and the next day. Getting soaked to the skin in the pouring rain, and unable to move about to warm themselves they could not even eat the oranges—'they seemed so cold.' Every track through the grove was packed with the Brigade transport—limbered waggons with four horses apiece, and hordes of camels. The waggons became so jammed that the unloading parties could not find the limbers they had to unload; the drivers lost their tempers and yelled curses at one another, and the camels refused to co-operate at all. It was all very typical of war, in which nothing ever seems to go as planned; in which everything is continually lapsing into chaos and confusion, and yet is miraculously sorted out at the last moment by the physical effort of men shortly to go into action, and perhaps to their deaths—as well they know.

At 8 p.m. the 7th H.L.I. crossed in their coracles near the bar, landing on the marshy ground at the river-mouth in order to overcome the Turks supposed to be watching the ford. The Turks were asleep and taken 'in their night attire,' whatever that could have been. Meanwhile the 6th

H.L.I. waited to cross by the ford, but could not find it until their Colonel took to the water and discovered it—though deeper than when he had last examined it. The Sappers marked it out with stakes, and the battalion crossed arm-in-arm through the strong current. The other two Brigades crossed elsewhere in a similar manner ; the Sappers immediately commenced the building of pontoons; while the Divisional and Corps artillery—silent until then—opened up upon the Turkish support lines.

It is seldom indeed, that complete surprise can be achieved in any major operation of war. In this instance it was achieved by good planning; the weather; the laxness of the enemy, and the remarkable discipline, patience and forbearance of the British troops. The latter brought its just reward, for the operation was an almost bloodless victory.

The crossing of the Auja brought to an end the fighting of the H.L.I. Brigade in the Palestine campaign. The Turkish counter-attacks against Jerusalem having been defeated, the Expeditionary Force consolidated along the line gained. It had advanced a hundred miles in little over a month and achieved a decisive victory, which put an end to any hope which the Turk might have of taking Egypt and securing the Suez Canal. Winter in the Palestine line was a holiday for the H.L.I. Brigade—except for digging and otherwise improving the defences—for the Turk kept very quiet a long way off. Meanwhile however, the Western Front continued to drain away the manpower of Great Britain and France. A pending German offensive in the spring of 1918 had to be faced. In April 1918 the 52nd Lowland Division left Egypt for France.

The H.L.I. left many comrades behind them, and their officer casualties, as usual during the Great War, had been particularly heavy. In the three weeks between Gaza and the fighting on the ridge before Ajalon the 5th H.L.I. for example, lost 25 out of 29 officers, and 368 out of 699 rank and file. The hardships of the campaign, as has been shown, were also particularly onerous. But in spite of this the H.L.I. Brigade was quite sorry to leave the Palestine Front, 'where in between the battles the life was often very pleasant.' They consoled themselves with the reflection that in between the forthcoming battles in France, they might get a chance of some home leave.

To return to September 1914; at about the time when the 74th—2nd Battalion and vanguard of the Highland Light Infantry—were battling their way across the Aisne, the Glasgow City Fathers met to discuss the raising of men to fight for the cause. The mace was brought in by the council officer in scarlet coat ; the Lord Provost took his seat and the Baillies and councillors resumed theirs. The Town Clerk in wig and gown, sitting on the left of the Lord Provost, rose to read the rubric of the minutes

The Magistrates recommend.., that steps be forthwith taken ... for the raising of the necessary recruits to form at least two battalions, and that the expense of raising and equipping such battalions be borne by the Corporation out of the Common Good.

The recommendation did not cause any particular excitement among the dignified occupants of the horseshoe benches, who rose in turn to ask questions or to speak for or against, in an exactly similar manner to that in which they were accustomed to debate such matters as public transport or the disposal of refuse. In fact it was nothing out of the way, for in the history of the ancient city the same sort of recommendation had been approved before, from time to time. In the old days, when recruits were raised in such an emergency 'by beat of drum or otherwise,' it took some months to raise a regiment, even in wartime, as has been shown in the histories of the 71st and 74th; but in 1914, the translation of intention into action was far swifter. The drums certainly beat, but more for show than for encouragement ; for the recruits were already waiting.

At Coplawhill tramways depot a table was set up behind which sat an army officer, two

doctors and a Justice of the Peace. Before it hundreds of employees in their green uniforms with the watch chains worn by all respectable men in those days, milled around waiting for instructions. They were all types and ages, and when made to Strip provided an interesting contrast between the white skins of the boys and the tattooed torsos of their mustachioed elders. They were fine men—'the best of them strong enough to drive a bayonet through a two-inch deal board.' The raising of this, the 15th H.L.I. took exactly sixteen hours—which was the time required for a retired Sergeant, with much shouting of incomprehensible orders aided by piercing blasts on a whistle, to marshal them; the doctors to satisfy themselves that no one was likely to die of heart-failure in the near future; the Justice to swear them in and the officer to attest them. 'And if it hadn't been for all that nonsense,' said one of them, 'the 15th H.L.I. could have been raised in fifteen minutes.'

The former members of the Glasgow Battalion of the Boys' Brigade had got together soon after the outbreak of war, with a view to forming a battalion of infantry from among themselves. Without official backing this proved impossible, but as soon as the Glasgow Corporation passed its resolution the Boys' Brigade was ready—and so the 16th H.L.I. was raised.

When these two battalions were raised 'the time had not come when the Highland Light Infantry was the proud family name for twenty-six battalions that were to bear witness to the soul and substance of Glasgow in Armageddon.' They were not of course, the first Service battalions of the Regiment. The 10th and 11th H.L.I. had been raised 'by beat of drum' a month before. They did however represent the first official response by the City of Glasgow to the national call to arms. The example of the Corporation was quickly followed by the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, whose Directors held their own meeting early in September, and unanimously resolved to raise a Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion. The recruits were enrolled in the Lesser Hall of the Merchants' House and so the 17th H.L.I. was raised within a few weeks.

While the tramwaymen were waiting for their turn with the doctor many jokes passed among them, one of which took the form of a speculation as to whether anyone had remembered to bring sufficient change to pay each of them the 'King's shilling.' In fact they got no shilling, nor anything else. It was a far cry from Coplaw Street to the battlefields of France. They had no officers, N.C.O.s, arms, uniforms or equipment. The officers and N.C.O.s were advertised for, or obtained through the Territorial Association. There were no arms—the country had entered a major war with a reserve of thirty thousand rifles only. Uniforms and equipment had to be manufactured. There was accordingly not much else that could be done with the men once they had been enrolled except to teach them how to salute. Contemporary photographs show this necessary military function being performed by earnest-looking citizens, wearing cloth caps and waxed moustaches, to a musical accompaniment played on a gramophone by a staff-sergeant—one wonders what tune was being played, and why. It is therefore not surprising that it took over a year to get these three battalions into the field. What is surprising is that their enthusiasm for getting to grips with the Kaiser was in no way damped by this frustration. Patriotism and the pangs of conscience no doubt made up for many disappointments. When one's fellow-countrymen are giving up their lives in thousands for the common cause, it is no time to grumble. A man could do no more than offer his services and life. Once he had done so, he felt that he was 'doing his bit.'

Chapter XVIII

THE SOMME

The Glasgow Highlanders raid Mad Point 27 June 1916—opening of the Somme offensive 1 July 1916—the 16th and 17th H.L.I. at the Battle of Albert—the 15th H.L. I. in the Leipzig Redoubt.

FROM the time Sir Douglas Haig took over command on the Western Front from Sir John French until midsummer 1916, no large battles were fought on the British Sector of the line. Elsewhere it was a different matter, and the French, whose heroic defence before Verdun received world-wide recognition, became very hard-pressed. It became quite essential for the British Army to make a major effort to relieve the mighty pressure upon their Allies, which they could but barely withstand. Arms, ammunition and reinforcements were pouring across the Channel to the British Expeditionary Force in quantities which, had they been at the disposal of Sir John French a year before, might well have saved Russia and shortened the war by a couple of years. Since the Battle of Loos however, the Germans had taken every advantage of the British exhaustion to strengthen and improve their defences, so that in 1916 Sir Douglas Haig was faced with the problem of breaking through a line of fortifications in comparison with which—though such comparisons are always relative—those with which Wellington had been confronted at Badajoz pale into insignificance.

The German defences consisted of the first and second line; each a maze of deep trenches protected by two belts of barbed wire of extraordinary thickness, with each belt forty yards in breadth. The woods and villages along the line had been turned into fortresses, in which the redoubts were connected by underground passages thirty feet below the earth. Each of the numerous salients along the line was itself a small fort, strengthened by concrete, from which both the approaches to the line, and the line itself—in case it should be taken—could be swept by machine-gun fire in enfilade. Behind the first and second lines many others were in course of preparation, so that the whole system became one of enormous strength and depth. In general also, the enemy had the best of the ground, being able to keep the British lines under constant observation.

To break through such defences on any significant scale could only be done by battering them into pulp with an immense weight of artillery; by securing the important tactical points with infantry, and then sending the cavalry through to prevent the enemy plugging the gap—the front was in such depth that only cavalry possessed the necessary speed to exploit any break-through. The preparations for an offensive of such magnitude occupied most of the first half of 1916. During this period therefore, as the Germans were fully occupied with the French, and the British in preparations, the ordinary routine of trench warfare prevailed in the British sector. This by no means meant that hostilities died down, or that life in the British trenches could conceivably be described as quiet. In between various local offensives the British and Germans passed the time lobbing lethal missiles at one another, in endeavouring to blow each other up with mines, and in chasing one another up and down the communication trenches with bayonets and hand-grenades. These minor activities had no tactical value, and were therefore nothing more or less than plain murder and a regrettable denigration of the soldier's honourable calling. The trench raid however, a favourite British pastime, was a legitimate operation of war, undertaken for the important purpose of obtaining information and preventing the enemy from sapping forward with his

infernal machines. As may well be imagined, to raid enemy trenches as well laid-out and protected as those described was certainly no child's play. Up to the summer of 1916, at any rate, they were very seldom successful, and more often than not resulted only in the production of some shattered Bavarian who had been dragged out of his trench by the ears, and frog-marched across no-man's land at the cost of some thirty men's lives.

It happened to fall to the lot of the Glasgow Highlanders to make, in June 1916, one of the few raids which could definitely be described as a success, and which was, in fact, a model of how such an affair should be conducted. The Glasgow Highlanders had left the 5th Infantry Brigade three months previously for the L of C and were subsequently transferred to the 100th Brigade of the 33rd Division. The first of the H.L.I. Territorial battalions to go overseas, they had more than the average *esprit de corps*, and a particular pride in their turn-out and appearance. When they marched up the frost-bound road into Bailleul in 1914 between the cheering men of the 74th, they had certainly presented a sight for sore eyes to that battle-scarred gathering of the 5th Infantry Brigade, for they were up to strength, with a fine turn-out of pipers playing at their head, and they were still wearing brogues and Highland spats. These latter embellishments the Flanders mud soon obliged them to discard. They soon learned also, that the kilt could be a definite encumbrance when at close quarters in the enemy trench system. Consequently, when engaged in any affair of an athletic nature and limited duration—such as a raid—they became accustomed to discard it and fight in the apron. Although this accessory now fortunately went all the way round, covering the rear as well as the front, it was still a somewhat flimsy covering in which to be marched off to a prisoner-of-war camp, for anyone unlucky enough to be left in enemy hands. Still, the discarding of the kilt before advancing to close quarters was an old Highland custom after all—though not invariably followed.

In 1916 the Glasgow Highlanders were desperately struggling to preserve their individuality in the face of a decree that Territorial and Service battalions which dropped to below four hundred in strength and remained so, should be amalgamated. This fate had already fallen upon the 10th and 11th H.L.I. The Glasgow Highlanders appeared to think that the Territorials in general, and themselves in particular were being deliberately starved of reinforcements as a preliminary to their dissolution. The fact was however, that at a time when new battalions were still being raised at home, to be sent all over the world, it had become most difficult to send drafts to any particular battalion. Consequently the Regulars had the first call on reinforcements, and the Territorials and Service battalions had to take their chance. At this stage of the war there was of course, little or no difference between Regular, Territorial or Service battalions as far as efficiency went, but every effort was made as a matter of policy, to keep the Regulars up to strength and to preserve their identity. In addition to their battle casualties, the Glasgow Highlanders had lost many of their best men to the commissioned ranks, for in peacetime a large number of them whose education and background fitted them for commissions preferred, for one reason or another, to serve in the ranks. By 1916 therefore, the strength of the battalion had fallen below the danger level and, such is the moral force of a strong *esprit de corps*, those remaining were far more worried about this fact than about the course of the war or the probability of death, wounds or captivity. While on the L of C however they at last received reinforcements which brought them up to strength, and so they were once more their old selves when they returned to the line in June.

The trench raid referred to was carried out by a company of the Glasgow Highlanders led by Captain A. C. Frame during the night of 27—28 June 1916, and was directed against Mad Point, a bulge in the German front line a little to the north of the Hohenzollern Redoubt facing the Cuinchy Right Sector of the British line. Captain Frame's orders were to advance to the German Second line behind Mad Point, and hold this for 60 minutes, to enable old and new craters to be

examined and any mines destroyed. Also to get as many live prisoners as possible, and any other articles, and to do damage to defences and dug-outs.'

The preparations for this affair were of the utmost thoroughness, as indeed they required to be, in the case of so formidable a proposition. Each man was individually instructed and carefully rehearsed in his particular role, with the aid of air photographs, maps and lantern slides. A full-scale plan of the enemy trench system was marked out, upon which the selected company carried out rehearsals by day and night. Co-operation by artillery, machine-guns and trench mortars was planned to the last detail. The password was the nostalgic-sounding one of 'Sauchiehall.'

The battalion went into the line on the night of 26 June, and shortly before midnight the guns put down a heavy bombardment on Mad Point for the purpose of cutting the wire. The resultant gaps in the wire were carefully observed during the following morning, and Lewis guns trained on them to prevent repairs being made. The raiding party, consisting of 4 Officers and 148 rank and file crept out of their trenches at 11 p.m. and formed up in three parties, each of which was organised into three similar groups of 2 bombers, 2 bayonet-men, 2 bomb-carriers and 8 bayonet-men, and was led by an officer. Captain Frame's headquarters party consisted of 2 buglers, 2 signallers and 3 runners, and a small demolition party was attached to deal with enemy mines and mine-shafts, and there was also a Gunner Major as forward observation officer.

Before the preliminary bombardment mines were exploded on the flanks to mislead the enemy. The guns then came down on Mad Point for three minutes, then lifted and put down a box barrage. A small mine was exploded at Mad Point and the infantry rushed in through the gaps in the wire, and the smoke and falling debris. They came on loose concertina wire, but 'quickly brushed it aside,' and leapt into the enemy front. To charge into manned enemy trenches eight feet deep, in the middle of a pitch-dark night in this manner was certainly no game for weaklings, as may be imagined. There was no time to worry about bruises, or even sprained wrists and ankles. It was essential for the trenches to be cleared at high speed, and so within the trenches the screams of bayoneted Germans and the crash of exploding grenades rose above the roar of the barrage without. Leaving no German alive in the first line the Highlanders drove up the communication trenches and entered the second line at the bayonet point, overcoming all resistance. The area was sealed off by erecting sandbag barricades, pulling down the trench revettments and posting bombing parties, while guards were posted over each of the deep dug-outs. Thus the German first and second line trenches, on a frontage of 150 yards and to a depth of 85 yards were securely in the hands of one company of the Glasgow Highlanders. Officers went to the entrance of each dug-out and shouted *Kamerad!* If the occupants immediately came out with their hands up, they were escorted back over no-man's land; otherwise grenades were flung down upon them and any unwounded survivors similarly taken away.

The enemy was completely surprised and was apparently unable to grasp, in the general turmoil, exactly what was happening. His only reaction was to put down a ragged defensive fire which did no damage. The raiding party was accordingly able to hold the positions gained for the required sixty minutes, during which the enemy mines were demolished and his shafts and a bomb store blown up, 47 prisoners collected and sent back, and a large quantity of arms and material, including two machine-guns secured. An officer, whose papers were secured, and ten other Germans had been killed in the trenches, and an unknown number in the dugouts; while of his wounded 16 were counted of whom 9 were taken prisoner. At the end of the hour the buglers sounded the recall and the raiding party returned, its sole casualties being 11 men wounded, all but one slightly.

This very remarkable exploit, in which important results had been achieved at trifling cost by a combination of skill, gallantry and resolution, attracted the attention of the whole army. A spate

of congratulatory signals including many from individual units, and from each commander in the chain of command up to Sir Douglas Haig himself whose telegram read:

‘Commander-in-Chief wishes his congratulations conveyed to 9th H.L.I. on the creditable achievement night of 27.6.16.’

The Commander-in-Chief also wrote personally ‘a most charming letter’ to the Lord Provost of Glasgow.

It must of course be understood, that the success of an operation of this nature did not depend alone upon the quality of the troops taking part. It required the most detailed planning and a programme worked out to the second. This was not done by the troops nor even by battalion headquarters, but by the General Staff. The 33rd Division was well served in this respect, but in many other Divisions the lack of experienced staff officers was a most serious problem, and Sir Douglas Haig had been seriously worried by the fact that on the front, north of the Somme, where he intended to attack, no raid had succeeded in penetrating the enemy position. This he attributed to bad staff-work and cast no reflections on the troops, who had indeed paid with their lives for these failures. His concern is understandable, for the fact that repeated attempts to reach the enemy trenches upon very narrow fronts, with the advantages of surprise and an elaborate artillery programme had failed, boded very ill for the success of the great offensive which was being planned. The Glasgow Highlanders, on the very eve of the Battle of the Somme, had proved to the Commander-in-Chief that the penetration of the enemy line was possible. This would explain the relief which prompted a man who commanded vast armies, to send a personal signal of congratulations on the achievement of one infantry company. It is only too apparent indeed, that the death in battle during the first year of war of so many of the potential commanders and staff officers, who belonged to the fighting units of the old regular army, was to cost the country dear, in blood and misery.

On 5 June 1916, Lord Kitchener went down in the cruiser *Hampshire*. He left as a legacy to his country a machinery of war which at last functioned smoothly. His death deprived the Allies of the only man among them of sufficient stature to be able to compel respect for his views upon soldiers, sailors and politicians alike—British and French.

Following continual alterations of date and changes of plan, dictated by the progress of the battle raging at Verdun, the Somme offensive eventually started on 1 July 1916. The initial battlefield, as the name implies, lay astride the basin of the River Somme, both banks of which happened to lie in the French sector of the line. Sir Douglas Haig would have preferred another battlefield. On the Somme front the enemy defences were particularly strong, and the ground itself offered no advantages to the attack. General Joffre however, was insistent upon advancing his left along the Somme, and as it was impossible for him to do this without British co-operation, Sir Douglas Haig had little choice but to agree. The Battle of the Somme in fact developed into a series of battles, each with its official name. That of 1 July, known as the Battle of Albert, consisted of an attack by the British 4th Army with its right at Maricourt, where it joined the French, and its left at Serre, where it joined the 3rd Army; a frontage of about 12 miles. It will be noted how far south the British line had extended since Loos and Festubert. In those days, a few short months before, the 74th in their trenches north of La Bassée Canal were on the right of the line—but the line now reached to the Somme, for the British Army had extended its front to more than double its previous holding, in those few months.

At the Battle of Albert, the Regiment was represented by the 15th (Glasgow Tramways Battalion), 16th (Boys’ Brigade Battalion) and 17th (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion) H.L.I. These three fine battalions, the manner of whose raising has been described in the previous chapter, had gone overseas with the 32nd Division in November 1915. The 15th was in the 14th

Infantry Brigade and the 16th and 17th together in the 97th Infantry Brigade. Since arriving in France they had had a comparatively quiet time in and out of the trenches before Thiepval. Formerly, the three battalions had been in the same Brigade, and it was a pity that they were now separated.

South of the village of Thiepval, which, with its little church and sixty houses, had been turned by the Germans into a fortress of immense strength, the enemy line curved into a sharp salient, known as the Leipzig Salient. The defences ran along a spur from the Salient to Thiepval, overlooking the British positions. It was one of the strongest parts of the enemy line, and it fell to the unhappy lot of the 32nd Division to attack it on 1 July. The Division planned to advance against this formidable objective with two Brigades up ; with the 97th Brigade on the right, directed against the Western face of the Leipzig Salient. The 97th Brigade was to be led by the 16th and 17th H.L.I.

The preliminary bombardment, all along the front of the 4th Army, lasted a week, during which the enemy defences disappeared behind clouds of smoke and flying debris. The village of Thiepval was blotted from the map and vanished completely. Woods were reduced to a few bare poles, the whole country-side pitted with shell-craters, communications obliterated, trenches knocked in and topographical features changed out of recognition. It seemed to the observers to be quite beyond belief, that any Germans could be left alive in this dreary chaos, but the British commanders were not deceived. They well knew that the enemy 'funk-holes' would still be full of live Germans—and so they were, although the unfortunate 'Jerries' were by no means enjoying themselves, and were looking forward to the coming assault with the liveliest apprehensions. 'Thou fearsome night, what wilt thou bring us ?' wrote the good soldier Eversmann of the 143rd Infantry, as he took up his pen in Thiepval for the last time in his life. 'Five days and five nights has this hell-concert lasted. One's head is as a madman's ; the tongue sticks to the roof of the mouth. No sleep, almost nothing to eat or drink. All contact with the outer world cut off.' Sympathy for him, his comrades and their families at home would be natural but misplaced. They asked for it and they got it. The British soldiers had not asked for it. The H.L.I. would have been quite happy driving trains, totting up ledgers, keeping shops and delivering coal until pensioned off; their only excitements caused by the arrival of a baby or a trip down the Clyde. Yet here they were, under arms, forming up in pouring rain for their first venture 'over the top,' and well aware that they would be uncommonly lucky to get through the day alive. When the Divisional Commander inspected them before the battle they cheered him lustily. Knowing what he did about war, he must have been hard put to it to restrain his emotion, but they would have thought little of him had he not done so, for they were tough men—very tough men indeed.

At 7.30 a.m. the 17th H.L.I. on the right and the 16th H.L.I. on the left crept out of their trenches and moved close up to the German wire under cover of the barrage. This was by order of the Brigade Commander, Brigadier-General J. B. Jardine, as an alternative to the usual practice at that time of advancing in extended waves. The moment the barrage lifted the two battalions rushed forward. The 17th H.L.I. found the wire demolished by the guns, and so entered the enemy line before the Germans had had time to come up from their dug-outs. Thus they gained their first objective with small loss, and the bewildered prisoners of war were soon streaming back to the British trenches like frightened sheep.

The 16th H.L.I. had no luck this day. When they rose up they immediately came under heavy enfilade fire from the ruins of Thiepval; the wire was intact except for occasional gaps each of which was covered. They charged forward first together and then in parties. They had with them sappers, carrying Bangalore torpedoes, for it had been realised that the barrage had not been effective on the wire in this sector. But they were all shot down on the wire. In a short time the

16th H.L.I. lost 19 officers and 492 rank and file out of a strength of about 800 all told. Some of the survivors on the right managed to join the 17th H.L.I. and fought on with them, but many others were kept pinned to the ground close to the enemy wire.

The 14th Brigade was in reserve, and the 15th H.L.I., advancing from assembly trenches in Aveluy Wood, did not go into action on this day. Instead, they carried out a long approach march, by a road crammed with transport; wagons, limbers and ambulances, all horse-drawn. In the afternoon they reached Authuille Wood which was under heavy bombardment. They had to dig themselves in through the heavy chalk soil, and lost forty men.

The 17th H.L.I. pushed on towards the second line, but the failure on their left exposed their flank and the leading companies were all shot down. The remainder consolidated on the first line—the Leipzig Redoubt—and held it. Their casualties were 22 officers and 447 rank and file. They gained a Victoria Cross—posthumous:

No. 15888 Sergeant James Young Turnbull, late Highland Light Infantry. For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty, when, having with his party captured a post apparently of great importance to the enemy, he was subjected to severe counter-attacks, which were continuous throughout the whole day. Although his party was wiped out and replaced several times during the day Sergeant Turnbull never wavered in his determination to hold the post, the loss of which would have been very serious. Almost single-handed he maintained his position and displayed the highest degree of valour and skill in the performance of his duties.

Later in the day this gallant soldier was killed whilst bombing a counter-attack from the paradocs of our trench. (*London Gazette* 25/12/1916.)

‘In the desperate circumstances,’ wrote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘it might well be considered a remarkable result that a stretch of the Leipzig Redoubt should be won and permanently held by the Highlanders, especially by the 17th Highland Light Infantry.’

