# THE MOTOR-BUS IN WAR

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Being the Impressions of an A.S.C. Officer during Two and a Half Years at the Front

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# *THE MOTOR-BUS IN WAR*

## *BEING THE IMPRESSIONS OF AN A.S.C. OFFICER DURING TWO AND A*

# *HALF YEARS AT THE FRONT*

*BY*
*A. M. BEATSON*
(*Temp. Lieut. A.S.C.*)

*LONDON*
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*To*
*LIEUT.-COL. GERALD CHARLES GORDON BLUNT,*
*D.S.O.*
*Army Service Corps*
*as a mark of esteem*

## *CONTENTS*

*Chapter*

# *THE MOTOR-BUS IN WAR*

## *Chapter I*
## *INTRODUCTION*

The War has been responsible, amongst other things, for the publication of a number of books dealing with it in its different aspects and from various points of view.

Many of these have been written by men who, previous to it, possibly never thought of writing a book, and even less of seeing what they had written reproduced in print.

Finding themselves, however, amongst entirely novel surroundings, engaged in an adventure equally different from anything they had previously anticipated even in their wildest flights of imagination, they have sought to place on record some account of their experiences on active service, but in nearly every case of the actual fighting in which they have taken part with their regiments or batteries at the front.

The majority of people at home very naturally focus their mind's eye on what is taking place actually in the long lines of trenches that stretch from the sea in the North right down to Switzerland in the South, particularly in those manned by the British armies, scarcely realizing the stupendous part in the war drama that is played by the men engaged in the vast organization behind the battle-line. The organization that is essential in order to maintain an army in the field as an effective fighting force, by supplying and conveying to it its two main wants—food and ammunition—thus enabling it to keep itself alive and destroy the life of its enemy. An army in the field drags behind it a long chain of transport, mechanical and animal, advanced supply depots, hospitals, rest camps, etc., and communications by which it is securely fastened to fixed bases at its rear. There are in France to-day thousands of men from the railheads nearest the firing-line, right through the long lines of communication to the base supply depots, leading a more or less uneventful life of regular routine, freed to a certain extent from the dangers of shot and shell, but who are, nevertheless, "doing their bit somewhere in France." Whether the establishment of men so engaged is too large and should be reduced to enable more men to be available for the firing-line, as has been recently suggested in Parliament and elsewhere, is a matter I do not propose to discuss at any length, but would add that nearly all the criticism which has been levelled at Army administration has been destructive as opposed to constructive criticism, which is, of course, not only more difficult but infinitely more useful.

Preparations on a vast scale have been created, and should our armies in due course advance and drive the invader before them, every bit of that vast organization will be needed, and, moreover, should its efficiency fail, the advancing armies would find themselves in a sorry plight.

A reduction in that establishment of personnel behind the line might, therefore, prove fatal.

At least, it can be said for these men that their job is not of their own seeking, and that they volunteered, many of them in the first weeks of the war, for "active service," having no definite idea at all as to what they would encounter and what was in store. Although they are members of a combatant corps, oppor-

tunities for gallant actions and distinctions seldom come their way. Lord Northcliffe has described them as "The Army behind the Army." Such are the men of the administrative branches of the Service, who deal with thousands of tons of every imaginable material daily, from the time it is off-loaded from the ships at seaport supply bases such as Rouen, Le Havre, Calais, etc., up to its actual issue to the fighting troops at the front. Thus their operations extend from the bases to within a few hundred yards of the trenches, the interest and excitement of their work increasing proportionately with its distance from the former.

It is of the doings of some of these men that I have endeavoured to write a description, and the following pages contain an account of my experiences with the British Expeditionary Force, chiefly incidents in my particular appointment during 1914, '15, '16 and '17, as an Army Service Corps officer in the Mechanical Transport Supply Column of an Indian Cavalry Division. This book does not pretend to be an historical record of the doings of the unit to which I have been attached during this period, but merely a few sketches, written at random at various times, of incidents that have occurred in the course of duty with the largest mechanical transport unit (except the Base Mechanical Transport Depots and Workshops) of the British Expeditionary Force in France.

Incidentally, these experiences have been unusually varied; though many is the time when they have appeared to be exactly the opposite. Nevertheless, the unit of which I write has consistently "rationed" its troops at almost every part of the British line, from Ypres to the River Somme, not to mention the places far behind the line where cavalry have been billeted during the winters and other periods of enforced inactivity. Looking at the map of the Western front war zone and drawing on it roughly a rectangle, having for its four angular points Boulogne and Ypres in the North and Rouen and Péronne in the South, there is, in this area, scarcely a town through which, or a main road over which, motor-lorries of the Supply Column have not travelled in their many journeys, covering thousands of miles, during the last two and a half years, up and down this strange land of "somewheres."

This has been called an engineers' war; it is certainly the first war in which petrol-propelled mechanical transport has been employed to any extent. Thousands of Army Service Corps motor-lorries, painted service grey-green, line the roads behind the trenches in France and Flanders. Petrol is surely the key to modern warfare. Operations on such a gigantic scale could not be carried on without it, for petrol-propelled vehicles are used, amongst other purposes, for the following:—

The conveying of food, clothes, ammunition, and water to the troops.

The haulage of heavy pieces of artillery.
The evacuation of sick and wounded to the casualty clearing hospitals, etc.
The rapid movement of troops from one part of the line to another, and as the quickest means of bringing up reinforcements.

The fate of Paris was largely changed, at the beginning of the War, by the requisition and mobilization of some thousand or so motor taxi-cabs during a night, at the order of the late General Galliéni. In them were sent out twenty-five thousand troops, who by this means of transport swiftly proceeded to the Ourcq and reinforced the French Army, which was striking a terrific blow at the turned flank of Von Kluck's army. It will be recalled that the enemy's columns advancing on Paris turned abruptly eastwards to unexpectedly rush on the British Divisions and cut them off from their juncture with the 5th French Army. They failed to do so, but until the night of September 9th-10th the battle of Nanteuil-sur-Marne hung in the balance. General Maunoury's army was constantly being reinforced, however, by the troops which arrived at Dammartin and other points in the requisitioned taxi-cabs so regularly that the pressure was increased, the tide of battle turned, and the capital of France saved. The stand put up by the allied French and British Armies on the Marne will go down to posterity as the most epic battle in European history. The warfare in France and Flanders, since it settled down to a prolonged and continuous trench *strafe*, has been described as consisting in "months of boredom punctuated by moments of intense fear," and it has been to pass the time of day during some of those months that the following chapters have been written. If they succeed in giving the reader some slight idea of the scope, extent, and versatility of work accomplished by the mechanical transport of the Army Service Corps, of how our armies in the field are fed, and of the soldier-man's life and surroundings at various distances "behind the front"—what he sees and does there—they will not have been written in vain. I have purposely avoided matters of controversy, and I have written not as a critic but as an observer and the player of a very small part in the great drama. I trust that the varying degrees of discomfort, inseparable from active service, under which I have had to write will be accepted as sufficient excuse for any lack of literary style.

## *Chapter II*

# *"AU REVOIR" TO ENGLAND*

In the early stages of the War it was by no means uncommon for a man to enlist in the Army Service Corps in the afternoon and the same night find himself marching, in company with a good many others, into the Mechanical Transport Depot at Grove Park, singing "Tipperary." The following morning, having been put into khaki, he would be told off to a motor-lorry, on which he would chalk such cryptic remark as "London-Berlin Express." Later in the day he would be driving his lorry—one of a convoy of many similar vehicles—to ——, and a few hours after that he would be in France.

This is not exactly what happened to the author; suffice it to add that in the first few days of August 1914 he enlisted, and on October 28th made the meteoric flight from private in a Territorial Battalion to a second-lieutenant in the Army Service Corps. On Sunday, November 15th, he had just come up from Grove Park to London on a few hours' leave of absence from duty, when a telegram arrived. It read:

"Return at once.—ADJUTANT."

Having followed this order, he was packed off at once to Woolwich, and here found he was posted to the —— Indian Cavalry Division Supply Column. On Tuesday, the 17th, the column was due to leave Woolwich for —— and sail for France almost immediately after arrival at the port of embarkation. So on that morning we entrained; the motor-lorries and half the personnel had gone on by road the previous day. The same night we found ourselves at ——, ten officers and some 700 N.C.O.'s and men, the latter composed of lorry drivers and supply details, with roughly 160 motor-lorries and cars. Half the lorries were old buses off the London streets, but not of the usual "London General" appearance, for they had been converted from passenger to food and forage carrying vehicles by the substitution of van-shaped open bodies in place of the familiar bright red, two-decker bus bodies. I was destined to travel many thousands of miles on the front seat of many of these, and it has often occurred to me during the course of my journeys that perhaps the same buses that I have taken to Ypres have perhaps taken me on previous occasions, before the War, down Piccadilly or along the Strand, under entirely different circumstances. The remainder of the lorries were brand new Silent Knight Daimlers, and the carrying capacity of the majority of the lorries was thirty hundredweight. Painted grey-green service colour, they presented a sombre spectacle, "parked" in a long line along a straight open road just outside the docks. Besides the lorries for carrying supplies, we had the large, closed, high-bodied, portable workshop lorries, fitted with the essential tools—

lathes, drilling-machines, and the like—driven by petrol-electric sets, to effect repairs to broken-down lorries in the field. Also the closed-in store lorries, fitted with interior shelves and pigeon-holes, in which were carried engineers' tools, stores of all kinds, spare parts, and various equipment. In addition, we had five 12-16 h.p. Sunbeam four-seater cars and a dozen or so Douglas motor-bicycles. Collectively, the column occupied just a mile of road.

At —— we did not enjoy ourselves. For one thing, 700 men, mostly quite unaccustomed to military discipline, are not altogether easy to deal with, and for another, the only sleeping accommodation available for officers and men consisted in the floors of the various offices and goods-yards at —— Railway Station. Moreover, it was snowing hard, and on the night of November 17th there were several degrees of frost. Matters were made very much easier by the presence of an Army Chaplain who was on duty at the docks. He mixed with and chatted to the men, telling them what splendid fellows they were, and on the evening of our arrival got up an impromptu concert, which proved a great *divertissement*. Our stay was not, however, a long one; we did not even wait to effect certain most necessary repairs to the lorries, and those that were able to run under their own power towed those that could not, and the splendid hydraulic cranes on the quayside at —— soon picked up each vehicle and securely deposited it—at the rate of about five minutes per lorry—in the holds of the four tramps that, sailing under sealed orders, were to transport the column to France. So on the evening of November 19, 1914, I left England on H.M. Transport *Trevithoe*, in company with two other second-lieutenants. On board we had roughly a quarter of our personnel and vehicles. Our departure was quite unlike that of any ship I have ever seen leave port or left port on myself. There were no scurrying, hurrying crowds of people on the quayside. The men filed on board almost silently in the darkness, each carrying his rifle and kit. There were none of the usual spectators, no relatives or friends to see us off. As each man crossed the gangway he was handed a small piece of paper; on it was printed Lord Kitchener's message to every soldier about to join the Expeditionary Force:

You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire, but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service

than in showing yourself in France and Belgium in the true character of a British soldier.

Be invariably courteous, considerate, and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women; you must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

Do your duty bravely.

Fear God.

Honour the King.

**KITCHENER**, *Field-Marshal.*

When all were safely on the *Trevithoe*, the padre whom I have already mentioned came on board and called the men around him. The senior officer present called all to "Attention," and the padre proceeded to bid us farewell and God-speed. He adjured the men to place absolute confidence in their officers and obey them implicitly. He added that he hoped all might come home safe and sound in due course, though there were some who might never return. Our caps removed, he raised his hand and gave the Blessing, and shaking hands with each officer and a good many men, he went ashore. Emotion travels quickly through a crowd, and his words had brought tears to the eyes of many who were leaving home so suddenly, for the first time, only a few days after they had been following their accustomed occupations as of yore. Never, I must admit, have any words I have heard uttered made me feel so momentarily miserable. Still, from the religious point of view it was, I suppose, necessary to remind each man going out on active service of the consequent possibility of meeting his death, that he might order his life and conduct accordingly. The whistle blew, the hawsers were cast off, and the *Trevithoe* steamed slowly away from the quay. I leant over the side of her deck to have a long last look at Old England, whose gradually disappearing shore and lights I could just distinguish, as we steamed out into the darkness. I wondered how long it would be before I should see them again. Only the silhouetted figures of the padre and an Embarkation Staff officer were to be seen on the quay.

I lit a cigarette and lingered a few minutes on deck, and as I looked across the dark silent sea, the throb of the ship's engines seemed to say repeatedly, "Three years or the duration!"

I am glad to have an opportunity of expressing our thanks to the captain and officers of the ship's company of the *Trevithoe* for the hospitality they extended to us on board. They gave us the run of the ship; we messed with them in their saloon and had a right royal time.

The captain offered to take me one day for a voyage more or less round the world. After the war I hope to find an opportunity of holding him to his promise!

Of the other ships which transported the Supply Column from —— to France, one was the *Woodfield*—and it was with regret that I read a year or so later in the papers that she had come to an untimely end, through being torpedoed by a German submarine—not, however, before she had put up a gallant fight against superior odds and given the U-boat a very unpleasant time of it.

After a voyage more or less uneventful, we lay to off Le Havre on the evening of the 21st. The next morning we picked up a pilot and steamed leisurely up the winding River Seine, appreciating the beautiful scenery and no less the greeting of the riverside inhabitants, who waved Union Jacks and the Tricolour, and whose frequent shouts of "Vive l'Angleterre" and "Vive les Anglais" could be plainly heard, so narrow is the river at many points. Such was our welcome to France, and towards the evening of Sunday, November 22nd, we arrived at Rouen, and the next day set foot on French soil. In a few hours, with the help of the French pontoon cranes, so different, alas! to the hydraulic jibs at ——, we successfully slung and landed all the vehicles, without any casualties of serious importance. The lorries were parked in a long line on the road outside a former cinema theatre on the outskirts of Rouen, which building was for the time being the Advanced Mechanical Transport Depot of the British Expeditionary Force, and no time was lost in completing equipment before starting on the journey by road up country. Rouen, with its magnificent cathedral and quaint narrow streets, is an altogether delightful town. It was, of course, full of khaki, and it seemed strange to think that it, of all towns, should be occupied by British troops. A few days later we started on the journey to the front. The column went up in two sections. I was with the second to leave Rouen, and we had with us half our vehicles, and carried all our equipment, cooking utensils, stores, etc., for all the world like a huge travelling circus. Leaving Rouen by the Route Nationale Number 28, we wondered how soon it would be before we should encounter patrols of Uhlans or come under shell fire. No one knew where the front exactly was, how far away, or what it was like.

I had the pleasure of travelling together with our French Interpreter, in the car which led the convoy, with the senior lieutenant who was in charge of it. The first night after leaving Rouen we stopped at Neufchâtel-en-Bray, where there is a small country hotel, kept, strangely enough, by an Englishwoman, who put up a very good dinner for us and the best cider that Normandy can produce, which

is saying a good deal. The next morning we were on the road again, and by midday reached Abbeville, outside which the convoy was halted while the officer in charge proceeded into the town for orders as to our ultimate destination. Pushing on, we arrived at Hesdin and stayed there the night. Travelling throughout the following day, we at length reached Lillers. This little town was full of troops of almost every imaginable regiment, from dusky Indian Cavalry soldiers to kilted Highlanders. Guns were booming away in the distance, and we realized that we were at last at the front and within measurable distance of the trenches.

I was billeted for the night in a café in the square; all night long could be heard the regular tramp of men marching, horses, and the wheels of limbered wagons rumbling along the cobbled street, for Lillers is on the main road to Béthune, not far beyond which were the trenches. Resuming our journey the following day, we passed through the picturesque old town of Béthune, with its typical *pavé* Grande Place and square-towered church. At that time it was to all intents and purposes momentarily deserted by its civilian population, for the Germans had on the previous day caused much alarm and some damage by an aeroplane raid and bomb-dropping exploit, and civilians took more notice of such unaccustomed incidents at this period than they do nowadays. Eventually we arrived at Fouquereuil, which for the time being was to be our railhead. It consisted of a railway station, a couple of dozen or so small cottages, a few estaminets and a brickfield. The latter served as the parking ground for our mobile workshops and a good number of the supply lorries, while the roofed-in part of it was used as sleeping quarters for officers and men, the column office, and officers' messroom. In the latter our table and chairs, if one may thus describe them, were composed of loose bricks built up in heaps to the required shapes. The Indian Cavalry regiments were billeted in the surrounding villages.

The same evening two officers of the Supply and Transport Corps, Indian Army, joined us, so that our establishment was complete and we were ready to carry on. The following day we tasted for the first time the joys of "loading"—refilling the lorries from the supply train at railhead, which brings up from the Base the rations and forage for the troops. It appeared at first a complicated and extremely lengthy business, and the mud and rain—it seemed to rain continuously—did not make matters any easier. Notwithstanding these several disadvantages, a complete division of Indian Cavalry "in the field" was for the first time in history rationed in Europe, and also for the first time anywhere by

means of mechanical transport.

## *Chapter III*
## *RAILHEAD*

Supply trains, which, as their name denotes, bring up supplies for the troops in the field, are made up and loaded at the Base, and possibly certain of their contents are loaded at intermediate points *en route* in the line of communications. They then proceed to the regulating station, which is to all intents and purposes the terminus of the lines of communication, and from there they are dispatched to the railhead of the Division for which the supplies are intended.

The railhead of a Division is the furthest point along the railway line in the direction of the Division in question to which the supply train travels. From that point motor-lorries are loaded up with rations and forage drawn from the supply train, and in due course convey them by road to the vicinity of the troops, where they either dump their contents in bulk at a prearranged point, deliver it to each regiment individually, or, in the case of an Infantry Division, off-load it to the divisional horse train. This consists of a number of thirty hundred-weight carrying capacity General Service wagons, which in turn carry and deliver the supplies to the Brigade or regimental ration dumps. From there they are taken on by carrying parties into the trenches when necessary—the plan adopted being, of course, in accordance with tactical considerations and the conditions prevailing.

The railhead usually consists of a station yard; fortunately, in France they are nearly all large, rather more so, I think, than those of country villages or small towns of corresponding size at home. They are all built on the same pattern and have the same attributes. In winter they are covered with a sea of ankle-deep mud and in summer they are as dusty as the Sahara. In any season of the year they are places to avoid from a pleasure point of view.

We will try to picture a typical railhead. It is about 6 a.m. Drawn up in the yard of some country station, possibly one that has been blown to bits by shell fire, are one or more goods trains. They are composed of large closed-in trucks, each of which is marked "Hommes 40. Chevaux [en long] 8." One reads this for the first time with feelings of sympathy, for either the "hommes" or the "chevaux." But, for the trucks we are going to deal with, the inscription is misleading, for

they actually contain rations for men and horses, and go to make up a supply train.

The Column Supply Officer arrives in his car and "takes over the train" from the Railhead Supply Officer. The sealed trucks are opened up by the supply personnel. A convoy of perhaps sixty to eighty empty motor-lorries appears on the scene. They draw up outside the railhead and are checked into the yard in batches and detailed for the load they are to carry. Entering the yard, they "back" one by one up against the open trucks and are loaded up from the train. The grocery trucks in particular present a scene of great animation. The men who "issue" the groceries are experts at their job, and can ladle out tea or sugar and cut off given weights of cheese and bacon with a rapidity which is amazing. So accurate are they, through long practice, that weights and scales are almost unnecessary. Each railhead has attached to it several officers of considerable importance, namely: Railway Transport Officer, Railhead Supply Officer, Railhead Ordnance Officer, and a representative of the Assistant Military Forwarding Officer, officially designated and known only by their initials, R.T.O., R.S.O., R.O.O., and A.M.F.O. respectively—not forgetting the "Commissaire Militaire," an officer of the French Army, usually of advanced age and senior rank, who is the liaison officer between the French and British Armies in matters of traffic regulation and organization. The only other personnel at railheads are a few military police, a handful of A.S.C. details, and usually a company or so of some line regiment in charge of a subaltern. These latter are employed as sentries over trains and on various fatigues, and are usually part of the remnants of a battalion that has had a rough time in the trenches and is out on rest, awaiting the arrival from England of reinforcements to bring it up once more to its fighting strength. The duties of the R.T.O. include all matters in connection with the regulation of the railway traffic of his railhead, such as the arrival and departure of supply and ammunition trains; the entraining and detraining of troops, reinforcements and remounts; the evacuation of sick and wounded men and horses; and last, but surely not least, the issue of "movement orders" to officers and men travelling by train, including the "leave train," which, being apparently of little or no importance in the scheme of things, has to make way for all other traffic on the line, and usually occupies from ten to twenty-four hours to accomplish the journey from the front to Boulogne or Le Havre, as the case may be; sometimes even longer in making the return journey. French trains, at any rate in war-time, are anything but rapid, and to get to one place from another by train is not always so easy a matter as might at first appear.

