

THE VETERAN

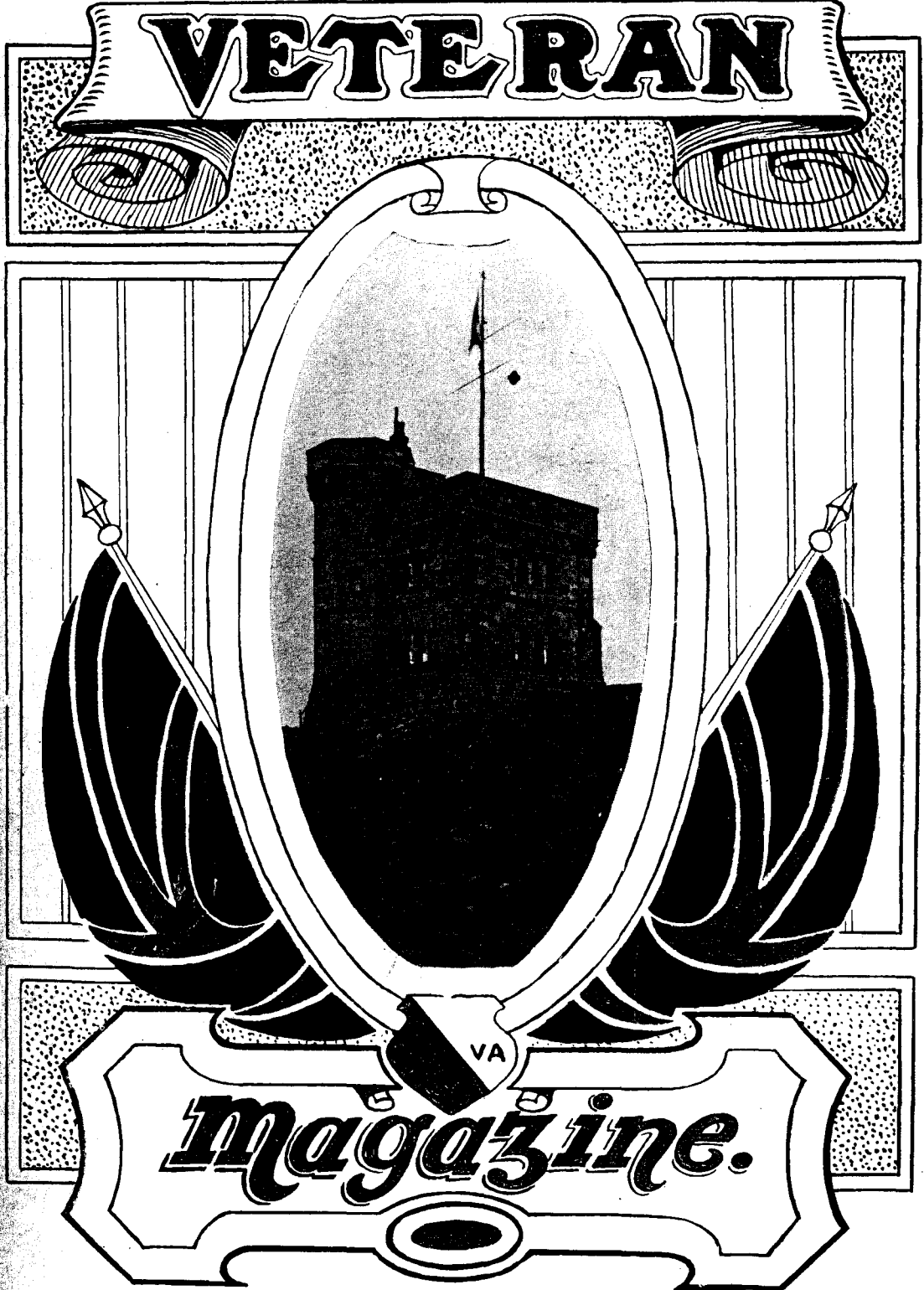
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CAMBRAI

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The **VETERAN**



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THE ROYAL NEWFOUNDLAND REGIMENT AT CAMBRAI

NOVEMBER 20th to DECEMBER 5th, 1917

By MAJOR R. H. TAIT, M.C.

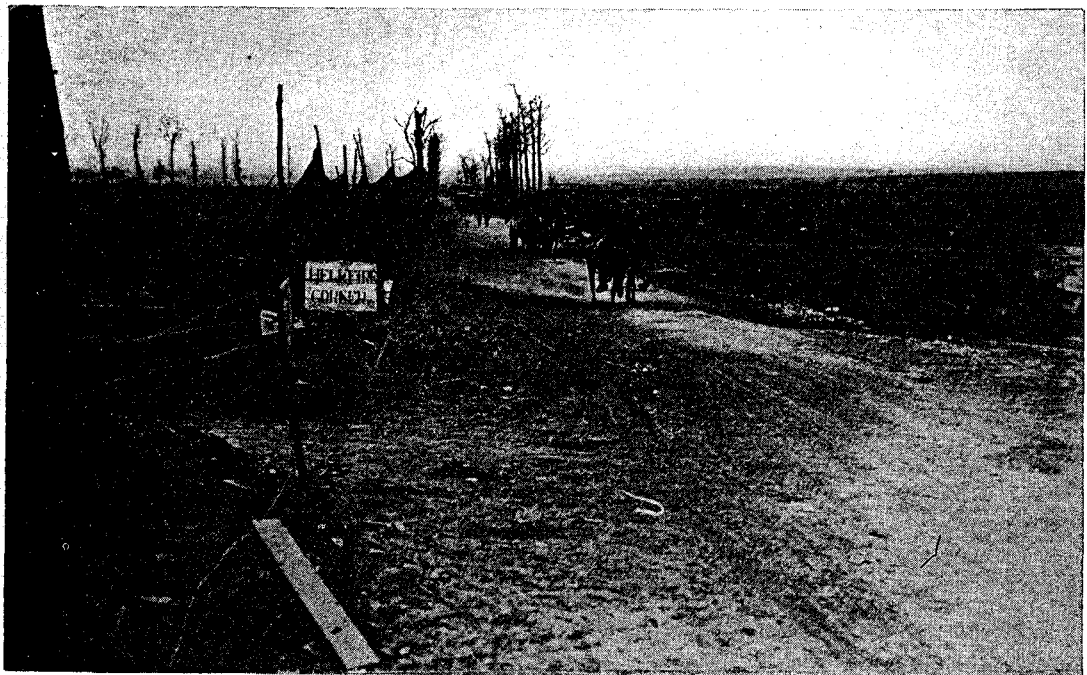
FOREWORD



FOR some months preceding our being sent to the Cambrai Sector, our Regiment had been engaged in defensive and offensive operations in the Passchendaele area and has participated in the attack on the Steenbeek on August

Consequently during the latter part of October, 1917, we were not at all sorry when orders came for us to entrain and proceed Southwards to the more favourable fighting ground in France.

Our new destination was rest billets in the village of Berles-Au-Bois, situated in the



Hell Fire Corner, near Ypres, a place very familiar to members of the Regiment.

16th and on the Broembeek on October 9th, and we were tired out and considerably reduced in numbers as the result of our experiences in that devastated and shell torn war zone. Mud and muck, continuous shelling, raids, gas attacks, bombardments, occupying shell holes and strong points instead of trenches, and subjected to the direct fire of the low flying enemy air craft had been our lot for some little time.

Somme area and only about 9 miles away from the old familiar grounds of Beaumont Hamel.

During the three or four weeks of our stay here we were able to reorganize the Battalion and by means of systematic training and a good Quarter-master to regain our wasted strength. We enjoyed to the full our short respite from the horrors of the front-line trenches, and when parades were over

for the day football and inter-battalion cross-country running were indulged in.

Once more we went back to the "spit and polish" orders of things and practised Brigade ceremonial drill in preparation for inspection by the Divisional Commander, Major-General Sir Beauvoir De Lisle.