The attack by eleven Infantry Divisions on 1 July had, at a cost of nearly sixty thousand casualties, driven the enemy from his forward positions astride the Somme and between Maricourt and Fricourt. North of the Leipzig Redoubt success could only be measured in the terms of a few lodgments in the enemy line, such as that achieved by the 17th H.L.I. The battle however, had to go on; developing into a series of actions on a Corps basis, carried out as artillery support could be arranged. The casualties, said Sir Douglas Haig at 4th Army headquarters, could be replaced—but the ammunition was running very low.

The 15th H.L.I. assembled in their trenches in Authuille Wood before dawn on 3 July. ‘This was not a battalion of youngsters,’ wrote the Padre. ‘Many were fellows satisfied with civilian life, having a fairly high standard of physique, education and intelligence, whose occupations had led them to cultivate a sense of responsibility. Many of them were married. It is no wonder that they made efficient soldiers and N.C.O.s—grave men, as I remember them, clothed with authority and refusing to yield to panic in the direst circumstances.’ They went up into the Leipzig Redoubt—which should have been re-named the H.L.I. Redoubt, had old customs been observed, in the same way that the Sultan’s Redoubt at Seringapatam was re-named after Sibbald of the 71st.

The Leipzig Redoubt was a pulverised mass of rubble. On either side as far as the eye could reach the battlefield was covered by the corpses of fallen men, while above the roar of the guns could be heard the unceasing rattle of the enemy machine-guns. The 15th H.L.I. had suffered the

strain of waiting for two days on the edge of the field, not knowing when they would be called forward, and well-aware of the fate which had fallen upon the attacking troops. Yet they made their effort without flinching, driving forward with bombs and bayonets. They reached the second line and killed every German in it, but the enemy reinforcements came pouring down the communication trenches and across the open. 'C' Company which was isolated, was submerged under several times its own numbers but gave no ground and fought it out hand-to-hand. Various attempts were made to get to their assistance and finally the reserve company was called upon which sent a platoon under Sergeant J. R. Pearson. He could find no way except across the open, so he made the attempt as a soldier must, and fell at once with half his men. Therefore 'C' Company had to fight its way out, leaving eighty six men on the field behind them. Within the maze of trenches and in the open, the fighting went on all day at close quarters against superior numbers. Subalterns led their platoons across the open from trench to trench, hurling bombs and following up with the bayonet. A Lewis gun was mounted on a parapet to engage a German machine-gun. The gunner was killed and his place immediately taken by another, and six men were killed at this gun in succession— each taking his comrade's place without hesitation or orders. The 15th H.L.I. lost 13 officers and 272 rank and file on this day.

Chapter XIX

THE ANCRE

The Glasgow Highlanders at High Wood, 7 July 1916—the 15th H.L.I. at Orvillers, 9 July 1916—the 74th and 18th H.L.L at Delville Wood, 27 July 1916—the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.I. at Martinpuich—the Glasgow Highlanders at le Tronsloy—the 74th on the Redan Ridge, 13 November 1916—the 16th and 17th H.L.I. in the Munich and Frankfurt trenches—the last stand of the 16th H.L.I., 17—25 November 1916.

SINCE Sir Douglas Haig had thus failed to break through—or into—the enemy fortifications on the Somme, it has been suggested that he should have halted the attempt and tried elsewhere, in accordance with the accepted principles of siege warfare. This however, was not really a feasible proposition. The necessary build-up on the Somme had taken months of immense effort, and it would have been impossible to have switched elsewhere at a moment's notice. Nor under the circumstances, was it possible for him to call off the offensive altogether, for the Allies had to be considered. Furthermore it was never certain, and could not be certain, how close the enemy was to the breaking-point, and whether one more push might not drive him to his knees. The only way of judging his morale was by the prisoners, and in general these were so shattered as to encourage optimism. But the morale of prisoners is an unreliable guide to that of an army. It was usually the effect of being captured, after all that they had gone through, which had finally broken their nerve. Those German soldiers still under arms and in position were still by no means beaten—although at times they came very close to it.

Therefore the offensive continued on the Somme, with a gradual extension of the front, drawing into the battles all the H.L.I. battalions in the field. These now amounted to ten, or, if the 10th and 11th battalions having amalgamated are counted as one, to nine. The last arrival was the 18th H.L.I., a 'Bantam' battalion composed of men under five feet three inches in height, which belonged to the 35th (Bantam) Division. The Bantams did good service in static roles, but such small men were seldom strong enough for close action, or to carry the weight of equipment of an infantryman across the mud and craters of the Western Front. Therefore they were unable to perform any spectacular feat, but did their duty manfully while they lasted—for their casualties were in the end replaced by men of normal height.

Among various transfers for the reinforcement of the battle-front the 33rd Division was moved from the 1st to the 4th Army on 7 July, and went into action near Bazentin, a few miles east of the Albert-Bapaume Road.

During the week following the initial set-back, by maintaining a relentless pressure the 4th Army had made steady gains, and the German line bent back before it. Every tactical feature however, woods, hills and villages, was strongly fortified and determinedly held. Two of these strong points, Delville Wood and High Wood, were on the line of advance of the 33rd Division. Strange as it may seem, the Division had cavalry in front—the 7th Dragoon Guards and Deccan Horse armed with lances—who were doing pretty well, as there was no wire about in that part of the field. They were fired on as usual both by artillery and machine-guns, but whereas infantry would have been held up or suffered heavy casualties, the cavalry were able to turn their mobility to good account, by galloping out of the shell-fire and charging the machine-guns. They speared large numbers of Germans and captured thirty-two, desisting from this admirable work only at nightfall, when they bivouacked under cover near High Wood.

The Glasgow Highlanders and the 1st Queen's were then sent forward to secure the ground

between High Wood and Bazentin le Petit. The cavalry withdrew early in the morning, after which the 7th Division attacked into the wood. The Glasgow Highlanders and Queen's were then ordered forward to attack the enemy Switch Line, under cover of a bombardment, but when they advanced they were fired on from High Wood in enfilade and suffered heavily. The Glasgow Highlanders, being on the right caught it worst, and were obliged to send a Company against the wood. The company attack disintegrated into a series of small assaults with bomb and bayonet, some led by private soldiers, which pressed forward with the greatest gallantry but to no avail. Meanwhile the leading companies of both battalions reached the enemy line to find the wire intact, as was so often the case even after heavy bombardment. No more could be done for the time being therefore, except to hold the ground. Before the affair ended the remnants of three platoons had got into the wood, and held on there in a most precarious position while the remainder of the battalion spent the night on the open spur, which was even worse. When the Brigade was withdrawn, some fifty men remained out among the dead and wounded, not knowing of the withdrawal. Most of them fortunately succeeded in rejoining, but in this action the Glasgow Highlanders lost 5 officers and 87 rank and file killed; 15 officers and 214 rank and file wounded; 1 officer and 99 rank and file missing, most of whom were believed killed. This amounts to 421 all ranks—about the same as the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I. had each suffered in one day's fighting on the Somme. As the approximate strength of an infantry battalion in the field at that time was six hundred, these sort of casualties naturally rendered it ineffective for the time being.

The surmise cannot be avoided that these excessive casualties were due in part to faulty tactics. Too great reliance was repeatedly placed on the effectiveness of the artillery barrages, behind which the infantry marched in extended lines, slowed down by the weight of equipment and special battle stores which they had to carry. The Scottish regiments were usually accompanied by a piper or two, while the others, lacking this form of encouragement, would cheer themselves up by kicking footballs or blowing hunting-horns. They could not see through the barrage and so, until they got to the wire, did not know if it was practicable or not. Their extended formation and slow pace had meanwhile rendered them especially vulnerable to the cross-fire from the enemy machine-guns which opened up on fixed lines and fired through the barrage whenever one started—for they knew of course, that ten to one there would be infantry behind it. In this connection it is interesting to compare the casualties suffered by the Glasgow Highlanders at High Wood with those of the 7th Dragoon Guards and Deccan Horse whose combined strength amounted to more than an infantry battalion. Although the cavalry had, as described above, operated in the same area all day, their casualties were only 102 men and 130 horses, killed, wounded and missing. The cavalry of course, did not go through the wire—but it was not at the wire that the majority of infantry casualties occurred.

A more sensible method of attack was adopted by the 15th H.L.I. and the others of the 14th Infantry Brigade at the taking of Orvillers—under somewhat different conditions it is true. Situated south of Thiepval and likewise on a spur, this village had similarly been turned into a fortress which had defied all efforts of the 8th Division to take it on 1 July. The 12th Division, with a Brigade of the 25th Division, had established itself in parts of the first line by 7 July. The 32nd Division went in two days later by which time, says the *Official History* 'In this maze of ruins, trenches, dug-outs and shell-holes, the antagonists were at such close quarters that artillery could afford little assistance ; the struggle was maintained with bomb, rifle, machine-gun, trench mortar, and occasionally with the bayonet.'

The assault being entrusted to the 14th Infantry Brigade, the 15th H.L.I. attacked on the right of the 2nd Manchesters from the west side of the village. The 15th H.L.I. after Thiepval had been

reorganised into two companies, as had most other battalions in the Division—although by this time the 6th and 17th H.L.I. could barely raise two companies between them.

Orvillers was held by the Fusiliers of the Prussian Guard, and the idea of engaging with this fashionable and exclusive corps apparently gave the H.L.I. much pleasure. The affair lasted two days, and consisted mainly of driving up the communication trenches and in and out among the ruins in platoon strength—a method of infiltration which seldom exposed the attackers to machine-gun fire except at short range, when it was comparatively innocuous and could be dealt with. Therefore although the Prussians resisted stoutly, the place was captured at reasonable cost, and the H.L.I. were able to see and marvel at the comforts with which the Prussian officer surrounded himself in the front line—the deep dug-outs were furnished with beds, bookshelves, electric light, telephones, cases of champagne, and even tapestry curtains to keep out the draught.

By 17 July the enemy first line had been taken along the entire central position, and some three miles of the second line were also in British hands. A salient had thus been formed, on either side of which the enemy defences remained quite intact, and upon which he commenced to mass his reserves. The British central position now bent from High Wood through Delville Wood to Guillemont, and this deep salient became packed with British reserves, ready to break out when the opportunity presented itself but meanwhile in a most dangerous position. Sir Douglas Haig did not like the look of it at all, and intervened with the order that the line gained was to be consolidated in depth, and that the area Longueval—Delville Wood was to be cleared as a defensive measure. Meanwhile he would postpone further attack. The operation ordered by Sir Douglas Haig was planned to start on 27 July, and on 25 July the 2nd Division took over from the 3rd Division south of Delville Wood. East of Trones Wood and on the left of the 2nd Division, the 35th Division had previously relieved the 18th Division. Therefore the 74th, in the 2nd Division and the 18th H.L.I. in the 35th Division were not far apart. The 74th, so far almost unscathed in the Battle of the Somme, had a long journey to Delville Wood. Entraining at Pernes and detraining at Saleux, near Amiens, the battalion then marched twenty-one miles to Vaux-sur-Somme, and by the evening of the 23rd was in close bivouac in Happy Valley, surrounded by infantry, cavalry and guns—including two 13-inch railway guns which rolled up from the rear every night and opened fire near the 74th bivouac, making sleep impossible and even shaking men out of their beds at each salvo. The day before the 74th marched from this bivouac into the battle, they played a football match with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, an event which aroused terrific enthusiasm and ended in a draw.

The 74th moved up to Delville Wood by night, through a German communication trench leading to Waterlot Farm. It was a most unpleasant experience, for it was the only communication trench on two miles of frontage; the Germans, having dug it themselves, knew every inch of it and had sited a battery to enfilade each bend. Had the 74th not been doubtful of the way, they would have left it and taken to the open. From Waterlot Farm they moved forward to the wood and took over from the 18th H.L.I. who were holding captured enemy trenches just inside it.

The capture of the wood was made on 27th July by the 2nd Division, while the 5th Division attacked Longueval which lay on the western fringes. The method of attack was to hammer the wood flat with heavy artillery and then mop it up with a brigade. The 99th Brigade on the left of the 5th Brigade was chosen for this task, but took with it 'C' Company of the 74th. By the time the 'Heavies,' had finished their bombardment there was in fact no wood left—merely a revolting, churned-up mess with a few tree-stumps sticking out of it, in which no birds sang. Normally, the birds did not give in easily, and the troops on the Western Front were often astonished when the guns stopped for a moment, to hear them singing away as merrily as ever—

perhaps to keep their hearts up. The Germans, however, were still there, not raving lunatics as one might have expected to find them after such a pounding, but still resolute. In the capture of Delville Wood the 2nd Division lost 59 officers and 1,339 rank and file, killed, wounded and missing. The 74th felt a bit sore about their own casualties which, except for 'C' Company, had been chiefly caused by shell-fire, while the battalion was standing by with no active role other than the one company; so that its casualties seemed to have been incurred to no purpose—which, in fact, was not quite the case.

Lacking the resources for an attack along the whole of his front, Sir Douglas Haig was obliged to confine his further efforts to the right of his line where, in collaboration with the French, some not insignificant successes had been gained. He had however, abandoned all hope of a break-through, and had resigned himself for the time-being to a battle of attrition. Therefore, while subsidiary attacks of limited scope were being made elsewhere, the main battlefield continued to be the Somme, where in the Delville Wood area the 4th Army gradually pushed the enemy off the high ground. All the H.L.I. battalions returned here at one time or another, and the experiences of one were the experiences of them all. On this featureless field, in which battles were fought out in a welter of mud among a fantastic conglomeration of ruined buildings, trenches and fortifications, whole battalions sometimes disappeared leaving only their headquarters. Remnants of units were posted to others as reinforcements, and a battalion bearing the name of the Highland Light Infantry might well go into battle with anything up to half its strength made up of survivors from several other regiments ; English, Irish and Scots. The Glasgow Highlanders who lost 33 officers and 750 rank and file during the first six weeks on the Somme had the by no means unique experience of receiving a draft of 355 men, belonging to four other Scottish regiments of whom ' some were very young, some rather old, and some were Just out of hospital.' Seventy-nine were found to be unfit, but as the battalion was just going into action and needed the men, the doctors relented except in the case of 18 of them—who must indeed have been in a bad way. Young, old or sick, they did not disgrace the name of their adoptive battalion. The 16th H.L.I. got some of the Bantams, who were finding conditions on the Somme a bit too much for them, although they stuck it doggedly. 'D'you think you could fight a Boche ?' asked the Brigadier, eyeing one very small Bantam, compassionately. 'Yes, Sir,' was the somewhat doubtful reply, 'but he'd need to be a wee yin.'

Apart from this mix-up of regiments, the formations were also mixed up ; Brigades being attached to other Divisions, battalions to other Brigades, and sometimes, as happened in the 74th at Delville Wood, companies being attached to other battalions or Brigades. As the year wore on and the fighting became bogged down in the mud, few noteworthy episodes occurred in the history of the Regiment. This is not to say that there was nothing worth recording. Hardly a day went by, in which some incident worthy of record did not occur. One cannot however, describe every deed of individual or collective courage which was performed during this time. One can only say, that the selection of recipients of the Victoria Cross must have been most difficult.

September saw the capture of High Wood and the village of Martinpuich to the north-west. The latter was the objective of the 15th Scottish Division, which attacked with two Brigades up. In the 46th Brigade on the right, the 10/11th H.L.I. were leading on the right flank, with the 12th H.L.I. in reserve. This attack was wholly successful, although it required a change of front in order to storm the German defences along the sunken road leading south-westward out of Martinpuich. Factory Lane, the Brigade objective, was reached by the 10/11th H.L.I. soon after 7a.m., and the battalion joined hands with the Canadians. By nightfall the village had been cleared, and the 12th H.L.I., sent forward to occupy the forward outskirts, also gained touch with the Canadians in Gunpit Trench. This attack had been supported by a tank, the survivor out of

two allotted to the Division. The tank had been hit on the tail, and its machinery was not working at its best, so that it could not keep up with the infantry; but it still did good service in silencing several machine-guns before running out of petrol. Its appearance also frightened the enemy and got many on the run, for the German soldier did not feel competent to deal with these monstrosities at that time. It cannot be doubted that the tank was the answer to the machine-gun, and Sir Douglas Haig has been criticised for not waiting until he had plenty of them before starting his offensive. Unfortunately he was not in a position to wait, or he would certainly gladly have done so. He did not even have enough ammunition, let alone tanks. Neither had the French, whose resources in manpower and arms were steadily running out while those of the British increased. Under the circumstances prevailing on the Western Front in 1916, the Commander-in-Chief had no alternative but to make the effort he did. Therefore if the casualties on the Somme should be regarded as wanton slaughter, the responsibility for them must lie elsewhere than at the door of the high command. To expect a commander to make good the defects arising from years of neglect and unpreparedness purely by the exercise of military skill and experience is to demand a miracle. By October the battlefield had dissolved into a vast sea of mud and slime, in which the tanks could not in any case do very much. It was quite as much as the infantry could do to wallow through it, and more than one unfortunate soldier, weighed down by his arms and equipment, was swallowed up in this noisome mess. It even swallowed up some of the mules bringing up supplies. The Glasgow Highlanders were in trenches south-east of Lesboeuvs, up to their knees in mud and cold, wet and exhausted, with many of them suffering from 'trench feet.' In spite of these conditions the battalion was ordered to attack, in order to secure the low ridge in front of le Tronsloy. While he was going round the trenches—an expedition which took him all night—the Commanding-Officer, Colonel Stormouth Darling, was killed by a sniper. The Command devolved on Captain Whitson who, on receiving the orders for the attack, ventured a written protest to the Brigadier. 'I am fully aware of the great strain that has been placed on the endurance of all ranks during the last few days,' replied the Brigadier, 'but it is not in my power to do more than to ask the men to remember the great name of their regiment and, especially on a day like this, when it has suffered the irreparable loss of the best commanding officer a unit ever had, to be animated by only one thought, the determination to win through. I hope you will make a point of encouraging the men in the above sense.'

It was in fact impossible to put off the attack, for it had been planned in conjunction with the French, who were attacking on the right from somewhat higher, and less waterlogged ground. Therefore after the usual bombardment, the Glasgow Highlanders left their trenches at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The business of going 'over the top' in these conditions was not easy. There being only a few trench ladders, steps had had to be cut in the parapet, but mud and water poured down them, and as the men climbed them they crumbled away. They had to haul one another up, and flounder through the mud towards the enemy line. It being impossible to keep up with the 'creeping barrage,' the attack petered out against the enemy defensive fire, and the battalion had to take what cover it could find in the flooded shell-holes and remain there until dark. It was not altogether a wasted effort, for it enabled the French attack to succeed.

By the time of the Battle of the Ancre, in November, conditions had become even worse, for by then it had begun to snow. The conditions were not as bad perhaps, as those endured by the 71st and 74th on the Pyrenees or Crimea, but then at least they had not been required to launch an attack, and so had been able to concentrate on keeping themselves alive. The British army on the Somme was not so fortunate. The fact was however that on parts of the battlefield the British troops could not, for tactical reasons, remain where they were, and as retreat was unthinkable there was nothing else for it but to go forward. The British advances had resulted in the

establishment of an enemy salient astride the Ancre, and with a view to reducing it the Battle of the Ancre commenced on 13 November.

In its opening stages the Battle of the Ancre had been exceedingly carefully planned, in accordance with the lessons so far learnt in the fighting on the Somme. As troops are usually aware—if only by instinct—when this is so, they advanced into this battle with a good deal of their old *élan*, in spite of the horrible conditions under which they had been soldiering during the previous months. The 2nd Division attacked along the Redan Ridge with the 5th Brigade on the right, led by the 74th and the 24th Royal Fusiliers. The 74th had been putting in a great deal of work on their trenches, and in endeavouring to drain them had gone so deep that they could not get out of them without ladders which, however, they seem to have managed to secure in plentiful supply. Not trusting the barrage, they sent two officers' patrols out during the night before the attack, with Bangalore torpedoes. These ancient devices blew the enemy wire sky-high, which was a great help on the morrow. The battalion left its trenches before dawn and formed up in the open, or rather in 'assembly trenches,' a foot or two deep, dug while they waited. They advanced in column of half-companies in four waves with a piper—and many of the men playing martial music on mouth organs. They were a bit too eager, and pressing too close behind the barrage, suffered some casualties from it, but this probably paid, for as they rushed in upon the enemy first line they were able to leap in upon him just as he was coming up from his 'funk holes.' It was a great day for the 74th. 'Assaulted and captured the enemy's front system of trenches just north of Beaumont Hamel. All objectives were reached and consolidated ; 207 unwounded prisoners captured 5 machine guns, 2 trench mortars and much war material captured.' (*War Diary*) All this was accomplished with small loss, but unfortunately the 74th were then left in advanced positions with their flanks exposed, which they held only by the sacrifice of 14 officers and 255 rank and file, killed, wounded and missing.

Although not wholly successful, the advances made on the initial offensive were held to justify its renewal on the 17 November. Beaumont Hamel and Beaucourt had both been taken, but the enemy still held out on parts of the Redan Ridge. He was now of course, thoroughly stirred up and on the alert. Surprise was impossible and the further attacks, which had had to be hurriedly planned, were really doomed to failure from the start. The 97th Brigade sent in against the Redan Ridge assembled for the assault on taped lines, during the night of 17 November. In the pitch darkness, rain and sleet this proved so difficult that the 17th H.L.I. only arrived in position an hour before zero, practically deadbeat. The 16th and 17th H.L.I. advanced together at 6.10a.m. on 18 November. The whole of the 17th and the right company of the 16th were decimated by machine-gun and rifle-fire, as they struggled through the driving sleet; but the remaining three companies pushed on and the survivors reached and stormed the German Munich and Frankfurt trenches, overcame all resistance with the bayonet and sent back fifty prisoners. As the attacks on either side had failed they were then isolated, and watched the Germans descend on the prisoners, kill the escort and liberate them. There was nothing they could do, for they were hard-pressed. The German trenches were in ruins and offered little cover from the bullets which cracked in from all four sides. A runner went back to get orders from the company commander and found him dying in a shell-hole, with just sufficient strength left to scrawl some orders on a blood-stained pad. On his way back the runner lost his way in the turmoil, but found three Germans in a shell hole who readily agreed to take him to the Frankfurt trench. This they did, even assisting the runner when he fell flat in the mud from exhaustion, for they had ceased to care who won the war and who was friend or foe. As far as they were concerned, everyone was a friend on this field of disaster and misery.

The remnants of the 16th H.L.I. in the Frankfurt Trench, about a hundred men under

command of a Sergeant-Major, now found themselves surrounded by enemy in the subsidiary trench system. Therefore they consolidated and held out for eight days, for the last few without food or water, gradually shortening their line as their strength became reduced in the repeated attacks made against them. The Germans at length sent in a flag of truce, which they ignored. The end came when only fifteen of them were left, and those so weak that they could no longer stand up. The 16th H.L.I. were awarded thirty-three decorations for this affair, although for some reason it has escaped mention in the *Official History*. As it has not thus been officially recorded, the letter from Sir Hubert Gough, 5th Army Commander, when forwarding the recommendations is repeated

I have today received a visit from Colonel Kyle, 16th H.L.I., and he has shown me his recommendations in regard to the attack made by his battalion on November 18, 1916.

I can confirm all his statements as regards the circumstances of the attack.

It was made under immense difficulties of ground and weather. It demanded the greatest grit and courage.

I can also confirm the fact of the portion of the battalion which succeeded in capturing the final objective holding out and repelling several attacks during 8 days and eventually having to be abandoned after failure of several attempts at relief.

I consider that these men deserve great recognition for the magnificent example of soldierly qualities they displayed.

The Battle of the Ancre was the last offensive on the Somme. Winter descended on the Western Front. Old Bill and his comrades in their balaclava helmets crouched over their primitive braziers, cooking sausages on the ends of their bayonets and exchanging their sardonic jokes; looking neither forward nor back, but living for the day, such as it was. In billets at Noyelles the 74th spent what they described as 'quite a happy Hogmanay.'

Chapter XX

THE MESOPOTAMIA CAMPAIGN

The 71st arrive in the Persian Gulf, 1 January 1916, and enter the entrenchments before Hanna—the attempt against the Dujaila Redoubt—the action at Bait Isa—the fall of Kut 29 April 1916—the battle for the Khudhaira Bend—on the Lines of Communication—the action at Mushak—the Battle of Sharquat and Victory 30 October 1918.

ON 1 January 1916, the 71st arrived off the Persian Gulf in H.M.T. *Kalvan*, eighteen days out from Marseilles. The ship dropped anchor at the bar soon after dawn, and New Year's Day was spent in transferring the horses and mules to a smaller transport, the *Thongwa*, which came alongside to take the battalion in to Basra. For some reason no orders arrived, or if they did were afterwards countermanded, so that the *Thongwa* did not cast off until 8 January. Thereafter there was no delay. The 71st embarked in river steamers and sailed up the Tigris, disembarking at Orah on 23 January to find themselves posted to the 8th Infantry Brigade in their old Division the 3rd (Lahore Division). The other regiments in this Brigade at that time were the 1st Manchesters and the 2nd Rajputs.