* * * * *

The R.S.O. is responsible for the issue of all rations and forage at railhead, whether from the supply trains or from the railhead "dump" or "detail" trucks, while the R.O.O. deals with the classification and return to the Base of all unserviceable and worn out material classed as Ordnance Stores, which term includes such items as used shell cases, rifles, boots, clothing, horseshoes, saddlery, and various equipment.

The A.M.P.O. receives and distributes the various boxes of presents, luxuries, and so forth, sent by friends at home through the M.F.O., Southampton, a task more arduous than it may appear, particularly about Christmas-time, and also dispatches home surplus personal and deceased officers' kits, etc. At each railhead there is to be found also a field post office. I need hardly add that from it His Majesty's mails, always so eagerly awaited by all of us, are distributed and loaded on to postal lorries of the Supply Column allotted for the purpose, which take the mails on to the units of the Division. The field post offices are in charge of the R.E.'s. What a wonderful corps the Sappers are! Their versatility and multifarious duties are truly remarkable, varying as they do from "tunnelling" and the administration of asphyxiating gases to the Huns from our front line trenches to the maintenance of telephone wires and the running of field post offices.

One of the excitements of railhead is the passing through of convoys of German prisoners *en route* to internment camps. On one occasion I happened to be at Merville and saw a party of prisoners marched into the railhead yard, where they were to entrain; their escort consisted of some Gurkhas, whom they looked on with evident signs of alarm and suspicion. The R.T.O. happened to be able to speak German, and very soon formed the prisoners up in two ranks and marched them to the train, giving his words of command in their own language, greatly, it need scarcely be added, to their surprise.

On such occasions as the entraining of German prisoners, "souvenirs" are in great demand, in the shape of German uniform buttons and helmets, though the latter are more uncommon than was formerly the case. This word "souvenir," which is frequently put in the form of a request by the inhabitants to English soldiers, appears to cover a variety of articles, from an empty shell case to a full tin of "bully." It is the recognized custom within the war zone for every one to ask every one else for a souvenir.

There is a current story of one Tommy who, writing home, remarked in the course of his letter that the French were funny people, and the only word of

English they seemed to understand was ”souvenir”!

## *Chapter IV*
## *SUPPLY COLUMNS AND RATIONS*

The Supply Column of a Cavalry Division consists roughly of 160 motor-lorries, mostly of a carrying capacity of thirty hundredweight each. The column is divided into two echelons or sections of eighty lorries, each of which works independently of the other. Briefly, the system is as follows: The echelons load and deliver rations on alternate days—that is to say, No. 1 Echelon draws rations from the supply train at railhead on Monday and delivers them to the troops on Tuesday. No. 2 Echelon refills on Tuesday and delivers on Wednesday, and so on. The rations in each case, being delivered direct to units in their billets or bivouacs, are consumed by the troops on the day following delivery, so that one day's rations are always held regimentally for the following day's consumption.

The lorries are loaded in a particular manner, namely, ”by regiments,” and according to a definitely laid down scale of daily rations. That is to say, each lorry is told off to a particular job, and the quantity of each ration issued to a regiment is arrived at by multiplying together the number of men or animals to be fed—that is ”ration strength” of each regiment—and the allowance of each particular ration, as laid in the ration scale. The scale of rations and forage now prevailing for personnel and animals is as follows:

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BRITISH AND DOMINION TROOPS
(*Daily Ration per Man.*)

1 lb. fresh or frozen meat or 3/4 lb. (nominal) preserved meat.
1 1/4 lb. bread or 3/4 lb. biscuit.
4 oz. bacon.
3 oz. cheese.
2 oz. dried vegetables, peas, beans, or dried onions.
5/8 oz. tea.
4 oz. jam.
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3 oz. sugar.
1/2 oz. salt.
1/50 oz. mustard.
1/36 oz. pepper.
1/12 tin condensed milk.
2 oz. butter, thrice weekly.
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The ration of tobacco is 2 oz. per week, either in the form of cigarettes or for pipe-smoking, and two boxes of matches are also issued. There are certain extras issued according to season or circumstances, such as rum, pea-soup, Oxo cubes, lime juice, and candles. The fresh vegetable ration, such as potatoes and onions, is 1/2 lb. per man per day; it may come up by supply train or be a local purchase.

Also must be mentioned the combined meat and vegetable or Maconachie ration: the latter name, by which it is usually known, is that of its original maker. It is issued in lieu of fresh meat and vegetables occasionally, and to Mr. Thomas Atkins is the most popular feed. It consists of stewed beef or mutton with carrots, onions, rice, and potatoes, and is packed in an air-tight tin. It is only necessary to boil the tin in water for about five minutes, then cut it open, and there is a good meal ready cooked without any further trouble. Nothing is overlooked: even, in summer-time, fly-papers are issued. Latterly, sardines and pickles, and even rabbits, have become occasionally part of the British ration. The iron or emergency ration, which is always carried on the soldier, and is only consumed under exceptional circumstances and at the direct order of an officer, consists of 1 lb. of preserved meat 1 lb. of biscuit, 5/8 oz. of tea, 2 oz. sugar, and two 1 oz. cubes of meat extract, such as Oxo.

Curious incidents occur in the best regulated and fed armies; the following is one: Some little time ago it was announced that a new kind of ration in the form of tinned pork and beans would be issued to the troops as soon as stocks of the same were available at the Base, and a few months later the pork and beans ration duly put in its appearance; appropriately enough in midsummer! On opening a tin a certain Railhead Supply Officer was surprised to find it to apparently contain only beans, the pork being conspicuous by its absence. As the contents were intended to be a substitute for the ordinary fresh meat ration, he opened a second tin, only to find that its contents were similar to the first. He thereupon reported the absence of the elusive pork to the Deputy Director of Supplies, and was in reply informed that, strange as it might at first appear, the pork, though invisible, was none the less present in each tin; it had, however, become ”absorbed” by the beans. A later request by the Railhead Supply Officer

was to the effect that "in view of the rapacious appetite of the beans now being issued as rations of pork and beans, it would be advisable that, though a meat ration, the latter be not sent up from the Base in the same truck of the supply train as the fresh British meat, for fear of the devouring tendency of the once homely bean."

For Indian personnel the "field" ration is as follows:

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Atta ........................... 1 1/2 lb.
Fresh meat (goat or sheep) ..... 4 oz.
Dhal ........................... 4 oz.
Ghi ............................ 3 oz.
Gur ............................ 3 oz.
Potatoes ....................... 2 oz.
Tea ............................ 1/3 oz.
Ginger ......................... 1/6 oz.
Chillies ....................... 1/8 oz.
Turmeric ....................... 1/8 oz.
Garlic ......................... 1/8 oz.
Salt ........................... 1/2 oz.
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Atta is coarse ground flour, very similar to that of which so-called "standard" bread is made at home. Of it the natives make chupattis, which are round flat cakes of baked dough. Dhal consists of dried peas. Ghi is a kind of butter, which, judging from its smell, would appear to be rancid. Gur is simply brown sugar or molasses. It will be noticed that the native meat ration is very small. The natives are not meat-eaters in the accepted sense of the word, and their small ration they invariably "curry" with the ration of ginger, chillies, turmeric and garlic, which are the raw ingredients of curry powder. Not infrequently also they are issued with a ration of rice and also dried fruits, when stocks are available.

The ration of forage for horses and mules varies according to the size and type of the animals, from 6 lb. to 19 lb. oats, plus 10 lb. to 15 lb. hay. Hay is sent up in bales averaging from 80 lb. to 100 lb. in weight and grain in sacks containing 80 lb.

It will be seen from the above scales that there are a number of different rations to be weighed out and loaded; the operation of loading at first took a considerable time at railhead, but with continual practice we reduced the time and

have consistently loaded the rations and forage for the entire Division, roughly for the ten thousand men and horses, in two and a half hours. Taking into consideration the fact that we were dealing with British and Native rations, and that the quantity amounted to about sixty-five lorry loads—over a hundred tons of rations—two and a half hours is, I think, not a bad average for time. Speed in loading, combined, of course, with accuracy, is essential—it being not infrequently necessary to get the train away quickly, so as to clear the line for other traffic.

After refilling, the lorries either remain near the railhead or proceed towards the direction of the troops and park in a suitable position until the following day, when they go out in convoy and off-load their contents, returning immediately after doing so.

Most of the foregoing remarks apply to a Cavalry Divisional Supply Column. With an Infantry Division matters are somewhat different, there being only one echelon of lorries, which issue and are refilled on the same day. Moreover, an Infantry Divisional Supply Column is loaded with rations in bulk; a Cavalry Divisional Supply Column, as I have already explained, is loaded "by regiments."

The reason for the first of the above differences is not difficult to discover, for, infantry being slow-moving troops, the distance to be covered by road by the Supply Column is not great, and cannot increase rapidly, whereas with cavalry, the radius of mobility or action may be possibly ninety miles each way out and back to railhead, and thus a double establishment of vehicles is necessary. If the cavalry to be rationed are on the move, supplies cannot be delivered until a definite resting-point for the night has been reached, usually after dark. They are then delivered by supply lorries direct to units in their billets or bivouacs. With a Cavalry Division there is no horse train; obviously, horse-drawn wagons could not keep pace with advancing cavalry. On the latter presumption the "War Establishment" is entirely devised.

Ill-fed troops are worse than useless, and in the British Army no pains or expense are spared to enable the soldier's daily ration to be not only plentiful and of the best quality, but delivered to him with clock-work regularity and dispatch. The Army Council evidently believe in the Napoleonic maxim that "an army marches on its stomach." The British meat ration, nearly always —— frozen beef, and occasionally —— chilled mutton, is excellent in quality. It, of course, requires to be hung for a few days, when practicable—as Tommy puts it, "to get the frost out of it," or, in other words, to be slowly thawed; after that has been done, it satisfies the most fastidious or enormous appetites. During the summer months it was found that the long journey in a closed railway truck did not improve its quality, and for this reason it was for a time sent up in trucks specially built for the purpose and marked, "Insulated Meat Wagon. Viande gelée."

All the other rations are of equally good quality. The bacon, so much ap-

preciated, especially in the trenches, where cooking facilities are not great, is of the best quality Irish. The butter, tinned dairy butter. The cheese, mostly Canadian Cheddar. The jam, at first of the proverbial plum and apple variety, was later varied by strawberry, apricot, marmalade, and occasionally by honey. As for the tea, one can taste worse in London drawing-rooms, and the bully beef, scorned perhaps to a certain extent owing to the fact that it in time becomes monotonous, is nevertheless the finest preserved meat procurable. The bread is all baked in the A.S.C. field ovens at the Base, and owing to the amount of moisture purposely left in it, does not readily become stale. After being kept a week, if a loaf is sprinkled with water and put into a hot oven for ten minutes or so it comes out as crisp as newly baked bread. One of the commissariat problems, which, however, has been solved satisfactorily, was the question of "Native meat," or the ration of meat for Indian troops serving in Europe. The solution has been found in the institution of "Native butcheries." A Native of high caste in India would, of course, not eat any meat that even the shadow of a European had passed over. In coming to France the Native troops have, however, been granted certain religious dispensations, not only with regard to food, but, in the case of Hindus, in being allowed to leave the boundaries of their own country. Nevertheless, their caste rights as to food are as strictly observed as the exigencies of active service allow. The goats and sheep, chiefly Corsican and Swiss, purchased for their consumption, are sent up in a truck to railhead alive, and are slaughtered by men of their own caste in a butchery arranged for the purpose, generally in a field or some open place in close proximity to the railhead. The Mohammedan will eat only goats or sheep slaughtered by having their throats cut, and the Hindu, by their being beheaded. The latter method is carried out in the abattoir by a Native butcher with the aid of a cavalry sword at one fell swoop, and of the two methods is certainly to be recommended as being the most rapid and instantaneous death. I need hardly add that the Native butchery is always looked on as an object of awe and interest, if not of excitement, by the French inhabitants, and none the less by English soldiers.

The Natives do not object to their meat being handled by English soldiers, or to it being brought to them in the same lorry which also perhaps carries British ration beef, although the cow is a sacred animal to the Hindu and in the form of beef is naturally distasteful. The only point is that the goat's meat or mutton intended for their consumption must not actually come into contact with the beef, and this is arranged for by a wooden barrier between the two, erected in the interior of the lorry. On one occasion, however, the native rations for a certain regiment had just been dumped on the side of the road, and were being checked by the Daffadar, or Native Quartermaster-Sergeant, when at a critical moment an old sow, followed by her litter, came out of a farm gate and innocently ran

over the whole show. A lot of palaver followed amongst the Natives, and there was no alternative; they would not have these rations at any price, and back they had to be taken to be exchanged. The pig is, of course, abhorrent to the Mussulman. One story in connection with the rationing of the Indian Cavalry whilst in the trenches at Ypres in the summer of 1915 may be of interest. The cow being a sacred animal to the Hindu, it became necessary to replace the usual tins of bully beef by a suitable substitute. With this end in view, quantities of tins of preserved mutton were sent up for the consumption of Hindu personnel. The tins in which it was packed, however, unfortunately bore the trade mark of the packers, Messrs. Libby—a bull's head—and in consequence of this the Hindus would not have it that their contents could be anything but beef, until their own Native officers convinced them that such was not the case. It will be seen that the organization for rationing Native troops is such that they are able to be fed in accordance with the rites of their caste, surely a not unimportant factor.

## *Chapter V*
## *THE MOTOR-LORRY CONVOY*

Our duties continued daily, with one or two exceptions, in an unbroken monotony for the remainder of the winter, loading the supply lorries at railhead one day and taking them out in convoy the next, to deliver the supplies to the troops who were billeted in the surrounding villages.

What cold journeys those convoy jobs used to be too! The front seat of a lorry leading a convoy, on a frosty, snowy, windy or wet day, is no place for a joy ride, and the only alternative for a section officer, namely, a motor-bicycle on a muddy or dusty road, as the case may be, is not much better. The mud of the trenches in winter has become proverbial, but it is not confined to them: it exists on the roads behind the line as well. It must be seen to be believed! Take any good main country road, that for years has been used merely by a few farmers' carts and periodically perhaps by a small amount of motor-car traffic; suddenly start running over it several hundred heavily loaded motor-lorries, ambulances, general service wagons drawn by teams of four horses, not to mention sundry motor-cars, motor-bicycles, and several batteries of artillery; continue to do this every day for a few months, in winter for choice; let the heavens pour forth

torrents of rain, fairly continuously day and night, as was the case during the winter months of 1914; let the road be made on a clay soil and ill-drained, perhaps not drained at all artificially—the one and only result in due course will be a road full of pot holes and ankle-deep with mud and slush. This is no exaggeration; it is exactly what has happened to the roads on which we have to travel behind the trenches. The only wonder is that they have stood such a severe test so well. In summer, of course, they are correspondingly dusty, and it is an open question which is the lesser of the two evils—to get oneself splashed from head to foot with mud, or almost choked with dust. The user of the roads that one pities most, though it must be admitted he appears to be perfectly happy and contented with his job, is the motor cyclist dispatch rider. Clad in leather overalls with map-case hanging from one shoulder, dispatch case from the other, and revolver attached to his belt, he dashes along the worst roads, frequently into the danger zone, wet or fine, day or night, winter or summer, at lightning speed, nevertheless finding time as he goes to salute any officer he may chance to meet or overtake. This he accomplishes by turning his head and eyes smartly in the direction of the officer to whom he is paying the compliment, at the same time proceeding at considerable speed in a direction at right angles to that towards which he has turned his head whilst saluting. Such courtesy surely deserves appreciation from the officer!

Cases of motor-lorries being "ditched" or stuck in thick and squelching mud at the side of the road are not unknown, though, of course, during the succeeding winters they were less prevalent than in 1914, through greater expertness, born of continued practice and more experience on the part of the drivers in handling their lorries. Still, the liability to stick in a convenient ditch is always present in bad weather on narrow country roads, and during the temporary pause of the lorry thus caused, the greater the effort exerted by the driver and engine to extract it, the more briskly the rear wheels revolve in the mud without advancing the lorry, and the worse becomes the "ditching." Non-skid chains that can be easily fitted in such an emergency have proved themselves an invaluable aid. With these securely fixed on the offending wheel or wheels and another lorry in front, attached to the defaulter by towing chains, the latter is soon on the crown of the road once more and able to continue its journey.

All convoys are run strictly in accordance with orders, and the cardinal principles are briefly that lorries running in convoy must keep twenty-five yards, approximately, apart and not travel at a greater speed than ten miles per hour, even this being reduced on passing troops on the march or going through a village or town. Since the convoy must keep together, its speed must therefore necessarily be the speed of its slowest vehicle, and the method of keeping a convoy together and thus preventing lorries taking a wrong road or getting lost is

a very simple one. In addition to the driver, each lorry has a driver's mate, who rides inside the body of the vehicle just behind the tailboard, and as soon as the vehicle immediately in rear of him stops, he signals to his driver to pull up. Thus the driver of the lorry immediately in front will receive the same message from his mate, namely, that the lorry immediately behind him has stopped, and in a very few minutes the whole column of vehicles will be at a standstill. Instances of such a stoppage occurred in the event of a lorry in the column suffering from any mechanical breakdown during the course of its journey or meeting with a mishap of any kind on the road. It is also the job of the "look-out" man in the back of the lorry to warn the driver, by means of the communication cord, when vehicles approaching from the rear desire to overtake the convoy, so that the driver can be immediately warned to pull off the centre of the road and thus enable the faster-moving vehicle to pass. The idea of the communication cord is a good one; on these occasions it makes outbursts of fiery language from Staff officers in cars, who are in a hurry, superfluous.

The tendency of drivers of all forms of motor vehicles is, and I suppose always will be, to drive too fast, exceeding the speed limit, whether the nature of the road and other circumstances allow or not. The condition of the roads within the war zone is such that to drive too fast spells broken springs, to mention only one result. Severe disciplinary action has become necessary, and with this in view Assistant Provost Marshals have a way of employing military police with stop-watches in the old and approved method of the Portsmouth and Brighton roads. I heard of one trap which was set on a little stretch of road that was within view and under enemy observation. At this particular spot the military police made some easy captures. All roads are under the supervision of the military police, who direct all traffic. Each army issues a Traffic Map of the area in which it is operating, and this is in possession of all officers in charge of convoys. On it, roads over which, owing to their broadness, traffic is allowed to travel from both directions are marked in a certain way; narrower roads, over which it is only allowed to proceed one way, are otherwise indicated on the map. This road control, though often an inconvenience, necessitating a long detour, in some cases, to reach a certain place, in order to avoid going against the orders, is absolutely essential. Without it, blocks in the traffic, ditching in narrow roads, and consequent delay, would be of frequent occurrence.

All lorries are, of course, inscribed with a W.D. number, duly registered at G.H.Q., and from this their histories can be immediately traced. Different supply columns and ammunition parks choose and register distinguishing marks of their own—almost like trade-marks: the Bee, Bluebird, Black Cat, Bulldog, are all to be seen, to give only a few examples. The origin of these distinctive marks is a matter of some interest. When the 1st Indian Cavalry Supply Column arrived in

France in November 1914, there were, of course, far fewer lorries in the country than there are to-day. At this time there was a General Routine Order to the effect that all motor-lorries were to have affixed to the outside of their tailboards a large white card, 15 inches square, with a red danger bull's-eye, 6 inches in diameter, in the centre of the card. Cards of this size and description were accordingly issued, one to each lorry, to be nailed on the back, the idea being that, at night especially, the driver of a lorry would be able to distinguish a lorry in front by the aid of his headlights shining on to the bull's-eye and thus avoid collision. The idea was a good one, but the inventor did not take into account the weather conditions that prevailed during the winter of 1914 in the North of France, for in less than no time the cards became pulp, destroyed by the constant rain. We therefore did away with the cards and painted lasting facsimiles in red and white where the cards had been. But even this was not everything that was required, as the lorries of our Supply Column were not easily distinguishable from those of others. To overcome this, a special mark was painted over the bull's-eye and square. This was the origin of all the distinguishing marks in existence at present amongst the various —— Supply Columns and Parks.

