DENEYS REITZ

TREKKING ON

A BOER JOURNAL OF WORLD WAR ONE



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DENEYS REITZ

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Preface

The writer of this book, as a boy of seventeen, served under me during the days when he and I raided British camps and convoys and outposts during the Boer War in South Africa.

Of those doings he has written a stirring account in a previous work, and now he carries on the story from the time he went into exile in 1902 rather than submit to British rule. He describes his trials and adventures in Madagascar and he tells of how, at length, at my wife's request, he was induced to return to South Africa to take part in the reconstruction period that followed the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging.

He goes on to tell at first hand of the troubled rebuilding of our country and of a rebellion wherein so many of us found ourselves in the same position as those Southerners who stood by the Union during the American Civil War, and how, like theirs, our road was a thorny one.

Thereafter he soldiered under me in the wilds of Africa, and his is the first connected narrative that I have seen of those strange half-forgotten campaigns that were conducted by General Botha and myself against the far-off German colonies.

He concludes his tale with a vivid description of his experiences in France during the Great War, and he lived to lead a British battalion to the Rhine.

Since then he has taken an active part in the public life of his country and he is, at the time of writing, a member of the present South African Government.

For nearly thirty-five years he and I have been closely associated in peace

and war, and it gives me great pleasure to introduce this work to what I trust will be a very wide public.

J. C. SMUTS

Capetown,
South Africa,
June, 1933

Chapter I — Exile

On the 31st of May, 1902, the war in South Africa came to an end after three adventurous years.

Of our family, my two elder brothers, Hjalmar and Joubert, had been captured by the British troops, but my father, my younger brother Arend and I served in the field until peace was made.

My father was Secretary of State for the Transvaal Republic under President Kruger at the beginning of the war, but later, when things went badly for the Boer cause, he carried a musket like the rest of us. At the conclusion of the peace treaty of Vereeniging he refused to accept its terms, and my brother Arend and I followed his example. Consequently Sir Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner, ordered us to be deported.

He allowed us, however, a short period of grace, that my father might settle his affairs in Pretoria, and for a fortnight we were back in the town that had been our home.

We found our house occupied by a British general, and we could not go near it because sentries were posted in the grounds. But my father managed to realise some other properties he owned for what seemed to us a large sum of money, and, our time having expired, we were placed on board a railway train and escorted to Ressano Garcia, the first Portuguese village across the Eastern Transvaal border.

From here we travelled to the coast to Lourenço Marquez. We tramped its sandy streets until we found cheap lodgings, and then sat down to consider the future. My father favoured the idea of going to the United States where,

he said, one might live a free man under a republican flag, but I did not want to go there.

Nearly two years before, Georges de Gourville, a wounded Frenchman whom I had helped to nurse, told me about Madagascar, a French possession off the east coast of Africa. He said that if we lost the war we could take refuge there, and through the rest of the campaign Madagascar had lain at the back of my thoughts.

Now that we had the world before us, I argued and pleaded with my father until at last he gave in. He agreed that after all the main point was a republic, and as Madagascar belonged to one, my brother and I could go there on condition that we first accompanied him to France to make enquiries.

We were glad enough to compromise, for it meant a longer voyage and more countries to see; and when, a few days later, a German ship stood into the river, we went on board, and as she sailed out we paced the deck taking farewell forever, so we thought, of South Africa, our country.

The ship, though German, was carrying a battalion of Gurkha troops from India for some native war on the Somaliland frontier, and the day after we started there was a strange incident.

There were live cattle on board, and I saw the ship’s cook and his assistants lead out an ox. Drawing down his head with block and tackle, they quickly killed him. When the Indian soldiers realised what had happened, the cook and his companions were attacked by an infuriated mob. They defended themselves with knives and choppers, but were quickly overborne, and all I could see was a squirming mass struggling on the deck.

Whistles blew and trumpets sounded the alarm, bringing European officers to the rescue, but it was only by picking each Gurkha separately from the heap that we succeeded in extricating the three men, almost at their last gasp. Several of the Indians were badly slashed about, and when the affair was over

I heard a British officer angrily tell the Captain of the ship that if more cattle were slaughtered he would not be answerable for the consequences.

The ship stopped at every port, no matter how small, to load ivory and rubber, so our progress was slow.

At the island of Zanzibar we again had trouble. There were two German emigrants on board, quiet, well-behaved men with whom I had struck up an acquaintance, as I spoke their language. The younger of them, Muller, fell foul of one of the sailors, a bullying German-American, and while we lay at anchor, the quarrel turned into tragedy. My father and I were standing outside our cabin waiting to go ashore, when the little German came up from between decks. His tormentor happened to be close by, and, for no reason that we could see, slapped his face. Quick as lightning the smaller man whipped out a revolver and shot the sailor through the head, the bullet plugging into the planks between my father and me. The fellow dropped dead in his tracks, while the German flung the revolver down, crying “Ich kann es nicht hilfen; ich kann es nicht hilfen,” as he gazed down on his handiwork, a picture of despair. Officers and men came to arrest him, and he was manacled, and brought down the ladder into the boat that was awaiting us.

We took our seats, and before we pushed off the body of his victim, wrapped in a shroud, was lowered beside us. The unfortunate prisoner liked it very little and his face blenched every time he looked at the grim package. When later we returned from land we found the German back before us, as the British Consul had refused to hear the case. He said the murder was committed on a German bottom, and should be tried in a German court.

Next day we returned to Dâr-es-Salaam, and here again the Governor refused to act, so Muller was once more with us. I saw the leave-taking between him and his friend before he was finally put into a cell. It was a pathetic scene. Both men were in tears, and I heard the older man say:

“Comrade, no matter what happens, if it be twenty years hence, come to me. With me you shall always have a home,” and so they were parted; one man to go into the interior of Africa, the other to stand his trial in Germany. Nearly all on board sympathised with the poor fellow, and for the rest of the voyage we used to let down bottles of beer and packets of cigarettes for him to take through the grated porthole. A petition was drawn up in which we said that the dead man had started the quarrel. This paper was handed to the Captain for the court in Germany, but I never heard what happened or whether it was of any avail.

At Mombasa we landed the Indian troops, and then sailed slowly up the coast of Africa, touching at many places for cargo, and so worked our way to Aden, and thence through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to Port Said.

Here a party of Egyptians came to see us. They said their country too was oppressed by the British, and they had come to offer us their fraternal sympathy. In South Africa we had always taken it for granted that aboriginals should be governed by whites, and our colour prejudices are so deep-rooted that we did not relish being claimed as fellow patriots in distress by natives, so the incident helped to open our eyes on a great problem.

From Port Said we crossed the Mediterranean, passing between Sicily and the mainland, and after a five weeks5 voyage reached Naples, our port of disembarkment.

My father and brother went ashore first, leaving me to see to the baggage. He had brought with him a dozen rolls of Boer twist, but as there was a heavy import duty on all tobacco landed in Italy, he had asked the Captain to take the parcel on to Amsterdam for him.

Whilst waiting for the rowing boat, I decided that I would at any rate carry one roll with me, as I knew my father would miss his favourite brand. I broke the tobacco into strips and filled my pockets, with the result that the moment

I stepped on land I was arrested by two gendarmes who took me to a large prison building. After a long delay, during which I had anxious visions of being lost to sight in an Italian dungeon, I was led before an officer who sat at a table, with a sheathed sword across his knees. My pockets were searched, and with an accusing pile of contraband steadily mounting before them, the magistrate and the police eyed me pretty sternly.

I was unable to follow the proceedings, but I knew I was up for smuggling, and at last I was marched off on my way to the cells.

Luckily an Italian passenger who had been on the ship stopped to enquire what was amiss, and as he spoke English, I was able to tell him. He told my two guards to return me to the courtroom, where he explained that I was a young Boer newly come from the war in South Africa.

The effect was surprising. Throughout the war the continental nations were strongly “pro-Boer” (as it was called), or at any rate strongly anti-British, and I was released at once with smiles and handshakes, and some of the impounded tobacco was even thrust back on me, while a policeman went to fetch me a cab.

We now journeyed via Rome and Florence to Geneva, where we stopped a few days, revelling in all we saw; then to Holland to meet my stepmother and her children. They had been refugees at the Hague ever since the British occupation of Pretoria more than two years before, and very hearty was our reunion.

During our short stay in the Hague, President Kruger arrived from Switzerland. My father attended a banquet in his honour, and the visit created a great stir. Huge crowds gathered in the streets to see the President go by, but so dense was the throng that my brother and I failed to get even a glimpse of him, though we received a minor ovation ourselves, for the people around us saw that we were South Africans.

From the Hague we went to Paris. My brother and I walked the streets, enjoying the sights, while my father did the rounds of various government offices to collect information about Madagascar, for he was a good French scholar. One of the cabinet ministers, (Conseiller d'Etat) M. Louis Herbette, called several times to see us, and his well-meant efforts on our behalf were to cause embarrassing complications later on. We had other visitors too, including Miss Maude Gonne and Major McBride, both Irish revolutionaries. Miss Gonne had been concerned in various agitations, and was forbidden her native country, so she was living here in exile. McBride I had met during the siege of Ladysmith, as second in command of the Irish Brigade. He had left the Transvaal after the fall of Pretoria in June 1900, and was also in exile.[1]

Miss Gonne was a beautiful woman nearly six foot tall, while McBride was a brave but ugly, red-headed little man, and their mutual hatred of England was so close a bond between them that they were married soon after.

At the end of an interesting week my father had collected a sufficient supply of literature about Madagascar, from which he copied such items as he thought would prove useful, and we prepared to start. He had never been a good business man, and now, when he began to reckon up the outlay since leaving South Africa, he found that he could only squeeze enough money for two second-class fares to Madagascar and twenty-five pounds in cash, between my brother and me. We bought a cheap rifle and a few cooking utensils, for we planned, on getting there, to march inland on foot, subsisting on the game we could find, and we looked forward to a life of adventure and the exploring of foreign parts.

Therefore, in August 1902, we said good-bye to my father and set out on our journey, while he left for America.

At Marseilles we boarded the *Djemnah*, a French steamer. In crossing the Mediterranean we ran into a violent storm, during which passengers and

troops were battened under hatches, for great waves pounded the decks overhead, and it felt as if the ship might capsize at any moment. It was the worst storm that had raged on these waters for many years. Nearly six hundred people were drowned by a tidal wave along the Italian coast, and a number of vessels were sunk, so we were fortunate in escaping.

Soon after re-entering the Red Sea, we passed a squadron of Japanese men-of-war on their Way home from King Edward's coronation. As we came abreast, a sailor fell overboard from the ship nearest us. Our crew manned a boat, but before they had swung from the davits, the Japanese were already on the water, rowing hard for the man who was swimming far astern, and in a very short time they fished him out.

I had not even known that Japan possessed a navy, so that their efficiency, and the sight of great ironclads owned by a coloured race, gave me further food for thought.

At Aden we had a surprise of a different kind.

The latest cables were brought on board for posting in the saloon, and one of them referred to us. It said "les deux Messieurs Reitz", sons of the former State Secretary of the Transvaal, were on their way to Madagascar, whither ten thousand Boers, fleeing from British tyranny, would shortly follow them. Ample funds were being provided by sympathisers on the Continent, and France welcomed these valiant descendants of the Huguenots seeking liberty under the tricolour.

This was the work of our friend M. Herbette in Paris. Up to now my brother and I had been unobtrusive second-class passengers whom no one bothered about, but before the anchor was in the Captain was pointing out "les deux Messieurs Reitz" to the passengers and their wives, and they, not unnaturally, seemed astonished at our youthful appearance and our shabby clothes.

I had learned sufficient French by now to understand the drift of their

remarks, and I caught such expressions as “des garçons comme ça”, “mais c’est ridicule”, etc., which was embarrassing enough, but our worst fear was that, if similar publicity awaited us in Madagascar, it might defeat our intention of slipping ashore, and marching unnoticed into the interior. As it turned out, our apprehensions on this score were only too well grounded.

Meanwhile the ship continued on its way, and, save for the curiosity of the passengers in regard to us, we enjoyed the long voyage.

We went to Djibout, and thence coasted down Africa, once again touching at many queer little ports. At length we headed across the open sea for the Seychelles, a group of lovely islands lying some days north of the northernmost point of Madagascar.

We stopped at Mahé, and the Captain brought me a French newspaper containing an article in which the number of our adherents had grown to fifteen thousand. It concluded on a high note:

“Madagascar is thus destined to be colonised by the Boers, who rightly prefer the rule of France, so just and so liberal, to the tyranny of Great Britain, so harsh and so brutal. As between the Union Jack and the tricolour, the Boers have chosen the latter. Under it they will become French citizens, breathing liberty, under the other they would be crushed by British rapacity. For the Boers to become British subjects is absurd and abominable, for them to become French citizens is in the natural order of things [dans l’ordre des choses].”

We gathered, further, that elaborate preparations were being made for our reception in Madagascar, and that our arrival was to be in the nature of a state entry. All this made us still more uneasy, for the knowledge that our Boer followers were a myth, and that we had less than twenty pounds in our joint pockets, lay heavily on our minds.

A few days later we entered the harbour of Diëgo Suarez, the first port of

call on the Madagascar coast. There was a French cruiser lying near by, and ashore we could see forts and barracks, for this was an important garrison station. Soon after we anchored, when my brother and I were below, a steward rushed down to say that we were wanted on deck. We came up to find the officer in command of Diëgo Suarez awaiting us with his staff. His name was Colonel Joffre, and he had come to give us an official welcome on behalf of the French Republic. He and his officers appeared to be mystified when they saw two beardless striplings in dingy slops appear before them, but the French are a courteous race. Swallowing their obvious concern, they shook hands with us, and the Colonel made a little speech, which was translated into German for me by a young Alsatian lieutenant. The speaker told us of his admiration for the Boers, and of his joy that so many of them were coming to settle in Madagascar. Passengers and crew stood around during the ceremony, and, to add to our discomfort, the Colonel informed us that we were to be his guests at a banquet on shore that night.

Lastly, I was handed a letter from M. Gaston Doumerge, Minister for Colonies in Paris, instructing officers, officials, and residents to lend us every assistance on our travels. With this, the party returned over the side of the ship, leaving us behind in a very perturbed condition, uneasily wondering what was coming next.

However, we had to see the matter through, and as it was getting towards evening, We went down to unpack our Sunday best. Shortly after dark a skiff with two officers came to fetch us off. They took us to the Mess at the barracks, where we were welcomed afresh by Colonel Joffre and twenty or thirty other officers, all sprucely clad in white uniforms plentifully decorated with medals, a great contrast to our ready-made suits.

But we put a good face on it, as we were led round to be introduced to all present. Before the banquet started I told the Alsatian officer that I wished to

have a word in private with his chief, so we went into a side room and I there explained the position to the Colonel, telling him that we knew nothing about thousands of Boers, and generally setting out our circumstances. He looked astonished at first, then he lay back and roared with laughter. He said instructions had come from Paris to fête the two Boer leaders on their arrival, and as garrison life was monotonous, they had been looking forward for the last ten days to this opportunity to make merry (pour faire la noce). He seemed to consider the matter an excellent joke, and amid chuckles and pleasantries advised me to say nothing more until I had seen General Gallieni, the Governor of the island, whom we were to meet further south.

The banquet was a great success, for the officers were a jolly lot, and there was plenty of good wine. The Colonel made a speech in which he spoke of the bravery of the Boers and of their love of freedom. He was loudly applauded and I then stumbled through a few sentences in French, ending with “Vive la France!” which was well received too, and towards midnight we were escorted to the beach by a laughing troop of officers, and rowed to the ship.

Next morning a naval officer came in a boat to take us on board the *Catinat*, the cruiser lying in the bay, and, dressed once more in our pepper-and-salt clothing, we went to inspect her. When we stepped on deck we found ourselves in the presence of the Captain and his officers, and about two hundred marines drawn up as a guard of honour.

At the word of command the men grounded arms, and we replied by respectfully raising our hats. We were then led to see the guns and other weapons, and were given refreshments in the wardroom, after which we were ferried across to our own ship, whose rails were lined with passengers watching the return of the Boer plenipotentiaries.

We sailed again that afternoon, but just before starting I received a telegram

in English from Tamatave, the port for which we were making down the coast. It read: “Whishing you hartly wellcome shall be at your arrival on bort considering you as our gests. Rosseger.”

We did not know who Rosseger was, but we were glad enough to hear that we were to be entertained free of charge, for with our dwindling resources we would not long be in a condition to sustain the onerous role of distinguished visitors.

For some days we followed down the east coast of Madagascar, always within sight of its palm-fringed shores, and we gazed with interest at the country that we thought was to be our new home.

We had taken in a number of local officials at Diëgo Suarez. They spoke mainly of heat, mosquitoes, fever, how many grains of quinine to a dose, sacré pays, sacrés indigènes, and sacré pretty well everything connected with the island, none of which was calculated to raise our spirits.

At length we reached Tamatave. The anchor was scarcely down before a dignitary in gold lace was calling for les deux Messieurs Reitz as he came up the ladder. He was M. Dubosc-Taret, the Mayor of the town, and he too seemed staggered when he saw us. Quickly recovering himself, he greeted us cordially, and handed me a large sealed envelope containing a letter from General Gallieni, who bade us welcome to Madagascar in the name of France, and invited us to visit him at Antananarivo, the capital, lying some two hundred miles inland. The letter said, further, that arrangements for our transport were in train, details whereof would be notified us later.

Whatever lingering hopes we may still have cherished of an unobtrusive landing were now finally dispelled, for in addition to the Governor’s letter, there was a double row of soldiers and citizens awaiting us at the jetty. With the Mayor by our side we marched between the onlookers, who greeted us with cheers and loud shouts of “Vivent les Boers!” The Mayor made a speech

before some sort of public building and we were then carried in palanquins to a large hotel, the owner of which turned out to be the author of the telegraphic invitation which we had received.

Rosseger was an Austrian who had served as an artilleryman in the earlier part of the Boer War; and I suspect that his offer to us was based on the belief that we would prove a good draw for his hostelry. In any event, whatever his motives, he treated us with lavish hospitality and we found in him a good friend.

We confided our affairs to him and asked what we should do. He said at once that our idea of going into the interior on foot was impracticable, for there were great swamps and impenetrable jungles, in which we would surely perish from hunger, if we did not die of fever, and he advised us to fall in with the Governor's suggestion and go to Antananarivo. He thought we were lucky to have received the invitation and, indeed, we began to think so too.

Three days later, our instructions having arrived, we said good-bye to him, and at sunrise took the little Decauville train that runs for about fifteen miles to a native town called Ivondrona. Here we boarded a flat-bottomed sternwheeler for the first stage of our journey, through the swamps or "pangellanes" that lie parallel to the coast.

All that day we sailed through the narrow channels that twisted and turned in every direction amid high walls of vegetation, and we frequently ran aground on sandbanks, from which we were pushed off by the native crew. Now and again a crocodile showed above the water, but otherwise there was no sign of wild life, for Madagascar is a country strangely devoid of game. The swamps, rivers and forests, and the grasslands of the interior seem ideally suited to support animal life of all kinds, but during the time I was there I saw neither antelope nor beast of prey, and except for the little ringtailed apes there appears to be no fauna, so our dream of living by

hunting also went by the board.

We tied up after dark at Mahatsara. From here our journey was to be overland by the great military route which the French had recently constructed to Antananarivo, a road I was to retravel many times in days to come, but under less opulent circumstances.

The usual method of European transport in Madagascar is by way of a pole-chair carried by natives, but more luxurious provision had been made for us. General Gallieni had introduced a system of light mule-wagons for conveying the mails to the capital. On special occasions high functionaries were permitted to go in them, and we found that we had been singled out for this honour.

Early next morning we went ashore to where the post-chaise stood ready in charge of a Senegalese soldier, and we moved off under the admiring glances of the few whites and the many natives who had come to see us start.

We sped on all day, halting only at intervals for a change of driver and mules at the relay stations. Our course ran through low hills intersected by numerous streams, but we did not see many people.

By sunset we reached a place near the margin of the great forest belt that lies between the coast and the inland plateaux. Here we spent the night in one of the bamboo rest-houses (gîtes d’étapes) erected for the convenience of travellers. At dawn we were on the move once more, and the road now entered primeval forest, where the view was shut out much of the time, though we caught glimpses of high timber-clad mountains and very beautiful scenery. In the frequent clearings stood picturesque villages surrounded by cassava fields. It was magnificent, but all so strange and different from our own country that we felt bewildered and lost. The deeper we penetrated into the forest, the more we seemed to be cutting adrift from old familiar things, and we sat most of the time in depressed silence, as the wagon hurried along.

That night we halted at another relay post in the forest. We built a fire, and were preparing supper, when a French officer came out of the dark and greeted us with a “Bonsoir, mais òu done sont les deux Messieurs Reitz?” Here again came the fleeting look of surprise at finding the two Boer emissaries, whose approach had been heralded by telegraph, squatted by a fire and cooking their own food. He explained that the driver had made a mistake, as a mile further on was a small garrison at a blockhouse, who had been expecting us. We had already helped to stable the mules and laid out our sleeping-bags, so he agreed that it was not worth our while to pack up again, and he left us after a short chat in broken English. Next morning we passed his little fort with the soldiers standing smartly to attention, and we stopped to greet them. All that day and the next we still travelled through the forest, the road now gradually rising towards higher country. On the fourth day of our journey we crossed a height known as the “col de frais air”, from which there is a distant view of Antananarivo and the ex-Queen’s palace, standing on a high hill in the centre.

When we had come to within twenty miles of the capital, we saw a cloud of dust rapidly approaching along the road, and out of it there soon emerged an automobile containing an officer and his lady. They were General and Madame Gallieni come to meet us. He spoke fluent English, and, after a few words of greeting, invited us to change over from the post-wagon, as he wished us to drive in with him.

This was the first time in our lives that we had been in a motor car, so the novelty of travelling in one of these new inventions was an added experience. As we sped along, the only car in the island, with the Governor-General inside, was met on all sides by respectful salutes from the natives on the road.

In little more than an hour we were entering the streets of Antananarivo, and we brought up before the Governor’s residency where a guard of honour

was in attendance. We were taken into a large hall to be introduced to Gallieni's daughter and several officers, and when I told the General that I wished to have a confidential talk he made an appointment for us to lunch with him next day. We were then driven to the chief hotel, where the proprietor and his whole establishment stood ready to usher in such important guests.

Soon after, a sergeant of the Foreign Legion presented himself. He was a young Hollander named Nicolas Wolf, and he said he had been ordered to attach himself to us as interpreter and general adviser. He turned out to be a capital fellow and we became great friends in time, though at the moment he seemed a dubious blessing, for it looked as if we would have to keep him as well as ourselves at the most expensive hotel in the place.

When we told him of the state of our finances, and that our Boer followers were a delusion, his face fell, for he had hoped to escape through us from the drudgery of barrack life, and now his new job looked like coming to an untimely end. However, he took the matter philosophically and, as it turned out, his ambitions Were not wholly disappointed.

The following day we attended a luncheon at the Residency, and I explained to General Gallieni how M. Herbette's mistaken zeal had placed us in a false position. I told him that my brother and I were in Madagascar solely on our own account, and that what we wanted to do was to earn a living until we could advise our father whether to bring out the rest of his family or not.

General Gallieni replied that the Colonel at Diëgo Suarez had already reported the gist of what I had told him on the night of the banquet, and he said he was glad that I had cleared the matter up at once. He said half seriously, half jokingly, that the French were very sensitive to ridicule, and that if the English press were to put it about that two Boer youths had hoaxed the authorities, there would be political repercussions in Paris. He added

laughingly that a cabinet crisis might even be precipitated.

With regard to our earning a living, he said that need not be thought of for the moment, as he had arranged for us to go on a long journey into the south, to judge for ourselves how we liked the country. He would provide us with riding mules, and since the territory down there was still somewhat unsettled, a company of Senegalese soldiers would go with us.

Arend and I were delighted at this turn of events. We were not cold-shouldered, and what we had told the General made no difference to him; we were to explore unknown parts after all, and under more favourable auspices than if we had been able to put our original plans into operation.

Our pleasure was even greater when he said that he had given orders for Nicolas Wolf to go too. We hurried off as soon as we decently could to tell him the good news, and he fairly hugged us for joy.

In a few days all was ready and we woke one morning to find a dozen Senegalese infantry paraded before the hotel, with Wolf on a mule at their head. There were two other mules for us, as well as a number of porters carrying supplies, for General Gallieni had even provisioned us for the journey.

In a few minutes we were moving through the streets, attended as far as the river by a crowd of Hova natives, who seemed more interested in the mules than in us, for a mule was still a rarity in Madagascar. The natives call him “Ràmulet”, that is to say “Mr. Mule”, and I was told that for a long time after the landing of the French army of occupation the inhabitants lifted their hats whenever they passed one on the road.

We had a glorious time. We made first for Lake Itassy, travelling mostly by bridle paths over the tumbled hills. We crossed the rivers by swimming. The Senegalese would fearlessly plunge into the water to scare the crocodiles, while we worked the mules and baggage to the other side.

We camped at Lake Itassy for over a week. It is a pretty large sheet of water teeming with wildfowl, and at sunset hundreds of crocodiles lie floating on the surface. We commandeered a pirogue and crew from a native village, so were able to examine the shore line and make short expeditions on foot into the surrounding country. As duck, fish, and eels were plentiful, we fared well. This area holds craters and vents that looked as if they had been recently blown out, although we saw no smoke or steam issuing from the ground.

From Lake Itassy we travelled slowly southward via Antsirabé and Ambositea to Fianarantsoa, a distance of about two hundred miles over open grassy country varied by difficult hill-climbing. This was pacified country, for there were small military posts and blockhouses and occasional French officials, and at Fianarantsoa there was a European garrison with barracks, hospital, and a church. The commanding officer was, I believe, the same man who later became the famous Marshal Lyautey. He entertained us at his quarters for two days, and replenished our supplies of rice from his military stores.

From here we trekked west for some days, until we reached a desert-like region, and then we took a more northerly direction to skirt these arid parts. There was no game to be had except waterfowl, but we saw troops of wild cattle on the uplands, descendants of domestic stock that had escaped to the prairies. I could see no difference in appearance between them and ordinary tame cattle, but they were difficult to approach, and they have to be shot at long range like big game. We were now heading towards the Sakalava tribes, who were still restless and unsubdued, and as we came among the natives bordering on the disturbed area, we found them living in a state of perpetual alarm, for the Sakalava not only objected to the French but constantly raided their neighbours for wives and cattle.

The villages along here were heavily stockaded, and often surrounded by

deep moats, and it was a sight at evening to watch the tribesmen bringing in the herds of cattle from the grazing grounds.

At these places, we camped inside the enclosures at night, and let the villagers stand guard. Their method was to post a circle of men, and in the dark these sentries called out a long-drawn watchword every few minutes, each man passing it on to the next, so that by the time it came round again they could tell whether there was anyone missing. As this went on all night, it made for restless slumber, but we grew accustomed to it in the end.

On the Tshirivikina River lived a Sakalava chief who looked like giving trouble, but we went carefully, the three of us on mule-back scouting ahead of our little army, while at night we formed a hollow square with the soldiers posted, and our loaded weapons by our sides. This chief made an incursion in our direction to lift cattle and there was great stir amongst the villages.

Armed bands went hurrying off to meet the invaders, but I do not know how it ended, for the raiding party did not come within sight of us. Nicolas Wolf said he doubted whether General Gallieni had intended us to go as far as this, and he might get into trouble for risking the mules and the soldiers, but we prevailed on him to continue, and crossed the river into the Sakalava country. They soon realised that we meant them no harm, for after a while their headmen began to come to our camp, and there was no unpleasantness at all.

At the river we turned, and made our way back by easy stages to Antananarivo, after an absence of about three months, which Nicolas said was the best time he had had in his life. My brother and I had also enjoyed it very much.

We reached the capital in January 1903, and waited upon the Governor to thank him for his great kindness. Then we hired two rooms and began to look around. The future seemed none too clear. We had crossed countless square

miles of good grazing ground and many broad rivers, but they were in remote parts where we would have to live like a Swiss Family Robinson, exiled far from civilisation. And here at Antananarivo the prospects were equally difficult. All agriculture and nearly all trade were carried on by the Hova natives themselves, who are a highly developed race, and there was little scope for us. My brother and I accordingly wrote a long letter to my father telling him what we had seen, and then set about to earn a living while we waited for a reply. We had only about twelve pounds left, so we did our own housekeeping, and food was so cheap that we managed on eight sous a day. My brother found odd jobs, and I joined an Algerian, with whom I went on long tours on foot through the densely populated Imerina highlands, buying cattle from the natives. He paid me ten francs a week. The cattle were shipped to South Africa, as the British Government was in the market to make up for the losses of the Boer War.

We paid thirty shillings to two pounds a head, and I sometimes looked with envy at the oxen, wishing that I were going along with them, for I was homesick at intervals. It was hard work tramping over the hills in the rain and heat, chaffering with the native herd-owners, and sleeping in their villages at night, but it kept me employed, and this was the first money I had earned in my life. I soon picked up the Hova language, and on the whole did not dislike my work. Whenever I was back in town, I stayed with my brother at the rooms we shared. We did our cooking in the yard, which caused some talk among the French people, but they accepted our ways, and some of them used to come in to exchange courtesies. Nicolas Wolf fetched us when he was off duty to spend the evening at some wine shop playing draughts or dominoes with his soldier friends. The legionaries were a tough-looking lot but we met some very decent fellows among them. I had read of their stern discipline and harsh existence, but Wolf was contented enough, and he told

me that he intended to remain all his life. He was the son of an Amsterdam merchant. He had studied art in Venice where he must have got into some sort of trouble, the details of which he would never discuss, so he shipped over to Algiers to join the Legion.

My brother and I also made friends with two English merchants named Wilson, and sometimes went up to see them. Nicolas could not understand this, considering that we had come to Madagascar to be quit of the British, but the fact of the matter was that in our country we had lived side by side with them for so long that to meet an English family out here brought back to us something of our old life, and we liked going there.

One morning in town, I received a letter written in French and accompanied by a bunch of flowers. It began: “Cher aimé ami. Humbly prostrated at the foot of the eternal throne, I take the liberty of expressing to you how much I thank the Most High for granting me a pure heart enabling me to admire the sacred patriotism of your people,” and it went on for several closely written pages to say how much the writer admired the Boers. I was called “un fils légitime de la liberté” and it ended up with “every letter of the word Transvaal vibrates in my soul like a love sublime and I conclude by proudly offering you in honour and in memory of your noble country this bouquet of flowers culled in the splendid capital of this isle set in the bosom of the sea.

“Totus tuus in Xto, Benoit du cordon Séraphique.”

I thought the writer was probably some Catholic priest I had met when tramping, so I sent a note to say that I would be glad to see him. In reply, an hour or two later, there came, not a priest, but a tall young Hova native with the usual white lamba-mantle draped over well-fitting European clothes. His name was Benoit Adrianomanana, and in spite of my inborn colour prejudice, we became great friends. He proved to be a man of liberal education who knew much more than I did. He gave me books to read by good French

authors, and in the months that followed I learned a great deal from one who would in South Africa have been denied the elementary rights of citizenship.

In March 1903, I happened to be in town after one of my trips into the Imerina district, and I went up to read the overseas cables that were posted before the Residency once a week. They were mostly about “l’affaire Humbert” and the celebrated “coffre-fort”, a sensational fraud that was causing great excitement in France at the time, but there was also an announcement that the Boer general, Maritz, was shortly expected in Antananarivo from Paris. This was my old acquaintance Commandant Maritz with whom I had seen service in South Africa, and my brother and I looked forward with keen interest to his arrival. He reached the capital by the middle of the month, accompanied by a Hollander named Jan van Brummelen, who had fought under him during the war.

Maritz came well provided with money, and he did things handsomely. He took a double-storied villa near the market place, where he lived on a lavish scale. He had brought with him from France two motor cycles, the first I had ever seen, several gramophones, and many other expensive articles, and he kept such open house that the advent of the wealthy Boer officer created quite a stir.

I asked Maritz what had brought him to Madagascar, and how he came by all this cash. He said when peace was made in South Africa, he and van Brummelen had fled north through the desert into German territory. After many trials they reached a seaport and embarked for Europe. In Paris he was lucky enough to fall in with Jacques Lebaudy, a French millionaire, who had sent him to Madagascar to buy up tracts of land. Afterwards he was to proceed to Central Africa to buy more land, over all of which Lebaudy at a later stage was to assume rulership.

From what Maritz told me, and from what I subsequently saw for myself

from his letters, Lebaudy was a bit mad.[2] In one letter to Maritz he said that however much the French people might laugh at him, they would live to see in him their Cecil Rhodes, for he meant to build them a great colonial empire in their own despite (*malgré eux*).

Maritz said he intended remaining in Antananarivo for the present, so I returned to my work out in the country with my Algerian employer.

After a few days, a native runner brought me a message to say that General Gallieni had arranged for Maritz to go on a journey like the last one, and that my brother and I were to be of the party.

Telling the Algerian I would rejoin him when I got back, I hurried to town as fast as I could. When I got there everything was ready. Mules were once again provided, as well as an escort of Senegalese, and to Wolf's delight he too was included.

We travelled over much the same ground as before to Lake Itassy. Maritz was so taken with the lake that at first he refused to go any further. He said this was the place for him. He would acquire the surrounding country for Lebaudy, and would build himself a house on the high foreland jutting into the water. He was so full of new schemes, and made so many plans, that we could not get him away for a long time. When at last we persuaded him to move on we found that our delay at the lake was to cost us dear, for some days after leaving its shores every one of us went down with malaria. Our expedition now came to an abrupt standstill at a native village perched on a hill, and here we lay for the next fortnight in various stages of the disease. Maritz's previous enthusiasm evaporated, and he spent most of his time cursing Madagascar and all its works. When he was sufficiently recovered to get about, he said he had had enough, and was returning to Antananarivo. Most of us were so weak that we could scarcely sit our saddles, but we made our way slowly back, a miserable crew, and by the end of April were home

once more.

Chapter II — Hard Times

We found several new companions awaiting our arrival. Robert de Kersauson, a young French marquis who had soldiered with Maritz through the Boer War, was here, and a South African named Jan van Zyl had come up to the capital with his wife and infant daughter from the coast, where he had been growing rice. De Kersauson, on reaching France after the peace of Vereeniging, was conscripted into the French Army, and knowing that Maritz was in Madagascar, obtained permission to be stationed there.

Maritz was illiterate and cruel, but he had so much power over men that during the war he had been blindly obeyed even by men as undisciplined as are we South African Dutch, and now here were van Brummelen, a Hollander, and de Kersauson, a French aristocrat, both come to the ends of the earth in order to be with this ex-Boer policeman. He was a short, dark-complexioned man of about thirty. His physical strength was enormous, and he was difficult to get on with. The slightest opposition brought him raging to his feet, and since we knew that he had killed one of his followers in the war with a single blow of his fist, we did not often cross him.

After our return from the south, he settled down to spend his money, for he was an extravagant man who must buy everything he saw, and I returned to purchasing cattle.

I had recurrent attacks of malaria, but was well enough to get about. The state of my brother’s health, however, was alarming. He grew so thin and worn that I was anxious about him, and determined to get him out of the country before it was too late. We had just heard from my father. He was in

Texas and he wrote to say that, in view of what we had reported to him, we should leave the island, and endeavour to make our way to the States. He was troubled at having no money to send us, and seemed much affected at the thought of our being stranded penniless on the far side of the world.

I felt that as there was not enough cash on hand for both of us to leave, my brother must take what there was and depart. He would not hear of it, but as he was too weak to argue, I hired a push-push and packed him into it with his few belongings, and sent him to the coast. I gave the two natives who relayed him instructions to see him safely on the pangellane boat at Mahatsara, and I wired to Rosseger at Tamatave to meet him. He reached there in a serious condition, but managed later on to ship steerage to Mauritius, and he wrote to me from there. His money was finished, but he was at work, and I heard no more until I returned to South Africa long after. Once he was gone, I continued with the Algerian. I felt lonely without my brother, but my time was fully occupied with our travels among the hills, and I worked at night on a journal of the Boer War that I had begun.[3]

One morning, while returning to Antananarivo, I had a fresh idea. I passed a sort of country estate, and noticed thirty or forty ox-carts abandoned in an enclosure. On making enquiries, I was told that they were the property of two Port Louis creoles, who had tried to run a transport service to the coast. The venture had failed and the carts were laid up where I saw them. I had often watched the long files of native porters coming up with loads from Mahatsara, and had wondered why vehicles were not used instead, but was told that several transport concerns had tried it unsuccessfully, as ox-drawn traffic could not compete with low-paid native labour.

But I thought I knew better. It seemed to me that the previous failures were due to lack of experience in handling oxen, and I got Maritz’s Hollander, Jan van Brummelen, to support me.

We searched out the creoles, and suggested that they should restart their convoy with us as overseers. In the end, the two old fellows said they had lost so much money over the business already that they might as well risk some more, and they agreed to equip about thirty carts with the necessary trek oxen and gear. They were to pay us fifty centimes a kilo for all goods brought up from the sea, so we signed a contract, and after I had taken leave of my Algerian friend, we set about our preparations.

Our first task was to collect the necessary animals. Trained draught oxen were unprocurable and the creoles only had a few left from their former experiment, so we had to break in the requisite number from a large herd owned by them. It was hard work. For six weeks we toiled day after day in the blazing heat, varied by rains that brought on bouts of fever, but at last we had some thirty pairs in trim, after which we had to shoe them all. Maritz took a lion's share in the work, for he had nothing to do with his time. He came out each day, and his immense strength was of great assistance. Malagache oxen are on the small side, but so savage and untamed that we had to carry heavy cudgels to fend off their rushes, and we did not always go unscathed. On one occasion an ox gored Maritz. He felled the animal with his bludgeon, and it never moved again. Another time when he was charged, he flew into one of his ungovernable furies, and seizing the ox below the belly, lifted him bodily from the ground and hurled him yards away. The sight of this feat and of his towering rage was too much for the natives who were helping us. With one accord they threw down ropes or whatever else they had in their hands, and fled for the bush, shouting "vaza abdalla — vaza abdalla," the white man is mad — the white man is mad, and we had considerable difficulty in getting them to return to their work.

The oxen being ready, we had to enlist native drivers, and as I spoke the Hova language, this became my work, a fact which involved me in serious

trouble later on. As headman or “commandeur” I appointed a Hova named Ramamoens. My first acquaintance with him was due to a letter which he had written me in English some time before. It was headed “Privet, I only”, and then:

“Sir, I have heard your design to establish in Madagascar, and that has urged me to bring you some old men well known in mineral and metal matters. A little after, which will not linger, I will show you a concession rich and auriferous. I have also heard that you have been west of the lac Itassy and I am ready with others living there, who are chiefly respectable, to say can you possibly get a permission from the governor to hunt cattles in this region. In means of enriching this is in the second class. I can assure you more than 1000 men to furnish the hunt, and in three months will have gains (over the spent) 1000 bisons or 1,100.

“Ramamoens. Agent of the Chiefs.”

He followed up this epistle by a personal visit, bringing large pieces of rock-crystal, which he said were diamonds, and ore samples which he said were heavy with gold from the rich and auriferous concession. He was such a plausible rogue and his efforts at selling me a “gold-brick” were so transparent and so cheerfully made, that I set him to work collecting a crew of drivers for me. We enlisted chiefly Sakalava bourjanes, as they are excellent cattlemen. They are good-natured, but terribly lazy, and they hold strange beliefs about ghosts and spirits that make it hard to understand their ways.

At long last we were ready. As a trial, we inspanned the whole convoy and rehearsed it around the big square below Antananarivo, and hundreds of natives flocked to see what we were doing.

Next day we loaded a cargo of rice for the coast, and started off on difficult times.

We had twenty-eight transport carts, and a twenty-ninth, somewhat larger than the rest, for sleeping quarters. The road from Antananarivo to Mahatsara is a good one, but it was built for infantry columns and not for ox transport. Throughout its length of two hundred miles it is forever climbing up steep mountain slopes, or dropping down sharp gradients, which require ceaseless vigilance when dealing with clumsy natives and half-wild oxen.

As a rule, we did the journey to Mahatsara and back in about sixteen days. At Mahatsara we loaded wine and meal for the French troops, and downward we carried rice. It rained with tropical violence every other day, so both Jan and I went down with fever regularly once or twice a week. Much of the way led through dank and gloomy forests, our food was rice and brêdi (a shrub growing in the glades), with a rare piece of meat purchased at some native village. The work was gruelling, for the oxen were eternally getting out of hand, upsetting the carts, or breaking their tackle, and we had to walk up and down the convoy all day long to supervise.

We travelled in the heat of the day, as the Sakalava resolutely refused to budge after dark, for fear of ghosts. If we happened to be on the road at nightfall, they would squat down at once, refusing even to unyoke the oxen, and no amount of persuasion had any effect on them, so great was their terror of the unseen.

I do not remember how many trips we made to the coast and back, for I kept few notes, but these were months of bitter hardship. Yet with it all there was a fascination about the life, and I grew almost to like the long road and the forest-clad mountains, and the great rivers. At such times as we were at Antananarivo, awaiting loads or refitting, Jan and I took turn and turn about in staying with Maritz, one of us remaining to look after the convoy while the other had a rest at his villa.

Maritz never learned a word of French or of Hova while he was on the

island, and he retained all the prejudices with which he had arrived. Once when I was at his house my friend Benoit Adrianomanana called. He and I frequently met, but knowing that Maritz classed African negroes, Hovas, Japanese, Indians and all coloured races as “niggers”, I had thus far succeeded in keeping the two apart, though Benoit had several times expressed a desire to pay his respects to “M. le Général”. On this occasion there came a knock at the front door and Benoit walked in. Maritz bridled at once, and said roughly: “Ask the bl——y nigger what he wants.” I manœuvred Benoit into a chair before he tried to shake hands, as I knew that this would cause an explosion. Benoit then said he had intended to bring his wife to call on the

General, but as she was ailing he would bring her another time. Maritz’s face was a picture when I translated this to him, but at my whispered request he contained himself. I told Benoit that M. le Général was very glad to see him. He replied that I was to tell the General he hoped some day to make a pilgrimage to visit the sacred battlefields of the Transvaal. I thought this at any rate would please Maritz, but he growled angrily: “Tell the d——d Kaffir if he sets foot in the Transvaal he will have to carry a pass.” I suitably toned this down, but Benoit realised that all was not well, for he took his leave and did not come to the house again, although he visited me at the convoy whenever I was up.

On our second coastward journey, we had an alarming experience. Some of the larger rivers are provided with “bacs” or pontoons, on which goods are ferried across. At the Mangoro River Jan van Brummelen and I decided to swim the oxen through to save their passage money. The French soldier in charge warned us that the river was full of crocodiles, but we thought they would be too scared to come near the pontoon, so, after manhandling the carts over the ferry, we drove the oxen into the water and they were soon

making for the far side. One of the animals, however, was blind, and kept swimming against the current. Fearing he would tire and drown, I swam out and, seizing one of his horns, headed him after the rest, who by now were streaming for the opposite bank. As I turned back I heard a bellow of terror and, looking round, saw the blind ox disappear in a swirl of foam, pulled under by a crocodile within a few yards of me.

On this trip I had unexpected news of my elder brother Joubert, who had been captured by the British in South Africa three years before. I knew that he had been sent to Bermuda as a prisoner of war, but I did not know how he had fared since then. One night van Brummelen and I were cooking our supper in the forest, when a man came clattering down in the dark through the trees. He reached the road and without stopping to see who we were, scattered our fire with a vigorous kick that sent pot and kettle flying. He was a French colon, and when I protested furiously, he said he thought we were natives using up the bundles of firewood which he had stacked for the Antananarivo market. After helping to rebuild our fire, he sat down to talk, and when he heard my name, said he had recently met a brother of mine on a plantation at Grande Terre, on the west coast of Madagascar. I thought my brother Arend had somehow or other gone there, but found on further questioning that it was my brother Joubert, and I could not understand how he came to be on the island. I only learned years later that on his release from Bermuda he had made his way to Europe, and hearing that my younger brother and I were in Madagascar, had worked his passage thither in the hope of finding us. Through lack of money and fever he was forced to leave his ship at Majunga, and he was still living on a plantation long after I had gone.

As time went on, we found that things were not running quite smoothly with Maritz up at the capital. Jacques Lebaudy’s remittances had grown irregular, and at times ceased altogether. During these periods of dearth

Maritz was hard pressed for money, while at other times he entertained all comers, for he had no idea of economy. I have known him buy an expensive suite of mahogany furniture one day and borrow five francs from me the next, and I have been at his house when he had a chef and a troop of native servants, and also when he and I did our own cooking in our shirt-sleeves on the kitchen stove.

Meanwhile our relations with the two creoles were unsatisfactory. We were bringing up heavy loads from the coast each trip, for which substantial payments were due to us, but we could never get a settlement, and were fobbed off with excuses. Instead of being paid in full we received only sufficient money to buy food for ourselves and to keep the natives quiet, but never enough to bring their wages or our own up to date. The result was that the boys were growing restive and it was only because Ramamoens and I knew how to handle them that they remained with us at all. However, we lived in hopes, for the two partners always promised us that on our next return we would receive full pay, and as we scarcely had any alternative, we continued on the road.

We had several accidents. On one journey we lost two carts and loads in one of the mountain passes. Both drivers went too near the edge, and the vehicles toppled over. Luckily the trek ropes broke and the oxen were saved, but carts and cargo went crashing down the slopes, and what was left at the bottom was not worth salvaging. Another time, I got into trouble with the authorities. At a place called Moramanga, Jan and I spent the evening with a *sous-officier* at the blockhouse, and Ramamoens thought I was away for the night. Returning unexpectedly, I found him rolled up in my sleeping-bag in our cart, and here was my fine gentleman reading a Hova newspaper by lantern light. I hauled him out and gave him a sound thrashing. He reported me next morning, and I had to appear before M. Comperat, the

Administrates, who fined me ten francs, and what rankled even more, he read me a lecture on how to treat natives. In addition I was ordered to reinstate Ramamoens as headman, which I was only too pleased to do, as he was indispensable to us.

On this same trip a terrific cyclone struck us at Mahatsara. It raged for several hours, and it blew the whole village away. While it lasted, the safest place was between the wheels of our carts, for we had heavy loads weighing them down, but all else went flying on the blast, and the air was thick with bamboo huts and fowls and uprooted trees. One or two of our drivers were slightly injured, but eight of the villagers hiding by the river bank were killed or drowned, and many more were seriously hurt. I suffered an after-effect of the disturbance. We had an ox so vicious that I had to handle him myself, for the natives were afraid of him. The cyclone seemed to make him fiercer than ever, and when I tried to yoke him after the storm, he made a rush and tossed me several yards away. I do not know whether any ribs were broken, but it felt like it, and for ten days we had to lie up at a native village that had escaped the hurricane.

Retribution speedily overtook the poor brute, for soon after my recovery, while we were halted for the night on a mountain, he suddenly broke away and sprang over the edge of the road. We heard his body rolling down the incline until it landed with a splash far below. Not even Ramamoens would go down to investigate, but a Sakalava named Ringbar, a cheery giant who drove our living-cart, volunteered to accompany us. He said “Vaza, I *know* there are devils down there, but if you white men go, I will go too.” He was a brave fellow, for he firmly believed there were spooks, and his teeth chattered as we slithered down in the rain. We found the ox lying in a stream, with a broken spine. He had reached the limit of his rebellion and in the gleam of the lantern he looked at us so piteously, that I climbed up for my rifle to put

him out of his misery. When we reached the capital this time, our trouble with the two creoles was coming to a head. Wages were heavily in arrear and the drivers were mutinous. They said the time of the annual *impôt* was on hand, and they would be arrested if they did not pay the tax. When I referred them to the creoles they replied truly enough that I had hired them, and that they looked to me for a settlement. I went to have it out with our employers, and I felt rather sorry for the two old men, for they were in financial straits themselves. But they assured me that they would do their best to arrange matters on our return from the coast, and we managed to placate the bourjanes, who grumblingly agreed to start on another trip.

Before leaving on what turned out to be our last journey with the convoy, I saw the last of my good friend Benoit. Early one morning, as I lay asleep beneath our cart on the outskirts of Antananarivo, I was waked by a small native boy with a letter:

"Cher Ami. Notre Dieu si doux vient de poser une lourde croix sur mon épaule si faible, en m'enlevant ma fidèle et adorée femme Marie Magloire, qui est morte ce matin à 6 heures 52 minutes en odeur de sanctité. Le Divin Créateur l'a reglé ainsi de toute éternité, je préfère de souffrir plutôt de murmurer contre sa Providence à jamais bienfaisante. Je vous invite de venir la voir pour la dernière fois et de prier pour son âme.

"Totus tuus in Xto et in Sto. P. Francisco.

"Benoit Adrianomanana."

Not wishing to hurt Benoit's feelings by a refusal, I followed the errand boy to his house. There were already several hundred natives collected outside, and as soon as I arrived Benoit came to meet me. Taking me by the hand, he led me into a room where the dead woman lay on a bed covered with flowers and surrounded by votive candles. He asked me to kneel by the bedside. I was embarrassed, but did as he wished, and was about to mumble some sort

of a prayer when I heard a click, and looking round, saw a native photographer with his camera on a tripod, and Benoit was assisting him to get a proper focus of the scene. I made an excuse to take my leave as soon as I could, in case they wanted me for further obsequies, and I did not meet Benoit again, although he continued to write to me for years afterwards.

We now loaded the convoy with the usual cargo of rice for the trip to the coast, and van Brummelen and I set off. We travelled in heavy rain most of the time, and both suffered severely from fever, which indeed had seldom left us during the past months. We reached Mahatsara in due course, where a heavy consignment of meal and wine was waiting. In order to have more room, we loaded up our living-cart as well. This was the largest vehicle of the convoy, and because of its extra size was drawn by six oxen. Of these, the wheelers were a cream-coloured pair that I had grown very fond of for their tameness and their gentle ways. They used to eat rice from my hand and sometimes, if I lay reading under a tree, one or other of them would come and with a soft low and a nudge invite me to scratch its flanks.

Ringbar, the huge Sakalava who was in charge of the living-cart, was a good-natured fellow and he paid special attention to my favourites. We started on the homeward journey to Antananarivo. All went well until we reached the Pont d'Ampasimboul, a high trestle bridge spanning a gorge in which the river ran, more than a hundred feet below.

Our living-cart always brought up the rear of the column. The other carts crossed the bridge safely, but just as the big cart was halfway, I heard the planking creak, and one of the wheels went through. I was marching at the tail, and as the wheel sank into the flooring, I jammed on the brake but it was too late. There was a crash, and a whole section of the bridge gave way. I leaped clear in the nick of time, but cart, team and driver went headlong into the depths. Of the six oxen, the two leaders remained on the far side of the

gap, for their trek rope broke, but my cream-coloured wheelers and the rest went hurtling down in a tangled mass, to fall with a sickening thud on the rocks below.