The 71st marched at once for the trenches and entered the third line, which was about two thousand yards from the Turkish forward positions. They were relieved to find these trenches a great improvement on those to which they had become accustomed in France. Although a regular battalion, the 71st had probably forgotten by this time that there are other ways of fighting a war than 'in the trenches,' but in the Mesopotamia Campaign—although it was not quite as mobile an affair as the Palestine Campaign—they were to be given opportunities for recovering forgotten skills in due course. The British advance on Baghdad, undertaken rather as an attempt at a *coup de main* before sufficient resources were available, had been checked before Ctesiphon, where General Townshend with thirteen thousand men had been foiled by the arrival of Turkish reinforcements in an attempt to outflank the enemy positions. The exhaustion of his troops, and the impossibility of watering either men or horses on the desert battlefield, then obliged Townshend to fall back along the Tigris to Kut el Amara which, being a position of great tactical importance, he resolved to defend. The Turks, having surrounded and laid siege to it, then pushed on down the river, establishing defensive positions on either bank. At the time of arrival of the 71st, the British army was in contact with the enemy before Hanna, where the Turks had constructed several lines of trenches on the left bank of the Tigris, between the river and the Suwaikiya Marsh. Here it was that the 71st fired their first shots in the Mesopotamia Campaign, and joined in the effort then being made to relieve Kut.

A few days before the arrival of the 71st, an attempt to force the enemy positions at Hanna had been repulsed with heavy casualties. As a signal from General Townshend then indicated that by eating their horses the garrison could hold out much longer than had been previously supposed, a further attempt at Hanna was postponed in order to give time for a satisfactory build-up. Meanwhile the ordinary trench routine prevailed on the left bank, while a demonstration designed to worry the Turk and discourage any thought of a counter-attack, was made on the right bank.

The 71st relieved the 62nd Punjabis in the second line on 24 January, and the Manchesters in the first line on the 31st January, receiving a few casualties on each occasion. Themselves relieved by the Connaught Rangers on 4 February they crossed to the right bank, and moved gradually up-river to Abu Roman, being sniped on the way from the opposite bank. On crossing

the river the battalion had joined the 9th Infantry Brigade whose other regiments were the 1/1st and 1/9th Gurkhas and the 93rd Infantry.

The main Turkish defences covering the approach to Kut, consisted of an entrenched line, known as the Es Sinn Position, whose left flank, on the left bank, was secured by the Ataba and Suwada Marshes, and the right flank, on the right bank, by the Dujaila Redoubt, a formidable fortification based upon several mounds containing the remains of ancient civilisations. In an attempt at a short-cut to the relief of Kut it was planned to surprise and capture the Dujaila Redoubt, thus outflanking the Turk and opening the way to the beleaguered garrison.

The force for this venture—which included the 9th Infantry Brigade—formed up at the Pools of Siloam, five miles south of the Tigris, in the evening of 7 March and, heading a little east of north, marched through the night over the desert to the point of divergence, some four miles east of the Redoubt. Here the force divided in two groups of which the former, including the 9th Brigade, continued the march until it reached the southernmost bend of the Dujaila Depression. This was a former waterway, leading with many curves from the Tigris past the Dujaila Redoubt and to the south. It varied in depth from fifteen feet to practically nothing, and was accordingly an uncertain guide in the darkness. It was intended as the place of deployment for the first group, which was then to attack northerly in order to get to close range of the Redoubt at dawn. There had been however, several unavoidable delays during the approach march, followed by a further delay in finding the Depression. The outflanking movement was consequently late into action and lost the advantage of surprise upon which it had counted.

Of the three Infantry Brigades in the group, the 9th was to advance with its right flank on the Depression with the 28th in echelon behind it, while the 36th Infantry Brigade deployed on the left, with its flank protected by the Cavalry Brigade. The 9th Brigade advanced with the 1/1st Gurkhas and 93rd Infantry leading; the 1/9th Gurkhas in support and the 71st—marching in column of half-companies—in reserve. Machine guns were sent over to the right of the depression. The advance, though made in broad daylight, at first met with no difficulty and pushed forward under direct and long-range rifle and machine-gun fire which caused few casualties. An unfortunate mistake was then made by the 1/1st Gurkhas who reported themselves within assaulting distance of the enemy line, and that it was lightly held and could be carried without difficulty. The Brigadier repeated this to the Group Commander and ordered up the 71st to support the Gurkhas. The Group Commander laid on full artillery support and ordered the attack to be pressed home at 2 p.m. The 71st however, on coming up to support the Gurkhas found that they were in error, and that the enemy line was still nearly a mile away. It was too late then to do anything about it, and although the Brigadier reported that an assault on the Redoubt was impossible, he was ordered to make the attempt.

Closing upon the enemy the casualties of the 71st increased, and they were obliged to press on in short rushes. Orders were orders, and it is noteworthy that neither the 71st nor the native troops failed to get up when called upon to make the next rush. The time came however, when the whole line came under heavy enfilade fire from the enemy trenches south of the Redoubt, whose frontage far exceeded their own. ‘The right half of the 9th Brigade firing line,’ says the *Official History*, ‘(1/1st Gurkhas, part of 1/9th Gurkhas and Highland Light Infantry), managed with great gallantry to gain some ground during the artillery bombardment, but the left was checked by the very heavy hostile fire from the trenches on its left front.’

As the attack from the other Group developed against the eastern face of the Redoubt, the fire of all guns was directed upon the Redoubt and the 9th, 28th and 36th Brigades were ordered to make a further effort. This they did most gallantly, and again the right gained some ground, but under a withering fire they could make no headway and at nightfall commenced to dig

themselves in, with the 71st and Gurkhas no closer to the enemy line than four hundred yards. The night was spent in collecting the wounded at considerable risk, and with many further casualties. When all had been collected that could be found, the advanced troops withdrew back to the Depression. The Corps Commander was in considerable doubt as to whether or not he should abandon the enterprise. As had happened to General Townshend at Ctesiphon he found himself in difficulties over water, and with insufficient resources to renew the attack with any hope of success. Eventually therefore, he retired back to the Wadi Camp downstream from Hanna. The Turks followed up for some distance with cavalry and guns, but although the 71st marched with the rear-guard they were not attacked. The 71st lost 7 officers and 264 rank and file in this affair in killed, wounded and missing (only 16 were missing, and all presumed killed). The wounded had to be carried from the battlefield to the Wadi in carts, and on the rough ground suffered intensely. By this stage of the campaign the medical supplies and arrangements had fortunately greatly improved, so that at least they had a reasonable chance of survival. From the Wadi they were evacuated to Basra in river steamers.

The failure at the Dujaila Redoubt was most unfortunate, for it put an end to any hope of relieving Kut., although further attempts were made. The plan, involving assaults from several different directions at the same time, after a long night march, has been much criticised as being altogether too complicated. It would seem also, that insufficient allowance was made for the intrusion of the unforeseen factors inseparable from war. The 71st suffered the same fate as the 74th at Assaye, in being led astray by native troops. ⁽¹⁾ They also displayed the same gallantry, and were lucky not to have received the same proportion of casualties.

Following the failure at the Dujaila Redoubt, the main effort was switched to the left bank. This had more success, and the Turkish lines at both Hanna and Fallahya were driven in. The advance was then carried on against the enemy positions at Sannaiyat, while a demonstration was made by the 3rd Division along the right bank. During this time the 71st with the 9th Brigade were in reserve on the Senna Canal. On their side of the river the Turkish positions were at Bait Isa, covered by one at Abu Rumman which had however, been driven in by the advanced troops.

The attack on Sannaiyat failed at the second line, and the initiative was switched once more to the right bank, where the 3rd Division was ordered to attack Bait Isa. The garrison at Kut was by this time on very short commons indeed, and the advance up the Tigris to its relief had to be continued without delay although, apart from enemy opposition, great difficulty was caused by the rains, which led to the Tigris bursting its banks in many places and flooding the area along them.

The British line on the right bank having been advanced to within about a mile from the Turkish line before Bait Isa, orders were issued for the 7th and 9th Brigades to attack on 12 April. Further flooding however, obliged the Commander to postpone the operation, the ground everywhere being covered in two inches of water. The 8th and 37th Brigades were then sent forward to drive in the enemy covering positions and establish a forward line nearer the enemy. This they succeeded in doing, although it meant advancing under heavy fire through water waist-deep in places. The 9th Brigade then went forward in support.

The 7th and 9th Brigades formed up at 4a.m. on 15 April and commenced the advance half an hour later in a heavy thunderstorm. Each Brigade consisted of two battalions only, which in the 9th Brigade attacked with both of them up, in line of half-battalions. The lightning and the fixed bayonets affected the compasses, so that a loss of direction followed. However the objective—a covering position consisting of about eight hundred yards of trench running south from a feature known as Twin Pimples—was reached and stormed, captured and consolidated. It was lightly held, and the 71st came off lightly with 3 officers and 34 rank and file killed and wounded.

The 3rd Division then received orders to attack the main Turkish line at Bait Isa on the morning of the 17 April. This assault was again led by the 7th and 9th Brigades, which again formed up at four in the morning. In the 9th Brigade, which was on the left, the 1/1st and 1/9th Gurkhas led, with the 71st and 93rd Burma Infantry in line behind them. All went well on this occasion; surprise was achieved and the enemy trenches were stormed and captured at small cost, while the Turks lost heavily. The 71st were then withdrawn into Brigade reserve near the Twin Pimples, and the Brigade was warned that it would be relieved during the night. At about 7.30 p.m. however the Turks, having increased the floods by cutting into the banks of the river and canals, launched a counter-attack in considerable force preceded by a heavy barrage. The brunt of the attack fell upon the two Gurkha battalions of the 9th Brigade, and the 71st and 93rd Burma Infantry were sent forward to their support. The leading company of the 71st arrived at the first line just as it gave way, and the battalion was borne back by a disorganised mass of native troops and Turks as far as Twin Pimples, where it rallied and took up a position from which it brought the Turkish attack to a standstill. During the subsequent lull, the Brigade reorganised and again advanced, although the 71st were the only formed unit, for the Gurkhas and Burma Infantry could collect only a portion of their men. This affair, which it will be remembered took place during a dark night when it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe, or to grasp what was happening, was most unfortunate. Had the 71st arrived at the first line either a little sooner or a little later than they did, they would no doubt have been able to prevent the panic of the native troops which was due, no doubt, to the loss of most of their British officers. As it was, the 71st could not avoid being broken up and carried back by the rush, and the fact that they were soon able to rally and afterwards hold up the Turkish assault practically by themselves, with the loss of 8 officers and 107 rank and file, tends to be obscured by the fact that they belonged to the 9th Brigade and so shared the ignominy of this episode.

By morning the Turkish attack had been repulsed all along the front, and the trenches in front of the 9th Brigade could be seen blocked with their dead. They were soon in full retreat, having suffered some four or five thousand casualties. They had however, succeeded in halting the British advance up the right bank. Plans therefore, were made for renewing the attack upon the Sannaiyat positions on the left bank, while the greatly depleted 3rd and 13th Divisions on the right bank were to assist by maintaining their pressure on the enemy. The attack on the Sannaiyat positions took place on 22nd April, and failed after the most staggering efforts had been made, during which the Turks suffered so heavily that it appeared to the troops on the right bank that they had been utterly defeated. This unfortunately was not the case, and as the British forces on both banks had come to the end of their physical and material resources; having been constantly engaged since 5 April, the attempt to relieve Kut had to be abandoned, although it was but a bare day's march away. A final attempt was made by the Royal Navy in the gunboat *Julnar*, loaded with supplies and manned by volunteers. She was shelled and grounded near Maqasis.

General Townshend capitulated on 29 April. The troops of the Tigris Corps were heartened in the depression caused by the knowledge of their failure, by the following message to their commander from the King Emperor:

Although your brave troops have not had the satisfaction of relieving their beleaguered comrades in Kut, they have under the able leadership of yourself and subordinate commanders fought with great gallantry and determination under most trying conditions. The achievement of relief was denied you by floods and bad weather and not by the enemy whom you have resolutely pressed back. I have watched your efforts with admiration and am satisfied that you have done all that was humanly possible and will continue to do so in future encounters with

the enemy. George, R.I.

As the demands of the vital theatre in the west made it impossible to reinforce the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, while the fall of Kut made it no longer imperative to continue the attack, Sir Percy Lake, the Commander-in-Chief, was instructed to remain on the defensive and keep up such pressure on the enemy as could be done without endangering the safety of his force, which was to be his primary concern. In fact, in the Tigris Corps there was no immediate possibility of resuming the offensive, for battle casualties and sickness had torn gaps in its ranks which would take time to repair. The 71st, for example, who had been reorganised into two companies after the action at Bait Isa, were only able to muster 4 officers and 140 rank and file on 16 May, when they paraded for the presentation of 'brooches' to those awarded decorations in the field. A fortnight later they received a draft from home which had left Devonport 134 strong; left Basra 105 strong, and arrived 47 strong—58 had taken ill on the trip up-river, and 16 of them had died. Nor could the 47 be regarded as the survival of the fittest; but only as the lucky ones.

On 19 May, following reports of a Turkish withdrawal, an advance was made to the Dujaila Redoubt, which was found to be unoccupied and consequently taken over. The 71st bivouacked by the Depression which was then flooded, so that they were able to bathe in it. Bathing in the Tigris waters no doubt accounted for a good deal of the sickness, but in such a climate it is essential to have a bath sometimes even when on active service, and there were no other facilities.

From May to December, 1916, the 71st remained in camp by the Tigris, training and renewing their strength from returning sick and wounded. On 18 December they marched back to the Dujaila Redoubt, 30 officers and 583 rank and file strong. By this time the Turks had considerably shortened their line on the right bank, and were now concentrated within the first great horseshoe bend below Kut, known as the Khudhaira Bend. Their first line ran across the base of this bend from north to south, with each flank resting on the river. Preparatory to continuing the advance, the Tigris Corps Commander, Sir Stanley Maude, decided that the whole of this area would have to be cleared. The initial operations were carried out by the 8th and 9th Brigades, who worked forward towards the southern sector of the enemy line. The 71st, who were at first in Brigade reserve, were ordered forward on 22 December, and from then onward had a most trying time, clearing enemy advanced posts and sapping forward. The ground being very open and well covered by the Turkish positions, which were most skilfully sited, all this work had to be done at night. Twice when going forward to clear the enemy out of nullahs and off advance features, the battalion lost direction and arrived against the wire of the first line, which cost them some casualties.

The attack proper, was launched against the enemy right flank in daylight on 9 January 1917. This flank was particularly strong, for besides resting on the river, it was protected by a strong point constructed among some sand-hills. The attack was carried out by the 8th Brigade on the right and the 9th, with the 71st in reserve, on the left. There was a heavy mist and the Turks appear to have been taken by surprise, in spite of the warning given them by the preparatory bombardment. The right of their first line was accordingly secured at slight cost, and the stormers pushed on. The second objective of the 9th Brigade was a nullah behind the first line, which was taken by the Gurkhas supported by a company of the 71st, which lost 4 rank and file killed and 2 officers and 16 rank and file wounded during the assault. The Turks then put in a strong counter-attack against the 8th Brigade and drove it back. This stopped any further advance by the 9th Brigade and so the line reached was consolidated.

The attack was resumed at 9.30 a.m. on 11 January, when the 71st were ordered against the

second line. The battalion immediately ran into heavy enfilade fire but reached the second line which was stormed and taken. In this attack the 71st were supported only by a company of the 93rd Burma Infantry, which also suffered heavily when following up. Therefore the 71st were unable to consolidate the position captured, and when the Turks put in a heavy counter-attack they were bombed and machine-gunned out of it and had to retire back to the first line. The 71st lost 15 officers and 197 rank and file in this affair. They spent the night looking for their wounded, but 5 officers and 91 rank and file were still missing in the morning. Most of these must have met their end in or near the enemy second line, for few were ever heard of again.

The 71st being thus rendered temporarily ineffective were relieved, thanked by the Divisional Commander for their gallantry, and transferred to the 51st Brigade of the 7th Division, which was defending the Tigris Lines of Communication. The battalion was thus unfortunately denied the satisfaction of assisting at the actual capture of Kut, for which during the initial stages of the Battle of Kut they had helped to pave the way with such gallantry and sacrifice. On leaving the front line they handed over their first-line transport to the 2nd Dorsets, with whom they also exchanged rifles—for this battalion was not the real 2nd Dorset, the 54th, but one raised to replace the 54th who were part of Townshend's force, taken at the fall of Kut. It is interesting to note that even as late as 1917, it was still not possible to arm a newly-raised battalion with the modern short Lee-Enfield, and that such an expedient had still to be adopted as to exchange arms on the eve of going into battle.

From this date, 14 January 1917, until October, the 71st remained in the Tigris lines, their only excitement afforded by frequent expeditions in mobile columns against marauding Arabs. Meanwhile the Tigris Corps took Baghdad and advanced as far as Tikrit. In November Sir Stanley Maude died of cholera. He was the third Commander-in-Chief of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. Sir John Nixon, Sir Percy Lake, Sir Stanley Maude—now Sir William Marshall; all of them very fine commanders indeed. Each of them was responsible for a massive contribution towards victory, though frustrated at every turn by lack of resources, political considerations and the climate. Owing to the slaughter on the Western Front it seems likely that the British generalship in the Great War will be forever criticised in this country—although the enemy formed a different opinion of it. In this spirit of criticism the skill of the commanders elsewhere than on the Western Front tends to be forgotten or ignored, although it was in fact somewhat remarkable and certainly deserving of recognition if not appreciation.

While Germany was trying to bolster up the Turks, Great Britain had been trying to bolster up Russia. The former was having little success, but the latter was having none at all. The war effort of the Russians had dissolved in the Bolshevik Revolution, which was having serious effects throughout the Middle East and Afghanistan, and especially in Persia where the Bolsheviks lost no time in commencing to stir up trouble. The Turk however, was feeling very sorry for himself and, following Allenby's advance into Syria, failed to respond to German suggestions that he should attempt another offensive in Mesopotamia. General Dunsterville went into Persia with a few armoured cars on a military mission, known as 'Dunsterforce.' As he was given a reasonably polite reception some British infantry followed, and this showing of the flag restored British prestige. Reports then indicating to the British Government that Turkey was on the verge of surrender and would not survive a defeat in the field, the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force was ordered to advance against the Turkish Army on the Tigris with a view not merely to pushing it back on Mosul, but to destroying it.

The forward Turkish positions lay at Fat-Ha, some thirty miles north of Tikrit, where the Tigris flows through the gorge formed by the Jabal Makhul and the Jabal Hamrin. This was a very formidable position, offering few opportunities to a direct attack. Therefore while the Tigris

Corps advanced upon it, the 11th Cavalry Brigade and some armoured cars under General Cassels were sent to outflank it on the left bank. This movement induced the Turks to abandon it and fall back on Mushak, greatly to everyone's surprise.

The 71st had left the Tigris defences for the front on 27 September 1917. Their old Division, the 3rd, had been transferred to Palestine, and so they were still in the 17th Division and in the 51st Infantry Brigade with the 1/10th Gurkhas and the 14th Sikhs. They embarked at Sheikh Saad in river steamers at a strength of 698 rank and file, and twenty officers whom—so long had the 71st served with the Indian Army—they now persisted in calling 'British Officers.' Brigade Headquarters was at Kadhiman, where they disembarked and marched to Istabulat. From then on they were continually on the line of march during which they crossed the Tigris twice. This manoeuvring lasted until 26 June 1918, when they finally encamped below Tikrit. When the Tigris Corps advanced on the Turkish positions at Fat-Ha, the 71st, at the head of the 51st Brigade, marched on 21 October through Abu Rajash to Shuraimiyah, where they had some minor affair with the Turk of which there are no details. Then, as they approached Fat-Ha, air reports indicated to the Corps Commander that the enemy was on the run, and the 51st Brigade was ordered to step out. This it did, but the road was extremely difficult and at times evidently disappeared altogether for on 25 October, when the 71st at last caught up with the enemy, they reported having had to march a mile and a half through tall thistles, which, although the emblem of Scotland and a good omen, tried their tempers very severely.

Contact was made with the enemy at about 8 p.m. by the two leading companies of the 71st. As the enemy was known to be holding a line ahead—though not exactly where—the other two companies of the 71st, which had been detached to the right, had been called in to support the leaders, but unfortunately had not arrived when the head of the battalion came under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire at close range. The leading two companies at once deployed and 'with great gallantry, promptly closed with the enemy, forcing their way through a double high-wire entanglement. Taking twenty prisoners they captured the Turkish trench which, lying astride the road and to the west of it, was apparently a picquet post. Their own losses amounted to over one hundred.'⁽²⁾ The 14th Sikhs were sent forward to support these two companies, but found that they were not needed, for the 71st had consolidated their position in close touch with the enemy. The Sikhs were accordingly withdrawn and a little later the remainder of the 71st arrived and the battalion established a line astride the road about a mile south of Mushak.

On 26 October the 51st Brigade was ordered to attack at 7 a.m., with the 71st on the left and the Sikhs on the right. This order was anticipated by the two forward companies of the 71st, but they were met immediately by heavy artillery and small-arms fire and had to fall back again. Meanwhile the Sikhs, trying to come up into line on the right of the 71st, lost 323 men and six of their eight British Officers while pressing on with their assignment in the most gallant manner. Only their left company succeeded in keeping it, and aligned itself on the right of the 71st. There was thus no possibility of attack, and the 71st could do no more than hold their positions against considerable pressure from their left. The 112th Infantry and a machine-gun section was sent in to relieve this pressure and succeeded in doing so.

It being now evident that the enemy intended to hold his ground, the whole resources of the Corps, including aircraft, were brought forward on both banks of the river. On 27 October however, before a full-scale attack could be launched, the infantry patrols reported that the Turks had retired. The 71st had at once advanced on receiving this information from their own patrols and so, when the general advance started they were ahead of it and formed the vanguard as before. This was very splendid, for although the 71st did not know it, the 11th Cavalry Brigade had crossed the Tigris on to the enemy line of retreat. The last battle was about to be fought and

the 71st were to have the honour of leading into it, although, as will be seen, they retained this honour owing to a lucky break—which they well deserved.

At Mushak the casualties suffered by the 71st were 5 officers and 70 rank and file killed ; 6 officers and 192 rank and file wounded. During the action the battalion had been temporarily under the command of the 34th Brigade whose commander, Brigadier-General Wauchope, told them that it had been an honour to have had them under his command, even for one day; while the Divisional Commander, General Leslie, told the Commanding Officer that it had been largely owing to the Highland Light Infantry, that the Turks had been forced to withdraw from Mushak. Information now came back from the cavalry that the whole Turkish force was now on the right bank. Therefore the cavalry were ordered to take all possible steps to block its further retreat, while the 17th Division was to press on with speed. On 28 October, as the Divisions marched northwards to Sharquat, the 51st Brigade was in reserve, but on the following day it went to the front, so that the 71st marched at the head of the main-guard, with the 1/10th Gurkhas ahead of them as vanguard. Fortune would not allow such an arrangement. As the marching column closed on the Turks the Gurkhas took the wrong road, so that the 71st again moved up to the van. The cavalry of the advanced guard, a squadron of the 32nd Lancers, discovered and reported the enemy holding a strong position among the hills west of the Mosul road. As the cavalry then manoeuvred to its left to find the enemy flank, the 71st deployed immediately west of the road and advanced with three companies up. Meanwhile the 1/10th Gurkhas, on discovering their mistake had turned north across country, coming up on the left of the 71st just as battle was joined. The 14th Sikhs were then sent forward to support the Gurkhas, while the advanced guard artillery, 18 field guns, 4 heavy guns and a mountain battery, hastily went into action to support the attack of the three infantry battalions.

The Turks had already discovered that they were cut off for when part of their force endeavoured to continue the retreat, it had been repulsed by the 11th Cavalry Brigade and its supporting armoured cars holding a line across the Mosul road at Huwaish. Furthermore an infantry battalion and ten guns was in position on the left bank and could enfilade the road south of Huwaish. The enemy had therefore been out-maneuvred and satisfactorily trapped, but as nothing is certain in war he continued to resist for the time being in the hope, no doubt, that some opportunity might present itself for avoiding at least a complete defeat.