Every lorry and car is equipped with a complement of tools, necessary for adjustments and the carrying out of roadside repairs. The tools are all entered up in the log-book with which each vehicle is provided for the purpose, the driver signing a receipt for them in it, when taking over the vehicle, and having to make good any deficiencies that can be traced to his own neglect when he is transferred to a different vehicle and "hands over" to the driver succeeding him.

The multifarious duties of the motor-lorry convoys continue in all weathers and at all times of day and night. Carrying as they do every imaginable material, from bread and meat to stones and coal, they do not work by time-tables, nor do definite hours end and begin their day's work, so that a high-pressure state of readiness has to be constantly maintained, this being only possible by perfect organization and the closest attention to the most minute details, which can alone pave the way to thoroughness.

The duties of the Army Service Corps in peace-times are many and various, and the inauguration of hundreds of mechanical transport units since the outbreak of war has multiplied in every possible way the duties which previously existed, and considerably enlarged its scope of action and power of assistance to the armies in the field. Its many phases, and the important part that it plays in the commissariat of our armies, cause the Army Service Corps to be an integral part of the fighting machine. From a Departmental Corps it has become an army in itself, with many thousands of officers. Its spheres of operation with the Expeditionary Force in France alone are of such a magnitude as could never have been adequately realized before the war. It will be seen, therefore, that thousands

of mechanically propelled vehicles, from motor-cycles to huge tractors, are employed in this vast undertaking. This necessitates supply depots, where are kept stocks of tyres, spare parts, tools, and reserves of all kinds of stores, such as oil, petrol, etc., essential to the maintenance of this huge system in the desired state of efficiency, so that it is capable of promptly satisfying the many and constant demands which are made daily by officers commanding mechanical transport units in the field. The organization now existing does credit to its originators. For the original Expeditionary Force, motor-vans and such-like suitable vehicles were hurriedly impressed, and of them Supply Columns, Ammunition Parks and such-like units were rapidly formed and dispatched to France. So one would, in those early days, frequently meet on the road a convoy composed of miscellaneous vehicles of various makes, brewers' drays, grocers' vans, etc., still bearing the names, in blazing letters, of their former owners, and the nature of the load they had previously carried. The London General Omnibuses and their drivers, which were previous to the war subsidized by the Government, continued for some time to run along the roads of Flanders loaded with troops, still displaying their former route through London. "Piccadilly-Strand-Bank" routes were to be seen, whilst many of them continued to advertise the Revue at the "Empire" and the fact that it started at "8.30 p.m. every evening."

But times have changed, and convoys are now composed, not of miscellaneous subsidized or impressed vehicles, but of standard motor-lorries; each convoy made up of vehicles of the same make, each painted a uniform colour, and all of exactly similar appearance, groomed and turned out like a regiment on parade.

## *Chapter VI*
## *THE WORKSHOPS*

Any account of the working and organization of a unit in the field, composed of mechanically propelled vehicles, would be incomplete unless it contained a description of the mobile repair workshops which form such an important part of it. So vital are they that without their aid, and the skilful application of the tools they embody, the Supply Column—if such, for example, be the nature of the unit—would become hopelessly crippled and inefficient as a natural course

of events. The question will possibly arise in the reader's mind, "How are the two hundred odd motor-lorries, cars, ambulances, and motor-cycles attached to a Division whilst on service at the front, and which from the General's car to the machine of the motor-cyclist dispatch rider are all of necessity subjected to such hard wear and tear, maintained in a state of efficiency and 'running order'?" I have alluded briefly to the workshops of the —— Indian Cavalry Division Supply Column, and in this chapter I shall endeavour to give a more or less complete description of them—the work they perform and the results they achieve in the general scheme of things. The workshop section of a Cavalry Supply Column has an artificer personnel made up of fitters, turners, blacksmiths, electricians, and carpenters—the latter known in Army parlance as "wheelers." The equipment consists in four mobile workshops and four store lorries. Dealing firstly with the workshops themselves: the type of lorry employed is usually a Silent Knight Daimler or Leyland, propelled by a 40-h.p. engine. Surmounting the chassis is a platform, on which is erected a four-sided and closed-in body; the two sides are made so that they can be opened out at will and secured horizontally by wood supports. The top half of each side, opening upwards, forms an extension to the roof, and the lower half, being let down, extends the platform or floor-space. The back and front are fixed vertically upright, the latter immediately behind the driver's seat. Inside the body on the wooden platform are mounted a lathe, drilling machine, tool-grinding machine, also fitter's bench and vices, together with the accompanying small hand tools. A petrol engine direct coupled to a dynamo drives the lathe, drilling machine, etc. Such, briefly, is the arrangement of the standard mechanical transport mobile workshops. Our Workshops Officer, however, was not satisfied and sought to improve upon it. This he has accomplished in the following way. In the first place he has made structural alterations to the workshop lorry bodies so as to take fuller advantage of the possible floor-space. To do this he has extended the front end of the body from the back of the driver's seat to the dashboard of the lorry. Secondly, he has eliminated the stationary petrol engine, and instead employs the engine in the lorry chassis to drive the lathe, drilling machine, and other machine tools. The system of driving the machine tools from the lorry engine is by means of a triple set of whittle belts to the dynamo, and thence the power is transmitted to the machines. The speed of the engine is maintained constant by a specially designed centrifugal governor. Imitation being the sincerest form of flattery, this system of drive in one form or another has since been copied in many workshops of the mechanical transport units in France. In addition to the workshop lorries, O.C. Workshops has a two-wheeled "trailer" of his own design and construction, which when the column is on the move is coupled up to one of the workshop lorries and towed by the latter. It is designed to carry two spare engines complete. When station-

ary, it acts as a fitting, erecting, and engine-testing bench, and on it all lorry engines are overhauled and refitted as occasion requires. On the trailer is fixed a crane, which enables the engine that is to be overhauled to be lifted direct from its lorry chassis and placed on the trailer. Conversely, the crane replaces the reconstructed engine into its chassis, time and labour occupied by the operation being considerably reduced by the use of this device as compared with manual labour and pulley blocks. The time during which the lorry is out of action is appreciably reduced; it becomes a matter of hours instead of days, for the engine that is removed from the chassis for overhauling purposes is replaced for the time being by one of the engines which is in running order carried on the trailer. Moreover, without the mechanical advantage gained by the use of the trailer and crane, the operation would naturally take very considerably longer and the lorry be out of action for a proportionately longer period.

The O.C. Workshops has also designed and constructed numerous other time- and labour-saving appliances; for example, he has made extensions to lathes, enabling almost any part of a lorry to be machined in them when required.

To enable the blacksmiths to tackle any job that might be required, he has made and fitted up an electrically driven "Roots" blower. Thus it is only necessary to build up a hearth of bricks and mud, set up the blower, switch on the electric current, and a roaring welding fire within a few minutes is the result. Although these workshops are designated "mobile," and only intended for the carrying out of simple and "running" repairs, the blacksmiths have literally forged axles by the roadsides. Amongst other appliances must be mentioned the brass furnace, in which is melted up all old scrap, such as used up phosphor or bronze bearings, etc., and from such metal, when poured, castings are made of every conceivable brass part of a car or lorry that could be required. It is not uncommon for 2 cwt. of metal to be "run" in a day from this furnace and cast into moulds, the necessary "patterns" from which the castings are moulded being also made by artificers of the workshops.

The net result of such well-equipped workshops is that during the whole time that the column has been in France it has not been found necessary to return a single vehicle to the Base Depot for replacement. Every repair has been carried out "in the field" by the column workshops. The non-evacuation of a single lorry is a record held by the —— Indian Cavalry Division Supply Column, and the fact is the more remarkable since over half of the lorries are, as I have previously stated, ex-London General buses.

It will be seen at once from the brief description I have given of the workshops appliances that at any time, day or night, and in any place, be it even by the roadside, it is only necessary to start up the engines and the whole unit is set in motion, and is immediately in full working order—at night, illuminated through-

out by a blaze of electric incandescent lamps, the current being generated by the self-same workshop lorry engine.

The workshop artificers are all specially enlisted and skilled workmen at their particular jobs, and with the tools and appliances at their disposal, there is no job that they would not be prepared to tackle. One of the difficulties of mechanical transport vehicles and motor-cars has been the question of road "springs." Owing to having to carry heavy loads on rough roads, these were found to occasionally break a leaf or two, and thus put the vehicle out of action. For this reason the O.C. Workshops not only makes sets of springs, but hardens and tempers them; an operation which, being an art in itself, requires considerable skill. He has constructed a special hardening furnace for this purpose.

Apart from the many jobs necessary to keep all the motor vehicles of the Division, the Supply Column motor-lorries and cars, all the motor ambulances, motor-cycles and Divisional Staff cars, the total number amounting to over two hundred in the case of a Cavalry Division, in a state of running order and constant efficiency, the following, to mention only a few, are samples of the jobs which have been undertaken and accomplished: the making of 3-inch shells, hand grenades, "discs" for motor-car wheels, automatic barbed-wire cutters, and last, though not least, a silver christening cup, which was presented by the officers of the column to one of our number, as a gift from them for his son and heir, who was born very shortly after our arrival in France. In order to make this cup, first of all a wooden pattern was made; a quantity of old silver spoons, forks, and other articles were then melted up in the furnace, and the cup cast from the pattern. It was then turned up and polished in a lathe, the result being a handsome goblet, 18 inches in height and weighing 1 1/2 lb. The O.C. Workshops and his artificers delight in making any special article which calls for exceptional skill and ingenuity; there are sometimes days when possibly the workshops are not particularly overburdened with work, and "fancy" jobs such as the above serve to keep the artificers' hands "in," and the efficiency of the tools and machines up to high-water mark.

As I have already explained, although the workshops are designated "mobile," which term implies that they can be moved from place to place as the position of the column changes, and also suggests that they are only intended for carrying out "running" repairs, they are now the most complete and up-to-date engineering works for the size that it is possible to imagine. They are able to carry out all the operations of any engineering works, from the preparation of designs and drawings, patterns, castings, and forgings, etc., to the fitting together of the complete article. Every workshop tool and appliance is marked with a number, which identifies the workshop lorry to which it belongs, so that in the event of the column receiving an order to suddenly move, which is, in fact, frequently the

case, the entire equipment can be packed up and the workshops are on the road in less than a couple of hours from the time the order to move is received. There is a place for everything, and everything has been designed and constructed to fit in its place. It is, of course, necessary to have always at hand a considerable quantity of workshop stores in the form of spare parts, tools, sparking-plugs, bolts, nuts and the like; these are carried in the store lorries, which have closed-in bodies, the interior of the bodies being fitted out with pigeon-holes and compartments for the purpose. The store lorries are four in number; they also serve as offices for the storekeepers and clerks, and in them all office work connected with the organization of the workshops is carried out. In order to enable this to be done, the O.C. Workshops has fitted them with an office table apiece and large side windows to admit light and air, two necessaries which the original designers must have overlooked! The lorry which serves as his own office he has fitted up with an office-chair and table, cupboards, an aluminium wash-hand basin, which was cast from scrap aluminium, a gas stove, and hot-water supply apparatus, the whole equipment having been made throughout in the workshops. The interior of the lorry is also, of course, lit with electricity, and thus the O.C. Workshops is enabled to carry on his work in comfort day or night, summer or winter.

## *Chapter VII*
## *LIFE BEHIND THE LINE*

During our stay at Fouqtiereuil, which was not, however, of long duration, we saw and heard things that to most of us, at any rate, were quite new. In the distance artillery was continually booming away, and at night the brilliant flashes of the star-shells over the trenches beyond us lit up the sky. It was not uncommon any day to see an aeroplane in the distance, followed in its passage across the sky by little puffs of white smoke, the phenomenon caused by shrapnel shells loosed off by our anti-aircraft guns on land at a hostile Taube, bursting all around it.

Our next move was to Lillers, where we remained only for a short time also. Of our journeys and convoys from this railhead I give some account in a following chapter. A few days before the end of December, railhead was again moved, this time to Berguette, and here we spent our first Christmas Day. Our mess was a room in a small empty house, which certainly looked cheerless enough

when we first saw it, but the O.C. Workshops very soon, with the assistance of his able artificers, produced a table and forms, rigged up a thoroughly efficient acetylene lighting plant and also a fire-grate; this latter was really a masterpiece of blacksmiths' art.

With these and many luxuries in the form of Christmas puddings and cakes sent by fond relatives at home, not forgetting a turkey locally acquired by the C.O., and some champagne of doubtful vintage, we managed to do ourselves proud. In all the different places in which we have been stationed, whether our mess has been a brickyard, a deserted house, a barn or a tent, the ingenuity of O.C. Workshops and his contrivances to produce light, heat, and such-like cardinal comforts have never failed us. A man who has spent years in the wilds of Africa and is accustomed to making himself always comfortable and thoroughly at home amid the most unpromising surroundings—even amongst the haunts of the man-eating lions of Tsavo or the snowy summits of the Klondyke—and who is also an engineer and an inventive genius, is a distinct acquisition to any unit on active service.

The artistic touch also we do not usually omit, for whenever possible we decorate the faded wall-paper of the messroom with a selection of Raphael Kirchner's fair "Parisiennes"—those charming vivandiêres of the trenches, dressed with that economy which is so very French!

A day or two before the end of the year railhead was again moved. This time to Aire-sur-la-Lys, where we were destined to stay for some months. Aire is one of those quaint, old-fashioned little towns of which there are so many in the Northern departments of France, with its large *pavé* Grande Place or open market square bordered by shops, and squared off at one end by an imposing Hôtel de Ville. I must not forget that here also is the Café du Commerce, which in due course became a recognized rendezvous for officers between the hours of six and eight every evening, and where Madame and Mdlle Chermeux dispensed many delectable *apéritifs*.

Aire contains one or two good examples of sixteenth-century Spanish architecture, and a large, square-towered and massive cathedral, which has been restored and added to until it seems to embody many types of architecture, and incidentally contains some very fine and beautifully coloured stained-glass windows, the interior effect of these in the long, dark nave being somewhat nullified by the amount of cheap and gaudy decoration, gilt paint and such-like, on walls and pillars, alas! so noticeable in many cathedrals and big churches in France.

Not very far from this cathedral a number of our motor-lorries were parked. The town boasted of many good billets, as is usual in small towns of this sort. The rank and file sleep usually in their lorries. These can, by a man with a little ingenuity, be made quite comfortable resting-places, by rigging up inside the vehicle

a hammock or other similar contrivance. With the tail-board up the cold is more or less kept out, and the tarpaulin cover, which is stretched over the top of long oval-shaped, channel iron supports, roofs in the vehicle and protects the sleeper from rain and other indiscretions of the weather. Other accommodation in the shape of empty warehouses is usually available, or billets in private houses—if the men care to go to the expense of paying for them—are not disallowed. In the smaller villages matters become somewhat different, the only opportunity for additional cover consisting usually in the inevitable farmhouse mud-walled barns. These are seldom weather-proof, and frequently their hospitality must be shared with many rats which also make them their dwelling-place.

French farms are curiously arranged places. In the North of France, at any rate, they are invariably one-storied buildings of rectangular shape surrounding a farmyard with a dung-heap. Near the dung-heap is frequently a pump, so it is not to be wondered at that the greatest care has to be taken in treating water before it is used for drinking purposes by the troops. This is accomplished by large movable chemically charged filters, mounted on wheels and towed by wagon or motor-lorry from place to place as necessity may require. In any place where troops are billeted it becomes necessary to immediately construct incinerators, either of brick or metal, where all rubbish in the shape of empty jam-tins, garbage, etc., can be destroyed and, after being thus burnt, is buried. The result is that ground in France, after being occupied by British troops, is generally left by them in a better state of sanitation than they found it, owing to the measures taken to drain any stagnant water and the free use of chemical disinfectants over any doubtful soil or drainage. The French peasants sometimes express surprise at the precautions taken by the British Army to avoid insanitation, and at the fact that all refuse is buried after being burnt. Owing to the latter we have sometimes been described as *les chats*, the peasants apparently assuming that we have learnt this idea from the habits of the amiable members of the feline tribe.

All such undertakings are carried out by that most necessary and efficient party of men known as the Sanitary Squad.

But to leave the subject of billeting areas in general and return to the town of Aire and the attractions it offered. I shall not forget the first Sunday—the first of the New Year, 1915—which we spent there. Besides ourselves there were considerable numbers of troops stationed in the vicinity at the time, and in honour of this fact, and also presumably by way of further cementing the Entente Cordiale, it was announced that in the afternoon there would be a special service in the cathedral to invoke the Divine aid for the success of the Allied arms. All British soldiers were invited to be present, and long before the advertised time of the service the cathedral was packed, and, looking down its long nave, presented in appearance a solid mass of khaki. The service opened by the singing of "God

Save the King," in which the whole congregation were asked to join. The National Anthem was accompanied by the organ and conducted by an aged priest, who stood at the chancel steps beneath a life-size statue of Joan of Arc, and never, I thought, had there been such an assembly under such strange circumstances. Here were a thousand or so English soldiers of all ranks, from General Officers to privates, and a sprinkling of French soldiers, singing the National Anthem while facing a statue of Joan of Arc, her arms outstretched as if in the act of pleading. And all this in a Catholic cathedral in France, which still held protruding from its outer walls cannon-balls accurately placed there by a piece of Marlborough's artillery in a former and somewhat different campaign. Incidentally, several similar cannon-balls were dug up in a field adjoining the railhead, in the course of excavations made in connection with the Native abattoir, which I have referred to in a previous chapter. That priest was nothing if not thorough, for he conducted the congregation through all the verses of the National Anthem, and it must be admitted to our national shame that the majority present knew no more than the words of the first verse, and I think these words did duty for all the remaining ones! The Bishop, who preached, again and again addressed himself to "Messieurs les Anglais," reminding his hearers that the great armies of France and Great Britain were fighting side by side in brotherhood for the liberties of Europe. He also laid frequent emphasis on the help which Great Britain had extended to France in her hour of need, and paid a glowing tribute to "Sa Majesté le Roi George de Grande-Bretagne."

There was nearly always something of interest going on at Aire. On the broad canal the many barges presented a picturesque sight. The French, unlike us, make the greatest possible use of their canals and waterways, and their barges would, I think, put anything of the kind that one might see on the Thames quite in the shade. The use of these barges has been invaluable to our Army: some have been lavishly fitted up as Red Cross barges, and, in charge of officers of the Royal Army Medical Corps, gently bear down the more seriously wounded from the front to the casualty clearing hospitals, in a degree of comfort that could not possibly be approached by motor ambulance cars on bad roads. These lavishly equipped hospital barges are indeed worthy of comparison with our magnificent ambulance trains running on the French State railways between the casualty clearing hospitals and the base. Any one who has studied the map and knows the position of La Bassée Canal will at once realize of what use this waterway has been as a means of evacuating wounded. Among other *divertissements* there duly arrived at Aire a flotilla of motor-gunboats, commanded by a real live Admiral, with his second in command, a celebrated surgeon and bone-setter from Harley Street. Amongst the other officers of the flotilla was Earl de la Warr, who has since lost his life in the service of his country in another quarter of the

globe. His own yacht, having been armed and suitably fitted up, formed one of the flotilla. The gunboats were anchored in the canal at Aire for some time. Exactly what they were intended to do we never actually discovered. In the end they did nothing, but departed as mysteriously as they had arrived. We heard at a later date that some had gone to the Dardanelles, and others were being used for spotting German submarines in the English Channel, a job for which, judging by their speed, size, and light draught, they must be eminently suitable. Whilst the gunboats were at Aire, I spent some cheery evenings in the wardroom with the gallant members of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve who officered them—the second in command not infrequently himself cooking the dinner on board. Aire having been before the war a training centre of the French Army, boasted a very good rifle-range, and here our lorry drivers were instructed in the use of the rifle.

In those days drafts of troops, arriving from home, used to be frequently detrained at Aire and other stations in its vicinity, and great interest and excitement was evinced at the arrival of the famous 1st Division of the new Armies to come to France, who marched through on their way up to the trenches. A finer set of men, in the uniforms of almost every Scottish regiment, it would have been difficult to imagine, as one saw them file through the narrow streets of this old town.