The bridge length on which I had been left standing was rocking dangerously, so I scrambled back to land. Then I climbed down the cliff to where the wreckage lay. The cart had been dashed to pieces with its contents, and the poor oxen were dead, their bodies frightfully mangled by the jagged boulders upon which they had fallen beside the stream. Ringbar, miraculously enough, was alive. He had come down on the tented hood of the cart which broke his fall, but his legs were fractured and he was unconscious. As I was cut off from the convoy by the gap in the bridge, and the river was too deep to ford, I made my way upstream to where some Italian labourers were at work on a steel bridge, which was to replace the wooden structure. They were kindly men, for they came down in a body and carried Ringbar to a native village near by. I did not see him again, but Benoit wrote me later that he made a complete recovery in a military hospital to which he was taken, and that he was now looked upon with reverence by his companions, for they considered that he had had a supernatural escape from death.

The Italians ferried me across the river to rejoin the convoy on the other side, and we moved forward without our living-cart and minus my beloved creams. We reached Antananarivo some days later after nightfall, and camped, as we always did, a short distance out of town. Here the crowning disaster befell us. At daybreak the chief *huissier* (sheriff) came with a dozen gendarmes to demand possession of the convoy in the name of the law.

The creoles had gone insolvent during our absence, and everything was laid under attachment by their creditors. To make matters worse, our bourjanes got wind of the position, and when Jan and I started off for the Palais de Justice to make enquiries, they came along with us. It was an unpleasant

procession, for the sight of two white men surrounded by the angry Sakalava brought a crowd of onlookers, who followed us through the streets. At the Court House matters were even worse. So far from getting our back pay from the creoles, the Commissaire produced the contract which we had signed long ago, and had since forgotten about. One clause required us to make good all losses sustained in regard to livestock and equipment, and he said it had been reported to him that we were short of a number of cattle, several carts, and a quantity of merchandise, totalling over five thousand francs, for which the creditors held us responsible. As if this were not enough, our natives stood outside demanding their wages. Jan and I evaded them by a back door, and we hurried down to find General Gallieni, but he was away on a distant tour. We went to M. le Nègre, the Secrétaire d'Etat, to whom we stated our case. He gave us little comfort, for he said that while the claim for loss and breakages was a civil one, the claim against me personally by the natives was an offence under the criminal code. It was the settled policy of the French strictly to safeguard native rights in their dealings with Europeans, and as I had engaged our drivers, the consequences would be serious were they to charge me with withholding their money. Thoroughly anxious, we went to seek the creoles at their office. Only the elder partner was there, despondently sitting before his desk. When we told him of our plight, he said he was in worse case himself and could do nothing for us. At this van Brummelen lost his temper, and thrusting the old man aside, began to open the bureau drawers. I assisted him, and our search yielded just over a hundred francs, a high-handed proceeding that would have landed us in still further trouble, had it become known. From here we went to look for Maritz. With all his faults he was a generous man, but we met him at the wrong season, for Lebaudy's remittance was once again overdue, and so far from being able to help us he was in difficulties himself. As a last resort we tried Jan van Zyl, who was

employed by the Antananarivo municipality. We found him down with black-water fever, and his wife said she had barely enough money on hand to buy food and medicines. Everything seemed to conspire against us, for Nicolas Wolf and de Kersauson were on outpost duty in the south, and Benoit was away looking for a new wife. Meanwhile the natives were demanding their money. I went to consult André Constans, the lawyer. He agreed with M. le Nègre that the claim for dead oxen and broken carts was a civil one, but that if the Sakalava laid a charge against me I would go to gaol. This was too much, so I decided to levant that very night. I wrote a letter to General Gallieni to thank him for his past kindness, and I explained the reason for my unceremonious exit. I also wrote farewell letters to Nicolas Wolf and to Benoit. Then I made a parcel of my Boer War journal and other papers and posted them to Tamatave, and I packed a few necessaries in an empty paraffin tin, to which I fixed a wire handle. Van Brummelen stayed behind with Maritz. He was in no danger of criminal proceedings, as he had not hired the natives, and he said he would remain until Lebaudy sent some money. As soon as it was dark I slung my sleeping-bag across my shoulders, and with my paraffin tin in my hand, threaded the streets of Antananarivo for the last time, until I reached the beginning of the *grande route*, and started for the coast. I was weakened by long-continued fever, but I did not linger on the road. So far as my memory serves me, I did the two hundred miles to Mahatsara in little more than a week, in spite of the rain that fell all the time. I walked mostly at night to avoid attention, fearing arrest every time I passed a blockhouse or a soldier. As a matter of fact, I was never in danger at all, for Benoit wrote long after to say that M. le Nègre had interviewed our two creoles, and it was decided not to prosecute. But I did not know this, and I dared not meet anyone. When at length I reached the pangellanes at Mahatsara I was so wretchedly ill that I could scarcely drag myself on board

the paddle-wheeler. For a few francs I got a steerage passage through the swamps, and then by Decauville to Tamatave. The first thing I did was to hire a rowing boat to the ships anchored offshore, and on one of these, a French steamer, I persuaded the Captain to take me as a fireman. Having secured my lines of communication, I recovered my parcel at the post office, went to say good-bye to Rosseger, and returned to the ship, where I went straight down with the worst attack of fever I ever had. I was delirious for several days, and when I came to we were at sea, and strange to say, Maritz and Jan van Brummelen were also on board. A timely draft from Lebaudy had arrived, and they had started by rickshaw for the coast without delay.

This was the last of Madagascar for me. I remember but little of the voyage. I lay in a bunk in the forecastle until we reached Zanzibar, and was there put ashore, too ill to proceed. I was carried to a tavern, but by the time I was on my feet again my money was gone and the proprietor ordered me to leave. A kindly clerk in a German shipping office looked after me until I was well enough to get about.

Maritz, so far as I could gather, had continued on to Europe, and the next time I heard of him we were under arms in opposite camps. I never saw van Brummelen again. I had no definite plans for the future except to rejoin my father in America, but at the back of my head was an insistent longing to return to my own country. At Antananarivo I had received a letter from Mrs. Smuts, wife of my old leader, urging me to come back, and other friends had written that the British were dealing fairly by South Africa. I had felt all along that we had made a mistake in exiling ourselves, but I was not yet ready to admit it, so, with the help of my young German friend, I shipped on a Woermann cargo boat bound for Hamburg, once more before the mast. I was miserably ill, but I polished the brass fittings, and did such odd jobs as I could. The food was coarse, chiefly potatoes, rye bread, and tinned beef, and

the sleeping accommodation was dirty and verminous, but the Captain and officers were good to me, for they saw that I was ill. The crew, however, were rough ill-natured fellows, who spoke a German patois I scarcely understood. There was an old carpenter among them, and whenever we collected in the galley for our meals, he dipped his bread in my coffee to save his own. I took no notice at first, but in the end I pulled him up. This started a fight, for the crew took his part, and one of them attacked me with a skewer, which he unhooked from the kitchen wall. I knocked him down with a bench, but the rest bore me to the floor amid oaths and the drawing of knives. Luckily one of the mates came running to my assistance, before I was much the worse, but after this I berthed with men who showed me hostility at every turn, and my life was an unpleasant one. We travelled slowly up the coast of Africa, and then into the Red Sea. Afterwards we anchored at Hodeida off Arabia, to land pilgrims for Mecca. Here there was another German tramp loading donkeys for South Africa, and the sight of a ship going homeward, coupled with the fact that I was ill and at odds with my messmates, decided me. I consulted the Captain, who accompanied me in a boat to the other ship and arranged a transfer, with the result that by next morning I was in new quarters on another ship, heading south once more.

As on former occasions, we nosed down the African littoral, touching at Mombasa, Tanga, Dâr-es-Salaam and other ports, and in due course reached Zanzibar again. At Zanzibar we took in more goods, and I paid a visit to my German friend; he put me up for a day or two, after which we continued our southward journey. At last we reached Delagoa Bay, from which I had started for Madagascar long ago. I intended landing there, but discovered to my dismay that the Portuguese laws allowed no man to come ashore unless he had a passport and twenty-five pounds in his pocket. This was the first I heard of a passport, and instead of twenty-five pounds I had less than twenty-

five pence.

The Portuguese officer at the gangway refused to allow me ashore, and the Captain grumblingly complained that he was saddled with me for good. It looked like it, and I spent an unhappy night on board, tantalised by the thought of being so near my country, and yet so far away.

The following morning, shortly before we were due to sail, help came from an unexpected quarter. A man climbed up the side of the ship, on some business with the Captain. I saw by his appearance that he was a South African, and accosting him, unburdened my troubles. His way of showing sympathy was to count me out twenty-five golden sovereigns from his purse, although he did not know me from Adam. He was a Cape rebel named Theron, who had fled to Portuguese territory to escape the proscriptions that followed the Boer War, and he was now living here, hoping that some day the ban would be raised. Having deposited this money with the immigration officer, I was allowed to land, on condition that I obtained a permit to the Transvaal within ten days. This was not as easy as it looked, for when I waited on the British Consul he bluntly told me that I could not enter the Transvaal, as I had refused to submit to the peace terms of Vereeniging.

I lodged with Theron on the waterfront, he paying my board, and for the next five days I importuned the consular office. But I also telegraphed to the Transvaal Chief Justice and others whom I knew in Pretoria, and at last the Consul handed me a passport through the wicket. He said he was glad to be rid of me.

My next difficulty was my train fare, and here again Theron was the man. But I made the mistake of underestimating the cost, and took only thirty shillings from him. As he had left on a journey into the interior, it was too late to borrow more, when I found at the railway station that this sum would not take me to Pretoria. I worked it out, and booked passage as far as Belfast,

a village lying well within the Transvaal.

At last the train was off, and after a few hours' run we crossed the Transvaal border at Komatipoort, and, British rule or no British rule, I was delighted to see my own country again. We reached Belfast on a bitter winter's night, and the sudden change of altitude on these bleak plains brought on another severe attack of malaria. The station lay two miles from the village, and I dragged myself down the road in the dark until I reached the main street, where I saw a public house all lit up. There I collapsed unconscious on the floor.

Next morning I found myself in a comfortable bed in a pleasant room. An ex-Republican officer whom I had known in the war (and had thought little of at the time), was my Samaritan, and for the next week he was constantly in and out, seeing to my wants. A British garrison was in occupation of the village, and one evening he came in elated, to say that he had procured me the post of billiard marker at the Officers' Mess, as soon as I was well enough. He thought me ungrateful when I refused the offer, but he lent me sufficient money to take train to Pretoria, and in a day or two I was able to start. I reached Pretoria at sunrise with a fresh bout of fever upon me, which left me so weak that I had only strength enough to crawl to the Burgher Park, where I lay in a stupor for some hours. Later on I found myself back on the platform of the railway station with a knot of people gathered around me. Then a man recognised me. He must have set to work at once, for soon a Cape cart drove up, into which I was lifted, and I woke to find myself in bed, in the home of my former chief, General Smuts.

Chapter III — Transition

For nearly three years General Smuts and his wife kept me by them, nursing me back to health of mind and body. During that time I slowly shook free of malaria, and entered an office to study law. Our family seemed in a bad way. My father lay ill far off in America, and his wife and seven small children were in straitened circumstances. My eldest brother, Hjalmar, having returned from his prison, was now in Holland, struggling in poverty to complete his studies, and my brother Joubert was on a fever-stricken plantation on the west coast of Madagascar. My younger brother Arend, had after many vicissitudes reached Table Bay, where he was working as a dock hand. Thus, in common with thousands of others, we experienced the aftermath of war.

Nevertheless, things began slowly to improve. The British conferred Responsible Government on the two former republics, and South Africa settled down to rebuild its shattered fortunes. In a measure, I saw one phase of the rebuilding, for Louis Botha, the Commandant-General, came frequently to the house, and I listened to him and General Smuts planning the political future of the country.

I had returned from exile, not hating the British, but resenting the enforced rule of any other nation. These two men showed me that only on a basis of burying past quarrels and creating a united people out of the Dutch and English sections of the population, was there any hope for white men in South Africa. I became their devoted follower, and my acceptance of their creed was profoundly to influence my life in the years to come.

In 1908 I convinced General Smuts that I could at last fend for myself

again, so I said good-bye to him and to his wife, the two people to whom I owe most in the world, and with a few law books and the political idealisms which he and General Botha had taught me for my chief possessions, I set out to earn a living.

After many wanderings I reached the little town of Heilbron on the northern Free State plains, and there cast anchor. The place had under fifteen hundred inhabitants, but it was the centre of a sturdy Boer peasantry who had fought bravely during the war, in the course of which they had suffered great losses. Their grim jest, “my wife and children died in the concentration camps, my home is burnt down and my cattle gone, but otherwise there is nothing to complain of,” was a fair illustration of what many of them had suffered, and of their unbroken spirit. Now they were back on their ruined farms, patiently at work, and among them I lived for the next five years.

There were difficult days at first, and I was often hard put to keep afloat, but gradually my legal practice grew. In the course of time I was able to build a small home of my own, to collect books, and to look around me, freed from the cramping effects of financial cares.

In the meanwhile South Africa was moving towards great political changes. In 1910 the Act of Union was passed, merging the two British colonies and the two former republics into one country, and General Botha became our first Prime Minister. He and General Smuts established the South African Party, and there was material progress and peace.

Our family prospects were mending too. My father recovered his health, and realising that under the new order he could return to South Africa without humiliation, he came back from America. He was soon elected President of the Union Senate, and once more held a prominent and respected position among his fellow citizens. My other brothers had also drifted in from their wanderings.

Living as I did, far from the centre of things, I took little part in the political developments that were pending, though I keenly followed the thread of events, and no one rejoiced more sincerely than I did at the goodwill that reigned. But this happy state did not last. The Boers are an intensely race-conscious people, and before long they began to say that General Botha's policy would lead to their being swamped by the British element.

Opposition spread, and General Hertzog seceded from us with his followers. He formed the Nationalist Party, with the object of keeping the Dutch apart as a separate entity, as against General Botha's ideal of merging us all into one nation.

These differences rent South Africa, and the struggle became an exceedingly bitter one. There was scarcely a Dutch-speaking family in the country that was not divided on the issue, and even in my placid district, tempers were beginning to rise. The Free State Boers stood behind General Hertzog almost to a man. They thought he aimed at secession from the British Empire, and the re-establishment of the republics, and to them General Botha's policy looked like a betrayal of their cause. In the Heilbron district, I found myself standing well nigh alone, for the farmers went over in a body to the Nationalist Party. I understood their attitude, but to me General Botha's vision was the only one to follow, and so, haltingly at first, and then with growing assurance, I threw myself into a struggle in which I was to be involved for many years, and which, indeed, is not settled at this day. My countrymen, for all their solid qualities, are inveterate politicians. Everywhere the clamour of party rivalries and personal animosities filled the air, and our district was no exception. The Heilbron men had been dogged fighters during the war, and they were equally obstinate in their political beliefs. They began to look on me, striving to uphold the new faith, as an apostate. My standpoint, and the standpoint of those who thought as I did,

was akin to that of the Southerners who stood by the Union during the American Civil War, and like theirs, our lot was an unpleasant one.

President Steyn and Christian de Wet, the two men who had led our little state so brilliantly during the Boer War, joined General Hertzog's crusade, and there was scarcely a Free State leader of any note who was not of the new party. In the Transvaal and in the Cape Colony, the strife waxed equally hot, although opinion was more evenly divided, while Natal was unanimous for General Botha.

My father, whose word had been law to us all our lives, joined the Nationalists, as did my eldest brother, and our family too was a house divided against itself.

There now came to Heilbron a clever young lawyer, named Rocco de Villiers, a champion of the Nationalist cause, and there was instant war between us. In oratory I was not his match, and I fought many a losing battle against him. I vainly advocated the ideal of a united nation, regardless of sectional distinctions, but my hearers would have none of it, and de Villiers would not either. At many an angry meeting I was howled down, and sometimes roughly handled, while he was carried shoulder high. In this manner I made many enemies and lost many friends.

It was a depressing experience to find myself branded as a renegade by men of my own race, at whose side I had fought in the war, and whom I respected for their courage, but who now looked at me askance, and as often as not turned the other way when I passed. However, holding the convictions I did, there was no other course and I stood my ground.

Similar dissension was going on all over South Africa, and it led in the end to civil war, but we were unable to foresee this, and I found the turmoil a relief from the boredom of village life, for, apart from battles with my opponents, there was little enough of interest. We held weekly rifle

competitions which, after politics, are the chief recreation of the Boers, and at Nagmaal (Communion) they came into town with their ox-wagons and their families to attend the quarterly religious services.

For the rest, I saw to the unexacting details of a country practice, varied by an occasional springbok hunt or fishing expedition out in the district, and we ended the year with the annual Dingaans Day festival, to celebrate the victory over the Zulus in 1836. These were dull gatherings at which the speakers gloated over a long-vanquished enemy, and made speeches extolling our race. We held these meetings at Vegkop where the Zulus had been defeated in a local battle, and on one occasion at any rate there was a touch of humour. We decided to erect a memorial to the unknown dead who had fallen there, long ago. A committee was appointed to collect funds and supervise the construction of the monument. When at last the unveiling ceremony took place there was an inscription in Dutch on the base:

"IN MEMORY OF THE BRAVE MEN WHO DIED HERE,
THIS PILLAR HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE FOLLOWING
MEMBERS OF THE BUILDING COMMITTEE"

and then came the names, deeply carved, of the fifteen or sixteen worthies of the committee who had thus perpetuated themselves at our expense.

The quarrel between the Nationalists and the South African Party continued unabated. General Botha was still firmly in power, but he was losing ground in the country districts, and as far as the Free State was concerned, we of his party were in a hopeless minority, only a few stalwarts holding out in every centre.

Things went on in this way for a year or two, the rival sections of the Dutch growing more embittered against each other; for, like the Irish, if we have no external enemy we fight amongst ourselves, and this has been our custom for more than a century.

In 1913 there was a general strike at Johannesburg and Louis Botha called out thirty thousand Boer horsemen to maintain order along the Reef.

Our Heilbron commando was among those for service, and I now realised how deeply our political feuds had bitten. I found that our men looked with suspicion upon instructions emanating from General Botha, and as we rode towards the Vaal River on our way to Johannesburg, there was a great deal of mutinous talk in the ranks. When we reached the south bank, they refused to cross over into the Transvaal. As usual, meetings were held and speeches were made, and some of the orators said that instead of fighting the strikers, we should ride through the river to fight Botha's men. Our commanding officer was David van Coller, a brave soldier but a narrow man and a strong supporter of the Nationalist Party. Nevertheless he did his best to talk reason into his followers, and after two days of haranguing, the bulk of the men pocketed their political scruples, and we forded the river.

We found Johannesburg in a state of siege. The mines were idle and the railways at a standstill, but with so strong an opposing force on the spot, the workers were impotent, and there was no fighting.

We of the Heilbron commando were stationed at Germiston, a mining town eight miles from Johannesburg. Whilst we were lying here, General Beyers came to address us. I had served under him when we took the British camp below the Magaliesbergen in December 1900, but I had never liked him. He had recently been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the military forces in South Africa, and he rode up in full uniform with befeathered helmet and sword.

I sat my horse directly in front of him, so I heard every word he said. His speech was a scarcely veiled attack on the Government and on Botha and Smuts. He ended by saying that these English townspeople had forgotten what a Boer commando looked like, and that it was time we refreshed their

memories. He then ordered us to follow him through the streets of Germiston, a curious performance, I thought, for the head of our army.

Next day he told us to ride through the town again, and to arrest every man who looked as if he were a striker. We galloped along beside the houses, rounding up everyone, and by the time we were finished, we had captured a member of Parliament, two Wesleyan ministers, and several town councillors, as well as many other perfectly innocent citizens. There were curses and complaints, and fainting women, and the incident aroused a great deal of resentment against General Botha, who had nothing to do with it.

There were thirty thousand Boers under arms, many of them Nationalists, and with political feeling running high, there were strange rumours in the air.

Our men said openly that Beyers should utilise the commandos on the Reef to overthrow Botha's Government, and I heard talk of his intending to proclaim a republic. Indeed, Red Daniel Opperman, by whose side I had fought in the Battle of Spion Kop, came riding past one morning, and knowing that I was a Botha man, called me aside, and told me that Beyers had asked him the day before whether the burghers would support him in case he arrested Botha and Smuts. We talked it over and we came to the conclusion that Beyers had only been joking, but in the light of subsequent events, I am not so sure.

The strike now collapsed. At the end of January 1914 we were sent home, and I rode back into the Free State in the company of men against most of whom I was to be in the field before the year was out.

Chapter IV — The 1914 Rebellion

For the next six months the political situation went from bad to worse — until half the population was not on speaking terms with the other half. Like everyone else I carried on a wordy warfare with my local opponents, in the course of which many hard things were said on either side.

In June I camped out in the district, for a rest, about the last rest I have had since then. On the evening of my return to town, I was sitting in our little village hall, when a message was thrown upon the screen to say that the Archduke of Austria had been murdered at a place called Serajevo, in the Balkans. The news did not interest us overmuch, for we were vague as to who he was, and we had never heard of Serajevo.

But then came the ultimatum to Servia, the mobilising of the nations, and the outbreak of the Great War.

For the next six weeks South Africa forgot its internal squabbles in the face of vast battles in Europe, and before long we read of German victories, of British and French armies in retreat, and of the invaders sweeping all before them.

The Boer population had no particular love for Germany. They have tenacious memories, and they still bore the Kaiser a grudge for his refusal to meet President Kruger in 1902, and because he had boasted of having advised Queen Victoria how to overcome our two republics. On the other hand they saw no reason why they should side with Britain in a European war, and it was only natural that they began to ask themselves how we would stand if England were defeated.

Then, on the 9th of September, General Botha made his announcement in Parliament at Capetown that the British Government had asked him to equip an expedition of South African troops to invade the German territory lying on our borders, and that he intended to comply with the request. General Hertzog, the leader of the Nationalists, replied that it was folly to antagonise a powerful nation like the Germans. He said we would lose the flower of our men in the sands of the desert, and that it was better to await the issue in Europe. If Germany was defeated, the South-West territory would fall into our laps like a ripe apple, and if she was victorious, South Africa would pay dearly for having sided against her. These utterances reflected the views of the two political parties, and the Nationalists voted unanimously against the expedition.

General Botha's proposal, however, was carried, and preparations for the campaign were immediately taken in hand.

The report of the proceedings in Parliament and the decision to attack the Germans created a sensation, but there was no sign of trouble at first, for in South Africa we had never looked with a kindly eye on their annexation of a territory which we regarded as part and parcel of our own country. Nevertheless, our political opponents took full advantage of the position. Their leaders and their press conducted a violent campaign against the Government, and on the 15th of September, to add to our troubles, came the shooting of General de la Rey, the famous guerilla leader of the Boer War. A gang of desperadoes had committed a series of murders and robberies along the Reef, and, during the police attempts to capture them, de la Rey was accidentally killed, as he and General Beyers were travelling by car through the suburbs of Johannesburg. It was later established that General Beyers was on his way to start a rebellion in the Western Transvaal and that General de la Rey was accompanying him. If General de la Rey knew of the plot, then his

consent was obtained by playing upon his religious beliefs. I had met him only a few days before his death and I saw that his mind was affected, for his talk was of Christian Science, spiritualism, and the dreams of van Rensburg, his tame prophet; and once, when he had gazed at me in a strange manner, I asked him why, and he said that he was testing our souls to bring them *en rapport*, a phrase he must have picked up at a séance.

We all regretted his tragic end, for he was universally loved and esteemed, but now the manner of his death was used against us.

General Beyers, in the Transvaal, and General de Wet, in the Free State, began to make speeches in which they accused the Botha Government of having deliberately murdered de la Rey because he was opposed to the South-West expedition. Beyers was the Commander-in-Chief of all our forces, and de Wet was a member of the Union War Council. With these two levelling charges of such a nature, and with a war against the Germans on our hands, the prospects of the campaign seemed none too promising.

But Botha and Smuts were determined men. They called for volunteers, recruits were enrolled at various centres, and plans for the occupation of South-West were pushed forward.

I volunteered, but I did not like the look of things. In Heilbron, the Boer farmers stood sullenly debating events at the street corners, and when I passed, they turned their backs on me, and I gathered that the rest of the Province was in a similar state of unrest.

A few days after de la Rey's funeral, General de Wet drove through our village. When he saw me, he stopped the car and called me to him. He angrily declared that Botha and Smuts had murdered de la Rey, and he berated me for supporting them.

I had too much respect for him to bandy words, and merely answered that I was doing what I thought was right, whereat he drove off in a temper. Within

the next few days I found that he was holding meetings in the district, at which he advocated the use of armed resistance to the Government. This was a very serious matter, for de Wet had immense influence in the Free State. He stood high in the opinion of his countrymen for his record during the Boer War, and whatever attitude he adopted was likely to be followed by thousands of his old fighting men.

This being the case, I went to Pretoria to consult General Botha. I met him and General Smuts in the Government Buildings, and we had a long conference. They said that reports from the Free State were not reassuring, and they feared that Beyers was planning mischief in the Western Transvaal. He had resigned his position as Commandant-General and was moving about the country districts in a suspicious manner.

In spite of these ominous signs, they still hoped that the various agitations were the work of politicians trying to make party capital, but they asked me to keep a strict lookout, and to let them know in good time should there be danger in the south.

Before I left Pretoria, General Botha invited me to his home at Sunnyside. When we arrived, I was astonished to see General Beyers waiting for him at the door. He looked ill at ease, and I wondered what had brought him there, for he was supposed to be raising adherents in the rural areas. I heard him ask for a private interview, so I went off, but I have many times wondered what passed between these two men, once companions in arms, at this last meeting before one of them died a violent death.

A day or two after my return to Heilbron I saw a crowd collected at the Court House, so I walked across to enquire. There was an official announcement posted on the board outside:

"October 12th, 1914. Whereas Lieut.-Colonel Maritz, with a number of his officers and portion of the forces placed under his command, has shamefully

and treacherously gone over to the Germans and is now in open rebellion against the Government and the people of the Union, and is, in conjunction with the forces of the enemy, invading the northern portions of the Cape Province, and whereas there is grave reason to think that the Government of German South-West has communicated with and corrupted other citizens of the Union under the false and treacherous pretext of establishing a republic in South Africa, and whereas the Government considers it necessary to defend the Union against attacks from within and without, now therefore I do hereby declare that all districts of the Union are placed under Martial Law until further notice.

"J. C. SMUTS

"Minister of Defence."

This Maritz was my old Madagascar associate, whom I had last seen at Zanzibar, years before.

On his return from Europe he had settled in South-West, where he served with the German Army against the Hereros. Latterly he had re-entered the Union, and Beyers had appointed him to the military command of those districts of the Cape Province that lie adjacent to the German border, and here was the result. The moment war broke out, Maritz had opened negotiations with the German military authorities in the South-West territory, and on a given date he arranged for their troops and batteries to surround the fifteen hundred recruits he had in camp. He then addressed his men, telling them of his intention of going over to the enemy who had promised to help him to establish a republic in South Africa. He gave the men the option of following him or of being handed to the Germans as prisoners of war.

A few agreed to join him, but most of them, including my brother Joubert, preferred internment, and they spent the next ten months in a prison camp.

In South Africa, the news of Maritz's action was received with indignation

by those who were loyal to the Government, and with unconcealed satisfaction by many of our political enemies.

As far as our district was concerned, things moved swiftly to a head.

On the morning of the 23rd October, a man came into my office, and locking the door behind him, whispered in my ear that David van Coller, the District Commandant, was coming with a strong force that night to take the town on General de Wet's behalf, and that I was to be shot in my back-yard. Having delivered himself of this at a gulp, he unlocked the door and quickly vanished.

I telephoned the information to General Smuts in Pretoria, and I suggested that I should collect volunteers to defend the place. He gave me peremptory orders to do nothing of the kind. He said that if van Coller came in, and we fired on his men, the Nationalists would raise a cry throughout the country, and would say that we had started the trouble. He said he did not like leaving me in the lurch, but they were expecting outbreaks at other centres, so I was to look after myself.

In view of this, I saw no reason why I should tamely remain to be captured by my political opponents. I did not believe that I would be shot, for the Boers are not given to assassination, but in the heat of our long quarrels I had made many enemies, and the least that would happen to me would be arrest and indignities.

I decided therefore to make my escape. I was able to ascertain that already, out of sight, there were rebel pickets on every road leading from the town, so a daylight attempt was out of the question, and my only hope was a getaway after dark.

In the meanwhile, I pretended to be ignorant of what was afoot, and I attended to my affairs until four in the afternoon, when I went home to prepare for flight, and I ordered my native boy, Ruiter, to get our horses

ready. Ruiter had been with me for years. He was a bandy-legged, diminutive Hottentot, the ugliest and loyalest servant a man ever had. My horse was a thoroughbred named Bismarck, one of the best in the country, and Ruiter had a fast Basuto pony. When I explained matters to him, he said we had the legs of any animals in the district.

As we were waiting, ready saddled, for darkness to fall, two young farmers, Daniel Malherbe and Fritz Weilbach, came galloping to my house. They were Government men, and they had both taken a prominent stand in the political war, so they had decided that the town was the best place for them. They said that all the countryside had risen, that mounted bands were patrolling in every direction, and that it was only by hard riding that they had got through. When I told them of the orders received from General Smuts, they agreed to join my attempt to bolt.

By now, standing in my yard, we could see rebel horsemen dotting the skyline, so there was no time to lose, and the moment it was dark enough we set off and, slinking by the gaol and the municipal pound, slipped quietly out of the town.

We left not a moment too soon, for we found afterwards that, within twenty minutes of our passing, every exit was occupied by pickets, which must even then have been closing silently in as we went.

Once clear of the streets we proceeded cautiously, our rifles at the ready, for we expected trouble, but we reached the railway crossing four miles away without being challenged, and beyond that we halted in a hollow, in order to take stock. We had no definite plans. Our first impulse had been to escape from the more immediate danger in the town, and now that we had accomplished this, the question arose what we should do next. The whole district, and, for all we knew, the whole country, was in revolt, and as far as we could tell, wherever we went we should still be among enemies, so we

decided to remain where we were for the night, and see what the morrow would bring forth.

At dawn, we told Ruiter to fetch our horses from the pad-dock into which they had been turned, and I crawled up the slope with my rifle to see whether the coast was clear. Carefully peering over the edge, I found myself looking down on about seventy armed men almost within a stone's throw of me. The majority of them were sitting on the ground before their horses, their heads bowed down, as if wearied by an all-night vigil. This, I learned long afterwards, was a contingent posted here by van Coller, for the especial purpose of intercepting me. He had been told that I intended to escape in this direction after dark, and he had sent these men to watch the railway crossing. They had spent the night there, little knowing that we were lying so close by.

I took a good look at the party, among whom I recognised some of my best clients, and then seeing another outpost on a hill beyond, I wormed my way back to where Malherbe and Weilbach were awaiting me with our horses. Ruiter was still running about, trying to bring in his pony. By now, more men were riding down from the hill, waving and shouting to those out of sight near the crossing, and as I knew that they would not harm him if he were captured, I told him to hide himself in the grass since we could not wait for him, and we galloped off, bearing west, the only direction that seemed open to us.

The instant we rode out of the little hollow the men at the railway saw us, and leaping on to their horses, they gave chase. My horse Bismarck could outdistance any animal which the rebel band behind us was likely to have, and both Daniel and Fritz were noted for the quality of the horses they bred, so our chief danger was that we might be brought down by a bullet, or that we might be shepherded into the arms of some other rebel force coming our way. Fortunately neither of these things happened. We soon drew out of

range, and as van Coller, in his anxiety to make sure of the town, had concentrated most of his men around it during the night, we had the district to ourselves.

Although we were better mounted than our pursuers, they pounded stubbornly behind, and we saw other stray horsemen in the distance, but none came near enough to intercept us, and when we had gone five or six miles we dropped into an easier pace, our rebel friends also slowing down. After a while we heard galloping in our rear, and looking round, saw my boy Ruiter, riding hard. He had lain low while the rebels were streaming past, but after they had gone, the plucky fellow had caught his pony, and cutting cross-country to avoid the hunt, had actually overtaken us.

We went on and occasionally met cartloads of Womenfolk, driving towards Heilbron. They told us with smiles of triumph that the town was taken by van Coller and “General” Rocco de Villiers, who had blossomed into field rank overnight.

Our original pursuers were still coming on far behind, but we had no fear of being overtaken by them, and we trotted steadily along. My two companions were inclined to be depressed, for they had left their wives and property to the mercy of their enemies. Their wives were safe enough, for no Boer, rebel or otherwise, would molest a woman, but they knew it would go hard with their flocks and herds, and they were men of substance. I rode along in a more cheerful frame of mind. I had long been tired of the humdrum existence that I had been leading, and now that the whole world was at war, the highway stretching before us seemed to lead to a wider life and, indeed, I have been far afield since that morning.

Towards three in the afternoon we approached Wolvehoek Station, on the railway line that comes up through the Free State to Johannesburg and Pretoria. We had ridden twenty-five miles by then, and most of the rebels had

dropped out. About a dozen of them, however, better mounted, or more determined than the rest, made a final bid to get within range before we reached the cover of the station buildings, and they came hurrying towards us in a cloud of dust. We were not certain whether the station was held by rebels or not, but we were relieved, as we rode, to see the mail train steaming in from the south. It was the last train to get through before the line was broken up, and passengers leaned from every window, to view what must have seemed to them like a cinema performance, three armed men and a native boy riding for their lives, and something like a sheriff's posse coming on behind.

The arrival of the mail was an equal surprise to the gentlemen in our rear, for on seeing it they reined in their horses, and presently rode back along the way they had come. There was great excitement. Everyone fired questions at us, and we in turn were eager for news. So far as we could piece matters together, Maritz was invading the Cape Province at the head of German troops, Beyers was in revolt, and the Northern and Western Transvaal were up in arms against General Botha, while much of the Free State had risen at de Wet's behest.

The railway line to Johannesburg and Pretoria was still open, but beyond that all was doubt and uncertainty.

My two friends and I held a hurried consultation, and we agreed to board the train for the Transvaal. I was anxious to see General Smuts, and there was no particular object in remaining here to be picked up by the rebels.

As the mail train consisted of passenger coaches only, we could not load our horses. The Transvaal was still thirty-five miles away, but when I asked Ruiter whether he would ride for Vereeniging on the north bank of the Vaal River that night, he cheerfully undertook the risky mission, and as the train pulled out, we saw his stocky figure already in the saddle, our three led horses trotting beside him.

By dark we crossed the Vaal River Bridge, reaching Johannesburg two hours later. Malherbe and Weilbach remained there, while I went on to Pretoria to find General Smuts.

I arrived at 11 o'clock that night, and immediately made for Defence Headquarters. General Smuts was sitting at his desk, working at high pressure. Orderlies rushed in and out, telephone bells rang, and the building hummed with a cheering activity. He gave me a hurried account of the situation. The rumours we had heard that afternoon were true in the main, but somewhat exaggerated.

Beyers was at the head of the Transvaal outbreak, and was at this moment moving about the Pretoria district with a strong rebel force. General Smuts spoke bitterly of his conduct, but he said General Botha had marched out that afternoon to attack him, and he had little fear of the result.

Taking a piece of paper, he scribbled a note appointing me to the command of the Heilbron military district, and with this rapid promotion in my pocket, I took my leave, having likewise blossomed into field rank overnight.

I had spent a long and exciting day, so I walked to the nearest hotel with my rifle and cartridge belts as my only luggage, and having booked a room, was soon fast asleep.

Before daybreak I secured a car and started back for Vereeniging on the Vaal River. In passing through Johannesburg, I picked up Malherbe and Weilbach, and by 10 o'clock in the morning we reached Vereeniging, and across the river lay the Heilbron district. At the police station stood trusty Ruiter, grinning a welcome, our horses safe and sound. He had ridden all night, keeping clear of the roads, and so had come through unharmed.

I now sent the car back to Pretoria, and after fording the Vaal River we were in our own district once more. Coming across the plain were about thirty mounted men, whom, scouting nearer, we recognised as Government

supporters making for the Transvaal. Amongst them was Antony Peeters, an old school friend, and there were others from our area, so that when I produced my appointment as Commandant, they agreed at once to serve under me. With this nucleus of a commando I decided to raid deeper in. We went carefully, seeing only a few distant rebel patrols, and by 3 o'clock were at Wolvehoek Station. I had left there as a fugitive the afternoon before, and I was back within twenty-four hours at the head of an armed force, which was pretty quick work, I thought.

The Stationmaster told me that van Coller had visited the place during the night with four hundred men. They had looted the shops and torn up the railway line, after which they rode off without even cutting the telephone lines to the north. The stationmaster advised me to be cautious. Van Coller had said in his hearing that if I ventured to return to the district, he was going to make short work of me. I felt none too easy myself, outnumbered as we were, but we rode out as far as the Clydesdale colliery ten miles away, to reconnoitre.

I discovered that van Coller was lurking in the neighbourhood, and I knew him to be a pretty resolute customer. So we waited at the mine until dark. Just as we were preparing to leave the shadow of the pithead, we saw about fifty rebel horsemen riding past. I told the men not to fire. An open fight was one thing, but I was reluctant to shoot down unsuspecting men of my own district, so we sat on our horses and waited for them to go by. One man turned aside, and before he realised it, he was in among us. He was a cousin of Fritz Weilbach's, and Fritz himself steered his horse alongside, and whispered fiercely: "Neef Wilhelm, if you utter a sound you are a dead man." The young fellow took it calmly. He said he was glad we were Government men, for he had been pressed into service against his will, and would sooner be with us than on the other side. In any case he remained contentedly with me

until the end of the rebellion.

As soon as the rebel column had disappeared, we made for higher ground and camped for the night, but next morning We returned to Wolvehoek Station, whose sheds and stone buildings seemed to me a good defensive position.

It was well that we did so, for in less than half an hour van Coffer's force showed on the skyline, a solid mass of horsemen. They halted, and a messenger came galloping towards us, bearing a white flag and a letter addressed to me. It was an ambiguous document, for I was van Coffer's "dear friend", and he requested the meaning of my presence with armed men in a district of which he was in command. I wrote him a reply on the booking counter. I said the meaning of my presence was that I was now in command of the district, and not he, and that I intended to fight him. After sending off this boastful message, I went to the telephone office, and in a few minutes got through to General Smuts at Pretoria. I told him what was doing and that I thought we could hold our own at the station, but hoped he would be able to send a relief force in a day or two.

Here again he gave me emphatic orders that there was to be no fighting. He said President Steyn was in touch with the rebel leaders in the Free State with a view to preventing bloodshed, and I was on no account to do anything that might imperil the negotiations. Looking through the window of the little office where I stood, I could see the rebel commando still on the rise, but smaller groups of horsemen were detaching from the main body and riding down in our direction. I told General Smuts this and asked him how I was to avoid a fight under these circumstances. He told me to withdraw my men towards the Vaal River immediately. This was across thirty-five miles of open plain, but his instructions were too explicit to be disregarded, so I called the men from their different posts, and we mounted our horses, and rode

slowly away. Thereupon the rebel parties came galloping straight for us.

I was riding some distance behind with a few companions as a rearguard, and as I knew that General Smuts would not expect passive resistance, I jumped to the ground and fired at the foremost rebel. The man flung up his arms, and tumbled headlong from his horse, and a brisk little battle ensued. Bullets whistled about our ears, but as the rebels were firing from the saddle, not one of us was hit, and after a few minutes they withdrew, leaving several of their number on the ground.

To show van Coller that I was not afraid of him, we off-saddled at a farm in full view of his commando, and through my glasses I could see them gesticulating and pointing in our direction, as if arguing whether to come after us or to leave us alone. Then van Coller's brother Piet came riding under a white flag with another letter. There was nothing ambiguous about it this time. He said the blood that had been spilt was upon my head; my punishment was being prepared, and I would rue the day I was born. I sent him back a curt reply, and after giving our horses sufficient rest, we rode on, leaving our opponents still given over to debate.

As we went, an Irishman from a neighbouring farm rode up. He had heard the sound of firing and had hurried to ascertain the cause of it. When I told him, he asked me whether this was a war between the British and the Dutch, or between Botha and Hertzog, or between myself and David van Coller. I told him it was a mixture of all three, whereupon he said that, being an Irishman, he had to take part, and as I had helped him one night when he had got into trouble at Heilbron, he might as well join me, which he did there and then, for he had come fully armed. It was like the story that went the rounds in these days of the old Boer who was questioned as to what side he was on. He replied that he was neutral. Asked what he meant by "neutral", he said he meant he was going to join whichever commando on either side was the first

to reach his farm.

We now continued unmolested on our way, and crossed the Vaal River to Vereeniging after dark. I had left here the previous afternoon to recapture my district, and I had been chased out of it in little over twenty-four hours, which was quick work too, I thought.

Next morning we were cheered by the sight of many Government men entering the town. From them we obtained a rough idea of current events. General Botha had defeated Beyers, who was however still at large with many followers; and all over the Transvaal there was confused fighting going on between rebel bands and bodies of Government sympathisers. Along the Orange River, Maritz at the head of German troops had invaded the Cape Province, and in the Free State Christian de Wet and Rocco de Villiers were raising strong rebel commandos, so that, generally, wide areas of South Africa were in a state of disaffection. General Botha and General Smuts boldly faced these many dangers. Troops were being despatched to every threatened point and as de Wet's activities were looked on as likely to involve the entire Free State in the revolt, General Botha had ordered the assembly of commandos at Vereeniging, in order to prepare for an invasion under his personal command. He was still in the west, and for the moment old Coen Brits was in charge. I reported to him, and he greeted me with a slash of his raw-hide sjambok, which was his idea of a military salute. He was an amusing character. He stood six foot six inches, did not know a word of English, drank enormous quantities of alcohol without turning a hair, and was celebrated throughout the Transvaal for his racy wit and Rabelaisian stories. But he was a good soldier. He had fought with skill and courage on the Republican side during the Boer War, and General Botha was the only man who had any influence over him. When Botha wired him to mobilise his men for the South-West expedition, he wired back to say he was ready, but

wanted to know whether he had to fight the Germans or the British. He was quite prepared to do either, for he worshipped Botha, and obeyed him blindly.

We lay at Vereeniging for several days, during which time a considerable number of Government supporters from the Heilbron district escaped through the Vaal River to join me, and I soon had about two hundred and fifty men.

We now heard that General de Wet was in the central Free State with five thousand men, and that more were joining him daily. When General Botha arrived to take command, we were over six thousand horsemen with several guns, and we set out at once to look for de Wet. After a journey of two hundred miles we found him at Mushroom Valley, with his men strongly posted in the hills.

My commando was attached to Coen Brits's larger force, and we were told to take up a position in the rear, to cut off the rebel retreat. A pretty fierce battle now took place. De Wet was angered at the death of his son, killed in a skirmish, and his fighting spirit was aroused.

After preliminary shell-fire, General Botha attacked, and there were heavy casualties on both sides. Then the rebels broke, and came streaming up the valley in our direction, with de Wet on a white horse at their head. We gave chase and drove him into the mountains towards McQuathlingsnek, but he was too old a guerilla to be caught, although we took a number of his stragglers, who dropped behind with wounds or foundered horses.

We crossed McQuathlingsnek, a beautiful pass high among the rugged mountains, where lie the graves of British dead killed here in the old war, but by dark de Wet had given us the slip. He next broke cover, and leaving the mountains, went west across the Free State plains, our forces tearing after him.

My place in the drive ran via Bloemfontein, and then down the Modder River, for a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, but neither I nor any

other of old Coen's men came in sight of the quarry, for de Wet had changed direction and was now heading north-west for the Kalahari Desert. His course lay so far out of our road that we were ordered to halt at Paardeberg, where Cronje was captured by Lord Roberts in 1900. Here Brits collected his men.

There was a Scotchman with me who owned a set of bagpipes, which he played around our camp fires at night, and old Coen apparently took this to be a Scottish religious observance. One morning a Dutch Reformed clergyman wrote for permission to address the men. Coen, who was somewhat of a pagan, replied that he didn't want any preaching in his camp, and turning to me, said that as he had forbidden the predikant to come, he must be fair as between the sects, and I was to stop that damned Scotchman of mine from playing the bagpipes!

And now word came that strong rebel commandos were reforming in the north-eastern Free State. Coen Brits was ordered to continue after de Wet, but General Botha instructed me to hasten along a route of my own towards the scene of the fresh trouble, and there await his arrival with his troops.

This meant journeying two hundred miles across the width of the Province. Our objective was the little town of Reitz, named after my father, where the rebel concentration was gathering. I went via Kroonstad and Lindley, and thence into our own district of Heilbron. I found that David van Coller had brought his men back from the Mushroom Valley disaster, and they were now dispersed in small bands, making their way to Reitz.

At the headwaters of the Rhenoster River an old friend of mine named Doris Botha, tried to oppose my passage with some rebels he was commanding. I was riding ahead when he came into view, and he waved his hat at me before dismounting to fire. I got Bismarck behind some rocks, and replied, whereupon he gave me another salute and made off. He and his men then opened a brisk fire, but I turned their flank, and crossed the river higher

up, capturing Doris and about twenty others. They all shook hands in the most friendly manner, and later in the afternoon we picked up a dozen more, equally friendly, as they handed over their rifles. They told us a commando of Transvaalers had relieved Heilbron a few days before, so our little hamlet was free again, but we regretted that its taking had not been left to us.

Next morning we rode in. Less than a month before I had fled the place in the night. Now I was returning with a commando and prisoners, so I enjoyed the ovation we received as we filed through the streets to a banquet which the ladies had prepared for us.

I found my house pillaged, but no wanton damage had been done, and, needless to say, every shop and warehouse had been cleared by the rebels. In South Africa, however, the commandeering of supplies in time of trouble is part and parcel of our military system, and the Heilbron insurgents had at any rate shown a sense of humour, for most of their requisition notes were endorsed: “Payable to bearer by the winning side”.

The Transvaal men who had liberated the town had gone off in the direction of the rebel gathering in the east, and next day we took the same road. As we moved, there was a steady flow of local rebel horsemen going forward in small parties. They kept out of range most of the time, but on several occasions we exchanged long-distance shots, and once I personally captured four men as they were watering their horses at a trough. They were rebels from our district, and they too shook hands smilingly, when I relieved them of their weapons. To them, as to all the rebels I ever met, the rising was but a more acute phase of our original political differences, and I never came across one man who thought that he had committed an offence in taking up arms against the Government of his country.

In spite of the rains that now descended, the heaviest in thirty-five years, it was said, we groped our way across the sodden country, until we came to the

neighbourhood of Reitz, where we found the Wilge River in flood, and barring our way. On the far side stood several rebel camps and laagers, and many mounted men were moving about.

By the time the rains had ceased, General Botha was approaching with his force of nearly three thousand men, and we began to close in. One band of rebels, about three hundred strong, tried to break back under cover of an early morning mist but I headed them off, and chased them for over two hours until we cornered them in a bend of the river. After a short fight they put up the white flag, and we were surprised to find that we had captured the major portion of David van Coller's Heilbron commando, from our own district, though he himself was elsewhere with the balance of his men. Nearly three hundred surrendered, with over four hundred horses, and every one of the captured men was an acquaintance, a client, or a friend.

After resting our horses, we went on, and presently fell in with one of Botha's patrols, who told us that he had occupied Reitz that morning. So we went there to hand over our charges. We reached the village by dusk, and as our cavalcade clattered through the streets with the long column of prisoners and led horses, it aroused a good deal of attention from the troops and townspeople who came crowding up.

This little "dorp" that bears our family name was strongly rebel in sympathy. One of the Transvaal men told me that when they entered the town, some of the inhabitants expected to see khaki-clad British soldiers, for they believed that General Botha was fighting them with an auxiliary army from overseas, whereas his men were chiefly old-fashioned Boers from the Eastern Transvaal. Thus it happened that when the advance guard rode in, an ancient rebel dame rushed into the street, and seeing only shaggy burghers, thought they were her own people and called out in Dutch: "But men, where are the bloody English?" (Waar is die verdomde Eng-else?) to which a young

Boer scout replied in the same language: “Old lady, we *are* the bloody English.”

The following morning I visited General Botha at his quarters beside the railway station. He looked fit and well, but he was a saddened man. He did his duty in opposing the rebellion, but I know what sorrow it caused him. He explained the situation to me. Beyers had fled across the Vaal River, making for German territory. De Wet, with a mere handful of men, had escaped into the Kalahari Desert, and Coen Brits was still on his trail, while Maritz lay on the Cape border with a mixed contingent of rebels and Germans. In the rest of the country the rebellion was being stamped out by the effective measures which he and General Smuts had taken.

Locally, David van Coller and two other leaders named Wessel-Wessels and Serfontein, were in the field with several thousand retainers. They were more or less hemmed in, and they were disheartened, for General Botha showed me a letter received from them proposing to negotiate. He had replied demanding an unconditional surrender.

That afternoon, when I was again at Headquarters, a telegram came to say that old Coen Brits had captured de Wet. He had collected a number of motor cars, and with these wore down de Wet’s horses, until they could go no further. When I heard how the obstinate old guerilla leader had been run to earth by the help of mechanical contrivances I was almost sorry, for it spelt the end of our picturesque South African commando system. With these new engines of war it would no longer be possible for mounted men to play hide-and-seek across the veld, and the good old days were gone for ever.

General Botha now received another letter signed by the three rebel leaders:

“6th Dec., 1914.

“To General Louis Botha.

“We desire to impress upon you that it was to maintain a cause dear to us

beyond everything that we resolved upon hostilities. Also, we are pledged to our other commandos in the field, so we cannot surrender without consulting them. Therefore, we tell you the only way is to send General de Wet here. Also, let Beyers and Maritz be present."

This letter, like the previous one, was in Dutch, and General Botha wrote a reply at once. He told me the three leaders were said to be in a cave that had been used to store grain and ammunition during the Boer War, and as I knew the lie of it, I was to deliver the despatch.

At daybreak Malherbe, Weilbach and I set out. We met numerous rebel horsemen, apparently on their way home, and it was clear that the movement was collapsing. When we reached the cave, there was no sign of anyone. We crawled and stumbled about the dark passages by candlelight, but we had come on a bootless errand, and when we got back that evening it was to learn that van Coller and his fellow leaders had agreed to surrender.

Next morning, what was left of the rebel commandos rode in to lay down their arms. So many had slipped away during the past few days that there were only about fifteen hundred left, and we sat our horses beside the road to watch them pass. First came van Coller at the head of his men, and he glowered fiercely at me as he rode by. Then came Wessel-Wessels and Serfontein, each with their followers at their heels. It was mournful to see the long files of sullen dejected men ride past, many of them old friends, all of them our countrymen.

General Botha now ordered me to take the prisoners from my district back to Heilbron, and to release them there. Having beaten his opponents, he showed no rancour. Even towards men who had betrayed his personal friendship he cherished no ill will, and in all the years I knew him he Was the same large-hearted generous man.

After saying good-bye to him and to my two younger brothers, Arend and

Jack, who were serving under him, I started off. We formed an imposing array as we trekked through the countryside, with hundreds of prisoners and hundreds of captured horses being driven along. As we passed, the rebel women and children came running from the farmhouses to stare at us, and to call greetings to their menfolk under guard.