We were in the neighbourhood of ground that had been in the hands of the Germans in the early days of the war, and their trenches and dug-outs were still in existence on the out-skirts of the village. Rows of thickly set barbed wire entanglements still protected their old lines and were proving a hindrance both to our troops in training and also to the civilian farmers who were trying to carry on with the cultivation of the soil.

One of the jobs assigned to each battalion in the Brigade was the clearing up of so much of these entanglements every day. Platoons were detailed every afternoon for this work and a record kept of the amount salvaged. Each Battalion then sent on the salvaged wire to the dump at Brigade Headquarters for it was intended to be used by our own forces to help out in the supply to the front line trenches.

When, after a few days complete rest, our training took the form of practising attack formations every other day, we knew that sooner or later we would be in the fray again. Then the mention of tanks was heard, and we began to practise advancing behind tanks which were sent to help in our training.

This was the first time that we had seen the tanks at work so close at hand and we marvelled at the ease with which they were able to crush beneath their caterpillar treadmill wheels the barbed wire obstacles, to surmount breastworks and "waddle" over the trenches.

We had two or three field days with the Battalion and the Brigade, and then with the whole division. On the divisional day the Commander-in-Chief, Sir (then) Douglas Haig, accompanied by his staff, came to see our operations.

During the remainder of our stay at Berles-Au-Bois we underwent fairly strenuous training, so that by the middle of November the Battalion which had in the meantime been reinforced by drafts from England and the convalescent depots was in the pink of condition.

After the day's work, our men sought recreation at the temporary "Music Hall" where the divisional troupe gave a first class

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entertainment three nights a week, and we enjoyed the sketches, songs and choruses that comprised the programme.

Then came rumours of an impending battle and the warning for us to be prepared to move on given notice. These rumours became a certainty when the commanding officers, adjutants and other representative officers of each Battalion in the Division were detailed to proceed by motor-lorry to Peronne where further orders would be received.

On reaching Peronne, the Battalion officers were given the map references for their several destinations, and we found that our duty was to reconnoitre the ground in the

ing at Peronne from whence we proceeded immediately by road to camp at Moislains, a distance of about 6 miles. This march was one we had cause to remember. We had been on the move since the early morning, the train journey was a cramped and trying one, and we found ourselves dumped out at Peronne station with a long march in pitch darkness over an unfamiliar road ahead of us. Our only guide to our new halting place was our map reference, and the weight of our extra rations and war stores in addition to the ordinary impediments soon began to make itself felt. Many byroads turned off the main road and we had to make sure at intervals that we were on the right route;



The everlasting fatigue party dragging its way through mud, near Passchendaele.

vicinity of Gouzeaucourt and to make ourselves familiar with the approaches to what was later to be known as the assembly area.

When we returned to our billets at Berles, plans for the forthcoming operations were discussed in secret conference, for it was impressed upon us that the project was not to be communicated outside for fear of our intentions becoming known broadcast and ultimately to the enemy.

On the 17th day of November we made the first move in the train of events that were soon to follow. Leaving Berles-Au-Bois at 11.30 a.m., we marched to Boisieux-au-Mont, about 8 miles distant, where we entrained at 4.45 p.m.

At midnight we found ourselves detrain-

smoking was forbidden as it was feared that the glow of the lighted matches and cigarettes along a column of troops might possibly be perceived by the enemy, for several units were passing along the roads from different directions, and the higher command was not taking any chances of detection.

Secrecy in word and movement was the order of the moment.

At Moislains we remained for the day, during which time we received further essentials in war stores, equipment and rations. We broke camp at 5 p.m. and took the road once more to Sorel-le-Grand about 4½ miles nearer the front line, arriving there about 8 p.m.

The next day, November 19th, we were

closely confined to our huts, as in keeping with the plan only the least movement was allowed in daylight, so that the enemy might not know of the sudden concentration of troops in that particular area.

Then a final inspection of equipments, rifles, war stores, rations, etc., was held by Company commanders; bombs, flares, rifles, grenades, etc., issued, and we dropped off for a few minutes' sleep prior to taking part in the big advance on the morrow.

THE GENERAL SITUATION

PERHAPS I may be allowed at this juncture to say a few words as to the general situation in relation to the coming battle, as it may help to make more easily understood the circumstances and happenings when I come to narrow down my chronicle to the exploits of our Regiment alone.

For some weeks prior to the 20th of November, there was a comparative lull on the Western front in so far as the British troops had not been engaged in any recent severe fighting. It is true that daily incidents occurred in different portions of the line and the usual artillery demonstrations took place at intervals, followed by raids on a small scale. It was known that the Germans feared an attack on our part at any time, in the Ypres Sector especially, and that in anticipation of such an event the enemy had withdrawn troops from the quieter sections of the line to hold in readiness for use where required.

After the debacle in Russia where operations had now virtually ceased, the Germans were enabled to release a great many divisions and so strengthen their forces considerably on the Western front. In addition, they had captured a vast quantity of guns, ammunition and war material from our quondam ally, which they could use effectually against us. Winter, too, was now setting in, which would mean under ordinary conditions a rest for his tired troops.

Under these circumstances and in view of the enemy operations in Italy and in order to get our blow in first, it was determined to make a strong attack in an unexpected quarter and if not ultimately to make a break through his line, at any rate so to establish our position as to be able when the opportune moment arose to exploit the situation to the best advantage later on.

The main reason why the Cambrai front was the Sector chosen for the attack was on account of the favourableness of the ground

(a) for the concealment of the preparations for the attack, and (b) for the employment of tanks in large numbers. The country to the rear of our lines in that Sector was for the most part smooth undulating ground with very few formidable obstacles in the way. Little patches of woods and thickets appeared here and there which afforded protection from view to our assembling troops. The tanks were able to lie practically unexposed by day in the hollows of the rolling ground, and our back area was screened from direct observation from the enemy lines by the nature of the sloping country.

The main element of the attack was to be surprise, and to effect this the utmost secrecy had to be maintained. Previous to this engagement, the enemy had been warned of impending assaults by the preparatory destructive heavy artillery fire followed by a hurricane bombardment, which proceedings served but to herald the approach of our troops behind a curtain of fire at the appointed zero hour.

To follow out this accustomed plan would not find the enemy totally unprepared. A different scheme must be adopted to catch him unawares. What would serve the purpose? The answer was the tanks. Hitherto, the tanks had only been employed on a small scale in minor engagements and had not as yet been afforded the opportunity of proving their usefulness in large numbers.

In this attack it was decided to employ our tanks not in tens, but in hundreds, whose main duty was to perform the task hitherto allotted to the guns i.e. the destruction without warning of the enemy wire entanglements and the demoralizing of his front line troops, and so clear the path for our advancing infantry.

The length of the British attacking front on that day was about 12 miles, extending roughly from Moeuvres on the left flank to Gonnelleu on the right, and the advance along the whole front was covered by relays of tanks,—large tanks, small tanks, fighting tanks and supply tanks, tanks of all descriptions, tanks everywhere.

They advanced in formidable array headed by the General of the tank corps, Brig.-Gen. H. J. Ellis, in his own tank with the banner displayed from it.

A word or two as to the positions in front of us.

The German main line of defence was the original Hindenburg line, a formidable line of defence. The trenches were far larger and

deeper than the ordinary trench lines and more strongly fortified. In breadth, they measured as much as 16 feet in places, and were 9 feet deep with the firestep about 4 feet below the ground level.

They were firestepped both facing the front and facing the rear so that they could be used for fire in any direction if needed. There were deep strong dugouts at frequent intervals, some of them large enough to hold a whole Company, whilst in others a whole battalion could be sheltered without difficulty. Well protected and well chosen machine gun emplacements were built in at short distances from one another, and the whole front was strongly guarded by deep thick belts of heavily barbed wire with con-

THE REGIMENT IN ACTION AT CAMBRAI

AT about 1 a.m. on the 20th the Company Sergeant Majors of each Company went round and aroused their sleeping comrades. In spite of the excitement of the moment, everybody was calmly awaiting the issue with a studied attempt at outward indifference; but inside was the realization that in a few hours we would be at grips with the enemy, and every advance meant gaps in our ranks.