Judging by the many substantial buildings which have been erected for various purposes and the enterprises started in the war area, one would imagine that the war was really a permanent institution. Amongst those that should be mentioned are the Y.M.C.A. Huts and the Expeditionary Field Force Canteens. In the former, which are to be found in all towns behind the line of any size, the soldier is always sure of a welcome and is able to obtain refreshments, read the papers, and write his letters. Pens, ink, and paper are provided free. The good work that the Y.M.C.A. has accomplished out here is simply magnificent and meets with much appreciation. The Expeditionary Field Force Canteens, of which there are now quite a large number, are veritable diminutive Harrod's Stores; in them can be purchased by officers and men every imaginable thing, from soap and writing-paper to tinned fruit and cigarettes, all at particularly low prices, especially, of course, tobacco and cigarettes, which are exported from England in bond free of duty. Even at the extremely low prices prevailing after paying current expenses and establishment charges, etc., a profit is made, and this is devoted to the alleviation of distress amongst the dependents of soldiers fallen in battle. Surely a worthy object.

Boxing and, of course, especially football are very popular behind the line, often much to the evident amazement of the French population, who are in a few cases averse to lending their fields for the purpose, which they naturally consider may be spoilt as pasture land.

Amongst other amusements, some little time ago, the Indian Cavalry Corps was presented with a cinematograph machine. An electric motor to drive it was provided by the Indian Soldiers' Fund. The whole equipment is mounted and carried on a motor-lorry. Frequent changes of pictures are obtained from London, and when times are quiet the lorry travels from unit to unit, giving periodic exhibitions for the amusement of officers and men, the screen being erected in a suitable barn or, when weather permits, out of doors.

Aire was also not without its amusements, both aquatic and equestrian. It boasted of one of the best open-air swimming-baths I have ever seen. As the summer of 1915 approached, we looked at it expectantly, and very soon the officer commanding a Reserve Ammunition Park, which was at that time in a state of immobility and compulsory idleness, was placed in charge of the bath. With considerable enterprise and some perseverance he succeeded in clearing it of weeds and rushes, and thus it became a splendid bathing-place, adding considerably to the enjoyment of officers and men alike, who were fortunate enough to be able to take advantage of it. Towards the end of July a very fine programme of aquatic sports was put up and extremely well run, the band of the aforesaid Ammunition Park assisting in no small degree towards the success of this enterprise. That band of string, wood, and brass instruments, as a "volunteer" orchestra on active service, was really an achievement. It not only did duty for such shows as this, but on Sunday mornings regularly occupied the band-stand in the centre of the Grande Place during Church Parade, at which Sir Douglas Haig, at that time the General Commanding the 1st Army, was frequently present. At a later date His Majesty the King attended a Church Parade in this Grande Place.

During the summer two horse shows were arranged by the Indian Cavalry Corps. The first was a competitive meeting in which French cavalry also participated, and was attended by civilian inhabitants and officers and men who were anywhere within reasonable distance of it at the time. A military French-horn band and a British regimental band assisted. The sight of the Royal Horse Artillery batteries going round the course at the gallop to the music of the band, and the traditional smartness of their "turn out," was one which once seen could not easily be forgotten, together with a number of riding and jumping competitions, reminiscent as they were of the Royal Naval and Military Tournament in London.

The second show was more in the nature of an exhibition of feats of horsemaster-ship by the Natives, and was arranged for the pleasure of their Majesties the King and Queen of the Belgians, accompanied by their son, the Duke of Brabant, and by Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, who were evidently much impressed, as were all spectators, by the Natives' prowess as horsemen.

It is interesting to note that on this occasion King Albert wore the khaki uniform and Sam Brown belt of a British officer. His son was in the uniform

of a private of the Belgian Army, and stood at attention as he watched the show, smartly saluting all officers as they were presented to the King. He is now an Eton boy, and when his picture appeared recently in the illustrated papers, standing beside Prince Henry, the son of our own King, my mind harked back to that horse show and this strange contrast.

Lord Charles Beresford was wearing khaki slacks and field service tunic, with badges of a Colonel of Royal Marines, and any one who knows the gallant Admiral by sight will at once appreciate how picturesque he looked on this occasion.

The course was in a large field of very green pasture land, roped in and marked out with flags. The setting of the whole scene could not have been more beautiful. The field was surrounded with woods, and a typical French château stood at one end.

The various competitive events were, as I have already remarked, not confined to the Indian Cavalry Corps; officers of both British and French cavalry regiments participated, and the many different bright scarlet and blue uniforms worn by officers of French cavalry, together with the red and gold cap-bands and gorgets of British Generals and Staff and their many rows of ribbons, showed up as bright spots of colour amongst the crowd of khaki-clad soldiers, making the whole scene a really picturesque one.

The uniform of French cavalry officers, before the introduction of the universal pale blue uniform, was a creation truly marvellous; perhaps that is why they were the last to adopt the new field service dress. It consisted in bright red breeches, sky-blue short tunic with silver buttons, red and white facings distinguishing the chasseur from the dragoon; jack-boots and long spurs; a forage cap of sky blue, with silver-braid badges of rank. My description may not be quite accurate in its details; nevertheless, it is the impression left in my mind of the full-dress uniform of these gallant officers. Also there were present cuirassiers, with their breast-plates and helmets, from the back of which hung long crimson horsehair plumes.

One evening at Aire, another officer and myself were taking an after-dinner stroll along the road which leads to Berguette. We were discussing matters far removed from war, when our conversation and the peacefulness of a moonlight summer night were disturbed by a terrific explosion, which appeared to be quite close. It was followed by several more in quick succession. We stood still and, gazing upwards, could see nothing, though we heard the hum of an aeroplane or airship overhead in the distance. Returning to Aire, we found the inhabitants all out in the streets trying to catch a glimpse of the hostile aircraft. "Zeppelin" they murmured with one accord. Owing to the stillness of the night, the buzz of the engine certainly sounded louder than that of the usual aeroplane, which,

however, it turned out to be. The damage done was insignificant. One or two bombs landed quite near a neighbouring station, which was being used as an ammunition railhead at the time. An ammunition train was standing loaded in a siding, but was untouched. The night-raider did not prolong his visit for very long, and by bedtime all was again quiet.

I remember a daylight aeroplane raid at Lillers one day. The Taube, flying very high, tried to bomb the station, but succeeded in damaging only a café just outside it and smashing, by the concussion of the exploding bombs, every pane of glass within a quarter of a mile radius. There were two or three casualties. A Frenchman who was the possessor of one leg only, had it damaged to such an extent that it too had to be amputated, which led him, no doubt, to reflect that troubles seldom come singly!

## *Chapter VIII*
## *FROM BETHUNE TO YPRES*

While we were stationed at Lillers, in the latter part of December 1914, a detachment of the Indian Cavalry was sent up in the rôle of infantry to the trenches beyond Béthune for a short spell, where they reinforced the Lahore and Meerut Divisions, the latter two Divisions comprising the Indian Corps (infantry). This corps was moved to another theatre of war at the beginning of 1916, after having borne the brunt of the fighting through two winters in France and Flanders and suffered many casualties. The cavalry on this occasion gave a good account of themselves in the fighting round Festubert and Givenchy. During the time that they were there we convoyed the motor-lorries with rations for the detachment in the trenches, but although our destination was shelled during this period and was within earshot of rifle fire in the trenches and the "rat-tat-tat" of machine guns, like so many gigantic typewriters at work, we never managed to be actually there whilst any excitement was on.

In this neighbourhood are the graves of many gallant Native troops, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Garhwalis, and Pathans of the Indian Corps. Our Dominion troops have rightly won universal praise and admiration for the gallant part they have played in the war and the way they have come forward of their own free will to fight, but it is to be regretted that our Indian troops have in this respect

been somewhat neglected. The nature of their loyalty is different somehow to that of any of our other overseas troops. "For East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Perhaps it is not generally known that every Native cavalryman provides his own horse or its equivalent value in money on enlistment. I shall never forget the Review of the Indian Cavalry Corps by the Prince of Wales in France; the way they gave "eyes right" as each squadron marched past the Prince left in one the impression that they really meant it and were saluting the future King-Emperor. These contingents, infantry and cavalry alike, came to a far-away, strange, cold land, and to a particularly bleak part of it at that, during the rainiest winter ever experienced in a proverbially wet part of the country, dressed only in their thin Indian khaki, be it remembered. They found themselves taking part in a kind of warfare that was entirely new to them, in deep trenches, frequently up to their middles in water, and always in thick mud and slush, such as they had never experienced before in their lives. Moreover, not only were they unused to shell fire, but they found their own particular methods and tactics of war in open country impossible under such circumstances; yet, in spite of all this, they upheld the fighting traditions of the Indian Army, and stuck it through the very heaviest of the fighting and under the worst climatic conditions it is possible to imagine. I am referring now chiefly to the Indian Infantry Corps.

During the nights and days which preceded the battle of Neuve Chapelle we heard guns away in the distance making a continuous bombardment, and a deep roar like thunder rent the air. This was the prelude to the attack. On March 9th Sir Douglas Haig's Special Order to the 1st Army was published.

Our minds at this time must have been dwarfed, for the attack on Neuve Chapelle was as nothing in magnitude, compared with subsequent attacks, in the matters of men and guns.

The Indian Cavalry Corps was moved up towards the direction of the attack and massed some way behind the line in woods, where they remained "standing to," in co-operation with divisions of British and French cavalry, the whole representing, I believe, the greatest number of mounted troops ever massed together, up to that time.

The Supply Column made two or three journeys up on its usual errand, but the cavalry were sent back to the previous billets after a few days, it being found that no opportunity for cavalry fighting had been effected. Although this was the case it must not be thought that the Indian Cavalry Corps were kept entirely in a state of idleness. The —— Divisions of the Corps, under the command of Lieut.-General Rimington, were directly under the orders of General Headquarters, and were available to be attached to any army and sent to any part of the line where it was considered that an opportunity for using them might arise. Meanwhile they

did their bit of reserve trench digging in various parts of the line, and many a pleasant summer day I have spent in convoying up the lorries of supplies for the different digging parties, and off-loaded them at various points between Locon and Estaires. The R.H.A. batteries attached to the Corps were almost continually in action at different places, though more in the rôle of Field than of Horse Artillery.

The most interesting journeys, from the Supply Column point of view, were when the Indian Cavalry were sent up to the trenches, again in the rôle of infantrymen, to the Ypres Salient. This was in the early summer of 1915, when they reinforced the line immediately after the first German gas attack, from which our line naturally suffered severely through being unprepared for another new and previously unanticipated form of German "Kultur."

It is interesting at this point to note that during this time a British Cavalry Regiment, forming part of a Native Cavalry Brigade, assisted in the attack and capture of Hooge Château, which has changed hands so many times.

The rendezvous for the motor-lorries on these occasions was at some shelter huts on an open, flat piece of ground, where once grass had grown and now used as a camping-ground for troops recently out of, or about to take their turn in, the trenches just beyond. On it are erected a number of huts, similar to those which can be seen in many parts of England where troops in training have been encamped. A road runs through the middle of this plain, and at a prearranged point on it was the ration dumping-ground. Here the motor-lorries were met by the Supply Officer and their contents off-loaded. The use made by us of this ground as a camp was, of course, not unknown to the Germans, who occasionally favoured it with a certain amount of shelling. On one or two occasions they shelled it at a most inopportune moment. A smoking concert had been got up and was to take place in one of the largest huts. It was to start at 8 p.m., and no sooner had the first performer on the programme mounted the improvised platform than a shell landed just outside; it was followed by several others. There was only one thing to be done, and the senior officer present ordered the hut to be evacuated. So everyone departed, cursing the Huns roundly for being so extremely inconsiderate as to spoil an evening's amusement.

One Sunday a Church Parade was being held, and those present were lustily singing a hymn, the opening line of which is, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus." As the words "Stand up" were leaving their lips, a shell came screaming over and exploded near by. Every one, the padre included, instinctively "ducked"!

From the rest camp, as from many other points behind the line, an aerial combat is no unusual sight. One hears the drone of the aeroplane engines and sees the hostile machine speeding along over the line, while little white puffs, like flakes of cotton-wool, spring suddenly into being all around it, as the shrapnel

shells from anti-aircraft batteries, familiarly known always as "Archies," burst. Or perhaps the gunners may favour it with high explosive shells, which leave little black puffs. On a still day the puffs of smoke linger for several minutes in the blue sky like tiny clouds and gradually disperse. The hostile aeroplane darts hither and thither. All eyes are turned skywards, and the following are the type of comments overheard as the shells burst: "Just a bit too low," "Too far ahead," "The next'll get him," "Got him," "No, he's only doing a dive down into his own lines." Often the whole path which the aeroplane has taken across the sky is literally covered with these little white puffs of shrapnel smoke. I have counted as many as a hundred and eighty, and even then the aeroplane not infrequently escapes without apparent damage. But the Taube does not have things all its own way, for one or more of our own 'planes rise to attack, and if one is very lucky one sees it descend with a long and rapid dive—nose first, in flames, a tangled mass of framework and burning canvas. An air duel on a clear day is not only wonderful from a spectacular point of view, but the most exciting episode it is possible to witness. If, however, one happens to be directly underneath where the shrapnel shells are bursting and realizes that all that goes up comes down again, one takes more than a spectacular interest in such an incident. By night aviators afford one even greater excitement, trying to spot the hostile machine and locate it by the sound of its engine. Then perhaps a terrific crash as it drops an incendiary bomb, the explosion of which lights up the whole neighbourhood with a dull red glow.

The weather all through that month of May 1915 was ideal, and nothing could have looked more beautiful than the long, straight white roads, with their line of tall trees on either side that characterize the Routes Nationales and Routes de Grande Communication, the main arteries leading across the borders of France into Belgium, and which run through miles of intensely cultivated land. The main road from Hazebrouck to Ypres is a typical example of the highways of Flanders; with its strip of raised *pavé* in the centre, it is flanked by earth on either side and runs between an avenue of tall and stately poplars. It has been followed by troops from every part of the world over which flies the Union Jack or the Tricolour, and they have marched along it on their way to fight the bloodiest battles of the world's history. The nearer one gets to the trenches, the worse becomes the condition of the roads, and that leading through Poperinghe to Ypres was among the roughest on which I have ever travelled. Leaving Hazebrouck, it gradually became worse and worse as one approached and crossed the frontier of Belgium. The *pavé* in the centre is narrow and has a high camber. The earth that borders it on either side is soft, so that it is particularly difficult for two heavy motor-lorries proceeding in opposite directions to pass one another. It is to the credit of British motor-car manufacturers that the lorries and cars with the Expeditionary Force in France have stood up so well on roads such as they were never designed or

intended to travel on.

They were sad runs these, up to the trenches, where every village through which the convoy passed was suffering more from the devastating effects of shell fire than the last. Every day almost one would notice a change; another church tower a little more damaged, or a house that yesterday was proudly standing and a landmark is a victim to German artillery and a ruined mass to-day. Fewer and fewer buildings left standing, not a piece of glass remaining in any single window frame; the bare walls, perhaps, of a house here and there still standing, but bespattered with shrapnel bullets. The further up one got, the fewer civilian inhabitants one saw, until the last villages, such as Vlamertinghe on the road to Ypres, which had been entirely evacuated by the civilian population, except perhaps for one or two old peasants here and there, who had possibly spent all their lives in their own particular village and intended to continue doing so, even if this entailed living a considerable part of the time in cellars. We often passed little parties of refugees making their way slowly into France, there to throw themselves on the hospitality of their more fortunate friends. Turning their backs for ever on their old homes, which they instinctively knew they had seen for the last time, a whole family, perhaps, the father leading a horse and cart piled up with such odd bits and pieces of household goods as they had managed to save, perhaps all their worldly possessions—a bed, mattress, and a few sticks of furniture—the other members of the family either riding on the cart or following in a sorrowful little procession behind it, their possessions amongst the animal world not being forgotten, but frequently represented by a goat and a few chickens. The further up one got, too, the more congested were the roads with the impedimenta of war: motor-lorries, ambulances, guns, wagons and the like. The Military Police, being stationed on point duty on the more important cross roads, with the aid of red and green flags directed the traffic, and for all the world it was often like a block of vehicular traffic at Piccadilly Circus, the usual accompaniment of language not being forgotten!

From the rest huts at Vlamertinghe right into Ypres, or what remained of it, was only a matter of five minutes on a motorcycle. Never have I seen or imagined a sight so tragic. Street after street in a state of absolute wreck and ruin. What had once been beautiful and massive buildings, such as the famous Cloth Hall, which dates from the thirteenth century, and the Church of St. Martin, now heaps of debris and broken glass lying across the road. Houses destroyed, many of them, beyond recognition; some had been set alight by shells and were slowly smouldering; others, with their fronts completely blown away, were still standing and displayed their contents nakedly to the passer-by. Such is the ugliness of war's destruction—the desolation of desolation, deserted by every living soul. Never before have I experienced such a sensation of utter loneliness. This struck

me more forcibly, I think, than anything else. If one had searched amongst those ruins, what treasures and what gruesome tragedies might one have encountered! Ypres must once have been a very beautiful city and capital of Flanders; now it was a city of Death. To visit it in 1915 was to see the eighth wonder of the world. Surely it will for ever be haunted by the spirits of the soldiers who have fallen in fighting to hold it. That the Ypres Salient has been consistently held against fearful odds and the heavy attacks which the enemy has made on it, with Calais as his objective, is an everlasting memorial to the valour of British soldiers.

I picked up some pieces of coloured glass, which had once formed part of the stained-glass windows of St. Martin's Church, now shattered and littered over the ground around its ruins, to take away as a memento, and as these thoughts were just passing through my mind, a shell whistled overhead and burst with a crash a little distance away and awoke in me a sense of duty. I made my way out of Ypres along the debris-strewn road, containing here and there some fine examples of shell-holes in the middle of it. On the way out I passed what had once been a General Service wagon with horses and riders, now a horrible inert mass of horse-flesh and wheel-spokes—at least, that is the impression that this sight left on my mind. A shell had caught it fair—a direct hit—a few minutes before.

Ypres at this time, it will be seen, was by no means a health resort. The long straight road leading into it was shelled regularly as clockwork every day; usually at about five or six o'clock the evening "hate" started. That is what is meant when the official communique states that "artillery fire was directed upon billets, railheads, and communication roads"; for this was a road which much transport loaded with rations, ammunition, and other material for the trenches there travelled along, and in the villages along that road troops on their way up to or out of the trenches were frequently temporarily billeted.

Whether it is a peculiarly machine-like working of the German mind or due to the fact that German organization is carried to such limits of mathematical precision I do not know, but the fact remains that this road was normally quite safe except between certain fixed and regular hours each evening. So I was never particularly anxious to delay the return journey of the convoy of empty motor-lorries longer than was absolutely necessary, and used to leave the danger zone as soon as we had off-loaded the rations and secured the Supply Officer's receipt for them. On one occasion only, on the return journey, however, did we have any excitement. We were travelling in convoy along a narrow road leading from the huts up to and at right angles to the main road. Just as we came to the junction of the two a few shells landed in the adjoining field, planted with tall poles, around which twining hops grew, doubtless of the famous Popeninghe brand. A few of these were destroyed, and quantities of earth were thrown up, the shells leaving

dense grey-black clouds of smoke in the air, but doing no other damage. We were only just in time, though, that day, for a few hours later a motor-cyclist dispatch rider, who had come along the same road, caught up the convoy at Hazebrouck and told me that further back the road was being heavily shelled.

The saddest sight of all is just behind the line, in those roadside fields where rest the fallen. No matter to what part of the line one goes, but particularly behind Ypres—and nowhere scarcely along the whole front has the fighting been heavier than on this bit of the British line—one sees clustered together in groups here and there the little wooden crosses which mark the graves of those of whom Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "They despised Death and have won their discharge." They are cared for now and duly registered, and as far as possible inscribed with names and dates by that excellent department, the Graves Registration Committee at General Headquarters. "Oh, Cromwell's England, must thou yield for every inch of ground a son?" asks the poet; and these little graves will for ever remain, silent witnesses to the fact that here Death once reaped a rich harvest.