As the 71st and Gurkhas came under fire they began advancing 'by bounds,' rushing forward from one feature to another under covering fire. In this manner they had worked to within four hundred yards of the first line by nightfall. Meanwhile the other Brigades of the 17th Division came into action and the battle-line gradually built up. The final position had the 71st on the right of the first line, with the 14th Sikhs, 114th Mahrattas and 112th Infantry on their left. In the second line were the 2nd Royal West Kents, and the 1/10th Gurkhas, while the 45th Sikhs were in reserve in the third line. Fighting went on throughout the night, and by the time day dawned on the morning of 30 October 1918, the field artillery was down to its last rounds. It no longer mattered, for white flags were flying all along the enemy's front and a little later Ismail Hakki Bey surrendered with the total remains of the Turkish Tigris group, amounting to 8,000 men, 40 guns, 80 machine-guns and 2,000 animals.

VICTORY

On 3' October 1918, the day following the Battle of Sharquat, information was received by the Tigris Corps that an armistice had been signed with Turkey, and that all hostilities were to cease.

A 17th Division Order of the Day dated 30 October 1918 read:

For the last ten days the Division and attached troops have been strenuously marching across

difficult roads and carrying on despite shortage of rations, water and sleep. They have fought two rear-guard actions and two pitched battles, the last on 29th instant against a superior force which they defeated and which with the co-operation of our cavalry further north and infantry and guns across the river they have forced into complete surrender, resulting in the capture of every man, gun and animal.

The troops have given the finest possible exhibition of soldierly fortitude and gallantry in action, and have fully maintained the best traditions of the British and Indian Armies.

I am proud to command such a fine force, and thank it for the superhuman efforts it made to bring the operations to so successful an issue.

After assisting in clearing the battlefield at Sharqat, the 71st marched back down the right bank of the Tigris by the way they had come. At Mushak they halted to pay respects at the graves of their fallen comrades, whom they had known as living men and good companions only a few days before. The fact that the war was now over was hardly believable. The first excitement had been succeeded by the inevitable reaction, and so it was with heavy hearts that they stood at the *present*, while the strains of *Lochaber no more* echoed along the Jabal Makhul. Whatever their thoughts may have been, they could not have drifted back to the pleasant days among the Simla Hills in 1914, when the officers played polo and cricket and danced at the club ; the sergeants took their families on picnics, and the men—the *soldier sahibs*—walked about in their scarlet coats, respected by all. Those old days were gone, and the officers, the sergeants and the men who had known them were dead and buried somewhere in France, in Egypt, or along the Tigris between Basra and Sharqat. Now, what remained of the 71st was a parcel of conscripts from the drafting battalions, who had never seen the colours of the regiment under which they served, nor looked with pride on the thirty-three names of hard-won victories which even then adorned them, entwined with laurel leaves. They were not even commanded by an officer of the Regiment, for their very gallant Colonel belonged to the Connaught Rangers. Yet still, they belonged to the Highland Light Infantry, and were as proud of the fact as if they had served with it twenty years. So indeed may the Regiment be proud of them, for the battle honour ‘Mesopotamia,’ which their efforts added to the colours was most dearly purchased and most stoutly gained.

‘Both from what I have seen myself and from what has been reported to me by others,’ wrote the Brigadier, ‘I am able to say with pleasure that through-out these operations you have all borne yourselves with very great distinction as becomes members of such a fine regiment. The Division was asked by Corps to submit a list of those battalions who had done especially well during these operations. That list was headed by the Highland Light Infantry.’

The Corps Commander wrote

That, remembering the heavy sacrifices the battalion was called upon to suffer through no fault of its own in January, 1917, he was anxious that it should have next time a good opportunity:

that at Mushak on 25 October it was suddenly called on to face in the darkness a very difficult situation, in which it bore itself magnificently and was successful : that its heavy losses in that battle; which losses he greatly deplored, were unavoidable in such fighting ; and that he was very pleased to hear that, in spite of them, the battalion was still able to lead the Division into the highly successful action of 29 October, north of Sharqat, in which success it bore an important part.

The 71st marched into Baghdad on 20 January 1919, and stayed there until March, by which time the remaining strength of the battalion had been gradually whittled away by drafts being attached to other regiments for duty with the Army of Occupation. A small cadre, consisting of

battalion headquarters and a few rank and file was all that remained of the 71st when it embarked at Basra on 2 April, and so came back from the war.

⁽¹⁾ The expression 'native troops' is the old one used to differentiate between troops who are natives of India and British or European troops. It is by no means intended as a disparagement. Although in this case it covers Gurkhas, who are not natives of India, this is for convenience only. The Gurkhas are now of course, members of both British and Indian Armies.

⁽²⁾ *Official History*

Chapter XXI

GERMAN WITHDRAWAL TO THE HINDENBURG LINE

The 16th and 17th H.L.I. at Ten Tree Alley, February 1917—another raid by the Glasgow Highlanders—the 74th raided at Rubempre—the 74th as advanced guard—the 57th H.L.I. at the capture of Savy, 1 April 1917—the 16th H.L.I. at Etalon and their meeting with the President of France at Nesle—the 15th H.L.I. and the capture of the guns at Francilly, 2 April 1917—the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.I. at Arras, 9 April 1917.

AFTER Lord Kitchener's death, his place as Secretary of State for War had been taken by Mr David Lloyd George, who was well known for his energy, determination and courage. Apart from these attributes he had no particular qualifications to fit him for the appointment, and his selection was an unfortunate one. He did not understand warfare and disliked accepting advice from those who did, having a strong antipathy for general officers. Succeeding Mr Asquith as Prime Minister in December 1916, he abandoned his predecessor's policy of accepting without question the advice of his military advisers; preferring to go behind their backs for counsel more in accordance with his own wishes, such as might be offered him by Lord French, or by some of the French generals.

The Field-Marschals, Haig and Robertson, who happened both to be men of outstandingly straightforward character, could not in any way compete with the tortuous mentality of the 'Welsh Wizard,' who rapidly conceived a dislike and contempt for them both which ripened into an enmity and hatred so profound, as to lead him into active intrigue against them even in the midst of war. Even after the war his envy and maliciousness had not spent itself, and it pursued them beyond the grave.

He became Prime Minister after the operational plans for 1917 had been agreed in principle at the Chantilly Conference headed by Sir Douglas Haig and General Joffre. After this conference General Joffre had been relieved of his post as Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies—for political reasons and in a very dubious and distasteful manner —by his own Prime Minister and replaced by General Robert Nivelle. General Nivelle had his own plan for breaking the deadlock on the Western Front, which consisted of the assembly of an immense 'mass of manoeuvre' close behind the front line, and ready to exploit the break-through. In theory there was nothing against such a conception, but certain practical difficulties and changes of dispositions did in fact prevent its implementation. One of its principle features was that the effort was to be entirely French; and, to enable the French to mass the troops necessary, the British army had to take over more of the front and play a subsidiary role. This led, as General Nivelle had no doubt intended it should, to a demand that the British army should be placed under his orders. To this demand Mr Lloyd George, who had already adversely compared British methods with those of the French in a meeting with Sir Douglas Haig, agreed. General Nivelle however, was not a popular choice in his own country. There was a change of French government and the British army therefore, was committed to the orders of a French General who did not enjoy the confidence of his own government, and who was indeed completely untried, having been promoted over the heads of several colleagues including Foch, owing apparently, to his possession of a fine appearance and a persuasive tongue.

The British army had it is true, been placed under General Nivelle for the one operation only, and with numerous important safeguards. Its effect however, was completely to restrict the

initiative of the British Commander-in-Chief at a critical time in the war. The year 1916 had ended in favour of the allies on the Western Front. So much so that Germany realised that eventual victory had become highly unlikely and made a peace proposal. When this was rejected by the Allied Governments, she immediately put into execution her plans for starving Great Britain by unrestricted submarine warfare, and meanwhile went firmly on to the defensive on the Western Front, where Field-Marshal von Hindenburg replaced General von Falkenhayn as Commander-in-chief, with General Ludendorff as his Chief of Staff.

During January 1917, to enable General Nivelle to withdraw divisions in order to form his 'mass of manoeuvre,' Sir Douglas Haig commenced taking over from the French as far south as the Amiens-Roye road. This meant that he had to thin out his front line considerably, and that behind it there was a constant movement of troops which lasted until the end of February. Meanwhile, partly in order to cover these movements and partly as a result of the policy decisions reached at the Chantilly Conference, he ordered the enemy to be kept stirred up by raids and limited offensives along the line, and particularly on the 5th Army front in the area of the Somme, in order to give the enemy the impression that the offensive would be renewed in that area. The 5th Army accordingly attacked on a limited scale from several directions with a view to the capture of various enemy strong points. These attacks were all successful and included one against the part of the German first line known as Ten Tree Alley. This attack was made by the 97th Brigade, in which the 16th and 17th H.L.I. were in reserve and relieved the two forward battalions—the 11th Borders and 2nd K.O.Y.L.I.—as soon as the objective had been captured. The enemy immediately put in a strong counter-attack which lasted most of 1February, and which the H.L.I. were hard put to it to hold off. They managed it, but had to be relieved during the night on account of their complete exhaustion and heavy casualties.

On 9 February the Glasgow Highlanders carried out a raid against the first line astride the Peronne road, with three officers, seventy-two rank and file and six sappers. It was planned and carried out with the same precision as that on Mad Point. The enemy unit however, was evidently an exceptionally good one, for no German would surrender. An indication of this was given by the attitude of the first met with—a lone sentry—who attempted to fight it out with a dozen Highlanders. On these affairs there was of course no time to argue with brave fellows like this, and as his comrades were all of the same mind only two prisoners were taken— one wounded. Others in the dug-outs likewise refused to surrender and were methodically blown up by the sappers. Although therefore, the raid was completely successful the results were disappointing, and the Glasgow Highlanders lost an officer and two men killed, and two wounded.

Three days later the 74th had the experience of being raided themselves. The battalion had just relieved the 17th Royal Fusiliers at Rubempre on a part of the Somme battlefield where the front line consisted merely of a series of shell-holes, not all of which were linked up, while the wire was quite inadequate. In one part there was a gap of two hundred yards between section posts, which the battalion had been ordered to cover temporarily by siting a Lewis gun in a shell-hole right in the middle of it. It was realised that this was not the best of tactics, but higher authority was understandably nervous of a gap of these dimensions, and this solution was evidently the best that could be arrived at with the resources there available. The 74th had been warned of the raid by an obliging prisoner, who informed them that seventy *Sturmtruppen* had been practising for it for a month. The Divisional artillery and 'C' Company, on whom the blow was to fall, were all ready for the *Sturmtruppen* when they arrived with clockwork punctuality: The raiders went straight through the gap without stopping, thereby exposing their backs to 'C' Company, who took full advantage. The defensive fire then came down on them and about twenty got back to the first line, where they were all killed or captured. They must however, have carried away the

Lewis gun team while 'C' Company was shooting them up from the rear, for the unfortunate Lewis gunners were never heard of again. Otherwise, the 74th lost only two rank and file killed. The raiders had apparently planned to sweep round behind the first line and take it in the rear. Under the circumstances it was not a bad idea, and it was just as well the 74th were expecting the visit.

During the winter, digging and even the erection of wire was practically impossible owing to the black frost, snow and sleet. It was difficult to get water, for all supplies were frozen. Frostbite and trench-feet were common, and even the seasoned soldiers had an exceptionally hard time. Many arriving in new drafts, experiencing these conditions for the first time were often unable to stand up to them. The Glasgow Highlanders complained of getting men 'unaccustomed to the kilt,' whose leg-muscles became so stiff they could barely move. The troops were however, fairly well-found in food and clothing and their morale was in no way impaired.

On 24 February the 74th, who had just relieved the Essex in the Ancre Valley, found that orders for rigorous patrolling were in force. The Essex in fact, kept their patrols out until the relief was completed. These orders were the result of indications of an enemy withdrawal which had been observed for several days. The possibility of such a withdrawal had not been entirely overlooked by General Headquarters, for the construction of the 'Hindenburg Line' had been reported both by prisoners and aircraft. The massive extent of the Line had not however been appreciated at this date, for a combination of bad weather and the activities of Freiherr von Richthofen's 'Flying Circus' had made a detailed air reconnaissance impossible. In fact the Germans, having determined to go on to the defensive on the Western Front until such time as their submarine campaign had had due effect, had taken a leaf out of Wellington's book and constructed a most formidable defensive system in the rear to which they were now retiring—on the Somme, distances of up to thirty miles.

When the Essex patrols returned, they reported the enemy still in position, but when the 74th patrols went out they found that he had gone. This was simultaneously discovered along the front, and an immediate advance was ordered to be carried out with caution. Owing to the villainous state of the ground on the Somme battlefield there was little that could be done to hinder the enemy's retirement, for the movement of guns and wheeled transport could be carried out only with the greatest difficulty, while pursuing infantry were in constant danger in crossing an area so bristling with hidden machine-gun posts and potential rear-guard positions.

In the 5th Infantry Brigade the 74th were ordered forward as advanced guard to the 2nd Division. Their objective was the line from Loupart Wood to Pys, on which they were to take up an outpost position. The battalion left Courcellette accordingly at 3.30 in the morning in pitch darkness and fog, with two companies up. Evidence that the enemy had not simply cut and run, but that his retirement was well covered, was afforded by the distant sounds of musketry and the roar of his defensive fire on either flank. Nevertheless the realisation that, after their long months of squalor and hardship in the trenches, they were at last pressing hot on the heels of a retreating enemy had a most exhilarating effect on the troops—which was not however, shared by the Commanders, who understood only too well the intentions which lay behind this withdrawal.

To provide an advanced guard through enclosed and difficult country known to be occupied by enemy rear-guards, and without the assistance of cavalry and guns requires highly-trained troops. It is essential that an advanced guard should press on with the utmost speed, and that it should be able to deploy and attack immediately it is fired on. In 1914 the 74th could have carried out such an assignment without difficulty, for they were then trained in all operations of war. In 1917, it was another matter, for by then the military knowledge of all but the senior officers was extremely limited. 'The 2/Highland L.I., advanced guard to the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division,

reached its objective by 9.30 a.m.’ So says the *Official History*, making it sound easy, but it was not. The two forward companies, toiling through the mud in column of platoons in fours at fifty paces interval—for they did not know how to deploy from column of route—soon lost touch with each other and also their sense of direction. They also lost their gunner and his signallers, and the battalion signal officer with his party of eight; all of whom were cut off and made prisoners during the advance through the enemy defensive barrage. The fog however, saved many casualties from snipers and machine-guns, many of which they were able to deal with without loss to themselves. ‘D’ Company on the left found it was being continually held up by the slowness of the two men leading as point, about seventy yards ahead of the point section, for none of the men understood this duty. Eventually an old regular, Private Albert, somewhat impatiently asked to be released from the administrative duties allotted to him out of respect for his years, and to be given charge of the point. ‘From that moment,’ says the record, ‘the advance continued unchecked.’ At last however, shortly before 9 a.m., Private Albert was seen to be signalling ‘enemy in sight in large numbers,’ and a moment later his verbal message came back through the connecting files— ‘There’s a whole regiment of the s on the hill half-right.’ Having laboriously extended, ‘D’ Company struggled through the mud in the direction indicated to find, fortunately before opening fire, that they had fortuitously come upon ‘B’ Company, engaged in consolidating on the objective. Thus did the 74th succeed in carrying out its mission— and if anyone ventured to pull Private Albert’s leg, it is quite certain that he received back as good as he gave.

The German retirement proper, began on 16 March, when the enemy withdrew all along the line, with the British infantry in close touch. In an area so devastated as that of the battlefields on the Western Front, this touch could not long be maintained by the troops in the first line. Advanced guards formed in a more orthodox manner than had been that of the 74th at Courcelles had therefore to be sent out, preceded by the cavalry. The field artillery could advance only with the greatest difficulty and many advanced guard actions had to be fought without artillery support. The object however, was to regain and maintain touch with the enemy without becoming heavily involved, and this was duly accomplished.

As the Hindenburg Line was not yet complete, the enemy strove to protect it by a line of outposts, one of which was at the village of Savy in whose capture the 17th H.L.I. played an important part.

The action at Savy was part of a plan conceived by Sir Charles Woolcombe, commanding the 4th Corps, of cutting out the enemy’s position at Holnon Wood by sending the 32nd Division round it to the south, and the 61st Division to the north. It was an interesting operation, in that it was the first open battle fought by British troops on the Western Front since 1914, and in which they did very well although such operations were foreign to most of them. The 97th Brigade led off by sending the 17th H.L.I. and 11th Borders against Savy at dawn on 1 April 1917. On the previous day the 16th H.L.I. who were holding an outpost line before Roupy had watched a squadron of cavalry cantering across their front to discover the German strength at Savy. The cavalry drew heavy machine-gun fire from the houses and gardens.

The 17th H.L.I. marched from Germaine just after midnight, and moved across country in advanced guard formation with two hundred yards between companies. Passing Fluquières, a sad heap of smoking ruins, they came upon the main St Quentin road and marched along it to Roupy, where the cross-roads had been blown up. Arriving before Savy at 5 a.m. the battalion deployed and attacked immediately. The affair while it lasted, was extremely exciting and altogether worthwhile. The enemy had had no time to turn it into a fortress and disappear underground, but had to fight it out man to man along the streets and among the houses. He resisted very strongly,

but the 17th H.L.I. gradually pushed him out with rifle, bomb and bayonet, after which he took up a position along the railway embankment north of the 5th village. Outside the village the 17th suffered heavy casualties from a couple of machine-guns in a mine crater, but one of the platoons succeeded in capturing this strong point under covering fire from Lewis guns. The Borders then arrived and the enemy was evicted from the railway line and sent packing, under the heavy fire of both battalions directed against his rear. Patrols were then sent forward to the Bois de Savy, which was found to be held in strength. In accordance with the plan the 96th Brigade therefore went through the H.L.I. and Borders and attacked the wood, which was captured after some hours of brisk fighting. The 17th H.L.I. lost 103 all ranks on this day, of whom 32 were killed.

During the advance a new German abomination was encountered in the shape of the booby-trap. This devilish contrivance is nowadays accepted as a commonplace in warfare, but no soldier had thought of such a thing before 1917. Even then, many of the German commanders would not countenance its use. In some parts of the territory abandoned by the enemy however, it was unsafe to touch anything while searching the German fortifications, until the sappers had been round them first. This certainly caused delay, but it is doubtful if the enemy gained much thereby, for such further evidence of the unpleasant character of the German merely strengthened the resolve of the troops to see that he paid for it. Equally so, did the Wanton vandalism met with in the villages lately occupied by the enemy, such as Etalon, which the 16th H.L.I. entered hard on the German heels on 19 March. They found the Mayor contemplating the smouldering ruins of his house, lately a German headquarters. He showed them his fine old walled garden, now reduced to chaos with its fruit trees sawn through at ground level. The retreating Germans had left parties of cyclists behind to smash up peoples' furniture, burn the churches and monuments and desecrate the countryside, as was being done in most other villages, but at Etalon the cavalry screen caught up with them, and made them pay dearly for this mischief.

The 16th H.L.I. marched into Nesle in the evening, with the pipers playing *Scotland the Brave* — for the cavalry had reported it clear. The Germans had taken away all the teenage children, for some obscure reason. The rest of the village was there to give them a rousing reception, although the battalion had a hard job protecting its prisoners, whom the populace—so bitter were the memories of its recent experiences—wished to tear to pieces. Before the H.L.I. left this village the French President, M. Poincaré, arrived. Speaking at his installation as Lord Rector of Glasgow University after the war, he recollected this occasion

I had before my eyes in 1917 a spectacle which fitly symbolises France's gratitude. The small town of Nesle had just been liberated by Scottish troops, I immediately hastened to see the poor people; the inhabitants were happy and cheerful; they had so long waited for their release ! Release which, by the way, was unfortunately of short duration, for the next year the town was again taken by the Germans.

But in 1917, the population thought only of their good luck.

A Scottish battalion was drilling and marching in perfect order; a Scottish band was playing in the square some tunes which were eagerly applauded by the crowd. *Scotland the Brave* and *The Kilt is my Delight*. The pipers went to and fro amid the clapping of hands and the waving of hats while the thundering of cannon was still heard in the distance.

Meanwhile, the inhabitants kept repeating to me, 'What beautiful troops, and how pleased we are to welcome them !' The Germans continually told us that the British Army was worth nothing and that they had never seen any Scots before them in the field. We well knew they used to lie.

But we did not know that these troops they pretended to disdain so much were so remarkably well-trained

Immediately after the affair at Savy, the 15th H.L.I. with the 14th Infantry Brigade arrived in the Bois de Savy at about three o'clock in the morning of 2 April. Here the Brigade deployed between the village and the wood, in preparation for an attack at dawn against the villages of Holnon and Francilly-Selency. In this attack, which was completely successful, the 1st Dorsets made for Holnon and the 2nd Manchesters for Selency, while the H.L.I. had to capture the height running eastward from the latter village. During the fight the Manchesters were fired on over open sights by a six-gun battery just outside Selency. They drove off the gunners with rifle-fire and dug in a post to command the guns. Meanwhile the remainder of the Brigade were digging in fast along their objectives, for, as they were under heavy artillery fire the troops were not suffering from their customary distaste for hard manual labour. The enemy guns remained out in the open, forming, as had the British guns at Colenso, a focal point for the attention of every combatant. Ever since guns were invented, they have headed the list of honourable trophies, in the capture or defence of which any soldier worthy of the name would be prepared to risk his life. These being the Manchesters' guns, the battalion made most desperate efforts to carry them off but horses could not be got to them and the Manchesters had no drag-ropes, besides having an insufficiency of men after their casualties during the day. At last they were withdrawn to their main line, and the H.L.I. took over the task of covering the guns. The H.L.I. were then ordered to bring them in during the night of 3 April, and a careful plan was made by an officer of the General Staff Major F. W. Lumsden, who was temporarily commanding the 17th H.L.I. He brought horses up as close as possible, sent out a company as covering party and led out thirty men with drag-ropes. The enemy put down a heavy barrage round the guns—not because they had noticed these arrangements, but in order to cover a battalion of *Sturmtruppen* who, by a curious chance, had been ordered to bring in the guns at exactly the same time as the 15th H.L.I. whose covering party met them head on. In the darkness it was hard to distinguish friend from foe, and a very confused battle developed. The covering party was deployed, with considerable gaps between the platoons, through which the enemy marched unawares and, being fired on from flank and rear were thrown into confusion. Meanwhile the guns were hauled away one by one to the cover behind which the horses awaited them. All guns were thus secured undamaged except for the last, which a party of *Sturmtruppen* managed to reach and blow out the breach-block. Still, Major Lumsden insisted on having the whole battery, so the haulers went out again for the sixth time and brought the last gun safely in. Major Lumsden, who had gone to the guns three times, besides joining in the affray with the *Sturmtruppen*, was awarded the Victoria Cross, and shortly after appointed to the command of the 14th Infantry Brigade. Lieutenant Calderwood, who commanded the hauling party, received the Military Cross, and Lieutenant Jeffreys, commanding the covering party, was 'complimented.' The casualties of the H.L.I. were an officer and a private killed, 23 rank and file wounded and 6 missing. For some reason the 15th H.L.I. received no credit for this affair in the *Official History*, but the facts as briefly given are authenticated by the War Diary, the records of the Commanding Officer and others, and are given in full in the battalion history. It was a very fine performance in its own small way, noteworthy for the skilful leading and stout hearts of the covering party, which enabled them to hold off many times their number of picked troops, and for the manner in which the officer and his platoon went through the barrage six times with their drag-ropes to the guns.

This action was noteworthy for another reason. From their trenches the 15th H.L.I. could see

the spires of St Quentin appearing above the high ground on their right front. They proved to be a symbol that the brief period of open warfare was at an end, for the high ground before St Quentin was one of the most strongly defended positions in the Hindenburg Line.

General Nivelle's plan, which envisaged a British offensive at Arras with the object of forcing the enemy to commit his reserves, followed by a vast French offensive intended to breakthrough on the Aisne, had been somewhat put out of joint by the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. Sir Douglas Haig, who had regarded the plan with considerable scepticism from the first, was now more than ever against it. He was not a little worried by the implications behind the project of the Hindenburg Line, which he saw as a massive defensive screen from behind which the enemy would in due course launch a major offensive against his line in Flanders. No arguments however, would prevail against General Nivelle, who remained confident in success. As Sir Douglas Haig was now under his orders, there was therefore nothing that could be done and the Battle of Arras went forward. The plans for a British offensive at Arras during the Spring of 1917 had been formulated at the time of the Chantilly Conference, but the situation now confronting Sir Douglas Haig on the Western Front could hardly have been envisaged by him at that time. Apart from the problem of the Hindenburg Line, he was now committed to taking over thirty miles of the French line preparatory to his offensive. A number of modifications to his original plan were therefore necessary, and in the end it was limited to the attack and capture of Vimy Ridge by the 1st Army, while on its right the 3rd Army attacked south of Arras and advanced on Cambrai. The original plan, as agreed upon by Sir Douglas Haig and General Joffre had been arranged for February, and it is tragic to think that, had it not been for the replacement of General Joffre by General Nivelle, and the support of the latter by Mr Lloyd George, the enemy would have been caught in his original worn and water-logged positions, instead of in his new and immensely strongly fortified line. The Battle of Arras opened on 9 April 1917, after a preliminary bombardment lasting several days, by the 3rd Army advancing into what is known as the First Battle of the Scarpe, and the 1st Army into the Battle of Vimy Ridge. As far as the infantry was concerned, the fighting differed very little from that experienced during the offensives of the previous year. Sir Douglas Haig, however, now had a very considerable weight of metal at his disposal, which included what in those days was considered a large number of tanks. Forty of these contrivances were allotted to the 3rd Army to assist the advance of its hundred and twenty infantry battalions— of which, as a matter of interest, forty-four happened to be Scottish. Another innovation was the use of gas-shells in considerable quantities. These advantages enabled the infantryman—who, even without his greatcoat, had to carry into action half his own weight in arms, equipment and stores—to gain what was certainly a victory, though unfortunately not a decisive one, on the first day. On the 3rd Army front the enemy third line was reached and taken in most places, while the 4th Division, passing through, captured Fampoux. In the 1st Army the Canadian Corps took most of Vimy Ridge.