By 2.30 a.m. we had all fallen in Company by Company ready to move off. Then at 2.35 a.m. at the signal the Battalion marched off, Headquarters leading, and the Companies following at the allotted intervals.



A dilapidated barn behind the line used as a sign to radiate the good humor and high spirits of "Ours."

cealed gaps so arranged as to be swept by their machine fire.

Behind this line at a distance of about 1000 yards was the Hindenburg reserve line, a strong defensive position but not so strongly fortified as the main line, and behind the reserve line a third line known as the Beaurevoir-Masnieres-Marquion line, which depended for its strength on the River Scheldt, and the Canal de L'Escaut (called some places the Canal du Nord and the Canal in St. Quentin) which ran in front of it.

In addition to these three lines of defences, there were subsidiary lines of trenches lying in front of the Hindenburg line and between the Hindenburg line and the two rear lines.

The strength of the Battalion going into action was 17 officers and 536 other ranks.

Our route lay through the village of Gouzeaucourt about $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles along the main road leading to Cambrai, and from thence to our Assembly ground near Queen's cross, where we arrived at about 5 a.m.

Zero hour was set for 6.20 a.m. and we had over an hour to spare. We lay down on the grass eagerly awaiting the approach of dawn and the sound of the signal gun.

Soon, other troops began to filter by in our vicinity, taking up their stations as ordered and the rumble of tanks manoeuvring into position could be heard.

Dawn broke with low overhanging dark

clouds and a grey mist enveloping our surroundings.

A little longer wait; and then at 6.30 a.m. to the second came the report of a single gun. A short pause; and then a mighty roar and thunderous detonation as the whole line of our artillery burst forth in unison.

On the moment, the formidable array of tanks concealed behind our lines began their stolid advance towards the enemy trenches, covered by the barrage and advantaged by the mist and half darkness of the early morn. Their immediate purpose was successful. The German troops holding the front line system awakened suddenly by the artillery outburst looked over their parapets and saw advancing upon them through the gloom hideous looking iron monsters spitting fire in all directions and trampling down their barbed wire entanglements like grass under foot. Then through the haze came waves of Khaki coloured infantry.

In frightened amazement the Bosches who did not shout "Kamerad" and give themselves up turned tail and scuttled to the rear as quickly as their legs could carry them.

The tanks were doing their work well. Traversing the length of the trenches they poured their fire in upon those who were hardy enough to remain, and crushed beneath their weight machine gun posts, crew and all, and, dipping in over the trenches as they crossed, they went on to deal with the second and third lines and intermediate posts, taking up favourable positions to enfilade cross trenches. Soon they came up to the field guns and closing in upon them forced the gun crews to rapid flight, leaving guns and ammunition intact.

These fell into our hands to be used later on against their former possessors. In several instances, however, the Germans stuck to their guns and fought to the last man, and before yielding put many a tank out of action.

Except at isolated points, this was practically the only resistance offered to our troops until they had advanced well on the way towards the final objective and our troops went along talking and cheering without a check.

Whilst this was happening along the forward area, our Regiment was still behind slowly edging up towards our original front line. Our share in the operations actively had not as yet come.

The task of capturing the first and second objectives immediately in front of us fell to

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the lot of the 20th Division, and on completion of their task the 29th Division was to pass through to the capture of the third and final objective i.e. the high ground beyond the Canal du Nord and the villages of Marcoing and Masnieres, about 4 miles away.

As soon as the zero hour had been denoted, we moved along with the other Battalions of the Brigade up through the Borderer Ravine, where we were held up for nearly two hours by the block in the troops massed there. All branches of the service were represented in this confined area—in-
fantry, pioneers, sappers, ambulance sections, machine gunners, field artillery, en-

oured flares the movements of the enemy; others, fighting machines, circled over the enemy lines and took part in the general attack by means of direct machine gun fire on bodies of German infantry and then, further inland, by dropping bombs on batteries, transports and railways. The day, however, was disadvantageous for aerial observation and contact duty, and frequently the machines were forced to fly as low as one hundred feet from the ground to keep in touch with the infantry.

Whilst we were slowly edging up towards our jumping off point we saw the first evidence of the success of our troops ahead as



A view of the Canal du Nord, which was captured by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment on Nov. 20th, 1917.

gineers and cavalry including the Indian squadron.

What a target for the German artillery if they had only known it!

Fortunately for us, however, there was little or no enemy shelling and we did not have a single casualty at that point.

Probably our heavies had done their work with good result and had silenced many of the enemy batteries, or else their artillery was inadequate in this sector to reply with any vigour or effect.

Overhead our aeroplanes hovered or flew away into the mists. Some acted as contact machines to communicate by means of col-

batches of German prisoners, some wounded, began to file along towards our rear—a most encouraging sign for us and one which helped to strengthen our resolve to do our share in the good work as well when our time came.

Finally, at about 8.45 a.m. we reached our jumping off posts—the trenches that had originally been held as our front line. Here we sorted ourselves out ready to advance at the signal.

At 10.10 a.m. a bugle was sounded and the Battalion jumped over the parapet as one man and proceeded to open out into artillery formation—diamond shaped—just as we had

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already rehearsed in training. A Co. under Capt. Stick was at the point of the diamond; D Co. under Capt. Rendell on the left; B Co. under Capt. Butler on the right, and C Co. under Capt. Paterson brought up the rear. Headquarter Co. with the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. A. L. Hadow; the Adjutant, Capt. R. H. Tait; Signalling Officer, Capt. G. Whitty, and the Intelligence Officer, Capt. Waterman, proceeded with B Co.

This formation was maintained until we reached what was known as "The Blue Line," when the companies opened out into attack formation, as at this point we began to come under enemy machine gun fire and long range sniping for the first time.

As we advanced, we could not help being struck by the great difference in the nature of the ground from that which we had been accustomed to in previous attacks. Hitherto our advances had been made over bare muddy ground pitted with shell holes, some relics of former battles, others freshly formed as we passed along, with no sign of vegetation anywhere near; but on this occasion we found ourselves strolling as yet over almost virgin soil with grass and thistles and nettles growing knee high.

In fact, as we progressed, numerous hares darted out of the long grass almost at our feet and bounded off ahead of us, and many a man prodded at them with his bayonet as they scudded past, and some hearty lads even fired at them.

However, soon after opening out into attack formation we received our first casualties, though our men were only knocked out at intervals; but later on we ran into the enfilade fire of a machine gun and they began to fall more rapidly, but only for a time, as the fire eased when the machine gun was put out of action.

A small narrow ditch ran back from the enemy trench and those nearby had to take cover in it during a burst of fire when several of Headquarters Company were hit, including the Battalion Sergeant-Major, F. P. LeGrow. It was at this point too, that Lieut. Walter Greene, D.C.M., was killed.

The tanks, meanwhile, were some distance ahead of us and the bulk of them had passed over the ridge beyond and were lost in view. But we came upon several which had either become ditched or been put out of action from whizz-bangs or anti-tank guns.

On the sky-line we could see three or four

tanks in flame and these made an excellent target for the enemy artillery and it was in this vicinity that we saw for the first time evidences of enemy shelling.

We were at a loss at first to know where this burst of fire came from as the nature of the ground and the presence of the tanks ahead precluded the possibility of enemy direct rifle or machine gun fire reaching us; and as we neared a particular tank the fire increased. Capt. Whitty and a sergeant set out to investigate and shortly after the fire ceased he came back and reported to the C. O. that he had observed the fire coming from that particular tank. He managed to get close to it and perceived that the tank sergeant was using his machine gun and firing in the direction of our men.