## *Chapter IX*
## *MR. THOMAS ATKINS AND THE FRENCH*

As I have already stated, Aire remained our railhead for some months, and during the first week of August 1915 we left it. What sorrow our departure caused! As the long procession of lorries pulled out through the narrow *pavé* streets for the last time, the civilian population turned out *en masse* and was literally in tears! It is a noticeable fact that when British troops arrive to take up their quarters in any town or village for the first time they are occasionally, but by no means always, looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion and distrustfulness by the civilian inhabitants, who sometimes seem disinclined to offer facilities in the way of accommodation and so forth. I suppose this is not to be wondered at, and it would be curious to see what reception Allied foreign troops would receive in an English village. After a few days, however, they find Tommy is a good fellow and spends freely what little money he has. The shopkeepers in the little towns behind the line are as fortunate as the inhabitants of the invaded towns on the other side of the line are unfortunate. Among others, the *debitants de boissons*, or Estaminet keepers, do a roaring trade in such drinks as they are allowed to sell to

the troops—very "small beer," and the usual red and white wines. Occasionally, in some places, one observes a small notice to the effect that "English Beer and Stout are sold here." The popular winter drink of 1914, *café-rhum*, came to an end when the veto was put on the sale of spirits to the troops, and it is impossible now to buy even a whisky and soda, though I have heard of one being produced by the *garçon* at a certain café on being asked for a *vin blanc Ecossé*.

It is wonderful how Mr. Thomas Atkins, always adaptable, has mastered the French language, or rather, I should say, has compounded a language, half-French and half-English, but which nevertheless enables him to make himself understood and thoroughly at home in the most trying circumstances. As a rule, he is able to undertake the most complicated shopping with the greatest of ease, and carry on long conversations and arguments with the vendor meanwhile. There are, however, exceptions to every rule. A friend of mine, on one occasion, arrived late in the evening in a new village. It had been raining hard all day, as it only can in Flanders. Being wet through and very tired, he told his orderly to find the billet allotted to him and make various arrangements with Madame as to a latch-key and so forth. The orderly returned a little later with a crestfallen look and an air of dismay. "Can't make Madame understand, sir," he said. "They seem to talk a different kind of slang here to the last place we were in."

On another occasion my friend himself went into a chemist's shop at St. Omer with the object of purchasing some hair-wash. "Huile pour les chevaux" was the nearest he could think of, and he was greatly alarmed when the chemist produced a bottle of Elliman's horse embrocation and proclaimed its excellent qualities at some length. *Huile pour les chevaux* and *huile pour les cheveux* are two very different things! But Tommy is seldom at a loss. "Deux beers sivous play, Ma'mselle, compree?" he will demand as he enters an estaminet, and if Ma'mselle in question has any pretensions to beauty, he will not infrequently at a later stage of the proceedings, purely, no doubt, by way of paying a delicate compliment and to further cement the *entente*, add to his previous remarks some such jocular suggestion as "Promnarde avec moi?" To which the Ma'mselle will probably reply to the effect that he is "Très polisson." Tommy, nothing daunted, will round off the conversation by some cryptic remark to the effect that she is "no bong"!

Certain phrases, easily acquired orally, and seldom quite understood—for example, "nar poo," derived from "il n'y-en a plus," do duty on many occasions and under varying circumstances. Tommy even sometimes carries his French phrases so far as his letters home, possibly for "showing off" purposes. His spelling of French words is usually quaint.

Many of our lorry drivers, as I have explained, were previous to the war motor-bus and taxi-cab drivers in London. The powers of repartee of this type of

man are proverbial, and with a slight admixture of French have lost none of their former crispness. On the contrary, his "vocabulary" has been augmented. It is a pity that we have had to resort to conscription for the Army, and one can only hope that sooner or later some distinction will be made between the conscript and the man who, regardless of age and the cost, volunteered for service in the early part of the war. In an Army Service Corps unit particularly, one notices men whose appearance leads one to think that there is, to say the least, a discrepancy between their real and regimental age as given on enlistment. I recollect asking one elderly-looking man his age; he replied, "Forty-two, sir." Noticing that on his breast was the blue and white ribbon of the Egypt medal of 1882, I remarked, "Then you must have been eight years old when that was awarded to you!"

It is interesting to note that Indian troops pick up French in many cases quite readily, and apparently more easily than English. If you chance on one on the road, trying to find his way to some village or other, and he cannot speak English and you cannot speak Hindustani, a little "pidgin" French will usually be found to be a common basis for conversation, or an old soldier, who has rejoined for the war and who many years ago perhaps served in India, will come to the rescue and explain matters with much gesticulation and a curious mixture of English, French, and Hindustani, the word *compris*, in the form of a question, usually playing an important part in the conversation. Many of the Native Cavalry soldiers now speak French quite fluently, their pronunciation being almost perfect.

There is one excuse for everything which, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, in France to-day. If one has occasion to suggest to a shopkeeper that so and so is *très cher*, or to the *chef de gare* that the train is late for which you are waiting, no matter what the complaint, the answer is invariably the same, "C'est la guerre, monsieur." It is the stock phrase of consolation and explanation. They accept the war, do these peasants and bourgeois of Northern France, in a spirit of optimistic fortitude, as something which has unfortunately got to be, and which shows no sign of ending, at any rate at present. Their hatred of the Boches, which they readily express, both verbally and by such cryptic signs and phrases as "Coupez la gorge," etc., is intense, and of a nature that could hardly be realized by the people of England, who have not been subjected to the systematic brutality which the Boches have invariably exercised, or experienced the invasion of Belgium—as carefully planned as it was diabolically executed.

In no town or village in which I have been have I seen a solitary man of military age, married or single alike, except, of course, the obviously physically unfit, who is not in the Army, the Navy, or the workshops, and this has been the same since the first 1914 mobilization in France. The older men are employed as sentries at level crossings and on railway bridges. Even in the munition works,

the impression one gains is that the bulk of the people thus employed are old men, women, or young girls and boys.

Yet the work of the land, right up almost to the trenches, in this richly agricultural and intensely cultivated country, is carried on as usual by those left behind. The old men, women, and children work in a way that is truly remarkable. Never have I seen women and children do such an amount of manual work. The pay of the French *poilu*, formerly five centimes (a halfpenny) and latterly raised to twenty-five centimes (two-pence halfpenny), together with the small "separation allowance" paid to his dependents, compel the latter to carry on the work of the land as of yore and keep things going till the war is ended.

As a contrast to the many posters which placard every available hoarding and wall in England, there are very few in France. One is to be seen everywhere—in cafés, railway carriages, in the streets, etc.; and it contains three lines of straightforward and pungently sound advice, strictly to the point and commendably brief. It emanates from the Minister of War, and is as follows:

Taisez-vous!
Méfiez-vous!
Les oreilles des ennemies vous écoutent!

The only other posters to be seen advertise the advantages of investment in the French War Loan; they are obviously drawn by artists, and are in keeping with the best theatrical posters in London, such as one would see outside His Majesty's Theatre.

The three lines of warning which I have referred to above lead me to the question of spies. Of course, spies there are, without a doubt, especially in places which have previously been in enemy occupation, and through such agents information of military importance is conveyed to the enemy, by one method or another. There are, however, alleged spies, who are occasionally reported by different people, soldiers or civilians, who may have reason to suspect them. The various Assistant Provost Marshals are, naturally, only too anxious to catch real spies, and are not only willing but keen to investigate reports and incidentally inconvenience ninety-nine suspects in the hope of catching the hundredth. Curious mistakes happen, and did so particularly in the early stages of the war. On one occasion an apparently eminently respectable-looking and bearded Frenchman was apprehended. He was noticed standing in the street making what appeared to be entries in a pocket-book with the aid of a pencil whilst some batteries of artillery were passing along through the town.

It was only necessary to put two and two together and use a small amount of imagination; what could he be taking note of in his pocket-book except the

sizes, number, and such-like particulars of the passing guns? He protested vehemently and excitedly that so far from being a spy he hated the Germans. He was, he said, a merchant from Roubaix, and was not his house and business place in their cursed hands? Which facts were proved by investigation in due course to be perfectly true. On being examined, he was asked among other questions if he could produce what he was alleged to have written in his pocketbook. This, he said, was a matter of impossibility, but he offered instead an explanation. He had, he stated, on the previous evening seen a girl who greatly attracted him; chancing to run across her again the following day, he hastily pulled out his notebook with the object of scribbling a brief note to suggest a rendezvous for later in the day. Unfortunately, she disappeared into a house near by, and he, losing sight of her, was unable to deliver his note. Naturally, therefore, he could not produce it; he had torn it up and thrown it in the gutter. I need hardly add that when the authorities were satisfied as to his identity he was released, the victim of a mistake and his own indiscretion.

A few days after this incident I happened to notice a report of it in a French newspaper. With true journalistic ardour for sensational details, the writer of it added that the supposed spy "swallowed" the note he had written, rather than produce it for inspection. This is not true, but my story is an accurate account of the incident, which caused great amusement at the time.

On another occasion I was Orderly Officer of the Day at Aire, and "visiting rounds" late at night, a sentry on duty in the town, belonging to a Scottish regiment, told me that he had a man dressed in officer's uniform under observation, who aroused his suspicion owing to the questions addressed to him as to the whereabouts of certain brigades and regiments. He had already, he said, reported the matter to his corporal, who had posted two sentries outside the house into which the suspect had gone. My duty was quite plain: this case was one for immediate investigation; so, accompanied by the sentry, I went up to the house, which was only a few yards away, and which happened to be a *brasserie*. The next thing to be done was to gain admittance to the *brasserie*. It was now after midnight. Having given the sentries orders to load their rifles, but only to loose off in the event of their suspect endeavouring to make his escape or resist escort, and to shoot low at that, with my revolver in one hand I rang the *brasserie* bell with the other. It was one of those large bells suspended at some height, actuated by a long chain, and which have a way of continuing to ring for some time after the chain has been pulled. Very soon, up went a window on the first floor, and out of it appeared the head and shoulders of a woman, obviously aroused from her slumbers. I inquired in the best French I could command if there was an "Officier anglais" billeted in the house. She replied that there was one, and she would go to his room and wake him. In a few minutes, after much clanking of chains and

bolts, the front door was opened. This, then, was the critical moment! A Captain of the —— Regiment emerged and asked what the —— I wanted and why the —— I had woke him up at such an unearthly hour of the night. The sentry had made a mistake in his overzealousness. The alleged spy was an officer, who had that night returned from leave, and finding no one about except a sentry, had sought from him such information as to the whereabouts of his unit as would enable him to rejoin it on the following morning. So, apologizing profusely and explaining my position in the matter, I withdrew, greatly disappointed at being denied the excitement of catching a real spy.

A friend of mine was travelling along a country road in a motor-car and noticed a man walking who aroused his suspicions. He was dressed in an odd assortment of military uniform and civilian clothes, and on his coat were several regimental buttons, both French and English. Moreover, he was unable to produce any pass or papers of identification. My friend, first ascertaining that his prisoner was unarmed, invited him to get into the back of the car, which he did, not neglecting at the same time to pull over his knees a fur rug which happened to be there—one of those magnificent bear-skin rugs which were sent out as presents to certain members of the Expeditionary Force by the Grand Duke Michael of Russia in the winter of 1914. In a few minutes the next village was reached, and passing through it my friend noticed with some surprise that his fellow-traveller was being greeted with cheers, thrills of laughter and hand-waves by the children and a few people who happened to be about. Stopping at the *mairie*, the man was at once identified. He was the local "rag and bone" man, quite harmless, though somewhat mad. Nevertheless, he thanked my friend profusely for the lift, which he explained had not only saved him a two or three miles walk on a dusty road, but provided for him a new sensation and experience, for this had been his first ride in a motor-car. I need scarcely add that spies have since been a sore point with my friend.

And here I must tell a story against myself. Returning to railhead about ten or eleven o'clock one evening, I had occasion to halt the convoy *en route*, as I noticed that it was beginning to spread out too much and several vehicles in the rear were becoming "stragglers." As I pulled up, a man approached from the direction in which I had been proceeding and walked past along the line of lorries drawn up on the roadside. He aroused my suspicions, for although he wore the usual service jacket of a British officer, he appeared in the dim light to be also wearing red-coloured "slacks" of apparently the same hue as a French soldier. My first impression was that he was dressed in a mixture of British and French uniform, possibly an ill-informed German spy, who, having heard of the *belle alliance*, imagined it to be carried to such lengths in practice that the uniforms of the two Armies were combined. I watched him for a minute, then followed,

and getting even with him, wished him "Good-evening." There was no time to lose, so I got straight to the point and asked him his name and regiment. He inquired the reason of my apparent curiosity, and I admitted that the shade of his trousers had aroused my suspicions. He replied that he was in the 11th Hussars—the only regiment in the British Army, he added, who were privileged to wear "cherry-coloured" slacks. I apologized and withdrew, feeling quite crestfallen. The following day I told this to a cavalry officer who had been a good many years in the Service. He was much amused, and said, "Oh yes, that's quite right; no doubt he belongs to the 11th, always known in the Service as the 'cherubims'!" I have never run up against my cherubim friend again, but if he should ever chance to read these lines and recalls the incident, I trust he will forgive me, and realize that I only carried out what I deemed, in my innocence, to be my duty.

## *Chapter X*
## *WITH THE R.H.A. BATTERIES*
## (CONTRIBUTED BY A LORRY DRIVER IN THE COLUMN)

In the capacity of motor-lorry driver on a converted London General Omnibus attached to the —— Indian Cavalry Supply Column, and carrying rations to the Royal Horse Artillery Batteries of the Division, I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity of driving my lorry as near the line as lorries go, and have witnessed many exciting incidents. The author of this book has asked me to record some of the more interesting of them.

My first occasion to leave the Column was in the early part of 1915, when, amongst others, my lorry was for a time "on detachment" and we left Aire for ——, from which latter railhead we rationed the batteries whilst in action. Leaving ——, we early sighted hostile aircraft, flying fairly low, passing over the lorries. We quite expected some bombs to be dropped, but as nothing of the kind occurred, the machines may only have been out on a reconnaissance flight. On this particular day, having returned to our own lines, our load being dumped, we had not been there many minutes when I observed an aeroplane bearing the British mark, a red bull's-eye on a target of blue and white circles, which distinguishes our aeroplanes from those of the enemy, the latter being marked with the famil-

iar "Iron Cross." The signs are, of course, readily distinguishable from the ground, being painted on the underside of the planes. Much to my surprise, on the aeroplane coming over us, there was a loud report in the field alongside where I was standing, followed by four others in rapid succession. After the disguised hostile machine, as it proved to be, had disappeared into the blue, we made for the field and found deep holes, measuring some five or six feet in diameter, in the soft ground. One bomb exploded close beside a cottage, but fortunately no one was near at the time, so no casualties occurred. At the Gendarmerie, where I was billeted, a note, dropped from one of the aeroplanes evidently, was picked up, bearing the message, "A present from Uncle: many happy returns." This was on April 1st, but as the only victim of the "raid" was an old hen, the "fool" can scarcely be described as having been a success. One bomb certainly succeeded in claiming the back premises of an estaminet, but this was the full extent of its day's work. We dug up a "dud" bomb in a newly ploughed field, which was at once taken apart and "flogged," as we term it, for a few francs by the finder. Its propeller now forms part of a lady's hat-pin.

Our journeys were now to ——, by no means a healthy spot, but there was too much interest attached to the job for time to think of the dangers lurking around.

We watched the church being shelled—twenty-seven shells in all were sent over by the Huns; but they did not get the tower, which, was, no doubt, their objective. The deserted village afforded considerable interest—the village pump standing over at an angle of 45 degrees, the unroofed houses and roads ploughed up with shell holes. The various notices on the doors, to be seen in every shell-shattered village, such as "Men must not linger here," "Out of bounds," etc., were hardly needed, for no one desired to linger any longer than curiosity prompted him. As I returned to my lorry, one of the R.H.A. batteries was just starting to make itself heard. Although at this time the guns were only 13-pounders, they spoke volumes, and to be a short distance away in line with the firing gun was as much as one wanted. On one occasion, when we went in advance of the gun-pits to dump the rations, a salvo was fired just as we approached the battery; a terrific flash came through the hedge, a matter of thirty yards away. We scarcely needed the order given by the battery sergeant to "halt."

Constantly we met parties of weary, wounded Tommies, walking cases, making their way to the —— Field Dressing Station, smoking and always cheery—no doubt thankful to get off so lightly: one had an arm in a sling, while he wielded a mouth-organ with the other. Those passing in the opposite direction on their way up to the trenches were a contrast. The only semblance of cheerfulness was a slight wink given from a very sober countenance. Their jaws set, there was no "Tipperary" here. The contemplation of what is to come precedes the indifference

in the heat of battle, when the time arrives to go over the parapet and excitement is at its highest pitch.

I had many talks with fellows just out of the trenches, mud-clobbered and wet. One I recollect who had lost his mate beside him, taken by a stray bullet penetrating his forehead, his brains falling in his lap; the mud-plastered and blood-stained tunic, turned back for my inspection, showing the truth of the boy's statement. Such incidents, alas! are an everyday occurrence. Neuve Chapelle claimed an army almost in itself. One had only to see at railhead lorry loads of rifles twisted beyond recognition almost, with bullet holes through the stocks, in some cases stockless; blood-smeared and broken bayonets, which had done their work and whose period of usefulness had for the time being passed—all on their way to the Base, there to be sorted out, and, where possible, overhauled for further service; kits, which were hardly to be recognized as such, German knapsacks and accoutrements all mixed up in utter confusion with those of our men.

German prisoners we saw daily brought in. Yellow-faced as Chinese, due to lyddite or high explosive shells and gas fumes, which had changed the colour of everything. Big men, many of them, of fine physique; others spectacled, or puny little baby-faced boys, all bearing the same dazed expression of men who have been through "Hell's gates." This phrase I borrow from one who was in the first gas attack at Ypres. He was resting on account of broken nerve when I met him, having carried out no less than eighteen of his comrades, some never to recover, who had lain down oblivious of the gas being heavier than air, the communication trenches being choked with men who had dropped from the suffocating fumes. How many cases of "unconspicuous" and unnoticed gallantry occur almost hourly!

On April 24, 1915, we left this part of the line with many regrets. The forest of Nieppe is one of the most beautiful that I have ever seen; thickly timbered and with innumerable ponds and lakes in its interior was an easy matter to lose one's way, unless one kept to the paths. The length and breadth of the forest are twenty-six and five kilometres respectively. My temporary home was built by bending and crossing branches of nut-trees, the young foliage forming a roof or covering. Some fellows erected most elaborate bivouacs, approached by a pergola of nut-trees. Beside a railway level crossing near by was the grave of a Private, who was shot dead by a French sentry, through failing to reply to his challenge. This was in the days when parties of Uhlans were still in the locality. Nightingales sang at night overhead and frogs croaked on the ground as an accompaniment, the concert being at times interrupted by the bombardment of the guns, which resounded through the forest. The earth shook and the din reminded one of a number of traction engines travelling over sets, only louder; the sky was lit up

by the gun flashes, intermingled with star shells. The batteries around were all in action from Fleurbaix to south of Béthune. This necessitated our moving about a great deal. On one occasion we left —— at 2.45 a.m. Taking the road to Béthune, which town was then under shell fire—several French soldiers and civilians were killed there during this particular night—from there we went on through Hinges, passing across former German trenches and over the La Bassée Canal. There were many graves of soldiers dotted about in the fields; one we passed by the roadside had received special attention, having been planted with rose-trees and evergreens.

After receiving directions from the battery quartermaster-sergeant, we made our way up the road to a moat farm, the road being screened by a wood, the interior of which was a mass of earthworks and fortifications. Desperate hand-to-hand fighting had taken place here; now, all was peaceful and quiet. Hundreds of crosses were dotted about the fringe of the wood, and the bodies of some of those who had fallen during the night before were being placed in their last resting-places. The road was lined on either side with tall trees, now clothed in young foliage, silhouetted against rugged timber which would never see the green on it again. A nightingale, oblivious of what was going on underneath, was singing as I walked down the road, in close proximity to the line. Having a few minutes to spare, I took a turning to my left, when a voice from behind a hedge demanded, "Where are you going?" "Just having a look round," I answered. "Well, I should come down if I was you." The voice came from the communication trench, and I about-turned, following the further advice of the man who had just come out.

The battery wagon lines were shelled that night and the camp had to be shifted, which was scarcely to be wondered at, for the field in which it was pitched, whilst we were dumping the rations in it earlier in the day, was under shell fire; several, screaming over us, had burst within a matter of a few yards from our dumping-ground. The battery being on the move, we took up a fresh position, this time at a little place near Béthune. I had a bed for the first time for many months, but was unable to sleep, owing, I suppose, to the sudden change from the hard floor-boards of the lorry to the softness of a box-spring mattress. Early the following morning shells were bursting in the town, and the *strafe* continued for about half an hour. Once again it was the unhappy inhabitants who suffered. Two women and a child were killed.