Only two battalions of the Highland Light Infantry had the luck to take part in the successes of 9 April. They were the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.I. in the 46th Infantry Brigade of the 15th Scottish Division, attacking due east out of Arras against the Wancourt-Feuchy trench system. The Brigade started the day in Divisional reserve, with orders to advance at 12.30 p.m. This was later postponed, owing to a temporary hold-up in front, but the order to stand fast did not reach the two leading companies of the 12th H.L.I. who advanced at the original hour. This caused them to get in front of the initial line of the barrage, which came down behind them. Realising what had happened they took what cover they could find and waited until the barrage passed over them, when they jumped up and followed it—' a fine example of cool courage,' says the *Official History*. In the subsequent attack of the 46th Brigade, the enemy gun positions were reached and

attacked from distances of three hundred yards. The German gunners fought their guns to the end, firing over open sights and causing heavy casualties, but they were all shot down or bayoneted and no fewer than thirty-six guns were thus taken in the field by direct assault— a glorious achievement.

After these great initial successes the tempo of the offensive began to slacken as the enemy brought up his reserves, while on the British side the usual difficulties of advancing the guns and bringing up supplies once more exerted their frustrating influence. Therefore in an attempt to prevent the offensive degenerating into a series of local attacks, the 5th Army went forward from Bullecourt on 11 April, on which date a renewed offensive was made by the 3rd Army in co-operation on its northern flank.

Chapter XXII

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

The 10th/11th H.L.I. at the capture of Monchy le Preux, 11 April 1917—the 16th H.L.I. at the capture of Fayet—the 74th at the Battle of Arleux, 26 April 1917—the 10th/11th H.L.I. at Guemappe—the Glasgow Highlanders at Sensee—the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I. in the fighting for the Nieuport Bridgehead, 10 July 1917—the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.I. at the taking of the Frezenburg Redoubt, 31 July 1917— The Glasgow Highlanders at Gheluvelde, 25 September 1917.

As an essential preliminary to the further advance of the 6th Corps, in which the 15th Scottish Division had reached a line about half a mile west of Monchy le Preux just north of the Arras-Cambrai road, the 15th and 37th Divisions were ordered to attack and capture Monchy at 5 a.m. on 11 April. The town itself was within the boundary of the 37th Division, which was responsible for its actual capture, while the 15th Division to the north was to occupy the ground between Monchy and the River Scarpe from which the battle derives its official name. When the hour came the 46th Brigade advanced just north of Monchy with one battalion up—the 10/11th H.L.I. The attack on the town was carried out by the 111th Infantry Brigade and some tanks, but it met with such heavy opposition that its progress was slow. Meanwhile in the turmoil of battle the 10/11th H.L.I. became gradually pushed south by the 45th Infantry Brigade on its left, until it came under heavy fire from the outskirts of Monchy. Two of its companies therefore attacked and entered the town ahead of the 111th Brigade and partially cleared it.

Close behind the two Infantry Divisions, the 3rd Cavalry Division was awaiting the capture of Monchy before pushing forward to occupy the feature Hill 100, and cover the Scarpe Valley. The cavalry patrols reported the capture of the town on seeing the H.L.I. enter it, and although this information was premature the Division advanced, with its leading Brigades at the trot and canter. On coming abreast of Monchy the 10th Hussars and Essex Yeomanry came under heavy fire from the town and, in accordance with orders wheeled and charged, entering from the north-western corner, galloping through it and sending the remainder of the garrison packing. Owing to the heavy fire which the enemy maintained on the exits to the village the cavalry could not however get out of it to join the remainder of their Division, and before they could send their horses back a heavy bombardment was put down on the village from which they suffered severely. The leading troops of the 111th Infantry Brigade, which had had very heavy casualties and lost all its tanks, had by this time arrived and the 10th/11th H.L.I. left in order to work forward to their original objective.

Owing to the severe losses suffered by the infantry in the capture of this key position it was just as well that the cavalry were there, for their presence deterred the enemy from launching a counter-attack which he had prepared. The village therefore remained firmly in British hands, and its possession played an important part in subsequent operations. Its capture was a fine and gallant feat of arms, though achieved only at heavy cost, and in such confused fighting that the credit for it cannot be claimed by any particular unit or formation. The claim of the 10th/11th H.L.I. to have been the first into the village, thus paving the way to its capture is however supported by the German accounts, which state that while they were holding out against the 111th Brigade attack, British troops entered the village in their rear, and also by the reports from the cavalry patrols. After this day's action the 15th Scottish Division was withdrawn into reserve.

On 14 April the French commenced an effort to take St Quentin. Assisting in this operation,

the 32nd Division was ordered to capture Fayet, the last enemy stronghold before the city, which was carried out by the 97th Infantry Brigade, which 'had been living for some days in earth holes, while the weather flayed them unmercifully.' The Brigade attacked before dawn with the 2nd K.O.Y.L.I. on the left and the 16th H.L.I. on the right. The H.L.I. attacked with two companies up which were to secure an intermediate objective—a line running north and south through the Chateau Fayet. This done, the reserve companies passed through to the village, while the companies at the Chateau wheeled right to form a defensive flank towards St Quentin. Contact with the K.O.Y.L.I. was lost; and the battalion captured the village on its own, taking 150 prisoners and 2 machine-guns before moving out down the slope towards St Quentin, where they occupied a German trench running from Cepy Farm, close to the suburbs of St Quentin, with the 2nd Manchesters on their right and the 2nd K.O.Y.L.I. on their left.

The 16th H.L.I. lost 140 all ranks on this day. Besides prisoners and machine-guns they took a substantial quantity of loot at Fayet, including many pairs of brand-new German boots, which they instantly put on, for their own were worn out. It is a curious fact, vouched for by the battalion, that at the first kit inspection after being relieved from the line, the men wearing these German boots had the price of a British pair deducted from their pay. During this period of open warfare, the 32nd Division established a name for itself for the admirable way in which it adapted itself to the changed conditions. Certainly the manner in which the 16th H.L.I. manoeuvred during the affair of Fayet was highly professional. The prisoners taken were reported as being 'bewildered,' which is not surprising, for they were quite unaccustomed to such intricate tactics. The battalion received a message of congratulation from Sir Douglas Haig, for its capture of Fayet.

General Nivelle's offensive opened on 16 April, and although ten thousand prisoners were captured in the initial phases, it did not meet with the success anticipated. On the other hand all Sir Douglas Haig's objectives had been reached at Arras, where he would now have called a halt, had he had his way, and switched the axis of his advance to Flanders. As however, things were not going well for the French, he was obliged to keep up his pressure on their left flank in order to pin down the enemy reserves. A further renewal of the offensive was therefore ordered on 23 April.

Since the commencement of the Battle of Arras the 74th had been holding captured enemy trenches on Vimy Ridge. During this period Lieutenant-Colonel J. C. Grahame was promoted to the command of the battalion on the promotion of Brigadier-General A. A. Wolfe-Murray, who had taken it to France in 1914. Colonel Grahame had had the remarkable experience of commanding the 10th, 10th/11th, 12th and 9th (Glasgow Highlanders) battalions of the Highland Light Infantry in turn in the field, before taking over command of the 74th, whom he had joined on first commission in India, over twenty years before. The day of his arrival must have been a proud one for him, for his devotion to the 74th bordered on the eccentric—and was none the worse for that. He found them in excellent shape and ready for battle in whatever form it might take. They had incidentally, a piper to each platoon at this time, who played it in and out of the line. There was also a corps of drums, but these were left in rear and joined the pipes only when the battalion was resting. The pipers however, although reasonable care was taken of them, went forward and played in action on many occasions in accordance with their ancient tradition.

Colonel Grahame's luck was out. The 74th went into the line on 26 April before Arleux, and while the Colonel was visiting the forward companies, battalion headquarters was established in an enemy concrete gun-pit. It was a poor choice, being in a conspicuous position and filled with detonated 4.2 shells and cordite charges. However, there was probably nowhere else suitable, and the place was certainly very comfortable. There were two stairways leading down to it with a

small dug-out at the foot of each, in one of which lived the officers and orderly-room staff and in the other the mess-staff. Just after the Colonel had returned, the enemy opened heavy artillery fire on it, which blew in one of the entrance doors and set fire to a box of Very lights. As if this were not enough a further shell came through the door and burst in the gun-pit itself. The occupants being in the dugouts were unhurt, but as the shelling went on and the detonated shells began to explode, it became apparent that they would have to get out quickly, if they were not to be burned or buried alive. The cordite was ablaze however, and the flames shooting up to a height of several feet through the gun-pit exits. Leading the way up from the dug-outs Colonel Grahame assisted in beating out the flames, and the officers and orderly-room staff got out except for the sergeant, who was blown back by an exploding shell and had to be carried out by Major Murray-Lyon. Colonel Grahame and Captain Stewart then returned to look for the mess-staff but were both severely wounded. The reserve company commander, Captain Whistler, then arrived with a rescue party, and having carried the Colonel into shelter said he would go down and get out the mess-party. The medical officer tried to dissuade him, pointing out that to re-enter the pit meant almost certain death. Captain Whistler however, said that it was his duty to make the attempt and did so, being mortally wounded in the process. Captain Somerville, the Medical officer, who had fought throughout the war, afterwards stated that this was the bravest action he had ever either seen or heard of. It seems certain that Captain Whistler would have been put forward for the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross, only that the 74th went into action shortly afterwards and all the eye-witnesses were killed, wounded or scattered; while Colonel Grahame's wounds put him out of the rest of the war. It was later found that the blazing cordite had penetrated into the second dug-out and that the five unfortunate men of the mess-staff had been quickly destroyed.

As may be imagined, this disaster was particularly untoward, in happening only an hour or two before the 74th went into action; especially as they were the right leading battalion of the 5th Brigade. The 2nd Division was facing part of the former German third line, which crossed the Lille road in a deep loop in front of Arleux and continued south before the village of Oppy. On the left of the 2nd Division the Canadians had been ordered to take Arleux while the 2nd Division attacked Oppy with its right flank covered by the 63rd Division. The task was a most difficult one, for the third line was heavily wired and behind it a strong point had been established in Oppy Wood, covering the approaches to the village.

After the usual preliminary bombardment the 74th advanced at 4.30 a.m. with two companies up, moving in half-company column. They came under heavy fire immediately and on reaching the wire found that the bombardment had done it little damage. 'B' Company on the right found a gap, through which the whole company had to pass. 'A' Company on the left could find no gap and had to cut one themselves. The Company Commander was severely wounded at this work, but led his company through to the third line. By the time this was cleared the Company had lost touch with the barrage—and also with 'A' Company. Both companies however, pressed on towards the final objective, but came under heavy enfilade fire from Oppy Wood—for the advance of the left-leading Brigade of the 63rd Division had failed, causing the right leading Brigade of the 2nd Division to expose its flank, and thus fail in its endeavour to reach Oppy Wood. The 74th was thus isolated, and although they found a position were eventually shot off it, and with great difficulty withdrew back to the third line.

By 10 a.m. the battalion was much scattered and the position obscure. Captain Ross Skinner and a runner, Private Clapham, went out to clear up the situation, and found that the battalion right flank was in the air, for the leading troops of the Brigade on that flank had been driven back by a counter-attack. Measures were instantly taken to strengthen the flank, which was done just in

time, for at II a.m. the enemy launched a heavy counter-attack on it from Oppy Wood. This attack and another much stronger one during the afternoon, were beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy. The 74th held this advanced position until 30 April when they were relieved by the Royal Fusiliers. They had been opposed by a fresh German Division newly arrived, and they had gone into battle, it will be remembered, immediately after the disaster to their battalion headquarters. Their losses at Arleux—subsequently awarded as a battle honour, though not carried on the colours—amounted to 7 officers and 43 rank and file killed, and 8 officers and 226 rank and file wounded.

On 23 April the hard-worked 15th Scottish Division was once more in the line, south of the Arras-Cambrai road, with its right on the Cojeul River and its left a little north of Guémappe. In spite of all its hard fighting and its heavy losses its spirit was in no way impaired, and it went into action on the 24th as brave and determined as ever. The 29th Division was working forward on the left, and the Scotsmen could see the field artillery of the 12th and 29th Divisions driving into action up the Monchy Valley, some at a leisurely trot but others which were under fire at full gallop—a sight which was as good a tonic as the sound of the pipes, and one which they had never seen before, for they had not been out in 1914.

The right of the 29th Division was however, forced back in confusion by heavy counter-attacks, exposing the flank of the I 5th Division just as it was about to advance. Owing to this setback the barrage in front of the 15th Division was halted for half an hour on its first line, but this information did not reach the 46th Brigade in time for it to be able to warn the 10th/11th H.L.I. who were leading the advance. The H.L.I. accordingly advanced at 6 p.m. as ordered, and marched straight through the barrage, suffering heavy loss. North of the Cambrai road the battalion was obliged to halt and refuse its right flank, owing to being heavily enfiladed from the farm buildings by the roadside, known as Cavalry Farm. The 10th Scottish Rifles then came up on its right, but by then the enemy was working round the left, so that both battalions were obliged to fall back from their exposed positions to a trench running north from Guémappe.

The 10th/11th H.L.I. having been decimated by these misfortunes, the 12th H.L.I. were sent forward to take the lead on the left, and, with the 10th Scottish Rifles still on the right, the 46th Brigade again pushed forward and reached and consolidated the objective. The position remained precarious however, owing to the enemy possession of Cavalry Farm. An attack on the farm was therefore made by the 44th Brigade during the night of 26 April, when it was captured. Although it could not be held, owing to heavy artillery fire, it was thereafter denied to the enemy, and so the 15th Division advanced a little further towards Cambrai. During the Battles of Arras the 15th Scottish Division suffered 6,313 casualties. This was more than any other Division in the British Expeditionary Force, and about fifty per cent above the average.

By the beginning of May the Battle of Arras was over, but pressure on the enemy line continued with numerous local offensives. On 12 May the 33rd Division relieved the 21st beyond Croisilles and attacked the Hindenburg Line on the 20th of the month. The 100th Brigade's objective was a mile of the Line south-east of the Croisilles-Fontaine Road, and it moved up to its assembly area at Maison Rouge Farm during the preceding night. The Glasgow Highlanders marched through the ruins of Croisilles and along the banks of the Sensée in artillery formation, for they were being heavily shelled on the line of march, but escaped with only eight casualties. The Brigade attacked with three battalions up, the Glasgow Highlanders being in the centre. Owing to a mist, the leading companies were able to get within twenty yards of the first line without being observed, when heavy fire was opened upon them from the ~machine-gun emplacements. The wire however, had been effectively cut by the bombardment, so that the stormers were able to rush in upon the first line with loud cheers and capture the emplacements

with bombs and bayonets. An enemy counter-attack down the communication trench was thrown back and the first line consolidated. The two support companies of the Glasgow Highlanders then went through across the open to the second line, but direction was hard to keep in the mist and smoke, and there were few gaps in the wire. Five officers were killed and two wounded—about all there were—and the companies broke up into groups which nevertheless dashed on into the second line and killed or captured the garrison.

In the second line the survivors held out for about an hour, fighting mostly in groups led by N.C.O.s such as Company-Sergeant-Major McElvenny and Sergeant Armstrong, but at last they were forced back to the first line, by which time there were only four officers left to the four companies—all subalterns. The Worcesters on the right and the 60th Rifles on the left had also been driven back from the second line, and the remnants of the three battalions spent the day repelling desperate counter-attacks, using enemy stick-grenades when their own ran out. The 19th Brigade came forward in the evening and made a further attempt against the second line with great gallantry but to no avail. The enemy however had apparently come to the end of his tether, and could make no further attack during the 21st. The Glasgow Highlanders were relieved in the evening and marched back to Croisilles, having lost 297 out of a total strength of 496—7 officers and 38 rank and file killed, 3 officers and 198 rank and file wounded, and 2 officers and 49 rank and file missing. Nevertheless, the Glasgow Highlanders having received a draft of 78 men, went back into the battle three days later; attached to the 19th Brigade which made another gallant but abortive attempt against the second line. The Glasgow Highlanders in reserve, lost a further officer and 16 men killed and 15 wounded on that day.

In this manner the Battle of Arras came to an end. Undertaken, it will be remembered, in order to assist the Nivelle offensive, it did not come into the same category of grievous failure. If the results were disappointing it was because too much had been expected from it. The effect upon the enemy of the pounding which he had received could not be judged at that time, but that it contributed significantly to his eventual defeat cannot be doubted. Apart from that, pressure had been taken off the French which might otherwise have been disastrous ; positions of importance had been gained ; the Hindenburg Line had been pierced at many points, 20,859 prisoners had been taken, and 254 guns.

During the first half of 1917 the war was not going well for the Allies. Russia was out of it, as the Bolsheviks had signed a separate peace. The offensive had failed in Macedonia and the British army was held up before Gaza. The submarine campaign was causing acute anxiety as, for that matter, was the condition of the French Army after General Nivelle's failure. There were no doubts in Great Britain however, with regard to the possibilities of eventual victory. Nor in fact was there any need for such doubts, for America, which up to then, to use the extraordinary phrase of her President, had been 'too proud to fight,' had sunk her pride along with the merchant shipping torpedoed by the German submarines. Even worse prepared for a major war than the United Kingdom had been in 1914, the marshalling of her vast resources was going to take time, but still, considering that Germany and her allies were already seriously weakened, her entry into the war made the result as certain as far as anything can be considered certain in an event of such magnitude as the Great War.

The French, who after General Nivelle's failure were not nearly so cock-a-hoop as they had been before, were only too glad to hand over affairs on the Western Front to Sir Douglas Haig, and even agreed to take over some of his line, or rather to take back some of their own—to enable him to build up for an offensive in Flanders. The French Army was in fact in a very parlous state. There was a wide-spread refusal of units to go into the line and other 'acts of collective indiscipline,' or mutiny, as such acts are usually termed. It was evident therefore, that

if the enemy was not to be allowed to break the French Army up he had to be kept busy elsewhere, and as much pressure as possible taken off the French to allow them time to recuperate. Their fine old *poilus* in their baggy red trousers had now all gone the same way as the British regulars, and a French conscript army requires someone of the calibre of Napoleon to get the best out of it. Lacking a Napoleon General Pétain was put in charge and did very well as a nurse, but getting the army back on its feet took him some time.

The offensive in Flanders was to be carried out by the 2nd Army from the coast down to Messines. In preparation for it certain Divisions were transferred from France to Flanders. These included the 15th Scottish (10th/11th and 12th H.L.I.), the 32nd (15th, 16th and 17th, H.L.I.) and the 33rd (9th H.L.I.). None of these Divisions took part in the first battle in Flanders in 1917, that of Messines, so that no H.L.I. battalion had the luck to share in that great victory, in which the whole of the Messines Ridge was captured and the enemy salient eliminated. Whereas however, the 32nd and 33rd Divisions went to the coast and took over the Nieuport Sector from the French, the 15th Division went to the Ypres Salient and so took part in the great offensive launched by the 5th Army on 31 July.

The H.L.I. at Nieuport were not allowed to enjoy the sea-bathing undisturbed. The 32nd Division was holding a bridgehead across the Yser with the 96th Brigade on the right and the 97th Brigade on the left. From the left of the 16th H.L.I. to the coast, the bridgehead was continued by the 1st Division, whose boundary with the 97th Brigade was the Geleide Brook. On 10 July after a terrific bombardment which extended along the front of the 16th H.L.I., the Germans launched a heavy attack astride the brook. The 11th Borders, on the left of the H.L.I. were pushed back a considerable distance but, supported by the 17th H.L.I., eventually fought their way back to where they had come from. While they were away however, the flank of the 16th H.L.I. was exposed, and the battalion was very hard put to it to hold on. This it did for a night and a day, until the 17th H.L.I. restored the situation on the left. Having never moved a foot from the first line and held it against all comers, the 16th were extremely annoyed to get a signal of congratulations from Divisional headquarters, for having regained the trenches they had never left. The mistake apparently was due to the destruction of all communications by the enemy bombardment, and to the death of the Brigade Major, who was killed while trying to get forward to find out what was happening.

On 31st July the 15th Scottish Division went into battle with the rest of the 5th Army, having its right on the line of the Ypres-Roulers railway. This was what was known as the Battle of Pilcken Ridge. It reached the second objective—a little east of Frezenburg—up to time and on the heels of the barrage, although the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.I. in the 46th Brigade had had a stiff fight in taking the Frezenburg Redoubt; being assisted by a couple of tanks on each flank, which saved them from heavy losses. This was the first time that the H.L.I. were actually given a hand by tanks, which were now arriving in the field in considerable numbers. They were still very primitive and slow, and it must have been hell inside one, but for the time being they were the answer to the machine-gun and the Germans were very frightened of them.

The reserve Brigade of the 15th Scottish Division now advanced through to the third objective, which was part of the German third line near Zevenkote. This was gallantly taken, but a German counter-offensive launched from the Passchendaele Ridge drove back the 118th and 164th Brigades on the left flank, leaving the 45th Brigade isolated and exposed. By the time it had fought its way back to the second line it had lost seventy per cent of its numbers. On the second line the counter-offensive was held, and so the Battle of Pilcken Ridge ended, a general advance having been made and the front secured of about three thousand yards. The 15th Scottish Division was relieved by the 16th Division on 4 August.

The 15th Scottish Division came back to the line on 17 August when it relieved the 16th Division which had suffered heavily in the Battle of Langemarck when, in a renewed attempt to reach the third line, its Irishmen had fought and died with their usual reckless gallantry. The Scottish Division attacked on 22 August, with the 46th Brigade in reserve; but could make no headway against the German pill-boxes which, being plastered with mud, were hard to detect. Sir Douglas Haig then abandoned the hope of any further advance at Ypres for the time being, and switched the battle to the 2nd Army.

The 33rd Division, which had been transferred to the 10th Corps and held in Corps reserve, took over from the 23rd Division on and north of the Menin Road on 24 September. The Division was under orders to attack at dawn on the morning of 25 September and capture Gheluvelde. The enemy however, in anticipation of this operation, launched a spoiling attack behind a preliminary bombardment, which caught the Glasgow Highlanders as they were moving up and caused them heavy casualties. The bombardment was followed by an attack on the two advanced Brigades of the 33rd Division by no fewer than six enemy Divisions, and the most desperate fighting naturally ensued. The line was pushed back about four hundred yards, but this was recovered on the 27th. The Glasgow Highlanders lost 8 officers and about 450 rank and file in this operation, killed, wounded and missing. They gained one Victoria Cross, awarded to Lance-Corporal John Hamilton, one of the runners, who had shown 'most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during the enemy's attack on the line held by our brigades. The greatest difficulty was experienced in keeping the front and support lines supplied with small-arms ammunition owing to the intense and continuous belt of artillery fire placed systematically by the enemy on battalion headquarters. It was of vital importance for the successful maintenance of the defence of the position that ammunition should be got forward. At a time when this ammunition supply had reached a seriously low ebb, L.-Cpl. Hamilton on several occasions, on his own initiative, carried bandoliers of ammunition through the enemy's belt of fire to the front and support lines, and then passing along these lines in full view of the enemy's snipers and machine guns—who were lying out in front of our line at close range—distributed the ammunition to the men. In so doing he not only ensured the steady continuance of the defence by rifle fire, but by his splendid example of fearlessness and devotion to duty inspired all who saw him with fresh confidence and renewed their determination to hold on at all costs.