In two days' time we reached Heilbron, and once again received a rousing welcome from the citizens. Van Coller and Rocco de Villiers were ordered to stand their trial, and were each sentenced to a term of imprisonment, and I did not see them again. But the rest of the prisoners were returned to their homes.

In our district there were still a few roving parties in the broken country along the Rhenoster River. I ordered them to come in, but as they paid no attention, I collected my men and went after them. We chased these recalcitrants for nearly three weeks, in the course of which we had several sharp encounters. I had a few men wounded and we killed and wounded several of our opponents, but by the end of January they were rounded up, and the district was clear.

By this time, too, General Beyers had met his death in the Vaal River, while attempting to escape through the swollen stream, and Maritz had been disposed of. Jacobus van Deventer, my old Boer War companion, defeated him in a pitched battle at Upington on the Orange River. Maritz, though wounded, escaped into German territory, as he had done in 1902, and eventually made his way to Spain, where he found sanctuary on neutral ground.

My final contact with the rebellion savoured of comedy. Early in February 1915, when everyone was settling down peacefully, I received a telegram from the Commandant of the adjoining district to say that a desperate character named Josiah du Toit was at large in my area, and I was requested to effect his capture. The wire concluded with the statement that this should

be facilitated by the fact that his horses were in poor condition.

I knew du Toit and his ways, and I knew him to be a decent fellow, so, instead of hunting him, I sent him a message to come in. Two days later I heard a clatter before my office, and looking out, saw Josiah on his horse, fully armed and with two led horses alongside. He dismounted, hitched his animals to the post, and walked in, rifle in hand. He greeted me like a long-lost brother; but drawing myself up, I said: “Josiah, I’m sorry, but you have to go to gaol.” He answered smilingly: “Man, don’t talk nonsense. How can you put an old friend like me in prison now that the thing is over?”

I conceded this point, but demanded his rifle. Here again he was obdurate. He said: “You can’t have my rifle. I have lost my crops and all my sheep while I was away, and I shall have to live by shooting springbok, so my rifle I keep.” I tried another tack, and told him I required two of his three horses for government purposes. He would have none of this either. He had bred the animals himself; it was through fear of losing them that he had remained out so long; and he would like to see the man who would take them from him.

Brushing this talk aside, he asked me how I had known of his presence in the district, and I showed him the telegram I had received. He spelt it out slowly until he came to the disparaging reference to his horses. Then he angrily flung down the wire and cried: “How dare they accuse Josiah du Toit of having poor horses! Everyone knows I breed the best in the Free State. This insult I will not endure; you are my lawyer, now you sit down and demand from that officer heavy damages for defamation of my character.”

That he had been concerned in a seditious rising and had remained under arms long after everyone else had surrendered, was to him a mere detail, but being charged with owning third-rate horseflesh was an insult not to be borne, and I had the greatest trouble in smoothing his ruffled feelings. In the end, he compromised by borrowing half-a-crown from me and rode off,

horses, rifle and all, with the injured air of one who had received rather less than his just dues.

The rebellion was over. With a great conflict raging in Europe, it passed almost unnoticed in the outside world, but in South Africa the aftermath is with us yet, and the motives and origin are still the subject of fierce controversy.

I personally have not the slightest doubt that it was a direct outcome of our preceding political warfare. That it was essentially a party quarrel is proved by the fact that every member of the South African Party stood by General Botha, and while not every Nationalist was a rebel, it is literally true that every rebel, without a single exception, was a Nationalist.

Furthermore, the rebellion was a domestic dispute among the Boers themselves, and hostility towards the British had comparatively little part in it. Of the thirty thousand men who helped to quell the revolt, twenty-one thousand were Boers, and of the nine hundred casualties we suffered on the Government side, nearly seven hundred were of Dutch descent. The rising was crushed by Boer commandos under Boer officers, and to this day the ill feeling that was engendered lies not between Dutch and British, but between the two sections of the Boer people in South Africa.

Chapter V — An Excursion into German West

During all the time that General Botha and General Smuts were grappling with the rebellion, they had kept steadily in view their intention to conquer German West, and now that the outbreak was crushed, they did not delay.

While I was still busy clearing up my district, they had already sailed from Capetown with large bodies of troops. They had called up fifty thousand fighting men of English and Dutch stock,[4] and for the first time in the history of South Africa, Boer commandos from the interior rode through the streets of Capetown to lead their horses into ships, and for the first time an armed expedition went by sea beyond our borders. By the time I was able to go, Botha had landed at Swakopmund with twelve thousand men, and Smuts had landed at Lüderitzbucht with an army of six thousand, while other columns were marching from the Orange River to make the issue doubly sure.

As soon as I could, I locked my office, and started to catch up with General Smuts. I travelled by rail to Capetown, my servant Ruiter with Bismarck and two other horses journeying in a cattle truck behind.

At Table Bay we embarked on a transport going up the west coast with reinforcements, and after a voyage of four days we reached Lüderitzbucht. There I learned that our troops had advanced, and now lay at the village of Aus, a hundred miles across the Namieb Desert. The railway had been repaired to within twenty miles of Aus, so we proceeded on a supply train through what is perhaps the most desolate tract on earth — leagues of shifting sand dunes as far as the eye could see — with no vegetation of any kind, and

no water.

At Aus the worst of the desert lies behind and here I found General Smuts with his men, and joined his staff.

Until recently the Germans had had it all their own way. On account of the rebellion, only weak detachments could be sent against them, and several of these had met with disaster. In addition they had seduced Maritz from his allegiance, and he had handed over to them the troops under his command.

But now their time was come. Against our great display of force they had only eight thousand soldiers in the field, and Botha and Smuts were leaving nothing to chance. In the north, General Botha was marching from the coast towards Windhoek, the German capital, and here in the south Smuts was preparing to get astride the main railway line, so as to cut their forces in two, while at the same time overland columns were converging from the Orange River and from the Kalahari.

None the less, the odds were not so unequal as they seemed, for the Germans were standing on interior lines, and in any case their chief defence lay in the difficult nature of the country. For German West is a very large territory. It stretches from the Orange River to the Cunene, nine hundred miles north, and from west to east it lies between the Atlantic Ocean and the Kalahari Desert, a width of four hundred miles. Much of this vast space is arid, so the moving of troops was by no means an easy matter, and if the Germans took to guerilla warfare, as we had done against the British long ago, they might easily involve us in a long and inconclusive campaign.

Both Smuts and Botha were alive to this danger, and they were determined to prevent it.

As a preliminary, General Smuts had sent Sir Duncan McKenzie with eight hundred horsemen towards Gibeon, to cut off the retreat of the German forces operating in the south, and he was making ready to march the rest of his army

into the hinterland.

To that end we busied ourselves with preparations. In our immediate vicinity the enemy had withdrawn shortly before, but they had left many unpleasant tokens of their occupation, for we discovered that they had mined the roads and the railway track, and had planted mines at random in the open veld, and in dwelling-houses, stables, and kraals, and they had poisoned the wells. As far as the wells were concerned we could not complain, for warning notices had been left, but to bury infernal machines in a place they had given up was new to us.

I made early acquaintance with one of these mines, and it cost me the life of my horse Bismarck. I was coming from the railhead one morning, and overtook an infantry company plodding along. I rode chatting to the officer at their head when suddenly there was a roar in the midst of the soldiers and a column of smoke and dust shot a mile high, whilst fragments of metal went whizzing in all directions. When the air cleared, two men lay dead and a dozen wounded, and many others were temporarily blinded by the spurting sand. My horse, stung by flying grit and pebbles, reared and plunged, and when I dismounted to help the injured, he gave a snort of terror, and wrenching free, headed straight for the waterless desert that lay westward for a hundred miles and more.

By the time we had made the wounded men comfortable, and I had procured another horse, Bismarck was a mere speck on the distant horizon, and he was steadily making deeper into the sandy waste. I followed him for hours, for I hoped to save him from the certain death from thirst that awaited him, but in the end the animal I was riding gave in, and I was obliged to retrace my steps on foot, leading him behind me, and when last I saw my poor misguided horse, he was still going to his doom.

When I reached camp, and Ruiter heard of Bismarck’s fate, tears ran down

his ugly wizened countenance, for he loved the horse even more than I did.

Two days later, I witnessed another explosion. I was standing in the street at Aus when again there came the report of a mine. The roof of a neighbouring stable lifted bodily into the air, followed by the carcase of a mule, and an officer fell wounded to the ground. The mine had been set beneath the stable floor, and the mule had touched it off. Similar occurrences were comparatively frequent. One of our men turned the handle of a door in a dwelling-house, and was blown to pieces. Another, who lit the wick of a lamp suspended from the ceiling of a room, met with instant death, and in the north General Botha's troops had many losses of the same kind.

One evening, riding down a gorge near Kanus, we came on a grisly sight. Swaying from a branch of a tree were the mummified bodies of three Hottentots. They had been hanged here by the Germans some time before, to judge by their condition, but for what offence I never heard.

By this time General Smuts was anxious for news of Sir Duncan McKenzie's column that had disappeared into the void, and he ordered James Leisk and me to ride after them. Leisk in civil life was a highly placed government official, and we were old acquaintances.

I had two horses left, one for myself and one for Ruiter, and Leisk was also well mounted. We set out at once, our road running through wild country, sparsely inhabited by nomad Hottentot tribes. Occasionally we found a dead horse or mule to show that McKenzie had gone by, but we travelled nearly a hundred miles before we came on a few of his men, left behind at Bethany Mission to look after the weaker animals. They had no news and we pushed on. Game was not plentiful, but there was an occasional antelope to be shot, and we had no difficulty in finding water. We went by Wasserfall and Besondermaid to the Great Fish River, and thence up past Bukaross Peak, through the Berseba Reserve. On our fourth day, at Deutsches Erde, we

struck an outpost. They said they had heard the sound of distant gunfire during the night, so we hurried forward and towards noon came up with McKenzie and his men in possession of Gibeon Town. He had got astride the Northern railway line just too late to cut off the German retreat, but he had fought a sharp rearguard action, in which he had captured some guns and a hundred and fifty prisoners, as well as several trains and large quantities of war material. He lost twenty-six men killed and fifty or sixty wounded, and the German casualties were about the same.

We stayed here for a few days. Food was scarce, and the men lived on what they could forage in the way of sheep and goats in the neighbouring hills, though gradually Dutch farmers from the surrounding district began to bring in supplies. They were mostly men who had settled here after the Boer War, to escape British rule, and now British rule had overtaken them once more. They said the Germans had treated them well enough, but there were too many irksome restrictions and too many officials to suit their taste. I had a look at the German prisoners. They were regulars, but not as spick and span as I had expected. Each of the captured guns bore an inscription, “Ultima ratio regis.”

After some days Leisk and I, and a Colonel Muller, were assigned two motor cars that had accompanied the expedition, and were instructed to go north towards Windhoek, to establish contact with General Botha’s troops, who, if they had not already taken the capital, must be nearing it by now.

We reached Marienthal by the end of the first day, and here we found a picket of McKenzie’s men that had pushed forward. They warned us to go carefully. Somewhere ahead, they said, the German force that had escaped was slowly falling back, blowing up the railway as it went. We started at dawn. From Marienthal the railway runs through the Reo-both Reserve, a huge area inhabited by a race of half breeds. It is a sterile, barren tract, across

which probably no motor cars had ever ventured, and we had a trying time. We ploughed all day through heavy sand and blazing heat, until, by evening, we had used up every drop of water in quenching our thirst, and in providing for the radiators. We moved parallel to the railway line, and at every station the boreholes, wells, and tanks were dynamited. Therefore, when at last we were brought to a halt for lack of water, we were in a serious predicament. There was no open water that we knew of within eighty miles of us; the cars were dry, and so were we, and we spent an anxious, thirsty night. At daybreak, after trying in vain to extract some water from a destroyed borehole, we were lucky enough to find a patch of Tsama melon growing in the veld. In these parts the game and the natives rely almost entirely on this species of cucumber during the dry season. Liquid is extracted by gently heating the melons, and we were able to distil enough water for ourselves and for both radiators. We moved on, but saw no more Tsama that day, and by noon, owing to the intense heat and the heavy going, the cars gave out for the second time. We calculated that we were within walking distance of Reoboth Station, which by our map lay somewhere ahead, so we abandoned the cars and went on foot. The sun beat down; our drinking water was finished, and this knowledge made us the more thirsty. In our heart of hearts we felt that our chances of finding any water at the station were remote, seeing how thoroughly the Germans had destroyed the wells and boreholes which we had discovered up to now, and we tramped along the railway track in gloomy silence. At one spot we passed two lonely graves. On each headstone was the name of a German soldier with an inscription “hier erdürstet”, to show that they had perished of thirst on some bygone patrol, and this did not raise our spirits.

After three hours, our tongues swollen with thirst, we came to a place where the railway line had spanned one of those waterless river beds that

intersect the country at frequent intervals. The bridge had been dynamited, and on the sandy course below were two engines piled one upon the other, a mass of twisted wreckage. The Germans had mined the bridge, and then run the engines over. As we stood gazing at them, I caught a shimmer through the torn side of one of the boilers. We scrambled hurriedly down, and found a supply of water, providentially unspilt, in a corner of an engine tank. There was enough and to spare, and in a moment we were ladling out long satisfying draughts. When we had finished drinking we were new men, and still further in luck, for climbing a rise, I saw the buildings of Reoboth Station a mile or two beyond. Cheerfully we filled our bottles and an old bucket picked up near by, and walked back with sufficient water for the cars. By 10 o'clock that night we had reached the station with both machines. We slept till morning, and then inspected our surroundings. Here again the water supply had been completely demolished, but again we were fortunate. The tanks and boreholes were destroyed, and the rolling-stock standing on the line had been set on fire, but a little square-bellied engine, in a shed by itself, had been overlooked, and its boiler was filled to the brim with clear, cool water. This freed us from further care, for we knew that we would be running out of the desert beyond this point. From the trampled spoor around the station buildings, and from the general appearance of things, we concluded that the Germans had now abandoned the railway line, and were continuing their withdrawal by road. And on looking north-east, along the way they had gone, we could see a tall pillar of dust where their column was trekking fifteen or twenty miles away. They must have left in a hurry, for considerable quantities of stores and military kit were strewn about, and although the wells and water-towers were destroyed, the burning of the rolling material was incomplete.

As the railway line runs straight from here to Windhoek, sixty miles off, we

argued (correctly as it proved) that General Botha must have occupied the capital, and that these troops, having got wind of his arrival, had swung east to avoid capture.

After we had satisfied ourselves of this, we continued our journey, through improved country, which enabled us to make better progress, though the going was still heavy. Far away to our right moved the dust cloud of the retreating Germans. We could make out a convoy of wagons escorted by infantry, and about two hundred horsemen, and this was the nearest sight I got of the enemy in South-West.

Towards evening we ran into the mountains around Windhoek, and before long we met a picket of General Botha's men. They said the town had surrendered, but the bulk of the German forces had retreated north into the wilds. We entered after dark to find the streets swarming with South Africans, some riding about, others on the sidewalks around their camp fires. We slept in a vacant yard for the night, and reported next morning to General Botha, whom we found in the citadel, where he had taken up his headquarters. I had not met him since the end of the rebellion on the day of the surrender at Reitz, and he looked a different man. To him the rebellion had been a deep tragedy of his race, but fighting for a territory which he regarded as part of his own country was another matter, and he was far more cheerful, as he sat in Governor Seitz's office telling us of the hardships encountered on his way up from the sea.

He had defeated the Germans in two important engagements, and he had brought his troops through the terrible desert belt by a series of brilliant marches that completely demoralised the defence. I was told that when Hauptmann Francke, the German Commander-in-Chief, saw the Boer horsemen appearing out of the bush in all directions, with no semblance of order or discipline, but relentlessly hustling his soldiers, he exclaimed

bitterly: “This is not a war, it’s a hippodrome!” At all events General Botha’s unconventional tactics were so successful that he was now in possession of the enemy capital with insignificant losses.

For the moment, the German forces had withdrawn north, along the Otavi railway line, and it was rumoured that they intended to resort to guerilla warfare in the unknown country that lies towards the Cunene River. General Botha told us that he viewed this contingency with apprehension, as he feared the result of a long-drawn campaign on public opinion in the Union, where the Nationalists were conducting unceasing propaganda against the expedition. He told us further that Italy had come into the war on the side of the Allies, and he told us of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and of great battles in France. He ordered me to report for duty to Coen Brits, pending instructions from General Smuts, so Ruiter and I went to find him at Karibib, where the old man greeted me with the usual cut of his sjambok by way of welcome. During the next week or two I visited Windhoek several times. The town is built against a hill, and it has many fine buildings and shops. Some of the dwelling-houses and hotels have hot water laid on from a thermal spring flowing out of a rock crevice in the public gardens, and on the plain outside stands an enormous wireless plant, the second largest in the world, it was said.

The German civilian population were polite but aloof, and I never met one who was not serenely confident that they were going to win the war. It was always the same. They said we might temporarily overrun South-West, but in the end we would pay dearly for having challenged the might of Germany.

I found a local German newspaper dated some days prior to the entry of our troops. The leading article ran:

“The early occupation of Windhoek by the South African forces is unavoidable. We must bear the inevitable with dignity. General Botha’s

troops are neither Russian barbarians nor undisciplined French, but they are men of the same Teutonic extraction as ourselves, whose commander would never countenance improper conduct by his men. The occupation can at most continue for a week or two as dire calamity has overtaken the Allies in Europe.

"Calais is practically in our hands, and with Calais we hold the key to England. British statesmen are not going to wait until we invade their prosperous land, and they will make peace to save their country from invasion. It goes without saying that the Fatherland will not conclude a peace which leaves German South-West under foreign yoke, and we may say with confidence that the enemy's banner will not long float over us."

A later article of May 10th, 1915, was to the same effect:

"The last German squadrons left Windhoek to-day. We who were obliged to remain looked on in sorrow as our men rode through the streets in the chill autumn wind; we gazed at our departing troops with grief, and yet with envy. For sad it is to stay behind, knowing that the flag of the enemy will soon be hoisted, even if we have the certainty that it will fly but for a brief season. We may rest assured that the Emperor will exact stern retribution from these South Africans for their attack on us. Therefore we await their arrival with dignity and calm. They are neither Belgians nor Frenchmen, whose civilians have committed so many offences against the law of nations. With unbroken spirit we shall bear the temporary yoke. That is our duty to our hero-Emperor [Helden-Kaiser], to our fellow citizens and to the Fatherland."

Reading this, one realised that they were trying to keep up their courage, and I remembered the Boer War, when we had hoped against hope, knowing in our hearts how little hope there was.

Coen Brits was stationed at Karibib, the village on the Otavi railway, and the German troops were now standing at Omaruru, forty miles up the line.

We spent some weeks here, while General Botha was preparing for the death stroke. Supplies had to be brought up from the coast, animals had to be rested, and the damaged bridges and railway track had to be repaired, all of which took time. Old Coen was as genial and entertaining as ever. He provided me with a horse, and I rode to and fro on long journeys, carrying orders to outlying posts. Once there came a telegram for him from a Union citizen of bibulous habits, offering his services. Coen wired back: “Don’t come; all the liquor there is in South-West Africa I can drink myself.”

I was told that on the march from the coast his supply of alcohol had given out, and the only available bottle in his brigade was found to belong to a soldier. Coen was told that, as a brigadier, he was not supposed to drink with a private, but he easily overcame this difficulty, for he promoted the owner to second-lieutenant, and after the two of them had emptied the bottle, he reverted the man back to the ranks, satisfied that the military conventions had been properly observed.

I missed the closing scene of the campaign, for I belonged to the Southern Army and received orders to return, just as General Botha was making ready for his final thrust. Not long after we embarked on the transport at Walfish Bay, he loosed his forces on the enemy. They consisted mostly of Boer commandos, and their rapid advance was too much for the stereotyped military training of the Germans. In a few days the commandos rode hundreds of miles through wild uncharted country. If Hauptmann Francke was still planning to adopt guerilla tactics, Botha was too quick for him and he was forced to surrender with all his men, guns, and ammunition; and for the first time in the Great War, a German commander in the field had laid down his arms.

The campaign was over, and by August 1915 all our men had sailed back to Capetown, their task accomplished.

In spite of the rebellion, and in the teeth of violent opposition from the powerful Nationalist Party, General Botha and General Smuts had added to the Union a territory larger than Germany, and they had done it with fewer casualties than the cost of an average trench raid in France.

Chapter VI — To German East

The moment we returned home from the South-West expedition, the political situation in the Union claimed us.

The five-yearly elections were on hand, and we forgot all else. We arc a race of politicians, and the struggle that now followed made our previous quarrels almost tame in comparison. The Nationalists were smarting from the result of the rebellion, and we were angered because they had refused to assist us in the German West campaign, so feeling ran high, and at times it looked as if we were on the verge of another civil war.

General Botha asked me to take the field in the Free State, where the Nationalists regarded everyone as a renegade who supported the South African Party. Every meeting I addressed became a battlefield, and more than one village hall still bears the scars and bloodstains of those days. I also undertook to contest the Heilbron seat. I had been under arms shortly before against those whose votes I was seeking, and they had not forgotten it. After a turbulent offensive I was beaten by a huge majority, and what was worse, every constituency in the Free State was captured by our opponents. Luckily, the rest of South Africa showed sounder judgment, and General Botha remained in power. The clamour now died down, and freed from the danger of domestic troubles, Botha and Smuts turned their attention to the conquest of German East Africa.

Up there, the Germans had a strong garrison of regular troops, and an army of eight or ten thousand well-trained Askari, and there too the climate and the difficult nature of the country were their chief defence.

Von Lettow was in command. He was an able leader, who did what Francke should have done in the west, for he took to guerilla warfare. Hitherto the British Government had been unable to send out reinforcements, for they were hard pressed in France, and their small local army had found great difficulty in holding its own. But now the authorities had begun to consider the position, and had decided to take the matter in hand. South Africa was asked to supply an expeditionary force for the reduction of the colony, and General Smith Dorrien was sent from France to take command.

Once again General Botha called for volunteers, and within a few weeks drafts were being despatched by sea up the east coast to Mombasa, fifteen hundred miles away, from which they went to base camps in the interior. Before Smith Dorrien could take over he fell ill, whereupon General Smuts assumed command of the campaign, and he left South Africa in December 1915. I decided to go too. I had no animus against the German people, but I thought then, as I think now, that a victorious Germany would have been a disaster to human liberty. Also, my chief was going and, further, I could not hang back while so many of my countrymen were moving forward to an adventure in the wilds of Africa. I had to settle my affairs, for I foresaw a long absence, so I could not get away until two months later, and it was only in February 1916 that I sailed from Durban in a troopship with my native boy Ruiter.

After an uneventful voyage we reached Mombasa, and in company with other troops going inland we entrained for Voi, a camp on the railway line that runs to Nairobi. Our route took us at first through low-lying jungle, steaming with heat, and then across dreary scrub country devoid of man and beast. The line ran parallel to the German frontier, forty miles south, and it was occasionally attacked by small enemy forces that made their way on foot through the thorn to derail an engine or blow up a culvert; but we were not

molested, though the line continued to be interfered with during the next month or two.

At Voi we lay over for several days. Here we learned that our troops had fought several important engagements. Von Lettow had held a formidable position on the Taveta Hills, from which General Smuts had ejected him after heavy fighting. As a result, the South African troops had advanced over the border, and were lying below Mount Kilimanjaro, well within German territory.

From Voi we travelled to an advance supply camp at Mbuyuni, near the German boundary, where I spent an interesting time.

The region from the Serengetti Plains on British territory, round by Kilimanjaro to Mount Meru, a hundred miles away, and thence back to the Pare Hills, is probably the most fascinating part of the African continent. Within this charmed circle lie game-covered plains, and swamps and jungles and impenetrable forests. There lie the snow-capped peaks of Kibu and Mawenzi with their base in the tropics and their summits wrapped in eternal ice and snow. There is Mount Meru like a basalt pyramid to the east, and there are lakes and craters, and a network of great rivers, with strange tribes and beautiful scenery, such as no other country in the world that I know of can show within so small a compass.

I rode to Lake Chala, lying high in an extinct volcano, and I explored Lake Jipe, a curious sheet of water, half in British and half in German territory, and each of these journeys led through vast herds of big game. I saw giraffe and eland, wildebeest and zebra, and of an evening I used to sit on the banks of the Lumi River watching the thousands of animals coming down to drink.

It was all so beautiful that I forgot I was on my way to a war, until one evening we received orders to march next day. With our instructions came a change in the weather, for the rainy season was on hand. The water fell in

torrents, and the camp underfoot was like a lake. Looking down towards the German border, we could see black clouds towering miles high into the sky and hear the incessant growl and mutter of thunder.

I saw now that campaigning in a country like this was going to be far more difficult than in German West. In that territory there were open plains, and above all there was no fever, no horse sickness, and no tsetse fly. Here lay before us a thousand miles of dense forest and bush, and a deadly climate, and with the lowered spirits that come on most South Africans when there is no sunshine, I did not envy General Smuts the task upon which he was embarked.

Next morning we marched out with the rain coming down in sheets. We plodded along to Taveta where we spent a night, and then crossed the German border. We passed over the Himu River and several other streams, and then made our way gradually through the forest to Neu Moschi at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, where the South African troops were camped in the rain. Here I was told that General Smuts was at Alt Moschi, a German fort lying on the slopes of the mountain, so Ruiter and I climbed the slippery road in a deluge, and by nightfall I was once more on his staff.

Military operations had come to a standstill on account of the weather. Our forces were mudbound at Neu Moschi and Kahé, a point on the German railway line that runs along the Pangani River to the coast. I do not know where von Let-tow and his men were at this time, but they seemed to be scattered all over the country.

From such information as I could gather, General Smuts intended, as soon as the rains were over, to march down the Pangani, and then strike south towards the Central Railway that descends from the great lakes to Dâr-es-Salaam.

As a preliminary he had sent Jacobus van Deventer, our old Boer war

commandant, with a column of mounted men and infantry, nearly five thousand strong, to make for the Central Railway via Mount Meru and Arusha. This expedition had vanished into the bush some time before my arrival. It was at present hung up by the rains two hundred miles away, and word had come back that our men were suffering great hardships from the weather, and from the ravages of malaria. For a while I remained at Headquarters. I climbed the slopes of Kilimanjaro and explored the wonderful forest, in company with my friend Krige. He and I had both belonged to Isaac Malherbe's corporalship in the old days of the Boer War. He was so dangerously wounded at the Battle of Spion Kop that he was left for dead, but he recovered and even accompanied our raid into the Cape Colony in 1901.[5]

There were many elephants in the forest, but although we came frequently on their tracks we never saw any. Once we almost reached the snow line, thousands of feet up. On General Smuts's staff were several British officers who had remained after Smith Dorrien fell ill, and as they were the first men from the trenches in France whom I had met, I listened eagerly to their accounts of the great battles overseas. One of them was McCalmont, the millionaire owner of Tetrarch, a famous Derby winner. Another was Venables. He wore an artificial hand, in lieu of one that had been shot away, and he could release it by pressing a clip at the wrist. One evening, at the fort, a Swahili mess-waiter brought in a tray of refreshments. Venables pretended to reach for a glass, and withdrawing his arm, left his dummy hand lying on the salver. The Swahili stared wide-eyed at the object for a moment, then he dashed tray and contents to the ground, and with a howl of terror rushed out into the night and we never saw him again. Another morning Venables came laughing into the office with a story that a party of Germans had approached the railway at Tsavo. He said the Babu stationmaster had telegraphed to

Headquarters:

"One hundred Germans advancing on station, please send one rifle and one hundred rounds of ammunition."

It was pleasant living at Moschi, with Kilimanjaro towering overhead. The snow-crowned peaks glittering at night under a full moon is the most majestic sight I have ever seen.

But I grew restless, and when I heard that three officers and a contingent of eighty men were going forward to join van Deventer I obtained permission to accompany them. I had not brought any horses from the Union. I had taken three of my own horses to German West, and had lost them all, so I had learned wisdom, and now General Smuts allowed me to choose what I wanted from amongst the staff animals. I took a brown and a chestnut for myself, and a wiry Basuto pony for Ruiter, and thus well equipped we set off with the reinforcements. For the first two days we rode through dense forest as far as the Sabok River, crossing numerous other streams flowing down from Kilimanjaro, all swollen from the rains that were still coming down.

To our right lay Mount Meru, with Arusha beyond. In the open spaces of the forest were great quantities of big game, and once I saw a herd of elephant beneath tall trees by a river bank. Beyond Meru the weather lifted, and we emerged from the gloom of rain and forest into the sunshine of the Masai Plains. The Masai are a fighting tribe always at war with their neighbours. They wear short pigtails like the old-fashioned British jack tars, and they carry long-bladed stabbing spears, and sword and shield. On one occasion while we were halted in a clearing, a raiding party of them came by in single file, and although their path ran within a few feet of where we sat beside our saddles, they looked neither to right nor left, but marched straight on, as if we were not there. They are a strange race. Their plains are alive with game, but they will not touch venison, and their food consists chiefly of

milk and blood from the veins of their cattle. They draw what blood they require, and then close up the artery with a thorn pushed through the animal's skin. Counting cattle as money, they are said to be the wealthiest people in the world.

Far out on the plains we reached Lol Kissale, a lonely hill standing like an island above the bush, and here we came on a number of van Deventer's sick and wounded. They told us he had surrounded the 27th Field Company of Askari on this hill, and after a sharp fight had captured them all. There were four or five German officers and N.C.O.'s and about a hundred and fifty Askari, well-built, soldierly men in khaki tunics and shorts. From Lol Kissale we rode on through wonderful game country, with troops of giraffe and herds of zebra, eland, and wildebeest.

The first night out from Lol Kissale we camped at Masai-wellen, and lions were roaring about us till dawn. Early next morning, as we rode along, we saw a lion and a lioness tearing at a dead horse beside the road (for van Deventer's passage had left many animals behind). One of the men fired and hit the lion, but he gave a grunt and sprang into the bush with his mate. We passed little Masai villages with their queer flat-roofed huts of mud, the inhabitants gazing at us as incuriously as if our presence in their domains did not concern them.

As on previous days, our road still ran through dense bush with numberless antelopes of all kinds grazing in the open spaces, but except for those which we had to shoot for food, we left them alone.

In two days we reached Ufiome, a little village in the hills on the far border of the Masai country. This place had been an administrative post of the Germans, and there was a substantial boma (fort) and various official buildings and dwelling-houses. We found a number of Boer families here. They had left South Africa to avoid living under British rule, and now it was

overtaking them once more, just as it had overtaken their compatriots in German South-West, and as it had overtaken their ancestors who had moved north into the wilds during the Great Trek of 1835.

Near Ufiome, I saw three lions trotting in the distance across a millet field. They were so plentiful in these parts that some Boers to whom I happened to be speaking at the time scarcely troubled to glance at them, though to me they were an ever interesting sight.

We learned that van Deventer was thirty miles ahead at Kondoa Irangi, so next day, in heavy rain, we rode on. That afternoon we came on a small camp in charge of Major Hilgaard de Jager. He had not only fought against the British during the last Boer War, but he had fought against them in the war of 1880 as well, and he had taken part in the Battle of Amajuba where, so he told me, he had seen General Colley lying dead on the hilltop. He was a small wrinkled old fellow, with a fund of anecdote and dry humour that kept one in roars of laughter. With him I found my friend Jack Borrius of the Ryk Section. In spite of having lost an eye and a hand during our expedition in the Boer War, that I have elsewhere described,[6] he was serving here as a scout. He was one of the men who, with my brother Joubert and many others, had been handed over to the Germans by Maritz, and he told me the news that my brother was also in East Africa.

From de Jager's camp the country fell away to a long plain stretching to Kondoa Irangi, and by next afternoon we came in sight of the native town on the near side of the river, with the fort and European quarters beyond.

We reached there after dark and camped for the night in the open space before the Boma. We had no knowledge of the local military situation, so we were considerably surprised at being wakened at dawn next morning by the boom of guns, followed by a succession of heavy shells exploding around us on the square. Luckily the river bank was near, and we were able to hustle

our men and horses under cover without suffering any loss, but it was surprising to be bombarded by sixty-pounder shells in the heart of the wilds. The shell-fire continued intermittently for half an hour, when it ceased, and we emerged from the river bed to look around us. Some distance away stood a large church surrounded by tents, and there we found Colonel Fairweather of the Cyclist Corps, with his men. A shell had exploded inside the church, killing two men whose bodies were being extricated from the fallen masonry as we came up. We got directions for finding van Deventer's headquarters, and recrossing the river, discovered him and his staff installed in one of the houses facing the square. He explained things to me. Owing to the heavy rains and lack of supplies his advance was held up. Nearly eleven hundred of his men were down with fever, and the Germans, taking advantage of his immobilised condition, had brought up a strong force from the Central Railway, and were at this moment holding the line of hills overlooking the town. They had many field and machine guns, as well as several sixty-pounder naval guns that had been removed from the *Königsberg*, one of their cruisers that had taken shelter in the Rufiji River. It was with shells from these guns that we had made acquaintance that morning.

Von Lettow himself was said to be here, and a few nights before he had launched an attack on our lines that had only been beaten off by fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the dark. The enemy lay in an entrenched position across our front, and with so many of our men out of action from malaria, and with the rest on half rations, van Deventer was unable to continue his attempt to reach the Central Railway, his objective since leaving Mount Kilimanjaro. All this was disappointing, and I for one look back with no pleasure upon the long period of enforced inactivity that followed. Our men were strung out for miles to right and left, facing the German positions, and for the next two months there was stalemate. I was posted to the First Mounted Brigade,

holding the left flank of our line in very rugged hills. Food was scarce and sometimes lacking altogether, and cold biting rains, varied by oppressive heat, prevailed much of the time. The Germans were before us in the ravines and gorges, but in such rough country it was difficult to know exactly where their front line ran. Often bullets whipped about our ears from some unexpected quarter, and it was but rarely that we caught more than a fleeting glimpse of the enemy. It was well for us that the Askari, like all natives, were remarkably poor shots, while the German soldiers were not particularly good either, so that our losses were not heavy, and we probably caused more damage than we received during our frequent brushes.

There was a little six-pounder German gun in our vicinity, daringly handled by an officer whom we learned to know by sight, so often did he appear from behind boulder or thicket, with his field-piece carried on a wooden frame by its Askari crew. In a moment, half a dozen rounds would come screeching at us, after which the gun was taken off to reappear at some other spot. Beyond wounding a few horses once, she did no harm that I know of, and the men laughed at “Big Bertha” as they called her. One morning three of us tried to stalk the gun, but when we closed in on the patch of scrub where we had last seen her, all we found for our pains was a piece of paper bearing a derisive message: “15 Rupees for the bluddy Englisch”, a joke at which we were not amused, after our long crawl in the heat.

On another occasion we were ordered to reconnoitre down a rocky gorge giving access to the open country beyond. The Germans, with great speed, rushed up two companies of Askari, who came at us as eagerly as hounds on the scent. Young Lieut. Bowden stood on a rock to get a better view, and almost immediately fell back dead, and we had four other men killed and a number wounded, before the attack was staved off. Desultory fighting of this kind went on most of the time, while we were waiting for the fever season to

pass, and for the roads to dry. I do not know how many men died of fever, but I think we left over three hundred of our countrymen in the graveyard at Kondoa Irangi.

During all this time the enemy forces confronting us must have been having their own troubles. In some Morogoro newspapers, that were brought in, were many obituary notices of officers and men “gefallen auf die Höhe von Kondoa Irangi” (fallen on the heights of Kondoa Irangi), and the names of many others who had died of fever. Moreover, like ourselves, they had their supply difficulties, for this region is inhabited by a poverty-stricken native tribe, who wander about with clubs and bows and arrows, so there was little to be had by foraging, and there was no big game within transport distance. In one of these captured newspapers there was a paragraph blacked out by the German Censor, so I set to work with a magnifying glass, and after a lot of trouble succeeded in deciphering most of the suppressed item. It had nothing to do with the military situation. It was an account of a revolver duel between a German officer and a planter.

The planter had killed his opponent and he was tried by court martial and hanged (mit dem Tode durch den Strang bestrafft). Apparently a great deal of feeling had been aroused, for not only had the reference to the affair in the paper been rendered illegible, but there was a command from von Lettow which said: “Justice has been done and this unhappy affair is now relegated to oblivion (die Sache gehört jetzt die Vergessenheit). I call upon all citizens for the common good to refrain from further discussion.”

Suddenly, towards the middle of July 1916, the Germans evacuated their positions, and we awoke one morning to find them gone. Mounted patrols were pushed forward, and we came on many well-built hospital and other bandas in the valley behind their trenches. The numerous graves showed that they too had suffered severely. We then rode through the hills into the scrub-

covered plains. Once I saw a single Askari running across a glade, but he was out of sight before I could fire, and a little later, hearing shots to our left, we made thither to find two of our men lying dead, but no sight of the enemy.

After a long and difficult march through the bush, we cut into the road along which the main German force was retiring. I was with our advance party, and as we rode on to the bank of the Barei, a broad sandy river bed with occasional water-holes, we saw twenty or thirty Askari squatted around their fires. They grabbed their rifles, and opened so hot a fire that we were glad to retreat up the road, to await the rest of our party. After a while they arrived and we advanced. The Askari had withdrawn to the opposite bank of the river, from which a vicious splutter of bullets whizzed about us. I dismounted and walked forward with some others, and as we went there was a thud, and one of our men pitched forward dead. So we remounted and galloped across the river bed under an ill-aimed fire from the Askari rearguard, whom we could just see making off into the dense thicket on either side of the road. We spent the night by the river, listening to the lions, and next morning van Deventer arrived. He said his whole force was coming on behind, making for the Chamballa water-holes, fifteen miles down the road. He ordered me to lead a small patrol by a detour through the bush, to scout the country to the east. We rode along the Barei River for the first day, camping on its banks that night, during which we spent most of our time pacifying our frightened horses, who threatened to stampede every time a lion roared. From there, next day, with a native guide, we threaded our way along game paths, to find out at the various native villages whether there were Germans or Askari about. From the fact that the natives were quietly at their kraals I knew the Askari were gone, for whenever there are any about the local inhabitants take to flight. The Germans recruit their Askari from the savage tribes beyond the lakes, and they are much dreaded by the unwarlike

people who live in this area. In the course of the morning I saw a lioness squatting on her haunches close to a millet field in which native women, their infants on their backs, were unconcernedly hoeing the ground, and they merely laughed when I pointed out the lioness to them, so little fear have they in the daytime of these brutes. For safety's sake, however, I fired a shot, and drove her away.

Next day we made for Chamballa, a series of water-holes among some hills. The place was crowded with troops, horses and wagons, that had come up, and van Deventer was there. He told me that General Smuts was also on the move. He had marched down the Pangani River, and was now striking south for the Central Railway on a course parallel to our own, some hundred and fifty miles to our left. His force and ours were ultimately to join hands, but in the meanwhile each was independently groping its way through unknown bush country.

As far as we were concerned, the Central Railway was still ninety miles away, and whereas in the past we had been hampered by too much water, we were now entering a region that looked as if no rain ever fell on it.

I was ordered next morning to take out a patrol and search for a pan of water, reported by local natives as lying some distance off the main road. It was an interesting ride. We were in game country once more, and herds of eland, wildebeest and sassaby were grazing in all directions, and several times we saw giraffe. I never tired of looking at the strange and beautiful creatures of Africa, and I learned in these days the pity of killing them without need.

By midday our native guide brought us to the pan. As we approached we heard the trumpeting of elephant, and when we reached the water it was all muddy and churned where they had been drinking a few minutes before, but the animals themselves were crashing out of sight among the trees. I sent a

man back to report the water, while we went on. We spent the night around big camp fires, for the lions were again holding a concert, and next day we reached Hanetti, a desolate spot with a few muddy water-holes and a small native village. The natives told us that the German forces had passed through the previous day, and that a strong rearguard was holding the next water at Chenene, twelve miles on, so we halted until our troops arrived.

Towards evening a weary horseman rode in from the left to say that the 1st and 3rd Mounted Regiments were held up at Tissu-Kwamedu, thirty miles east. They had made a flank march, and nearing there, after men and horses had gone for twenty-four hours without water, had found the place strongly occupied by the enemy. Our men were reported to be in a serious plight, as their animals were too exhausted to be ridden back to other water, and the enemy were holding a fortified position before the wells. Van Deventer was requested to send reinforcements, but our troops that were arriving at Hanetti were too fatigued to undertake a forced march. He therefore ordered a patrol to ride hard for Tissu-Kwamedu, with a message that the two regiments were to take the wells at all costs.

We set out with a native guide, and trekked steadily all through the tropical night, seeing the dim forms of many animals silently moving in the dark. Soon after daybreak we heard the crackle of rifle-fire, and pushing forward, were just in time to see our mounted men gallop across a wide clearing at the far end of which lay the enemy around the wells. Desperate with thirst, they had anticipated van Deventer’s instructions, and were riding full tilt upon the rifle pits. The enemy had opened a ragged fire, but as we hurried up we saw several hundred Askari rise to their feet, and make for the bush behind. Their German officers seemed to be trying to stop them, then they followed their men and the fight was over. It was now a pleasure to see horses and men drinking their fill from the cool, clear water, for these are famous wells,

known for their excellent and abundant supply. They lie on the old caravan route to the coast, and I have read that for a thousand years and more the great slave convoys from the interior were halted there, before being driven to Dâr-es-Salaam.

Three or four of our men were wounded, and there were about a dozen dead and wounded Askari, and after a while a German officer came limping out of the bush to surrender. Going about among the men, I came on my brother Joubert, whom I had not seen for nearly ten years. He was a sergeant with the 3rd, and he told me he had only returned from hospital on the day that our advance started from Kondoa, which was the reason why we had not met before. He had much to say of how he had fared in the past, of Maritz's treachery, and of his long months in a German prison camp in South-West. Here too, I met another acquaintance of mine, young Piet Swart, a Boer farm hand from Heilbron district. He had served under me during the rebellion, and was now a rifleman in my brother's regiment. He was haggard from fever, he had starved and suffered and he was in rags, but he held an original view of the campaign, for when I asked him whether he regretted having come, he said No: he had travelled in a ship, he had seen aeroplanes and Kilimanjaro and elephants, and if his parents wanted to see all this it would cost them over fifty pounds.

Next day our patrol started back for Hanetti. There was plenty of game on the way, and when a wild sow ran by with a string of youngsters squealing at her heels, I shot one, and we had baked sucking pig for supper that night.

At Hanetti, van Deventer was preparing to deal with the enemy at the Chenene water-holes. The 11th S.A. Infantry had come up, and the morning after my return they were ordered to advance.

Hilgaard de Jager rode ahead with his scouts, and I accompanied him. Our course lay through dense bush, so we were compelled to keep to the road, a

pretty dangerous business, for the enemy custom was to lie in wait at a bend, fire a volley, and then decamp along some pathway, to repeat the process further on. That was what happened here. After we had gone some miles, the road entered a kloof flanked on either side by rugged hills, and as we approached the intake, half a dozen Askari and one German ran out, fired a single volley at us, and dived back into the scrub. No one was hit, and we caught a glimpse of a considerable number of Askari running up the wooded slopes to take position above. We waited for the infantry, and Col. Burne at once pushed them into the bush. The enemy opened rifle and machine-gun fire on our men and a fierce little battle began. Then there came from the rear two engines of war that were new to me, although I had read of them. They were Rolls-Royce armoured cars, just arrived from base, and immediately sent into action. It was the first and last time, I believe, that they were used in this country, as they were found unsuitable for rough work, but on this occasion, at any rate, they justified themselves.

Capt. Goldberg, a Jewish officer, was in charge, and he took his machines straight at the enemy barricade across the road. As he neared the work, machine-gun bullets rattled like hail on the steel plates, but he continued on his way, hosing the enemy with his fire as he went. Old Hilgaard's face was a picture when he saw the Askari running for all they were worth, before the armoured cars. He clapped me on the back and cried in Dutch (he knew no English): "By God, man, those things look for all the world like two rhino bulls charging up-wind!" and he chuckled with glee at a sight that had thus far lain beyond his military ken.

The forward thrust of the cars had cut across the enemy position, and the rest of the Askari on either side of the road vanished into the bush, leaving us to reach the water-holes without further opposition. We had three men killed in this affair, and I saw a few dead Askari lying on the road, while there were

probably more dead among the trees.

Next day the advance was continued to Mei-Mei, another water-hole, where de Jager captured a detachment of the 9th Field Company, all Europeans, mounted on little Somali mules. I did not see this fight, but I arrived in time to find the old Major distributing the loot among his followers. Of the thirty-odd prisoners, two were young Transvaal Boers. When spoken to, they stood stiffly to attention, and on being dismissed, they goose-stepped back to their companions, came to a halt with a stamp of feet, and fell out in best Prussian style, which made de Jager and his irregulars roar with laughter. This was the last effort the Germans made to hold us up. When we continued our advance we found them gone, and by next afternoon, scouting through the bush, we saw the gleam of white buildings and the Fort of Dodoma out on the plain, and also the station and metalled track, to show that one stage of the campaign was over, for we were astride the Central Railway at last.

Chapter VII — The Toll of Fly and Fever

We were met at the gateway of the Dodoma Fort by an enormously corpulent German official, who handed over the keys and a medical certificate as to himself.

General van Deventer decided to postpone his entry until next day, so he placed sentries at every entrance to the Fort, and ordered me, with an officer of his staff, to take up quarters inside for the night. My companion and I at once set about making an inventory of the war material and stores that had been left behind. By the aid of a lantern we went through room after room, and gallery after gallery, opening boxes and cases with a bayonet, and when van Deventer arrived in the morning we had an imposing array of loot awaiting his inspection in the courtyard.

Now that we were on the Central Railway, a turning-point in the operations had been reached. Sooner or later the whole line must fall into our hands, and with that we would have driven von Lettow from the northern half of the colony, leaving him the alternative of surrender or of taking to the savage country lying towards the Rufiji, where he and his men would be little better than bushrangers.

We knew that General Smuts was advancing on Morogoro, the administrative capital, about a hundred and fifty miles down, and by all accounts the entire German forces were concentrated in the area between our two converging armies. So far as the railway was concerned, the sector between Dodoma and Morogoro was still in possession of the enemy, and during the next week or two von Lettow skilfully ran his troops up and down

from one threatened point to another, in a manner that was to cause us a great deal of trouble before we finally shouldered him off.

Our task now was to work eastwards along the railway, to join hands with General Smuts across the terribly difficult country that still separated the two forces. Van Deventer made immediate preparation. The 1st and 3rd Mounted Regiments, that had been marching on our left flank during the advance on Dodoma, were lying at Njangalo, thirty miles east, having reached there after their fight for the wells at Tissu-Kwamedu. I was ordered to join them, so with my servant Ruiter I rode across the plains.

At Njangalo I found our men camped around the water-holes in picturesque country. There had been the usual skirmish for the water, in the course of which Major de Jager was shot below the heart. He was lying in a precarious condition under a grass shelter, and I nearly caused his death, for sitting by him one morning, I sought to while away the time by repairing the seat of my riding-breeches with a cutting from the sleeve of my tunic. My sartorial efforts were too much for him and he burst into fits of laughter, bringing on a flow of blood from which he barely recovered.

We remained at Njangalo for several days. I went out with the hunting parties to get meat, and we brought in twelve to fifteen huge eland on the wagons. Before leaving the Fort at Dodoma I had come on a dozen cases of Ersatz whisky. Not without difficulty I had smuggled one case on board a supply wagon that was following me to Njangalo. When the wagon arrived I satisfied my self that the box of contraband was still there, then I informed my friends that to-night was the night. After sunset an expectant circle stood round my fire, while I prized off the lid with a hatchet. When the contents were exposed there lay, not row upon row of straw-covered bottles as in the crates I had opened in the Fort, but layer upon layer of counterfoil receipt blocks, that had been packed away by some over-zealous German official,

and the gathering dispersed in gloom.

General van Deventer now began his advance down the railway line. Owing to the difficult country, he did not follow the metals, but struck away for Mpapwa, an important German centre lying thirty-five miles eastwards among rugged hills showing in the distance. We started on a long march through waterless bush, and before dark we reached Chunyo Neck, the enemy holding the crest in force, and the only available water on the far side. Our infantry were up, and as the slopes were too steep and the scrub too dense for mounted work, we all climbed up on foot. Soon came the rattle of machine-guns, as the Germans searched the jungle, and as we neared the top I caught a glimpse of our old Kondoa friend, the little six-pounder, handled by the same white-coated gunner whom we had learned to know there. He loosed a few rounds, but when our Q.F. battery came up from the rear and opened fire, the opposing force disappeared over the ridge into the bush behind, where it was impossible to follow as it was nearly dark. Of our men we lost four killed and eleven wounded, so the water-hole was an expensive one, as were most of them in these days.

Next morning we crossed the hills into a thickly populated area. All along the road stood native women with baskets of beans and poultry to greet us.

Mpapwa Town lay twelve miles away across dense bush, and we worked forward carefully, for the natives told us the enemy was awaiting us there. After a time we could see a well-built fort surrounded by other buildings and by a native town. As we came within range of the Boma, machine-guns opened fire, whereupon we scattered into the bush, until the rest of our troops came up. While we were halted, the Kondoa six-pounder improved the shining hour by shelling us, and four of our men were wounded, but this was the last we ever saw or heard of her.

Presently our battery arrived, and as soon as the guns began to shell the

town, we saw the enemy move out. I was ordered to ride in with an escort to take possession of the Fort, and the mounted men were sent on a wide circle to get athwart the road beyond, and cut off the retreat. We found the gateway of the Boma standing wide open and the place was deserted. In the streets of the town lay a few dead Askari, and two or three wounded sat nursing their hurts, but the main force had doubled across the sandy river bed, and in a few minutes rifles were cracking at us from the slope beyond. Mounting a stairway to the parapets of the Fort, I saw our horsemen appearing and disappearing through the bush on their way to get behind the enemy. Some distance up the road on the other side of the river were several field companies of Askari, with a knot of European officers walking up and down in an undecided manner. I thought they were meditating surrender, but in this I was mistaken, for as soon as our guns got their range the whole lot vanished in the twinkling of an eye. Our mounted men were in their rear, and they were practically surrounded, but in bush fighting ordinary rules do not apply, and when our cordon tightened, they had filtered away like water through a sieve. Not only were they gone, but before long they were firing at us from a bush-covered rise to the left. The infantry under Col. Molyneux were ordered to attack, and I went with them. It was hot work, with two or three hundred Askari blazing away at us. But their shooting was bad, and we went steadily to the top, until we saw the Askari running for it. We lost three men killed, but we killed a considerable number of them, and the ground was littered with abandoned rifles and equipment. I then returned to where I had left my horse, and rode back to the Boma. The mounted men had brought in ten German prisoners and twenty or thirty Askari, but the rest of the enemy got away. I spent the night camped in a garden beside the stream. Next morning I found a dead Askari not far behind the tree under which I had slept, and several more were lying dead in the vegetable plots fringing the stream. We

lay over at Mpapwa for three days, as the grazing was good, and again I went out with the hunting parties to shoot eland. They were so fat and unwieldy that we rode up to the herds, and singling out the animals we wanted, shot them down like so many bullocks. It was an unsporting business, but we needed food.