Our next delivery of rations was well within range of the German gunners, who had pretty well knocked the place to pieces; there were shell craters all around. We halted at a farmhouse for the night, and the following morning a shell carried away the roof of our improvised cook-house. Nobody, however, was injured. It is really amazing what good luck follows some of our men; they seem to have charmed lives. Three of the gunners while at —— were sitting in a garden,

where the guns had been placed; a few yards divided them. They were chatting, seated on ration boxes, and a little peasant girl was amusing herself standing behind them, tickling the ear of one of the gunners with a straw. A shell burst directly in front of one of the guns. Two of the gunners were killed outright, the little girl was very severely injured, and the third gunner was simply knocked over by the force of the explosion, but absolutely untouched. The same man, on another occasion, was with the Commanding Officer of the battery, looking for suitable positions for guns, when a shell burst quite near them. Seeing an old French dug-out, the Major dived in and the gunner did so simultaneously. The result was a jamb, neither being able to get right in. The Major asked him where the devil he was going to. "Same place as you, sir," was his quiet retort. On another occasion an R.H.A. gun was knocked out by a direct hit. Parts of one of its wheels were found almost a hundred yards away from the gun, and pieces of it were scattered everywhere, yet an officer who was sleeping on the ground only ten yards from the gun was untouched. Towards the end of August 1915 the rumour "Batteries on the move again" came through, generally from the battery cook-house, where all matters, military and otherwise, are discussed. The 1st of September found us on the road again, this time to Corbie, near to which town the batteries had taken up their position on the Somme. To reach the wagon lines, where rations were dumped, it was necessary to travel along a road under enemy observation, along the Somme Valley, a beautiful part of the country. At that time we saw the French troops leaving this part of the line to make room for our men. The Saxon regiments were in the trenches just across the valley, their line being visible on the side of a hill. A distance of three hundred yards has to be maintained between each lorry on such roads, it being possible to only use this road after dark; no lamps were allowed on the lorries. This, of course, made driving exceedingly difficult, especially on one occasion when it happened to be a particularly dark night and a lot of horse transport was on the road. One could only judge the centre of it by the camber and listen for the jangle of chains, the only means of knowing when we near the horse wagons. That night a thunderstorm raged nearly the whole of the way to the batteries, the flashes lighting up the road at intervals and making matters even worse. One might as well have driven blindfolded as be dazzled by the lightning and star-shells. The risk of delivering rations at night being so great, the order was given to deliver in the early morning, trusting that the mist would hide the lorries as they travelled over the roads under observation. Very often such roads run between high banks on either side, and if one clambers up to the top (which, of course, must be done very stealthily, otherwise there is always liability to draw fire), a perfect view of the trenches may be obtained.

I took a walk with my glasses one day and found a more or less concealed

position from which I could see both lines clearly, and traces of the German attempts to shell the road below, which were evident everywhere. Here it seemed was a veritable dumping-ground for their shells, which had been, however, used to no account. Many had fallen in the marshes—no less than thirty fell in an hour, prior to our arrival, nearly all in marshland within a small radius.

Our journeys were not without excitement; one, particularly, I shall not easily forget. We were first forced to make a halt outside Bray, on account of the very heavy shelling which was in progress at the time. During the halt we filled in the time by going round a very fine garden. The inhabitants having left, we regaled ourselves with some luscious pears which lay ripe on the ground, when suddenly a shell burst within forty yards of the roadside. We picked up a large piece, weighing seven or eight pounds at least. A few minutes later the order was given to continue our journey. This we did, although the shelling was still going on. It is an uncanny feeling, driving a motor-lorry along roads under observation or under shell fire.

Whilst at Corbie I paid a visit to a large woollen thread manufactory, which was still being worked, almost entirely by women—a staff of forty against four hundred men prior to the war. I don't think I ever saw such beautiful gardens as those which lay at the back of the château belonging to the factory proprietor. Carpet-bedding and elaborate borders, most beautifully kept, led down to a natural and intensely cultivated garden—lakes fed by the Somme, connected up by rustic bridges; weeping willows fringing the banks, and waterlilies floating on the water by hundreds. Such a contrast to the country only a few miles beyond, made ugly and desolate by war.

The lakes were full of fish, and many a good dinner I made off a pike boiled in white wine. The French bourgeois of the Somme district knows how to cook fish as I have never before tasted it.

Where I was billeted the worthy *grand'-mère* cooked my rations for me and supplemented them with delicacies which I had not tasted since I left England. Omelettes au rhum, confiture of any variety I cared for, was always made ready. Poulet en casserole frequently awaited me on my return at midday. So I lived royally, and it was a sad day when I had to leave such very charming friends.

## *Chapter XI*
## *ALONG THE SOMME VALLEY*

The move from Aire at the beginning of August 1915 was for the purpose of taking up a position to the rear of the most southern portion of the line that the British Armies then held, and for the time being the Division came under the orders of the 3rd Army. To reach this position entailed a move to some considerable distance for the cavalry; it was a three days' march, and necessitated the loading of their rations from two intermediate railheads *en route* and "rationing" at different points on the line of march. Eventually, we took up our quarters at the new railhead, on the River Somme, situated between Abbeville and Amiens, and here we found ourselves amongst entirely new surroundings—the beautiful scenery of the Somme Valley.

Those large lakes or tracts of water which seemed to stretch for miles gave splendid and, I should think, almost unsurpassed opportunities for swimming, fishing, and boating, which we were not slow in taking advantage of. The O.C. Workshops, who was, of course, equal to dealing with any opportunity for ingenuity that might arise, immediately procured some timber, and with the aid of his workshops staff, after working hours, produced in an incredibly short space of time the most ideal and comfortable 24-foot Thames punt imaginable—not to mention its accompanying boat-hook, pair of paddles, and plush cushions, all of which emanated from the same source. The punt was the envy of the entire Division, not to mention the French inhabitants for miles around; from it we bathed and fished daily throughout those summer months.

During August and September the cavalry were again given some spells of trench fighting, for which they gained the thanks and appreciation of the General Officer Commanding the 3rd Army. These spells in the trenches gave the Supply Column some very long runs, with which were mingled a certain amount of excitement, for the road was not infrequently under shell fire.

Taking up convoys of motor lorries with rations to the R.H.A. batteries was also a job not entirely devoid of interest and excitement at this period. The batteries were in action at various points of the line due east of Amiens, around which towns the lorries with rations had to pass to reach them. Amiens is a picturesque and interesting town. It has one of the most beautiful cathedrals in France, and its inhabitants being naturally anxious that it shall not share the same fate as Rheims, have taken the precaution of barricading it with piles of sandbags, which if the worst came to the worst would at any rate, to a certain extent, save the adornment of its exterior—porches and the like—from utter destruction.

On these occasions we used to off-load the rations at the wagon line of the battery, to reach which it was necessary to travel along roads that were anything but healthy. One road which we frequently used was particularly unhealthy, and was seldom safe, except after dark, for transport of any kind. This was the long open road leading from the village of Bray-sur-Somme towards Suzanne.

The German gunners had registered its range accurately, and no transport was allowed along it in daylight without a special pass or permit from the Divisional Headquarters. We frequently took convoys along it by day, however, without any mishap of any kind, always taking the precaution, of course, to keep the lorries a good two or three hundred yards apart from one another. Taking these precautions, the possibility of a shell putting the whole convoy or any part of it out of action is reduced to a minimum.

Bray was a particularly interesting place—now, alas! much shattered through heavy shelling. The main road running through it is a steep hill, from the top of which, just before entering the village, was to be obtained a most beautiful landscape view, in which was included the lines of British and German trenches, which could be distinctly seen from this point on a clear day with the naked eye. At this time our —— Army had just taken over from the French an additional bit of the line north of the Somme and east of Albert, which stretched approximately from Hebuterne in the north to Carnoy in the south, and at these points our trenches linked up with those of the French. So, passing through the villages in this district, it was not uncommon to find khaki-clad British Tommies in one village and blue-clad French *poilus* in the next, each out of the trenches for a few days' rest in billets. A small village full of French troops, dressed in their looped-up-at-the-knee greatcoats of that wonderful pale blue which is the colour of the service uniform of the French Army, and with their blue anti-shrapnel steel helmets—the mass of colour vying with the blue of a summer sky—presents a wonderful picture. The colour of their uniform is, in fact, officially designated *le bleu d'horizon*, and is, I believe, particularly indistinguishable at a distance. If there was a shortage of anti-shrapnel helmets in the British Army in 1915, there was certainly none in the French. Every soldier seemed to have been provided with one, even down to the old Territorials employed in repairing the roads in the lines of communication; and the gendarme fifty miles behind the line would wear one, presumably for the same reason that a miller wears a white hat. The British variety, which is of a pale sea-green colour, round in shape and with a flat brim, and frequently has a home-made cover of drab sackcloth, is certainly not so beautiful either in shape or colour as the oval French casque, and reminds one rather of the head-dress of a Korean. It is heavier, and, I believe, has proved itself more effective in actual practice, than the French type, as a protection against shrapnel bullets.

This was our first view of French troops *en masse*. First-line regiments of the French Army are composed of men of fine physique and sound discipline. It would be ridiculous to discuss their qualities as fighting men: one has only to think of Verdun. Their equipment is extremely heavy; they never seem to march in step; they attack with extraordinary "dash," and they "get there" every

time. Their artillery, so largely composed of the famous *soixante-quinze* guns, is incomparable. I remember at Lillers, in 1914, seeing batteries of these 75's on the move and passing through the town one after the other continuously for seven hours.

There is one thing which differentiates Monsieur le Poilu from Mr. Thomas Atkins in the matter of smartness, and that is that the former will not shave himself regularly. Tommy, on the other hand, no matter under what difficulties he is existing, is always well groomed and has a clean chin.

I have already referred to Bray. Amongst the little towns of interest on this part of the front is Albert. It is possessed of a large Byzantine church, which is reported to have taken fourteen years of labour to build and fourteen minutes of shell fire from the Hun gunners to destroy. Surmounting the church tower is a large gilded statue of the Virgin, holding in her arms the Holy Child. Glittering in the sunshine, it must have been a good target, and for some time has hung suspended in mid air, almost at right angles to its original position, having been displaced by shells. It bends over the almost deserted streets of the little town, which has suffered so sorely at the hands of the enemy, in an attitude of benediction, and presents a picture which cannot but impress one. The superstition amongst the inhabitants is that the day on which the statue falls to the ground from its present position is the day that the war will end.

This is perhaps the place to add a few words on German "Kultur," of which so much has been heard and written, and the nature of which, after investigation and the careful sifting of evidence, has been proved up to the hilt by competent committees. I have myself seen what remains of the large church at the village of Doulieu, near Estaires. Doulieu was formerly in German occupation; its church suffered no damage from shelling, but had been destroyed by being used as a crematorium, for the Germans placed in it many of their dead, and, having saturated it with petrol or paraffin, set it alight. Its outer walls, blackened by fire, now only remain. A friend of mine on one occasion got into conversation with a German officer prisoner, who spoke excellent English, having resided for some years in London. My friend, discussing the war with him, remarked: "Your army has played a pretty dirty game in Belgium." The Hun replied, "It would certainly appear so, unless you have heard our side of the story. It must be obviously a difficult matter for an invading army to operate in a hostile country, and in one which has been so wickedly wronged at that, and has a just grievance. Stern disciplinary action in regard to civilians must be essential, and this has led to calculated and systematic brutality."

It will be within the recollection of many that Christmas Day 1914, on certain parts of the line, notably where the trenches opposite ours were occupied by Saxons, was observed as a day of peace and a temporary armistice was unof-

ficially agreed on. Soldiers of the opposing armies climbed over the parapet, and it was reported, though I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement, played a football match in "no man's land" at one point on the line. I do know that one regiment of London Territorials exchanged presents with "brother Boche," a jar of ration rum being thrown over to the Saxons, who returned the compliment by a roll of barbed wire, of which, an accompanying message said, they had reason to believe our fellows were short at the time. Since then, however, times have changed, and subsequent events have put a stop to anything of this kind. In fact, strict orders on the subject were issued just before Christmas Day 1915.

Towards the end of September our railhead was "moved up," this time to Doullens. The Indian cavalry were in "close billets" and "standing to" under an hour's notice to move. During the days and nights immediately preceding the attack on Loos, the bombardment by our guns of every calibre was terrific and incessant; it seemed to never stop, day or night, the continuous deep reverberating boom. The air trembled, window panes thirty miles behind the line rattled in their frames, and at night the sky was lit up by the flickering of the gun flashes. One wondered how men could live in such a hell, for as such its effects can only be adequately described. Such a bombardment is the essential prelude to an attack by infantry, and the transport of the immense amount of ammunition that is necessary to keep the guns fed is a task which devolves on the Army Service Corps.

The system adopted for transporting and issuing ammunition to the guns is to all intents and purposes a parallel to that for transporting and issuing rations to the troops, which I have described in a previous chapter. The "Ammunition Parks" of motor-lorries are to the guns what "Supply Columns" are to the personnel. The lorries comprising an ammunition park are loaded up from the ammunition train at railhead, and off-loaded to the limbered horse wagons of the Ammunition Column, the function of which corresponds to that of the horse train in the Supply scheme.

But to return to Doullens. It is a small town, boasting of nothing of great interest, but was at one time in German occupation; only, however, for a matter of days. The inhabitants will tell you that the Germans, contrary to custom, did not treat them badly during their stay; they paid for their billets and everything else they had, making no civilians prisoners and exacting no money from the population. Doubtless, however, they would have done so had their departure not been of necessity a hurried one.

Shortly after the attack on Loos had been made, the cavalry were again sent back to their former billeting area, no opportunity for cavalry fighting having presented itself. It was sad indeed to see these fine troops, superbly mounted and in perfect fighting trim, marching back from the front, useless for the time

being in the general scheme of things.

Any descriptive account of the Indian Cavalry would be incomplete without mention of its veteran Rajput warrior, Lieut.-General Sir Pertab Singh. He is in a sense the *raison d'être* of the Indian Cavalry. Over seventy, short, but as alert and erect as a man half his age, he has literally lived in the saddle, and is a born fighting man. "'One charge, one bullet' sums up his philosophy, and it is not a bad one to live up to in these times," remarked a writer in *Blackwood's* recently.

Sir Pertab, before leaving India to come to France with the Indian Cavalry, made over his principality to his descendants, in the belief that he would never return to his native country. He is frequently to be seen—his breast covered with the ribands of many decorations and medals—amongst his regiment, the Jodhpur Lancers, and his wish is to lead them into action, charge and "pig-stick the German brutes," as I believe he once expressed it. Writing of him in 1897, Winston Churchill, in *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, remarks: "The spectacle of this splendid Indian Prince, whose magnificent uniform in the Jubilee procession had attracted the attention of all beholders, now clothed in business-like khaki and on service at the head of his regiment, aroused the most pleasing reflections."

So history repeats itself twenty years later!

## *Chapter XII*
## *BETWEEN THE ANCRE AND THE SOMME*

In previous chapters I have referred to the intense bombardment which preceded the attacks on Neuve Chapelle and Loos during 1915. Looking back they seem as nothing compared with what our artillery has been able, thanks to the munition workers at home, to treat the Huns to in August, 1916, a bombardment audible very far back from the scenes of action. At, say, nine o'clock one night the guns will suddenly start: one man turns to another and remarks, "There must be a *strafe* on to-night." The guns continue without cessation, till perhaps just as daylight is stealing across the sky they stop for a time abruptly. This may signify that at this very moment the infantry are over the top, or parapets, of the trenches at the particular point where the attack is being made. More names for the Roll of Honour, for "Somewhere in the universe, God's awful dawn is red."

Newspaper correspondents at the front have recently, in a sense, come into

their own: they have been granted more latitude in writing and allowed to see something of the show. It is good that this should be so, both from the point of view of the fighting-men themselves and also that of the people at home. Much has, therefore, appeared in the Press and elsewhere on the subject of the advance north and south of the Somme, and for this reason there remains little left unwritten, so far as the actual fighting and the scenes of its surroundings arc concerned.

On many occasions, in the course of duty, I have had the opportunity of going over a good deal of the ground captured from the enemy in the great Allied push which started on July 1, 1916. It almost baffles description. Without actually seeing the results, it is difficult to realize the pulverizing effect of continued and heavy artillery bombardment.

In this sector, such villages as Contalmaison, Fricourt, and Pozières, to mention only three, have literally ceased to exist; the fact that there have ever been villages in these particular spots is indicated only by their names on the map and heaps of debris and rubbish. They are not like such places as Ypres or Arras, where still here and there remain standing a few forlorn-looking bits of outer walls and the skeletons of destroyed houses. To give one instance, the curé of a village in the Somme district, after it had been taken from the Germans, sought leave from the British authorities to be conducted to it in order to see if it were possible for him to recover any of the possessions, or relics, of his church. The privilege was duly afforded him, and thither he was escorted. Unfortunately, however, he was quite unable to find either the church, his own house, or even his way about "the village"; but then, as the officer remarked who told me this story, all these things were scarcely to be wondered at, for Monsieur le Curé had only spent forty years of his life there! I give this story to indicate what is the state of the land over which this heavy artillery preparation has been necessary in order to dislodge the Hun and destroy his ramifications.

The impression of the whole scene of the captured ground (July 1916)—or, at least, that part of it which I have seen—remaining in my mind is an undulating plateau extending as far as the eye can see. In more peaceful times it was perhaps arable land. Now it is arid and dead: nothing grows there, not a blade of grass; even the trees of such woods as the Bois de Mametz do not boast of a green leaf—they are splintered and torn down by shells. Those that still stand are withered and brown, the results of continual high explosive and gas shells. It reminds you of nothing so much as land which is suffering from the effects of very severe volcanic eruption, for it is everywhere pitted with craters and shell holes of all sizes and depths. On this plateau are quantities of transport wagons, limbers, and heavy draft horses, their bay coats shimmering in the sun; these are the wagon lines of the many artillery batteries that are operating in the sector. As you proceed along the road, which runs through it, you will note that it crosses

more than one line of former trenches which have been wrested from the enemy at great cost.

At the point of the road-crossing they have been filled in. Almost all along the road are well-constructed old German dug-outs, many of them spacious, dug a considerable depth into the bank on the side of the road and surrounded by layers of sand-bags. They must have taken considerable time and labour to construct, many of them being a series of cellars, connected by passages, at least fifteen or twenty feet deep. If you care to climb down into them, frequently you will come upon sights which are, to say the least, gruesome. There is a cold, clammy feeling in the air in some of these dugouts; they reek of death. Some have been luxuriously fitted up, walls plastered and papered; traces of electric wiring and lamp fittings and stolen French furniture and beds are still visible. I have before me a scrap of torn and blood-stained paper, part of a leaf from a Field Message Book. On it is written the following, which it is just possible to decipher. It was picked up in a dug-out in the old British line, north of the Somme, over which British troops have advanced:

... high state of efficiency. An important section of these operations has been entrusted to this battalion, and the Commanding Officer feels sure that every one belonging to it will rise to the occasion and "do his bit" for the regiment and his country. A man, no matter what his position, who sits down or otherwise idles when he ought to be working, is failing both one and the other.

No doubt the remains of an order issued by the C.O. of a battalion in a tight corner, with perhaps a difficult job ahead to accomplish and an important part to play in the "Big Push." There is no signature or clue which would enable the writer of this inspiring human document or the regiment referred to in it to be identified. Perhaps his men obeyed his order and with him have earned their discharge and joined the great majority. To see the captured ground and its network of trenches and dug-outs is to realize what a tremendous achievement it has been on the part of British troops to dig the Huns out like rats from their strongholds and drive them back, and what artillery preparation must have been necessary to break down their defences. In passing, there are also the other rats, and the shelter afforded by dug-outs is shared by men and rats alike. It is scarcely necessary to add that the latter are a veritable plague, not only in the trenches themselves, but behind them as well. There is a story—I cannot vouch for its truth, though it certainly has a Bairnsfather touch about it—of an officer commanding a battalion who received orders from his Brigade Headquarters to "render a return" to that

office by such and such a date, stating the number of rats in the trenches occupied by the unit under his command. The nature of his alleged reply I have not, however, heard. It is better, no doubt, left to the imagination. The Army lives on "returns." Every unit in the field, no matter under what conditions it is living, has to "render returns" on at least a dozen different things each week. In that most priceless little book of wit, which contains so much that is in reality true, *The Young Officer's Guide to Knowledge*, we find that "a return" is a document sent to a superior authority and comprises lists of persons or things in your charge. This document, quite contrary to what you might suppose from its title, never returns to you, unless the person to whom you have sent it thinks it requires attention. It is probably called "a return" for this very reason, as it is the most unlikely name for it, and so cultivates a taste for the eccentric in the Service. Returns are always being "called for" by somebody. You must be prepared to "render" these "returns" at all times at a moment's notice, e.g. "the average number of men who have had sore feet between January 1st and April 1st."