Owing to its casualties, the 33rd Division took no further part in the offensive, which continued into the winter. In November the 32nd Division moved from the coast into the Passchendaele sector of the line before Ypres. By that time the third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, as it is popularly called, had come to an end, and the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I. had no more to do than hold the line through the winter in the middle of a waste of liquid mud, across which the duckboard tracks wound their way past great waterlogged craters and shell holes. In these there was no sign of cultivation or habitation, only the debris of war—the smashed or overturned waggons or gun-carriages, and the corpses of men, horses and mules. Although there were no attacks or counter-attacks, the shelling went on without a break. During two particular days when it was especially heavy the 16th H.L.I. lost over a hundred all ranks, of whom twenty-eight were killed.

Nevertheless, the line was as worth holding as it had been worth taking. It now ran along the crest of the Ypres Ridge, from Messines through Wytschaete and Gheluvelde to beyond Passchendaele. The bloodshed and misery suffered during the capture of this line have obscured the fact that it was in fact a victory. An 'ordinary' victory, the Germans called it; not an 'annihilating' one. An ordinary victory is better than none, and worth more than an ordinary effort. The victory of the third Battle of Ypres, and the offensive which preceded it, relieved the

French Army of all pressure during its internal troubles, and enabled it to hold the line and recover its morale. It had drained the German Army of nearly all its trained reserves, and had led to the exhaustion or destruction of all its best Divisions, thus denying it—as the Germans themselves admitted—complete success in the German offensive of the spring of 1918. The troops who took part in this battle—the Glasgow Highlanders before Gheluveldt ; the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I. at Passchendaele, and all their thousands of comrades, might certainly be forgiven for wondering for what purpose they were being subjected to decimation in repeated attempts to gain a few more yards of ground. Still, the fact that the enemy contested it so hotly and was willing to pay so heavy a price to defend it, may have indicated even to the attacking troops that it was well worth having. The knowledge of the issues involved, available after the war, should, it might have been expected, have enabled the purpose and magnitude of the task to have been better appreciated than has been the case.

Chapter XXIV

THE GERMAN OFFENSIVE OF MARCH 1918

The 74th at Barrastre and in the withdrawal from the Cambrai Salient, 23 March 1918—the 74th at Villars au Flos and Lessars—the 10th/11th and 14th H.L.I. at Bullecourt, Mory, Sapignies and Adinfer Wood—the 12th and 18th H.L.I. at Hardecourt and Bernafay Wood—Bayonet Charge by the 12th H.L.I. and a V.C. for the Colonel, 25 March 1918.

By the beginning of 1918 it had become apparent to the German High Command that the all-out submarine campaign had failed. It was also evident by this time that the Turks had been beaten and that the Austro-Hungarians were unlikely to have any further successes against the Italians in the field. On the other hand the collapse of Russia had released a million men for the Western Front. The time had therefore obviously come for a last major effort in the west. The plan worked out by Field-Marshal von Hindenburg—or rather, by his Chief of Staff, General Ludendorff—was to break through the British line at the Cambrai Salient, isolate and defeat Sir Hubert Gough's 5th Army in the south, and drive the British Army north-west to the sea.

In spite of the formulation of this bold and ambitious plan the Germans were far from happy about the general situation ; but neither were the British. The French Army was still in a very delicate state, and the anxious representations of General Pétain had obliged Sir Douglas Haig to take over its line as far south as Barisis—some twenty miles beyond St Quentin. This meant that the British front became greatly attenuated and in order to cover it, Divisions had to be re-organised on a reduced strength of three Brigades each, the Infantry Brigades losing one battalion each. Sir Douglas Haig was well aware of his danger. He had expected a German major offensive for many months, and had hitherto attempted to prevent it by maintaining the offensive himself. The inordinate length and weakness of his line had now forced him to desist from this policy ; obliging him to watch impotently the building up of the army groups of the Crown Prince Rupprecht and the German Crown Prince which the enemy made no attempt to conceal—for it would have been useless. He had repeatedly represented the gravity of this situation to the War Council without success. Mr Lloyd George, while full of confidence and determination to beat the enemy in the field, was still reluctant to acknowledge the fact that this could best be done by giving every possible support to Sir Douglas Haig. He found the extent of the British casualties on the Western Front during 1917 hard to stomach and, being unable to appreciate the military position, sought to restrict further casualties by denying to the Commander-in-Chief the reserves which were essential for a successful resistance.

The argument as to whether or not there was any sound alternative to the battle a *l'outrance* on the Western Front is still open, although, apart from many other considerations the fact that the enemy should have chosen to have made his last effort in the west, and had there rushed upon his destruction, would seem to place the matter beyond all reasonable doubt. Such events surely proved Sir Douglas Haig to have been in the right, and he was supported by most responsible military thought at the time. Among those who did not support him were his personal enemies, Sir John French and Sir Henry Wilson, whom the Prime Minister accordingly selected as his military advisers; appointing Sir Henry Wilson Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the place of Sir William Robertson. Without consulting the Commander-in-Chief, the War Council then agreed with the French for the establishment of a joint 'mass of manoeuvre' composed of both British and French reserves, which was to be outside the control of the Commander-in-chief. This arrangement of course, suited the French, as it removed their fear that if the enemy established a

break-through, the British Army might leave them in the lurch. It did not suit Sir Douglas Haig, who with an attenuated line and no reserves at hand, was left to face an offensive by an enemy force which outnumbered his own by three to one; on a front most of which had recently been taken over from the French, and upon which there had been neither the time nor the labour to strengthen the defences, which were therefore still in a most rudimentary state. 'The Commander-in-chief,' says Sir Winston Churchill, 'viewed the coming shock with an anxious but resolute eye.'

Sir Winston Churchill, with his usual flair for being at the right spot when great events are pending, happened to be visiting an old friend of his, the Commander of the 9th Scottish Division, General Tudor, on the night of 19 March 1918. 'It's certainly coming now,' the Commander told him, 'trench raids this evening have identified no less than eight enemy battalions on a single half-mile of the front.' There were in fact, forty German Divisions facing the fifteen British Divisions in Sir Hubert Gough's 5th Army. Sir Winston woke up at 4 a.m. on the morning of 21 March. There was complete silence, suddenly broken by several loud explosions in the distance. Then, 'exactly as a pianist runs his hands across the keyboard from treble to bass, there arose in one minute the most tremendous cannonade I shall ever hear. . . . Far away, both to the north and to the south, the intense roar and reverberation rolled upwards to us, while through the chinks in the carefully papered window the flames of the bombardment lit like flickering firelight my tiny cabin.' ⁽¹⁾

This fantastic bombardment, far surpassing in intensity anything that Sir Douglas Haig had been able to produce on the Somme, came down along the ill-constructed trenches of the British line, filled with troops already tired by the constant labour, hardships and fighting of the winter months. They stood to arms and took cover at the bottom of the trenches or in the dug-outs, while the sentries lay out on the battered parapets, staring through the dust and smoke to watch for the first appearance of the attacking infantry. Unlike the British bombardments, this one lasted only until dawn, when the infantry arrived, sometimes in waves and sometimes by 'infiltration.' Whichever way they tried they were shot down, but when forty Divisions attack fifteen, and there are thirty others in close support there can be only one result. By nightfall the enemy was through the line in many places; but in confusion. He was up against men, as he soon found out, who held on to the last round. This was the first day of an extensive German advance, but it was also the day on which the gamble failed. During the Somme offensives the Germans often became demoralised and surrendered in large numbers at a time. Had the British troops done so in March 1918, the enemy would have been through, for there were no reserves or strong support lines on which he could have been stopped. But the British troops held out, often in small isolated posts of a few men, and sometimes by companies and battalions reduced to scattered remnants, whose wounded continued to hurl bombs and fire their Lewis guns and rifles.

None of the H.L.I. battalions was in the line held by the 3rd or 5th Armies on 21 March, for their Divisions were all in close reserve or in other parts of the front. The 2nd Division was concentrated in the Barrastre-Haplincourt area with the 19th Division on its right, covering the Cambrai Salient. The 74th were living in huts at Barrastre. A few days previously they had been visited by the Divisional Commander who presented the Transport Officer, Second Lieutenant Whittle (promoted from the ranks) and one hundred and twenty rank and file with the ribbon of the 1914 Star. These were all that remained of the 74th of 1914. Many of them had been wounded several times and few had been at Mons. Still, in this fighting battalion they were accorded the respect due to veterans and their medal was worth having, for it could be earned only on the battlefield—it was the last of its kind, in fact. The reserve Divisions were not sent into the line, but used to cover the withdrawal, which had been ordered as soon as the weight and

main direction of the enemy's thrust could be determined. The 5th Brigade moved back to dig in by Bertincourt, and the 74th dug hard all day on 22 March. The next day they were ordered to cover the retirement of the Brigade and then fall back and face east. The withdrawal became a fighting withdrawal, most difficult to execute, for the enemy was pressing hard and working round the right flank. The 74th had to fight their way back through Villars au Flos and made a stand by the Bapaume-Peronne Road. They lost 6 officers and 160 rank and file on this day; 23 March 1918.

On 24 March, the 74th fell back on Beaulencourt, joining some of the 51st Highland Division. Here ammunition almost gave out, and the machine-gunners had none left. Orders came for them to join the Brigade on the Ligny-Thillois line, and when they reached it were allowed to sleep for two hours, for they had had no sleep for two days~ The rest of the night was spent in digging, with outposts out, but when morning came it was found that the Germans were round the flanks, and the withdrawal continued to the Courcellette-Pys line. On 25 March the 74th and the 53rd Light Infantry held the ridge at Lessars, overlooking the Courcellette-Miraumont road and facing east. The general retirement was observed to be continuing on either flank, but no orders came from Brigade owing, it turned out later, to the orderly carrying them having been killed. As large numbers of the enemy then appeared in front and on either flank, Colonel Knight of the 74th and Colonel Crome of the 53rd held a conference and decided to withdraw. The 74th then marched up the Ancre and at last took up a position in the old British line, west of Beaumont Hamel. The battalion had the 1st Royal Berkshires on its right and the 24th Royal Fusiliers on its left, while a gap was partly filled by the 2nd Divisional School and its band, under the command of Major Smith of the 60th Rifles; for in this emergency all manner of back line troops were taking up arms, and as it was no time for anyone other than pipers to make music, such bandsmen as happened to be about were expected to lend a hand in stopping 'Little Willie' as the German Crown Prince was called by the British troops.

Considerable casualties were inflicted on Little Willie's men from this position, and a successful counter-attack was put in. A New Zealand Brigade arrived in the evening and took over from the 74th, who were ordered back to Martinsart some two miles north of Albert, where they relieved a Brigade of the Royal Naval Division. The enemy still pressed closely and the relief was difficult to carry out. The 74th fought hard until the evening of 29 March in this position, although the troops were completely exhausted. The enemy pressed so hard that the retreat had to be conducted in bounds, so that, when relieved at midnight the 74th had to stagger back and relieve the Queen's, who were holding a line along a sunken road near Mesnil. On 30 March however, they at last got a night's sleep in billets at Varennes. The retreat had now come to an end, and the 74th spent several days marching about in the Varennes area and going into action at various points. Considering what they had been through their high spirits were remarkable. They marched with the pipes and drums playing at their head; which greatly excited a Chinese labour corps working in Ivergny. Shell-fire, marching troops, transport columns, gun-carriages rattling by with their teams at a trot or canter, wounded, crowds of refugees—all these sad or stirring sights of war left the Chinese coolie unmoved. He was not interested and it was none of his business. The sound of the Highland bagpipe was another matter. As one man, the Chinese dropped their tools and rushed to the roadside to watch the 74th go by, clapping their hands in appreciation of music which, in their opinion, was really worth listening to. By this time General Ludendorff had given up hope of driving the British north-west and into the sea, but he still aimed at the destruction of the British Army which he hoped to achieve by separating it from the French Army and fobbing off a full-scale offensive on the Somme with one in Flanders. This certainly appeared to be a possibility, for the 5th Army, under the repeated heavy blows

which it had received could barely hold together. In this grave situation the Allied 'mass of manoeuvre,' arranged by the Prime Minister and General Pétain, lamentably failed to function, for General Pétain—even in those days an old defeatist—preferred to use the French part of it to defend Paris, in defiance of the mutual agreement that the Allied reserves should support one another when hard-pressed.

Although as far as the Regiment is concerned the 74th had the worst of it during these operations, having been caught in an awkward position behind the Cambrai Salient, other battalions became drawn in as the enemy advance progressed and suffered even more heavily. On 21 March the 40th Division, in Sir Julien Byng's 3rd Army, was in G.H.Q. reserve at Achiet-le-Grand, a few miles north-west of Bapaume and thus not far from the Salient. Following the Divisional reorganisation the 10th/11th H.L.I. joined the 14th H.L.I. in the 120th Brigade of this Division, which was placed under command of the 6th Corps at noon on 21 March. The 35th Division, in whose 106th Brigade the 12th and 18th H.L.I. were now serving, came under the orders of the 7th Corps on 23 March. The 6th and 7th Corps, being on either side of the Salient, managed to hold their ground and withdrew tactically and by order. Neither the 35th Division nor the 18th H.L.I. was any longer a 'Bantam' formation. Apart from the survivors of the original Bantams, they were now composed of men of normal height.

The 10th/11th and 14th H.L.I. went into the line on the evening of 21 March, when the two leading Brigades of the 40th Division went to the help of the 59th Division at Bullecourt. Although the 59th had all day withstood the combined attack of three German Divisions, it was still intact when the 40th arrived. There were however, many parties of Germans established along the battle zone which required throwing out. The 40th Division, after an approach march of only three hours or so, was fresh and in excellent form, so that the line was re-established without great difficulty. The 59th Division then withdrew. In the morning it was found that a large number of Germans were still in the battle zone between the 120th and 121st Brigades. They resisted eviction with determination, and the line was not re-established until noon. A heavy enemy attack was then launched against the 10th/ 11th H.L.I. and 14th Argylls, who were on the right flank of the Division, and another against the junction between the two Brigades. Both these attacks were beaten off successfully, but after very heavy fighting. The enemy then began to make progress on the right, towards Vaulx. The 40th Division flank being thus exposed preparations were made to wheel east on either side of the H.L.I. This complicated manoeuvre was of no avail, for the enemy pushed on in considerable numbers on either flank of the 120th Brigade, which, being soon in action on three sides, was withdrawn after dark.

The 10th/11th and 14th H.L.I. were again in action on 23 March at Mory, by which time the enemy, owing to his heavy losses and difficulty in advancing his guns, was not so eager as before. The British troops on the other hand, were still in fine form, and it is reported that many young recruits, just out from England, were seen standing up 'to get a shot at Fritz.' The Germans, as their historians show, were considerably impressed. 'VI Corps reports 40th Div. recaptured Mory, and now holds the Green Line east of it. No other changes Corps front,' ran the confident situation report from 3rd Army headquarters. Dawn on the 24th revealed large enemy forces massing before Mory, and before long the two H.L.I. battalions were heavily engaged against those attacking the Divisional left flank in an attempt to advance up the valley to Gomiecourt. This attempt was frustrated and the enemy driven back. Likewise the whole Division held its ground; but the heavy fighting against such odds, both by the 40th Division and those on either side, gradually led to considerable confusion and a certain mix-up of Divisions. The right flank of the 120th Brigade became exposed, and again the Brigade had to form a defensive flank. It withdrew on orders at 10 p.m. and took up position first east of Gomiecourt

and then at Sapignies. The Germans also appear to have been thrown into some confusion during this heavy fighting. Some of those found wandering about and rounded up, said that a star had been pointed out to them and they were then told to march on it, which was the only order they received. After resisting heavy attacks at Sapignies all day on 25 March, the troops of the 40th Division were all jumbled up and exhausted. But they still fought on, until arrangements were made to withdraw them behind a screen formed by the fresh 42nd and 62nd Divisions.

The 40th Division, having been thus drawn into reserve, did not however get any immediate chance to rest and reorganise as had been intended. The 120th Brigade was immediately sent out to form the left of a defensive flank resting on Adinfer Wood. The expected enemy penetration did not take place, but the H.L.I. remained near Adinfer Wood until the morning of 27 March, when the Division withdrew into rest seven miles to the north-west. It had certainly deserved it.

The 35th Division, which was in the Ypres Salient, was rushed by train to the 5th Army at 11.30 p.m. on 21 March and came as before mentioned, under the orders of the 7th Corps. As may be imagined, to transport a Division with its guns and transport by train across the rear of the battle line just after the opening of a major enemy offensive was a difficult business, and it was not until the evening of 23 March that it detrained between Albert and Amiens. The 7th Corps was then still holding the Somme line, but its left, north of Cléry, had become very involved with the affairs going on in what was formerly the Cambrai Salient. Here it had lost touch with the 3rd Army and its line was weak and broken. Sir Douglas Haig was alarmed. While the 35th Division was detraining preparatory to marching eastwards to the sound of the guns, he telegraphed 'Fifth Army will hold the line of the Somme River at all costs. There will be no withdrawal from this line... The Third and Fifth Armies must keep in closest touch., and must mutually assist each other in maintaining Peronne as a pivot.' Events however, were moving too fast for G.H.Q., in those days of poor signal communications. While the orders were being studied at the headquarters of the 3rd and 5th Armies, and while the 35th Division was on the line of march, the line of the Somme had already been lost; Peronne was being evacuated and the gap between the two Armies was increasing.

On receipt of these orders Sir Hubert Gough repeated their substance to his Corps Commanders, with directions to halt and hold to their positions. But the 5th Army was already in a very poor state, with all its close reserves already used up, its Divisions disorganised and their units intermingled ; all sorts of non-combatants become combatants and blazing away at Fritz, and the troops completely exhausted after three days close fighting without rest, and with seldom the time to snatch a meal or a drink of water. This disorganisation was due to pure exhaustion. The troops were by no means outfought, and when ordered to halt did so readily. On the left of the 7th Corps, the enemy did not come on from Peronne as expected, and the troops cheerfully attributed his delay to 'the cases of whisky left behind in the officers' mess.' If only reserves had been forthcoming in anything like reasonable numbers, the line could certainly have been held ; but there were no reserves and such French Divisions as were supposed to be lending a hand 'fell back as soon as the British in front of them fell back,' and so might as well have been in Paris.

After a couple of nights in the train and a seventeen-mile night march, the 12th and 18th H.L.I. reached Hardecourt at about 10 a.m. At this time the 21st and the 9th Scottish Divisions—the latter now composed of the 26th and 27th South African Brigades and so Scottish South African— having been very heavily attacked were falling back. The 9th Division had been ordered to retire on Maricourt, and the 12th H.L.I. were sent forward to cover its retirement. The H.L.I. took up a position on the Maurepas Ridge, south of Combles, and it is a shattering thought that the battalion, though not up to strength, in fact outnumbered the two South African Brigades which had, of course, been in action since 21 March. It was outside the headquarters of the 9th

Scottish Division it will be remembered, that Sir Winston Churchill had stood in the early morning of that date, listening to the opening crescendo of the enemy artillery concentration as the barrage roared along the British first line.

A defensive position was meanwhile being hastily Organised between Hardecourt and the Somme, and as the enemy attack continued the 12th H.L.I. was ordered to fall back to it. Here the battalion had the 105th Brigade on its right and a battalion of Colonel Hunt's Force on its left. The latter, consisting of eight scratch battalions formed out of all sorts of odds and ends, was one of the numerous corps of which mention has already been made, drummed up at a moment's notice in this emergency, to make good the lack of reserves in fighting against an enemy who had no such lack and who was continually being reinforced by fresh troops. 'Hadow's Force' was another, formed at Amiens on a nucleus provided by the survivors of the gallant South African Brigades—for the 9th Scottish Division had ceased to exist except in name—as a headquarters only.

In the evening of 24 March the 7th Corps and all troops north of the Somme were transferred to the 3rd Army, while the 5th Army was placed under the orders of General Fayrolle, commanding the French Reserve Army Group. The 7th Corps, of which there was not much left apart from the 35th Division, had fought hard all day on 24 March, and its stout resistance caused some slackening of the German advance, which enabled many formations to escape from precarious situations—among them the 2nd Division, in which the 74th were not, of course, aware of how much they owed to the fighting qualities of the 12th and 18th Service battalions of their Regiment. The 7th Corps was holding the 6,000 yard line from Curlu on the Somme to Montauban, with the 105th and 106th Brigades and a battalion of Hunt's Force forward, and the 18th H.L.I. from 106th Brigade with three battalions of Hunt's Force in support. Thus it could hardly have been described as a strongly-held position, in view of the hammering it was getting from front and flank. There was no touch with the 5th Corps on the left, and a defensive flank had to be formed against the masses of Germans streaming through the Mametz Wood. 'The 35th Division put up a magnificent fight against five German Divisions.'⁽²⁾

The real attack came against the front of the 35th Division at 7.30 a.m. on 25 March, when the enemy, following on the heels of a heavy opening barrage, drove in the advanced posts. Before the Germans had time to consolidate Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Anderson, commanding the 12th H.L.I., organised and led a counter-attack against them, recovering all the ground lost and capturing 12 machineguns and 70 prisoners. The vast numbers of Germans continued to press on however, and although it can be recorded with pride that they could make no impression on the 12th H.L.I., the 105th Brigade on the right was pushed back to the second line; while Hunt's force on the left, lacking its complement of officers and N.C.O.s, became disorganised and fell back to Maricourt where it was rallied. The 12th and 18th H.L.I. were thus left exposed and ordered back to the second line. The 18th H.L.I. which, with the 1st Dismounted Cavalry Brigade was holding a position south of Bernafay Wood was then heavily attacked at its point of juncture with the cavalry. For a while affairs became critical, until a counter-attack by the 19th D.L.I. restored the situation.

The Durham Light Infantry not only recovered the ground lost but gained another two hundred yards. Colonel Anderson immediately seized the opportunity of doing some good with the Highland Light Infantry. The enemy had taken Maricourt Wood, and he determined to evict them from it, and also from a timber yard which they had packed with machine-guns. Forming up the 12th H.L.I. and every other man he could lay hands on—cooks, clerks, servants and signallers, belonging to the headquarters of the 104th Brigade—he led a bayonet charge against the enemy and utterly defeated them. It is a fact that they did not stop for three-quarters of a mile.

Most unfortunately Colonel Anderson was killed while leading the charge. He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry on this and the previous occasion mentioned. It is indeed sad that the award was a posthumous one. It would have been good to see a man like that alive and wearing so distinguished a decoration, and so nobly earned. Since the advent of the rifle had led to the disappearance from the battlefield of the British scarlet coated line, it was seldom that a Commanding Officer had the opportunity to lead his battalion into action personally, and the award of a Victoria Cross under such circumstances is a tribute to the gallantry of every one of his men. Having been reinforced, the enemy came again in the evening, but after desperate fighting was again thrown back by a counter-attack, which brought the fighting to an end for that day. Orders then came from Sir Julian Byng for the 7th Corps to withdraw to a line Bray-Albert, and the H.L.I., left as rear-guard, eventually withdrew from the position so gallantly held, in the early hours of 26 March.

In the continuation of the battle, which raged along the front of the 3rd and 5th Armies, some confusion of orders could hardly be avoided in so grave a situation. The 7th Corps could well have maintained its front on several occasions, but was withdrawn on orders. Sir Julian Byng's orders of 26 March, commencing 'Every effort must be made to check the enemy's advance by disputing ground,' were interpreted by Sir W. Congreve, the Corps Commander, to mean that the retirement was to be continued by establishing a series of rear-guards. Therefore, instead of the Corps—or what was left of it—maintaining positions and holding them by counter-attacks as it had done hitherto, it now began to move steadily backwards, covered by the 106th Brigade in which the 12th and 18th H.L.I. were in action on several occasions. In this manner, by the evening of 27 March the Corps was behind the Ancre. The H.L.I. fought their last action in these particular operations at Morlancourt, where, on the evening of 26 March they repelled a heavy German attack. The 106th Brigade, its battalions 'having achieved their object' then withdrew across the Ancre where, for the time being, the retirement ended. The Corps line then ran from near Albert to Ribemont on the Ancre, the 12th and 18th H.L.I. being with the 106th Brigade on the left, near Albert.

As may be imagined, this German *putsch*, in driving the 5th Army back so great a distance, greatly disturbed the minds of the War Council and the French Government; even though they had been adequately warned of the gravity of the situation by Sir Douglas Haig long before the enemy offensive had even started. As Sir Douglas Haig's reputation both in the Army and throughout the country was such as to render a demand for his resignation unthinkable at that time, and as a scapegoat still had to be found by the War Council, it was inevitable that Sir Hubert Gough, Commander of the 5th Army, should be chosen. The method of his removal was typical of the War Council, which seemed incapable of dealing in a straightforward manner with any subject whatsoever. No reference was made to Sir Douglas Haig on the matter, and while the Prime Minister accused Sir Hubert of neglect of duty in failing to blow up the Somme bridges, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, asserted that he had 'lost the confidence of his troops.' No one had any shadow of a right to make such charges other than the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, who was alone in the position to do so had he thought criticism justified. Sir Douglas Haig did not so think; but on the contrary protested hotly against this treatment of his subordinate, in whom he did his best to show his confidence by retaining him in France in another post.