From Mpapwa we continued east, and when we neared Kidete next day we were brought to a standstill. We had marched twenty-six miles without water, and again, on a line of rugged hills, lay the enemy barring us from the river behind. We were close to the railway line once more, and in addition to being strongly posted, the Germans had a 4.1 naval gun on a truck pulled by an engine, which steamed up and down shelling us as it went. Our infantry attacked at once, while the mounted men rode to turn the flanks. Under the heavy fire directed on them, the infantry made little headway. By dark they had suffered over fifty casualties, and were hung up halfway along the slopes. Once more we were in a serious predicament, for the nearest water behind was many miles away, and the only other water was in the hands of the enemy. I spent a thirsty night with the right flanking party, and by morning we found ourselves involved in such impenetrable country that we had to return the way we had come. When at last we got back to the main road we found that the left flank had been turned, and that the enemy had retired overnight, leaving us free to reach Kidete Station, where our whole army was lining the river bank, drinking their fill from the swift flowing stream.

We were now come, in the course of a single march, to totally different country. Instead of monotonous waterless scrub and bush, we had reached tropical conditions. We were suddenly in a land of waving palms and bamboo thickets, beautiful mountain scenery, and steaming heat. The mounted regiments rode down a long valley through which the railway wound, and far below we halted in the shade of great trees, and cooked a meal and bathed in

the river, enjoying the wonderful landscape around us.

After midday I accompanied an advance patrol. Our course lay through picturesque groves of bottle palm and clumps of bamboo forest, and on rounding a bend we were brought up by the sight of a German troop train lying on its side, halfway down a high embankment. Part of the train was on fire, and a more complete smash I have never seen. I never heard how the accident had happened, but under the wreckage we found nine dead Askari, and many more must have been injured, for there was an improvised dressing-station under a tree, with bloodstained bandages and uniforms scattered about. From here we worked our way down towards Karessa, where the valley narrows to a gorge not more than two hundred yards wide. As we neared the entrance to this ugly gateway, we were fired on by a few sentries posted overhead. Leaving our horses under cover, we climbed the side of the valley to where we could see into the gorge. There was barely room for the road, the railway, and the river to pass out into the country beyond. On the railway track was a party of Askari, laying land mines, as we afterwards found, and we caught them so unawares that we dropped five, the rest running wildly to the rear. As a hot fire was opened in return, we made for our animals, and galloped up the road to rejoin our main body.

When General van Deventer heard that the entrance was held, he halted until next morning, and then pushed his infantry up the heights on either side of the valley. After many hours of hard climbing through the dense growth we saw our men dotting the crest, and without firing a shot they outflanked the enemy rearguard from a position that would have cost many lives in a frontal attack.

The way into the port was now clear. While we were riding through, some of our men crossed the river to look at the dead Askari lying beside the railway track. As we watched them, there came a loud explosion, and a cloud

of dust and smoke, and a soldier was blown to pieces before our eyes by a mine upon which he had trodden. And another disaster befell us in this port. In passing a timber thicket, our horses began to kick and lash. Halting to ascertain the cause we found what we took to be gadflies swiftly darting in and out, but one of the men identified the insects as the dreaded tsetse fly, a baleful omen for the future of a mounted force. The tsetse is somewhat larger than the common house-fly, with wings that fold scissorwise. It has a mysterious habit of adhering to well-defined belts, which for some unexplained reason it will not leave. One may take a horse close to a fly belt without seeing a tsetse, but the moment the invisible border is passed, they emerge viciously from the shade. Their presence seems to be unconnected with game, and probably some species of vegetation, not yet discovered, is necessary to their existence. The man who solves the enigma will deserve well of Africa. Fortunately, a fly-bitten horse will last for weeks in the absence of rain, so for the time being no immediate ill effects were to be seen.

All our men had marched through the gorge by dark, and that night we camped by the river at Muni-Sagara. A mounted patrol brought in a few German soldiers who had lost their way in the bush. They said Hauptmann Lincke was in command of the troops in front of us, and that von Lettow had gone to oppose General Smuts, who was nearing Morogoro.

Next morning we went on, the road and railway entering rough hill country densely grown with jungle. I was riding with a patrol beside the railway line when a single German officer leaped out of the tall grass and emptied his Mauser pistol at us from about thirty paces, after which he vanished. His aim was wild and no damage was done, but his appearance was a prelude to trouble, for it was followed by the roar of heavy guns and the howling of shells, coming towards and exploding around us. The Germans had several

Königsberg naval guns, probably mounted on a train, and they had the range to such a nicety that we made haste to find shelter behind a bank that overhung the road. Here I had a narrow escape. My native boy Ruiter was close behind, so I handed him the reins of my chestnut, and he dismounted and sat with his back to the earthen bank, holding both our horses by the reins while he placidly puffed away at his pipe. As always during a halt in hot weather, I removed the saddle to ease my animal's back, and just as I had done this, a shell burst on us like a thunderclap. When the smoke cleared there lay my poor chestnut dead. I looked to see whether Ruiter was safe, and he was still holding the dead horse and his own by the reins and he was still imperturbably smoking. We were sad at losing the chestnut, but now that we were in fly country, he had met with an easier death than was awaiting all our other horses, although we scarcely realised it as yet.

General van Deventer came up and ordered us forward to reconnoitre. I sent for my spare brown horse, and we rode to a point from which we could see the Germans holding a transverse ridge lower down the wide valley. As our troops moved into view, they started to shell the road with very accurate fire, and our advance came to a standstill. In the course of the day, young Allen of the 9th went with me to pluck millet in a field. A ricochet that came skimming over the crest burst upon us, killing him on the spot, and I helped to bury the boy under a tree.

For a long time we were held up, while our Q.F. Battery shelled the enemy position. We had about twenty casualties that day. Towards evening the 1st and 3rd Horse proceeded up the sides of the hills, and by next morning they had outflanked the enemy to such good effect that when we advanced down the valley, we found them gone.

We now rode out of the hills. Beyond lay an unhealthy-looking plain, shimmering in the heat, and before us was the town of Kilossa. Here was the

usual fort and the usual official buildings, and a large native quarter. There were railway workshops, a rum distillery, and for miles around great rubber plantations, their storehouses and sheds standing like islands above the trees. German rearguards were lurking in the vicinity, for later in the morning, while I was with a patrol, we heard shots in the bush, and met a party carrying back two dead and two wounded. They had run into an ambush, and had suffered these casualties without so much as a glimpse of the enemy.

We rested for two days at Kilossa. During this time an aeroplane came over. It was only the second one I had ever seen in my life, and it dropped a message to say that General Smuts had reached Morogoro, so our two forces were about fifty miles apart.

Van Deventer now marched south to Kidodi with the 1st Horse and the infantry, and the rest of us were ordered to move east along the railway line. Our first day took us as far as the Makata River, across a wide plain covered with game and tsetse fly, and we camped that night beside the water. Next morning I rode out with a hunting party. We killed four giraffe by galloping alongside them and firing shot after shot, until the poor brutes rolled over dead. Still, the men and the native carriers required food, and thus they were supplied. As I was returning to camp that evening, I heard angry words, and then the report of firearms, and presently I came on the body of a native belonging to our forces. His chest was ripped open by a heavy-calibre bullet, and, strangely enough, the face of the dead man bore a placid smile.

Ruiter, who had private channels of information among the porters, told me soon after we got back that the native had been killed by an Indian of the mountain battery. He said the two men had fought a revolver duel, and the victor, having killed his opponent, decamped with both weapons. The native and Indian spectators who had assembled to watch the combat disappeared too. It was apparently a fair fight, so I kept my own counsel.

From the Makata River, in a two days' ride, with the atmosphere like a Turkish bath, we reached M'lali, a native village at the foot of the Uluguru Mountains. Here, for the first time, we came in touch with patrols from General Smuts's force. They told us that Smuts himself was at the enemy capital, fourteen miles away, and that Coen Brits, my old crony, was on the road in our direction with his mounted brigade. They told us of their experiences since leaving the Pangani River near Mount Kilimanjaro, and of their long trek to Morogoro. They had to fight hard at times, but, as with ourselves, the real enemy had been the jungle, fever, tsetse and the lack of supplies.

Next morning we heard gun and rifle fire among the foothills where Brits was skirmishing, and when we got up we found that the Germans had retired into the mountains, abandoning one of the *Königsberg* naval guns, which we came upon in a clearing, surrounded by many empty shell-cases.

We had now finally pushed von Lettow off the Central railway line, and our information was that he and his army had retired into the Uluguru Mountains lying before us, a magnificent sweep of forest-clad heights, running sixty miles east by west, and forty or fifty miles deep. Our next task was to drive him out of this great fastness.

As van Deventer was still away, Coen Brits was in local command. I had not seen him since the German West days, so I rode over to pay my respects. He greeted me with a slash of the sjambok and a "Good day you ——, I'm glad to see you."

He held the rank of Brigadier-General. Around the gilt oak-leaves on each gorget tab there twined sprigs of forget-me-nots, embroidered in vivid purple. Thinking this was some new insignia of office I asked him what it meant. Looking down affectionately at the adornments, the old man said that his wife had worked the flowers upon his uniform to remind him of her while he

was at the war. We could not help smiling, but we liked him the more for his naive simplicity.

General Smuts came to see us at M'lali. He was thin and ill from malaria, but he spoke cheerfully. He told me that Roumania had joined the Allies, and he gave us the latest news from France. We had been in the wilds for so long that we had almost forgotten that there was another war, so remote did things in Europe seem to us. He had come to make arrangements for an advance, and as soon as he returned to Morogoro the 1st Mounted Brigade was ordered to move into the Uluguru Mountains, while Coen Brits with his 2nd Brigade was to make a wide turning movement round the western flank of the range.

Accordingly he and his men vanished into the bush, and we began to climb the slopes before us. We left our horses below, and as we neared the crest of the first parallel ridge, German outposts fired at us and then fell back. From the top we looked down into a great bowl-like valley, in the centre of which lay the white buildings of a mission station. We found a number of sick and wounded Germans there, and some nursing sisters.

Von Lettow had slept at the Mission the night before, and he was still in the neighbourhood, for a native came trotting down a mountain path carrying a message in a cleft stick, and I relieved him of it. It was a note signed by von Lettow ordering the "Bahnschutz" (Railway) Field Company to retire southwards through the mountains to Kissaki.

We spent the night at the station, rain coming down heavily, and next day we returned to fetch our horses, after which, skirting along the base of the mountains for twelve or fifteen miles, we once more entered the Uluguru range.

For two days we ascended and descended endless parallel heights, dragging our weary animals behind us. A great many of them were beginning to show the effects of tsetse bite. They grew thin and sluggish, for the poison acts

slowly, and it was hard to watch the suffering the poor animals endured. My own surviving horse was still fit, but my servant's was sadly emaciated, and it was easy to see from the general appearance of the Brigade that our existence as a mounted force was drawing to a close. By the evening of the third day we were on the great watershed from which the mountain valleys and streams now drained southwards. Far below, we saw the native village of Kikeo in a deep valley, with several enemy field companies halted on the square. In the clear mountain atmosphere it looked as if one could drop a bullet among them, but in point of fact they lay two thousand feet beneath, and nearly four miles away. When we topped the skyline, there was great activity, and field company after field company marched down the valley into the darkness that quickly fell.

When it grew light next morning, a native came out of the forest with a letter in a stick addressed to the "Truppen Kommando" at Kikeo. It was written by a Hauptmann Schultz, and it contained a full report of our numbers, horses, etc. Schultz stated that these particulars had been obtained by Askari Ali Hassan, who entered our lines as a spy. According to the letter, Hassan had divested himself of his uniform and arms, and he had boldly come among us. He helped to cut grass for the horses, carried water and fuel, and took such careful stock of everything that he had us down almost to a man. We promised Ali Hassan a warm reception should he come again, but in the meanwhile we admitted his courage and resource.

When at last, after a frightful scramble, we reached Kikeo, several large storehouses were fiercely alight, and the air reeked with the smell of burning salt and oil. The Germans had collected great quantities of these articles here for the use of their troops, and on our approach they had fired their supplies.

From Kikeo the road taken by the retreating force was in good condition. The rivers and brooks were bridged, and the swamps adequately corduroyed,

so we made fair progress although we did not catch up with the enemy, for our horses were growing weaker by the hour.

As we approached Sonkomero that night, still among the mountains but nearer the last foothills, we came on two more storehouses ablaze, and there was the crackle of thousands of exploding rifle cartridges, and the roar of bursting shells, for both buildings were crammed with ammunition that had been carried here by von Lettow's orders, in preparation for a stand in the mountains.

We estimated the destruction at a million rounds, and the men began to say the campaign was over. We were soon to be disillusioned on this head. Sonkomero lies in the foothills. During the day we had left the streams and valleys of the Uluguru Mountains, and here at Sonkomero we were practically on the edge of the southern plains that lie towards the Rufiji River. The natives told us the nearest water from here was the Mgeta River at Kissaki, so we marched out next morning. After a while the road crossed a low neck, from which we could make out Kissaki lying in the distance. The white Boma lay deserted, and the only sign of life was the flutter of Red Cross flags over a hospital building, so we reckoned to be there within the hour. But between us and Kissaki was five miles of jungle, in which, unknown to us, von Lettow was lying in wait.

As soon as we were clear of the foothills, the road entered a forest, then it passed through a wide open space that had been a cotton field, and beyond that it ran into a dense tangle of trees and elephant grass standing many feet high. The 3rd S.A. Horse led the way. As we neared the far end of the cotton field, we spied a German seated on a platform in the fork of a tree. He fired a single shot which killed a horse, and scrambling down the ladder, vanished to the rear. A few minutes later, as we rode into the jungle beyond the clearing, heavy fire broke out. We could see nothing, but from the volume of sound the

enemy was in force, though so thickly matted was the grass that only spent bullets whirred by. Colonel Nussey had recently been appointed in command of our Brigade, and after a rapid survey of the position, he ordered the men to leave their horses and deploy on foot on either side of the road.

Once off the road, we were immediately swallowed in the rank jungle. Even the sky overhead was invisible, and one could not see one's next-door neighbour three feet away. So far from evacuating Kissaki, the enemy had dug rifle-pits and trenches, and from the noise of their fire there were thousands of Askari shooting at us. Our first task was to trample a pathway through the elephant grass to form a fighting front, so that the men could maintain contact, and then they scrabbled some sort of cover with their bayonets. We were committed to an unpleasant day. The heat was stifling; we had no water, and casualties began to mount.

At this very time, Coen Brits with his men lay only seven or eight miles away. He had marched round the western base of the Uluguru Mountains, and had tried to enter Kissaki the day before, when he ran into much the same kind of ambush that we were now involved in, and after losing sixty men, had been forced to retire. He was now camped on the Mgeta River some miles above Kissaki, but he was unaware of our predicament, for in forest country the sound of rifle-fire does not carry far. The Germans, earlier in the morning, had kept half their men opposing him, but when they found, as the hours passed, that he remained inactive, they moved all their forces to our front, with the result that their fire grew increasingly severe and they began to press us hard. They made several ugly rushes, and for the first time in the campaign I saw the Askari in action at close quarters, and I even heard them shouting their "piga, piga" as they came. It was confused fighting, for the jungle was so thick that one never saw more than twenty or thirty of the enemy at the same time, and only here and there could we make out their earthworks and

barricades. We hung on. With repeated attacks threatening us we could not advance against the enemy works, and to retire under these conditions was impracticable, so we fought in the steaming heat. As darkness approached at last, the firing died down and the encounter came to an end. We had lost four officers and twenty-three men killed and many wounded, and we had to withdraw. Thirsty and hungry, our men lay on their arms beyond the cotton clearing, but I was ordered to ride back to Sonkomero to hurry on the native carriers with water.

I rode away in the dusk with the ugly memory of some of our men whom I had seen lying dead, their skulls smashed by the Askari, and as a climax to an unhappy day, I committed a murder that night. Shortly after I got to Sonkomero, while I was superintending the enlargement of the water-holes in the moonlight, the local village jumbi (headman) rushed up in a state of great alarm, followed by his wives and children. He said there was a German Askari hiding in the reeds, and as he evinced the liveliest terror, I took with me one of the details who had been left behind in the morning, and we went to investigate.

About a week before, a young Boer soldier named Cloete had been shot down by a wounded Askari to whose assistance he had gone. All ranks had been advised of the incident, and with this warning in my mind I cautiously approached the bed of reeds in which the Askari was said to be. The headman, frightened and trembling, took my arm, and pointed to a dark figure crouched in a tunnel of rushes. I knew enough of the Swahili language by now to ask him whether he was certain it was an Askari. He emphatically replied “Ndio, ndio, Bwana, Askaria Germani,” and he showed such trepidation that I could not doubt him, for these “tame” natives look on the Askari with dread. To make sure, I called out several times to the hiding man to come forward, but he paid no heed, and then the soldier who was with me

clutched my shoulder and cried: “Take care, he is going to fire.” At this I loosed two rapid shots from my revolver, and running in, found a native lying dead. He was clad only in a loin cloth, and he was unarmed. I shall never forget the feeling of shame and regret with which I looked on my handiwork. I spent a tormented sleepless night, and at daybreak a messenger having come to say that the Brigade was moving, I saddled my horse, only too glad to get away from this ill-omened spot. I picked up the trail easily. Our men had marched from the cotton field through the forest along elephant paths, and after a long ride I found them camped on the banks of the Mgeta River some miles above Kissaki. Not only were they here, but Coen Brits was here too with his horsemen, and with an infantry regiment that had come up in his wake.

The old fellow was as surly as a bear over the setback he had received, and his men and ours were able to sympathise with each other, for we had both taken an unpleasant buffet. Next day I was ordered to ride into Kissaki under flag of truce, with a letter of protest against the mutilation of our dead, and asking information as to some of our men who were missing since the fight. I cut a bamboo pole to which I tied a piece of cloth, and with an orderly as standard-bearer I rode away. I hoped to meet the redoubtable von Lettow himself, but this was not to be. As we trotted across the cotton field, two German officers stepped out on to the road and halted us. We were told to dismount, and, at a shout, half a dozen Askari came running from the trees to guard us, while the senior officer went in to Kissaki with the message I handed him. The Askari looked bloodthirsty ruffians who handled their bayonets as if they would have liked to spit us, but the officer was a decent young fellow. He proudly showed me his Mauser pistol, which he said was one of a number sent out in a blockade runner by the people of Germany, as gifts for the stand they were making. Afterwards another officer shouted

gruffly from the forest that he was not to speak to the “Englander”, and then we stood in embarrassed silence.

An hour later the original officer returned with a reply to the despatch, and my orderly and I rode back the way we had come.

In the forest beyond the cotton clearing I saw movement in the grass beside the road, and stopping to investigate, we found a native lying mortally wounded. He said he had been working in his millet field the day before, when an Askari had shot him down. I gave him my water-bottle. He clutched it with trembling hands and emptied its contents at a gulp, then with a low moan he fell back dead, so we left him there. The letter I brought from Kissaki denied the murder of our wounded, but gave news of several of our men lying in hospital, and it said they were being well treated.

That evening Coen Brits walked over to where I sat by my fire. He clapped me on the back and told me to cheer up. He said two of his men had passed on their way from Sonkomero to Kilossa, and they had left word that a uniform and a rifle had been found hidden in the grass close to where I had shot the native, who had been an Askari spying on us. I only hope the story was true, but I have a suspicion that he concocted the tale for my benefit, knowing that I was fretting over the incident, for with all his gruff exterior he was kindhearted and understanding.

Meanwhile we were living under famine conditions. There was little or no game in the forest, nor any cattle in this tsetse-haunted region, and the millet fields lay mostly reaped. We had about twelve hundred men congregated here. Supplies had to be carried by native porters over the mountains from Morogoro, sixty miles away, and for the next few weeks we lived on very spare diet.

It was now decided to manœuvre the enemy out of Kissaki instead of making another costly attack, so Brits moved round west, and our Brigade

headed east. For two days we fought our way through dense forest, mostly along elephant paths, though these sagacious creatures had disappeared, leaving the jungle to mankind and his follies.

At Dakawa, a native town, we learned that von Lettow had ridden through the night before on one of our captured horses, and that the Germans had vacated Kissaki. I went with the advance guard into the place. Except for the Fort and the Hospital, where lay a dozen of our wounded and a number of German officers, there was not much to see. Though the enemy had given up the town, they had not gone far. I was with a patrol of the 9th on the Tulo Road next morning. A scout named Carlyon had gone ahead and as we rounded a corner we came on him sitting his horse engaged in a heated altercation with a German officer, four Askari standing to attention beside him on the road. They were out of sight almost at once, but we fired a volley into the grass, and riding up, we found the officer with a bullet through his leg, and an Askari rolling in agony. Carlyon said that on finding himself held up, he began to tell the officer that the war in Europe was over, and that Germany was beaten, hoping to delay the picket until our arrival. His captor had heatedly denied defeat, and had lent himself so successfully to Carlyon's ruse, that he was now our prisoner instead. He had a diary which I took possession of. On perusing it later on, I was astonished to find that the British Navy early in the war had occupied Dâr-es-Salaam, and had voluntarily given it up again. It must surely have enormously simplified the campaign had they retained the port, for it would have enabled us to use it as a base from which to work into the interior along the Central railway line, instead of having to fight our way through hundreds of miles of bush to reach it, as we had been doing.

The diary described the occupation of Dâr-es-Salaam as follows:

"Aug. 6th, 1914. Alarm signals again! This time followed by live shell

screeching overhead! Two English cruisers, Pegasus *and* Astraea, *were firing at our wireless mast. We made our way to the railway station where all troops, as well as the crews from the* Möwe *and from the two passenger steamers, boarded the train standing ready to take us inland as soon as the English came. At the last moment I was detailed to watch the movements of the enemy ships cruising up and down before the harbour.*

"At 10.20 as I was passing the room of Staff-Surgeon (Stabsarzt) Gastlach, I heard a shot, and rushing in, found he had blown his brains out with a revolver. First test of my war nerves!

"10.40. I reported the approach of an English pinnace (pinaz) with a cutter in tow, whereupon the trains steamed off into the pori (bush). I saw a naval officer and 18 men land. I went up and found the Englishman speaking to Councillor Methner at the customs office. While this was going on the sailors were lolling about and some of them occupied their time with carving their names — Thos. Cann, Wm. Smith — on the government jetty as if already the harbour belonged to them!

"The upshot was that Dâr-es-Salaam is declared a neutral port and all inhabitants are bound to take no hostile action against Great Britain. The landing party afterwards returned to their ships and by evening the cruisers were out of sight.

"Aug. 7th. Presented to Herr von Lettow in the officers' mess tent. Helped to sink the Möwe *in the creek."*

Why the British gave up Dâr-es-Salaam, when they had it, is a mystery to me, and why they did not at any rate carry off the *Möwe* sloop and the two passenger steamers, is equally hard to understand, but most wars seem to start with muddle and blunder.

Soon after our encounter with the wounded diarist and his picket, Coen Brits came up with his men, and we moved slowly through the forest in order

to strike the Mgeta River some miles below Kissaki. As we neared the river we came to a narrow lagoon, into which it spills during the rainy season, and in this lagoon swam a school of eleven hippo. Food being scarce we could not afford to be squeamish, and in less than fifteen minutes they were all killed. Trapped as they were, the wretched animals stood no chance against the shots that were fired whenever they came up to breathe, and they were ruthlessly slaughtered.

Leaving the hippo to be dragged ashore, we rode along the river, and after a while we saw a considerable number of Askari running on the far bank. We opened fire, and meeting with no opposition, crossed to the other side, where we picked up nine dead of the 1st Field Company, all neatly dressed in khaki tunics and shorts. We went on through the matted grass until we cut into the Rufiji Road, and here we found the enemy strongly posted. They had log stockades at intervals across the road, from which came machine-gun and rifle fire, and from what we could make out, their front extended a long way on either side. Capt. Haldane Murray, a South African member of Parliament, was killed while dragging a wounded man from the road, and several others were killed and wounded, though we did not realise it at the time owing to the dense vegetation.

Young Piet Swart, who had seen aeroplanes and elephants and had travelled on a ship, here saw the biggest thing of all, for I came on him lying dead by the river with a bullet between his eyes, his dead horse beside him. Lieut. Winer of the 3rd was also dead, and there were several wounded men, shot down by a single volley poured into them at close quarters.

Coen Brits was now in command of both brigades. He ordered us to take up a line facing the Germans, so we dug rifle-pits and trenches and for the next three weeks we lay in the jungle with the enemy about four hundred yards away, though we saw little enough of them in the high grass and dense forest.

We could hear them felling trees, and sometimes, after dark, they sang “Deutschland über Alles” and other songs, which the men declared was on “rum nights”, for they were enviously convinced that the Germans received a rum ration twice a week.

The weather now changed and torrential rains came down. When it did not rain the heat was terrific, and day and night the mosquitoes buzzed. This lowland is one of the unhealthiest parts of Africa, and soon malaria and dysentery were rife. The forest swarmed with tsetse fly and our horses began to die at such a rate that, weakened as we were, we could not muster enough hands to bury the rotting carcases, so the stench of hundreds of dead animals was added to the miasma of the swamps. Further, there was the food problem. With the heavy rains, the carriers failed, and where we had been on short commons before, we went on shorter now. A road had been opened from Morogoro east of the Uluguru Mountains, for the transport of supplies, but the Tulo River and other streams were up, and all the country was inches deep in black mud.

During this dismal time we lay on the south bank of the Mgeta with rifle and machine-gun bullets swishing through the rain. A battery had arrived but it could do little in such thick country, although one morning two of our men were killed by a “short”, within a few yards of me.

More than half of the men were down with fever, and I doubt if there were a dozen horses left, all told. My brown horse was still alive but my servant’s was dead, and he himself suffered from frequent bouts of fever, though I remained fit and well.

In spite of the sickness and discomfort which we were enduring, the fact remained that we had driven the Germans into the wilderness. The railways and towns were in our hands, and only the remote southern half of their territory was left to them. In view of this, and of the many deaths from fever,

General Smuts now decided to withdraw most of the white troops from the country, in order to replace them by Indian soldiers.

In pursuance of this policy, Indian battalions under General Hannington began to arrive on our front, and instructions came for the mounted brigades to return to Morogoro, as soon as the newcomers had taken over our line. They were smart-looking men under British officers, and as they were inured to malaria, they were more suited to campaigning in this deadly climate. With them came a unit of Frontiersmen. One of their officers was Selous, the famous big-game hunter, whose books I had read and whose exploits I had envied ever since my boyhood. I came on him in the forest one morning, when he was hunting nothing more dangerous than butterflies, with a net and a specimen box. He was killed in action near here, and he himself would have wished for no more fitting death after his long adventures in the heart of Africa.

As soon as the relief was complete, we left the dreary positions that we had been holding. It was pitiful to see the fever-racked men dragging themselves along on foot, for their animals were dead, and we had ceased to be a mounted arm. The mortality amongst the horses was one of the saddest features of the East African expedition. More than thirty thousand of these dumb gentle brutes died here, and that part of me which loved and understood horses somewhat died too.

The road to Morogoro did not lead through the mountains along the way we had come, but round by the eastern base of the Uluguru. As I still had a horse, I was ordered to ride ahead to prepare for the reception of our men, and leaving my boy Ruiter behind I pushed on, with another mounted officer, Capt. Fossbury. One night we camped at a broad river, where the tsetse hung in clusters on the flanks of our animals, a thing I had never seen before, and next morning each of them had an air bubble as large as a walnut running up

and down its jugular vein, a sure sign of the end.

We had another eighty miles to go, and we toiled along. At a supply camp, we came on a number of sick men beneath the trees. From amongst them a gaunt figure staggered to his feet, and addressed me. Disease had so emaciated him, that I did not recognise my own cousin, Will Schreiner from Capetown, although we had practically grown up together, and his condition was similar to hundreds of others.

We went on, leading our stricken horses, for they at any rate served to carry such kit as we still possessed, and after several more days through swamps and forests, we came at length to Morogoro.

My brown horse had carried me faithfully since I left Mount Kilimanjaro, and now I stood before him, rifle in hand, and put him out of his misery.

At Morogoro I built a grass hut and with the help of the supply staff, made preparations for those coming on behind. We collected natives to build hospital bandas and living-huts, and as the railway to Dâr-es-Salaam was now open, we had everything in readiness for our men when they began to dribble in.

By the middle of October (1916) what was left of the mounted brigades had arrived, and another phase of the campaign was over.

Chapter VIII — Last Safari

The work of reorganising the war on a fresh basis was taken in hand. As many troops as could be spared were ordered to return to South Africa and those of us who had not yet been notified were in hourly expectation of instructions to leave.

I was nominally a member of General Smuts's staff, but in reality I had all along been a free lance, roaming as I listed, so I was almost certain to be marked for departure. Jacobus van Deventer sent for me one morning. I walked over to his tent feeling sure that I was about to receive my orders with the rest. I was the more surprised, therefore, when he told me that a composite brigade was to remain in the country and that I was to take command of one of its four regiments, the 4th S.A. Horse. Further, I was to start for Kilossa at once. Fresh horses had arrived from South Africa, and on paper I was given a fully mounted regiment, but I knew that every one of these poor exiled animals was doomed, and that we would soon be on foot once more.

I made ready. I rode into Morogoro to say good-bye to General Smuts, who was proceeding to England, and I went to take farewell of many other friends who were returning home. Old Coen Brits gave me a final slash of his sjambok by way of benediction, and we moved off.

I left Morogoro with my new regiment after sunset to avoid the fly belt of the Makata River, but it was of little use, for both horses and men were freely bitten, in spite of the dark. Whenever we passed a patch of bush, out darted the fly, the horses kicking and lashing, and the men cursing and swearing, for

the sting of a tsetse is as painful as the sudden thrust of a needle.

By the time we reached Kilossa, the tragedy of dead and dying horses was being enacted afresh, and as we moved from each camping site, there came the merciful fusillade of a firing party left behind to put an end to animals that could travel no more.

At Kilossa I received orders to make for Iringa, one hundred and seventy miles away. We trekked across the great plains to Uleia, and thence westwards, every mile of our road marked by dead horses. The 3rd and 9th Regiments had preceded me, and our course lay in their wake, through picturesque forest and hill country, abounding with big game. But the beauty of the landscape was marred by the sight of dead animals, left by those in front, and by the knowledge that our own were strewing the track behind.

We crossed the Rubeho Mountain by the Elton Pass, fit only for a goat to climb, and then descended to the great Ruaha, a broad river, flowing towards endless swamps and jungle, and elephant country.

On the bank of the Ruaha, near the ford, I found my elder brother, Joubert, in a dying condition. I had last seen him on the Mgeta and I had noted then how ill and haggard he looked. Now he lay here under a rude shelter of grass, unable to go on. He was pitifully weak from malaria, but his mind was clear. He spoke a little of the days when we were boys, and of the mighty changes the war would bring.

Poor fellow, he had never had much luck in life.

As a boy of eighteen during the Boer War he was captured by the British and sent to Bermuda for three years. On his release, he made his way to Madagascar, where, for a further long period, he had suffered great hardship and poverty. When at length he returned to South Africa, misfortune still dogged him. He was a poet and a dreamer by nature, so he did not prosper, and the outbreak of the war in 1914 found him serving as a private soldier

under Maritz on the Orange River. He was among those treacherously handed over to the Germans, and he emerged from nine months of captivity in South-West with his constitution undermined by privation and hunger. He had nevertheless volunteered for the present campaign, and now he lay broken.

He was taken back to the Union and died there, so I never saw him again.

From the Ruaha we marched on, still losing dozens of horses every day. The saddles from the dead animals were stacked in native villages, as we passed, and for all I know they are lying there still. By the time we approached Iringa there were ten horses left of those we started with. These we used to carry the sick, for there were always men going down with fever, and for the rest, the entire regiment marched on foot.

At one point, a body of the enemy tried to ambush my advanced squadron after dark. They opened fire, wounding one man, but Capt. Mullins got into action so quickly with a machine-gun, that they scattered and disappeared. When at last we got to Iringa, it was a small town situated high up on a rocky hill, with the usual boma for its chief feature.

We had now reached country lying five thousand feet above sea level, with a cool temperate climate, a welcome relief after the tropical heat of past months. The Germans had evacuated the town shortly before, but they had several field companies of Askari under Hauptmann Lincke and other European officers in the district, and so far as I understood the operations, we had come to clear these healthy uplands of the enemy, and to join hands with General Northey’s troops, who were working in our direction from Nyasaland.

We lay camped for some days in a valley near Iringa. More troops arrived from the rear until we were quite a respectable force, and General van Deventer himself came by car from Dodoma, to direct affairs. My regiment was ordered south where Hauptmann Lincke was holding an entrenched

camp near Mount Erica, in dense forest country thirty miles away, while other units were sent to various spots in the same vicinity.

My instructions were to find a suitable place from which to patrol the area east of Lincke's camp, and to keep his movements under observation, so we set out at once. In this fine climate walking was a pleasure, and even the men who had been down with fever stepped it with a will. Our transport consisted of two hundred native carriers, for by now there was not a single horse left, and we had oxen on the hoof. We went through beautiful country, rounded grassy hills with patches of forest, like a succession of English parks. In the open spaces grazed herds of eland and other game, and native villages dotted the slopes.

Beyond Boma Himbu, it grew more rugged and more beautiful. The hills were steeper, with deep gorges and swift torrents, and the forest was closing in.

Near Likinindas, after three days' marching, I took up a position on a spur of the escarpment commanding a magnificent view over the country that lay in the direction of the Mahenge Plains. The air was like wine, and after our long months in torrid jungles we enjoyed the life. I allowed the men sufficient latitude, and permitted them to shoot game when returning from patrol work, so that we had food in plenty.

We remained here for over a fortnight, and time passed lightly enough, for the Germans lay inactive in their camp, and until van Deventer was ready to move, our task was an easy one. I was a Big White Chief. The native headmen came in with gifts of poultry and matama, and I dispensed justice in a grass-covered courthouse which I had constructed for the purpose. I dealt with only one important case. One of my patrols, returning from an inspection of the German stockade, killed a local jumbi (petty chief) by mistake. He had been watching the Germans on his own account, and as he

carried a rifle, my men, in the thick timber, thought that he was an Askari, and shot him down. Next morning the dead man's wives appeared, with the rest of the village at their heels. Long before they emerged from the forest I heard weeping and wailing, and as the procession came into view, the lamentations increased. After going into the matter, I awarded the bereaved widows two oxen in full settlement, and when last I saw them and their retainers, they were driving the animals along the hillside, singing and dancing joyously as they went.

On December 16th, 1916, I received a message from van Deventer that I was to come to Iringa, to attend a conference. I left camp at daybreak with an orderly, and we tramped the thirty miles by sunset. Officers commanding the other regiments had come in, and that night, in a large room in the Fort, he explained to us how he proposed to capture Lincke, or at any rate drive him into the low country.

The capture looked easy enough on paper, and before the meeting was over, van Deventer had the enemy surrounded on the map, within a ring of indelible pencil. But having seen the forest, the deep gorges, and the size of the country in which we were to operate, I was not so sure, and I told him so. However, next day I walked back to camp, and a few days after that I started off with my regiment to carry out the orders I had received, which were to get across the enemy's rear at the Muhanga Mission Station.

For the next three days we marched through a beautiful but difficult region. As we progressed, the forest grew denser and the climbing more steep. We had generally to go in single file along game paths, led by natives, and it rained much of the time. I was under strict injunction to reach my point in the drive by a given date, and as the distance proved to be nearly twice that shown on the map, I had to push the men unmercifully. They responded with such eagerness that we outmarched our carriers, and Christmas Day found us

still plodding through primæval forest, without a morsel of food. Hungry and tired, we pushed on in the rain, and by dint of continuing all night, we got astride the Muhanga Road next morning. Here we discovered a herd of goats which eased the supply problem, for we had gone without food for thirty-six hours.

Van Deventer was now to move upon Lincke's entrenched camp from the north, with troops kept in hand for the purpose, while the rest of our forces closed in, on the flanks and rear. These measures were carried out according to plan, and on paper our opponents were encircled. In practice, it worked out differently, for the cordon we had established was full of loopholes, and each unit was in fact separated from the next by wide stretches of forest and kloofs, leaving many gaps through which men with knowledge of woodcraft could escape. We spent another night in heavy rain on the wooded ridge behind the Mission, and next morning we saw Lincke's force strung out on the shoulder of a distant hill. They had evacuated their camp at van Deventer's approach, and were seeking an avenue of retreat.

They were eight or nine miles away, with several deep gorges in between, and we only caught an occasional glimpse of them in the misty weather, as they came and went through the clearings. We placed them at about five hundred Askari with hundreds of porters, and as the 9th Regiment lay across their road in the direction in which they were going, we hoped that they would run into our men. Lincke was too clever for that. He slipped down some valley, and by nightfall had got clean away.

At all events we had now cleared these uplands, for the enemy was forced down the escarpment into the unhealthy swamps of Mahenge. The drive being over, the South African troops that had taken part were ordered to return to the Central railway line at Dodoma, two hundred miles away, leaving Indian soldiers to garrison the district.

We marched to Boma Himbu in three days. On the top of Mount Kyalu we passed Lincke's fortified camp, with trenches and dug-outs that would have cost us many men in a frontal attack.

Near the breastworks lay a dead Askari. Suspended from a leather thong around his neck was a metal disc with a design of raised bosses in parallel columns. The finder brought it to me and he said it was a Mohammedan talisman. That night around my fire we held learned council regarding the interpretation of the charm. Afterwards a trooper standing near said: "Beg pardon, sir, that there article comes from a sewing machine, and them knobs is for regulating the stitches." This closed the debate.

We saw the old year out, camped by a river at the bottom of a rugged gorge, and on January 1st, 1917, we were back at Iringa once more. From Iringa we walked to Dodoma in six days, across level bush country that carried more giraffe and other big game than I had seen in the rest of East Africa put together.

The Fort at Dodoma, in which I had spent so agreeable a night, five months before, had been turned into a hospital, and most of the other buildings were soon full to overflowing with fever patients, for the long marches and the rains had laid low a great many of our men. We camped here for some days, and then came orders that we were to return to South Africa.

We were glad to go. The campaign had degenerated into something like searching for a needle in a haystack, with a handful of Germans hidden in thousands of square miles of bush. They had made a splendid stand, but they were not the real enemy. The real enemy were the deadly climate, the wild regions, and the swamps and forests, and scrub.

It is arguable that the expedition should never have been undertaken at all, seeing that the fate of German East depended upon the outcome in France. But I need not discuss the point, for this is not a history of the campaign, but

merely a personal record.

From Dodoma we went by rail to the coast. We trundled past Kidete Station, down the long valley through which we had fought our way in August, the wrecked German train and its skeletons still lying there, thence by Kilossa and Morogoro to Dâr-es-Salaam, where long years before I had watched the poor little German parted from his friend, after the murder on board ship.

At Dâr-es-Salaam we marched over the causeway of the lagoon to a lovely palm-fringed beach and lay camped for a week or two, awaiting transport to South Africa. We boated on the landlocked estuary, fished, swam, and visited the scuttled German passenger steamers and the *Möwe* sloop, the very ships that were to be had for the taking when the British landed here in 1914.

One morning I had an unpleasant experience. Six hundred yards out in the bay swung a yacht at anchor that had belonged to Herr Schnee, the German Governor, and I decided to swim to it. When I was halfway across I was horrified to see an enormous shark approaching me, his rows of teeth and his white belly showing as he turned on his side. The brute came up with a grunting noise, and actually sniffed at me like a dog. Then I remembered to churn and lash the water with arms and legs, for I had heard that sharks might be driven off in this manner. My efforts did not seem to perturb the creature unduly, but perhaps he was not hungry, for he went leisurely on his way, while I struck madly for the beach, more frightened than I have ever been in my life.

Early in February 1917 we embarked on the *Aragon*, a luxurious steamer that had been Sir Ian Hamilton’s headquarters at Gallipoli, and five days later we landed in South Africa.

Chapter IX — Overseas

With the greatest war in the history of the world going on in Europe, I did not feel that I could return to a quiet village life, so I decided to go overseas.

My boy Ruiter said he was coming too. He was, however, suffering from malaria, and, as I intended travelling to England by mail steamer, as an ordinary civilian passenger, I foresaw complications, if I arrived in London with a native on my hands. Accordingly I made arrangements for him to be sent on later with a draft of the Cape Coloured Corps, hoping that he would be able to join me.

I never saw this brave faithful servant again. True to his word, he enlisted for France, but when he got there he was lost in the confusion of millions of men, and the only news that ever reached me was a letter from the War Office, long after, to say that Driver Ruiter Makana of the 196th Battery was dead.

At Capetown I went to tell my father of my intentions. He said he did not understand why I wished to get myself killed in France for the sake of the British. But I had thought the matter out and I replied that I was going to fight not for the British, but *with* the British and the other allied nations. He said: “Well, my son, if those are your views, I cannot stop you,” and he gave me his blessing, and his hopes for a safe return.

A few days later I sailed from Table Bay in the *Norman*, a fast ship of the Union Castle Company. We went via St. Helena and Ascension Rock to Sierra Leone, which place we made in seventeen days. We anchored inside a great boom of floating logs, chained together as a protection against

submarines. There were many other ships collected here, for this was the most difficult period of the whole war as regards the U-boat menace.

I gathered that the tonnage question was extremely critical and that the Germans were sinking nine and ten merchantmen a day, around the British coast, so that all these vessels had run for shelter.

As the *Norman* could do nineteen knots, we received instructions to move off without the rest of the fleet, and one evening after dark we slipped through the boom for the open sea.

Next morning we began the zigzag course, which had been adopted by ships in the danger zones, for the enemy submarines were ranging ever further, and we were told that they had even been sighted off the coast of America. We would steam ahead for a mile or two, then swerve to right or left for an equal distance, and so we continued in order to make it as difficult as possible for a submarine to fire its torpedoes. Looking back at our erratic wake that showed the drunken fashion in which we staggered about, one could well imagine that a U-boat commander would have had considerable trouble in laying his aim.

During the day, we received news by wireless that the United States had entered the war, on the side of the Allies, and this gave me particular joy, for America was the biggest republic in the world, and her action more than justified me with my father.

After a few days we began to approach the English coast, and our last day at sea was an interesting one.

This week, as we heard later, was the worst of the war. Over seventy British ships had been sunk, besides many French, Italian, and neutrals. A number of them must have been torpedoed in this very zone, because, from daybreak onward, we were continually passing wreckage. We saw dead cattle, a great deal of floating timber, a waterlogged lifeboat, and once I saw the body of a

dead man, enormously distended, sliding down the oily swell of the sea only fifteen or sixteen yards away.

At about 8 a.m. a message was received from a cargo steamer ahead, calling for help. She reported that she was being shelled by a submarine, and was in urgent need of assistance, so we went to the rescue at full speed. After an hour we came in sight of her. She was on fire, dense volumes of smoke pouring from her sides. She had been abandoned by her crew whom we saw rowing off in their boats. A mile away stood a rusty old tramp steadily firing her aft gun, but although we could see the shells throwing great spurts of water where they struck, we failed to catch sight of periscope or U-boat.

It was clear, however, that an enemy submarine was about, and as the collier signalled that she was picking up the orphaned crew, the captain of the *Norman* sailed on. He was carrying the mails and millions of bar gold from South Africa, and he was under orders to take no unnecessary risks. When we looked back we saw the stern of the burning ship lift clear, and amid a cloud of smoke and steam she disappeared beneath the waves, leaving only the lifeboats making towards the tramp.

The wind now freshened to a gale, and it grew bitterly cold. I watched a sailor throw a bucket overboard tied to a rope, and when he drew it up I dipped my hand in the water. It was like ice, and it made me realise the terror of being thrown into these wintry seas.

During the rest of the day we took turns at watching for periscopes, as we twisted and turned through the shark-infested waters, but no further trace of an enemy was seen.

By three in the afternoon came two destroyers to meet us, racing at full speed around our ship, like terriers, and every time that they dashed by we cheered the young naval officers perched on the rail of their bridge. Shortly before dark an airship approached and circled overhead. This was the first

time that I had seen so queer a craft, and I looked on it with as much wonder as old Hilgaard de Jager had shown at the armoured cars at Chenene, for I was entering a new world, wherein many things were strange to me.

We now fell in with the minesweepers — small tugs of all kinds — dragging the sea with nets and cables. They stretched from horizon to horizon, and in the falling dark the sight of these cockleshells patiently at work on the stormy waters told me more of the doggedness of the British people than anything else which I saw in the war.

By midnight we were in the Channel. We heard the distant boom of guns, and there came fitful gleams, like sheet lightning, from below the skyline. Next morning we saw from the papers that we had just escaped a German destroyer raid. The firing had come from the Dover patrol which had intercepted the enemy ships and sunk several of them. We reached Plymouth before daylight.

After a lengthy examination we were passed ashore by noon, straight on to a train for London. Snow lay on the ground and it was biting weather, a great change from the tropical climate of East Africa, but I kept my eyes glued to the carriage windows, and I forgot about the cold.

As we approached the capital, we began to pass munition factories and training camps, and high above the smoke bank of London swung a number of observation balloons, glistening against the setting sun.

We reached Victoria Station at 8 o’clock. I had not been here since 1894, as a boy of twelve, and after all those years I could still remember the blaze of light on the streets at night.

But now all was wrapped in darkness. Owing to the Zeppelin raids the city was blacked out. The platforms looked ghostly and the streets outside were invisible. Only at long intervals was there a shaded lantern, while lampless taxis crawled slowly through the streets, hooting like ships in a fog.

All the houses were shuttered, and when we reached our hotel in Russell Square it seemed like a catacomb. Instinctively one spoke in a whisper, and trod softly down the corridors, so weird and abnormal was everything.

Next day I made my plans. I had come to take part in the war, but having lived in a small place for most of my life, I decided to see London first, so for ten days I roamed about. I visited museums, picture galleries, and theatres, and rode in trams, buses, and tubes, mixing with as many people as I could.

A Dutch South African feels at home at once in England, for the two races in our country have lived together for so long that although we quarrel at times, we understand each other's ways, and I felt no more of a stranger in London than in Capetown or Johannesburg, and had little difficulty in making friends.

It was a critical time. Russia had collapsed; the military position in France was stagnant, and the shadow of starvation lay across England, for the submarine danger was at its height. But in spite of enormous losses during the past three years, and in spite of present dangers, the people were confident. They appeared to take it for granted that Great Britain would win the war, and I heard no grumbling.

The London shops were well stocked with foodstuffs, but the papers said that one out of every three supply ships was being sunk. Everywhere, on walls and hoardings, were huge official pictures, twenty feet long, of a sharklike submarine seizing a ship between its jaws, with the words "Eat less bread; let the menu beat the U-men," all designed to urge the population to greater thrift.

I was taken by a man whose acquaintance I had made to a reception given for Dr. Walter Page, the American Ambassador, who was presented with a Shakespearian folio, in honour of the entry of the United States into the war. The platform was crowded with notabilities, but he was the man with the

strongest personality there. When he rose to speak, his ugly face lit up, and he stated the case for democracy with such depth of feeling, and put so clearly into words what one had long felt, but had been unable to express, that I left the hall with a lump in my throat.

Once, when I was walking in Pall Mall a man near me said: “Here comes the great little Welshman.” I looked round and saw Mr. Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, whom I recognised from his photographs. With him was his secretary, and Lloyd George was slapping him on the back and laughing gaily at some story that he was telling him. The sight of his good humour inspired confidence, and I felt that if the Prime Minister could walk down the street in this breezy fashion, the situation could not be as serious as the papers made out.

Having seen what I could of London, I enlisted in the British Army. But before doing so I had learned several important things. Firstly, that barbed-wire entanglements and machine-guns had rendered mounted men almost useless in France, and that most of the British cavalry were in Ireland. This was a great disappointment to me, for I had been bred in a tradition of horsemanship, and had hoped to join a cavalry regiment. But as I had no desire to help police that unhappy country, I reluctantly decided for the infantry.

I learned further that I would have to undergo a long course of training before being sent to the front in France. Up to now my idea of a soldier was a man with a rifle and a supply of ammunition in his cartridge belts, but modern fighting had grown so complicated and there were so many things one had to learn, that I realised there was no help for it, and I would have to go through the treadmill.

Never having been in a training camp before, the prospect of being drilled and dragooned was distasteful, but I went to a recruiting office at Chelsea and

handed in my name. I spent most of the day in a queue, waiting to be examined. At last I was led into a room, thumped and sounded, and made to run up and down a test staircase, for they said I had a malarial heart. After I had replied to many questions, I was given a batch of papers, and ordered to report to a camp near the Crystal Palace within three days.

I enlisted in the ranks because I had lately come to hold the view that it was one's duty to share the dangers of the greatest crisis in human history with the common run of men. My convictions on this head did not last. They vanished the very next day, for, having burnt my boats, as I believed, I went to call upon an uncle and aunt of mine in Cadogan Square. My uncle, Mr. Schreiner, was the High Commissioner for South Africa in London, and father of that cousin whom I had found so ill on the Tulo Road the year before.

When he heard that I had joined the Army as a private he took me to Wellington Barracks, and introduced me to Col. Mellish of the Coldstream Guards, who offered me a commission as second lieutenant in his regiment. My sentiments on the brotherhood of man quickly evaporated, and I accepted at once.

The Coldstream depot was at Bushey Park near Windsor, but I never got there. I was ordered to attend a preliminary course of drill on Wellington Square, and for several days, in company with other candidates for a commission, was barked at by a drill sergeant, as we wheeled and marched and halted strenuously.

I hated it. Inquisitive onlookers grinned at us through the railings. I was awkward on my feet, and disliked making a public exhibition of myself. Here again relief was at hand. General Smuts had arrived from East Africa in January. He was now a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, a strange turn of the wheel since the days when we had raided British camps and convoys

together during the South African War.

I had purposely omitted to communicate with him, as I wished to follow my own bent, and complete my own arrangements. Now my uncle told him that I was in London, and he sent for me to the Savoy Hotel where he was staying. I found him with Jonkheer van Swinteren, the Netherlands Ambassador, and Miss Emily Hobhouse.

When I told him that I was qualifying for a commission in the Guards he made no comment, but I was to find next day that he had made a mental note of the information. We talked about various matters, and presently Mr. Winston Churchill came in. I had seen him only once before, when he was a prisoner in Pretoria, in 1899, and now he was First Lord of the Admiralty. He and General Smuts had a discussion with the Dutch Ambassador, who said that if Herr von Kuhlmann became the next German Chancellor, there would be an early peace. They spoke of the internal troubles of Austria, and the effect on Germany of the British blockade. Mr. Churchill said that the German military leaders were staking their all upon the present intensive U-boat campaign. They had even braved American intervention in the belief that they could bring Great Britain to her knees before the United States could send an army across, and the German people were being buoyed up by extravagant reports of the result of the submarine war. He said the submarine menace was an exceedingly grave one but that it would be overcome somehow or other. I listened eagerly to all this, for it made me feel that for a while at any rate I was near the heart of things. Presently the gathering broke up, and General Smuts and Mr. Churchill went to a Cabinet meeting.