He went up to the door of the tank and remonstrated forcibly with the sergeant, and discovered that the man was stark staring mad, and badly wounded at that. Inside the tank he found the whole crew, including the officer, killed with this single exception. A direct hit had evidently wiped out the lot, and the effect of having been cooped up for some hours in the confined space and the tremendous heat generated by the tank's guns and machine guns in action and the horrible death of his comrades had driven him insane, and being thus unaccountable for his actions he had directed his machine gun on the first body of troops that he saw. Whilst Capt. Whitty was still talking to him an enemy bullet claimed the sergeant through the head and mercifully put him out of his misery.

We passed over small trenches and strong points, several of which contained dead German bodies as well as equipments, rifles and ammunition left behind intact. By and by we came up to a row of dug-outs along a sunken road which our bombers immediately began to deal with. The entrances to these were from ten to twenty or twenty-five feet deep and the shelters beneath looked to be likely hiding places for Germans who had scuttled down there for safety when our barrage opened out. This supposition was correct, as was proved when a few trial bombs on being hurled down brought forth loud frightened yells, and then a score or more of quaking Germans appeared shouting "Kamerad" and were quickly taken prisoners and sent to the rear. Some obstinate ones were dealt with as the circumstances required as we had no time to waste arguing over minor points.

Pushing forward, we came upon batteries of field guns and ammunition deserted by the gunners in their flight when they saw the tanks followed by the infantry bearing down upon them.

Finally we reached the high ground overlooking the Canal du Nord and the villages of Marcoing to the left and Masnieres to the right—practically our objective.

From this point, also, the Spires of Cambrai in the distance could be distinctly seen.

On our left front, about 800 yards away, was Marcoing Copse, and the Canal lay about 200 yards beyond.

Here for the first time since leaving our assembly trenches did we begin to meet with opposition on a determined scale. From our point of vantage we could see bodies of Germans taking up positions across the Canal and appearing amongst the houses in the village and coming towards us over the ridge beyond the railway track across the valley.

We now had to advance more carefully in order to minimise our casualties and in time our foremost Companies were able to take up a position in the shelter of Marcoing Copse.


For days before the attack commenced we had studied this very ground from maps and aerial photographs and it was interest-

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ing to note that the view that presented itself was but an enlargement in actuality of the picture that was photographed on our minds. As soon as this observation point was reached we could supply the details of the surroundings at sight.

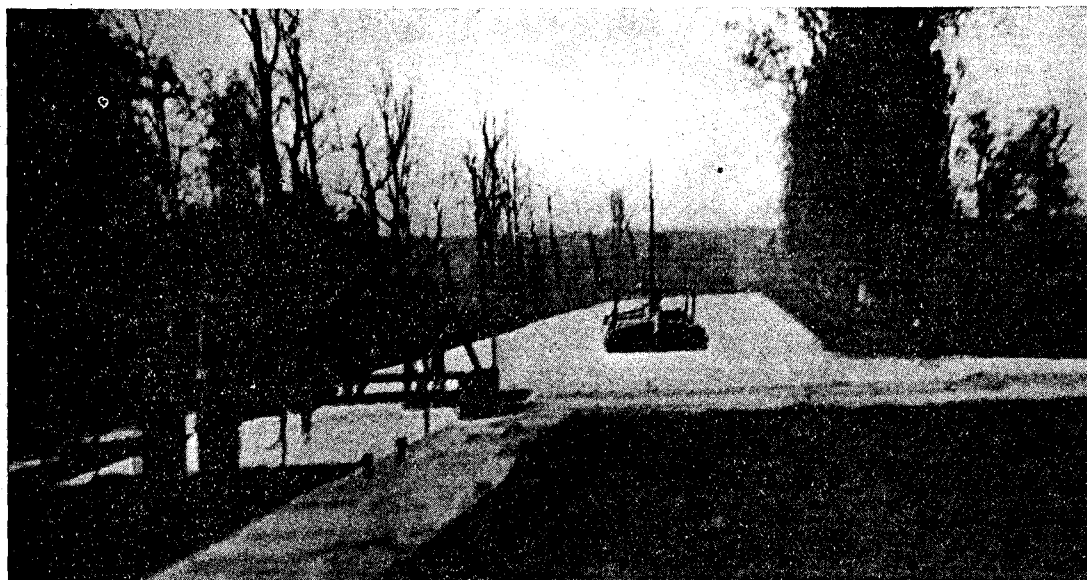
We knew that we should come upon Marcoing Copse and we knew that our orders contained the information that we were to force the passage across the Canal by the lock to the West of Masnieres.

We could now see this lock plainly and perceived that it was the only means of crossing the Canal on our frontage, as the Canal itself was some sixty feet wide and varied in depth in places from four to ten

small parties from the shelter of the copse were heavily swept by machine gun fire, and our casualties began to mount up, and it looked as if the capture of this lock would be a costly operation.

Meantime, one of our tanks that had been traversing along the Canal bank firing into the village saw the situation and came to our aid. Rumbling up towards the lock it poured shell after shell into the garrison there, retaliated with its own machine guns, and forced the Germans at that point to beat a hasty retreat.

This gave our men the opportunity they were waiting for, and under the organized leadership of Cpts. Butler and Rendell our



The canal looking towards Masnieres which was taken by the Division.

feet with a muddy bottom and brick or stone embankments.

Between us and the lock was a small row of brick houses and we could see scattered parties running to and fro between these houses and the lock to the other side.

Masnieres at this juncture was well garrisoned, as the Germans had received the hasty news of our attack and their available troops had spread themselves out to prevent us from crossing the Canal at any cost.

The approaches to the lock especially were heavily swept by machine gun fire and snipers galore had posted themselves in the upper storeys of the houses and other points of vantage.

All attempts on our part to sally out in

men crept up in small parties and rushing the footbridge at the lock made the passage secure for the remainder of the Battalion coming up behind.

From the houses on this side of the Canal a lot of sniping had been done and when our men reached the lock they lost no time in investigating.

They found the bodies of a few dead Germans nearby, but in the houses themselves were two or three villagers who proclaimed themselves Alsations impressed for work by their German masters. Having been seen in the very windows in which the sniping had taken place, they were treated with grave suspicion and we had certainly seen no German running back over the footbridge after

the tank had ceased firing, and we had no doubt but that they were Germans dressed up as villagers, hoping thus to escape capture or death. However, we took no chances with them.

Crossing by the footbridge, we pushed on up near the railway track which ran parallel to the Canal. Here the Germans resisted for a short time, but our men succeeded in driving them back up the slope.

It will be noted that we were only as yet on the outskirts of the village proper, which the Germans still evidently held judging by the firing that was going on. The other Battalions of our Brigade—the Essex and Hampshires—were attacking on our right and they were scheduled to cross the Canal over the bridge at Les Rues Vertes on the right of the village.

When we had gained the passage across to the railway track, we received word that our right flank was held up and unable to cross owing to the fact that the bridge was unpassable.

The majority of the Germans had gathered in the Eastern end of the village to guard the main road to Cambrai which leads from Les Rues Vertes over the bridge in question. This bridge was protected by several machine guns which for the time being prevented any troops from crossing over. However, one of our tanks again came to the rescue and began to assault the position, and succeeded in forcing the enemy to retire. Before doing so, however, the Germans blew a mine and partially destroyed the bridge, and its destruction was completed when the tank with irrespressible zeal ventured across the now shaky structure. For the bridge gave way entirely under its weight, and the tank was pitched headlong into the waters of the Canal. This later prevented the artillery and cavalry from crossing to assist our infantry when the latter did force their way into the village.

This hold up on our right left our flank in that direction exposed, and so we had to proceed warily as it was impossible to tell from what angle the Germans might rush out to counter-attack us in force.

Between the Canal and the track was a road leading to the Railway Station and as our men rushed across the road, a machine gun about 200 yards away enfiladed the road and caused us a large number of casualties. This gun could also fire into our rear and we were without cover. It was almost certain death to attempt to cross the road as the

machine gun kept up the constant fire. However as soon as its location was discovered Lieut. A. Herder and his Stokes Mortar Section set to work and in a few minutes put it out of commission. We afterwards discovered that a direct hit had been obtained and the whole gun crew laid out.