There was in fact no normal reason for finding a scapegoat to answer for the British retirement on the Somme, any more than there had been in the case of the retreat from Mons. A retirement in the face of an advance by overwhelming numbers is nothing unusual in war; and so long as it is ably conducted and the enemy advance stoutly contested, is often so far from being a

defeat as to be the prelude to victory. With truly pitiable resources the Army and Corps Commanders in the 3rd and 5th Armies, relying only on their skill and the valour of their troops, had kept the line intact and foiled the enemy at every turn. So far from being shameful, these operations were indeed magnificent. However, the Prime Minister having openly asserted that the Western Front was 'over-insured' and required no more troops, someone had to be sent packing to prove that his wisdom had been at fault only owing to military incompetence. He was of course, supported by Sir Henry Wilson, though for a different reason and as usual, in furtherance of his own ends. Sir Henry Rawlinson, the British Military Representative at Versailles, was altogether too strong a character for Sir Henry Wilson's liking, who desired a weaker representative through whom he could exercise his own influence. The removal of Sir Hubert Gough offered an excellent opportunity for transferring Sir Henry Rawlinson from the council chamber at Versailles to the battlefield where he belonged. Therefore Sir Henry Rawlinson took over command of the 5th Army—or what was left of it—from Sir Hubert Gough.

Meanwhile an historic meeting had been held at Doullens on 26 March, attended by M. Clemenceau, Prime Minister of France, Lord Milner the British Secretary of State, Sir Douglas Haig, Sir Henry Wilson, Generals Pétain and Foch and others. Sir Douglas Haig outlined the military situation and stated that he could do no more south of the Somme—that was, on the 5th Army front—but expected to be able to hold the line in the north. He later remarked that 'if General Foch will consent to give me his advice, I will gladly follow it.' An agreement was then drawn up and signed stating 'General Foch is charged by the British and French Governments with the co-ordination of the action of the Allied Armies on the Western Front. He will arrange to this effect with the two Generals-in-Chief, who are invited to furnish him with the necessary information.'

It may be wondered why, after first Sir John French and then Sir Douglas Haig had hitherto strongly resisted French domination over the affairs of the British Army, the Commander-in-Chief should now actually request it. The reason is partly given by Sir Douglas Haig's audible expression of relief, that in future he would have to deal with a man and not a committee, especially a committee—he may have added to himself—led by Lloyd George and Henry Wilson. Apart from this, General Pétain's defeatism and refusal to come to his aid had made the situation so serious, that he had previously advised the War Council that unless Foch (the French Chief-of-Staff) or some other fighting Frenchman was put in charge of operations on the Western Front, it would be impossible for the Allied Armies to keep touch, and the cause would be lost.

It will be observed that Foch was a co-ordinating agent and not a Supreme Commander—a dangerous institution where allied armies and national interests of such proportions are involved. Though by no means the master-mind popularly supposed, he was perfectly capable of 'co-ordinating the action of the Allied Armies,' which was all that was necessary. From now on, the British War Council had no say in the operations on the Western Front; the 'mass of manoeuvre,' was ready to go to the help of the British or to any part of the front as required by operational necessity. The French Army would keep touch with the British at all costs, and victory at last appeared in sight through the gloom.

⁽¹⁾ *The World Crisis*

⁽²⁾ *Official History.*

Chapter XXV

BACKS TO THE WALL

The 16th H.L.I. become Pioneers and the 17th H.L.L are disbanded—the 15th H.L.I. capture Ayette, 2 April 1918—the 10th/11th and 12th H.L.L in the Battle of the Lys, 9 April 1918—the Glasgow Highlanders at Neuve Elise—the 5th, 6th and 7th H.L.I. arrive from Palestine.

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

By Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, K.T., G.C.B., C.V.O., K.C.I.E.,
Commander-in-Chief, British Armies in France.

To all ranks of the British Army in France and Flanders.

‘Three weeks ago today the enemy began his terrific attacks against us on a fifty mile front. His objects are to separate us from the French, to take the Channel Ports and destroy the British Army.

‘In spite of throwing already 106 Divisions into the battle and enduring the most reckless sacrifice of human life, he has as yet little progress towards his goals.

‘We owe this to the determined fighting and self-sacrifice of our troops. Words fail me to express the admiration which I feel for the splendid resistance offered by all ranks of our Army under the most trying circumstances.

‘Many among us are now tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest. The French Army is moving rapidly and in great force to our aid.

‘There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.’

D. Haig,

F.M.,

General Headquarters,

Thursday, April 11th, 1918.

Commander-in-Chief

British Armies in France.

Just as Nelson’s famous signal stirred all hearts as his fleet closed the enemy at Trafalgar, so Haig’s well-known Order of the Day stirred the hearts of all fighting men along the western battlefield, among whom it was quickly circulated. Until it was read out to them, the troops, as usual, had had no idea of the situation, or that there was any particular danger—except, of course to their own lives. They might have been knocked silly and driven back fifty miles, fighting every step, but the idea of being defeated never entered their heads. Nor did it now, but they realised that they would have to get down to it and do some real fighting. What ? Fritz win the war ? Not bloody likely

As the right of the British Army was still holding firm at Barisis, the effect of the German offensive had been to create an immense bulge in the line, reaching to within fifteen miles of Amiens. South of the Somme this bulge was opposed by the remains of the 5th Army, with the 3rd and 1st French Armies all under command of General Fayrolle. Owing to General Pétain’s policy of keeping the French Army, rather than the Allied Line intact, there were great gaps in the bulge, through one of which the enemy advanced unopposed to seize Mondidier. General Foch’s

first action on taking over the direction of operations was to restore the situation south of the Somme with French reserves. The French Army then became responsible for the line south of the Somme, which became the line of junction between the Allied Armies, although the 5th Army and other smaller British formations remained below it, under French command. Thereafter the first object of the Allies was to prevent the enemy from forcing them apart. The exhaustion of the 5th Army and the slow arrival of French reinforcements made this no easy matter, and the Allied front along the Somme continued to give cause for grave anxiety.

Pending the deployment of the French reserves in full strength, Sir Douglas Haig was obliged to continue to transfer Divisions from the 1st and 2nd Armies to the south, in order to relieve the battered and exhausted Divisions of the 3rd Army. The 32nd Division left Ypres at the end of March and relieved the 31st Division south of Arras. This Division, it will be remembered, contained the 15th, 16th and 17th H.L.I. The 17th H.L.I. however, had been disbanded in February as a result of the Divisional reorganisation. It is not clear why it should have been selected for this fate, for it had built up a fine fighting record. Its members were transferred to the other battalions of the Regiment in the field. There were about fifty of its original members left, out of all those who had paraded with it in George Square in 1914 and later accompanied it to France. The 16th H.L.I. had become the Divisional Pioneer Battalion which they regarded as being a great honour and a tribute to their fighting efficiency. Whether it was so in fact, is a matter for argument, but the pioneer battalions, which were specially trained in fortifications, while continuing to fight as infantry when so required, certainly rendered invaluable service in the field, being able to take over much of the work formerly done by the Sappers. They retained their name, but were no longer brigaded, and wore a distinguishing badge of crossed pick-axes.

This left only the 15th H.L.I. in the line-of-battle of the 32nd Division, and on 1 April 1918, they relieved the 2nd Manchesters in an old German trench line, facing the village of Alette. No sooner had they arrived in the first line, than they were told to prepare immediately to attack and seize the village. It was situated on the Cojeul river on a reverse slope just forward of the British positions, of which it afforded the enemy an excellent observation. Once captured, and incorporated in the British line, it would be secure from fire and view. It was a long, straggling village, about half a mile long by a quarter in depth, and was strongly defended by infantry and machine-guns, with wire and other obstacles. It was quite a formidable proposition for one battalion, but the length of front which the Division had to hold with its attenuated strength permitted no more to be made available. It was also later apparent that the Divisional Commander had greatly under-estimated the number of enemy holding it.

So, once again the 15th H.L.I. packed the assembly trenches in the darkness, laden with battle-kit, picks, shovels and ammunition. Zero hour was at 2 a.m. 'Two o'clock in the morning courage,' was what Napoleon always demanded. The sort of courage which asserts itself contrary to nature, at an hour when human vitality is at its lowest ebb. The 15th H.L.I. needed it now, and a dram would have helped, but there was no rum. However, they were given some hot stew as a special treat, for once in a way. While they were eating it the enemy machine-guns from the village defences which they were about to attack sprayed the parapet, and the air was filled with the sound of the cracks and whines of the bullets.

Two o'clock in the morning ; the rushing of shells overhead ; the shrapnel bursting over the trees ; the high explosive erupting in sheets of orange flame ; the booming of the guns in rear and the fantastic rattle of the German machine-guns, as they opened up in sudden panic. In the trenches the shouted orders and whistle blasts, as the stormers climbed over the parapets and trudged along in the wake of the barrage, and in the weird radiance of the white and red Very Lights which showed them up in a ghostly light, as they instinctively lowered their heads to the

hail of bullets zipping through the air. Many stumbled and fell forward on their faces, and of these some got up again and went forward, while others lay still. Coming to the wire they tore up the pickets and wrenched it aside, picking their way through to the waiting enemy, while their lacerated hands poured with blood unnoticed.

Into the village and through the streets, with bayonets now on the *on-guard* and fingers on triggers. The barrage still crashed down in front of them, and it had to be followed, giving no time to search the buildings ; but out of the houses and cellars poured the enemy, some half-dressed. They resisted stoutly, and every yard had to be fought for. They were killed or driven back without a pause, for the orders had been to keep up with the barrage and leave the village to be 'mopped up' by others. Fighting with a dour and silent ferocity the H.L.I. left the village through the eastern fringe in the darkness, seeing in front of them against a background of exploding shells, a disorganised mass of Germans lining the sunken road running north and south across the slopes, from Courcelles to Ablainzeville. They did not stop there long. The barrage reached them, and as it lifted, through the mirk came the H.L.I. The enemy fought it out for a few minutes with the bayonet; then climbed up the east embankment and ran for it. The H.L.I. lined it and opened fire with rifle and Lewis gun, bringing down the enemy in his flight, until German bodies lay all over the ridge.

The battalion consolidated and sent forward patrols, being joined by the platoons sent round the north and south edges of the village, who had also had a stiff fight to get forward. While it was still far from daylight the reserve Company came up. It had been sent for by runner by the Commanding-Officer during the fighting in the village, when he got the impression that the leading companies were checked. It too had had to fight its way through the village which was still full of Germans. These fellows, finding themselves now surrounded, organised themselves and attacked the H.L.I. from the rear, but they were soon driven back into the village. There they came upon the mopping-up platoons, who were accompanied by sappers to blow the Germans out of any cellars in which they might still be lurking. The moppers-up and sappers were outnumbered and were soon hard put to it. Therefore the battalion returned to the village and spent the rest of the night in hand-to-hand fighting. One hundred and ninety-three Germans were captured before dawn, including the battalion commander and his adjutant, and the village of Alette was thereafter incorporated in the British line, which ran along the sunken road to the east. The 15th H.L.I. were later relieved by the 5th/6th Royal Scots and went back into close reserve at Quesnoy Farm.

Owing no doubt to the gravity of the general situation prevailing at that time, the merit of this small but important operation did not receive the recognition which it certainly deserved in the *Official History*, which merely describes it as 'an ambitious operation with four companies,' and omits to mention that the four companies were the 15th H.L.I. However, the feat excited considerable local comment at the time ; even the Belgian Division which had relieved the 32nd Division in Flanders sent 'a joyful telegram.' The Commander of the 14th Brigade reported 'A close inspection of the village after its capture cannot fail to impress one with admiration of a feat successfully accomplished by the attacking force of the 15th The weather was unfavourable, making the ground slippery and difficult to traverse. .

The enemy was flushed with the success of his recent operations, his morale was consequently good and he occupied a position which, if properly organised for defence, could justly be considered impregnable to any but a major operation.' The scale of awards for gallantry was likewise somewhat out of the ordinary for an affair lasting but a few hours, and are repeated in order to give an indication of its importance in the eyes of higher authority. Two officers received the D.S.O. and seven the Military Cross. Six rank and file were awarded the D.C.M. and no fewer

than twenty-six the Military Medal. The casualties to the 15th H.L.I. were three officers killed and thirty-five rank and file. Two officers and 147 rank and file were wounded.

On 9 April came the Battle of the Lys, and another German break-in, this time on the 1st Army front south of Armentières. Hereabouts three weak Portuguese Brigades holding the line east of Neuve Chapelle were attacked by four German Divisions—not what might be described as fair odds. Although British formations were being held ready to support the Portuguese, the German offensive was launched in such force and with such rapidity that the Portuguese Division was rapidly thrown into confusion. All communications being cut, its Commander was reduced to mounted orderlies in endeavouring to bring up his reserve Brigade and control his Division, but in that country, in the middle of the night, horsemen could make little progress, and the Portuguese were soon knocked out of the fighting and left the field, guns and all.

In this emergency the Corps mounted troops and cyclist battalion were sent hurriedly forward to hold a defensive line, while the infantry got ready. The infantry included the 40th Division four miles north-east of Estaires, which had lost 70% of its strength in the March fighting and was still exhausted. Nevertheless it was ordered to send in the 120th Brigade containing what was left of the 10th/11th and 14th H.L.I. The Brigade went in east of Laventie, in the northern part of the Portuguese line, and was soon in the thick of it. Its difficulties were increased by the fact that the troops had not previously come across the Portuguese in their green uniforms, and so held their fire for fear of hitting any of them, being none too sure which were Germans and which Portuguese. Thus they became engaged with hordes of enemy at close quarters, and had a very hard time fighting them off in front, flanks and rear. The 40th Division was forced back across the Lys and on 11 April stood at le Petit Mortier. The 121st Brigade had been sent to the 34th Division, so that the 40th Division only consisted of the 120th Brigade which had fallen back by order, as its flanks were continually threatened. In the end it was reorganised into two composite battalions which, with the Pioneer Battalion and some Field Companies R.E. were all that was left of the 40th Division. The 10th/11th and 14th H.L.I. therefore disappeared for the time being, having gone down fighting.

Except on the Portuguese front the enemy did not get everything his own way in the Battle of the Lys. North and south he suffered very heavily, and large numbers of prisoners were taken, including a complete regimental band with its instruments, which had apparently been brought forward to play the German troops into Bethune. Nevertheless, owing to the lack of reserves, the position was extremely serious, and Sir Douglas Haig appealed to General Foch for assistance, as it was evident that the enemy was set upon the destruction of the British Army. General Foch could offer no help; or at any rate would not. His strength as a Commander lay in his ability to keep his head and trust his judgment, which at this time told him that, hard-pressed as they were, the British would still somehow hold on. Sir Douglas Haig was therefore obliged to bring more Divisions down from the north, further weakening the battlefront of the 2nd Army. The British Army was now in fact filtering to the south and the French, instead of north and the Channel Ports. That the line was held in such circumstances was little short of a miracle, and accomplished solely by the valorous conduct of the British troops. ‘Backs to the wall!’ It was a good phrase, but in fact there was no wall, other than that of the soldiers’ own bodies.

One of the Divisions thus brought down from the north was the 33rd, in whose 100th Brigade the Glasgow Highlanders entrained at Vlamertinghe, and arrived west of Arras on 7 April. Among the British and Imperial reinforcements, summoned belatedly from home and overseas to hold the western line was the 52nd Lowland Division from Palestine, of which the H.L.I. Brigade arrived at Marseilles in the transport *Omrah* on 17 April. The troops, it will be remembered, had welcomed their transfer to the Western Front, as they thought that perhaps they might now get a

chance of some home leave. With their arrival all the fighting battalions of the Regiment save two, were now in the field to help in the final overthrow of the main enemy—the 74th; the 5th, 6th and 7th ; the Glasgow Highlanders ; the 10th/11th and 12th; the 14th, 15th, 16th and 18th. Only the 71st fighting their way up the Tigris beyond Baghdad, and the 17th untimely disbanded, were lacking during the last fierce battles in the west.

The Glasgow Highlanders on the road to the south, were turned about when on the line of march and returned to the northward. The 33rd Division, having been sent out to reinforce the 3rd Army, had now to go back and reinforce the 1st Army, upon which the latest blows were falling. This movement was indeed an indication of the dire straits to which Sir Douglas Haig was being reduced, in those grim days of 1918. Knowing that the enemy was straining every effort towards the destruction of his army, and knowing the terrible weakness of his battle line, manned by attenuated Divisions of exhausted troops with no reserves at hand, while every day brought news of fresh blows upon them, he wasted no time nor energy in fruitless recriminations against the folly of the War Council which had brought him to this pass. Keeping his head completely he maintained an iron composure and an inflexible determination not to be beaten, come what may. As is the way in war, the spirit of the Commander communicated itself to the rank and file, so that they shared it exhausted as they were, and fought on day after day against the never-ending columns launched against them. Slowly retiring on order and fighting it out amid the ceaseless din and turmoil of bursting shells and far-flung earth and debris, under conditions in which it must sometimes have seemed as if the world was coming to an end, they were still determined not to be beaten, come what may.

Entraining at Aubigny and detraining at Caestre, the Glasgow Highlanders went on by ‘motor-bus’ to Méteren. As far as speed was concerned they might as well have walked, for the road was packed with refugees fleeing from the villages in the line of the German advance—Neuve Eglise, Bailleul and Méteren. De-bussing, the Glasgow Highlanders marched on up the cobbled road towards Bailleul—exactly the same road by which they had marched to join the 5th Brigade in 1914, although there were few among them who could claim to have taken part in both marches. They were soon halted, and held awaiting orders within close sound of the guns. The situation in front was extremely serious. The enemy had by now broken in on a twenty mile front across the Lys, and the further he penetrated the larger became the gaps in the British line, which there were no reinforcements to fill. Twenty-seven German Divisions were being opposed by seven British—or the remnants of seven British, one might say.

This was 12 April 1918, a mile or two west of Bailleul, which the enemy guns were busy hammering into a heap of rubble; while east and south of the town the troops of the 9th Corps, all mixed up, were desperately trying to stem the torrent of the German advance. Orders came for the 100th Brigade to join the 25th Division, due east of Bailleul, and the Glasgow Highlanders stepped off accordingly, quickening their pace through the town, ‘which was no place to linger in.’ So confused was the situation that although the front line was still three miles ahead, on leaving Bailleul a company had to be sent out as right flank guard. The 100th Brigade was holding the line east of Neuve Eglise and the Glasgow Highlanders, in Brigade reserve, were constantly having to send companies to the support of the forward battalions. The position was a strong one, and there was little danger of it being over-run. The danger lay on the southern flank, and two companies of the Glasgow Highlanders had eventually to take up a defensive position facing that direction, along the Waterloo Road. A third Company was sent south to the support of the 1/2nd Monmouths, near La Crèche. This Company arrived just as the remnants of the Monmouths were driven from their trenches, and it at once attacked with two platoons up. The attack was a gallant effort, but just too late, for the enemy was by that time in position. All three

of the company officers were shot down, and most of the two leading platoons. Command then devolved on C.S.M. Caldwell, who took up an advanced position and held it until relieved next day, having ambushed a German ration party and taken several prisoners. He was attacked many times, but frustrated the enemy by his skilful dispositions. The supplies taken from the enemy incidentally, were all that this company had.

As the interminable battle went on, the British line began to crumble in a number of places and parties of stragglers, leaderless, exhausted, and belonging to a dozen different regiments, began to arrive in the Glasgow Highlanders' position. They were formed up and held in reserve. One party was led by a Sergeant-Major, who said that his men were so done-up as to be useless, but if a 'Jock' was placed between every pair of them they would still hold on all right. Not so many 'Jocks' were available however, for the Glasgow Highlanders had lost 14 officers and 300 rank and file by 14 April. Nevertheless, the position at Neuve Eglise still held, although the Glasgow Highlanders had lost touch with the other battalions of the 100th Brigade. During the afternoon of 14 April, when Colonel Menzies, commanding the Glasgow Highlanders, was just considering making a counter-attack towards the village, to try to make contact with the Worcestershires, an order was received for the battalion to withdraw to Hille, a mile south-west of Dranoutre. The whole of the 100th Brigade was now reduced to the strength of a battalion, or even lower, but it was by such stout resistance that time was given for rear defences to be organised and fresh plans made. So the line still held.

By 15 April Bailleul was evacuated and in flames, and Sir Douglas Haig had decided to withdraw from the Passchendaele Ridge and the greater part of the Ypres Salient. The French reinforcements however, at last began to make their appearance along the battlefield, and soon the characteristic bark of their 'Seventy-fives' could be heard among the booming of the British artillery—for the French sent their guns in first, presumably because they could move fast. Meanwhile the British infantry continued to be hard-pressed, for the enemy offensive showed no signs of slackening. There was still constant danger of the line breaking, for many of the troops had been hard at it for over a week without a break, and parties of dazed stragglers were constantly being rounded up and made to go on fighting by their fresher comrades. There was obviously some point at which this sort of thing could no longer go on—but it was never reached.

Perilous as the situation was, there were many cheering incidents to lighten the sombre scene, as examples of the fighting spirit which still prevailed. While the 100th Brigade was holding the foot of the south-eastern ridge of Mont Noir—with the remains of its battalions very mixed up, but the Glasgow Highlanders more or less in the centre—Captain McKersie's company runner came up to him, and said that the C.O. wanted him on the telephone. McKersie at the time was sitting behind a Vickers machine-gun which he had found lying about, enfilading a party of about four hundred Germans attempting to rush the position. 'My compliments to the C.O.' he said grimly, keeping his thumbs hard down on the firing button, 'but I'm too busy to talk to him just at this moment.' The signallers refused to pass on what appeared to them to be an insubordinate message to the C.O., and the runner was sent out again to bring the officer in, which he did very tactfully, and after McKersie had reluctantly shown one of his men how to operate the gun. Happening under circumstances in which any moment might have been the last for everyone concerned this incident is a pleasant one to record. By 18 April the enemy's advance had been brought to a standstill in this sector and the line firmly re-established. What remained of the 100th Brigade returned to its own Division, accompanied by a polite message of thanks for its services from the G.O.C. 49th Division to the G.O.C. 33rd division—'Wish to record my very grateful appreciation of the services of your 100th Brigade whilst under my command ... very materially assisted me in holding my line.., men were splendid under very strenuous

circumstances. Please thank them all.'

The Glasgow Highlanders came out of action after a battle lasting seven days without a break, having lost during those seven days 7 officers and 70 rank and file killed, 13 officers and 178 rank and file wounded, and 148 missing, of whom many were killed without proof of death being established.

A week later Kemmll Hill, a key position on the Lys, which had previously been held by exhausted and disorganised British troops for two days against repeated attacks, was lost by fresh French troops, who had been out of the line for months, in five hours. This necessitated yet a further withdrawal from the Ypres Salient.

The H.L.I. Brigade from Palestine, having spent two days in Marseilles 'discovering that the restaurants there were much more expensive than those in Cairo,' entrained for the north on 19 April, 'in spite of an R.T.O.' They did not know where they were going and the train took its time, during which they received depressing reports from the front which did not however, appear to disconcert them in any way. First told that they were to detrain at Versailles in order to defend Paris, they were unable to comply as the train did not stop. Then, having been told that Amiens had fallen, their train passed slowly through that city. They got out eventually at St Valery and, as the enemy offensive had at last been brought to a standstill, did not hurry to the front, but spent some time being re-equipped and lectured to, and given demonstrations of how to deal with 'Fritz.' This was reckoned to be with the sword bayonet which, when fixed to the short Lee-Enfield, undoubtedly produced an extraordinarily well-balanced and efficient weapon for use at close quarters. Its value depended entirely upon the training and determination of the user. The British soldier was traditionally very handy with it, but as he is by nature a kind-hearted and far from bloodthirsty individual, better in the defence than the attack, it is necessary to wake him up for close-combat work by specialist training, and this can be done very easily. The training at St Valery, accompanied by lectures full of semi-humorous anecdotes was just the thing: 'During a charge a "Jock," found himself opposite a huge "Hun," who hastily put up his hands exclaiming "me never fight, me shoot *minnenwerfer*" (a mortar). "Oh you do, do you" was the reply, "then you're the I've been looking for two years."' The great advantage in such training, was the self-confidence which it engendered in the troops, and which stood them in such good stead in battle, whether or not they ever found themselves in the position of the 'Jock' of the anecdote.