Next morning, while on parade at Wellington Square, I received a telegram from the War Office, ordering me to report for duty to the Senior Officers' School at Aldershot, with the rank of Major. This was General Smuts's doing. I was getting used to rapid promotion. During the South African War I

rose from batman to Chief of Staff in twenty minutes. During the rebellion I jumped overnight from village lawyer to Commandant of a district, and in East Africa I unexpectedly found myself a colonel. Now I had graduated from Private to Second Lieutenant, to Major, in the course of a week.

I packed my kit and proceeded to Aldershot, where I presented myself to General Kentish, who allocated me to Lille Barracks, and my education began in real earnest. We started as privates, gradually working our way through the ranks, from section commander to corporal, thence to sergeant, platoon and company commander, and ultimately to O.C. Battalion, in order to acquaint ourselves in tabloid form with the whole field of infantry work.

In the beginning, many of the things we had to do were irksome and irritating to one unaccustomed to discipline, but as time went on I settled down to the strange life. The work was hard, for in three months we had to assimilate what would normally have taken as many years to learn. We were drilled and manœuvred on Queen's Parade, and attended lectures upon a multitude of subjects. We were put through Stoke's mortars, Lewis guns, bombing, mapping, air photography, night scouting, trench-making, gas, smoke screens, and more other things 'twixt heaven and earth than had thus far entered my philosophy.

Most of the officers attending the school came from France. Others came from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Salonika, and even from the Russian front, and their experiences were an inexhaustible source of interest to me. From them I gained a pretty accurate view of conditions in the trenches, and of the ebb and flow of the war since 1914. We got week-end leave to London where I made many friends, and received great kindness and hospitality.

In June 1917 there was a vacation of ten days, which I spent at Chelsea Barracks, doing extra drill, to expedite my studies. I went on parade every morning with the Grenadier Guards. Among other evolutions they practised a

species of kick-step, like a ballet dancer's, which I tried hard to imitate. It led the old sergeant instructor to say "Sirr, ye make me weep tearrs of blood," so I gave up trying to acquire that particular accomplishment.

During this time I had my first experience of war in the air. It was the first daylight raid on London. On a Saturday morning I was near the Mansion House, on my way to the Bank of Africa. I had my field glasses with me for repairs, and was strolling along, looking at the shop windows and the passers-by. Suddenly guns started booming. As everyone was gazing upwards, I did so too, and saw to my astonishment, at a great altitude, twenty-five to thirty large German aeroplanes, streaming along the sky like a flight of cranes. Puffs of shrapnel burst amongst them, but they continued undeterred, until they were directly over the City, and then with one accord they changed direction and, wheeling round and round, began to drop their bombs. These fell mostly near the Bank of England and the General Post Office, and from far and near came a succession of appalling bangs, mingled with the shrieks of women, and the noise of shattered glass and falling masonry. I took refuge in a doorway from which I had a good view of the enemy machines. They were twin-engined Gothas (so the newspapers said) and through my glasses I could distinctly see the men and the machine-guns in each, while the black and white crosses on the wings were also clearly visible.

A number of British planes now joined the fray. They were all flying at an enormous height, and although the shells seemed to be bursting among the German machines, the evening papers angrily declared that the guns had failed to reach anywhere near them. The enemy squadron having delivered its cargo now went speeding back, with the English airmen following hotfoot behind. Far away, I saw one machine crumple up and drop like a stone, but I heard later that it was a British plane manned by a French pilot on leave in London, who had volunteered to go up.

The raiders got away scot-free from over the capital, but they were intercepted on the coast and two of them were shot down. I saw photographs of the wreckage in the press next day. The whole affair had not lasted fifteen minutes, but it was an expensive quarter of an hour, for sixty-two people were killed and one hundred and fifty wounded, and a great deal of damage was done to buildings.

As soon as the bombing was over, I went to look around. I saw some of the dead. I saw workmen lift something from the spikes of an area railing, which turned out to be the remains of a well-dressed lady and a child, and I saw dead horses, smashed buses and motor cars, and tumbled walls. I helped a stretcher party to take a case to Scotland Yard, whither the dead and wounded were being carried, and there were more unpleasant sights in the rooms and passages.

At the end of my leave, I returned to Aldershot for the finishing round, and once more we drilled and skirmished and paraded. On one occasion, while we were doing a route-march, we saw German prisoners of war loading timber on to a railway truck. Across the road, in a porch, stood an old lady in a mantle, gazing intently at them. Our Adjutant told me that she was the Empress Eugénie, widow of Napoleon III. My father saw her in her prime, at the Second Paris Exhibition in 1867, and he said that she was then a very beautiful woman. Now she was frail and shrivelled, and I wondered what her thoughts might be as she watched her captured enemies at work.

Another time Lord French inspected us, the same squat short-tempered man whom we had met on our way to the Peace Conference of Vereeniging in 1902. King George V also reviewed us. He rode up in a field-marshal’s uniform, dismounted, and walked down the ranks. Here and there he stopped to speak to an officer, and, when he came to me, he halted again, shook hands, and asked where last I had served. I told him “East Africa”, and he

knew all about the campaign. He enquired whether I had suffered from malaria; I said “No, I was ‘salted’,” an expression that seemed to amuse him, for he burst into hearty laughter.

At length, in August 1917, I passed out as a qualified infantry officer, and was ordered to report to the depot of the Middlesex Regiment at Chatham. I was only too pleased to escape from the great parade ground where I had passed so many weary hours.

During the few days I spent at Chatham, drilling recruits, we had a disastrous air raid. We were awakened at midnight by alarm signals, and hurried to our stations in accordance with standing instructions. Then we heard the drone of German machines, but although it was a moonlit night, we could not see them. A series of deafening crashes followed, and great spurts of flame shot up as the airmen dotted their bombs at random. The majority fell harmless on the slope beyond our camp, but two bombs struck the glass-covered drill hall in the town below. The building happened to be crowded with naval ratings from ships in the port, and the havoc was tremendous. A hundred and thirty-two men were killed outright, and ninety wounded. A cordon was formed around the hall, and there were terrible scenes amongst the wreckage, while crowds of women and children stood weeping in the streets. It looked to me, from the state of the roof, as if the two bombs had been released from either side of the same aeroplane.

I was told that this was the first real military damage done in England by air raids, for up to now only civilians had been killed. We got back to camp after daylight from the grim scene in the town below, and there was a telegram from the War Office, ordering me to France. This was exciting news, and also it carried three days5 leave, which I spent in London completing my outfit, and saying good-bye to friends. On the second evening I was at the Savoy with some of them, and we sat talking till after midnight. The moon

was at the full, and as I stood by the window overlooking the Thames Embankment, I heard a woman on the next balcony remark that it was “fine bombing weather”, a current phrase for a clear sky. Scarcely had she spoken, when a bomb went off at Charing Cross, and a second later another dropped on the Embankment below with a blinding flash and a roar. The projectile fell on the tramline, a few yards from Cleopatra’s Needle. It struck a tramcar, killing the driver and three women passengers. The papers next morning praised the driver’s heroism, for his tram was going at full speed and although he was disembowelled, he stuck to his post, and jammed on the brake in time to save a head-on collision before he fell dead.

So great a crowd collected that we did not go down to see, but when I passed there the following day there was a cavity in the street big enough to hold a motor car. Forty bombs were dropped during this raid, though the casualties amounted to only sixteen killed and fifty-six wounded, because of the better “take cover” regulations, the papers said.

I had now experienced two night raids in succession, and, had I stayed longer, I suppose I would have got as accustomed to them as were the people of London, who seemed to accept these visitations philosophically. The evening before my leave was up, I went to a theatre, and here again air raids were taken as part of the normal routine, for there was a notice on the programme that the electroliers would be turned up for a minute when a raid was impending, to give naval and military officers the opportunity of leaving for their posts, and there was a reassuring statement that the roof of the theatre had a concrete layer two feet thick. Fortunately we were not disturbed, and the play ended without a hitch.

Chapter X — A Taste of the Trenches

Next morning I started for France. There was no pomp or panoply. I caught a taxicab from my hotel to Victoria Station, handed my kit to a porter, and as soon as the train moved off, went to the dining-saloon for breakfast. We reached Folkestone in three hours, and at 2 o'clock officers and men returning from leave boarded the steam packet that crossed to Boulogne every day. Escorted by a destroyer and an airship, we made the Channel in safety, and by five that afternoon I stood on the soil of France at last.

After a night at an hotel I reported to the Railway Transport Officer in terms of the written instructions which I had received. I had no idea for what part of the front I was bound nor to what battalion I was posted. So far as I could make out, any unit in the fighting line that was short of officers applied to base, and unattached officers arriving at Boulogne were appointed to whichever battalions needed them. It was like taking a ticket in a sweep. When my turn came, I handed my papers to the R.T.O., who ran his eye down a list of names pinned to the wall, then gave me a card, which bore the name of the 7th Royal Irish Rifles, the battalion I had drawn. I enquired where they were stationed, but was told that no information was permitted, and was ordered to entrain for my unknown address at 11 a.m.

Punctually to time we drew out of Boulogne. All along our route were camps and depots, and mountains of war material were stacked beside the line. At halts and stations were soldiers from almost every land under the sun: Australians, South Africans, Canadians, New Zealanders, and there were Chinese, Indians and Malays at work piling up stores. In the fields we saw

gangs of German prisoners harvesting the crops, well-built fellows, very like Englishmen. We crawled on. Towards afternoon, far ahead, I saw a shining object suspended in the sky. It was an observation balloon, and soon I made out many more to right and left. The officers in my compartment told me that they indicated the firing line, for they were strung out behind the trenches to keep watch on the German movements. As we got nearer, I could see that beyond the first line of balloons was a similar row, and these were German balloons behind the enemy front.

They were the first signs of the battle zone, in which for three years the nations of Europe had been slaughtering each other, and from now onward every town, village and farm that we passed was a shapeless ruin. On all sides were roofless walls, old trenches, and countless graves, and we saw the shattered cathedral towers of Saint-Eloi, upon a hill.

The front line at this time lay beyond the town of Arras, which we were approaching, and as the place came into view, great mushrooms of smoke and dust stood up amongst the ruins, and we heard the boom of guns and the bursting of heavy shells.

It was my first sight of gunfire in France, so I gazed at the explosions with respect, although we were in no particular danger, for our train came to a halt some distance away from the station. My companions said the Germans shelled Arras so punctually every evening that the railway time-table allowed for it, and our delay outside was included in the daily schedule. While we were standing here, I saw through the carriage window a number of British aeroplanes, returning from over the enemy lines. Black puffs of shrapnel burst around the machines, but they kept straight on for their roosting places in the rear.

As soon as the Germans ceased their attentions, we steamed into the gutted station from which they shunted us to another line running further south.

After ten or twelve miles, we reached a mound of rubble that had been the village of Boisleux-au-Mont, and in the dark I heard a military policeman call out the number of my division, and knew that I had to disembark. A limber had been sent for me from my new Battalion. I loaded my belongings, and climbed up beside the driver, who beguiled the way with a racy Irish account of the doings along this part of the line. We went by Boiry Bequerelle, Boiry St. Marc and Mercatel, all in utter ruin. Our road ran parallel to the front line four or five miles away, and from that direction came the rumble of guns, and there hung a suffused glow in the sky, which my driver said was caused by Very lights over no-man's-land.

The 7th Irish Rifles were not in the trenches. They were in rest billets at Ervillers, and at length we arrived. I reported at a hutment that did duty for Headquarters. The Commanding Officer, Colonel Francis, and three others, were playing cards. They bade me welcome, and the Colonel explained that his second in command, Major Brigg, had been recalled for service in Ireland, so he had applied to base for a substitute. He seemed not a little surprised to find that they had sent him a South African Dutchman instead.

After some little conversation, an orderly was directed to lead me to my sleeping quarters in one of the camp huts. As we stumbled through the dark, there broke out from the front line, several miles away, a bombardment exceeding in violence anything I had ever heard before, even in Natal in the old days, which up to now had constituted my high-water mark in gunfire. The sky in that direction was illumined by the flash of many guns, and the air shook and swayed from the concussions. Making sure that a great battle was being joined, I hurried back for orders. To my astonishment, they were still calmly playing bridge, and when I enquired what was afoot, Col. Francis, without looking up from his cards, said: "Only some bloody raid or other," and continued his game. I turned into my bunk that night uneasily speculating

on what a real battle in France would be like if this were merely a casual affair.

Next morning I took over second in command. We were in Belfast Camp, as it was called. It stood on a plain. All around were hundreds of wooden crosses, where lay the German and French dead who had fallen in the autumn of 1914, during the first great crash of the conflict, which after three years was still raging only a few miles away. Many of the German graves were marked “Unbekannte Deutsche Held. Fur Kaiser U. Reich”, and most of the French crosses had been erected by the Germans. They had treated their fallen enemies with respect. Each cross bore the name, where known, of the dead soldier, and the legend “Soldat Français. Tombé pour la Patrie. Erigé par les Camarades Allemandes”. Their own dead they had treated with equal reverence, and the large German graveyards scattered about had finely sculptured monuments and tall memorial columns. There was one to the dead of the 121st Reserve Artillery, with bas-reliefs of Zeppelins, U-boats, and other scenes, finely carved.

They had honoured the dead, but they had treated the occupied territory in a ferocious manner, and had converted this once flourishing province into a wilderness. The only things that lay in the abandoned fields were ugly growths of entanglements, and blackened tree stumps, and there must have been enough barbed wire within sight of Belfast Gamp to fence half the farms in the Orange Free State.

The day after my arrival we were ordered into the front line, to take over from a battalion that was coming into billets. At two in the afternoon we marched out, each platoon at intervals of six hundred yards, to minimise the risk from long-range shell-fire. After a six-mile tramp past the ruins of Croisilles, Judas Farm, and Saint-Léger, we reached the entrance of a communication trench at a place called Stayley Bridge. The regiment we

were relieving was Irish too, and the first thing I saw by way of introduction to trench life was the body of a dead man wrapped in a blanket to which was pinned a note: “Pray for the soul of poor Mickey O’Neill.”

We now followed down the duckboarded C.T. [communication trench] for nearly a mile, and at length stood in the firing line, with only two hundred yards of shell-torn no-man’s-land dividing us from the enemy. This sector was part of the famous Hindenburg Line. The British, a month or two before, after furious fighting, had broken into and captured several miles of it, including a similar length of the extraordinary tunnel that ran below, and it was in this captured salient that we found ourselves.

When we had completed the formalities of taking over from the outgoing battalion, I started off to make myself acquainted with the portion of the line for which we were responsible. To our left was a continuation of the captured portion of the Hindenburg Line, which for a considerable distance on that side was held by the British. On our right the position was more complicated, for here British occupation of the Hindenburg Line ended, and the original German owners were still in possession beyond. There was only a block of sandbags fifteen yards wide separating us from them, and in the tunnel below an equal length of roofing was blown in.

When I visited the block in the trench, we were so near the enemy, that there was sacking laid down on the duckboards, to deaden the sound, and one had to tread on tiptoe, and speak in whispers, as the slightest noise brought over a stick grenade or a pineapple bomb. The Germans on the other side of the bank no doubt found their tenancy equally delicate, for whenever our men wished to make trouble, they lobbed across a Mills or two.

The struggle in which this segment of the Hindenburg Line had been captured must have been a desperate one. On every side lay relics of the recent battle; broken rifles, machine-guns and mortars, bloodstained tatters of

clothing, and out in no-man's-land were withered corpses that could not be fetched in, and several derelict tanks. In some places there were notice boards stuck on the parapet: "Don't dig here; dead bodies," "Dead Germans; no digging," "Unknown British dead," etc.

Occasionally the rampart for yards on end was constructed of dead men, British and German, hastily piled into the breaches during the fight, and subsequently walled in by sandbags. I spent some hours examining our sector. It was an involved task, for apart from the actual front-line trench, there was a labyrinth of lanes and communications to the rear, with which it was necessary to acquaint oneself. And there was the Hindenburg Tunnel. This was an amazing work. Fifty feet below the bed of our trench ran the great passage, with many stairways leading down. From the main tunnel subterranean chambers, offices, and sleeping rooms branched off, and the whole was provided with electric light. The Germans must have spent many months and millions of money upon its construction, although I heard that it had been made by Russian prisoners of war. The British held three or four miles of it, but I believe the portion still held by the Germans stretched for twenty or thirty miles, to far beyond Bullecourt.

Having seen as much as I could before dark, I returned to Battalion Headquarters in a large cavern running off the tunnel. During my round of inspection a few shells had come over, and now and then a German machine-gun rattled away, but we were in what was called a quiet sector, and there was relative peace. We had dinner in the bowels of the earth, comfortably seated around a table, the mess-waiter bringing in the courses from a kitchen excavated next door. Having eaten in these unusual surroundings, I set out to visit our night posts, this being my especial duty.

I chose a soldier named Freeney to be my runner, a cheerful good-humoured fellow, who became my constant attendant. Inspecting trenches in

the dark takes a long time, and it was midnight before we reached the spot where the Sensée River, a mere trickle of a stream, crossed our trenches into no-man's-land and then into the German line beyond. As we came to the river, a heavy shell brought down a section of the parados. A piece of timber fell on my head with sufficient force to dent my steel helmet and to make me see stars for a moment or two. When I looked up, I saw in the breach which the shell had made the partially exposed body of a British officer. Owing to the nature of the soil, the body was well preserved. The dead man was standing erect against the bank, one leg forward and his right arm poised as if in the act of flinging a bomb or hurling defiance, and it looked as if even in death his fighting lust was still unquenched. We left him there, and next morning, after a night in the tunnel below, I went to see whether he could be identified, but when I reached the spot he had already been walled up with sandbags once more. The sergeant in charge of the working party said that if once we started uncovering the dead for identification purposes, the whole trench would have to come down.

My first spell in the trenches was uneventful, as things went in France, but to a novice like me all was of interest. When not on duty, we lived in the Hindenburg Tunnel, where the reverberations of the guns came down the shafts like the pulsations of a giant piston. No-man's-land averaged two hundred yards, a wilderness of shell craters, dead men, barbed wire and wrecked tanks. If one peered over the edge of the parapet there was not a living thing to be seen, for both sides lived underground, but there was seldom a moment when a gun was not firing, or a shell coming over. The German batteries stood far back in concealed pits, and never once did I see their flash — very different from the days of the South African War, when the British guns were galloped up in full view, and fired at us across the open veld.

The tunnel and the trenches were full of rats, and sometimes we organised drives, in which the men joined with zest. On account of this plague, both British and Germans had introduced cats into the trenches, and the cats showed more sense than we did. One night, in going the rounds, I heard the mewing of kittens out in no-man's-land. I climbed over and groped my way towards the sound, until I came to an abandoned British tank. Crawling into the torn hull, I flashed my electric torch, and there lay a tabby comfortably installed with a litter of six. When I got back I told a neighbouring sentry what I had seen. He knew all about it, for he said: "Sorr, the father of them kittens is a Boche cat from across the way, and we looks after them." I found that the men took every care of mother and offspring, and that they were treated as "trench stores" by every incoming battalion.

In spite of the shelter of the tunnel we had casualties among the working parties and sentries. I saw one of our bombers struck by a high-velocity shell that reduced the top of his head to pulp, and another time a shell fell into a Lewis-gun emplacement, killing three men outright, and wounding several more. I was passing down the trench when I heard the explosion and the groans. I had the wounded lowered by the winch into the sick-bay of the tunnel, and when I followed down, our medical officer, Dr. Nicholls, and two assistants were holding one man down by main force. He was shockingly injured, great gashes over his thigh and stomach, and he shrieked and writhed in delirium. It was a very painful scene; then his cries ceased, and he lay dead.

A few mornings later, when Freeney and I were coming up the trench, a fatigue party was repairing a section that had been blown in, and as we approached I heard the usual "Make way there, men," in order to let us pass. Then came a swish through the air and a pineapple bomb exploded in the middle of them. When the smoke and dust had cleared, there lay four men

dead, and five wounded, all piled in a blood-spattered heap. I attended the burial at one of the cemeteries behind the line. After the interment the bearers and the firing party tramped back along the communication trench quite cheerfully, but next morning the whole Battalion sat around in gloomy silence. The Irish are a temperamental race, and the incident of the bomb had thrown them into a state of melancholy that an outsider like myself found hard to understand. However, by the following day the psychic wave had passed, and everyone was in good spirits once more.

We held this portion of the Hindenburg Line for the next eight weeks. Every ten days we were relieved from the front line to go into support, a few hundred yards back, after which we moved into rest billets, thence back to the front line. All this part of the line, from Arras to beyond Bapaume, was one of the quietest sectors in France. The storm centre in these days (September-October 1917) was north, in the Ypres salient, but down here no battles took place, and there were only the usual amenities of shell-fire, machine-guns and pineapples. British and German aeroplanes were frequently overhead, but the calm extended even to the sky, for I never saw anything that resembled an air fight.

At length we were withdrawn from the line, and received orders to pack up and march south. We went first to Belfast Camp, from which, one fine morning, we were played down the road by the band of an adjoining battalion, and started off along the Route Nationale of Picardy. We did an average of thirteen miles a day for five days, heading south as a rule, but we counter-marched a good deal, and as there were many other battalions travelling up and down the turnpike, we gathered that all these bodies of men were being moved backward and forward to mislead the enemy airmen, and that a big push was in preparation somewhere or other.

The secret was so well kept that it was only in hospital later on that I heard

of the great tank attack on Bourlon Wood and Cambrai. We covered far more country than was represented by the distance as the crow flies, but it enabled me to see a larger extent of the devastated area. Common ruin had overtaken this region. Every town, village and farm was reduced to dust. The woods were blackened stumps, and the very streams and canals had altered their courses and lapsed into bogs and marshes, their banks and dykes obliterated by shellfire.

Towards the end of our tramp we were back near our starting-point. We passed the Somme battlefields and marched through Albert, where the famous Virgin and Child still jutted at right angles from the shattered cathedral tower. The men said the French soldiers believed the war would end when the statue fell, and not before. We went by the remains of Sailly-Saillisel, the Butte de Warlincourt with its great mine craters, and the remains of Delville Wood where I saw the graves of many South Africans. We marched through Bapaume, and the only thing I saw intact in the place was the monument in the cemetery to Faidherbe's troops who fell here in 1870. For the rest, the town was a heap of rubble. Where the Hotel de Ville had stood, was now a gaping crater nearly a hundred yards wide, for the building had been blown up by a delayed-action mine after the German evacuation some months before. All that was left of the Cathedral was the crypts and vaults, where lay many human skeletons blown from their ancient tombs.

From here we went to le Transloi, and thence by the ruins of Rocquiny, Bus, and Neuville, to a camp between Gouzeaucourt and Metz-au-Cour, and here we came to a halt. This part of the country was somewhat less devastated than that through which we had come. The woods were standing, and the Canal du Nord was more or less intact.

There was a large concentration of troops concealed in the neighbouring woods, and our own quarters nestled comfortably in a copse near the Neuville

quarries. There were many rumours about the coming attack, but nothing certain, although our Brigade Major told me that we had been brought here to be “fattened up”, as he ominously put it.

On the first night of our arrival in camp I had another sample of the strange ways of the Irish. Colonel Francis had gone on leave, and I was in command of the Battalion during his absence. Our men were mostly South Irish from Dublin and Cork. The Ulster Division under General Nugent had arrived a few days before us, and their headquarters were close by. In the course of the evening I sent a fatigue party to fetch supplies for our canteen from the Ulster depot. Soon after their return I heard a violent commotion in the marquee tent where we kept our stores. There was the sound of breaking crockery, mingled with oaths and shouts, and, rushing up to enquire, I found that the men were busy wrecking the place. When I demanded the reason, several of them angrily flourished bottles in my face, to the accompaniment of threats and curses against the bloody Orangemen. To me the bottles seemed harmless, for they contained only soda-water; but, when I asked for enlightenment, it appeared that the root of the trouble was the labels, which bore the title “Boyne Water”. The men started off in a body for the Ulster Division, to avenge what they considered a mortal insult. I had heard of the Battle of the Boyne, but it conveyed no political implications, and I thought the men had gone crazy. Fortunately I was able to telephone through to the Ulster headquarters, who hastily turned out several hundred men to surround the malcontents; and with the tactful assistance of our Adjutant, young Hartery, who understood Irish politics, we managed to get our men back to camp without bloodshed. Next day they were playing football with the Ulsterites as if nothing had happened.

I had another curious matter to handle while I was in command at this camp. I presided at orderly room every morning to try the daily batch of

defaulters on minor charges of crown-and-anchor, loss of kit, etc. On this occasion, however, a soldier named Williams, a mere boy, was brought before me charged with desertion in the face of the enemy, the most serious offence in the military code. My duty was to hold a preliminary investigation, and, if there was sufficient evidence, the papers had to go to Brigade, and the accused would stand trial for his life before a field general court martial. Williams was ushered in between two armed sentries, and Capt. Hartery produced witnesses to show that the prisoner had deserted from our trenches in the Hindenburg Line a month before.

I asked Williams what he had to say for himself. He replied that he had been shell-shocked at Ypres, and since then, whenever he heard a shell explode, his legs ran away with him.

I realised that if this went before a court martial he would be shot, so I said: “My boy, can’t you think of something better to say than that?” but he sullenly adhered to his statement and I had no option but to prepare the record for transmission to Brigade. That afternoon two soldiers from an English battalion in the neighbourhood asked to see me. They came into the orderly hut, saluted, and one of them, stepping forward, said they wished to speak to me about Private Williams. He said that he and his companion had recently been patients at a casualty clearing station near Bapaume, and Williams had been in hospital with them, delirious most of the time.

I had the prisoner fetched from the guard tent, and asked him whether he knew these two men, and whether he had been in hospital. He said he did not know them, and remembered nothing about a hospital. I asked him where he had been during the past month, and he said he supposed he had “just hung around”. The two soldiers were positive of Williams’s identity, and one of them said to me: “Sir, the boy’s mind is a blank; it will be murder if they shoot him, and him a volunteer.” I thanked and dismissed them, and sent an

officer to Bapaume, to make enquiries. He returned next day with a certificate that Williams had been found wandering behind the front line a month before in a demented condition. It was decided to send him home to Ireland, but on his way to railhead he escaped, and after having lain delirious at Bapaume Hospital for some weeks, disappeared for the second time, and nothing more was seen of him until he was arrested under some sheets of corrugated iron close to the front line. This threw so much light on the case, that I tore up the court-martial papers, and Williams was sent to a mental home in England for treatment. Thus, thanks to the two soldiers, a grave miscarriage of justice was averted.

At Bray, beyond Gouzeaucourt, the troops were put through a course of training in co-operation with tanks. There were over thirty of these monsters ploughing their way across the fields with the men in artillery formation behind. All this, unknown to us, was for the Cambrai break-through. In the meanwhile there came an important change so far as our Battalion was concerned.

I do not know whether it was one more ramification of Irish politics, but Colonel Francis was transferred to the command of a brigade, and the 7th Irish Rifles were broken up. I heard it said that there were too many Sinn Feiners among us. The men certainly talked a lot of politics, and even my friend Freeney waxed hot on occasion, but, coming as I did from a country where everyone talks politics, I paid little attention to their frequent wranglings. Whatever the cause, we were disbanded. I regretted it, for I had made many friends amongst these happy-go-lucky Irishmen, and I was sorry to part from them.

I received orders to transfer to the 6/7th Royal Scots Fusiliers near Arras, so I gave Freeney something for remembrance, and said good-bye to all my friends, none of whom I ever saw again. I travelled on the light line to

Bapaume, and from there north to Arras.

Arras must have been a fine old town before the war, to judge by what was left of it, which was not much; and it was being pounded into still further nothingness, for the Germans were throwing heavy shells into it every day, and throughout the twenty-four hours which I spent there, trying to get word of the Scots Fusiliers, 5.9's and howitzer shells dropped among the ruined houses at regular intervals. Most of the civilian population was gone, but here and there an old market woman sold cigarettes and tobacco, and there were many British troops quartered underground in vaults and cellars.

By next afternoon I had got into touch with my new battalion, and a limber came to fetch me. We reached the battalion transport lines at a ruined village or suburb, and obtaining a guide from the Quartermaster, set out on horseback for the front line.

We rode along for three or four miles over ground that had been captured from the Germans. Multitudes of wooden crosses standing over filled-in shell craters showed where the dead had been buried, and here again lay broken rifles, fragments of bloodstained clothing and all the litter of a recent battlefield. We passed a damaged German howitzer on caterpillar wheels, still standing in its emplacement. On the barrel was a chalked notice: "This gun captured and claimed by the West Lancs."

The system of thus marking captured guns and other trophies was a common practice, and during my march with the 7th Irish I had seen a broken-down *fiacre* twenty miles behind the fighting front. Some wag had inscribed on it: "Captured and claimed by the 2nd Labour Battalion" — a gibe at the employment companies that did the road-making far in the rear.

During all the time that we were going forward there was a cannonade from the German side, and a liberal sprinkling of 5.9 shells, which were fired on the off chance of hitting something on the road, a busy thoroughfare that

followed the right bank of the River Scarpe.

There was a continuous stream of supply parties moving to and from the front line, but as no one seemed to bother about the gunfire, I pretended not to notice it either. We passed beneath the arch of the famous railway triangle, the taking of which had cost so many lives, and a little beyond that we halted at a Scottish Church army hut on the bank of the river. These Church huts served as resthouses and reading-rooms for the troops, and we went in for a cup of tea.

There was an old sergeant in charge, and as he handed me my cup a heavy shell burst outside with a tremendous racket. He merely remarked “Yon was a heavy yin,” and he did not so much as glance through the window to see where it had fallen. I resumed acquaintance with him some time later under less equable circumstances, but for the present I paid for the tea, and my guide and I resumed our journey until we came to the entrance of the communication trench leading to the front line. Here I sent him back with the horses, and entered the C.T. I continued down the duckboarded alleyway for half a mile, and reached the headquarters of the 6/7th Scots Fusiliers in an immense dug-out in the front line, where I reported for duty. I was agreeably surprised to find that the Commanding Officer was a South African, Col. de Haviland, Sergeant-at-Arms of the Union Parliament in Capetown.

I found another young South African with the Battalion, Lieut. Wilkinson, also from Capetown, so I felt at home.

Col. de Haviland instructed me as to the state of the front line and such matters as affected us locally, and then we sat down to a meal, thirty feet underground. After dark I went to inspect the line under the guidance of a runner. He was a humorous fellow. When I asked him whether he was well acquainted with the sector, he spat in his hands, and holding up his calloused palms, grinned and said he reckoned he should know it, as he had dug most

of these here trenches himself. He was as good as his word, for he picked his way to every nook and corner in spite of a black night and in spite of the twisted labyrinth of trenches and saps. Our left battalion front rested on the River Scarpe, and it was a damp, muddy business visiting the posts, for the ground was swampy and we had to find a path through reeds and brakes, to where the riflemen and bombers were stationed in forward pits and holes.

Once again I was in a quiet sector of the line. Up north the holocaust of Passchendaele was in full swing. There the British were engaged in disastrous attempts to break through to Ostende; attempts that were almost as bloody a failure as the German attacks on Verdun had been.

The result as far as we were concerned was that our sector was in a comparative backwater, and although desultory shell-fire went on most of the day, the knowledge that the storm centre was far off lent an atmosphere of peace and calm to our doings. There were one or two interesting incidents, however: interesting at any rate to me. Once, while I was inspecting some work in the front line, the enemy suddenly put down a heavy barrage, and we stood-to, expecting an attack. While we were manning the fire-step, a British aeroplane came over to investigate. As the machine was flying unusually low we watched its course with anxiety, for numerous anti-aircraft shells were bursting around it. To confirm our fears, the plane began to sway from side to side and then it came down in a nose dive at great speed. A groan went up from the men, for it looked as if nothing could save the machine, but just as it was about to crash, it flattened out, and though still violently wobbling, the pilot landed her on an even keel behind us, a feat of no mean skill considering the pitted surface, the old trenches, and the wire entanglements amid which he came down.

The aeroplane had landed in full view of the Germans, and their batteries began to shell it almost at once. The pilot lost no time. The moment his craft

came to a standstill he leaped out and ran towards us. He was a cheery individual, for dropping into our trench, he said: “Do you fellows mind if I stay here a bit; the jolly old Hun is smashing up my kite”; and for the next few minutes we watched the demolition of his machine. The German gunners expended about a hundred shells on it, which led him to say in a contented voice that it must be costing them more than the bus was worth.

There was not much aerial activity except for the usual patrolling squadrons of both sides and the night bombers, but sometimes a formation of German machines, painted in all the colours of the rainbow, came tearing down our line. The men called them “Von Richthofen’s Circus”, for they were said to be commanded by Baron Von Richthofen, the famous German ace. They were an extraordinary sight, some of the planes were a bright scarlet, others green or yellow or dazzle-painted like the sides of a ship, for what reason I do not know.

One afternoon three low-flying German aeroplanes came over, and as they passed there dropped from each a ballonet which slowly descended to earth behind our line. We retrieved them, and they contained bundles of the *Gazette des Ardennes*, a Flemish newspaper printed under German auspices. The airmen had made a mistake. They thought we were Belgian troops, for the papers were full of propaganda designed to create dissension between the Flemings and the Walloons. The articles were written in heavy style, and the efforts to foment race hatred between the two sections of the Belgian people were so ill-tempered that young Wilkinson said they would make even a South African Nationalist blush.

At this time, a fleet of seven or eight Zeppelins had set out to bomb London. They were caught in a blizzard and drifted helpless towards France where they successively came to grief, the last of them reaching as far as the Mediterranean, where it sank with all hands. The English and French

newspapers were jubilant at this final proof of the failure of a weapon upon which the Germans had built such high hopes. One morning Brigade H.Q. sent down a number of handbills printed in German, setting out the fate of the Zeppelins, and we were ordered to attach them to rifle grenades, and fire them across to the enemy trenches. We did so, and next day came the German reply, similarly transmitted by rifle grenades. It said they knew all about the Zeppelins, but did we know that they had just captured a hundred and twenty thousand Italians at Caporetto? And what was more, they had, and this was our first word of it.

Our spell in the front line came to an end in due course, and we went through the customary routine of going into support, then into rest billets, and thence back to the front line once more. By this time I was quite at home in France. I had grown used to living among thousands of men in dug-outs and tunnels and billets. Trench life was becoming my normal existence to such an extent that South Africa and old associations were imperceptibly fading into the background, and I seldom gave a thought to past or future.

But now I was suddenly projected into entirely different surroundings. We had moved from front line into support, where the whole Battalion lived in a single great cavern hewn into the side of a deep railway cutting. One morning I was instructed to report to Brigade Headquarters to preside at a court martial on a self-inflicted wound case. At half-past nine an orderly brought me a horse and we started off, following the road along the River Scarpe, by which I had originally come. There were a few 5.9 shells dropping about, and I remember seeing von Richthofen’s Circus streaming down the line in the distance, but to this day I do not know what happened next, nor do I know what became of the orderly and the horses. All I know is that I found myself coming to on a stretcher in the reading-room of the Church army hut where I had been before, and the same friendly Scotch sergeant was bending over me

with a mug of tea. A doctor was cutting away my riding-breeches with a pair of scissors, and I have a dim recollection of handing over the court martial papers to someone. Then I was lifted into a motor ambulance, and lapsed into unconsciousness once more. I found myself, I do not know how long after, in a large hall in the Hospice de St. Jean, in Arras. Through the shattered walls I could see French nuns in starched coifs, walking up and down in a cloistered quadrangle, and, looking upward, I could see the sky through the rents in roof and ceiling, for the place had suffered at the hands of the German gunners, and even now I heard the crash of heavy shells, exploding near enough to bring down flakes of plaster on my head.

My stretcher stood on the flagstones with a number of others, and a white-aproned surgeon with rubber gloves was probing my wounds, which consisted of several deep gashes in the leg, and injuries to arms and head. He injected me with a serum, and when I asked him whether I was badly damaged, he said it would be a long time before I was on my “pins” again. A medical orderly came up with a book to take particulars of my name, country, next-of-kin, etc. When he reached the question of my religion, and I told him “Dutch Reformed”, he nearly dropped the book, and said in a startled voice: “What the hell is that?” Afterwards I saw him take another orderly into the corner, and there was a whispered conversation and curious glances at me as they examined the entry in the ledger.

The Germans were dropping more shells than usual into Arras, for an officer hurried in with instructions that the wounded were to be evacuated. We were carried to motor ambulances, and to the accompaniment of the distant boom of guns and of shells bursting near at hand, we rolled out of the battered courtyard. We were driven down the Frevent Road for six or seven miles to a casualty clearing station (C.C.S.) out of range of the enemy guns, and here I lay for several days in a large marquee tent, with many others.

Then I was taken by hospital train to Rouen. All I saw of Rouen was what was visible through the rear of the hood, but I remember that English military police were on point duty in the streets, and that the pavement was thronged with British troops.

I was lucky enough to get into No. 2 British Red Cross Hospital, famous throughout the Army for its comfort and efficiency. I enjoyed being there. The nurses were good to us, and every morning French newsboys came round with papers, fruit, and cigarettes for sale, and we were allowed to buy wine. Most of the patients in my ward came from the Passchendaele offensive, still raging in the Salient, and from them I heard that things were going badly notwithstanding the glowing accounts in the press. There was a little Canadian lieutenant in the next bed who had been shot through the chest at Passchendaele, and before they got him away he was hit five more times, so heavy was the enemy fire.

It was while lying here that I first heard of the mutiny amongst the British troops at Étaples. It was kept secret, but from what I was told by a wounded officer it was a very ugly affair, in which a number of officers and men were killed and injured, before the rioting was quelled. The mutiny, so far as I could make out, was directed not against the war, or against the higher command, but against the so-called “red-caps”, the base police whose overbearing methods were resented by the fighting men.

The bed I was in was endowed by the English citizens of Sao Thomas, somewhere in South America. I was in Rouen for a fortnight and was then taken aboard the hospital ship *St. Patrick*, for removal to England. We sailed down the River Seine, past beautiful country which I could see through the portholes, and reached Havre before dark. That night we stood out to sea, with all lights extinguished and everything screened, to prevent the electric torches of the nurses from betraying our presence to the submarines. I lay

wondering what would happen to us, helpless between decks, if we were torpedoed, as the vessel threshed her way through the heavy seas, for the night was a stormy one. But we reached port in safety (Southampton, I think). We were carried ashore, and our stretchers placed in long rows on the station platform, where ladies distributed cigarettes, oranges, and even telegraph forms, offering to write out wires for those who wished to communicate with their relations. Then we were lifted into a Red Cross train for London. In London we were again laid on the platform, and officials came round to pin a card on each man's stretcher, with the name of the hospital to which he was to be taken. I drew Queen Alexandra's Hospital, Highgate. The driver of the ambulance was a stout pleasant woman, evidently a social figure, for she had her lady's maid on the seat beside her, and wore heavy furs. She rolled up the side-flaps to let us see the people on the streets, many of whom called out greetings, and the policemen stood to attention and saluted as we passed. We went through Hyde Park all crowded with fashionable folk, who waved their handkerchiefs. At Highgate I was carried upstairs and given a room to myself. It was a pleasant time. Friends and relatives came to see me and many of the patients used to hobble in on their crutches for a chat.

There was a young half-brother of mine studying medicine at Guy's Hospital. He came to visit me one afternoon, and while we talked away in Dutch, an old caretaker was cleaning my windows. He pretended to be scrubbing, but I could see he was all ears, and when my brother rose to go, he ran off in great agitation to tell Mr. Patterson, the surgeon, that we were German spies.

There were many sparrows in the grounds, and they used to hop right into my room to squabble and fight over the crumbs which I threw to them. We became so friendly that I was able to recognise some of them as they sat on the trees outside. By the middle of December 1917 I was well enough to go

to a convalescent home, and once again I was lucky, for I was sent, with several other wounded, to Melchet Court, a magnificent country estate near Salisbury, belonging to Sir Alfred Mond, Commissioner of Public Works. He and Lord Reading travelled down on the same train with us. Lord Reading (Rufus Isaacs) had just returned from America where he had been instrumental in securing the American entry into the war. I believe he received an earldom for his services on this very day, for I heard people on the train congratulate him upon his new honour. His son was married to Mond's daughter.

One wing of Melchet Court had been turned into a hospital with Lady Mond as Commandant, and here we were treated in princely fashion. We were not so much inmates of a hospital as guests at a country house. Every morning a butler in livery brought me my tea, and all night long a wood fire burned in my room. There was a beautiful carpet on the floor and a fine Madonna and Child on the wall. After I was able to walk, I had the run of the library, where I spent many pleasant hours, and we were taken for long drives to Stonehenge, Salisbury, the New Forest, and even to Portsmouth.

Once I was shown round Salisbury Cathedral by a young lady who lived in the Close, a sort of clerical compound, inhabited by churchmen and their families. To them the Cathedral is the hub of the universe, and after I had been led through the aisles and chapels and had learnt from my guide the inner purpose of its builders, she said suddenly: "Doesn't it make your blood boil to think that Cromwell's soldiers, the brutes, stabled their horses in the nave?" To her it was still a present living grievance.

At night I played bridge with Sir Alfred Mond and his family, and sometimes Lord Reading was of the party. He played even better bridge than General Botha, as I found to my cost. He told me he had run away to sea as a boy, and at one time had been a stockbroker, and there were many interesting

anecdotes of his early years at the Bar. He said a furious litigant had once referred to him as a “lineal descendant of the Thief on the Cross”.

One night the news came through that General Allenby had captured Jerusalem. Sir Alfred Mond and Lord Reading were both Jews, and both ardent Zionists. Lord Reading was visibly moved by the historic event, and in a voice quivering with emotion, he said to Mond: “Alfred, at last the time has come for the rebuilding of King Solomon’s temple.” Sir Alfred, with a wink at me, replied: “Yes, Rufus, and what’s more, you and I will get the contract and run it up for them in reinforced concrete, and beat old Solomon’s building record into a cocked hat.”

In the library at Melchet Court was a framed letter written by Abraham Lincoln. It was couched in such beautiful language that I copied it into my notebook:

“Executive Mansion,
Washington, Nov. 21, 1866

“To Mrs. Bixby, Boston, Mass.

“Dear Madam,

“I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant-General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming, but I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

“I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of Freedom.

“Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

“A. Lincoln.”

In January 1918, thanks to good treatment, I was passed out for light duty, and was ordered to report at Fort Matilda on the Clyde, the depot of the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

Chapter XI — The Great March Offensive

I was at Fort Matilda for three weeks, during which time I never once saw the sun, and not once was the far bank of the Clyde visible through the mists forever swirling up from the sea.

We put new recruits through their drill, standing all day in the sodden fields, with six inches of snow underfoot, and a cold drizzle of rain that never ceased. Truly an awful climate to a South African accustomed to eternal sunshine.

I was sent to Edinburgh for a gas course. It snowed all the time, and there was a blizzard such as I never wish to see again.

One morning I went with two naval officers to Rosyth, above the Forth Bridge, to view the Grand Fleet that had come in. The river was crowded with warships of all descriptions, from dreadnoughts like the *Warspite* and the *Queen Elizabeth*, down to flatbottomed monitors and scouting launches. I asked an officer from the *Warspite* what the truth was about the Jutland battle, and he said “Oh, you can call it a draw,” though he insisted that another hour of daylight would have given the British decisive victory.

During the storm of a few nights before, two destroyers had been wrecked on the Orkneys and with the exception of a solitary seaman, the crews, totalling two hundred and seven men, had been drowned. The sole survivor had been picked up by the islanders, nearly dead from exposure, and he had been brought to Queensferry, where he was housed for the moment at an inn. He was “on show” so to speak, and as my naval friends had access, we went to see him. His wife was with him, and she had strange views on the

workings of Providence, for she said to us: “Sirs, is not the mercy of God most wonderful? Blessed be His name for saving my man alone out of all his mates.”

I now returned to Greenock, and the weather was such that I was glad when I received instructions at the beginning of February 1918, to return to France. I left Glasgow by the evening express, and by five o’clock next afternoon was in Boulogne. As I was now definitely attached to the Royal Scots Fusiliers, I found, on drawing my card at the R.T.O.’s the following morning, that I was to entrain at 10.30 a.m., for the 1st Battalion, as second in command.

I clambered on board, and once more we journeyed through the countryside, now however not green and smiling, but all covered with snow, and bleak and sombre in the harsh winter weather. Towards evening we crawled by the ruined steeples on Saint-Eloi Hill, and then to Arras, where we again halted for the daily German bombardment to pass. While waiting outside the station I had an amusing experience. In South Africa we look on springbok biltong as a great delicacy. It is made by curing the venison in strips, until it looks rather like sticks of plug tobacco.

I had taken care to have a regular supply sent me from home, and now, being hungry, I sat whittling off chunks of biltong with my pocket knife and eating away with relish, to the unfeigned interest of the three young officers in my compartment. Having satisfied my hunger I climbed out to warm my feet during the halt, and, as I tramped up and down in the snow, I heard one of the officers, who thought I was out of earshot, exclaim: “My God, that fellow can hog tobacco!” On returning within I kept my own counsel, and must have remained for them the world’s champion in this art.

From Arras we went further, and as no lights were permitted in the carriages after sunset, for fear of attracting night bombers, we sat shivering in

the gloom, until at length I heard a military policeman at a siding shout that all men for the IIIrd Division were to detrain. As the Scots Fusiliers were in the IIIrd, I disembarked with my kit and groped my way to the R.T.O.'s hut through a slough of mud and snow.

To my surprise I found that I was back at Boisleux-au-Mont, where I had alighted the year before for the Irish Rifles. The R.T.O. informed me that the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers were in the front line, and that I was to make for the battalion transport camp at Boyelles, some six or seven miles down the Arras-Bapaume Road. I stopped the first ammunition lorry going in that direction, and soon reached my destination, going via St. Marc and Boiry-Bequerelle, looking more like disused brickfields than ever. At Boyelles I found the transport lines of the Scots Fusiliers, and Capt. Hester, the Quartermaster, gave me a Nissen hut for the night.

By a curious coincidence, the Battalion was holding the identical sector in the Hindenburg Line that we had held when I was with the Irish. As I was well acquainted with these parts I set off on foot next morning, carrying the few essentials for life in the trenches in my haversack. The day was fine and sunny, and the snow was firm, so I enjoyed my tramp over the long slopes.

In due course I reached the intake to the communication trench at Stayley Bridge, and soon I had the old familiar feel of the duckboards under my feet again. When I got to the front line, Battalion H.Q. were in the same chamber down the Hindenburg Tunnel where I had lived before, and I reported to the Adjutant, Capt. George Bissett, with whom I was long to be associated, and at whose death I was to be present in the end.

The officer in command of the 1st R.S.F. was Colonel E. I. D. Gordon. He was to all intents and purposes a South African, for he had served at the Cape station for many years, and had married a Capetown lady. He owned a farm in the Western Province, and he said he was going to live there if he survived

the war.

I soon settled down to the routine of the trenches, and my duties, as of old, consisted chiefly in prowling around the line all night to inspect the posts and generally supervising our sector from end to end, and then returning to my berth in the tunnel at dawn for a few hours' sleep. Colonel Gordon frequently accompanied me on these expeditions. He was well versed in South African political conditions, and although he had been on active service since 1914, had closely followed events in the Union.

One dark night at 3 a.m. he and I were splashing down the line, ankle deep in melting snow. Machine-guns were spluttering, an occasional shell came howling over us, and my thoughts were anywhere but in South Africa. Colonel Gordon, however, plodding ahead, was considering our affairs, for suddenly he stopped, and turning to me, named a well-known politician in the Union, and said: "Do you know what I would do with that fellow if I had him here to-night? I would send him into no-man's-land to inspect the German wires."

An order to examine the enemy wire entanglements was looked upon as almost tantamount to a death sentence, so the intensity of his convictions may be gauged, and I thought it a strange chance that had brought me under a Scotch commander, who talked South African politics at dawn in the mud of the front line of France.

The Scots Fusiliers had previously been commanded in this very area by Mr. Winston Churchill. Bissett told me that on one occasion Mr. Churchill tried to dam up the Cojeul River, a mile or two north of this, with sandbags stripped from the parapets. His intention was to create a head of water with which to flood the German front line, but he flooded the British front line instead, as well as many of the rear communication trenches, and there was a considerable flutter in the dovecotes of the higher command in consequence.

At this time, February 1918, the air was thick with rumours of a coming offensive by the Germans, and we were inundated with circulars and messages from Divisional and Army Headquarters, warning us of the imminence of a great attack, and prescribing the counter measures to be taken to parry the blow. The front-line troops had to do a prodigious amount of extra digging and wiring during the next few weeks, and whole new systems of defence works were springing up far behind, upon which we were to fall back in case of need.

What certainly pointed to a big-scale offensive was the fact that the Germans were raiding intensively along the line, from the River Scarpe to beyond Cambrai. Scarcely a night passed, but somewhere along the line there would come the tremendous roar of a barrage, followed by a lull, during which we knew that the final rush was taking place, and that, away there in the dark, men were bombing and killing each other.

On the second day after my arrival, the Germans began to trenchmortar the King's Liverpools adjoining us. This went on for hours, and by sunset they had blasted a wide gap in the wire, clearly indicating their intention to raid. I walked over in the evening to enquire of the Colonel of the Liverpool whether he wanted any assistance, but he said he preferred handling the coming attack himself. Next morning at the first flush of dawn a violent German barrage came down. Then the shell-fire ceased as suddenly as it began, and clear on the frosty air there came the shrill call of a bugle, followed by the rattle of machine-guns, confused shouting, and the bursting of hand grenades. Again the bugle sounded, and the dim figures of the raiders went pouring back across no-man's-land, and silence reigned once more. The Liverpools lay in a hollow, so our Lewis guns could not be brought to bear, and in any event the raid went with such a swing that hardly five minutes elapsed between the first bugle note sounding the assault, and the recall. I

went down the trench to see how they had fared. About fifty yards of their parapet was blown in and they were at work, busy as ants, repairing the damage. Most of their men had been withdrawn from the threatened point during the night, so the casualties amounted to only three men killed and a few wounded, but seven were missing, presumably dragged into the German lines. On the other hand, the Germans had left seven of their dead behind, and there were doubtless more lying in no-man's-land. They were accordingly in possession of the fact that the King's Liverpools held this part of the line, and they had left behind them the information that the 79th Westphalians lay opposite, which I ascertained from a paysheet on one of the dead men.

I doubt whether this kind of knowledge was worth so much bloodshed, and the total death-roll from raids in France must have run into huge figures.

The Germans tried to raid us one night, but it was such a poor attempt that I am not even sure that it was meant to be a raid, although they got near enough to fling a few stick grenades into our trench, and a mortar dropped a round into one of our bombing posts, that killed two men and wounded five.