We were thus enabled to push on a little further until more opposition was encountered. This came from the direction of a group of dis-used gun pits where a nest of Germans still held on to harry our advance. These were cleared out by rifle fire, bombs, and the point of the bayonet.

Owing to the situation on our right, it was now deemed advisable to halt and form a defensive flank facing Masnieres, and so the Companies sorted themselves out and dug in for the night.

Battalion H. Q. was situated in a farm house across the footbridge, where it became an information bureau for the different troops in the vicinity. After the rush across the foot-bridge units became mixed and we found ourselves with men from the different regiments fighting with our men, and, vice versa, several of our men were lost sight of for the time being and in some instances did not rejoin the Regiment until two or three days later.

We had taken up our final position about 2 p.m. and no sooner had we stationed ourselves near the Canal Bank before the inhabitants came to greet us.

The attack had been in the nature of such a surprise that the Germans did not have time to remove them, and it was a touching sight to see the delight of these poor people on being released from the captivity in which they had been held since 1914. They were elderly folk for the most part, some of the women carrying their children, and each one was burdened with household possessions tied up in a table cloth or shawl.

They cried tears of happy welcome as soon as we approached and, wan and weak as they were from privation, they streamed back through our lines to where safety and good food awaited them.

A number of the men were dressed in a hybrid uniform and claimed to be Alsations sent to work in Masnieres by the Germans; these were piloted down to Intelligence Headquarters for further interrogation.

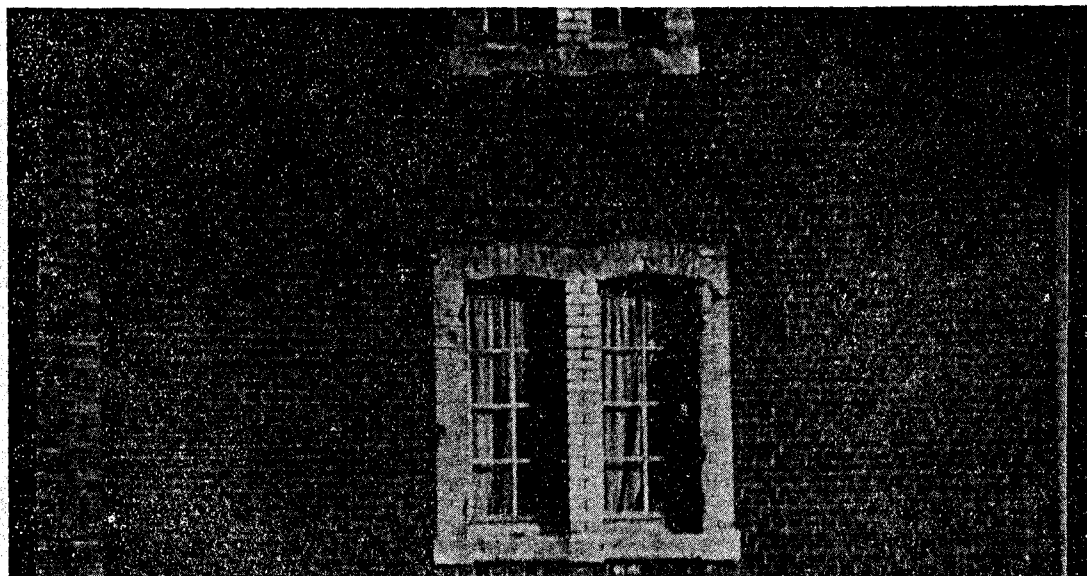
Our medical officer, Capt. Tocher, and his R.A.M.C. Section and stretcher bearers had set up their aid post in one of the old gun pits now in our rear and all our wounded

were safely evacuated, having been brought from the front line to Battalion H. Q. for temporary dressing, etc. As usual, this branch of the Battalion lived up to its high reputation, and showed great bravery and resource under the heaviest fire throughout the whole operations.

A road ran along by the Canal Bank towards the main bridge at Les Rues Vertes and dug-outs lined the whole bank on the side away from the water. A mopping up squad under Sergeant Pitcher, the provost sergeant, went along this road to deal with any Germans that might still be hiding there, and they succeeded in bringing back twenty-four prisoners.

been denuded of all their valuables and furniture which the Germans had no doubt carried off in their depredations in the early days of the war.

As previously mentioned, owing to the destruction of the bridge at Les Rues Vertes the cavalry were prevented from crossing the Canal, but a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse managed to cross over at the lock and by their subsequent exploits to make their name famous. During the night, after they had fought their way back through the German lines, their Commander, Lieut. H. Strachan, Fort Garry Horse, on whom the V.C. was conferred later, reported at our Headquarters and gave us the details of his



This dwelling house was occupied by machine gunners and was responsible for delaying the advance until eventually cleared.

After dark, our Companies set to work to consolidate their positions, and acting under Brigade Orders two mopping up parties from each Battalion were sent to scour a portion of the village and clear up every house and building in its section. In this way practically the whole village was combed out from end to end during the night and the coast reported all clear.

In some of the houses a number of old villagers were still found living, either too sick or feeble or from other causes unable to be removed without assistance, and these had to be carried out and sent back to the refugee station.

Our parties reported that the houses had

squadron's memorable fight. We were left unmolested after night had set in, but towards early morning a few scattered shells dropped near the Canal Bank.

On the morning of the 21st we received orders to move out of our present positions and to occupy the Sugar Factory at the East side of the village. We assembled without any trouble on the Canal Bank and marched along the road in fours to our new destination. As we approached Les Rues Vertes our left was protected by a high brick wall and we felt secure from observation; then without warning a shell pitched right into the midst of our column, killing about ten men outright and wounding about fifteen others.

Amongst the dead were Sergt. Pitcher, and Shiwak, our Premier Sniper from the Labrador. For fear of further casualties the Battalion was hurried past this danger point to the shelter of some buildings further on, and then a squad went back to render assistance to the wounded men. This was a most unfortunate occurrence as it was the only shell that pitched in our vicinity at the time and was only a chance shot at that.

We reached the Sugar Factory without further untoward happening and stowed ourselves away in the large brick building ready for emergencies.

We were detailed to act as the reserve Battalion for the Hampshires and Worcesters who were set down to continue the attack towards Rumilly on that day. In the meantime, however, the Germans had been rushing up reinforcements and made their counter-attack before our preparations were ready; and so we were rushed hastily from the Sugar Factory to line a sunken road and to act as a counter-attack Battalion.

Here we met with vigorous shell fire, and more casualties were added to our list. The German counter-attack was successfully beaten off and our services were not required in the immediate fighting that took place.

After dark we moved out of the sunken road and lined one of the main streets, our men sitting along the sidewalks and on doorsteps awaiting the next move. The German whizz-bangs annoyed us somewhat here as it was near an important cross roads. Our patrols were sent out along the different streets during the night as far as the Northern boundary of the village but did not meet with any of the enemy.

Our total casualties, killed and wounded, for the two days amounted to 10 officers and 238 other ranks, so that our strength was considerably reduced.

During our patrolling of the villages, the proofs of the surprise of our attack were apparent on every hand. In the estaminets, the chairs were pushed back from the tables on which still stood glasses only half emptied of wine or beer; pipes and tobacco were lying around, and in the shops the shelves still held their stock of every kind—the whole showing signs of a hurried departure.

Battalion H.Q. shared quarters with some engineers in a dug-out by the side of the road; and a remarkable dug-out it was: the entrance led down some 40 or 50 feet underground where there was a perfect maze

of tunnels. These tunnels were about seven feet high and five feet broad, reaching out in various directions from a central room like large tentacles.

It is said that one of these tunnels was 13 miles in length and reached all the way to Cambrai and beyond, and had been dug at the instance of the Germans by Russian prisoners for use as a concealed communication trench for troops.