The 5th, 6th and 7th H.L.I. of the H.L.I. Brigade were now the only battalions of the Regiment in France which were up to strength. All the others had been shattered. But the German offensive had been halted, with the British line bent but not broken. Given a month or two for their wounded to recover—many not for the first time—and drafts to join them, and the H.L.I. battalions would again be ready for the field, with the same spirit and traditions as before. This respite was to be given them, for the enemy had once more been forced upon the defensive. He continued however, to build up his forces in the north, where a renewal of his attacks remained a constant possibility. Indeed, Ludendorff was obliged to do everything in his power to retain the initiative, for time was certainly not on his side.

Chapter XXVI

THE HINDENBURG LINE

The 74th at the Battle of Albert, 25 August 1918—the H.L.I. Brigade at Hênin, Riencourt and Moeuvres—the 15th H.L.I. at the crossing of the Somme—the Glasgow Highlanders in the Targelle Valley—a Victoria Cross for the 5th H.L.I. — the 74th at the Battle of Cambrai—the Armistice, 11 November 1918—the 74th cross the German Frontier, 9 December 1918.

THE arrival of summer on the Western Front in 1918 marked the end of the Germans' last effort. It had been a mighty effort indeed, bringing their line to within forty miles of Paris at its nearest point; but equally mighty was the failure. The pattern of the battlefront now formed a huge salient, which swelled forward between Ypres and Verdun, reaching towards Amiens. It was no smooth curve ; but one broken into numerous smaller salients, remarkably like that made upon a sandy beach by a wave larger than those on either side, just as the water trickles to a halt exhausted, before pouring back on the ebbing tide. The gambler's throw, into which Ludendorff had cast the last of his resources, had left the German Armies completely exhausted. Naturally he has been widely criticised for making it, and for persisting in it after failing to achieve his initial objectives. The fact was however, that it very nearly came off. The reason it failed was not faulty generalship, but simply that the German Armies had been out-fought by the British Armies. This is not to be disproved by reminders that the French were also in the field ; any more than reminders that the arrival of the Prussians carried the day at Waterloo, disprove the fact that on that occasion, it was the French who were out-fought by the British Army. Both Waterloo and the German *putsch* of 1918 were 'damned close-run things,' in each of which defeat was avoided only by the almost incredible valour of tired British soldiers—most of them raw. Foch, who like his predecessor Joffre, had now been made a Marshal of France, had the duty of co-ordinating the efforts of the armies of Great Britain, France and America, under Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and Generals Pétain and Pershing respectively. The spearhead Divisions of the American Army, which had previously been scattered along the front under British and French command were now, with the arrival of some fourteen fresh American Divisions, to be concentrated under their own Commander-in-Chief. The 74th had had the 319th American Regiment of the Line under their wing, instructing its officers and N.C.O.s in trench warfare, patrolling, outposts, and picquet duties. At the end of July, the 319th were judged to be fully competent to hold the line on their own, and relieved the 74th accordingly.

Marshal Foch's plan for 1918 was to strike at the flanks of the enemy salients, of which the principal ones were four in number ; from north to south ; that between Ypres and Festubert, that on the Somme, that on the Maine, and that below Verdun before St Mihiel. As a plan it was of course, a fairly obvious one which, considering that the Germans had spent themselves, offered every chance of finishing them off. There were many difficulties however, attendant on its execution. The Allies were still unable to mass sufficient reserves at any one point to ensure the maintenance of the relentless pressure essential for the infliction of a decisive defeat, such as Ludendorff with his vast reserves on interior lines had so nearly achieved. Marshal Foch had therefore to rely on the old expedient of moving Divisions up and down the battle-front as they might be required, and the difficulty in this lay in the fact that the lateral communications had been over-run by the enemy at many points. As a preliminary to any knockout blow it was accordingly necessary to clear these places by frontal attacks. The general position indeed, gave

no indication that the end of the war was fast approaching, as is shown by a verbose directive inadvisably issued by Sir Henry Wilson who, though fortunately no longer able to exercise any control over affairs on the Western Front, apparently felt that as Chief of the Imperial General Staff he ought to make some sort of pronouncement. He seemed to envisage the war going on to 1920. ‘Words, words, words !’ Sir Douglas Haig scrawled across the directive. ‘Nothing but words !’

In the Second Battle of the Marne, the French eliminated the enemy salient reaching out to Château Thierry between Rheims and Soissons during July, while the Battle of Amiens, against the main salient, was planned for August. Under Marshal Foch’s direction the allied armies were united as they had never been before. Politics were cast aside and national sentiment took second place to the business of beating the Germans. Armies were reorganised and the French 1st Army placed under Sir Douglas Haig’s command. Great attention was paid to secrecy and security; the soldier being belatedly ordered KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT. All this inspired fresh feelings of confidence and optimism among the ranks, so that, whatever Sir Henry Wilson might think of the situation, the rank and file had little doubt that the tide had at last turned, and that this time the Allies would drive through to victory. That it was possible to disseminate such a spirit throughout the battle front, after the countless setbacks, disappointments and near-disasters which had been suffered over so long a period is indeed remarkable.

The 74th, who were in the line in the vicinity of Alette and Ervillers, in the middle of August, received no orders of any impending operations, being merely told to keep a close watch on the enemy and chase him at once if he started to run for it. This did not seem unlikely, for he was certainly very nervous, keeping the 74th under constant shell-fire and once attempting a raid. Behind the battalion line there was great activity ; tanks rumbling, wheezing and clanking as they moved ponderously into their assembly areas, and batteries driving forward into new positions at the trot and canter. The 74th were in very fine fighting trim, being rested, re-equipped, up to strength and commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Lorrain Brodie, V.C., who had marched with the battalion from Aldershot in 1914 and had served with it ever since, except when recovering from wounds. He had lived through so many desperate encounters that he was believed to have a ‘charmed life,’ but events soon showed him to be mortal like all men, for he was not one to rest on his laurels but, whatever his rank, had always to be the first into action.

In the Battle of Albert, which opened on 21 August 1918, the 3rd Division advanced on Gomicourt with the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division in close reserve, under orders to attack the line Behagnies-Sapignies if the 3rd Division was successful. The objective of the 74th was Behagnies, upon which they advanced in ‘worm formation,’ or, as one might say, with the platoons in line of sections in single file—the habit of inventing new nomenclatures during the Great War, at a time when there was so much else to be done, is difficult to understand. The 74th were supported by ‘Whippet tanks,’ and, crossing the Achiet-le-Grand-Arras railway, wheeled round the edge of Gomicourt under withering machine-gun fire. Soon they began to bear down on the objective, and the leading companies established themselves on the ridge five hundred yards north-west of Behagnies ; but Colonel Brodie was killed and 160 other casualties suffered. The advance was then halted till the following morning, when the 74th attacked and captured Behagnies against very strong opposition, taking 6 guns, 190 prisoners, 22 machine-guns and 10 anti-tank rifles. They were commanded on this occasion by Major Harry Ross Skinner, who has been mentioned before. Later in the month he handed over to Lieutenant-Colonel F. S. Thackeray, for he was still a bit young for a commanding-officer—just twenty-one in fact.

The 52nd Lowland Division attacked from Ficheux on 24 August with the object of assaulting and consolidating a part of the Hindenburg Line and support system. The 157th

(H.L.I.) Brigade attacked with the 156th Brigade in echelon behind it, the first objectives being the lower slopes of Hénin Hill on the Hamlincourt—Héninel Ridge. The 5th and 6th H.L.I. in the lead having captured Hénin village, the H.L.I. Brigade successfully occupied the objective and should then have waited until the 56th Division, on the right of the 52nd, was ready to co-operate in the advance against the main Hindenburg Position. Most unfortunately however, the orders given to the H.L.I. Brigade were evidently greatly lacking, for the 5th and 6th H.L.I. apparently thought that they were expected to push on into the first line, and could not understand why the barrage did not lift. The two commanding-officers held a consultation, as a result of which numerous wires, were sent back to the guns either to cease firing or to lift. This they did after an hour, when the H.L.I. leading companies advanced, but were held up on the wire and returned having suffered heavily. The Brigade Commander then arrived and a further attack was arranged after a fifteen minute bombardment of the first line. This time the H.L.I. got through the wire, but with great difficulty. They then found that a further three hundred yards had to be crossed to the enemy trenches, during which they again received heavy losses. Nevertheless they took and cleared the first line on the Brigade front, but were too weak to hold and consolidate it unaided, and therefore withdrew back to the first objective. During this affair Lieutenant J. W. Parr of the 5th H.L.I. was shot in the leg and fell into a shell-hole on top of a German Corporal, who hastily surrendered to him. Shortly after, the enemy infantry passed across the shell-hole in a counter-attack and tried to bayonet Lieutenant Parr who was however saved by his prisoner. The prisoner—who had now become the captor—then helped Parr back to the German Casualty Clearing Station, carrying his pack for him. Fortunately he did not have to spend long in captivity.

The H.L.I. Brigade again attacked on 27 August, this time with the 6th and 7th H.L.I. up and the 5th in reserve. The objectives were Fontaine Crossilles and Riencourt. All three battalions were in line by the time the first objective was reached, having advanced in 'Blobs,' or in other words, in line of sections in file, across ground thick with machine-gun posts and raked by defensive artillery fire. The German machine-gunners fought to the end, and as the H.L.I. advanced they passed many guns with their dead crews lying beside them. Several field guns, firing over open sights, were taken with the bayonet, and Fontaine Crossilles was captured as ordered, after which the H.L.I. Brigade was relieved. It went forward again on 1 September through Bullecourt and Reincourt to attack Queant and Pronville, which were however found to have been evacuated. By 13 September the Brigade was in the neighbourhood of Moeuvres, for the advance was nearing Cambrai. The second line of the old Hindenburg support line had now become the British first line. The 5th H.L.I. had a curious experience when relieving the 1st Royal Munster Fusiliers—who were old friends—in this area. The enemy was using great quantities of gas shell, and as the whole country reeked of the stuff the H.L.I. arrived wearing gas-masks. They were greeted with derisive shouts of laughter by the Irishmen who did not apparently use gas-masks. They assured the H.L.I. that provided it was sweetened with plenty of stout and 'whisky,' the gas was actually good for one, and gave one a better appetite. Certainly exposure to it appeared to have done them no harm.

Moved down from Flanders, the 32nd Division joined the Canadian Corps and went into action on 11 August before Amiens. The Divisional attack was led by the 14th Infantry Brigade which was held up before Damery. The 15th H.L.I., which had been in Brigade reserve, was then sent in, but by that time the other regiments in the Brigade had suffered so heavily that it was withdrawn before the H.L.I. became closely engaged. Later, as the Canadians pushed forward, the 15th H.L.I. were in action at Herleville, Soyecourt and Villers-Carbonnel, where they could look down upon the marshy banks of the Somme Canal. On 3 September the battalion was moved

up to the east bank of the Somme, facing the German rearguards which were defending the passage across the marshes. The situation presented quite a problem, for the whole Division was held up. On the morning of 5 September, Captain T. W. Hepburn, commanding 'D' Company of the 15th H.L.I., constructed a raft and with a small reconnaissance party poled it through the marshes. Having discovered a passage he returned for his company, which ferried its way across and formed a small bridgehead, though in the face of heavy fire. The remainder of the battalion followed, and was soon in close action in the woods and on the slopes rising up from the marshes. Numbers of machine-guns were captured and fifty-four prisoners and a line was established about a thousand yards beyond the river, along a spur north-east of Brie. The remainder of the Brigade followed across the Somme, Brie was captured and a Brigade line established which covered the crossing of the Division. Captain Hepburn's effort, undertaken entirely on his own initiative at very considerable risk, thus produced results of the highest importance, and showed qualities of leadership of a very high order, not only in Captain Hepburn himself—although he led the way—but in all the officers of the 15th H.L.I.

During August and September, 1918, the British Army had advanced along a forty-mile front to an average depth of twenty-five miles—an astonishing performance which had exceeded all expectations. It was an entirely British victory—not yet a decisive one—for the American Army had not had time to organise itself; while the French Army, tottering apprehensively forward under the anxious care of its nursemaid, Pétain, had done little to help in this tremendous achievement. Nor, for that matter, had Marshal Foch, who had shown signs of temperament, leading to serious disagreement between him and Sir Douglas Haig. Since he had accepted the position of Marshal Foch as the supreme authority on the Western Front, Sir Douglas Haig had taken considerable risks with the security of his line in order to support the Marshal's demands, even though General Smuts, the new envoy of the War Cabinet, had personally assured him of Government backing in the event of his refusal. 'I take the risk and accept the responsibility, acting in the main interest of the Allied cause,' he replied, and added with a bitterness uncharacteristic of him, 'I fully realise that if the dispositions (of Foch) prove to be wrong, the blame will rest on me. On the other hand if they prove right, the credit will lie with Foch. With this the Government should be well satisfied.' Having gone so far in supporting Marshal Foch in the main dispositions he was not however, prepared to accept orders as to the subsequent conduct of the operations which his knowledge and experience convinced him were wrong. Therefore he fought his own battle with every success, which irritated Marshal Foch into taking the unworthy step of withdrawing the French 1st Army from his command. This did not in any way worry Sir Douglas Haig, for the Army had been of little use to him and he was no doubt thankful to see the back of it. He knew by this time that he had the enemy on the run and was determined, in spite of Foch and anyone else, to break the Hindenburg Line and end the war before winter.

By late September the British Army had in fact already established itself in parts of the Hindenburg Line, although the breaking of it had still to come. On 18 September the 33rd Division, which had been transferred from the 2nd to the 3rd Army, was in reserve to the 5th Corps attacking towards the valley of the Scheldt and the St Quentin Canal. As the attack progressed the Glasgow Highlanders came up into line in the Targelle Valley, with the town of Villers Guislain, still occupied by the enemy, to their left rear. Throughout the last days of the month the battle raged, and the Glasgow Highlanders, themselves hard at work, could hear the guns near Moeuvres, where the 5th, 6th and 7th H.L.I. were in action and distinguishing themselves greatly. On 28 September the 33rd Division was ordered to advance down the Targelle Valley at dawn on the following day, and secure the crossings over the St Quentin Canal.

In this determined drive forward to victory, in which great armies were hammering at the Hindenburg Line all along the front, the situations confronting Divisions and Brigades could not be taken into account. If the attack was held up at one point it went ahead at another. The enemy was being beaten to his knees, and local set-backs and misfortunes to single units—which had often to advance against impossible odds—did not affect the main battle. The Glasgow Highlanders went forward in fog and drove the enemy before them—for by now he seldom waited for his opponents to get to close quarters. The battalion however, suffered heavily from flanking fire, and was unable to keep touch with neighbouring units. Eventually it found itself in a most precarious position, with its leading elements surrounded and no help forthcoming; while its losses amounted to 9 officers and 350 rank and file. Yet the next morning the Glasgow Highlanders were able to march down the valley unopposed, across ground littered with their dead. They felt very bitter, not understanding at the time that the efforts of the 33rd Division had pinned down the enemy in front and so assisted friends elsewhere; for the 4th Army and part of the 3rd was across the St Quentin Canal and through the Hindenburg Line.

‘The 52nd Division,’ says the *Official History*, ‘re-took Moeuvres on the evening of the 19th September, finding a post of the 5th H.L.I., isolated on the 17th, still holding out.’ This incident occurred after the 5th H.L.I. had relieved the Munsters near Moeuvres, where the position was extremely confused.

The battalion had been reduced by casualties to a third of its strength, and had great difficulty in covering the front allotted to it. The two or three forward posts, which were supposed to discover and break up any enemy counter-attack, could therefore only be manned by a section apiece. The four days spent in this position are described in the battalion history as ‘the worst time of the war,’ which is certainly saying a good deal. The battalion in fact, was hard put to it to hold its ground, and was unable to relieve one of its advance posts, commanded by Corporal D. F. Hunter with six men. After several attempts had been made the post was assumed to have been destroyed, for the enemy were all round it. When Moeuvres was finally cleared however, Corporal Hunter and his men were found to be still alive in the post, which was little more than a shell-hole, and which they had defended for three days with no food or water other than the ‘un-expended portion of the day’s ration,’ which they had taken with them. In view of the vast numbers against them, their performance was really very remarkable. Corporal Hunter was awarded the Victoria Cross and promoted Sergeant, while each of his men, of whom only two were unwounded, received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

The enemy was now in much the same unhappy position that the British had had to endure in March and April, being pushed steadily back all along his front, with no reserve to enable him to make a stand. The collapse of Turkey was followed by that of Austria, and Germany presumably held on because of her hope in the impregnability of the fantastic trench system of the Hindenburg Line. The German troops however, being for the most part raw conscripts whose morale was worsening daily, were in no condition to defend any position to the end as once they had done. Therefore once the British troops had got through the wire there was seldom more to do than round them up. Getting first to, and then through, the wire still remained a precarious business, and individual units continued to receive heavy casualties. The Glasgow Highlanders, for example, in crossing the Selle and moving forward to the Sambre, became reduced to 173 rifles, including battalion headquarters.

The 74th, who had moved up to the Canal du Nord from Vaulx Vreucourt on 6 September, attacked across the Canal on the 11th, and entered the Hindenburg Support Line on the 13th, having lost 3 officers and 52 rank and file. At this stage Colonel Thackeray left to command a Brigade, and the battalion was taken over by Major A. P. D. Telfer-Smollett, who had marched

with it from Aldershot in 1914 and, after being wounded during the Retreat from Mons and several times afterwards, now had the good fortune to lead the 74th to victory. The series of battles which led to the breaking of the Hindenburg Line at Cambrai and in which the H.L.I. Brigade with the 52nd Lowland Division participated at Moeuvres, began on 27 September, when the 74th crossed the St Quentin Canal and advanced to a position north-west of the Cambrai road, taking 55 prisoners and 12 machine-guns, with a loss to themselves of 75 all-ranks. By 20 October they had reached the battlefield of the Selle, taking over a line just west of the Harpies River from the Grenadier Guards. With 'sections in worms,' they attacked the following morning and ended the day with 300 prisoners, 3 guns and over 100 machine-guns in their hands, at a loss to themselves of 37 all-ranks. Moving forward through Capelle to Villers Pol they were at this village when news of the Armistice was received; and the pipes and drums played up and down the village street.

The British fighting soldiers had been aware for some weeks that they were sweeping forward to victory, but few among them could have expected the end to come as suddenly as it did. It was generally presumed that they would have to fight on into Germany and that the enemy would stand on the frontiers. His sudden collapse came as a considerable surprise, not only to the fighting soldiers but to the allied governments. Sir Douglas Haig indeed, seems to have been the only person in authority who expected victory in 1918. At home five million men and women were labouring at the munitions which would enable a really out-size offensive to be launched in 1919. The British Empire in fact, was now so geared to war that its abrupt termination caused a very severe jolt and, as soon as the jubilations died down, some problems of the first magnitude became manifest.

The British Empire had some three-and-a-half million men under arms. They did not of course, expect to be allowed to pack up and go home as soon as the last shot was fired but were, in general, prepared to do their duty so long as they were required. They did however expect fair treatment. Unfortunately the business of disposing of the munitions workers, who were drawing inflation wages (for in war the further a man is away from the enemy the more he gets paid) and of putting industry back on a peacetime footing, brought politics into it, so that fair treatment was the last thing the soldiers got. Demobilisation was started with those men who had jobs waiting for them, who were nearly always those who had been last into the field ; so that the longer a man had been fighting the longer he had to wait for release. Therefore by the time the old soldiers got home there were no jobs left. Discipline was naturally tried very severely by this sort of management, but it did not break. There were one or two mutinies among the administrative troops—who had never seen an enemy soldier except behind bars—but they were quickly put in their places by the fighting soldiers.

For the time being however there was no disbandment of units, and the H.L.I. battalions remained in France and Flanders, with some of them in the Rhine bridgeheads. Their number in fact, was augmented by yet another newly-raised battalion—the 51st H.L.I.—which was part of a force of eighty thousand young men held in reserve at home, and now sent forward to the Rhine. As the Service battalions of the Regiment returned to the United Kingdom some marched through Glasgow and were given civic receptions, while others less fortunate were quartered elsewhere in Scotland or England and ran-down gradually—a matter of old comrades parting from each other in sorrow, and with no farewell parade. Some, like the 16th H.L.I., did not disband until 1920.

The 74th, first into the field, were early informed to their great pleasure and satisfaction that they were to form part of the Army of Occupation. A party was immediately sent home for the colours. The Three Colours which, it will be remembered, had been deposited at the Depot in August 1914 by the Ensigns, Fergusson, Powell and MacKenzie, who were soon all killed in

action, were now taken out again by Major Ross Skinner and Lieutenants Blackley and Thorburn. The colour party was not in full-dress this time, but in battle-stained khaki. Still, it was a proud moment when the colours of the 74th, 'always victoriously carried,' emerged once again to be borne forward to victory. The 74th marched through Belgium by Grand Reng, Charleroi and Stavely to the frontier, which they reached on the 9th December 1918. The colours were then uncased and, with bayonets fixed and all pipes sounding, the 74th crossed into Germany. Marching through Malmedy they saluted their Brigade Commander, Brigadier-General W. L. Osborn, who sent the following message

My congratulations to the 74th Highlanders on crossing the enemy frontier to-day as a result of the battles they have fought this year. It will always be a source of pride to me to have had such a fine Scottish Regiment in the Brigade under my command, and to have saluted their colours in enemy territory.

During the Great War of 1914—1918, in which its battalions fought in France, Belgium, the Dardanelles, Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, the Highland Light Infantry gained seven Victoria Crosses and no fewer than sixty-four battle-honours; of which ten were selected to be inscribed on the colours.

But it lost five hundred and ninety-eight officers and nine thousand four hundred and twenty-eight rank and file; killed in action, died of wounds or of disease.

Lift not thy trumpet, Victory, to the sky.
Nor through battalions, nor by batteries blow,
But over hollows full of old wire go,
Where, among dregs of war, the long-dead lie,
With wasted iron that the guns passed by
When they went eastwards like a tide at flow;
There sound thy trumpet that the dead may know,
Who waited for thy coming, Victory.

APPENDIX

The 74th and The 36th.

Correspondence between 2nd Bn. The Highland Light Infantry and 2nd Bn. The Worcestershire Regiment in France, 1915.

From: LT. COL. G. C. LAMBTON *to:* LT. COL. A. A. WOLFE-MURRAY.

IN THE FIELD,

21st September, 1915.

Dear Wolfe Murray,—For almost a year we have now been continually ‘relieving one another almost without a break in the trenches, which is perhaps unique in the history of the British Army.

The best of good feeling has always existed between the Battalions during this period, and therefore we, the Officers of the 2nd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment, would like to cement the friendship thus formed by wishing you and your officers to become permanent honorary members of our Mess. In this Battalion we have a precedent from the Peninsular War, during which, owing to somewhat similar circumstances, the 2nd Lincolns became permanent honorary members of our Mess.

In sending you this invitation, we hope that the good feeling which now exists between us will always continue. Should you accept our invitation, I would suggest that the fact be entered in the records of both Battalions.—Yours sincerely,
(Signed) G. C. LAMBTON, Lieut.-Col.

Commanding 2nd Worcester Regiment.

From: LT. COL. A. A. WOLFE-MURRAY *to:* LT. COL. G. C. LAMBTON.

IN THE FIELD,

21st September, 1915.

My Dear Lambton,—Very many thanks for your nice letter, and we all appreciate very highly the honour you are doing us in asking us to become permanent honorary members of your Mess, a privilege which we accept with grateful thanks, and one which we shall always prize.

As you know, I have personally been quartered with the old 36th many times, and I have always been very fond of them. Now the remainder of our officers, who had not been so fortunate before, have during the past years—and more especially during the present War—got to know your Battalion well, and to hold them, as I do, in the highest respect. We all hope in return that you will consider yourselves permanent honorary members of our Mess. It shall be entered in our records, as I hope it may be in yours, and I am sure that the good feeling and comradeship which exists between the two Battalions will always remain.—Yours ever,

(Signed) A. A. WOLFE MURRAY,
Lieut.-Col., Commanding 2nd H.L.I.

From: LT. COL. G. C. LAMBTON *to:* LT. COL. A. A. WOLFE-MURRAY.

IN THE FIELD,
22nd September, 1915.

DEAR Wolfe Murray,—Many thanks for your letter in reply to mine. We all greatly appreciate the honour you have done us in inviting us to become honorary members of your Mess for all time, and it is a privilege which we most gratefully accept. We shall be proud to enter this fact in our regimental records, and I feel sure that when future generations know the reason why we cemented the bonds of friendship formed during the past year, it will tend always to promote good feeling between us whenever and wherever the two Battalions may meet.

Wishing you all the best of luck.—I remain, yours sincerely,
(Signed) G. C. LAMBTON.

NOTE: Brevet Lt. Col. G. C. Lambton was a younger brother of Captain A. F. Lambton killed at Magersfontein with the 71st. Their uncle, Col. F. W. Lambton, commanded the 71st from 1880 to 1884.