In the past, it had been the custom for a battalion to remain in the front line from six to eight days, after which it would be withdrawn to support, and then into rest billets out of range, far behind. Now, owing to the extra precautions being taken against the suspected offensive, we were kept in the front line all the time, so that when the storm ultimately burst on us we had not been out of shell and rifle fire for nearly two months.

However, things might have been worse, for the weather, though bitterly cold, remained clear and fine and the sun shone all day long throughout the last of February and most of March.

Colonel Gordon went on leave early in March, and I commanded the Battalion during his absence. I spent much of my spare time looking for troublesome German machine-guns. I had a friend, an artillery officer named

Capt. Mann, in charge of a battery behind us, and with his assistance we disposed of several guns cleverly concealed behind tree stumps. Captain Mann was killed at Boisleux St. Marc soon after. He was one of the best friends I had in France.

One morning I saw my first air fight. I was standing in a gas post enjoying the sunshine when the sentry called out, “Sir, there’s two aeroplanes having a scrap,” and looking up, I saw the machines wheeling for position straight above us. Through my glasses I made out that the lower plane was a German two-seater with a British single-seater sitting over him. There came the faint popping of machine-guns, and presently the German began to sway. Then it came down, not rapidly at first, but in oblique dives as a coin sinks through water. Suddenly, when it was at about three thousand feet, it fell at a sickening rate. As the machine started on its final plunge, a man jumped or fell out, and he gathered such momentum that I could not long follow his descent. As for the plane, it crashed in no-man’s-land about fifty yards away in a cloud of dust and lay a tangled heap of twisted stays and broken wings, while the victorious British pilot circled round once or twice to make sure of his victim, and then sped away.

After dark that night, a patrol went out. They brought back the body of a young Bavarian airman and the remains of a parabellum automatic gun, but the other man was never found. The dead officer belonged to Flug 57 stationed beyond Lens. He had been to a theatre on the last night of his life, for there was a programme in his pocket showing that he had attended a play at Valenciennes the evening before.

On instructions from Divisional H.Q. I now began to send out patrols every night to inspect the German wire. These patrols consisted of an officer and three men, and I sometimes accompanied them. Wire inspections were looked on as next door to suicide, but with care they are not as dangerous as

all that.

As a rule, we started at 1 a.m., crawling over the parapet on hands and knees and then through the narrow opening left in the wire for the purpose. We groped along in the dark, falling flat on our faces whenever a Very light soared up, to continue when it died down. We would creep up to the German wire and then along it, to see whether gates had been cut for their infantry to advance.

These patrols, though risky, proved uneventful, and we never lost a man at it. Once or twice we saw dark figures scuttling away which were no doubt similar German patrols. One night I came on a German bombing post, a regular little fortress sunk into the ground. There were rows of potato-mashers (stick grenades) neatly stacked, and half a dozen sets of steel body armour such as were used by German sentries in exposed posts for protection against Mills grenades and shell splinters. We carried them back, and they are now in the Imperial War Museum in London.

On another patrol, as we were crawling forward, a chance flare from a Very light disclosed five or six dead bodies lying close together, with some more dead beyond. One of my men phlegmatically remarked: “Them here is Gordons, and them there is Boche,” and I remembered having heard that the Gordon Highlanders had had a midnight clash with the enemy in no-man’s-land a month or two before.

In the first week of March our Brigade (8th) was instructed to withdraw from the sector we had been holding, in order to take over another portion somewhat more to the left. The night we moved out, a heavy snowstorm set in and the cold was intense. Through this bitter weather we went up by Croisilles, past multitudes of wooden crosses, then by the York lines at Mercatel, into our fresh position near the ruins of Wancourt Tower.

By this time, information of the impending German attack had grown more

definite, and the atmosphere became one of tense expectancy. The front line was reorganised in depth. That is, all three battalions of our Brigade were in the frontline system at the same time, one battalion holding the foremost trench, the next holding a line about two hundred yards back, and the third a line five hundred yards behind the second. These three trenches, all lying close together, comprised what was called the front-line system. Behind this, lay a second, third and fourth line of defence, a long way to the rear, marked on our maps as the Brown, Red and Purple systems respectively.

These rear zones however were still incomplete, and later, when we were forced to retire, we found them useless, and had to rely on old trenches left over from the fighting of former years.

The three battalions that formed our 8th Brigade were the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, the 2nd Royal Scots, and the 7th Shropshires (K.S.L.I.); and the three Brigades making up our IIIrd Division of the 3rd Army were the 8th, 9th and 76th Infantry.

Our Brigadier was General Tanner, a South African from Natal. Our Divisional Commander was General Deveril. Our Corps Commander was Lord Haldane and our Army Commander was General Byng. These three I had not yet set eyes on, for it is one of the evils of modern warfare that the higher command of necessity live far behind, keeping touch with their units by wire, phone or written instructions, and the men in the front line seldom or never see them.

When first we took over our new sector, the 2nd Royal Scots went into the front line, the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers into the second trench and the 7th Shrops. into the third. Our Brigade front was about eight hundred yards wide, and the German trenches were sixty yards away, with the ruins of Chérisy in the distance. Far away to our left was Monchy, in British occupation, and opposite it, behind the German lines, lay the Bois de Vert, overlooking all our

front, and a thorn in the side of the British for long past. On the hill behind us were the remains of Wancourt Tower and in our rear lay what was left of the villages of Henin, Heninel and Wancourt. The valley of the Cojeul River behind us bristled with British guns of every description in readiness for the coming battle.

Every third day we changed over; the battalion in front shifting back third, the second battalion going first, and the rear battalion moving into the second line. This kind of Washington Post made it a matter of considerable uncertainty which unit would eventually be in the front trench when the day came, and many bets were laid on the event.

Towards the middle of the month two deserters came over into the British lines, a Pole and an Alsatian. They said the main German thrust was to be made between Monchy and Cambrai, with subsidiary attacks in the Ypres Salient and in Champagne. Great numbers of trench mortars and vast piles of gas shells stood ready along the German front line, and on the night before the assault, shock troops were to creep forward into no-man's-land. Further, a heavy gas barrage would be placed on us, followed by a long bombardment, after which the troops lying out in the shell holes were to overwhelm us. According to them, dawn on the 16th March was to be the time. All this, as it proved, was substantially correct except that they were five days out in their reckoning.

The higher command was so impressed by the men's statement that they decided to put down a heavy bombardment on the German line during the night of the 15th. The 1st R.S.F. happened to be in the front line that night and as no-man's-land was only sixty yards wide, we were ordered to keep the men well down to avoid "shorts", and at 3 a.m. the firing started.

This shoot was, I believe, the biggest of its kind ever carried out in France. It was magnificent, but we were not appreciative, for we had a solid wall of

shells howling within a few feet of our heads, and the noise was appalling. The bed of the trench was strewn next morning with shell fragments that had been blown back on us, but as we kept the men low we had only a few casualties. I never heard whether the Germans had really intended to attack that morning, but it was said that they suffered heavy losses, especially in the back areas, where they had concentrated large forces. Their reply to the bombardment was feeble, as they were probably reserving their ammunition. They dropped a few dozen shells into our trench, and some gas. At daybreak we had another man killed, the sentry at the water tank. I saw him duck for a gas shell, and then a whizz bang went through the tank, scattering our water supply, and at its exit it caught and scattered him.

One of our Lewis gunners, examining the damage to the water tank, said to me: “Sir, it’s an anti-tank gun what done it,” and I was surprised to find that this mild witticism enjoyed great popularity in the Battalion, for I heard the men repeating the joke amid roars of laughter during the next few days. Poor fellows, it was the last pleasantry most of them were to have.

On the 17th of March we completed our turn in the front line, and moved to the rear position seven hundred yards back, where we lay quietly until the 19th. I was watching German shells bursting around a British plane one afternoon, when there came a sibilant rush through the air and a loud report. One of the men, a few yards away, pitched down dead and another gave a yell and started to run, holding his hand to his side and dragging a leg. The dead man was caught full in the back as he was stooping to clean his rifle, and he was eviscerated by what must have been one of the German antiaircraft shells that had failed to explode aloft, and had gone off on hitting the unfortunate soldier. The other man died too.

I also watched a combat between about twenty aeroplanes. It was rather cloudy, and they were a long way off, so we could not distinguish friend from

foe. I saw five machines crash to earth, one of them burning fiercely, with a long trail of smoke in its wake, but whether they were British or German we could not tell.

On the evening of March 19th, Colonel Gordon returned from leave, and the same night we moved into the second trench of the front line. Battalion Headquarters were in a roomy dug-out thirty feet below the surface of the ground. In this dug-out we established the Adjutant, signallers and runners, and Colonel Gordon and I lived down an old German shaft, with one of their concrete pillboxes still standing above.

The 2nd Royal Scots were in the front trench, two hundred yards ahead of us, and the Shrops. in the third line, five hundred yards back.

The 20th of March was a cloudless sunny day. Things were so quiet that scarcely a shot was heard, and the brooding stillness was almost uncanny. George Bissett and I spent most of the day lying out in a grass-grown shell crater, reading and talking, and revelling in the sunshine, and the singing of the larks, which is such a feature of this part of France.

It was the calm before the storm. Towards evening, I walked to the Cojeul Valley to see the guns, and on my return took out a fatigue party to Wancourt Tower; for our Brigadier, General Tanner, looked in on his way down the line, and suggested that as I was best acquainted with the locality, I should point out the dead bodies still lying there from previous fighting, and have them buried.

I supervised this ghoulish work for some hours, and when I considered that the men had done enough, I dismissed them, and retired to our pillbox dug-out for the night.

At exactly 4.30 a.m. next morning a tremendous roll of fire brought us to our feet, and even in the depths of the shaft we could distinguish the thunder of gas projectors being fired in enormous quantities.

I hurried up the staircase to see what was happening, and immediately ran into a cloud of gas that sent me choking and gasping below, for my box-respirator.

At first only projectors were being fired, and we still thought that it might merely betoken a big-scale raid. Then our uncertainty was dispelled by the instantaneous crash, the like of which was never heard before on sea or land, from thousands upon thousands of guns roaring on a front of thirty miles, and we knew that the hurricane had broken on us at last. The noise transcended anything I had ever conceived, but it would be hopeless to attempt a description of the monstrous din. Hastily throwing on our equipment, Col. Gordon and I climbed the stairs, and made for Battalion Headquarters a hundred yards up the trench, in order to get in touch with our companies and platoons.

As we ran, we were stunned by the concussion of literally thousands of bursting shells, and although the light was uncertain, for there hung a mist, we could see that all our front stood wrapped in a sea of smoke and flame, and the earth heaved and twisted under our feet. Amid this pandemonium we heard the guns booming for many miles along the line, to tell us that the great battle was joined. We reached Headquarters dug-out in safety to find that already all the telephone lines had been smashed by the bombardment.

We ordered up three signallers with an electric flashlamp to communicate with Brigade H.Q,. in the rear, but they were blown to pieces within ten minutes, and for the rest of the time we held the front we were isolated, except for some runners that got through.

The battle now starting was the biggest and bloodiest of the war. It was to rage for weeks, and it cost over a million men, but our view of it was limited to a few hundred yards of tossing earth, obscured by columns of dust and smoke shooting heavenward.

We were never at any moment able to see how the tide ebbed and flowed beyond our own immediate neighbourhood, and the people in England knew more of its progress from day to day than we did.

When the attack opened, the 2nd Royal Scots were in the forward line, we were in the second trench two hundred yards back, and the Shrops. were behind us. To our left lay the 79th and 9th Infantry Brigades of the IIIrd Division and to our right were other units of the 3rd Army, with General Gough's 5th Army hinging on us.

We had a good field of fire over the heads of the Royal Scots but visibility was poor, and when at nine o'clock the German troops advanced, we caught but dim glimpses of their oncoming waves. We were nevertheless able to bring a heavy rifle and Lewis-gun fire to bear on them to swell that of the Royal Scots, and the Shrops. in turn were able to fire into the enemy from the rear and in no single instance did a German soldier get nearer than bombing-distance from our front line, in spite of all their courage.

All through March 21st and 22nd repeated attacks were made and every one of them broke down. We were drenched with gas for thirty hours on end, and they pounded and battered our trenches until we hardly recognised them, but the men who were left clung doggedly to their shattered ramparts and fought on. With the trench in ruins, it was wonderful that anyone survived at all, and our casualties were heavy. The Royal Scots, who bore the brunt of the attack, had fewer men killed than we, and we had less than the Shrops. behind us, for the German bombardment was more intense the further it worked to the rear, and was lightest on the front line, for fear of hitting their own men. I was twice gassed, for it was impossible to wear one's respirator continuously. The Blue Cross mixture that the Germans were putting over caused eyes and throat to smart and burn, and made one violently sick, but did not otherwise incapacitate me.

During the two days that we held the line, the enemy had the mastery of the air, in our quarter at any rate, and they were extraordinarily active, swooping over us at a low altitude in flights of fifteen to twenty machines at a time, machine-gunning as they came, and hovering over the British batteries in the rear, dropping flares to guide their artillery.

At midday on the 22nd a runner got through to us with a report that I still have:

"Secret to 1st R.S.F.,
"2nd R. Scots,
"7th K.S.L.I.

"IIIrd Division. G.B. 50 begins. Germans have broken into right Corps sector. We still hold front line of 3rd (purple) system roughly from right Corps boundary to St. Leger wood, thence along Factory Avenue to Swift Support.

"IIIrd Division will readjust its line along Croisilles Switch to Sensée River, thence to Brown Line. Aeroplane has dropped message to say enemy infantry visible on wide front long way through British positions from Croisilles southwards."

This was disastrous news. It meant that the 5th Army on our right had given way, and it meant that we were outflanked and in grave danger of being surrounded. Col. Gordon decided to form a defensive flank along 1st Avenue, a communication trench running back from the front line, and preparations were made to move into it after dark.

We spent an anxious afternoon under heavy fire, knowing that only about fifteen hundred yards away the enemy were well in behind us on the slopes of Henin Hill, and we could see for ourselves that to our left they had taken Monchy.

In the evening, Capt. Gosling, our Brigade Major, and another young staff

officer, managed to reach us through the barrage. They carried instructions that the entire front zone was to be evacuated, and that we were to withdraw to Henin, three miles back, before daylight. He told us that the Germans were in possession of the hill looking down on Henin, practically in our rear.

Supplies were to be destroyed, excepting shovels, which were to be brought along to dig a fresh defensive line; and the withdrawal was to be completed before sunrise.

It was a sore blow to surrender what the men had held so bravely. We burnt all papers and maps, and dumped our stock of Mills grenades down a disused shaft. The question of removing our reserve of small-arms ammunition had been solved long before, for the whole lot had been set alight by a shell, and the boxes of cartridges were blazing and crackling fiercely in the concrete pillbox in which they had been stored.

Col. Gordon ordered me to lead a party of runners to Henin to reconnoitre the new ground we were to take up between Boiry-Bequerelle and Boyelles. I sprinted down to the remains of our sleeping dug-out to see that nothing had been overlooked. When I got there I found my servant, McColl, setting a match to letters and papers, having come on his own initiative to see to this. I noticed that the German concrete redoubt that had stood over the entrance had been completely blown away since Col. Gordon and I had left the place on the morning of the opening attack.

On my return I assembled my runners and we set off down Foster Avenue to the rear. Foster Avenue was considered to be the finest communication trench in France. It had a double track of duckboards, and was revetted throughout its length. Bissett used to say he would undertake to ride a motor cycle up it, and there was a standing rule that any incoming battalion was to maintain the trench in the same good order as received, so we had taken especial care of its upkeep.

But now, as we picked our way along, I could scarcely recognise it, after the two days' bombardment, for our favourite C.T. had been reduced to a series of shell craters, with fragments of duckboard and wire entangling our feet.

It was full moon, so we were able to make fair speed over the tumbled surface, and we wasted no time, for the shellfire, though slackened, was still heavy, and great projectiles crashed around us as we went.

Soon we reached the exit, where Foster Avenue abutted on the Cojeul Valley, which we had to cross to reach the plank road leading to Henin. The shelling in the valley, too, was considerably lessened, but the valley lay under a haze of gas, through which we made our way past broken guns, wrecked gunpits, and dead gunners, all looking weird and ghostly through the goggles of our masks. When we reached the plank road outside the ruins of Heninel, we found the gas so thin, that we could remove our respirators, and rest awhile beside the Cojeul, here more like a water-furrow than a river.

The plank road, though badly knocked about, and full of loose beam-ends and shell craters, was still practicable, and it was crowded with horse teams that had come up to fetch away the guns before dawn.

On the bank near by were stretched long rows of wounded for transport to the rear, and already, off the road, came the muffled tramp of men, and we could make out columns of infantry withdrawing to the next line of resistance.

After a short rest I went on with my little party, following the left bank of the Cojeul. As we walked, we passed four men of the 2nd Royal Scots carrying a dead officer on an improvised bier, made from a length of duckboarding. The moon shone full on the dead man's face, and I saw that it was Capt. Newlands, whom I knew very well. He looked calm and restful, and he might have been asleep, so little was there of death in his

countenance. I asked the men where they were carrying the body to, and one of them said they weren't going to allow no bl——dy Boche to bury the Skipper, so the worthy fellows had taken upon themselves the self-imposed task of carrying their company-commander back to the next line of defence, to ensure him against alien burial.

At length we reached the crossroad at Henin, and I set about making arrangements for the laying-out of a fresh position. It was still night, but away to our right the countryside was lit by columns of fire pouring from the shafts of the Hindenburg Tunnel. The great gallery was alight, and huge pillars of flame were shooting upward, for the heavily timbered interior had become like a blast furnace. The conflagration lent an added note of desolation to the scene.

By sunrise, what was left of our Battalion arrived. The men were come from two days of hell, but we had to set them digging straight away at an old trench, to make it capable of defence. The remnant of a battalion of the Coldstream Guards was digging in to our right, and to our left the rest of the Royal Scots and Shropshires were doing likewise. Having completed these measures for putting the new line in a fit state, Bissett and I spread a couple of old sandbags on the grass and flung ourselves down to snatch some rest, for neither of us had slept for forty-eight hours; Colonel Gordon stayed to look after things, for he seemed to be made of whipcord, and he said he was not tired.

We counted on getting at least a day's respite, as we thought it would take the Germans quite that time to discover that we had vacated the forward zone, but by 9 o'clock we were awakened and told that the enemy were advancing against us.

Starting to our feet we saw masses of their infantry swarming over Henin Hill in our direction. Teams of their light guns were being galloped up, and

groups of men, about two hundred at a time, came dribbling forward into the dead ground beside the Cojeul River. The British artillery had not yet had time to take up new stations, but a few guns began to fire over open sights at a target that could hardly be missed. They caused the enemy heavy loss, and the slope towards the Cojeul was soon plentifully strewn with fallen men.

One howitzer battery in particular in front of Neuville Vitasse, dropped its shells in the thick of the German infantry, taking toll with nearly every round. Once I saw what looked like two full companies coming down the sunken road by the graveyard. They were advancing at the double, and as they reached the angle by the Henin crucifix, a howitzer shell dropped among them. When the air cleared I saw a pile of bodies heaped in the cutting, and further off, in a ragged circle, lay more dead and wounded that had been blown outward, the survivors running wildly up the road. Through my glasses I saw some of the wounded shake themselves free of such dead as were lying across them, then they crawled away, and German stretcher-bearers came hurrying down to their assistance.

Towards 3 o'clock in the afternoon (March 23rd) the Germans launched an attack on us from the Cojeul Valley. Their gunfire, which had been growing in volume all the morning, now became violent, and shells were rained on us, mostly from light field guns and portable mortars, that were carried by hand.

Suddenly, before we quite grasped the fact that an attack was coming, we saw waves of field-grey infantry advancing towards us from this side of the Cojeul. Our men, earlier in the day, had collected a quantity of rusty wire entanglements which they found lying about, and had thrown these out before our trench.

The front wave of the enemy got as far as this obstruction, but no further, for they were met with so steady a fire that in a few minutes the assault withered away. The attackers went scurrying back for the shelter of the

hollow ground behind, leaving before us a number of dead and wounded. Of these, some writhed in agony, and others crept off on hands and knees. One young German who remained crouching near by, not daring to run, came in to us when called upon, and he was followed by several others, who had thrown themselves down to escape our fire.

They said the attack had been hastily organised and that their officers had assured them that they would meet with little resistance, as the British were too demoralised to fight. Simultaneously with the attack on our Battalion, other attacks were made to right and left, and these also broke down. Our opponents were 80th Württembergers. They had their own regimental postage stamps, which the prisoners distributed amongst us, by way of souvenirs. They were rather a poor lot physically, but good-natured country bumpkins, such as one might meet in any rural district.

Some of the wounded kept calling for help, but a platoon sergeant who crept out was shot through the head, so we had to leave them to their fate.

The Guards Brigade to our right were heavily attacked before sunset. They told me later that, on this and the following days, they accounted for ten thousand Germans, a pardonable exaggeration, considering the swathes of dead and dying whom I saw lying before their trenches. The night was quiet, except for the moans of the wounded lying out in the open. There were frequent cries of “Hilfe, hilfe, um Gottes Wille, hilfe!”, but as we were obliged to sweep the ground in front of us, most of them must have perished.

The 24th of March was another day of wrath. Our trench, though considerably strengthened during the hours of darkness, offered but little protection against the high-angle trench mortars, and by midday our sector was again full of dead and wounded men. It was heartbreaking to see how the poor fellows were blown to pieces.

Once, I saw two men hurled ten to fifteen feet in the air by a shell, to come

down shapeless behind the trench. There was a young soldier manning the firestep by my side. He was haggard and worn from the strain of the past days, and he blenched as he looked at the gruesome sight. His lips were trembling when I glanced at him, but he drew himself up and said to me, “Sir, the Boche may break through somewhere else, but they’ll no get through here.”

I have never held a high opinion of the military tactics of the British in the Great War. I think they could have fought it at a fifth of the cost and a fifth of the casualties, but of their stubborn valour, no man who has seen them in days like these can have a doubt.

After midday on the 24th, the Germans repeatedly sent their infantry to the attack, not only against us, but on a width of about ten miles, and we were kept busy until late in the afternoon. None of their attacks succeeded on our divisional front, but elsewhere they broke through in places. The German losses must have run into large figures, for the ground before us was ghastly with dead men, and with the cries of the wounded.

Once, in the thick of an attack, I saw a low-flying German aeroplane come firing down our line. It was pounced upon right over our heads by a Bristol Fighter, and shot to earth before the enemy pilot, as it seemed to me, was aware that an English machine had made its appearance. The plane crashed three hundred yards in front of us, where it lay like a dead locust, one wing sticking up into the air. The occupants must have been killed, for there was no movement under the wreckage.

After 4 o’clock the attacks ceased, but the shell-fire remained heavy. We did not know how the rest of the battle had gone, but we heard the unceasing rumble of guns in the south. A telegram about our own share was delivered to Col. Gordon that evening, and I have kept it:

“6-15 p.m. From military secretary to M.Z.O.[7] *Field-Marshal*

Commander-in-Chief sends his congratulations on splendid defence to-day stop he relies upon your steadfastness and valour to crush this new attack which will be enemy's last hope of success."

A similar message was received by other battalions of the IIIrd Division, and two days later we saw an outstanding reference in the London *Times* to the "Iron Division", as the IIIrd came to be called, wherein it received especial praise for its share in the great battle.

At 5 o'clock, we received orders to move out after dark to a fresh position to the left of Boiry-Bequerelle, and I was sent with two runners to reconnoitre the ground. It was a welcome relief to get out of that infernal trench, even though the back area through which I went was being liberally sprinkled with shell-fire.

We hurried up the Neuville Vitasse Road, for enemy rifles and machine-guns were active, and as soon as we were under cover behind the rise, we branched off towards Boiry.

As we reached the *pavé* road that leads to Bapaume, two soldiers belonging to the crew of a tank standing near by started walking towards us, when a long-range German shell burst on them. I saw one man fly through the air, and come down stone-dead on the cobbles. The other gave a shout and ran towards me. When he came abreast, he continued on his way, and I saw that his right arm was in shreds, and that he was blinded. He ran past, keeping the road for a short distance, and then, losing direction, pitched headlong into the storm-water drain. When we went to him he too was dead.

Having located our new position I returned to the Battalion, and we moved out after dark from the trench in which so many of our men had died. By 3 o'clock in the morning we had the remnants of our companies installed in some sort of a trench that we had found and deepened. I do not think any officer or soldier had enjoyed two hours' consecutive sleep for the past three

days, and we looked forward to the prospect of a little rest at last.

But our signallers had linked us up by phone with Brigade, and just as Bissett and I had lain down on the floor of a deserted Nissen hut, there came a message that I was to report to Brigade Headquarters at Boisleux-au-Mont at once, together with a junior officer. Col. Gordon pointed out that we were shorthanded owing to our heavy casualties. The Brigade Major replied that the order had come from the Divisional General, and was most explicit. Col. Gordon said there was no help for it, I had to go, and he told young Lieut. White to accompany me, so, dazed with fatigue and lack of sleep, we shuffled off in the dark.

I knew the road, and at Boisleux-au-Mont we found Brigade Headquarters down a catacomb, where, in one of the caverns, sat Capt. Gosling over his maps, and on the floor lay General Tanner fast asleep, his first real rest, so Gosling whispered, since the 21st.

We were told that a car was waiting to take us to Divisional Headquarters at Bretincourt, and, greatly mystified, we stumbled back along the galleries and up the staircase to find a roomy Napier ready for us. White and I promptly fell asleep, until wakened at daybreak by the driver, in Bretincourt. Here a staff officer came to find us, and led us to a hutment standing on the village green, in which was General Deveril, our Divisional Commander, whom I now saw for the first time.

General Deveril proceeded to tell us of the very serious state of affairs on our right. The 5th Army had retreated, and the Germans had overrun many miles of the British front. He said it was practically certain that the whole line would have to retire in order to conform with the 5th Army, and arrangements were being completed to withdraw the 3rd Army, during the coming night. He had sent for me to inspect the area near Ficheux and Blairville Wood, as far as Wailly, to fix a new line of resistance for our

Division.

We did not listen very attentively, for our most insistent need was sleep and we stood blear-eyed and stupid, while the General was speaking. He noticed this. He said he knew we were pretty well tuckered up, but we must go and do our job first, after which he promised us a good rest.

Our hopes of repose vanished indefinitely, for my instructions included an order to return to our Battalion first, to fetch a party of guides, whom I was to lead to Ficheux, in order to acquaint them with the ground. We saluted and went off, but I prevailed on one of the Staff to commandeer the General's car, which took us as far as Boisleux, where we ran into a sprinkling gunfire, and the chauffeur refused to go further, as he said he had no right to risk the car.

From here it was not a long walk to where we had left the Battalion some hours before. I explained the position to Col. Gordon. He said he was not a religious man, but he believed there was a God, and he did not believe the Germans could take Amiens. He was right, but we did not know it at the time. As for Bissett, the news of the *débâcle* of the 5th Army left him unperturbed, and he went about whistling and joking as always.

Accompanied by eight runners, White and I started back, past the brick factory and the railway triangle. The Germans were shelling the track, and we saw fragments of rails, rolling-stock, and water-tanks, go into the air amid the smoke and noise of 5.9's and howitzer shells.

It was a weary journey. The sun was hot, and we were burdened with our equipment, and with the knowledge of evil tidings. To add to our troubles, young White's nerves had given way. He was a brave boy, and had been awarded the Military Cross two or three months before, but now he was on the verge of collapse. Every time a shell howled over us, he flung himself to the ground, and covered his head with his trench cloak. Then he would rise shamefaced and trembling. I knew that in a war like this, any man may

become unstrung, and I pretended at first not to notice. But after a time he came to me and said miserably that he was obliged to confess his nerves had gone. I advised him to report sick. For a moment he stood silent, and I could see that he was fighting temptation; then he said he would see it through, for the sake of his people at home. None the less our passage was torture to him. He walked along quivering and quaking at every explosion, and the poor fellow kept harping upon the possibility of being taken out of the line to help train the American units that were beginning to arrive in France. Someone on the staff at Bretincourt had put this idea into his head, and he told me that if only he could do this for a few weeks he would soon recover himself.

I comforted him as best I could, for I was feeling the strain myself and understood his condition.

On breasting the rise at Boisleux-au-Mont we saw a sight that gladdened our eyes. The country beyond was black with troops — a great army of reinforcements marching south to stem the tide — and there came mile upon mile of steel-hatted infantry, the vastest concourse of human beings that I have ever seen, and the most welcome, for truth to say my spirits had been at a low ebb. Apart from the military situation, there were the terrible things seen of late. No man can bear the sight of torn human flesh, with thousands of dead and wounded, and the stress of prolonged gunfire, without being affected.

But this great force marching on the enemy put new heart into one, and even White looked more cheerful. For a long while we watched them going forward. The men laughed and sang, and they carried themselves with an air of confidence that did us good to see.

In the afternoon, White and I, with the runners, came to Blairville Wood and staked out a new line of defence amongst the network of old trenches to the right of Ficheux.

By sunset, drugged with fatigue, we reported our task complete to General Deveril at Bretincourt. He told us the position was somewhat easier and that, while the 3rd Army might still have to retire, the withdrawal had been postponed, and he said we could now sleep until we were blue in the face. Beneath a gruff exterior, the old fellow had a soft spot, for he ordered a Nissen hut to be cleared for our party, and he personally conducted us thither. He wished us all a good rest, and we slept at last.

Vaguely I heard the crash of bombs during the night, for the German planes were active, and White told me next morning that they had kept him awake most of the time. Many bombs were dropped on the village, and there were a considerable number of casualties.

At 8 a.m. the General sent for us once more. He gave us a good breakfast, and he told me that I was to return to Blairville Wood, to fix upon points for the placing of reserve ammunition supplies. He gave us a car, and we completed the work, and returned to Bretincourt by midday. After this, White and I were provided with horses, and we were ordered to take a convoy of ammunition limbers to the new trenches that were being dug above Wailly. In addition, I was to report on the trenches between Ficheux and the railway arch.

The Germans were dropping long-range shells on these back areas, and we saw an ammunition dump go up, a sheet of flame shooting straight into the sky. German aeroplanes were troublesome too. They came every ten minutes, firing on the men at work on the reserve trenches. A two-seater came flying low over the carts, as they stood strung out on the road near the arch. The pilot was a master-hand. He flew his machine, not so much in swerves, but rather jolting her from side to side in an amazing fashion.

He swooped down again and again, coming so close that I could see the gunner standing in the cockpit, slewing his gun from side to side as he

straddled us. Luckily the bumping of the plane disturbed his aim, and although he sent a stream of bullets whizzing about our ears, neither men nor horses were hit. I ordered the drivers and runners to open rifle-fire and this may have had some effect, for the plane now headed back for its own lines.

We watched its course for a few minutes, and then, far away above Monchy, we saw three British machines dive down from a great height upon the German, and it fell in flames, leaving one half-regretful at the fate of its occupants, for they must have been gallant men.

Soon after, another German plane came over, again flying low to rake the working parties. An anti-aircraft gun mounted on a motor lorry had just come up, and it opened fire. I saw a shell explode against the fuselage. The aeroplane swayed unevenly, and then descended in an easy glide, landing not far from where we stood. To my surprise the pilot clambered out, and running forward, threw himself on the grass, and opened fire with a Mauser pistol at two soldiers, who were walking towards him with their shovels over their shoulders. They bolted for cover, and now from all sides came dozens of angry men from the working parties, brandishing spades and pickaxes as they ran.

They surrounded the airman and I hastened across, fearing that they might kill him, for an aviator with a crashed plane has no more right to fire on those coming to help him than has a shipwrecked sailor on a raft the right to fire upon his rescuers.

However, when I got there the men had merely disarmed the offender, who was standing in their midst clenching and unclenching his fists, his face twitching and his eyes glaring, like one under uncontrollable emotion. In the rear cockpit of the machine lay the machine-gunner, crumpled and dead.

Towards evening, our work accomplished, I sent the runners back to Col. Gordon, and White and I returned to Bretincourt to report.

During the day White had again repeatedly spoken of his hopes of being transferred to an American training camp. Now, at the conclusion of our interview with General Deveril, we were ordered to return next day to duty in the firing line. I watched White's face at this, and the poor fellow looked as if he had received his death sentence, as indeed he had.

That night, the civilians in Bretincourt were greatly agitated. French political officers came riding through the village on bicycles ordering all non-combatants to leave the place in view of the threatened withdrawal. I thought the order very drastic. Most of the people were women and children, and old men, and it meant they had to flee on foot, carrying their belongings on their backs.

In the streets I passed knots of them loudly protesting, for the French are like cats in the way they cling to their homes, whatever the danger may be. But the political officers were obdurate and we could not interfere in a matter between the French Government and its citizens. It was a pitiful exodus, and, as it turned out, an unnecessary one, for the 3rd Army never retired after all.

We spent another night in our Nissen hut, once again to the sound of many air bombs, which did serious damage in the artillery lines close by. This helped still further to jangle White's nerves, and he looked a wreck next morning.

We then started back on foot to rejoin our Battalion. Our transport limbers were standing at Wailly in charge of Capt. Hester, and we touched there on the way. We found that a long-range shell had killed two men and thirteen horses just before we arrived. My horse, "Major", was among the killed, and also Col. Gordon's little pony which he had meant to take back with him to South Africa.

Capt. Hester gave me a batch of London newspapers, from which I learnt far more of the battle than we knew locally.

According to the papers, the Germans were dangerously near Amiens, and in the north they were attacking on a wide front from Arras towards Meteren. The position of the British Army was reported to be critical, and things were looking very black.

In the news columns were several German wireless telegrams intercepted by the Admiralty. They were bulletins from the front, in the shape of telegrams sent from the battlefield by the Kaiser to his wife. The fighting was represented as a sort of family affair of the Hohenzollerns, after the manner of Frederick the Great.

One message ran: “Wilhelm to Augusta: Our son Eitel Fritz gloriously advanced this day and our son Wilhelm attacked and drove the English in headlong rout — he has taken more booty than at Caporetto,” and it wound up with a boastful “Morgen geht’s weiter,” as if the Kaiser and his son were only waiting for daylight to finish off the British Army.

White and I now walked from the transport camp to the front line, passing to the north of Ficheux, and then along the Mercatel Road. As we approached Mercatel, the German bombardment flared up afresh after the comparative lull of the last two days. Mercatel itself, and the Bapaume Road, were under heavy shrapnel and howitzer fire, and White’s nerves were in a terrible state. I advised him to return to the transport lines, but he refused, and I let the matter drop.

We found our Battalion holding a sector of the front line to the right of Henin, the village itself three hundred yards away being in the hands of the Germans. Battalion Headquarters were in a sunken road behind the trench, a most uncomfortable place, for the cutting ran in the direction of the enemy, and their gunners kept dropping light and heavy shells around it until dark, so that everyone at Headquarters was kept standing against the side of the bank, to present as small a mark as possible to the innumerable shell fragments that

whizzed about our ears.

After dark, the bombardment subsided, and we were able to move up and down, to prepare for the next attack, which was sure to come at dawn. By the light of a candle-end in a cubbyhole I read the Kaiser's telegram to Bissett. It made him very angry. He said, "When the Boche come on again we'll give the —— Kaiser something to wire to Augusta about," and he kept muttering about it to himself all the evening.

Towards morning as I went the rounds, I saw Lieut. White crouched down in the bottom of the trench. By the light of a candle shaded under his steel helmet he was trying to read a letter, and his hand shook and trembled as he held it. For the last time I advised him to go back, and told him there was time to leave before dawn. As before, I could see him fighting the temptation to quit and, as before, he said he would stay.

When it grew light the German bombardment came down in earnest. Our casualties in officers and men mounted quickly, and by 7 o'clock we had only three company officers left. White was one of them, and, as the shell-fire lifted, we saw the waves of German infantry swarm towards us. Close to him stood a Lewis gun whose crew were all dead. He picked up the gun and carrying it forward of the parapet for better vision, started to fire, sitting behind it out in the open, and there a bullet found him. He was one of the bravest men I ever knew.

The German attack did not reach further than the few coils of wire which we had been able to throw out, and it withered away before the fire of our men. Then came a lull, and shortly after eight a heavy bombardment was concentrated over the Shropshires to our left. The line there stood in smoke, and we knew that another attack was taking place.

After a few minutes a Shrops. officer came running across from behind, and dropping among us, said that he had come to give us warning to guard our

left flank and our rear, as the Germans had broken into their sector. This meant that, a little distance away, the enemy was in the same trench as our Battalion, and Col. Gordon immediately sent word to the left company to form a bombing block, and ordered the runners and signallers to man the bank of the sunken road behind, as a protective flank.

I stood up to get a clearer view of the threatened point. There was a curtain of smoke and dust through which I saw men firing and throwing hand grenades. As I looked, I was struck with terrific force by what felt like an entire shell, but which later surgical operation established to be only a jagged fragment of one, the size and shape of half an orange skin, firmly embedded in my right thighbone. I staggered back to where Col. Gordon and Bissett were. Our medical officer, Dr. Flemming, was fetched, and he gave me first aid. His dressing-station had received a direct hit which had killed most of his orderlies, and such wounded as were there at the time, so there was nowhere else to go, and he advised that I be left where I was. Bissett's servant, Glossop, who also acted as mess-steward, had unearthed a brazier, on which he was calmly preparing breakfast, regardless of the battle around us, and he gave me a cup of tea which helped to revive me. In about twenty minutes came another attack, and there was a furious struggle with rifle-fire, and the bursting of German stick bombs. With this general uproar going on not many yards off, I lay remembering that if the enemy made even the slightest progress, I should be bombed or bayoneted, or become a prisoner of war, and so spent some crowded moments. But the attack was brought to a standstill, and, for a time, things simmered down in our immediate neighbourhood, although the guns still thundered away to right and left. At 10 o'clock Dr. Flemming came to me. He said I should make an effort to get to the rear for proper medical attendance. All his stretcher-bearers were dead or wounded, and no ambulance could reach us through the heavy German shell-fire.

I was not at first anxious to go, for I was in great pain, and looking back from where I lay, I could see that the Bapaume Road, which must be crossed in order to reach safety, was being swept by heavy metal and by shrapnel, to prevent reinforcements from approaching our line. But as the shelling was just as severe where I was, and I knew that our line might be forced back at any moment (it was forced back five hundred yards soon after I left), I decided to risk it.

Col. Gordon ordered Corporal Noble of the Guides and my servant, McColl, to hold me up on either side, and after I had said good-bye to those near me, we started off. I had noticed Glossop eyeing me appraisingly some time before, and now, when we had gone about a dozen yards, he came running after us with a slip of paper in his hand. He said, “Sir, sir, you haven’t paid your mess bill,” and handed me a hastily pencilled account for ninety francs.

I feebly protested at being dunned in these circumstances and promised to send him a cheque, but he returned to his brazier with a dubious look on his face, as much as to say he might as well write off the item as a dead loss. We started down the sunken road, and a heavy burst of shrapnel caught us. Two runners who were coming towards us were struck dead within twenty yards of us, so we decided to leave the road and go across the open.

We had chosen an evil time for our journey, for the shellfire was momentarily increasing on the Arras-Bapaume *Pavé*, which we had to pass. Between us and the road heavy shells were throwing up columns of spouting earth, and overhead the air was flecked with shrapnel. We were covered with dust and half stunned by the noise. I had lost a great deal of blood and my wound was throbbing, so we made slow progress, resting every now and then in a shell crater to ease my leg, or to allow a particularly heavy gust of fire to quiet down. The barrage was so dense that it was like walking through a fog.

In the sky we saw aeroplanes wheeling around, and everything pointed to the imminence of a fresh attack. Once, as we rested for a moment, an aeroplane detached itself from a number of others and crashed down at such speed that we could not distinguish its markings, and we heard a dull thud as it struck the earth some distance away.

As we approached Mercatel, we were obliged to make a detour to avoid a large ammunition dump that had been set on fire. Blazing fragments of Nissen huts and multi-coloured flames were shooting in all directions.

Our way now took us through ploughed land whose uneven surface caused me great agony, and we made still slower progress. As we crossed the field, a heavy shell burst ten yards beyond us and either the rush of its passage or the force of the explosion (we could not tell which) sent us sprawling over one another on the ground, with eyes and mouths full of grit, and a gush of blood from my wound.

In spite of everything our luck held, and at length we reached the Bapaume Road. What we had previously known as a cobbled highway was now a succession of shell craters, littered with dead men and horses, smashed motor lorries and limbers, for it was the main artery along which supplies came up, and the German gunners raked it night and day. Before crossing, we sheltered for a few minutes in a ditch, and when we detected a slight lull in the fire, the two young soldiers helped me up and dragged me over the battered road. We then continued until we found the high bank of a sunken lane, and were able to take a long breather in comparative sanctuary, for although stray shells were still dropping about, we were beyond the barraged zone at last.

I well remember the feeling of surprise with which I realised that the sun was shining brightly and that it was a beautiful day. Ever since dawn the atmosphere had been so obscured with dust and smoke up in the front line that it was strange to find one’s eyes blinking in the unaccustomed glare of a

clear sky.

After a long halt, we headed slowly for the Ficheux Arch. Another painful mile brought us in front of the British batteries by the railway embankment. They were firing at a tremendous rate, probably in answer to S O S signals from the front line, from which we could now hear the sound of heavy fighting.

German aeroplanes flew over the guns in the most audacious manner, dropping Very lights as target signals to their own side, a proceeding which intensely annoyed Corporal Noble, and he maintained a running fire of unflattering comment on the British Air Force, none of whose machines were in evidence.

We had to make another detour, as the forward blast from the batteries was so powerful that we could not face it, and were forced to branch away, until we found a clear space through which to go.

Beyond the railway arch, to my great relief, we came on an improvised dressing-station in a large Nissen hut beside the road.

I was now so exhausted, that I was unable to reach there, and sank down near the entrance. McColl spread my trench coat on the ground and he and Noble lifted me on to it. After a rest, they carried me into the hut, where I was given a mug of tea that tasted like nectar after our dolorous journey.

There was a considerable number of wounded lying in and around the hut, and the R.A.M.C. orderlies did what they could for us.

The Germans now began to shell the place, which stood conspicuously in the open. I do not think they knowingly bombarded a dressing-station, for it flew no red cross, but as the shells were dropping closer and closer, the walking wounded were ordered to make for some old trenches lying near by, and the stretcher cases were removed as fast as possible by the bearer parties.

I made an attempt to follow the walking wounded but found that I was too

weak to go far, so I lay down beside the road, Noble and McColl squatting beside me. McColl had asked me to take him to South Africa after the war, and I gave him my address. Just then a Ford box car was driven up by a major of the R.A.M.C. He had brought a load of bandages and medical supplies, and having delivered these at the old trenches where the wounded were being collected, had come on to see that no one had been overlooked in the hut. On his way back he noticed me lying on the ground, and stopped the car. Seeing the pool of blood in which I was lying, he got out and examined my wound, shook his head, and told my two companions to lift me into the back of his vehicle.

Then I said farewell to these brave boys who had stood by me so well. McColl was killed a fortnight later at Bailleul. Col. Gordon sent me the papers found on his body, for he had no next-of-kin.

Our road ran up a long slope, and we were nearly hit once or twice by long-distance shells that were dropping about.

Looking backward, over the rear of the car in the direction from which I had come, there was a roll of gunfire along the front line four miles away, showing that the Germans had resumed their attacks.

That was the last I saw of the great battle. At this distance, the shell-fire lay soft and fleecy over the line, like a riband of mist, and it was hard to believe that under that delicate tracery men were killing and maiming each other.

Further along, the car stopped again, and I saw the Major alight to examine a wounded man huddled near the road. He was a soldier from a London regiment, in great agony, for his right eye was destroyed, and his right arm hung in shreds. The Major gave him an injection, and helped him in beside me. Before long the cockney grew quite talkative, as the opiate took effect, and when I asked him how he came by his injuries, he said, “A blurry Boche frew a potato-masher straight at me gig-lamps,” meaning that he had been hit

in the face by a stick grenade.

The car took us for some miles, and then the friendly Major advised us to wait by the road until an ambulance could pick us up, as it was useless our going on with him and getting still further away from assistance.

He helped us out, and wishing us good luck, drove off. The Londoner and I lay down in the grass, and in about half an hour an empty lorry came up on its way back for gun ammunition. We signalled it to stop, and the driver and his assistant lifted us over the tailboard. An empty munition lorry is not an ideal conveyance for wounded men, and the jolting over the cobbles caused us both to bleed profusely, to say nothing of the pain of being shaken about like peas.

The lorry took us for five or six kilometres, until we reached a big casualty clearing station, where they unloaded us in a very limp condition. Bearers ran up, and, placing us on stretchers, carried us into a large tent and laid us on trestle tables for inspection. I did not see my friend of the potato-masher again, for a doctor gave me an injection, put a fresh dressing on my thigh, and within ten minutes of my arrival, I found myself in a comfortable motor ambulance, which already contained three other cases, and was starting for Doullens about thirteen miles away.

We reached there by two in the afternoon, and were taken from the car and placed in a courtyard, where lay many other wounded ranged side by side. Next to me was a tall young airman, still dressed in furs and leather headgear, like an arctic explorer. He turned his head and said to me, “What have you got?” I answered, “A shot in the thigh, and you?” “Finished,” he replied, “bullet through the stomach. I’ll be dead to-morrow.” I never heard whether his unfavourable diagnosis proved correct, for he was taken off, and I did not see him again.

Later on they came for me, and I was carried into a large building,

apparently the local Town Hall, for there was a raised stage at one end with painted scenery and wings, much like our village halls in South Africa.

On the stage, doctors were operating behind screens, and in a corner, only partially hidden by rubber ground-sheets, was an ominous pile of amputated arms and legs. Six or seven operations were going on at the same time, and the place reeked of chloroform and lysol. A surgeon undid my bandages. Then he said mine was a case for X-ray, and as there was no installation here, I was taken up a staircase, and my stretcher was placed on the floor of a large room already filled with wounded. The nurses were exceedingly kind. They belonged to a unit of the Canadian Red Cross, and as they had been driven from their permanent hospital near Bapaume to this temporary shelter, they had lost their equipment and had to leave most of us lying on our stretchers on the floor. I was very cold from loss of blood and one of the nurses said the action of my heart was weak, so she gave me an occasional dose of French brandy, which tingled new life into every vein of my body.

During the night, German aeroplanes dropped bombs on Doullens, but our hospital was not hit. The nurses said that Marshal Foch and Marshal Haig, with Mr. Lloyd George and other prominent men, had been here two days before to attend a council of the allied armies, which accounted for the extra notice which Doullens was receiving from the air. By next day so many of the wounded had been evacuated to base hospitals that towards afternoon I was lifted on to a bed, a welcome relief after thirty hours on a stretcher. In the bed nearest me lay a young airman, with a gunshot wound through his lungs. He was very ill, but did not know it, for I heard him ask one of the nurses for a postcard, as he wished to let his mother know that he had a nice blighty, and would be home in a few days. She brought him a card, and, as he was too weak to write himself, she wrote at his dictation, but she shook her head at me, and I knew that he would never see his mother again. Before long I saw

her place the screens around his bed, always an ominous sign in a hospital ward, for they are put around a patient *in extremis*, to spare the feelings of the other sufferers. I fell into a doze, from which I was awakened by one of the screens falling on me, and looked up to see the boy sitting upright in bed, his arms outstretched, then with a low moan he fell back dead.

Doullens was bombed again during the night, and once more we listened to the crash of the explosions. One bomb must have fallen in the street below, to judge by the roar and the trembling of the walls, but the hospital escaped injury.

We were glad to see the dawn, for after the long strain of the past week, it was an ordeal to lie helpless in the midst of an air raid. I have since heard that the hospital was hit a few nights later, and only hope that none of our little Canadian sisters were injured.

The morning after the raid I was carried downstairs to a motor ambulance which took three of us to the railway station. There were already many wounded waiting to be taken on board a hospital train, and I saw King George in service uniform walking up and down the platform, speaking to a wounded man here and there. I was told that he was on his way to the battle raging before Amiens, to find out for himself how things stood. Owing to the troop trains on the line, we were twenty-four hours in reaching Rouen, instead of seven, and it was a weary passage.

At Rouen, the wounded were transferred to ambulance cars, by German prisoners, and were then distributed to various hospitals. I found myself once more at No. 2, where I had lain the year before. My wound having taken a turn for the worse during the journey, I was carried straight into the theatre, and was given an anaesthetic and operated upon at once.

I spent twenty days in No. 2, and, after a second operation, was sent to Havre. From there we crossed the Channel at night in the *Guildford Castle*, a

former South African mail boat now reconditioned for the Red Cross, and within an hour of reaching England, we were on a beautifully equipped train bound for London. At Waterloo Station, we lay once again on the platform, and a medical officer came among us with pasteboard slips printed with the name of the hospital to which each man was to be taken. I drew No. 10 Cambridge Square, a small hospital in the private dwelling-house of Mrs. Muirhead Campbell, a patriotic Scotch lady, and here I remained for the next three months.

In France the great battle still raged, but the 28th of March had been the turning-point. From then onwards, the German advance slowed down and was ultimately checked.

I have the Order of the Day addressed to our IIIrd Division:

"30th March. The General Officer commanding the 6th Corps is at a loss to find words adequate to express his intense admiration for the unconquerable valour which the IIIrd Division has displayed during the fierce fighting of the last nine days. The repeated efforts made in great force by a determined enemy to break through the left of the Corps where the soldiers of the IIIrd Division stood, were repulsed time after time, and where ground had to be yielded to maintain an unbroken line, every foot was contested. Had the IIIrd Division, much weakened and exhausted by several days of hard fighting and nights devoid of rest, not maintained an unbroken front, it is difficult to believe that the enemy could have failed to obtain his objective, the capture of Amiens and the driving of a wedge between the allied armies."

I was glad to have witnessed so mighty a conflict in the company of such brave men.

And now, fallen out of the fight, I lay in the quiet refuge of the ward until the end of July, while my wounds were slowly mending.

Chapter XII — The Counterstroke

The months I passed in hospital at No. 10, Cambridge Square, were uneventful. The only excitement we had apart from the newspaper reports of the fighting in France, was an air raid.

On the night of May 20th, 1918, forty German bombers came over. By now the air defences were much improved, and, as we lay in our beds, we heard the warning maroons, followed by the British anti-aircraft barrage. Through the open windows we saw the curtain of shell-fire hanging far up in the sky, and amidst the boom of the guns and the bursting of the shells, we could distinguish the crash of the bombs as they struck the ground. Mrs. Muirhead Campbell and the nurses took it calmly, and they came among us with cups of tea and cheerful talk. Sixty people were killed and seven hundred and fifty were wounded, but it was the last aeroplane attack on London, for so effective was the artillery fire that seven bombers, each containing six men, were shot down, and the Germans never again repeated the attempt.