But to return to the scenery between the Ancre and the Somme.

Cunningly hidden away at different points, the guns will make their presence constantly known to you. Here a battery of ugly-looking howitzers is loosing off salvos into the Hun trenches, and a little further along, perhaps, a 6-inch gun by the roadside will every now and then belch forth a sheet of flame, as with deafening row it throws a projectile, weighing about 100 pounds, screeching through the air, which explodes perhaps five or ten miles behind the German lines. Guns of every size, from the 13-pounders of Royal Horse Artillery batteries to 12- and 15-inch Naval guns, can be seen and heard pounding away at the enemy when a big *strafe* is in progress. No one appears to pay any attention to these deafening distractions. Adaptability to circumstances and surroundings is a cardinal principle of war.

It is amongst such scenes as these that the Army Service Corps motor-lorries roll up as usual with their loads of rations for the personnel and horses of the guns. A little way behind a battery, it will be noted, is a bivouac. It is the improvised mess of the Gunner officers, and here you may meet these priceless desperadoes discussing "direct hits" that have been recorded to their guns by the observation officer ahead, narrow escapes and recent adventures amongst "Grannies," "Crumps," "Whiz-bangs" and "Heavies," whilst they consume delicacies from Fortnum and Mason with the utmost sang-froid and complacency, merely remarking that they hope the Huns won't *strafe* them to-night! They are totally unconcerned with the dangers that are constantly lurking around; thus does familiarity breed contempt of even Death itself.

Now and again one notices roadside groups of the graves of German soldiers, all of uniform size and design. They almost invariably consist of a wooden

cross about 3 feet high, surmounted by a little oval-shaped roof or shelter, to protect them from the weather—to such lengths in thoroughness do the Huns go and so far do they see ahead! Painted a grass-green colour, they are strangely out of keeping with the present hue of the soil and of vegetable life, so conspicuous by its absence. On each is painted in white characters the name and regiment of the man whose memory it perpetuates. This follows some such inscription as "Hier ruht in Gott" or "Unserem gutem Kameraden dem," etc. Not far from them are groups of British graves. The inscriptions on two plain wooden crosses that I noticed have particularly lingered in my mind: "Here lies a British soldier. Name unknown. Devon Regiment. He died fighting." The second, the epitaph of a horse: "To the memory of my dumb pal, Queenie. Killed in action, July 6th, 1916," gives an insight to the character of the British soldier and his love for the animals that work with him.

In the sky is an irregular line of watchful captive observation balloons for observing officers. In the language of the front they are known as "sausages," from their similarity in shape to that domestic commodity. Away in the distance is another line of stationary balloons of almost similar shape, for the Huns, also, are not unobservant. The barbed-wire cage, a temporary home for recently made prisoners, is always an object of interest; and everywhere one notices salvage parties clearing up and collecting together the quantities of waste metal, spent ammunition, accoutrements, etc., which litter the ground. Piled up at various points are stacks of empty shell cases, which by their size indicate the enormous quantity of ammunition that is being used by our guns in their work of pulverizing the German trenches and fortifications. Every one is busy—the newly won ground is being cleared, positions are being consolidated, roads are being made up, telegraph poles and wires erected, standard-gauge railway lines are being laid down. Whether at the Base or the trenches, war is carried on methodically and with the regular routine of a factory. It would appear to have become an institution. The whole war zone is linked up with a telephone system which compares favourably with that of London.

Along the road one may encounter parties of prisoners being marched back from the line, and occasionally little groups of wounded being helped towards the ambulances. So much for the ground taken from the Huns in the Great Push of August 1916.

To turn for a moment to another part of the line. From the gaunt and shell-shattered tower, which stands a landmark for miles around, on the summit of Mont St. Eloi I have looked across "the Labyrinth," as it is called, and watched the shells from our batteries beneath explode in the German trenches, or amongst their wire between our trenches and theirs, known as "No Man's Land." It is an amazing and uncanny sight. Not a single sign of life, not a single human being,

is to be seen; only the results of human and mechanical activity are visible. The guns below loose off with terrific noise, then in the distance there is a dull and heavy thud, as a huge solid-looking mass of black smoke suddenly rises up in a cloud from the ground and remains a few moments before gradually dispersing. To the right can be discerned the battered towers of Arras, and between this point and the trenches is the little village of Maroeuil, which nestles hidden away in a hollow and has been scarcely affected by enemy fire. There, crimson ramblers still blossom and roses flourish in the gardens, now almost choked with weeds, of its deserted cottages.

Sights like the view from the top of Mont St. Eloi bring home to one the fact that modern methods of warfare are accompanied by few scenic effects or dramatic spectacles. War, like its results, is invariably ugly. Engineers and chemists have made it so by their ghastly appliances and materials, which have put the open fighting of former days on horseback out of the question. Cavalry charges, as portrayed by Lady Butler, are indeed a thing of the past. A few machine guns, suitably concealed, could hold up squadrons of advancing cavalry. The only human element left is the infantry charge, with fixed bayonets. To be killed by the explosion of a shell or asphyxiated by gas, miles behind the line, cannot be described as a heroic death—it is not even fair on the individual who so meets his end. He is not in a position to combat his invisible enemy; sometimes he has not even a sporting chance of escape from an attack which he is powerless to combat or avert. Is it, then, to be wondered at that men living under such conditions, namely, in places which are periodically or continuously strafed, become fatalists? They cease to worry, take everything that comes as a matter of course, never knowing when their turn may come.

Not infrequently we have taken convoys by night to within a matter of a few hundred yards of the line. The absence of lamps and travelling along bad and often narrow roads make slow speed imperative and the utmost care in driving essential. The only light available is provided by the moon and the many star-shells over the trenches, which seem to light up the whole horizon, and remind one of so many shooting stars, or a pyrotechnic display at the Crystal Palace seen from a distance.

Convoying along roads which are in view and under observation of the enemy, even by night, is as exciting as it is a fascinating game, for even if the convoy is, by the absence of headlights, to all intents and purposes made invisible, the enemy is able to assume from their geographical positions what roads are of strategical importance and being made use of for transport purposes to the trenches. He may at any time train a gun on those particular roads, on the off-chance of bagging a convoy, or at any rate of making the road in question so dangerous as to necessitate it being put out of bounds for transport, thus making

the approaches to the line more difficult and fewer in number.

Was it not Field-Marshal Sir John French who, some years ago, while speaking of "Night Operations," remarked that "the darker the night, the more inclement the weather, the better the exercise"? "Strong words of comfort these," says *The Young Officer's Guide to Knowledge.*

## *Chapter XIII*
## *FROM ARRAS TO ALBERT*

In the preceding chapters I have endeavoured to narrate a selection from many and various episodes, disconnected, perhaps, due to the omission of details of long periods of enforced inactivity or hum-drum daily routine, during times spent miles behind the line, rationing the cavalry in such places as the neighbourhood between Abbeville and Le Tréport on the seacoast. In this area our second Christmas was spent, and the cavalry were billeted in winter quarters far from the scenes of action, waiting, always waiting, for their chance. Then we moved up again and settled down to our usual duties, seizing the opportunity of putting our house in order, and for the time being carrying out the work with the use of one echelon of motor-lorries only. The other echelon was refitted, thoroughly overhauled in the workshops, and all the lorries were given a coat of fresh paint, so that by the beginning of April they looked brand spanking new, in keeping with their springtime surroundings. During the spring and early summer nothing of importance occurred. The cavalry were continually being shifted from one billeting area to another, but always within the same neighbourhood, not so much for strategical reasons as for the purpose of making room for new Divisions of infantry from home and on their way up to the line. Cavalry, it will be readily understood, has, under existing circumstances, had to take quite a back seat on the Western front. As usual, the R.H.A. batteries attached to the Division were almost continually in action, and the cavalry regiments supplied a constant stream of "digging parties," not only for reserve trench digging, but chiefly for assisting in mining operations from the front line trenches, such operations not being carried out without casualties.

The job of rationing the personnel so engaged and of moving them from their billets to the trenches and back, or from one part of the line to another, as

occasion required, devolved, of course, on the motor lorries and entailed a fair amount of work, including a good number of all-night jobs on dangerous roads. During this time the Column was parked near Arras, on the main roads leading thither. Dusty is not the word for one of these on an August day, but it is straight, broad, and of good surface, wide enough in many parts for three lines of traffic.

So time went on, and during July and August 1916 we surveyed "the big push" from a little village not far from Arras, marking in daily on the large-scale map which hung on the wall, with red pencil, the villages captured from day to day, and the advance of the British and French line on the Somme. The nearer one is to the front, the less one knows of the news. The men in the front line trenches know nothing, except what has happened in their immediate vicinity, and even then they are not able to form an opinion of its relative importance, in comparison with what has happened elsewhere, of which they know nothing. Further back there are two sources of information: one is "rumours," on which some people thrive. There are fresh rumours every day, and they invariably contradict one another. The other never-failing source of news is the Paris Continental edition of the *Daily Mail*, which reaches the uttermost parts of the front by teatime daily and is well worth the 15 centimes usually exacted for it, and universally looked forward to daily.

All day long and often all through the night there was a hum of aeroplanes in the sky; fleets of them seemed to be always rising from the flying-ground, a neighbouring village, departing on bombing raids and reconnaissance flights. The Germans knew of this flying-ground, and occasionally one or two stray Taubes managed to reach Savy at a very great altitude and drop a few bombs, which usually landed in the cornfields—the invaders being invariably driven off by British machines and anti-aircraft guns. Doubtless they returned home to report the complete and utter destruction of the aerodrome! Nevertheless, the few and far between visits of the Hun planes caused a certain amount of interest and excitement during the course of an otherwise dull existence.

Wondering always how soon or if ever our Division would be called on to play a part in the advance, we received quite a shock when one day, towards the end of August, the entire —— Indian Cavalry Division was sent back to ——, only however, for a matter of a week. Here the Division put in some manoeuvres and field-days, and immediately after things began to get a move on at last. A little town, near which the week was passed, nestles comfortably in a hollow at the foot of steep hills, and possesses a large and beautiful cathedral, of Gothic architecture, with a very decorative west portal. Its interior is bold, and, unlike that of many such churches, has not been spoilt by the addition of tawdry decoration and gilt paint. From the top of its square tower can be seen a magnificent panorama of the surrounding country. Incidentally, it contains a life-sized beau-

tifully carved wooden crucifix, in which the detail is marvellous. It is said to be the most perfect example of its kind in the world. The story goes that an American offered to pave the church with gold if he were allowed to take it away. I do not know how true the story is, but, needless to say, his offer was not accepted.

The initial move towards the line —— for the Column was to ——, the first railhead from which the troops were rationed on the line of march. Being quite near Doullens, the country was very familiar to us. From there we moved to the environs of Amiens, a new railway recently laid by Royal Engineers being made use of for the supply train, whilst —— was railhead. Around here the country is flat and covered with cornfields; by this time the harvest was just gathered in, and on these fields the whole Division, including, of course, the Supply Column, bivouacked for the night. What a wonderful sight was the arrival of the cavalry that evening, miles of mounted men marching from all directions to the huge camp. Every one was optimistic; the air was full of rumours. At last, after all the weary months of waiting, the hour was soon to strike. Cavalry was at length to have a "show." French, British, and Indian Cavalry Divisions were "going through." On the 14th we packed up and were on the move again and bivouacked for the night on the roadside just short of ——, which was our railhead the following day. A sudden move is no light matter! More fortunate than other branches of the Service in the matter of carrying capacity, A.S.C. motor-lorries, when loaded up to their utmost capacity with rations and forage, do not offer as much accommodation for the carrying of kits and mess gear, though, as might at first sight appear. With matters properly organized, and after a little practice, it is quite possible to arrive at the resting-place for the night, and within an hour of doing so the men's cookhouse is set up and dishing out hot tea and rations—bivouacs and tents are in course of erection, the officers' mess tent is pitched, and dinner is being served. All is accomplished in an incredibly short space of time, even in pouring rain.

However, during these moves we were particularly lucky in this respect, for not only was there no rain, but we were favoured with a very bright full moon.

During the night of the 14th and the following day, cavalry was to be seen on the line of march across the country—massed cavalry marching towards a point of concentration. Towards evening we got orders to pack up at once, and later that night we arrived at Albert, pitching our tent by the side of the main Amiens-Albert road. All night long our guns just ahead were bombarding, whilst enemy artillery was by no means inactive. We could see their shells bursting over Albert and the other side of it, like huge balls of fire in the sky. In front and on each side Verrey lights, which linger about thirty seconds in the air before falling, lit up the whole horizon. There was, in fact, a "proper *strafe*" on that night.

The following day, the 16th, in company with some ten other Divisions,

we refilled the lorries from the supply train, which, however, did not arrive till the early hours of the following morning. I was continually reminded of my first visit to Albert, over a year before, and which I have referred to in a previous chapter. Then it was deserted, except by a very few French civilians, who, in spite of periodic shelling, still remained. They were still there in September 1916, and mostly made a living by selling such provisions to the troops as they were able to obtain—and goodness knows how the supplies ever reached them. Scarcely any troops were to be seen there at the time of my first visit. Now, more than a year later, it was a hive of activity, and the town was literally packed with troops and motor-lorries, a constant stream of traffic passing through its streets and along the main roads leading into it—loaded supply and ammunition lorries and wagons going up, ambulances full of wounded and empty lorries coming back. Cavalry horse lines and troops bivouacked in almost every field on its outskirts. A far greater number of vehicles passed any given point in an hour than would travel along Piccadilly during the same time at the height of the season. Motor-ambulances, the most frequent users of the roads, passed to and fro constantly in streams—towards the line, very fast; on their way back, very slowly, laden with wounded, British soldiers and German wounded prisoners alike receiving the same care and attention, each man with a label or ticket pinned on to his coat, giving particulars of his wounds and recent medical history. The more severe, lying-down cases were in ambulance cars; the slightly wounded in motor-char-à-bancs or empty lorries, all the latter with a Blighty smile, as it is called, if they were fortunate enough to have got off with a slight wound which would send them home. It is really marvellous how the wounded are bandaged up at the first-aid posts and field dressing stations. I have stood at a first-aid post and watched the R.A.M.C. officers at work. The post is usually just behind the trenches and indicated by a Red Cross flag, visible from a good distance. The wounded make for this flag, and one sees them, some walking, others crawling, coming from all directions towards it. It is a pathetic sight; even sadder is it to see those who do not survive, but eventually succumb to their wounds, perhaps on their way to the field dressing station.

Close to our camp a battery of big howitzers was loosing off in the direction of Thiepval at the rate of about two shells per minute. It was only one of many within a radius of a few miles, and all were equally active. Later in the day the Column was moved off the main road and parked in a narrow street. I have previously described the hanging statue that surmounts the church tower. It was still in the same position as it was a year previously, and to the minds of many the most striking and wonderful sight of the war.

On the afternoon of the 16th I went out with the convoy and delivered the supplies, as usual, to the cavalry, who were still bivouacking in fields around

Albert. Returning to Albert, we stopped for two or three minutes on the road to pick up a few men on the empty lorries. They were carrying their rifles and packs, and being bound for the same place as the convoy, naturally got a lift. As matters turned out, it was rather fortunate that the convoy did halt these few minutes; the slight delay probably saved us. We proceeded on our journey, and when about a kilometre short of Albert there was a terrific crash, and the town was momentarily hidden from view by a huge black cloud of smoke and dust. The Huns had put a "crump" right in the middle of the town. We pulled up, and as we did so, crash went another as it burst on an already demolished house by the roadside just ahead of us. The air was thick with smoke and dust. A good many troops that were on the road at the time dived headlong into the nearest dug-outs. Several more shells whistled over and exploded. Fortunately, there was a small turning at right angles to the road, almost exactly where we had stopped. Up it we were able to run the lorries one by one, and thus turn them round in the opposite direction. We then proceeded home by making a detour into Albert, leaving the road that was being shelled to its fate. Reaching our camp, we found that some twenty or more shells had dropped all around it, and more on other parts of the ruined town. Several landed within a few yards of the lorry lines, one beside the men's cookhouse. Fortunately, there were no casualties amongst our men or lorries. One unfortunately exploded in a bit of ground where vegetables were growing, and thus deprived us of cabbages: not one was to be seen the following morning. The shelling lasted from 7 to 8.30, and at that hour the episode ended. The Huns, by way of letting us know that they were still there, had a little evening "hate" regularly at this hour every day. We were indeed lucky to get the convoy turned round and safely away, for almost on the very spot where we had pulled up when the shelling started, some limbers were knocked out a few minutes after we had got away, three men and several horses being killed. After all, the Hun gunners could scarcely be blamed for sending over a few "five point nines"; doubtless they were quite friendly towards us personally, but the column of lorries was parked midway between a large ammunition dump and a battery of our own guns. No doubt it was these latter that they were searching for. During the whole of that night the British gunners returned the compliment, and all the batteries in the sector seemed to loose off continually. Sleep for us was almost out of the question, as the shells whistled over our bivouacs. "Whistle" is the word, I believe, usually employed in describing the sensation; as a matter of fact, the noise of a shell passing overhead is more comparable with the screech of an express train passing through a railway station.

Sunday, 17th, was a gloriously fine and sunny day, and during the morning a Taube circled around very high, but was quickly chased away by our 'planes. It was very seldom that an enemy 'plane was able to remain for long over our

lines or behind them. The number that our airmen brought down, and the hot reception which invariably awaited the invader, were the simple reasons. Fifteen hostile machines were destroyed on the 15th September, nine others being driven down in a damaged condition.

During this period, smoke helmets and gas goggles were invariably carried, and anti-shrapnel helmets always worn. The Native Cavalry soldiers looked strange in this form of head-dress, after seeing them in the familiar turban. All wore them except the Sikhs, whose caste does not allow them to completely cover their heads and their long hair. This is never cut, and is tied in a kind of bun on the top of their heads, and would, of course, make the wearing of the helmet a matter of impossibility in any case.

Our time for loading at railhead was usually about midnight, and at about this hour on the night of the 17th the weather changed, and the heavens began to pour forth rain and continued to do so throughout the night. We were not the only Division to be loading at the time, and the chaos of traffic in the pitch-black darkness and pouring rain can only be described as appalling. The amazing thing is that accidents and collisions between lorries are of such rare occurrence; their almost entire absence is due to the careful handling of the vehicles by the drivers. To back a heavy lorry up against a railway truck in the dark without damaging the tail-board or trying to knock the train over requires care and much practice. During the night a few shells came over; they fell in a field at the far side of the railhead yard, doing no damage. The change in the weather had evidently upset the Hun gunners. It had been very cloudy in the earlier part of the evening of the 17th, and they had even omitted the usual hour of "hate," except for a salvo of shrapnel shells, some half-dozen or so, which went over Albert and burst on a brow of a hill beyond. No doubt they were trying to *strafe* the guns, which from that direction had been firing at them continuously all the previous day and night. Loading being finished, we got back to our camp and between the blankets at 4 a.m. Fortunately, we had by now been issued from Ordnance with a few bell tents, which we pitched alongside the entrance to a dug-out. A subterranean gallery, some forty or fifty yards long, ran underneath, and opening out of it were several spacious dug-outs—some of the best I have seen; as good as many German ones, which is saying a good deal. The whole earthwork was dug deep into the chalky soil, its perpendicular walls wire netted; it was roofed with stout tree-trunks, and laid across these were sandbags. It was conveniently situated for us to beat a hasty retreat into when the shells became too frequent and fell sufficiently close to make us wonder how much nearer the next might come. This dug-out was behind a row of shell-shattered and deserted small suburban houses, and extended under the back gardens of some of them, now all joined into one. These had evidently once been well stocked and cultivated gardens, as there were

the remains of strawberry beds and patches of all the domestic vegetables. Our mess cook was not long in discovering and picking enough spinach for dinner one night, and a patch of thriving young turnips provided the vegetable courses for several days following. What, one wondered, would be the feelings of the unfortunate owner of one of these houses should he one day come back to find his garden connected by subterranean passages with those of his neighbours? Incidentally, there is little to be seen above the surface of the ground to indicate the existence of the large cellars and passages underneath.