Certainly during our stay underground for the 24 hours the tunnels we explored would hold all the Battalions of our Brigade without difficulty.

In company with my orderly and with the aid of a lighted candle I followed along one of these tunnels and discovered that it ended in the cellar of a house. We went up into the house and found that it had been occupied as an Officer's Billet. In his room uniforms, valises and clothes were lying around, bureau drawers pulled out and various articles scattered over the place. I managed to take away a few souvenirs in the shape of a medical dressing case, a pair of spurs, compasses, whistles and some medal ribbons including the Iron Cross.

Similarly, I suppose, the other tunnels led to vantage points in and around the village.

At this period no little difficulty was experienced in getting up rations and ammunition to our men. The transport mules came as far as a plank foot-bridge and each Company sent parties to carry the bags of rations and boxes of ammunition from the dumping off ground to where we were quartered. The roads through Les Rues Vertes and along the Canal bank were being more heavily shelled each day and we ran the risk of having our rations cut off.

However, they turned up safely each time, and once Lieut. Postlethwaite, the Transport Officer, sought to make things easier for us by attempting to induce his mules to cross the plank bridge and come up nearer the Battalion to save the long carry for the ration party. The only mule that tried it slipped off the plank into the Canal and so he had to abandon that idea.

On the night of the 22nd we were relieved by the 16th Middlesex, and moved over to the village of Marcoing. We marched through Masnieres in its death like silence over the road past the railway station and across the foot-bridge at the lock and thence by the road skirting Marcoing Copse to Marcoing about $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles away. As our

rear party came along, they kept on the lookout for the dead bodies of our comrades who had fallen two days before and carefully carried them to one spot and noted their names and numbers from their pay-books so that later on they could be given decent burial in marked graves.

At Marcoing we occupied the cellars of the houses. This village showed signs of heavy fighting and the houses were for the most part semi-demolished; while at Masnières, when we had arrived there, the buildings were practically untouched by shell fire.

The Church was in ruins, and underneath it we found room for part of a Company and the H.Q. details.

The transport was able to come right up to this village and we were glad enough to have our cooks with us once more and to be able to issue out hot food to the men.

During the next two days we rested and re-organised the Battalion. Owing to our heavy losses, we were compelled to reduce the Battalion from four Companies to two,—A and D Companies forming one Company under Capt. Rendell, and B and C Companies the other under Capt. Paterson. Company rolls were carefully gone over to check up casualties and a general readjustment carried out. During these two days we were subjected to intermittent shell fire especially in the region of Battalion H.Q.; and one night while the ration party was distributing rations a shell burst in amongst them and severely wounded several of the party—one of C.Q.M. sergeants, G. Gear, succumbing to his injuries a few days later.

The general situation on our front was quiet just at this time, but the enemy aircraft was beginning to appear more often and in larger numbers each succeeding day; and we witnessed many a fight with our own machines over head.

Sometimes their scout planes swooped down just over our heads, for the Germans were making every effort to discover what was going on behind our lines and to photograph our front positions.

Whilst we were resting here, Padre Nangle joined us from the 10th wearing his usual cheery smile. His chief purpose was to get an accurate record of the casualties and to make arrangements for the burial of all those in the Regiment who had fallen in the fighting to date. With a party he scoured the whole ground we had advanced over and collected all the bodies and buried them in conspicuous places. The greater number of

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our dead lay in the vicinity of the lock and along the road across the Canal. These were tenderly carried back to one spot near Marcoing Copse, where the Padre and his party prepared a temporary cemetery, and crosses were erected over the graves to mark their resting places.

On the night of the 25th we were sent up to relieve the Border Regiment in the left sector across the Canal. The Canal near Marcoing swept round to the North with a narrow loop in the shape of a "V," crossed by bridges and several locks, and our line ran West from Masnieres to join up the ends of the loop, so that we had the Canal on three sides of us.

gaged in observation work and the German staff during these days of apparent inactivity were piling up their reinforcements to make their big onslaught at a later date.

The left of our line was an outpost along the bank of the Canal from which direction it was feared an enemy attack would eventuate, and the platoon doing outpost duty was quartered in a large house near the Canal. By night German snipers used to come down the road and along the Canal bank and take up hidden positions for carrying on their deadly work during the day time; and it was not safe to appear exposed near the front lines by day.

Nothing exciting happened during our



Exhumation party at work near Marcoing.

The trenches we took over were narrow and wet and not properly dug, as they had only been hastily traced out in the dark but a few days before. We took advantage of the lull in the fighting to deepen and strengthen these trenches and put them into defensive shape. The weather hitherto had been cold and damp and finally developed into snow followed by heavy rain showers which half filled the trenches with mud and water. Owing to our small numbers we could only hold the line in sections and the unused portions of the trenches almost became impassable. Two or three times the Germans registered on these trenches and blew them in in many places.

The enemy aeroplanes were actively en-

tour in these trenches and we were relieved by the Border Regiment again on the night of the 28th, and moved back to the cellars in Marcoing. Our M.O., Capt. Tocher, M.C., left the Regiment here and proceeded to England on leave and was succeeded by Lieut. Sweetser of the U.S. Medical Corps.

The next day we were re-inforced by a draft from the 10% consisting of two officers, Capt. Bartlett, M.C., and Lieut. Miffen, and 75 other ranks.

On the evening of the 29th orders were received by us to be ready to relieve some of the troops in front of Masnieres the next morning, and the C.O. arranged with the Company commanders to meet him at the Battalion H.Q. in the morning in order to

proceed with him to reconnoitre the new trenches to be taken over and to arrange for the disposition of the Companies, etc.

The O.C. Companies turned up at about 5.30 a.m. on the 30th, and after a short conference were ready to carry on with their mission, when the Germans began to shell the village and along the valley of the Canal. As a general rule the enemy "Strafeing" stopped after half an hour or so, and the C. O. decided to wait until it quieted down a little more. But, instead of quieting down, the shelling increased every half hour, until at about 7 a.m. an intense bombardment was in progress. Guns of all calibres were directed against our front lines and lines of communication and gas-shells began to rain in on our village. Soon the whole place was enveloped in a dense black smoke and flying masonry as the houses were blown to pieces.

This went on without cessation and we saw that it was impossible to attempt to act in accordance with what had been mapped out for us. We knew that something was in the wind; and at about 10 a.m. a hasty message came from Brigade advising us that the Germans were counter-attacking strongly from the direction of Rumilly towards Masnieres and ordering our Battalion to proceed with despatch to a given position near Marcoing Copse to act as a support to the flank of the 86th Brigade which was being attacked.

Hastily O.C. Coys. were again summoned to H.Q., maps brought forth, and the rendezvous explained according to the map reference.

Owing to the heavy bombardment it was out of the question for the Battalion to try and march to the position indicated as a unit, and so Companies were instructed to proceed on their own to the point of assembly.

With difficulty Companies were gathered together, as the different Platoons were scattered amongst the different houses and the heavy shelling had forced some of them to evacuate their billets and find shelter where they could. Eventually they set out through the village in close succession and on approaching Marcoing Copse were met not by the other Battalions of the 88th Brigade, but by advanced posts of German infantry. Capts. Rendell and Paterson took the situation in at a glance and without hesitation opened out their Companies into attack formation and went straight for the Bosches with lowered bayonets. Platoons now acted on their own initiative, and the

Germans were driven steadily back by means of Platoon rushes.

The enemy were assisted in their attack by their aeroplanes which, flying very low, opened their machine gun fire on our troops. One plane in particular caused a large number of casualties to our men, but one of our Lewis guns succeeded in putting it out of commission.

Amongst those who were killed at this point, dying game to the last, was Capt. R. Bartlett, M.C., who fell at the head of his Platoon—a gallant soldier whose loss was felt by the whole Regiment.

By this time we had connected in a measure with the rest of the Brigade and in concert drove the enemy back over the ridge to the South of the Canal. They had evidently advanced along the valley of the Canal from the direction of Les Rues Vertes.