During July I was sometimes wheeled in a bath chair to Hyde Park, to see the American troops march by. They were landing at the rate of a hundred thousand a month. In these days there was nothing to prevent an American army from getting to France, for the German submarine menace had now been completely overcome. Instead of sinking sixty to seventy ships a week, as they were doing when first I came to England, they were unable to Stop the Americans from crossing the Atlantic without loss, and it was but rarely that the destruction of a merchant vessel was reported, for the recently invented convoy system had practically made an end to the U-boat activities.

In the last week of July I was discharged from hospital with orders to proceed to Fort Matilda. I was in Scotland for over five weeks on light duty in the training camps, for my wound was still unhealed. I was also sent to Grantham for a machine-gun course. On the way there, as we were travelling down the East Coast, the train was stopped midway between two stations, shortly after dark. All lights were extinguished, and we were told that a Zeppelin was approaching. I had never seen one, nor did I catch sight of one on this occasion, but presently, far out to sea, there was a great blaze in the sky, and this, we learned from the papers next day, was the L.70, commanded by Strasser, the head of the German naval air service, who with a crew of forty men was brought down by a British airman, Major Cadbury, and all on board perished in the flames.

That distant ball of fire over the North Sea was the last Zeppelin to make an attack on England. So many of them had been destroyed that the Germans were finally convinced that these engines of war were death traps, and never again did a hostile Zeppelin cross the Channel.

Of late the submarines, the aeroplane raids, and the Zeppelins had all failed, and one after another these three great weapons which the Germans had forged, broke short in their hands.

On my return from Grantham I remained at Fort Matilda. I was several times examined in Glasgow by a medical board, but my leg had not yet healed and it was not until the 12th of September that I received orders to return to France. I went to Boulogne, and from there we travelled the old route via Arras the following day, and after dark reached railhead at a place called Achiet-le-Grand. Here I was speedily reintroduced to the war, for as the train drew in, a low-flying German machine swooped down and aimed two bombs at us. They fell a few yards in front of the engine, exploding with vast noise, but beyond throwing a shower of earth on the carriage roofs, they

did no harm. We detrained, and were led to a reception camp near by, where we spent the night. At about 10 o'clock a big enemy bomber came droning overhead. The British defence against them nowadays consisted of numerous searchlights, whose beams moved across the sky in all directions. Whenever a searchlight picked up a German plane it held him until other searchlights could converge, and they followed him as long as possible, on the chance of a British machine being aloft. On this occasion we saw the bomber caught in the beams. He looked like a great silver moth as he dived and swerved to escape the glare. Then a British two-seater darted into the broad pathway of light, his machine-gun spitting as it came. In a few seconds a vivid flame broke out, and the bomber began to drop in a sheet of fire which lit the countryside for miles around. As it fell, from far and near we heard the sound of cheering from the various camps in the neighbourhood, and the thought that in that fiery trail men were being horribly burned to death did not seem to occur to anyone. One man jumped out with a parachute, and in the light of the burning machine we saw him descending, but the plane and its remaining crew of seven fell a mile away amid a shower of sparks, followed by loud explosions, as if the cargo of bombs were going off. I passed there next morning, and the charred wreckage and fragments of human beings scattered about were a ghastly sight.

At Achiet-le-Grand, whilst awaiting orders, I was able to realise the tremendous change that had come over the scene in France during the five months of my absence. Then, the British were fighting with their backs to the wall, and from April to July, under the hammer blows of the enemy they barely staved off disaster. But in August the tide had turned, and in a number of desperate battles they had recovered every inch of lost ground, and were now back in their old positions, facing the Hindenburg Line once more. In the course of the mighty attacks and counter-attacks that had swept over this war

zone, twelve hundred thousand soldiers, British, French, and German, had been killed and wounded since March 21st, and now the stage was being set for the greatest battle of them all.

The Allies had decided to force an issue, by blasting a way through the Hindenburg Line, the most formidable defensive position in the history of war; and I had come in time to see it done.

On every side there was evidence of the impending attack. The slopes and hollows and ruined villages were crammed with troops, long convoys were bringing up ammunition and supplies, and hundreds of guns were moving into position. The exact date was a secret, but otherwise the event was freely discussed, and there was an atmosphere of confidence that augured well.

On every side, too, there was evidence of the fighting that had swayed backward and forward during the past months. Abandoned war material lay in all directions, damaged field guns, broken trench mortars, and other weapons; and there was not a tree intact or a building left standing, while tens of thousands of newly erected wooden crosses told what it had cost the Germans to take, and the allied soldiers to retake, a strip of blood-drenched earth scarcely twenty miles in width.

After considerable difficulty I traced the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers to the ruins of Morchies Village, where I found them in billets five or six miles behind the front line. The Battalion had seen much hard fighting, and had suffered such cruel losses that there were few officers or men left who had been there in my time. Colonel Gordon had been transferred, and of the thirty H.Q,. and company officers whom I had known, only Bissett and Lieuts. Sleep and Gerstenberg, a young Jewish officer, were still with us. The others were dead or wounded, and Bissett now commanded the Battalion. In the ranks, pitifully few of the old hands remained, but Corporal Noble was there with his quiet smile of welcome. General Deveril was at the head of the IIIrd

Division, but General Tanner had been promoted and our 8th Brigade was now under General Fisher.

On the night of my arrival, the Battalion received orders to return to the front line on the Canal du Nord, near Hermes. I did not accompany them, for there was a message from General Fisher that I was to remain until he had seen me next day, so I spent the night in the transport camp.

German bombing planes were active. The air was filled with the hum of their engines, and at short intervals came the crash of heavy bombs and sheets of fire where they dropped their loads. Again I saw a bomber shot down in flames. He was caught by the searchlights, and dodged and twisted in vain. A British pilot dived into the beams, and, with a single spurt of his machine-gun, set the plane alight. It started to fall, enveloped in fire, and as before, from the unseen camps came the sound of thousands of men cheering. Suddenly, as we watched, there was a thunderous detonation overhead, and great flames of green and red shot out, for the bombs on the burning machine had gone off, and the plane and its crew were scattered through the air. So far as I know, not a fragment was ever picked up.

Next morning I rode over to see General Fisher at Brigade Headquarters behind Hermes. He was a sensitive highly strung man, and, as I was to find him, a splendid leader. He said he was troubled about Bissett and me. I was technically Bissett's senior, and he wanted to know whether I would serve under him. As I cared little for military precedence I told him that I would gladly serve under such a man as I knew Bissett to be, so it was settled that I should drop into my old place as second in command of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers.

I now joined them in the front line. H.Q. Staff consisted of Bissett and myself, with Captains McInnes Shaw, Keegan the Adjutant (a South African), Pud Robertson (signalling officer), and Westmoreland, the doctor,

all new men, with the exception of Bissett and me. The sector we held lay partly on the far bank of the Canal du Nord, with a few rifle posts forward of the main trench, and sixty yards beyond was the Hindenburg Line. The canal bed was dry, for it was still under construction when the war started. It ran here through a deep cutting, and in order to reach our positions on the other side, we had to clamber up and down tall scaling ladders, specially constructed for the purpose.

The day after my arrival there was a fierce battle, for the Germans had wind of the coming British offensive, and to parry the blow had planned to capture a substantial portion of our line and occupy the high ground on the Hermes-Beaumetz-Morchies ridge lying a mile or two behind us. They had therefore prepared a large-scale attack.

I had spent most of the morning and part of the afternoon examining our sector, and I suspected that trouble was brewing, for there was a continuous display of rifle grenades and gas and high-velocity shells along our parapets. Towards 3 o'clock, having completed my work, I was on my way to Morchies to make certain arrangements at the transport camp. I stopped to see Colonel Henderson of the 2nd Royal Scots, whom I had not met since the March fighting. His dug-out was close behind the front line, and we had scarcely settled ourselves below for a chat when a violent enemy bombardment came down. The air in the dug-out shook and quivered to such an extent, from the concussion of heavy shells striking above, that the candles were repeatedly extinguished, and, as almost always happens, the telephone lines to the companies were put out of action at once. From the intensity of the barrage we judged that the German infantry would soon be coming over behind it, so we climbed up the staircase, and stood in the mouth of the shaft to see what was happening. The shell-fire extended on a wide front. To the north it was flashing and smoking as far as Moeuvres, and southward it

stretched to Havrincourt Village, a total distance of more than twelve miles. We debated an attempt to reach the line, but decided to wait until the barrage lifted, and remained for some time in the doorway, watching the low-flying German aeroplanes sweeping backward and forward machine-gunning the barraged zone. We pitied the poor fellows in the dust and fumes and spouting earth of the front trench.

At last the bombardment moved to the rear, and we knew that the critical moment of the assault had come. We ran across the top to make quicker progress, for the C.T. was badly smashed. The barrage was now standing like a wall behind us, and the shrieking overhead of the thousands of shells that went to its making was tremendous. When we reached the near bank of the Canal du Nord we saw that the enemy had followed close behind their barrage. They had overrun the forward rifle pits, and had broken into our front line, where we could make out hand bombing and much running and shouting.

It was the tail end of the fight so far as our sector was concerned, for the men of the 1st R.S.F., the 2nd Royal Scots, and the 7th Shrops., had stood their ground, and, as we climbed up the ladders, the German soldiers were hurrying back across no-man's-land to their own lines. When we got into the trench we found many dead and wounded of both sides, and our men were guarding about thirty prisoners. The sector now quieted down, but to our left the battle still thundered away. The Germans had attacked on a twelve-mile front, and it was, I believe, the last time in the war that they came over in the grand manner. They remained in possession of elements of the British front line, but nowhere succeeded in penetrating to any great depth, and nowhere reached the high ground at our backs. I took from a captured officer a beautifully drawn little sketch, only two inches square, with our trenches and rifle posts accurately marked, and indicating their final objective, which

included the villages of Hermes and Demicourt. The British casualties in this battle were over six thousand men, and I suppose the Germans lost even more heavily as they were the attackers. The 1st R.S.F. had ninety-nine men killed, wounded and missing. Among them was Lieut. Gerstenberg, who was one of the three survivors since March. He had “got one to himself”, as the soldiers termed a direct hit from a shell, and he was blown to atoms. Poor boy, his pet joke used to be that he had joined a Scotch battalion as the next best thing to a Jewish unit. When I made for the R.S.F. headquarters after the business was over, I found Bissett standing outside the dug-out, roaring with laughter at his two carrier pigeons. At the start of the bombardment he had ordered the signallers to release the birds, each with a message to Brigade tied to its wing. But the pigeons had thought better of it, and instead of flying through the barrage had calmly remained on the roof, where they were pecking about for food.

Next day we buried our own and the German dead. These were mostly 78th Reserve Infantry. Afterwards General Fisher and Capt. Gosling, the Brigade-Major, came down, and I accompanied them to the slag-heap, a mound of detritus from the canal excavation, from which a view over the German line was obtainable. We took a wrong turning down one of the innumerable trenches criss-crossing in the rear, and it was a lucky mistake, for we came on a wounded lance-corporal of the R.S.F. He had been stationed in a forward rifle pit during the battle. A stick grenade had shattered both his ankles, and he had lain out there until dark. Then he started to make his way to the British front line by sitting on the ground and hitching himself backward on his hands, his broken legs trailing behind him. He had passed the front trench at a point where it had been blown in, and not recognising it, went on all night. When we found him he was far behind the line, but was still patiently heaving himself along. He was near the end of his tether from loss of blood,

but he was a brave man, for the first thing he asked on seeing us was, “Sir, did the enemy take our line?” and only after we reassured him on this point did he say: “Then for the love of God give me some water!” A bearer party was requisitioned, and he was carried off on a stretcher, his steel helmet on his chest, and a cigarette between his lips, cheerfully waving us farewell.

We went on to the slag-heap and from there to the rise above Morchies, from which the British and German fronts lay unrolled for miles on either hand. We could follow the Hindenburg Line from Moeuvres to Havrincourt, and behind it we could see their rear defensive positions — great parallel trenches linked by an intricate network of C.T.’s, and studded at short intervals with concrete emplacements. Far away, beyond the German lines, the spires of Cambrai were visible, and Bourlon Wood, a dark splotch on the horizon.

To me the system looked impregnable and General Fisher said Napoleon himself would have stood helpless before these works. He said that strategy and tactics were of no avail, and the only course was to hack a way through. As our Battalion was to take part in the hacking process, I had a good look at the forbidding lines that for over two years had defied all attempts to carry them. I remembered that in all the years of trench fighting, neither side had ever achieved a complete break-through. Verdun, the Somme, Chemin-des-Dames, Passchendaele and the March offensive, had cost millions of men, and every one of them had failed. Now another attempt was to be made, and although we knew that the alternative would be to sit down and look at the Germans for another winter, yet the thought of the lives that would be lost kept us a silent party as we stood surveying the grim scene.

General Fisher and his Brigade-Major now returned to Hermes, and I went on to our transport camp, where I spent the next few days attending to our many requirements for the approaching battle. There were a hundred and one

things to see to. We had air photographs and maps of the German line, and we brought the men out in batches from the front trenches to the camp, and there taught them the lie of every point, and post, and pillbox facing us across the way. We also made arrangements about ammunition, Mills grenades, Lewis guns, flares and signals, the removal of the wounded, and a host of other matters.

All through this time the enemy kept plugging away at the front line, and at the back areas, with light and heavy guns. Our Battalion suffered no casualties, but much damage was done elsewhere, for so numerous were the camps, that it was hardly possible for a bomb or shell to drop without falling on troops or batteries or horse lines. This continued shell-fire was unpleasant, but it in no way interfered with the concentration that was being rapidly pushed forward, and the air throbbed with preparations for the great assault.

In addition to bombs, the German aeroplanes dropped leaflets intended to discourage the fighting men. These came fluttering down on us in shoals, each containing the same clumsy appeal:

"British Soldiers!

Do you know what's going on at home whilst you're fighting for your country? You probably don't know anything, and therefore we'll give you a little piece of information by reprinting a letter that was found a few days ago.

"The letter is not very grammatical, but what does that matter? It's plain enough and she's a good girl who wrote it. She has brains all right and a good heart for the poor disabled soldier. Now just read the letter:

'London E. 28-8-1918.

'I have been busy trying to bring our women out on strike, well I have succeeded in bring out 4,000. The reason why I am trying to do this is because us women are working side by side with the men but we are getting

12s. 6d. less a week.'

"Discharged soldiers are refused work because — Women do it cheaper!

"Well, what do you think of that? They refuse to give work to your discharged pals for the beautiful reason that

Women do it cheaper.

They let you die for the 'Principles of Democracy' and at home they're sweating your womenfolk because

Women do it cheaper.

At any rate now you know what

YOU

may expect if you are lucky enough to return to Blighty alive. You will get the benevolent reply:

Thanks my good man,

Women do it cheaper.

The employers will rub the palms of their hands, they don't need you any more, the longer the list of casualties the better their prospects for

Women do it cheaper."

This document showed an utter misunderstanding of the position in England, and the men roared with laughter at its string of absurdities. The British air propaganda was more effective. I picked up some of their leaflets, that the wind carried back from over the German lines. There was one telling statement headed "Arithmetik", with parallel columns giving the weekly decrease of the German Army through battle casualties, and the weekly increase in the allied armies through the arrival of American troops in France. Another leaflet contained an account of all German submarines that had been destroyed, with the names of their commanders and crews, and I picked up a circular which, to the beleaguered German people, must have sounded even more deadly, for it contained a price-list of meat and sausages and other

foodstuffs to be had in any shop in England, and compared this with the lack of provisions on the other side. It wound up with the gibe that so far the net result of the submarine campaign had been to create a temporary shortage of marmalade.

While we were busy training parties of our men behind the line, I saw the Guards Brigade retake Moeuvres, from which they had been ousted during the recent attack. The Guards advanced behind a barrage a hundred yards deep, and through the smoke we saw the men enter the village. Within fifteen minutes from the start success flares went up, and the place was won. It was here that the Guards, on recovering the lost ground, came on a corporal and eight men of the Liverpools, among the ruins, where they had been holding out ever since the line was overrun days before.

I was sitting one afternoon on a fallen poplar above Demi-court, gazing once more at the Hindenburg Line through my glasses, when I saw a British two-seater taking photographs above Flesquières. A single-seater German plane came from the direction of Bourlon Wood straight for the slower flying British craft, which it quickly overhauled. A running fight ensued, and the machines were at times so close together, that they seemed in danger of ramming one another. Then the dreaded point of light sprang up behind the engine of the British plane, and in a second or two the fire had run in a thin streak to the tail. The pilot banked to keep the flames from his observer and himself, and once the fire was almost extinguished, for I could see the man in the rear cockpit leaning back over the edge of his seat, apparently trying to beat out the last embers with his tunic or a cloth. But just when I was hoping that they were safe, the entire plane burst into flames and crashed to earth some distance away, amid a shower of sparks. The victorious German dived steeply to make sure that his prey was down, and then sped off towards Cambrai, a something of exultation in his flight. I had the recollection of that

German bomber and its crew too freshly in mind to care to inspect the wreckage, but I was told that the pilot and his companion were unrecognisably burned to death.

Another form of air activity was the shooting-down of observation balloons. These “blimps” were strung out behind both fronts, and I must have seen nearly a score of them set alight on the British, and perhaps a dozen on the German side, during the few days I was in camp. As soon as the fabric was ablaze, the “balloonatics” as the observers were called, jumped for it and came swaying down to earth with their parachutes, always landing safely, as far as I could see.

On September 25th a batch of eight officers and a draft of two hundred men arrived from Scotland for the Regiment. Among them were Capt. Freeman and young Lieut. Bailey, both of whom I had met at Fort Matilda. I had to return to the front line after dark, so I took the new arrivals with me.

As we crossed the Cambrai Road, a German raider dropped its load of bombs near a searchlight. They went off with a tremendous noise and high flames, and young Bailey, who had not previously been in France, amused us by enquiring what all those fireworks were about.

Beyond Doignies, the Germans were shelling every road, for they probably knew that there was heavy traffic behind the front line, and, indeed, it was clear to us as we went that matters were coming to a head. We found the highways crowded with columns of men and vehicles, and guns moving up, and it was with difficulty that we threaded our way. Shells repeatedly fell on the road we were travelling, and, from what I could make out in the dark, they did considerable damage. There were traffic police every two or three hundred yards, and in spite of the firing there was little confusion. Whenever a horse or a limber was struck, willing hands quickly shifted the obstacle from the road, and the bearer parties that were posted at intervals ran up to

carry away the wounded.

As we were going through a sunken length, a shell killed several gunners, and their frightened team bolted right into us. A wheel crushed one of our men against the bank, and had it not been for his steel helmet, he would have been killed. The rest of us got off with minor bruises. When we reached the front line, I reported to H.Q. dug-out, and introduced the new officers to Bissett, who speedily assigned them and the accompanying draft of men to such platoons as needed them. He was especially pleased with Freeman. He said Freeman would make good, for he had dropped down the stairs with a jaunty air of "Here's Freeman, where the hell are the Huns?" — so he had sent him to the post of honour at the advanced rifle pits. The next time I saw Freeman he lay on his face with a bullet through his heart.

At eleven o'clock that night, Capt. Gosling, the Brigade-Major, arrived. He brought with him the long-expected news that the Hindenburg Line was to be attacked on a fourteen-mile front at 5.20 a.m. on the morning after next (27th September).

Bissett called a C.O.'s conference, and before long all officers that could be spared from duty came trooping down the stairway of the dug-out. The meeting remains in my mind as a very solemn occasion. We sat round a rough deal table, and by the flickering light of candles stuck against the walls, Capt. Gosling went over the operation order, explaining with the help of trench maps the portion of the enemy front that was to be carried by our Battalion. I watched the faces of the young officers as they listened in silence to instructions that, humanly speaking, meant death to many of them.

After Capt. Gosling had left, they remained quietly discussing the dispositions to be made. While we were at this, a runner brought a despatch from Divisional H.Q. ordering the second in command (myself) and one officer from each company to be held in reserve during the attack, as a

nucleus for reconstituting the Battalion in case of heavy losses. The fact that the Divisional Commander envisaged such a contingency added to the gravity that had fallen upon us, and one could not but think wistfully of these fine young men about to face death.

There was shell-fire during the night, in the course of which we sustained casualties, and poor Bailey was smashed within a few hours of his first appearance in the front line.

Next morning the five of us, who were to remain out of the battle, walked back to our transport camp at Morchies. I procured a horse, and rode over to see General Fisher. He insisted on my obeying orders, but agreed to my request that I be allowed to take up some coign of vantage from which to witness the attack.

I placed a liberal interpretation upon his consent. I returned to camp, and after midnight set off on foot to the front line. It was comparatively quiet, save for the usual bomb-dropping, and once again there was a hum of activity on the roads, with infantry and tanks and guns moving up in the dark. When I got into the front line, every man of the R.S.F. was on the firestep, from which they were to go over the top at dawn. I had no intention of breaking the letter of my instructions to remain in reserve, but I considered that the best spot for making use of the General's permission was from our parapet.

The battle, we knew, was to be one of the biggest and most decisive of the war. Its outstanding feature was the strictly limited objective allotted to each attacking unit. Every battalion was given a definite enemy trench sector, C.T. or redoubt which it was to capture, and beyond which it was not to go. As soon as each particular goal had been attained, other battalions from the rear were to leapfrog through to the next line of resistance, and, in this manner, the battle was to be pressed home, until the final limit set for the day had been reached.

The 1st R.S.F. had to capture what was shown on the maps as Whitehall and Ryder sections of the Hindenburg Line, situated directly opposite us across no-man's-land, so our share represented only an advance of sixty to eighty yards, on a front of three hundred yards.

The 7th Shrops. were then to pass through us to attack the next trench, after which the 2nd Royal Scots in turn would pass through them to reach a trench behind that again, which would carry our 8th Brigade some eight hundred yards forward. From there, other brigades held in readiness, were to continue the thrust, until the Hindenburg Line was slashed in two.

It was an ambitious programme, but it was to be amply justified by the result.

However limited the advance of the Scots Fusiliers looked on the map, it was a most important one, for on them fell the task of rushing the front trench of the great fortressed line, which was bound to be defended with more vigour than the subsequent positions, and on their success depended that of the further attacks on the rear network of the enemy system.

I speak only of our own immediate task that covered little more than three hundred yards of the German front, but all along the fourteen miles on which the offensive was to be launched similar measures were ready, whereby the leading battalions were to break into the first trench, followed by successive waves of other assaulting troops coming on behind. The battle plan was on so huge a scale that the fortunes of a single battalion should be multiplied nearly six hundred times to obtain an adequate conception of its entirety.

It was 3 a.m. by now. The men sat talking in undertones along the firestep, their bayoneted rifles in their hands, and some lay asleep on the duckboards, while Bissett and Capts. Shaw and Keegan went up and down, consulting with the company officers, and making last-minute adjustments.

At 4 o'clock the enemy began to trenchmortar us heavily, and a few men

were wounded. Then a stillness fell over the line. A million men were facing each other on this battlefront but there was scarcely a sound, save for a rare shot loosed by some nervous sentry, and the tension became almost unendurable.

As zero hour approached, whispered orders were passed, and the men stood to, and then, punctually at 5.20, the British barrage came down upon the German line with one stupendous roar.

During the preliminary ten minutes the Fusiliers stood ready to vault the sandbags at the given word, and along the whole fourteen miles stood thousands upon thousands of other men ready to leap upon the enemy.

At zero plus ten minutes (5.30 a.m.) the barrage moved forward, and the moment had come. Bissett dropped his arm as a signal, and the men swarmed over the parapet straight for the German line.

Almost at once the German S.O.S. barrage came down upon them, as they scrambled and stumbled over the wires and screwstakes and shell craters that obstructed every yard of the way. I have a confused memory of shells spurting and flashing, of men going down in great numbers, and almost before there was time to think, I saw the German soldiers rise from behind their breastworks to meet the attackers, and then the Scots Fusiliers were clubbing and bayoneting among them.

The enemy gunners immediately drew in their fire to protect their next line of defence, and seeing that our men were on their objective, I rushed quickly across no-man’s-land and dropped down into the great Hindenburg Trench. Flushed with victory, the men were rounding up prisoners and shouting down the dug-out staircases for others to come up, a process which they expedited in places by flinging Mills grenades into the shaft openings.

The trench was six feet wide by eight feet deep. Every few yards along the parapet stood a machine-gun, and there were many trench mortars and anti-

tank rifles.

The enemy soldiers had done their duty manfully, for on the floor of the trench their dead and wounded lay thick, and beside almost every machine-gun lay its crew, smitten down by the hurricane of the barrage.

By this time the British guns had lifted their range on to the next enemy trench, four hundred yards up the slope, and already the 7th Shrops. were coming through us, and deploying beyond. There was no excitement or hurry. They went forward at a walk behind the barrage, their rifles aslant, and we watched them reach and enter the area of the German counter-barrage. Many fell, but the rest went steadily on, almost hidden in the smoke and dust of the shell-fire. The German S.O.S. drew still further back, and, when the air cleared, we saw the Shrops. soldiers in possession of the next trench, and our men rose and cheered them.

Then the 2nd Royal Scots came past, and behind them other reserve battalions, streaming forward to further attacks, while to right and left the battle thundered on its way It was a marvellous spectacle, but now that our Battalion had accomplished its task, and the battle was surging over the rise in front of us, we turned to count the cost. Bissett and I walked back across the area over which the R.S.F. had advanced. The wounded were being carried away, but, as was the custom, the dead, being past succour, were left for future transport.

We were sad to find how many of our men had fallen, for we counted over a hundred officers and men lying dead in the small space between London Support and Whitehall. The poor fellows, alive a few minutes before, now lay in all manner of attitudes, some still hugging their rifles, others horribly torn by shells, and others again in shell craters, as if they had crawled there to die.

At one place we came on a heap of flesh and clothing so mangled that, had it not been for two fieldbooted legs protruding from the awful mess, we could

hardly have sworn that what lay here had been a human being. At first we could not determine whose remains they were, but seeing the rim of a steel hat beneath, I did some grisly work with a stick and got the helmet clear. I found the name of one of our young officers inside it. Bissett, at that moment, must have felt someone walking over his grave, for he shivered and said: “My God, I’m getting sick of this awful war”; and for the first time since I had known him, he fell silent and moody.

In the meanwhile, the main battle raged unabated. Overhead wheeled squadrons of aeroplanes, and a steady flow of infantry battalions was hurrying past us to the further attacks beyond the long rise, from which came the sound of heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, and the bursting of many shells.

To our right, towards Flesquières, a dozen or more tanks were going into action. As we looked, one of them stopped and burst into flames, and one stood still with a rent in its side, but the others went on until we lost them in the curtain of smoke that hung over the village.

As Bissett and I were returning to our men holding the captured trench, British batteries from the rear began to come by, to take up fresh positions nearer the enemy. That they were able to cross the Canal du Nord so soon was due to the careful manner in which the battle had been thought out beforehand. A bridge had been built in sections, and the moment the German barrage lifted that morning, the R.E.’s were seen coming down from Hermes with the bridge-lengths on wagons, and in a short time they had erected a trestle-way from bank to bank, over which guns and ammunition limbers and ambulances were now pouring on to ground which scarcely an hour before was held by the enemy.

By 8 o’clock practically every British battery had moved up, and along the lip of the Hindenburg Trench the guns stood in unbroken line, firing as fast as

they could load. Being so near to us, the roar of all these pieces was magnificent. General Fisher stood eagerly watching the guns belching forth, and he turned to us and cried: “Men, do you remember Lloyd George’s speech: ‘We will put the guns wheel to wheel, and pound home the lessons of democracy’?” He said we were privileged in being there that day, and indeed we were witnessing a great event, for the mighty Hindenburg Line was going at last.

Shortly afterwards an artillery officer, with whom I had fallen into conversation while watching his battery in action, invited me to breakfast, and we feasted on bacon and eggs, cooked on a primus stove by his servant, within a few yards of where his guns were banging away.

As we sat down to our meal, we saw a German aeroplane dart into a flight of British observers, and in a moment one of them began to fall in flames. The rear occupant stood up, and spreading wide his arms deliberately leaped into the void. I could see him whirling round and round as he gathered momentum, and I stood thinking of the poor man’s agony, but my host merely remarked, “Hullo, there’s a little man jumped out,” and stolidly continued his breakfast. The conditions were ideal for air fighting as there was not a cloud in the sky, and a bright sun shone all day.

The air was alive with machines, and the casualties on both sides were heavy, for, as the morning wore on, I repeatedly saw planes shot down, and long before evening the number of wrecked machines scattered about was quite a feature of the landscape.

I now had time to look around. The R.S.F. had taken over three hundred prisoners, and these were still standing about in batches, shaken and miserable, as well they might be after the terrible bombardment they had suffered. They belonged to the 97th Hanoverian Regiment, and strangely enough each man had the word “Gibraltar” embroidered on his left sleeve.

When I asked one of their officers the meaning of this, he said with a grin that it was a British battle honour conferred on their regiment for having assisted the English at the siege of Gibraltar in 1705.

By now many walking wounded were coming back from the forward battle line, and they told us things were going well. Large numbers of prisoners were coming back too, some under guard, others simply walking to the rear of their own accord, asking their way to the “Englische Gefangenlager”.

General Fisher had told us before he went that Bulgaria had just surrendered, and when I told a squad of captured officers this, one of them said “Na! wenn dass so ist, ist’s alles fertig,” and I thought they seemed relieved at the prospect of an early peace.

Towards noon, Glossop, the same man who had so imperturbably made breakfast and had held me to ransom during the March battle, once more conjured up refreshments. He fetched table and chairs from a German dug-out, and saying it was a pity to miss the sunshine, served an excellent lunch in the open. In spite of the glorious weather it was a silent meal. Behind us the ground was strewn with our fallen, and along the parapet of the captured trench lay many German dead, so we sat with averted eyes. Presently Shaw drew our attention to the body of a dead man lying face downward close by. Bissett got up to see, and turned over the body. It was Captain Freeman, who two nights before had so buoyantly dropped down the stairs. He was shot through the heart.

Later on, hearing from wounded men coming back that the British advance was being held up before Graincourt, a village this side of Cambrai, I decided to go forward to see what was happening, for nominally I was off duty, and therefore a free agent.

First I climbed the slope across which the Shrops. and the Royal Scots had attacked. They too had paid a heavy price, for numbers of their dead, and

many dead German soldiers, lay stacked along the parapets of the trenches, from which they had been lifted. After a short halt to exchange views with Col. Henderson, I bore away towards Flesquières by way of the numerous rear trenches of the Hindenburg system. These had all been taken by the successive assaulting columns and each trench was occupied by the men who had taken it. Everywhere lay hundreds of khaki-clad and field-grey dead, and everywhere improvised dressing-stations were dealing with the wounded.

When I reached what was left of Flesquières, the German gunners began to shell it so heavily that I made haste to get away to a rise, accompanied by a dozen soldiers who had been sheltering in the ruins.

From here the battle situation as far as Bourlon Wood stretched clear before our eyes. I could see the British firing line half a mile away, and German infantry four hundred yards beyond. Both sides were in open country, and for the first time in four years of war they faced each other from behind such natural cover as they could turn to account, without trenches or entanglements between.

The English were slowly advancing, and on the crest of a long grassy slope were German soldiers and machine-gun crews. The British shell-fire was no longer a barrage, but it was not negligible, and the shrapnel was taking heavy toll from among the exposed enemy troops on the rise. About four miles back stood Cambrai. Through my glasses I could even see a group of German officers standing on the round tower of the brewery, and tall pillars of smoke were rising from among the houses, as though the city was being given to the flames. On the outskirts of Cambrai were black masses of German infantry in reserve, while their thinly held line was fighting a desperate rearguard action, chiefly with machine-guns.

Away to the left was the real trouble, for there the British advance was hung up before the village of Graincourt. It was being stubbornly defended,

and the German garrison was inflicting heavy punishment on the British troops, whose dead lay thick before the ruins. Strong reinforcements of the Guards Brigade, however, were coming up, and I watched them attack afresh. They were well handled. The fire of several batteries was directed on the village, and the men went forward in artillery formation, until they had established a fire line, when they rose to their feet and charged. Many fell, but the attack was pushed home, and soon the men disappeared among the wrecked houses, after which the enemy machine-guns fell silent, and batches of prisoners were marched out.

Graincourt being captured, I went to the right. On my way I passed the enemy gun positions, from which they had fired their barrage that morning, and I counted more than fifty abandoned field pieces standing in their emplacements. I went no nearer the firing line. The British had by now bitten three miles into the German defensive system since dawn, and they had reached the final objective of the battle plan at practically every point. Owing to the rapid advance, the gunfire was thinning, and ahead of me there was point-blank fighting between German soldiers, who were flinging stick grenades from shell craters, and isolated parties of British who were volleying at them from behind trees.

Great numbers of wounded were being carried back, and, as rifle and machine-gun bullets were whistling too freely, I took a last look at Cambrai, now fiercely burning, and at Bourlon Wood, in the hands of the British at last, and started back in the falling dusk, passing on my way more dead men of both sides than I had yet seen in the war.

On this day the British took ten thousand prisoners and two hundred guns. On a fourteen-mile front, at a cost of eighty thousand men, they had blasted their way through the Hindenburg Line into the open country beyond, and from then onward the evil of the old trench warfare was a thing of the past,

and a new phase had begun.

Chapter XIII — Open Warfare in France

When I returned to where I had left our men in the captured Hindenburg Trench, a surprise awaited me. General Fisher was sitting his horse beside the parapet. He told me that the 7th Shrops. had lost their Colonel, and I was to take command of the Battalion.

I was sorry to leave the Scots Fusiliers after all we had gone through together, but in any case, we were brigaded together, so I was still in the same family circle. Indeed, all I needed to do, in order to transfer to my new command, was to shoulder my haversack and walk across to the trench which the Shrops. were occupying two hundred yards away. I did this at once, Bissett accompanying me to see me settled in.

Next morning was quiet. I went round to make acquaintance with the companies, and the men lounged about the battlefield watching the dead being carried away for burial.

Later on Bissett visited my quarters, and asked me to go through the German papers which I had collected in the dug-outs the day before, so I sorted them out. The most interesting document was a printed circular signed by Von Hindenburg, in which he warned the German soldiers against British propaganda. He said British airmen were dropping not only bombs that killed the body, but poisoned literature that killed the soul, and we gathered from letters from wives and relatives to the men at the front that a wave of pessimism was sweeping over the German people. This was borne out by a confidential report included among the papers I had found:

"From Supreme Command (Oberst Heeresleitung).

"To Military Governor of Belgium.

"The officer commanding Namur area reports on 24-9-1918 that troops on leave are spreading alarmist rumours as to recent events at the front (Seitens der von der Front zuruck-kehrende Truppen die letzten Vorgange an der Front in den dustersten Farben geschildert werden).

"In order not to exercise an adverse influence on the situation, all armies are requested to take steps to counteract this spirit among the troops.

"Copies to Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army, to 17th Army and to 20th and 40th Infantry Divisions."

I also came on a curiously tactless instruction by Von Below, Oberbefehls-haber der Infanterie, which read:

"During the cremation of corpses brought from the front line it has several times happened of late that cartridges left in the pockets of the dead have exploded, whereby the furnaces were damaged and in one instance a stoker was nearly wounded (Eine der Heizers ist beinahe verletzt worden). In future all combustible matter must be removed from the clothing of the dead."

Von Below seemed more concerned about his furnaces than about the soldiers in them, and when I translated this to Bissett, he said he would like to know what the German fighting men thought of his solicitude for the "nearly wounded" stoker.

In the meanwhile the first battle was over. Word came that the Germans were hurrying entire Army Corps to the defence of Cambrai, and that the British were bringing up fresh troops in order to continue the attack. That same afternoon (September 28th) I received orders to march my Battalion to a ridge lying north of Marcoing, ready to go into action if necessary at daybreak.

We went by Flesquières and Ribécourt across the complicated network of the trenches that had been the Hindenburg Line, past burial parties laying the

fallen soldiers to rest, and past the dozens of hospital camps that had sprung up. On the way, we saw a German aeroplane swoop down upon a British two-seater. As we watched, the British machine burst into flames. It fell in a fiery trail, striking the earth close to the village of Masnières behind the German lines, where we found it next day.

We were now entering another chapter of the war, for dusk found us in open country, and we were faced with the novelty of having to bivouac on a bare hillside without trench or shelter. The men were new to this kind of thing. They were so accustomed to the routine of stationary warfare, with the enemy's position known to a yard, and with their every act regulated for them, that they were at a loss, and stood about helplessly.

I started all hands to break out timber baulks from some old gun pits that we found, and soon had everyone cheerfully sitting around blazing log fires, cooking their suppers. My attempt to teach the men how to make themselves comfortable was well rewarded, for in going the rounds after dark I heard a voice say: "Lads, I would like to go big-game hunting in Africa with our new C.O."

As for the enemy, I had looked over the ground in front of us while it was light. Their troops lay two miles away along the slopes and woods from Cambrai southwards, and it was clear that they intended to fight.

British forces had been moving up all the afternoon, and behind us the guns were being wheeled into position for the next battle.

At 10 o'clock that night a runner brought a message to say that a C.O.'s conference would be held at my camp by General Fisher, and after a while he and Bissett and Henderson arrived.

We sat around my fire and the General gave us our instructions. There was to be an attack on the Marcoing-Rumilly-Masnières line at daybreak by other troops. We were to hold our three battalions ready to take part when so

ordered, but until we heard from him we were to stand fast.

After the conference was over and the others had gone, Bissett and I sat talking before the fire for a long time, and when he rose to go I walked a little distance with him before saying good night. When next we met, it was to see him struck down within a few yards of me.

I was up early to watch the first stage of the attack. We were able to look on in comfort, as our participation depended on what progress was made. As soon as it grew light, the British guns opened fire on the German line between Marcoing and Rumilly. The bombardment was somewhat ragged owing to the hurried manner in which barrages had to be improvised, since the vanished days of trench war of the day before yesterday. We could not follow what was happening at Marcoing, for the village lay in a hollow and all we saw was columns of smoke and brick-dust shooting upwards from the German shells, which showed that the British had entered it, and that the place was now suffering a counter bombardment. But we had a perfect view of the troops going up the slope to attack Rumilly, for we were on high ground, and looked straight down on the scene. The men advanced steadily, though a good many shorts from the British guns dropped among them, and the Germans broke salvos of shrapnel over their heads all the way.

Machine-guns and rifles were also crackling, and many fell, but the rest went on, and were soon in Rumilly with their flanks sweeping beyond the village. We saw the German defenders running wildly to the rear. Then dense bodies of German infantry came pouring from the Faubourg de Paris, a suburb of Cambrai, and from Niergnies. They rolled back the British line and re-entered Rumilly, whence came the sound of heavy rifle-fire and hand bombing, and of the soldiers who had captured it in the first instance very few escaped. Even the motor ambulances that had followed in the wake of the British attack were captured by the enemy. We saw the German soldiers

running out of the village to surround the vehicles. They were recovered next day, still standing at the same spot, with their tyres slashed, but otherwise intact.

The operations were by no means confined to Rumilly and Marcoing, and it was in reality the first day of the extended battle for Cambrai, which was only to fall into the hands of the British after a week's hard fighting.

As we watched, we saw more troops thrown into the fight, and the British gunfire increased. Successive waves of infantry went forward once more, and, for the third time that morning, Rumilly changed hands. Towards 10 o'clock we heard that Marcoing, after repeated counter-attacks, was now firmly held by the New Zealanders, and that the 9th Brigade of our IIIrd Division was said to be in Masnières, two miles east of Marcoing.

During all this time, we had remained inactive. We of the Shrops. were on the hill above Marcoing; Bissett, with the R.S.F., lay in a wood somewhere behind us, and the 2nd Royal Scots were to our left. But at midday a message came that I was to report to General Fisher with half a dozen runners, so I collected a party, and, following the guide, found the General at the quarry outside Marcoing. Fierce fighting had taken place here during the morning, and there were many British and German dead, while a large number of wounded were being attended to in the quarry. General Fisher told me that the battle was fluctuating, and that north of us the British attack had been checked, owing to the immense number of machine-guns which the Germans had brought into play. In our area, Marcoing was taken, and, he believed, Masnières too, but the situation was so obscure that my Battalion was to march thither at once, to reinforce the 9th Brigade who were in difficulties. I was to go ahead with my runners to ascertain the position, and he would send back instructions to Major Robinson, my second in command, to follow on with the men. We started at once, and, making our way across an area littered

with dead, entered Marcoing. It was being shelled with 8-inch howitzers, and roofs and walls were flying in every direction. In the lee of some of the buildings crouched the New Zealanders who were holding the village, and at a street crossing stood a traffic control, directing wounded and stragglers as calmly as a policeman on duty in London.

Hurriedly passing through, we emerged on an open plain, and skirting Marcoing Copse, saw Masnières in the distance. We met a few wounded men, but as usual they could give no coherent account of the situation. Next, we were brought up by the canal that ran between us and Masnières. All along the banks great columns of earth were shooting up, and high fountains of water spurted in the air, as the German shells fell in the canal. My instructions were to find out what the position was in Masnières, so the runners and I threaded our way among the pollards that stood along the bank, until we came to a spot where lay two half-submerged Rotterdam barges. By using these waterlogged craft, and by pushing out some loose planks towards the wreck of an old bridge, a portion of which still jutted into midstream, we managed to cross to the other side. We now followed the towpath until we reached a lock bridge from which we could see up the main street of Masnières. The place seemed deserted, but as I was preparing to enter, we came under rifle-fire from a party of Germans holding a big sugar factory, which showed above the other houses.

There was no sign of British troops, and except for the snipers in the factory, our small party seemed to have the neighbourhood to itself. After being accustomed to a war zone crowded with men it was strange to find ourselves in a sort of vacuum, and the isolation became oppressive, so with a few volleys at the building in which the Germans were posted, we moved on.

The lock bridge was still intact, and as it was the only passage left by which the Battalion could cross the canal, when it arrived, I sent a runner back with

a message to Major Robinson, asking him to bring the men to the bridge, and warning him that the enemy was still in the village. Then we moved along the bank, hoping that the bridge would still be there when our men came, although the German gunners were doing their best to destroy it. I went in the direction of Crèvecœur as far as the *estaminet* at the next lock, and there I found a few wounded men belonging to the King's Own. They said the King's Own and the Gordons had crossed the canal two hours before, but, after suffering heavy casualties, were hung up just over the rise. Following a trail of dead men we topped the slope, and immediately came under heavy fire from a sunken road six hundred yards ahead, which I could see was strongly held. No one was hit, and to our surprise we found before us a long trench length, to which we ran for shelter. Jumping into it we found the King's Own and the Gordons in occupation. The trench we were in was miscalled "Mon Plaisir", and it had been constructed by the Germans as a reserve position during the tank battle the year before. It came in very useful now, for the shell-fire was increasing, and we could see swarms of German infantry along the Crèvecœur — les Épines sunken road. They had retaken Rumilly Village lying close by, and towards Cambrai the country was black with their troops.

I discussed matters with the two Colonels, both of whom were in very bad tempers owing to their heavy losses. While we were at it, a patrol came in to say that Masnières was evacuated, the small garrison in the sugar factory having doubled up the road to rejoin their main body at Rumilly. It was thereupon arranged between us that, when my Battalion arrived, I would occupy Masnières, so I took my runners back to the lock bridge. We came under lively fire as we hurried over the rise behind Mon Plaisir, but again we had no one hit. When we reached the bridge I found it unhealthier than ever, for the Germans seemed determined to smash it, so the runners and I

scrambled down the bank to the level of the water, where we squatted on some wreckage that had accumulated against the concrete piers. This gave us shelter from the heavy shells bursting around, and at the same time enabled us to keep a look-out for the head of our Battalion, when it should appear on the opposite side. We spent the next hour here watching the columns of water shoot up whenever a shell hit the canal, and praying that the bridge would hold.

As the Germans had evacuated Masnières, they started to smash the place, and we heard tremendous concussions in the village, and along the towpath over our heads. Crouching below the canal bank, we got an occasional whiff of gas swirling over the rampart, but as yet it was not heavy enough to inconvenience us, for most of it was being thrown into the streets, and there we got the full benefit of it later on.

After a long wait, I saw Major Robinson and Capt. Hetherington, the Adjutant, come running up the Rue Vertes, so I signalled to them to cross the bridge to our side of the canal. The head of the Battalion arrived on the opposite bank soon after, and we began to get the men across, a few at a time. The German gunners were still trying to hit the bridge, and unfortunately, as the last section of “A” Company were coming over, a shell burst on the concrete ramp on our side of the canal, and killed four men on the bridge. The rest of the Battalion crossed safely, and as Masnières was being heavily shelled, I had the men ranged under such cover as was to be found at the entrance of the main street, while Robinson, Hetherington and I entered the village to investigate.

Shells were plunging around, and the crash of their deafening explosions reverberated in the narrow streets, while shell splinters, bricks, and tiles were flying about. At the same time the Germans were firing phosgene gas, so we had to grope our way through the dust-laden atmosphere in our box

respirators, a difficult process, as everyone knows who has tried it.

However, we succeeded in laying out a suitable position, and began getting the men into line. The nearest German soldiers were only four hundred yards away behind a barricade across the Rumilly Road, but I had little fear of them, as they were on the defensive, and would be unlikely to attack us. Our trouble was the shell-fire and the gas. To avoid unnecessary casualties, I ordered the company commanders to keep the men in cellars, and to post a sentry at each stairway, to see that they did not go wandering about, as they will do in a new village. The cellars were good protection, and not a man was injured by the bombardment, but the gas hung so heavily that there was the inevitable quota of loss, for it is almost impossible to wear a respirator continuously.

Robinson and I took up Battalion Headquarters in a double-storeyed cellar below a sort of chapel. We put the signallers in the top cellar, and the rest of us occupied the basement. Here our Medical Officer, Dr. Hubbard, joined us. He was an American, for owing to the shortage of British doctors through war losses, many battalions were provided with doctors loaned us from the American armies. Hubbard was an amusing witty fellow, but on this occasion he dropped down into the cellar deathly pale, and almost immediately he fell into a coma. He had been gassed while attending to some men who had been wounded beside the canal, for he had removed his mask the better to see what he was doing. He was carried away on a stretcher, still unconscious, but I never heard whether he recovered, for nowadays, in the war of movement, when a man was sent to the rear one generally lost sight of him for good.

Having made the needful dispositions to hold the village, I returned by a roundabout way to Mon Plaisir Trench, to see how the King’s Own and the Gordons were getting on. In front of them the Crèvecœur sunken road was still strongly held by the enemy, and we could see many of their troops in and

about Rumilly less than a mile away. As we did not know what was happening along the rest of the front, we arranged to hold our positions till further orders, and I took a short cut back to Masnières. Along the footpath I came on the remains of the British aeroplane that we had seen falling in flames the previous afternoon. Two airmen lay dead in the wreckage, horribly charred. From what I could see of their mummified faces, they were both mere boys. I found a silver identity disc bearing the name “Lt. Jacques, R.S.F.” and later I had the bodies interred with the propeller blade for a tombstone.

I reached my own headquarters by dusk, to find that the church had been shot away during my absence, but the chapel over our cellar was still more or less intact. Not long after I got below there was a thunderous detonation overhead, and the signallers and runners rushed down into the lower cellar, saying that a shell had come through the roof of the top storey. The force of the explosion had extinguished all our lights, and the clatter of the men stumbling down among us in the dark caused some confusion, until we lit up once more. At 9 o’clock that night I received a message from Brigade Headquarters to say that the King’s Own and the Gordons had been withdrawn from Mon Plaisir owing to heavy losses earlier in the day, but that Bissett with his Scots Fusiliers were there, together with a battalion of New Zealanders.

Furthermore, the Scots Fusiliers, the Shrops., and the New Zealanders were to make an immediate attack on the Crèvecœur sunken road, in order to drive the Germans out of it. Bissett was to advance on les Épines, I was to take the sunken road from les Épines to about halfway to Crevecoeur, and the New Zealanders were to capture the rest of it.

All this was to be carried out in the dark, and the directions we had received left a good deal to the imagination, but I realised that the day of set battle

plans was over, so I sent copies of the instructions by runner to Bissett and the New Zealand Colonel, and by the same means we arranged to start off at 10 o'clock for our respective destinations.

It was an inky night as the men silently fell in on the outskirts of the village, but I knew my direction from having seen the ground that afternoon, when I had also noticed how strongly the sunken road was held by the enemy.

At 10 o'clock we moved forward, slowly groping our way over the level plain that separated us from the road.

Soon furious fire broke out on my left against Bissett's men, and then came the clatter and flash of rifle and machine-gun fire, to show that the New Zealanders were likewise engaged. As it happened, the Germans were in the act of withdrawing from the sunken road, and when we of the Shrops. reached the edge of the bank, and leaped down into it, we found our portion deserted. In a short while runners from both Bissett and the New Zealanders came to say that they too were on their objectives, and we had successfully carried out our instructions with a loss of under fifty men between three battalions.

The signallers had linked up Masnières by telephone with Brigade Headquarters during the evening, so I was soon able to get word back to General Fisher. He sent orders that we were to hold the road, but that I personally was to return to the village, so as to be in direct touch with him. I left Major Robinson in charge, with instructions to report to me in our cellar below the chapel in the morning, and walked back with my runners. Close to Masnières we made out some dim figures marching along, and challenging them, found sixteen German soldiers under a Vize-Feldwebel, in charge of young Lieut. Orchardson of the Shrops. He had come on them unexpectedly, and they had handed over their rifles without demur. The Feldwebel (sergeant) told me they were a ration party making for Rumilly, but had lost

their way in the dark. Their presence here showed how fluid the front line had become, and how sudden had been the transition by which, in three days, we had passed from trench warfare, with its fixed battle front and its well-defined barricades and parapets, to a state wherein troops on both sides went wandering about in the open not knowing where their line ran. I sent the prisoners to Brigade Headquarters at Marcoing, and spent the night in our cellar.

Towards daylight General Fisher rang up. He said I was to find Bissett, and we were to make a joint reconnaissance of the position between les Épines and Crèvecœur. It would depend on our report whether the Divisional Commander, General Deveril, would order our two battalions and the New Zealanders to attack Serinvillers and la Targette, villages lying out on the plain beyond the sunken road.

Bissett had his headquarters under the old German Kommandantur, and, on receipt of my message, he came across with Capt. Shaw and his runners. I had not seen him since the night of the C.O.'s conference at my camp above Marcoing, and we hastily completed our arrangements. He was his old cheerful self, joking and chaffing, while we drank a hurried cup of tea down below. Then we collected our runners, and started in the dim light of dawn for the sunken road. Halfway across we met Major Robinson coming back. He told us things were getting pretty bad in front, for the enemy was shelling the road heavily, as indeed we could see for ourselves. I told him to continue to Masnières, to keep in touch with Brigade during my absence. As he went off he said: "Sir, I don't envy you your job; that road is going to be hell to-day." I didn't like the look of it myself, for the shell-fire was increasing, and great mushrooms of earth were shooting up along its course. Major Robinson had not gone a hundred yards when, hearing a shout, we looked round in time to see him flung down in a cloud of smoke. We ran back and found him

severely wounded about the face and chest, but still alive. He was carried off by our stretcher-bearers and Capt. Hetherington took temporary second in command in his place. Bissett and I with our runners then continued on our way, more shrapnel breaking over our heads as we went.