Throughout Monday, the 18th, the rain continued. We convoyed the rations in the afternoon to the cavalry, who were still bivouacked. Nothing could have looked more miserable than those miles of horse lines on the rain-sodden ground, now a quagmire of mud. A line of small flags had been stuck in the ground, and stretched away in the distance, indicating the route across country which the mounted men were to take when the time for them to go up to the line came. But that day no one was very optimistic; somehow, in the rain everything seems hopelessly impossible! At about 8 that evening the rain ceased for a time, the sky cleared, and our guns, which had been very quiet all day, started on their exploits once more, much to the annoyance of every one in their vicinity who was at the time anticipating a night of undisturbed and well-earned slumber. On the night of the 19th we turned in early; the supply train was not expected to arrive till 3 the following morning. Hardly had I blown out my candle, when once more the German shells started to come over. All through the night they shelled Albert intermittently, and we were glad of the homely dug-out. For every one they sent over they seemed to get about twenty back, including some from a 15-inch gun that had suddenly got busy. The supply train eventually arrived at 7 a.m. on the 20th. At the station there were a few big shell holes, but little damage. True, one had exploded on the permanent way; one short length of line had been torn up as a result and was pointing skywards, several sleepers being destroyed; but the damage was only such as could be repaired in a few hours, and did not hold up the traffic at all. The Germans were still shelling, and continued to do so throughout the morning in several directions, in their attempts, no doubt, to search out the guns that were bothering them so much. So things went on from day to day. On the afternoon of the 21st, half a dozen shells landed in the field adjoining our little camp. One, which fell on a house, killed several soldiers; the others did no material damage. Towards night they started to *strafe* again, and succeeded in hitting the ammunition dump near our lines which I referred to earlier in this chapter. The whole sky was lit up by the red glow from the fire, which was, of course, the result, and for some hours afterwards there was a succession of "ping-ping-pom-poms," as the fire spread and the ammunition became ignited. All night long, as usual, the *strafe* continued, the Huns, also as usual, getting back

good measure for what they sent over, including some useful efforts on the part of a large howitzer battery which had recently joined in the fray. When fired at a distance of a mile or so away, one could literally feel the blast in one's face. The resulting din can be better imagined than described. On such occasions, even from the point of view of getting away from the noise, there are worse places to spend a night in than in a dug-out 7 feet high, 8 feet broad, and 15 feet long, 12 feet below the level of the ground.

Albert at this time was distinctly unhealthy. The shells exacted their daily toll. Occasionally the Huns varied their hate by sending over a few lachrymatory or tear shells, which, however, falling a fair distance away from us, only had the effect of making our eyes smart for a time. We at first attributed this to the lorry "exhausts" and the quality of the petrol.

On September 25th one squadron of a Native lancer regiment was put into action. Cavalry patrols were sent on ahead, and returned to report that the village of Gueudecourt was still held by the enemy. The squadron galloped to the outskirts of the village; dismounting, they got their Hotchkiss machine guns into action and engaged the enemy for several hours. They had a few casualties amongst men and lost some horses, but achieved their objective. At Albert there was a sudden and unmistakable lull in the enemy's shelling. The reason was soon forthcoming. On the 27th we heard that not only Combles, but the fortress of Thiepval, which had for so long been bombarded by our artillery, had at length fallen to the Allied arms. Doubtless it was there that the guns which had been shelling Albert were situated; the shells had at any rate invariably come from that direction. Along the road from Thiepval to Albert that day were to be seen Hun prisoners being marched back not by tens but by hundreds. Many were wounded and looked pitiful as they came hobbling along, helping one another, guarded by mounted men—not that they needed guarding or were capable of escaping. Those that were not wounded seemed dazed and demoralized; here and there was one who had obviously been driven mad by the ordeal he had been through—the continual and ever-increasing hell fire which had been directed on Thiepval. One prisoner taken that day I heard, much to my surprise, had before the war been employed as chief telephone clerk in a big London hotel. At midnight on September 27th the Column left Albert and moved back to Corbie. Thence, in conjunction with the cavalry, we retraced our steps by gradual stages

westward.

## *Chapter XIV*
## *TO BAPAUME, PÉRONNE, AND BEYOND*

Events sometimes occur quickly and unexpectedly in this war. Recent ones justify another chapter. The 1st day of November 1916 found us on our way to winter billets; and in the same "back area" as that occupied the previous year we spent the long, dreary winter months. They were chiefly characterized as being the coldest on record and by the most prolonged and severe spell of frost within recollection. The thaw was, if anything, more unpleasant. French roads, even the main ones, seem to lack a sufficient foundation of metal, and the results caused by the passage of heavy transport over them during a thaw are, to say the least, disastrous to both roads and transport. They consist in the giving way, and in places utter collapse, of the roads. The difficulty is theoretically overcome by a procedure known as *barrières fermées*, which roughly means that when a thaw sets in all main roads are closed to heavy motor traffic until the thaw has been in progress for several days. After that, *barrières fermées* become *barrières ouvertes* once more. Whether it was owing to the impossibility of carrying out this scheme for a sufficient length of time, or due to a failure in the perfect working of the system, it is difficult to say, but the results were unfortunate. Many roads became impassable, and mechanical transport lorries were constantly getting "bogged" everywhere. A period of rain did not improve matters, and when they were almost at their worst for the moving up of ammunition and guns, the astute Hun began this retreat to the more salubrious neighbourhood of the Hindenburg line. Immediately, almost, we were on the road towards Albert.

The last week of March found us encamped just outside it. The cavalry had made a forced march, covering the best part of seventy miles inside two days. Not bad going, taking into consideration the heavy, muddy roads. Once again there was a wave of optimism and confidence in the air. The Huns were in retreat, unable to hold any longer the line they had fortified and stuck to for so many months; Bapaume had fallen; our troops were still advancing and meeting with little opposition from the enemy. Three very good reasons for optimism!

The town of Albert was, we found, little changed in appearance since our departure six months before, but it was a very much more healthy spot, being out

of range of artillery. Even its civilian population was returning in considerable numbers. One of the largest Expeditionary Force Canteens had been established, also quite a good Officers' Club.

During the first few days of April enemy aeroplanes came over and dropped several bombs. The damage done, however, was negligible, except to a motor-lorry, in which three men who were sleeping were unfortunately killed. Later on, when the last week of April brought fine weather and clear blue skies, Taubes became our daily visitors, though the barrage of anti-aircraft batteries kept them too high to make bombing worth while. Heavy snow marked our arrival at the front, and it certainly seemed that spring operations had started in weather that was as unfavourable as it was reminiscent of mid-winter. To add insult to injury, on almost the coldest night of all the British Expeditionary Force advanced its clock an hour and "summer time" came in! Railhead was moved up as far as — —, as soon as railway communication was opened up. It had been a village of some hundred and thirty houses. Now, of course, it was completely ruined, but none the less a place of considerable importance. Surprisingly few "traps" were left behind there by the Germans. On two occasions only, mines exploded, each leaving fair-sized craters under the permanent way, but only causing such slight damage that traffic was not seriously interfered with.

To reach Bapaume from Albert there is a long, straight road, which, from strategical importance, must almost equal that wonderful road from Bar-le-Duc to Verdun. The latter has come to be known as "La Voie sacrée" and General Pétain is said to have stated that the battle of Verdun was largely won by the prowess of the motor drivers along it, during those months when there passed over it a never-ending, continuous line of convoys, transporting munitions and rations to the defenders of France's most famous outpost.

The Albert-Bapaume road presented many points of interest. A few kilometres along it is Pozières, the name of a village which formerly existed here. Now it is indicated only by a signboard announcing the fact.

To the left are such places as Ovillers, Thiepval, Courcelette—names which recall bloody combats of a few months ago. Like Pozières, nothing now remains of them. A little further along one strikes Le Sars. There are indications here of what was once a village and a wood. Now the wood looks like a skeleton and the ground is littered with bricks and odd pieces of timber. On either side of the road the ground is literally studded with shell holes; not a solitary square yard of it has escaped: everywhere are broken-down dug-outs, old artillery emplacements, and irregular and much battered lines of trenches, running seemingly in all directions and difficult to follow. There is not a blade of grass or any sign of life. To leave the road is to meet with quantities of unexploded shells, broken and abandoned equipment, skulls, and corpses of both British and German soldiers. Salvage and

burial parties are constantly at work and gradually clearing the ground, a task of some magnitude. Here and there are the little military cemeteries—row after row of long brown mounds of earth, each surmounted by a wooden cross; here and there a smashed-up aeroplane waiting to be salved.

Nowhere is the ghastly aftermath of war more in evidence than around the Butte de Warlencourt, a few miles further along the road. The Butte appears an isolated hill, rising by gradual ascent to a height of about 100 feet. To capture it from the enemy must have been a matter of considerable difficulty. On its summit is a large wooden cross, dedicated to the memory of the gallant officers, N.C.O.'s, and men of the Durham Light Infantry who fell there in November 1916. At various points on the road, particularly, of course, at cross-roads, the Germans before their retreat set mines; these, later exploding, have caused enormous upheavals of earth and craters large enough, many of them, to bury half a dozen motor-lorries in. To let traffic pass them, it has been necessary to circumvent them with causeways built around their lips, until such time as they have been filled in again and the road is once more built up and able to follow its usual course. Eventually appears Bapaume, and the Albert road at this point strikes at right angles the road which, to the left, proceeds to Arras, and to the right into the centre of the town, into which converge roads from Cambrai, Douai, and Péronne.

Bapaume itself presents a sight which is at once amazing and tragic. The first thing that strikes the observer is that it is not suffering so much from the effects of artillery bombardment as from the deliberate burning and blowing up of its houses, and chiefly by the fronts having been blown out. Where these have thus been destroyed, the roofs have collapsed into the houses. Almost every building has been demolished in this way; in many cases the grey slate roofs lie complete, warped but intact, over a mass of debris caused by the blowing down of the supporting walls. Most of the furniture from the houses was presumably removed some time ago to furnish German dug-outs; what has not been made use of in this way has been piled up inside the houses, and, after being tarred, set alight. The trees which formerly adorned the main roads have, to a great extent, been sawn off near their stumps, and the trunks lay, till removed by our troops, at right angles across the roads. I take the object of this tree-felling to be threefold. Firstly, to impede advancing troops; secondly, to leave no cover, and thus throw the roads open to aeroplane observation; and thirdly, for the sake of sheer destructiveness. The third is an undeniable reason, for even the little fruit and rose trees in cottage gardens had not been spared at the hands of the Hun.

The wells everywhere had been poisoned with arsenic or fouled with manure. In Bapaume itself the cleanest well was found to contain eight German corpses. To appreciate the "wanton and cruel spirit," as Mr. Ian Malcolm so aptly

describes the spirit in which the Germans are losing the war, I quote in full a letter from him which appeared in *The Times* on April 7th, 1917. Comment would be superfluous. I can only add that, judging from the devastation, the Hun soldiers must have carried out their orders with a thoroughness which is typical of German organization, except, of course, in such places from which their hurried evacuation did not give them time. The following is the letter:—

## MORE INHUMAN DOCUMENTS
## TO THE EDITOR OF *THE TIMES*

SIR,—I enclose herewith two "scraps of paper" taken from German prisoners in the region of Bapaume, where I found myself last Monday. Their contents should, I think, be made known far and wide, for they bear eloquent testimony to the wanton and cruel spirit in which the Germans are losing the war. I will add that, for the time being, the originals are in my possession, and that these translations are faithfully done from the originals.

No. 1, dated March 9th, gives instructions for the procedure preliminary to the so-called German "withdrawal" on the British front, and runs as follows:—

1. Pioneer ——, and 1 infantryman will throw dung into the wells.
2. Pioneer ——, and 2 infantrymen will cut down the trees.
3. Pioneer ——, and 2 infantrymen will carry out special tasks.
4. Pioneer ——, and 2 infantrymen will stack wood in houses.

No. 2 is a time-table to be carried out at Bancourt, a village just east of Bapaume.

In the village of Bancourt it is more important to set fire to the houses than to blow them up.

5th March:—Straw will be heaped up and tarred.

10th March:—Explosives are to be ready for the cellars and wells in Bancourt.

11th March:—All unused wells and watering ponds must be plentifully polluted with dung and creosote soda. Sufficient dung and creosote soda must be placed in readiness beside the wells which are still in use.

12th March:—Bancourt must be ready to be set on fire.

13th March:—Parade in fighting kit, issue of iron rations, cleaning of arms, instruction regarding safe roads to be used and instructions for the demolition party.

14th March:—Explosives to be issued for destroying the cellars and wells in Bancourt. Bancourt church tower will be blown up.

16th March:—All wells in Bancourt with the exception of one will be blown

up by 6.30 p.m.

17th March:—The road mines will be fired at 3 a.m. The remaining cellars in Bancourt will be blown up at 3.15 a.m., and Bancourt will be set on fire at 4 a.m.

Your obedient servant,

**IAN MALCOLM**. BRYANSTON SQUARE, April 6th.

5, BRYANSTON SQUARE, *April 6th.*

It is noticeable that along many roads the great trees on either side of them have only been felled on one side, sometimes on the other, seldom on both at the same point. Possibly those left were intended as landmarks for artillery ranging purposes. Beyond Bapaume every village, with a mine crater at its entrance, has shared the same fate. At Beugny, part of the outer walls of the church still stand; inside them are lying about church ornaments, crucifixes, figures of saints deliberately destroyed by being decapitated, and mingling with this strange collection on the ground are countless old champagne and hock bottles. Around the church are hundreds of German graves. Amongst them I noticed one cross, similar to all the others, bearing as an inscription the one word "Englander." Hidden in the ruins of these places the Germans have not omitted to leave traps and ruses. Many of the roads were left for us mined, so that every cross-road became suspicious and the R.E.'s were busy investigating. A good many traps were discovered in time; others, unfortunately, were not.

The country the other side of the old German line looked refreshingly green, but only traces remained of former supply dumps and camps, of which everything of value had been completely cleared away. The roads, too, had obviously not been subjected to such severe wear and tear as those on our side. The Germans had used light railways running along the roadside in lieu of transport by motor-lorries on the roads themselves. Though the railway lines had been carefully taken up and removed, the sleepers still remained in many places and the lay of the former track was still visible. The devastation and laying waste of the countryside suggested to one's mind that the enemy did not anticipate having to fight over the same ground again.

Perhaps one of the most striking roads on this part of the front is that which goes through Aveluy and runs along the valley of the Ancre to Miraumont. From it can be had a wonderful panorama landscape of former trenches and heavily shelled battlefields.

The end of March and beginning of April saw, for a time, at any rate, a return to the more interesting though less comfortable open form of warfare. Cavalry patrols were out on reconnaissances, and in touch with Uhlans and the rearguards covering the German retreat. They were at such places as Miraumont and Bihcourt, and not once, but several times, Brigades marched out in the early hours of the morning "into the blue," spoiling for a big open fight.

During this time, one echelon or section of the Supply Column was employed in rationing the troops. The second section was employed on various other jobs, such as stone and road repair material fatigues, and taking up ammunition for the guns. The latter is a particularly interesting job; especially is it so when 9.2-inch howitzer shells compose the load. First of all, there is the loading, at one of the many ammunition dumps. These dumps seem to be everywhere; they spring up like mushrooms in a night and in the most unexpected places. Perhaps on what was once "No-man's-land," to-day there are enormous stacks of shells silhouetted against the sky. From these dumps the lorries draw their death-dealing loads. The shells are taken from the stacks and piled on to trucks running on a light railway to the edge of a road. Here they are transferred to the motor-lorries. Then there is the journey up to the battery, at snail's pace, probably, for no vehicle, except a Staff car, must pass another along the —— road. Traffic control officers and mounted military police on the road see to this. Arriving back at your parking ground, you have just swallowed breakfast, only to find that you must go off again almost immediately and repeat the performance. So that, though tired perhaps, you feel you are of a little use, even though it is only the Army Service Corps you are in! Long days and nights, but full of interest, and not infrequently enlivened by a few "souvenirs" from the Hun batteries across the way-shells that blow motor-lorries into matchboard and scrap iron and kill the men in charge of them.

The bombardment during this period was the prelude to an offensive, the results of which I will not attempt to write. They are now ancient history, for what is news to-day is history to-morrow, so suddenly do events sometimes occur in this war. Suffice it to add that British troops took close on 20,000 prisoners and an appropriate number of guns in a month, besides capturing large tracts of land and many fortified positions, including the Vimy Ridge, to mention only one, which the enemy, at any rate, had thought to be impregnable.

That part of the line towards which we were working was held by Anzacs. The Australian Army is a democratic one. Officers go through the ranks first, and all ranks are thus more or less on a footing of familiarity, the officer invariably addressing a man as "Son." There are many stories of them. One, I think, got to *Punch*, of the Staff Officer who remarked, "This morning I was saluted by an Anzac. It has been a great day for me." Every day General Birdwood is to be seen

in his car going up to the forward positions.

Our motor-lorries were also employed on salvage. This also is an interesting job. Thousands of men are dismantling old dug-outs, collecting R.E. stores and equipment—in fact, every kind of material imaginable, from live shells to dead bodies. The salved material so collected is loaded on to horse wagons and driven to the roadside, where loads are transferred to lorries, thence taken to railhead dumps, piled up, and sorted. Eventually it is put on train and mostly reaches the Base, some of it being sent further up to the front. All equipment that is repairable at the Base workshops is reissued later to the troops; the remainder, and scrap metal, sold by weight. By this means such places as Beaumont-Hamel and Serre are gradually being cleared. Corpses, when recoverable, are taken in horse-drawn wagons to the nearest military cemetery. Here they are, if possible, identified by an officer of the Graves Registration Committee, and then given a Christian burial, British and German alike, by a padre who is always there for the purpose.

No sooner is the ground cleared than its owners suddenly reappear and proceed to search for the money that they hid before their departure. Alas! I fear they seldom find it! The farmers begin to till the soil, so that land which a few months before was the scene of bloody fighting is gradually ploughed up, and not a sound is to be heard except the ploughman's cries in the stillness, urging on his horses, and away in the distance the never-ending thunder of the guns. The inhabitants are allowed to return and granted a *permis de séjour* if they are *cultivateurs*. When harvest-time comes they will be provided with reaping and thrashing machines by the British Army.

I recall two amusing items in connection with salvage. One was a notice outside an old dug-out which bore the legend, "This dug-out is mined": "To-night's the Night." The other was a sentence in a letter I was censoring: "I am now doing 'savage' work in the trenches."

The second week of May 1917 found us once more on the move, this time to Péronne. The move itself was an interesting one. Our route lay through Albert, Bray, and Cappy, and we travelled along roads in the Somme Valley which I have written of in a previous chapter—roads on which we had taken convoys as far back as August 1915. when they were at many points under observation of the enemy and in close proximity to the trenches. Thence along the main Amiens-St. Quentin road, the straightest and most tedious road imaginable.

Crossing the former lines of trenches and the old No-man's-land at Estrées, we turned into Péronne. The latter must have been an altogether delightful riverside town, with handsome buildings and broad streets. Now it is ruined, though not so completely as Bapaume. To pass through it one has to cross the Somme about four times, and at each point the original bridge has naturally been de-

stroyed. The other side of Péronne each village has, of course, been systematically destroyed and the trees felled. Even the cemeteries have been desecrated by the removal of corpses from coffins and of tombstones. The Huns have used the coffins and lead shells for their own dead, and even altered the inscriptions on the stones and re-erected them as gravestones for their dead soldiers. In one churchyard a huge family vault shows signs of having been used as a bakehouse. A Frenchman who had lived in one village during its occupation by the Germans said the Hun soldiers told him that their orders were to destroy fruit trees, gardens, graves, and houses, so that, after the German Army had retreated, the civilian population, returning, would be appalled at the wanton destruction of their homes, and, reflecting on the towns and villages ahead still occupied, would collectively revolt and demand terms of peace to be made by France.

I conclude this chapter writing in a tent pitched in a fair-sized garden: every fruit tree has been felled, apple and cherry trees lie sawn off two feet or so from the ground. Even so they are covered with blossom. The state of the village—between Péronne and St. Quentin—can be left to the imagination almost: a confused collection of grey slate roofs, burnt timber, loose bricks, and chunks of masonry. The night is dark, but in the distance the sky is red. The Huns have fired the cathedral at St. Quentin!

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