In the thick of the fighting was the Brigade Major of the 88th Brigade, Capt. McConnell, riding about on horseback and seemingly bearing a charmed life.

He was wounded later on, however, in the leg; but danger evidently held no terrors for him and he refused to leave until the situation was more or less in hand.

The attack continued until darkness set in, which was about 4.30 p.m., being December practically, and we took up a position along the side of the road leading from Marcoing Copse to Les Rues Vertes, with our backs to the Canal.

In the meantime H.Q. Co. with the C.O. had set out by a different route to reach the intended assembly point; and, instead of going through the village by the road close to the Canal, determined to skirt the rear of the village and cut off the Companies near the Copse. To do this, we had to pass through our Battery positions and here we met with the heaviest shell fire. The Germans were bent upon putting out of action all these guns which they had spotted, and in a great many cases owing to the angle of the attack the field guns were firing point black into the German infantry.

Many of our guns had to be abandoned in the onrush; but before doing so our gunners removed the breach blocks, thus rendering them useless. In fact, behind the village all was confusion, and in the confusion we were cut off from our front line Companies completely. We could get no definite news of what was happening near the Canal, and we could see plainly the Germans advancing in waves over the ridge in the

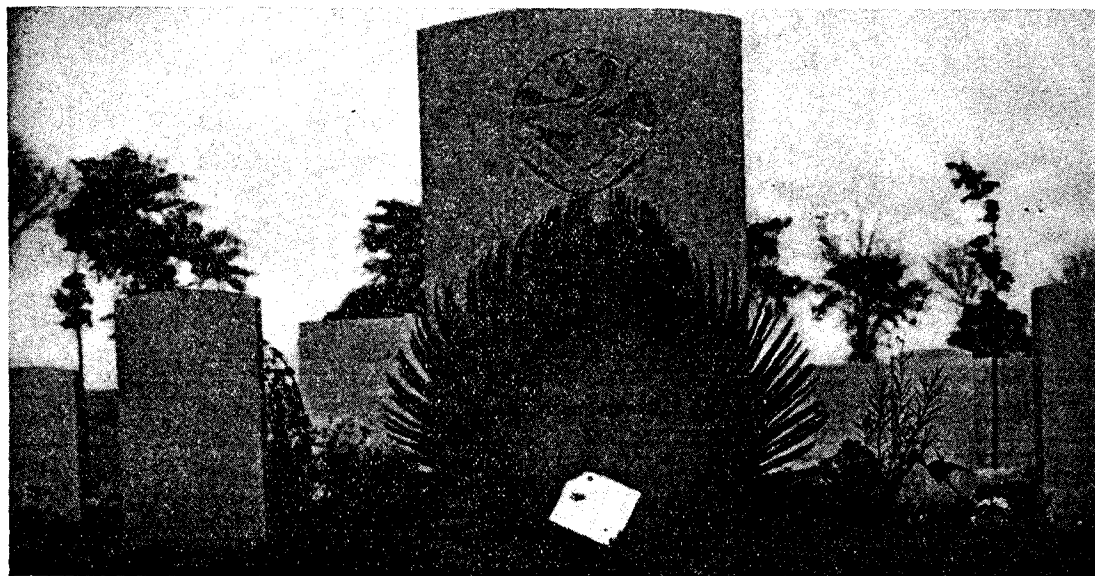
distance. Finally H.Q. Co. came to the road which was temporarily our line of defence and met up with the remainder of the Battalion.

We passed a large number of dead and wounded Germans, a testimony to the heavy losses which they had incurred in our own vicinity. In most cases the rifles had been removed some distance from the wounded, for our past experience and our experience on that day had taught us that wounded Germans did not hesitate to fire into our backs when we had passed them by.

After night fall we collected together our scattered platoons and took up a position by Companies about 150 yards South of the

trench dug at night to connect Battalion H. Q. with the front line.

Battalion H.Q. was situated in a dug-out leading down from one of the many old enemy gun pits that lined the sunken road. A long subterranean gallery connected up all the dug-outs under each gun pit and these were used as aid-posts and temporary hospital headquarters. The gun-pit itself was dug into the embankment on the side of the road and was about 10 feet long by 12 feet wide and seven feet high, covered with a single layer of corrugated iron. The entrance from the road was open and the small shelter became the rendezvous for runners, orderlies and drifting details, and the enemy



The slab which marks the resting place of one of Newfoundland's Warriors in Louvencourt Cemetery.

road, and dug in to give as much protection as possible.

Thus our hastily dug line on the evening of the 30th was facing in the direction almost opposite to that in which we had started off ten days before.

Intersecting on the left of our front was a partly sunken road. One Platoon of D Co. under Lieut. Miffen held a strong point on the left of this road while the remainder of the Battalion occupied portions of trenches extending on a frontage of about 300 yards to the right. Between D Co. and C Co. was a gap of about 75 yards and from this point C Co. was entrenched connecting with the Essex on the right. The details of H.Q. Co. occupied a narrow communication

snipers and machine gunners across the canal and along the road marked this post down as a target for their bullets. The least exposure invited their immediate attention.

The strength of the Battalion on the night of November 30th was 8 officers and 200 other ranks.

The next two days were more or less peaceful and the activity of the enemy had eased off to comparative quiescence.

During this time we were kept hard at work after dark re-inforcing our positions and digging strong points. The patches of old wire out in front were connected together and strengthened with the scanty ma-

materials at hand and made to offer as much resistance as possible against a surprise attack.

Rations, ammunition and bombs were sent up from the dump and distributed round to the Companies. We felt, however, that our position at the best was a very precarious one. Our division occupied the apex of a most pronounced salient and we were threatened from all sides.

In fact, we hardly knew how the enemy line in front of us lay. Whilst we were occupied in beating him off in our immediate vicinity, he had succeeded in his heavy assault in gaining ground further South, and Gouzeaucourt and Gonnellen had fallen into his hands.

He had thus penetrated far into what had been our original right flank, and situated as we were now, we, in turn, faced the side of the Salient which he himself had created.

On the night of the 30th when we went out to reconnoitre in front of our lines we could see waves of German infantry hidden in the hollows of the ground passing along parallel to our own frontage.

How far they were pushing on towards our right we could not tell. All we knew was that our own position was anything but secure.

In the sudden rush further South all available troops and details were pressed into service to help to stem the tide—cooks, sanitary squads, 10% details, engineers, railway men, transport men and every describable branch of the service—and these, as events proved, rendered invaluable service in bringing the enemy to a halt before he was able to cut off the forward troops completely and to overrun our lines of communication.

The fighting all through that day had been of the fiercest description and heavy casualties were inflicted on both sides. In our own sector the Germans lost far more men than we did, for their dense masses were exposed to deadly rifle and Lewis gun fires as they were driven over the ridge.

The situation on December 3rd was approximately the same as on the night of November 30th. The enemy shelled our positions intermittently but not heavily.

Our left flank, i.e., towards Les Rues Vertes, was exposed to his trench mortars and during these two days he was evidently getting the range on our trenches and communication lines.

At about 7 a.m. on the 3rd the enemy started a heavy bombardment of Les Rues Vertes and all along the Canal bank, especi-

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ally in the vicinity of Marcoing Copse, which was now about 300 yards to the left rear of Battalion H.Q., and the sector held by the 87th Brigade across the Canal at Masnieres.

At first the bombardment did not affect our own portion of the line to a great extent, but as the morning advanced the bombardment increased and the enemy ranged on our trenches; until at 10 a.m. when the bombardment had reached the height of its intensity, he began his infantry attack on our lines. The ground towards Les Rues Vertes and towards our front line hid the enemy from view at the start, but looking back across the Canal we could see the swarms of Germans advancing on the 87th Brigade positions, and there a battle royal ensued. Time and time again the Germans attacked in mass and time and time again they were driven off, losing heavily in men on each occasion.

The bravery and imperturbable spirit of our sister Brigade was marvellous and we watched them with pride as they held on their trenches by the skin of their teeth in the face of overwhelming odds.

But soon our turn was to come. Advancing from the direction of Les Rues Vertes, he swept along the valley of the Canal and attacked us heavily on the rear of our left flank, and by means of a hurricane bombardment with trench mortars, perfect in their range, he soon levelled the whole of our position to the left of the sunken road referred to before, and either killed outright or buried in nearly every man garrisoning that portion of the trenches. We were thus forced to evacuate that position and bend our front line back to face his advance. What was left of D Co. together with H.Q. details were hastily thrown into the communication trench leading from the front line back to H.Q. to form a defensive flank. Further down the sunken road near H.Q. a Company of the South Wales Borderers took up a position between the road and the Canal bank in order to check the advance. For a while the situation was extremely grave as we had no reinforcements and our artillery was not in a position to support us owing to the change in frontage.

The enemy advanced along the sunken road in our direction until for a time it looked as if nothing could prevent him from coming in on top of us and capturing our H.Q. and then attacking our front line troops from the rear. Happily for us, he halted his advance when only about 150 yards away and did not get beyond that point. Along our

front line he crossed over the levelled points and sent his bombing parties to work along the trenches to the right of the road. In order to find out where he was, a bombing squad of our own men advanced in his direction and the parties meeting had hand to hand fighting.

The Germans were driven back losing four of their men and we established a block in the trenches at this point. At Battalion H.Q. it was very difficult to find out exactly what was taking place in front, as we were fully occupied with our own situation and all communication with the Companies had to be by relays of runners, and this method of communication was uncertain owing to the deadly enemy sniping and the heavy shelling.

Our casualties that day amounted to one officer (Lieut. Langmead), died of wounds, and about 70 other ranks, killed, wounded, and missing.

About 7 o'clock that evening reinforcements of two officers and thirty other ranks reported from the 10% at Battalion H.Q. At 9 p.m. we were relieved by the 2nd Hants and occupied a trench temporarily near Brigade H.Q. Later on in the night, we were instructed by Brigade that dug-outs were available for us along a sunken road about 700 yards to the rear, and a party was detailed to reconnoitre the road and find suitable quarters for our men who were tired and worn out as a result of their recent experience.

On reaching the road in question, we found scores of dug-outs of all descriptions. Finally we reached one huge underground barracks, so to speak, which would hold the whole Battalion with ease. There were three entrances leading down to the dug-out which was about fifty feet beneath the surface of the ground and divided into compartments, roofed and walled with heavy timber, each compartment being lined with wooden bunks—a regular subterranean palace.

There were special officers quarters, orderly room, clerks' offices with tables and drawers for filing correspondence and reports, telephone and electric lighting system, latrines, kitchens and storerooms. These had been hurriedly evacuated on the first days of our advance and the latter were still filled with blankets, equipment, clothing and even provisions.

When we left later on in the night we took back a typewriter with us for use in our own orderly room, though the orderly room staff did not relish the idea of lugging back a typewriter for five or six miles.

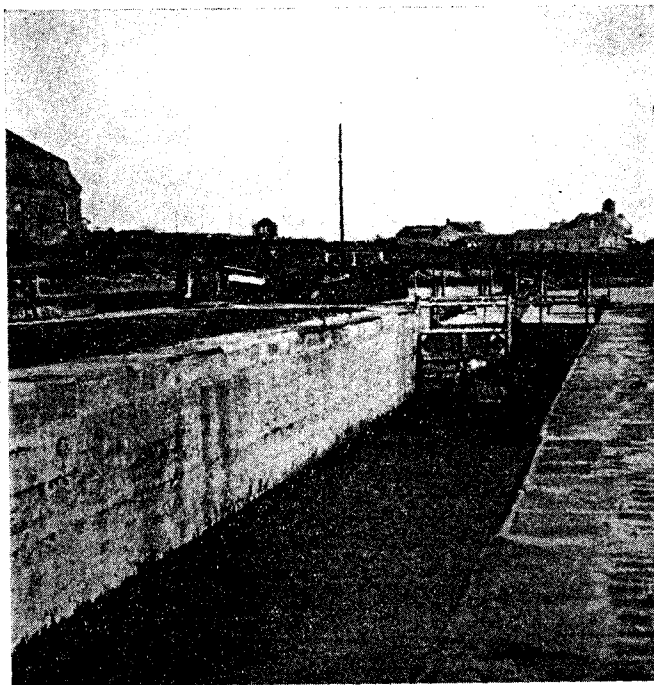
When we reported back to the C.O., the Battalion was led back to this dug-out where we remained during the night of December 3rd/4th and part of the next day.

At about 5 p.m. on the 4th the Companies were sent out to act as covering parties to the other Battalions of the Brigade who were being withdrawn from the original firing line and who were set to work to dig a line of outposts near the sunken road in preparation for the general withdrawal from the salient in order to straighten up the line.

Our task was carried out successfully and without untoward incident except in the case of B. Co. which was lining the sunken road.

The Germans were still shelling the area and one shell dropped into the road where B Co. was stationed and accounted for 15 casualties.

Then orders were received that we were to be relieved that night and at about midnight our places were taken by the 2/11 Royal Irish



The bridge spanning the lock at Marcoing where so many of our men fell on November 20th, 1917. The sugar factory can be seen in the distance.

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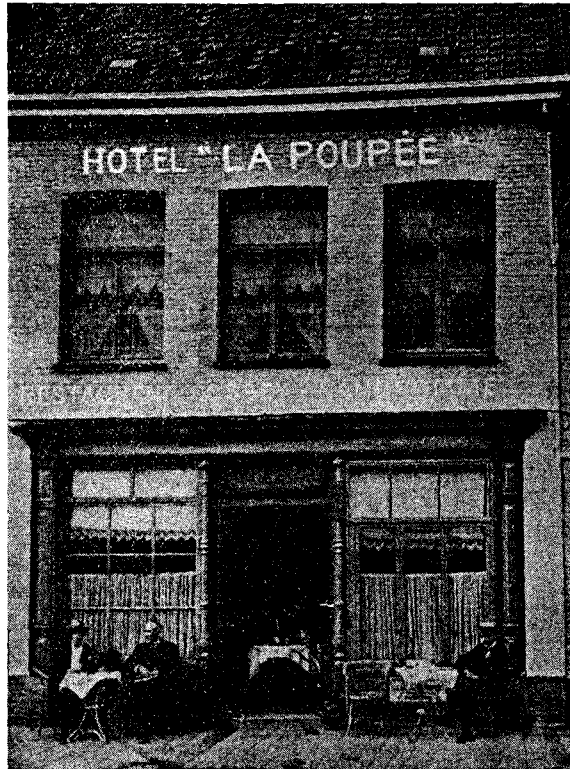
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Rifles, and with a great feeling of relief and thankfulness we moved out independently by Companies to the transport lines at Ribecourt which we reached in the early hours of the morning, and on assembling we were issued with hot tea and food.

At 5.30 a.m. on the 5th the Battalion marched by road to Etricourt about 7 miles away and remained there by the railway siding until 6.30 p.m. when we entrained for Mondicourt—very tired but happy to get back to a resting place. However, we were not yet out of the wood, for when we had proceeded about 15 miles along the railway cooped up like sardines in our several trucks—we were bundled bag and baggage in our several trucks—our train was shelled and the engine suffered badly from a direct hit and was forced off the track; and an aeroplane pursuing us over head commenced to drop bombs. However, another train was sent out to meet us and we transferred into it after some delay and proceeded on our way to Mondicourt, arriving there about 9 a.m. the next day. Our final destination was Humbercourt about 3 miles away and



Hotel "La Poupee," frequently called "The Broken Doll," situated in the Grand Plage at Poperinghe.



Marie Louise, who presided at "La Poupee" with Ginger.

there we went into rest billets; and so ended the Battle of Cambrai as far as our Regiment was concerned.

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