When we reached the edge of the sunken road we could hardly make ourselves heard for the noise of heavy shells bursting along the bank, but we hastily agreed that he and Shaw would go towards les Épines, while I went down in the direction of the New Zealanders at Crevecoeur, after which we would meet to compare notes.

As I was about to jump into the sunken road, a number of whizz-bang shells struck the earth close by in quick succession. I looked round and saw Bissett clap his hand to his side and fall to the ground. He rose almost at once, and walked towards me, still clasping his side. Shaw and I helped him down the bank, and as the shell-fire was increasing, we took him to the entrance of a dug-out which the Germans had made in the side of the cutting. Supporting him down, we laid him on the floor. He made light of his wound, a jagged hole in his right side from which the blood poured in torrents, but his breathing became stertorous, and although we did not realise it, he was mortally injured. We had to leave him for the present, and complete our investigations for report to Division. Shaw and his runners proceeded to les Épines, where the R.S.F. held the road, and I went with my party in the direction of the New Zealanders, lower down.

We crossed through the cutting of the road, and tried to walk out over the open to see the lie of the land towards Serinvillers, but we were immediately fired on from a line of rifle pits about three hundred yards away. From the hasty view I had, I realised that the enemy stood in great strength all the way between Serinvillers, Niergnies, and Cambrai, and that although they had evacuated our sunken road overnight, they showed no signs of further retreat.

As we went, whizz bangs and 5.9's were coming over in large numbers. Already some thirty or more Shropshire men lay dead and wounded, and I could foresee a heavy casualty list. I continued until I reached the New Zealanders. They were having an equally bad time. Many lay dead and the others were hugging the forward bank for shelter. Their C.O. had been killed, but the second in command was still alive. I asked him what he thought of our three battalions attacking Serinvillers, and he replied with some heat that he did not belong to a suicide club. We discussed the situation. The British were attacking further south, for we heard the roll of guns, but in this vicinity their batteries were silent, and, even in the air we saw only hostile machines, nor could we see any supporting troops in our rear. That being the case, we agreed that an attack with our weak forces across open ground against heavy shellfire, rifles and machine-guns would only result in useless slaughter of our men. Having satisfied myself of this, I returned to look for Shaw. The German bombardment continued and the sunken road was not a pleasant sight, for in it lay many dead and mangled men, and the stretcher-bearers were busy carrying the wounded to Mon Plaisir. Shaw was back from his inspection, and I found him in the dug-out with Bissett. Bissett was conscious and took part in our counsel. Shaw had arrived at the same conclusion as the New Zealander officer and myself, so we drew up a report for General Fisher, giving him our views of the local position, and telling him that in our opinion an advance on Serinvillers with our weakened companies, unsupported by artillery, would be a bloody failure.

I sent the despatch back by runner, and, pending further orders, we did what we could to get the men to dig better cover against the opposite bank of the road.

Some time later another runner brought orders that we were to attack Serinvillers after all with our three battalions. Guns had been brought up, and

at 11 o’clock we were to go forward. Shaw and I looked at each other in dismay, for we knew it meant the certain annihilation of our men. However, almost at once there followed a second runner with countermanding orders. It transpired that instructions to attack had been issued before our report reached Division, but this had since come to hand, and a stray aeroplane had also dropped a message to say that masses of German infantry were moving up from behind Niergnies. It was as well that the previous order was cancelled, for it subsequently took the whole of the 2nd and 4th Armies to dislodge the enemy from this line, and there would have been little left of the R.S.F., the Shrops. and the New Zealanders had they been sent on so forlorn an errand.

In the meanwhile we were ordered to hold the sunken road, and for the next five hours we sat inactive under a pounding which worked great havoc, so that shattered men, broken rifles and bloodstained equipment lay about everywhere while the wounded sat huddled against the bank awaiting the bearers, or crowded into the dug-out where Bissett lay.

Shaw and I moved up and down the road, but except for telling each man to sink a sort of pothole for himself with his entrenching tool, there was nothing much that we could do.

At 4 o’clock that afternoon a runner arrived with a message that we were both to come to Mon Plaisir Trench to talk matters over with General Fisher. We said nothing at the time, but we afterwards confessed to each other how relieved we had been to get away from that beastly road after ten hours of shell-fire.

We decided to remove Bissett. Up to now we had left him in the dug-out, as it seemed best to keep him quiet for as long as possible. Shaw got a squad of bearers that had come up, and we carried him upstairs, and lifted him on to a stretcher. He was taken off, but when next we saw him we were standing by

his deathbed.

Having seen Bissett on his way, we made the necessary arrangements with our company officers, and walked back across the plain to Mon Plaisir, where we found General Fisher waiting for us. We suggested to him that our men should be withdrawn from the sunken road after dark, as the place was a death-trap, and he agreed to this. During the night we fell them back about eighty yards, and here we made the men dig a system of rifle pits. By sunrise we were in occupation, and as the Germans never discovered the change they continued to shell the road for the next four days, thinking that we still held it.

A long pause now ensued for the bringing-up of fresh troops and guns, as the Germans were making desperate efforts to prevent the fall of Cambrai. During this lull they bombarded Masnières and Crevecoeur until both villages were destroyed. One morning I went to visit a forward post held by a Shrops. platoon in a short trench length that had originally been dug by the Germans. At this point we were said to be the nearest British troops to Cambrai, which was clearly visible only three miles off. The town had been on fire for days, and all through our time here a pall of smoke hung over the place, while at night the glare in the sky served as a directing mark to our runners. The town had been set alight by the Germans, for the British guns never fired on it, by special request of the French Government, so it was said. While I was inspecting this trench length, the German gunners suddenly began to shell us. The men had fitted together a few sheets of corrugated iron as a cookhouse, and five or six of them were sitting there when the bombardment started. Most of the shells dropped short or over, but a 5.9 came straight down on the roofing, and exploded amongst the soldiers round the fire. I saw them blown in all directions, and, running up, we found three killed outright and two seriously injured. As we were attending to the

wounded, a German plane came low overhead, probably spotting for the guns.

There was a squadron of British machines thousands of feet up, on its way across the lines. Two of these nose-dived at great speed, and started raking the German airmen at close range before they knew of their presence. In a moment their machine side-slipped, and came down with a thud not a hundred yards from us. Later on we climbed out of the trench to examine the wreckage. The plane was a Halberstadt and there were two dead men in it, still strapped to their seats. The German guns behind Niergnies reopened fire, so we bolted back, and the machine and its crew lay abandoned there for the rest of the time that we remained in this area.

That night, while going the rounds, we saw two figures approaching in the dark. A sentry challenged them, and we heard a shout: “Don’t fire, don’t fire, we’re British!” They proved to be Corporal Flood and Private Kane of the Manchester. They had been captured during the March fighting and had now escaped from a prison camp at Caudry, where they had been at work loading trains, and “helping the Boche to win the war”, as Kane put it. They were in rags and very emaciated, but they were fair enough to say that the food they had received was at any rate as good as that which the Germans themselves got. They said that the fighting soldiers had treated them well, but that some of the *landwehr* at the camp were brutes. I took them to Mon Plaisir Trench and gave them a good meal and a drink of rum in the dug-out, and then forwarded them to Brigade, with the assurance of getting long leave to England, which sent them happily on their way.

A few days after, Lt. Wiles of the Shrops. and I were sitting on the parapet of Mon Plaisir, chatting in the afternoon sunshine, when a two-seater British aeroplane came over from the direction of Cambrai, at about five hundred feet. As we idly watched it, the machine, for no apparent reason, literally flew

into pieces before our eyes. Wood splinters, strips of fabric, and fragments of metal rained down on us, but that was all that was left, and the airmen must have been instantaneously killed. I think the only possible explanation is that a high-angle British shell, on its way to the German lines, had struck the plane head-on.

We had the usual narrow escapes while holding the line, and I was once ill for forty-eight hours from gas poisoning, followed by a headache that lasted for days. On another occasion, during an inspection of the cellars beneath the sugar factory in Masnières, a 5.9 crashed through the concrete flooring. Lt. Sleep of the Scots Fusiliers, two New Zealand officers, and I, were very nearly buried under the avalanche of bricks and masonry that poured down. Sleep and I were the only two surviving R.S.F. officers of all those who had been with the Battalion at the time of the March offensive.

For a week we held the local sector with depleted strength, while the main armies were fighting elsewhere. Then troops began to move up, and the plain beyond the canal became crowded with men and guns of the 2nd and 4th Armies, to whom had been allotted the task of driving the enemy from Serinvillers and outflanking Cambrai.

Owing to the heavy losses which we had sustained, our Brigade was withdrawn at last from the firing line, and on October 8th we marched the remains of our battalions over the canal bridge that had defied all the efforts of the German gunners, and halted on the plain beyond, where we lay out of range, or at any rate free from shell-fire, for the first time for nearly a month.

Thus far Shaw and I had had our hands so full that we had found it impossible to enquire about Bissett. Under the system in vogue, once a man was carried from the front line he was lost sight of, and it became a difficult matter to trace him through the numerous clearing stations behind the line. But now we decided to look for him, and we rode to Beaumetz, the

headquarters of the 8th Field Ambulance, and here, after considerable trouble, we ascertained that Bissett was at No. 57 casualty clearing station at Crévillers. The Commanding Officer of the 8th lent us a car, and we started at once. Crévillers is (or was) a village just beyond Bapaume, and here stood a large hospital camp of marquee tents. We found the matron, who directed us to the ward where Bissett lay. At the entrance to the tent sat the faithful Glossop, on a roll of kit. Tears ran down his cheeks as he told us that his master was dying inside, and that it was only a question of minutes before the end.

In the tent were two rows of wounded men in cots. A nursing sister, hearing that we had come to see Bissett, whispered to us: “Smile and tell him a few jokes and keep his spirit up; nothing else can save him.”

Shaw and I walked between the beds scrutinising the patients, but we failed to recognise Bissett, and even when the sister led us to his side, we scarcely knew him, so gaunt and altered was he. A smile and a few jokes were beyond me, and I could not speak for fear of breaking down. Shaw felt the same, so we stood silently looking down on what was but the shadow of our friend. His eyes were dimmed, and his face pale and shrunken and we could see that the end was very near. He tried feebly to speak, and muttered something about the Scots Fusiliers and the Arras Road, then he became unconscious, and we went sadly off, knowing that we had lost a brave and good companion.

We were back with our Battalion that night, and next morning General Deveril sent for me and told me, because of Bissett’s death, to hand the Shrops. to Colonel Burne, and to take over command of the 1st R.S.F. I had been with the 7th Shropshires for less than two weeks, but I had made many friends. I have kept the only battalion order issued while I was in command:

BATTALION ORDERS

by Deneys Reitz

Commanding 7th Battalion, the King's Shropshire Light Infantry

In the field, Monday, 7th October, 1918

1. Command. Major D. Reitz, 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, took over command of the Battalion on 27-9-18.

2. Lights. Air reports point to an excessive amount of illumination at night in the forward area due to unscreened bivouacs.

3. Care of the dead. During recent operations several No. 64 Army Books have been lost from dead bodies in the Corps area and in the case of Germans, identity discs have been removed. Care should be taken to prevent this.

4. Casualties. The commanding officer regrets to announce the following casualties:—

Killed

Ellis; Monks; Pickard; Samuels; Sexton; Collins; Brown; Whettall; Parker; Donelly; White; Wood; Humphries; Gill; Jenkins; Davies; Jones; Clarke; James; Weedon; Evans; Gallagher; Payne; Fosker; Lewis; Jones; Bayley; Powell; Jones; Langslow; Bates; Booth.

Died of Wounds

Cresswell; Williams; Trantor; Dorris.

Gassed

Matthews; Healey; Jones; White.

Wounded and Missing

Raynor; Jones; Taylor; Cotton.

Missing

Turner; Griffiths; Crellin; Johnson; Rawlings; Duckett; Oakley; Fitzsimmons.

Wounded

Corner; Smith; Hudson; Asplury; Brook; Thompson; Meredith; Nicholas; Davidson; Clay; Wood; Alexandra; Winterbottom; Cartwright; Brown; Amplett; Gough; Caine; Winward; Holton; Allmark; Hodges; Pople; Grayson; Jones; Tunnicliffe; Cholerton; Eaton; Bradley; Rhodes; Jennings; Hayward; Layton; Parminter; Lowe; Chadwick; Bevan; Burgess; Broadbent; Lee; Hanson; Hallard; Phillips; Wilson; Jones; Munday; Moore; Davies; Baker; Turner; Harris; Plimmer; Shaw; White; Law; McGregor; Jones; Powell-Tuck; Perrins; Cooke; Davies; Croft; Johnson; Lamond; Bailey; Sullivan; Holman; Davies; Legge; Walker; Barker; Yeomans; Wenman; Griffiths; Richardson; Powell; Durrant; Anslow; Bright; Cooke; Birchall; Gallagher; Jones; Cooper; Kingswell; Kendall; Lowe; Thwaite; Mansell; Nicolas; Rumsey; Thraves; Hollman; Jones; Whittington; Hillman; Coppack; Ryder; Bocock; Jones; Hitchin; Taylor; Robinson; Edwards; Ingram; Grainger; Vicars; Evans; George; Hinchcliffe; Moreton; Humphries; Bromley; Millward; Rostron; Bates; Orford; Pover; Madeley; Thelwell; Edmonson; Devine; Fleet.

(Sgd.) A. C. Hetherington, Capt. and Adjutant
7th Batt. The King's Shropshire Light Infantry.

I have never been in Shropshire, but this order will serve to show how one of its battalions fared during a fortnight of the Great War.

Chapter XIV — Nearing the End

The 2nd and 4th Armies now moved up. Our Brigade was held in reserve, and my share in making ready for battle was confined to sending for two miles of white tape from Arras, with which I laid out a starting-line near the sunken road, upon which the troops were to assemble in the dark.

During the night of the 10th of October the attacking battalions silently filed through Masnières and Mon Plaisir, and from 2 a.m. onwards the British guns began to fire. The Germans knew what was coming, for they replied in kind, and they caused heavy damage, as we realised at daybreak. The battle commenced before dawn, but except for the flashes of bursting shells there was nothing to be seen, although when sunrise came, the British had taken Serinvillers. It was being heavily bombarded by the enemy, and coming from the captured village was a steady flow of German and British wounded.

General Fisher was at Mon Plaisir Trench, and he ordered me to take my runners forward to gauge the position. We made for the sunken road and crossed it, then we followed a trail of dead and dying Suffolks and King’s Own to Serinvillers. On the way I came on a solitary German machine-gunner, sitting behind his weapon in a shell crater. Before him lay nearly a score of British soldiers that had fallen to his gun. The man himself was riddled with bayonet thrusts. I heard afterwards that he had refused to retire or to surrender, and here at his post he “went down scornful before many spears”. When we reached Serinvillers, the place was going to pieces under heavy German shell-fire. I found that the British advance had been checked, and that the Germans were still holding la Targette, a pistol shot beyond.

After a hurried inspection, I walked in the direction of Niergnies, with a wide view of the firing line right up to Cambrai, where things were going none too well.

At Niergnies, close by, dense columns of German infantry were approaching, and in the middle distance were two tanks clanking towards us. Judging by their build, they had been captured from the British and were now being used against their former owners. Each had an iron cross painted on its sides. They were bearing straight on the King's Own, who were grouped in small parties across the plain, and the sight of the tanks and the heavy German reinforcements was taking effect, for some of the men were falling back, and it looked as if the whole line might give. Shells were bursting, and rifle and machine-gun bullets whizzing plentifully about. As I did not propose getting run over by tanks, I withdrew my party to a slight rise near les Ɛpines from which we still had a good view. Batches of men came by, and when I questioned them they denied that they were retreating, but said that they could not stand against the tanks on open ground, and were making for the sunken road. A considerable number of them were "coming back", as they called it, but the majority of the King's Own remained lying in the grass, awaiting the enemy counter-attack, and I could see detachments of Suffolks hurrying to their assistance. Soon there was a deafening rattle of Lewis-gun and rifle-fire, but the advancing German waves did not seem to have much stomach, for they began to run behind a fold in the ground. I saw one of the tanks go ambling back to Niergnies, while the other stood close to the British line, firing its guns at short range. Then it burst into flames. The King's Own had found an abandoned German trench mortar and some ammunition, and after a few rounds they scored a direct hit, which put her out of action, while another shot fired the petrol tank. After a time, seeing that the fighting was stabilised, I returned to report to General Fisher. At the sunken road a column

of about two hundred German prisoners was being marched to the rear in charge of British soldiers. The German guns were dropping random shells all over the place, and, as we approached, a projectile fell in the centre of the closely packed mass. I saw men, and pieces of men, fly into the air, the prisoners breaking in all directions. Running up, we counted nineteen Germans and five of the British guard lying dead, and there were many wounded. It was a dreadful sight. We did what we could until the arrival of the stretcher parties, after which we went on.

At Mon Plaisir, I reported to General Fisher, and that was all I saw of this day's battle.

So many fresh troops were moving forward, and the operation was now going so well, that next day our Brigade was withdrawn for a week's rest.

We marched back past Havrincourt and Flesquières and the battlefield of the Hindenburg Line, and recrossing the Canal du Nord, went into camp near Hermes, now a deserted region, with the fighting so far ahead that even the gunfire was merely like distant thunder.

General Fisher knew how to handle us. Next morning a fine staff car drew up, and there was a message from him to say that the three Colonels of his Brigade — Henderson of the Royal Scots, Burne of the Shrops., and I — were granted four days' recuperative leave to Calais, and the car was at our disposal. It was a pleasant holiday. We went via Bapaume and the Somme battlefields and through Albert. When last I had been in Albert, eight months before, it still bore some semblance of a town, and the Virgin and Child still leaned from the cathedral tower. Since then the tide of the German March offensive and the British counter-offensive had swept over it. The Virgin and Child and the tower from which they had jutted were gone, and it was now the most completely devastated spot in France.

From Albert we went to Doullens, and I searched for the building in which

I had lain wounded, but it was in ruins, and the rest of the village had been greatly damaged.

There was a section of the famous Spad *escadrille* of the Cicognes stationed here, with distinguished French aces walking the streets all a-glitter with decorations, the townspeople proudly pointing them out to us. We spent the night at the "Trois Fils d'Aymon", and next day we went on to Calais. We put up at the Officers' Mess, and had a good time. Henderson was a regular, who had been in the Mons retreat in 1914, and on active service ever since, a quiet undemonstrative man, who perhaps saw more fighting than any other officer in the Army. Burne was a South African. He had commanded the nth Infantry in German East on the day on which old Hilgaard de Jager and I watched the armoured cars break the line at Kidete. Before that, in the Boer War, he was with the British convoy that we had sacked and burnt at Middleport in 1902, so we had many things in common.

There was a furious battle in progress south of Nieuport, where French and Belgian armies were attacking. We heard the rumble of gunfire, and we saw long convoys bringing in the wounded, while allied staff officers were rushing about the streets, so that there was plenty of bustle and colour. The battle was going well, they told us, but we had had enough of battles, and motored to Zenninghem instead, through twenty miles of Dutch-looking country, with shady canals and windmills and stolid peasants trudging along. Here and there a French soldier on leave stood surrounded by admirers in his little village, and in spite of the far-off boom of guns, this was a quiet peaceful region, untouched by war.

On our way back to Calais we visited an aerodrome beside the road to see Capitaine Georges, the famous Belgian flying man, start off on one of his daily expeditions over the German lines. On some days he went up three times. The Belgians were very proud of their star performer, and a crowd of

refugees always collected to see him go on his perilous journey. An onlooker told me that the month before Georges took two British officers joy-riding on successive days, and crashed his plane and killed his passenger on each occasion, so the British military authorities had stopped him from breaking the necks of any more of their people, and he was now limited to fighting the Germans.

In Calais we ordered the finest dinner that money could buy, for we knew that we were to go into action again, and as life was an uncertain lease, we feasted royally.

Next morning we started back, and stayed over a night at Amiens, which was in a battered condition. In the early days of the war the Germans had occupied the town for a short while, and during the fighting of this year they had very nearly retaken it, but Colonel Gordon's faith had been justified, although at the cost of great battles and many lives.

At an hotel I sat down to table with an old American colonel of engineers. His language was quaint, and among other things he asked me "Was your boys badly bent in the last show?" and when I asked him why he was a Democrat he said that in the South one was born a Democrat. He showed me some Roman coins he had found in the Argonne, which looked as new and shining as if they had been minted the day before. They bore the head of the Emperor Hadrian and a woman's figure on the obverse side.

Early next morning we continued our journey, and by dusk we were with our battalions once more. The 1st R.S.F. was at Ribécourt, where Shaw had fixed up Headquarters in a ruined nunnery. We remained at Ribécourt for several days, during which time the entire IIIrd Division was set to work salvaging the Hindenburg Line. We used our limber teams, and between us collected a hundred and thirty-three abandoned guns. They ran from monsters with barrels thirty feet long to little trench mortars. We also collected over

three hundred machine-guns, and a great pile of Mauser rifles and other articles.

I rode across from Ribécourt to Masnières to have a look at the scene of our recent encounters. As a result of the last battle, the British line had gone forward quite eight miles, and Cambrai had been evacuated, so that the area around Masnières, Crèvecœur and Rumilly, which we had only known as steeped in shell-fire, now lay in peace and quiet. Even Army Headquarters had moved up to Masnières, and there were A.S.C. and other base troops quartered where we had faced the enemy a week ago.

Beyond Mon Plaisir Trench the soldiers had marked out a football ground. They had filled in the shell-holes, and erected goal-posts, and as I rode by a match was in progress, the supporters of either side loudly cheering and shouting. A number of German dead had been moved out of the way. They were simply dumped beside the touch-line, where they formed a grim reminder of the sterner game that had been played here so short a time before.

On my way back to Ribécourt I came on a German dug-out, in a bank above Marcoing, and by the light of my electric torch I collected a bundle of journals and other papers that had been left behind. I looked through them that evening. One was a leaflet containing a sermon delivered by the Kaiser, and I remembered that in East Africa, in the fort at old Moschi we had found a speech of his to the naval cadets at Kiel telling them that they were privileged in having before them one who held the German sceptre by direct dispensation of the Almighty.

Now he said:

"He who takes up the sword without just cause will perish by the sword; but the sword I wield is as sacred as that carried by St. Peter on the night of Gethsemane."

This was accompanied by an article by one Dr. Rosner of Berlin, reading:

"The Kaiser is with us. He remains from daybreak to sunset among his beloved troops in the battle zone. He has visited the trenches and positions they have captured from the enemy and he frequently expresses his astonishment at the glorious feats performed by German valour. From a battle-post (Gefechts-stande) he watches the progress of the fighting. Yesterday he was recognised and surrounded by a Division on its way to the firing line. The victorious (sieg-bewuste) German soldiers cheered him enthusiastically as he briefly told them the news from the different fronts, and as he returned to his car the men crowded round him with heartfelt greetings before going joyously into battle for Kaiser und Reich."

This bolstering-up of the Hohenzollerns seemed merely silly to me, but the German people, with all their fine qualities, have a sentimental streak which makes them susceptible to this kind of thing.

In one of the newspapers I had brought was an account of a recent interview between Ludendorff and a gathering of German pressmen whom he had summoned to Berlin to discuss the military situation. He complained of the pessimism spreading through the country and told them that Talaat Bey, an Ottoman official who had visited the capital shortly before, had returned to Constantinople smiling and hopeful, although Turkey was in a worse plight than theirs.

I translated this at dinner, and Corporal Noble who was in attendance, must have taken it in, for later on I heard him retailing the gist of what I had said to the runners and signallers in the lean-to that served as a cookhouse. Apparently Talaat Bey's optimism rankled, for after a long silence I heard a voice say: "Well, boys, I guess we've wiped that smile off Talaat's mug by now," and there came approving murmurs in the dark.

On October 20th we received our move order, and the whole Brigade marched via Marcoing, Crèvecœur, Serinvillers and Wambaix to Catinières,

over country that had been cleared of the enemy during the latest fighting. We were now definitely out of the devastated area of France, for, from Serinvillers onward, the villages, though often damaged by shell-fire, were still villages. Most of the houses had sufficient roofing to provide cover, and, most pleasing of all to the men, there were often glass window panes and even beds and stoves left behind. Up to now, such places as they had been quartered in were heaps of rubble, and a watertight roof and unbroken window panes assured them more than anything else that the German Army was on the run.

We were in an area where for years past there had been enemy rest billets and training camps, and it looked as if they had intended to settle down for good. The names of the streets had been altered to Ludendorffstrasse and von Bulowstrasse, etc., and in every direction were large vegetable gardens sometimes extending for miles without a break, which must have formed an important addition to the German food supplies.

Now too for the first time we began to fall in with French civilians, who had been living in the occupied zone since 1914. Women and children and old men stood along the roads or in the village streets and gave us a feeble “Vivent les alliés!” as we went by. Most of them were haggard and starved, and from what they told us they had been living chiefly on cabbage soup and contributions from the American Relief Fund. The Germans had forced them to work in the military vegetable gardens at two paper marks a day. I gathered that their treatment had not been brutal, but pettily oppressive, with fines and penalties levied on an already impoverished population.

The day after our arrival at Catinières, there was a C.O.’s conference at Brigade Headquarters, to which Henderson, Burne and I were summoned. General Fisher informed us that our 8th Brigade was to take part in an attack on the 23rd of October, and gave us detailed instructions as to our share in

the battle.

The British front line ran beyond the town of Solesmes about four miles away, and the attack was designed to push the enemy back another few miles to within striking distance of the Valenciennes — le Quesnoy Railway, where they were said to be preparing a new line of resistance.

The attack was to be carried out by the 17th, 4th and 6th Corps. As far as our Brigade was concerned, Henderson with the 2nd Royal Scots was to capture the village of Vertain, lying two miles beyond Solesmes. As soon as this objective was attained, the R.S.F. were to leapfrog through and take the next village of Escarmain, after which the Shrops. would go through to a brown line on our maps.

I still have the Battle Order:

Secret.

Copy No. 3.

8th Infantry Brigade.

Operation Order No. 80.

22nd Oct., 1918.

1. The 3rd Army is to resume the advance on the 23rd October.

2. The attack on the 6th Corps front will be carried out by the IIIrd Division on the right.

3. The attack on the IIIrd Division front will be carried out by the 76th Inf. Brig, on the right and the 8th Inf. Brigade on the left.

4. The 8th Inf. Brigade will move to Solesmes under orders to be issued later.

5. The attack is to be carried out as a surprise, there will be no preliminary bombardment.

6. The attack will be carried out under a creeping barrage as follows:

(a) The 2nd Royal Scots, Col. Henderson, will take the first objective shown

in red on Ref. Map 51 A.

The initial barrage will come down for 6 minutes 200 yards beyond the road marked W.20.G. by which time the 2nd Royal Scots will be in their assembly position immediately west of the road.

The barrage will move at the rate of 100 yards in 6 minutes.

The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, Col. Reitz, will be formed up at zero hour on the slopes east of le Pigeon Blanc in rear of the 2nd Ryl. Scots.

The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers will follow 1,500 yds. behind the rear of the 2nd Ryl. Scots and will be prepared to assist in the capture of Vertain should the latter be unable to carry out the task single-handed. The 7th K.S.L.I. (Shrops.), Col. Burne, will form in rear of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers.

(b) At 08.40 hours the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers will resume the advance from the Red objective under a creeping barrage at 100 yards in 3 minutes up to the Green dotted objective. The village of Escarmain will be included in the 2nd objective. The 7th K.S.L.I. will follow 1,500 yards behind the rear of the 1st R.S.F. and will be prepared to assist if necessary in the capture and mopping up of Escarmain.

The 7th K.S.L.I. will push on to the Brown line.

(c) O.C. 8th Trench Mortar Battery to move under orders of 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers.

7. After the capture of the final objectives, the 8th Brigade will organise in depth and will be prepared to continue the advance to the Blue line.

8. Information from prisoners and civilians shows that the enemy are holding a rearguard position around the villages of Vertain and Escarmain. His artillery strength is unknown.

Issued at 11.15 hours.

B. W. Gosling, Capt. and Brigade-Major 8th Inf. Brig.

After the conference, Henderson, Burne and I rode off to look over the

ground beyond Solesmes, across which we were to attack next day. When we reached the outskirts of the town we found that the bridge spanning the River Serre had been destroyed by gunfire, and that the Germans were steadily dropping heavy shells among the streets and houses, at the rate of about one every five minutes.

A traffic policeman at the broken bridge told us we could cross by a plank-way at St. Python, lower down, so we followed the bank until we reached a sort of trestle bridge, leading over the stream into the courtyard of a large brewery, and thence under the archway and up the long street into Solesmes.

Solesmes was normally a town of about ten thousand inhabitants. It had prosperous-looking residences and a fine town hall. Most of the civilians were sheltering in cellars against the plunging shells, and only here and there did we see an anxious-faced woman or a child peering through window or doorway.

At the Town Hall were French political officers sent by their Government to distribute gas masks, for here again the people obstinately refused to evacuate their homes, preferring to be gassed and shelled, when they could easily have gone away to some of the liberated villages in the rear until the enemy had been driven out of range. Fortunately all the houses had deep cellars and the casualties were light, although many suffered from the prolonged gassing.

We rode through the streets, with dead German soldiers still lying where they had fallen, and then up the road to the shrine this side of Pigeon Blanc Farm, where we left our horses and proceeded on foot. The Germans were briskly shelling all this area, and in the porchway of the farmhouse lay a number of British dead, who had been killed in the forward rifle pits. We hurried on to a rise beyond Pigeon Blanc, from where we could see the villages of Vertain and Romeries, two thousand yards away, with Escarmain

lying further back. The Germans were in possession of these villages, and they had numerous machine-guns and rifle posts in the open country. As the shell-fire was heavy, and the air humming with bullets from the German rifle pits, we made a quick examination of the ground lying before us, and inspected the sunken road in which we were to assemble our companies during the night.

Having completed our reconnaissance, we fetched our horses and rode back through Solesmes and St. Python to our battalions, in order to issue the necessary instructions for their march. By dark we had our men quartered underground in Solesmes, in various cellars previously marked down for the purpose.

We were to start for our assembly point at 2 a.m., and until then everyone was to remain below. We spent a disturbed night, for the Germans continued to shell the town, and a heavy concentration of gas came over, so that sleep was impossible. Apart from frequent alarms and the noise of bursting shells and falling masonry, there were enemy planes droning overhead, and we heard the crash of heavy bombs at St. Python, where they were trying to destroy the only bridge that was left.

Our Battalion Headquarters were in the cellar of a house situated in a street with the inappropriate name of Rue de la Gaieté. We had for fellow lodgers a number of women and children, half starved and fearful of the explosions, so that it was anything but gay.

At 2 a.m. (23rd October) I fell-in my companies in the dark. A gas shell struck the pavement in front of “C” Company, and killed young Lieut. Ferguson before my eyes. The 2nd Royal Scots, who were to lead the attack on Vertain, had already started, and as we moved up the inclined street, we came on several of their dead, and met their stretcher parties coming back with wounded, for the Germans seemed to know what was afoot, and shells

were bursting in all directions.

The Royal Scots lost thirty men before they reached the sunken road beyond Pigeon Blanc, but we were luckier, for we had only seven hit, while the Shrops., coming on behind, lost over forty.

It was still night, and the blinding flashes of the shells and the crackle of machine-guns and rifles from the German line made it no easy task to carry out our preparations.

At 3.30 the British barrage came down. It was not the solid wall of flame of the old days, but it was heavy enough, and the Royal Scots went off behind it.

In the dark we could see the figures of the advancing men outlined against the barrage with the light playing upon their bayonets.

German machine-guns and rifles were spitting away, but they went on until they were swallowed up in the dark. As we were to follow fifteen hundred yards behind, we watched until we could no longer distinguish them, then when I judged that they would be nearing Vertain, I started my men off.

We advanced in open order across the level plain, passing many Royal Scots lying dead and wounded. They had caught the brunt of the enemy fire, which already was slackening down, and we lost only four men killed, and five or six wounded, even though shells dropped freely among us.

It was getting light by now, and we could see the dim shadow of Vertain before us. The Royal Scots were not in sight, but as the small-arm fire had ceased, I knew that they had entered the village.

To our immediate right, at Romeries, heavy fighting was in progress, and further south too the battle was thundering away. We now came to a small stream, the Georges, through which we waded knee deep, and beyond that we were among the houses and gardens of Vertain.

As we were about to penetrate further, the German guns shortened range, and began to pound the village with 8-inch howitzers, accompanied by gas

shells. This was additional proof that they had fallen back, for latterly it was their custom, whenever they gave up a town or village, to smash it with gunfire. They had done this to Marcoing, Masnières and Crèvecœur, and to all the other villages between Serinvillers and Solesmes, and now they were doing it to Vertain. I could not make out where the Royal Scots had gone, but I found afterwards that, having driven out the enemy, they had moved away to the left beyond the houses, to escape the counter bombardment. I collected my men behind a bank, until I had time to gauge the position. The tear gas was causing us great inconvenience. Owing to the cloud of brick-dust and smoke drifting from the village we were unable to use the eyepieces of our masks, so we contented ourselves with clipping the wire springs to our noses, and suffered in consequence from coughing and sneezing, and smarting eyes that gave us acute discomfort.

I ordered the men to remain under cover behind the bank, while I went forward with the runners to investigate.

Near by stood a large square of farm buildings on the road that linked Vertain to Romeries. In the entrance to the courtyard were two German machine-guns and a light trench mortar and several dead gunners, and as three or four shells dropped in the quadrangle in quick succession, we bolted into a doorway and down a cellar stair. We found the cellar well lit by candles stuck to the walls, and in it were eleven German soldiers and two N.C.O.’s (Vize-feldwebeln). One of them stepped forward, and saluting at every few words, he said that they had been driven to take shelter by the British barrage, and wished to surrender. I put a guard over them, and as I had to continue the attack to Escarmain at 8.40, I had the Battalion brought to the farm. After sending scouts to look for the 2nd Royal Scots, Lieut. Pud Robertson and I walked forward to reconnoitre the ground over which we had to go.

We found ourselves on an open grassy plain of considerable extent. It was clear that Vertain had been held by the enemy as an advanced post only, for now, six hundred yards distant, lay their real defensive line, in the shape of parallel rifle pits in front of Escarmain. The German guns were firing from the rear, but the infantry in the rifle pits loosed only an occasional round, not being anxious, I suppose, to attract the attention of the British batteries.

In the near foreground two kilted soldiers were digging away in a hollow, and Pud and I wormed forward to see what they were at. They were Gordon Highlanders who had pushed on in the dark during their attack on Romeries, until daylight found them out in the open all by themselves, so they had decided to dig in. As they were in the direct line of the barrage that was to come down, I took them back with me to the farm, after having satisfied myself of the lie of the land towards Escarmain. The Battalion was still at the farm, and contact had been established with the Royal Scots in the hedgerows and orchards on the far side of Vertain. To our right lay Romeries, also captured that morning, and there too troops were waiting to go forward.

At 8.30 the men were in the assembly line, ready for zero hour. It is always a trying time waiting for the final moment, but I had no fear of the outcome. From what I had seen of German army orders and newspapers, and of their infantry of late, I knew that their spirits were low, and that we were not so much fighting an army as hustling demoralised men.

At 8.40 to the second, the barrage came roaring down. A British 6-inch howitzer shell dropped between our front and rear waves, and killed three men, and all the way to Escarmain this infernal gun dropped shorts among us, causing eight or nine further casualties.

The rest of the barrage worked smoothly, and we followed behind it at a walk. The German infantry in the rifle pits opened fire on us, but they were rattled by the shells, and their firing was wild, whilst their batteries were too

thin to do much damage. The moment the barrage reached their rifle pits the infantry crouched down while it swept over them, and as soon as they saw the curtain of bursting shells move on beyond, they came running towards us, hands in air, and our role was practically confined to following in the wake of the barrage and receiving the prisoners in batches as they came to meet us. Including the losses caused by the 6-inch howitzer, we had under fifty men hit in crossing from Vertain to Escarmain, and we took over two hundred prisoners on the way.

And now we reached and entered the village, the elated men rushing down the streets, and fetching out more prisoners from houses and cellars. They speedily cleaned up the place of such Germans as were still lurking about, and we then waded the stream that runs through Escarmain, and climbed the slope beyond to the Chapelle de la Rosaire, from which we had an extensive view across another open plain sloping down towards the Ecaillon, a small river two miles away. German infantry were streaming back, and we sped their passage with rifle-fire. Many gun teams too were galloping in the distance, and it was clear that the enemy was retiring on a wide front.

Our instructions were to reach the red line on the battle map, and no further, so we made no attempt to pursue, and I had the satisfaction of sending a runner back to Brigade with a note to say that the 1st R.S.F. had reached its objective according to orders.

We now had time to look about us. The German retreat was crossing the Ecaillon River far down on the plain, and on the bluffs beyond we could see them already hard at work digging new rifle pits. On a large field near the edge of the village was an aerodrome with a Halberstadt machine, and two abandoned guns with dead teams and dead gunners, struck down by the morning’s barrage. The hangars were made of tarred felt on wooden frames, and one of them had served as an officers’ mess. Painted on the wall inside

was the usual coloured inscription about “der Gott der Eisen wachsen Hess”, which one found in almost every German billet and rest camp, and even on their notepaper, but in addition there was a scroll: “Niemand fliegt ungestrafft zur Sonne” (No man flies unscathed towards the sun): a fine motto for airmen.

After a while the enemy gunners, true to custom, began to bombard the village, so I made the men seek cover, while Shaw and Pud Robertson and I took up a forward observation post at the Rosary, where we had several narrow escapes from bursting shells. The runners brought in a German cavalry officer whom they had found in a copse close by, a Prussian, standing nearly six foot six, jack-booted and spurred like Bismarck. He was a Berlin lawyer, and he had no illusions about the result of the war. He admitted that Austria and Turkey were as good as done for, and that the German cause was a hopeless one.

After midday the British gunfire flared up again, and behind it the Shrops. came through us, to the brown line of the Operation Order. They suffered only a few casualties, and had soon reached their objective, halfway down towards the Ecaillon.

As for Escarmain, a river flowed through it, spanned by an ancient bridge, and there was a large church, while on the slope above was a sort of public garden; otherwise it was only a small hamlet. There must have been a poet among the troops who succeeded us in this area, for in the November *Country Life* I found the following verses:

How softly drip the patient trees
In Romeries and Escarmain
While on the uplands wild and brown
Softly comes down the little rain!

But we do chase the fleeting hare

Across the bare lands of Vertain,
Through sunken roads, o'er sodden plough,
And hell for leather back again.

Chorus:

Oh well she ran from horse and man
Across the misty leas, Sir,
Above Vertain and Escarmain
And down to Romeries, Sir.

But when you gallop with loose rein
Above Vertain and Romeries,
Beware the shellholes in the mud!

Beware the dud i' th' turnips, please!
And keep eyes wide for rifle pits
Where lately Fritz crouched ill at ease
When the barrage fell in the pearl-grey light
On the day of the fight upon the leas.

Chapter XV — The Last Phase

Before daybreak next morning, October 24th, fresh troops continued the advance, and meeting with little opposition, pressed the Germans back towards the Valenciennes-le Quesnoy railway line, three or four miles on.

At 7 a.m. I received instructions to march towards the Pont de Buat, by which the road to Ruesnes crosses the Ecaillon. I ordered up my horse, as I proposed riding into action for once, and we marched out. As we passed below the Rosary Chapel a shell struck an elm tree on the bank, bringing it down across the road a few yards in front of the column and holding us up for more than half an hour before we could clear the obstruction.

Beyond the station the road climbed a rise, and then descended to the Pont. We passed a number of German dead, and twice we had to manhandle abandoned guns and dead horses out of the way. Stray shells were falling, mostly in the open, so I strung the men out in artillery formation, to minimise the risk. Just as we had crossed the Buat Bridge, a high-velocity shell pitched on the road, right in the middle of "C" Company section, instantaneously killing seven men. There were no wounded, every man that was hit was dead. The bodies were laid beside the road for subsequent burial, but the violent scene cast a gloom over us all, and the men now tramped along in silence, where they had been whistling and singing before.

Having crossed the stream, we took up a position behind the bluff where we had seen the German infantry digging in the day before. They had, however, fallen back again for some distance, and there was the sound of rifle-fire among the orchards and farmhouses lying on the plain beyond.

An orderly came up with a despatch from General Fisher, so I rode towards where a red pennant, on a lance stuck in the ground, denoted his presence. As I emerged into the open I came under fire from some buildings six hundred yards away, and when I broke into a gallop two machine-guns spluttered as well, but I reached the spot safely, where the General was posted in dead ground, out of sight of the enemy marksmen. From here we could see the village of Ruesnes due north of us about two miles away, and to our left, at an equal distance, another village named Beaudignies. A mile beyond that lay the fortified town of le Quesnoy, a mediaeval stronghold with walls, battlements and moats.

As well as the scattered rifle-firing among the farms and apple orchards dotting the landscape before us, the German guns were sprinkling the plain on which we stood with shrapnel. Not far off were several British batteries firing over open sights at parties of German infantry, appearing and disappearing among the trees, and wounded men were dribbling back. General Fisher said the Oxford and Bucks Yeomanry were pushing up towards the Valenciennes Railway, and I was to follow immediately to lend them support. As I rode back to where I had left the R.S.F. beside the river, relays of German aeroplanes came swooping low over the guns, straddling them with bursts of fire, and I saw several artillery men fall dead and wounded in the battery positions.

Shaw, Pud Robertson and I climbed a high point on the bluff to look over our line of advance. There were a few dead German infantry lying about, so each of us picked up a Mauser rifle, and next time the planes came overhead we potted at them. One machine banked so steeply that Shaw called out “My bird, I think, sir,” but the plane righted itself and sped away.

We now deployed the Battalion and moved forward across the plain in the direction of Ruesnes, keeping among the orchards to avoid observation from

the German machines. My orders were to advance as far as a line which looked on the map like a sunken road. An occasional shell fell near, and rifle and machine-gun bullets whizzed through the trees, but we saw neither Oxford and Bucks nor German troops, and when we came to what we had thought to be the sunken road we found a muddy ditch running through a wood, with the village of Ruesnes only a hundred yards away. As we could not take position in the knee-deep ooze, and as I could see that Ruesnes was not held by the enemy, I ordered the men forward to a row of houses along the road leading to le Quesnoy.

Le Quesnoy, with its forts and walls, lay straight down the highway, and as we hurried across the cobbles, there came a rapid succession of whizz bangs from its battlements, and a fusillade of bullets from the viaduct arch nearer by. Of the Oxford and Bucks, whom we had been sent to support, there was still no sign, and as we were being enfiladed, I ordered the company commanders to get the men into cellars as quickly as possible. While I was talking to Capt. Andrews of unlucky “C” Company about his casualties, a shell came howling up the street, missing us by a foot or two, and striking the kerb, where it burst into the thick of his platoon sheltering against a house. It killed five men and wounded twelve, and the bloodspattered pavement was as gruesome a sight as I saw in the war. The wounded were carried into a cellar, and with more shells coming, the men of their own accord found cover quickly among the buildings. Shaw, Robertson, Keegan and I found a good cellar beneath a double-storeyed house, where we fixed Battalion Headquarters, and I then sent a runner back to report to General Fisher.

In the meanwhile we climbed up to the attic, and through a rear window looked across the intervening orchards to Bellevue Farm, standing beside the Valenciennes Railway. This was the line upon which, it was said, the Germans intended to make a fresh stand, and it looked like it, for we could

see many newly-dug rifle pits in the open ground beyond the track.

Owing to the intervening trees we could not estimate their strength, but a mile off the slopes above Villers Pol were black with German troops, and it was clear that we were in touch with a strong line of resistance. The German guns were hard at work breaking down the houses of Ruesnes and its suburb in which we were, so we descended the stairs and squatted in the cellar listening to the muffled detonations above. At 2 p.m. orders came for us to advance as far as a line marked on the map as the outer edge of some orchards lying three hundred yards on the other side of the Valenciennes Railway. The order stated that the Oxford and Bucks had already established themselves on the far side, but if so it was not in our vicinity, for there were no British troops between us and the enemy.

As we moved forward we came under fire from a half-hearted rearguard on the railway embankment, and, advancing through the trees, we saw them retire at the double. With a loss of seven men we crossed the metals, and settled ourselves behind hedges and other shelter.

And now only a few hundred yards in front lay the prepared German position, a deep network of rifle pits, with reserve troops swarming at la Folie Farm and Villers Pol. We were screened from observation and I set the men to dig themselves in, for we could advance no further. I sent a runner who found General Fisher in Ruesnes, and I received a message in reply to say that aeroplanes reported the Germans in great strength before us, and, pending further instructions, we were to stand firm.

All through the night, and indeed for the next four days, the Germans continued to bombard our area. They concentrated specially on Ruesnes, and on the street running to le Quesnoy, and they treated the fields and orchards to gas throughout our stay. So heavy was their fire that we concluded they were deliberately shooting off their ammunition to save the trouble of

removal in case of further retreat. Our men in the rifle pits were well hidden, so we did not have many casualties from direct hits, but as it was impossible to live in box respirators our losses from gassing rose at such an alarming rate that in the four days ending October 29th we had to send two hundred and seven men to hospital.

During the first night, our old friends the New Zealanders came into line with us on the right, and as the 2nd Royal Scots and the 7th Shrops. were on our left, we were in familiar company once more.

The New Zealanders, at their nearest point, lay within five hundred yards of le Quesnoy, still held by the enemy, and even at Ruesnes we were under rifle-fire from its walls. In view of the next attack that was to be delivered, Divisional Headquarters were anxious to know whether la Folie was occupied. I was ordered to send out a night patrol to investigate, and General Fisher explained to me the importance of our knowing more of the enemy's dispositions. He said I was to send a reliable officer with ten good men. I chose Lieut. Barnekow, a Swede who had recently joined us from the depot. During the attack on Escarmain he had behaved with great courage, singing and dancing ahead of the men, and as he hailed from the Malay States (he was a rubber planter) I thought he would make a useful scout. His favourite witticism was to say that he was the only Swede who had seen active service since the days of Gustavus Adolphus, so they would have to make him Commander-in-Chief of the Swedish Army after the war.

He entered into the scheme with zest and stole off at midnight with his men. We heard shots towards la Folie Farm an hour later, but when daybreak came the patrol was still missing. Both Division and Brigade were calling for information, so I went to look for Barnekow. I crawled out among the trees, intending to reach a spot from which I had previously reconnoitred la Folie. As I scrambled down the bank of a sunken lane I found the entire patrol lying

in various stages of gas poisoning. Barnekow was able to tell me that on nearing the farm they were fired on. They beat a retreat, and on their way back ran into heavy gas accumulated in a hollow. They had struggled along until the last man who could see gave out and they were brought to a standstill. Fortunately this happened in the sunken path, where the German riflemen in the pits close by could not observe them. It was only with great difficulty that the stretcher-bearers reached and removed them to the rear, and I never saw Barnekow again, for he and his men all went to the base. I recommended him for a Military Cross for his work on this night and his conduct at the taking of Escarmain, and he got it.

That evening Division called for another patrol. Aeroplanes had reported that la Folie now seemed deserted, and the higher command wished to verify this news, so I was ordered to push out a patrol at dawn. During the night the Germans fired so many gas shells among the orchards that by daybreak there was scarcely an officer or man who would be of any use as a scout, owing to the state of their eyes. Most of them were sitting in the rifle pits with tears streaming down their cheeks from the smarting gas, and only a few could face the light with uncovered eyes. I therefore decided to do the patrol myself, for my eyes were practically untouched. I wormed my way towards the German rifle posts in the direction of la Folie. The pits were clearly defined by mounds of fresh earth, and after a while, when I raised my head I found myself within a few yards of one of them. All was silent, and I noticed mess-tins and other equipment lying near, which made me think the Germans had withdrawn their line. I decided to make sure, and crawled anxiously forward, expecting to look down the barrel of a Mauser rifle at any moment, but I found to my great relief that the pit was empty, and several others to which I made my way were also abandoned. I now went on to la Folie Farm which was unoccupied, though at Villers Pol, a thousand yards away, many

German soldiers were walking about, and I saw two machine-guns and their crews among the willows by a stream, which enabled me to fix their new positions. I was away for over two hours, and on my return was able to hand in a useful report. For this patrol I was mentioned in despatches and received a bronze sprig, the nearest approach to military honours I attained during the war.

Although we did no fighting, this period was by no means an easy one, for the gassing and the shell-fire were abnormal, and we spent an unpleasant and perilous time at Ruesnes.

On October 28th I went to la Chapelle with Watson, my runner, and a French officer named Berthier, to interrogate two civilians who had escaped from le Quesnoy during the night. They had nothing of importance to tell us and on the return journey Watson and I branched off to see how the New Zealanders were getting on. As we came within three hundred yards of the railway embankment the Germans suddenly put down a very heavy trench-mortar bombardment on a sector of the track. At the same time they severely shelled the orchards through which we were approaching. We saw the New Zealanders break for the rear, and then amidst the smoke and dust came numbers of German infantrymen, yelling and brandishing their bayonets. As the New Zealanders were running, Watson and I bolted too, through shells dropping thick among the trees, until we came on a machine-gun pit in the middle of the next field, and we fairly tumbled down upon the two men below. From here we saw the Germans moving about on the captured railway embankment, and just as our two hosts were preparing to train their gun, the British batteries came down, followed by the New Zealanders rushing pell-mell to the counter-attack. There was some rifle-fire and throwing of bombs, the Germans in their turn scuttling to the rear, and the situation was restored.

This little episode was the last fight I witnessed in the Great War.

That evening General Fisher sent over a copy of a captured document that was a revelation to us. We knew that there were peace rumours in the air, but we did not know how desperate was the condition of Germany. It was an appeal issued by Ludendorff, "Erste General-quartier Meister", to the German troops. It read as follows:

"Soldiers, stand fast or Germany will lie in the dust. Should the enemy discover that our morale (Mannzucht) is broken, all is lost, you will have fought and suffered in vain and the Homeland will hear the tramp of the invader.

"Have you Heard*? (Habt Ihr gehört?) The British declare that Germany has fallen. They say our armies are defeated; that Hamburg is to be annexed; that Alsace will be appropriated by France; Schleswig-Holstein by Denmark; East Prussia, Posen and Silesia by the Poles! Our Empire is to be disrupted!*

"Is This To Be*? (Wollt Ihr das?) Was it for this that your fathers and brothers fell in battle; was it for this that your mothers and wives and children suffered? MEN, was it for this that you endured four long years of war?*

"No, a thousand times No! (Nein, und abermals nein!) Still stands it in your power to stave off disaster. Hold but for a few weeks more and a peace such as you desire we shall wring from the enemy.

"Soldiers, grasp your weapons proudly; let every shot tell!

"Thus far they have seen only German faces, shall they now see only our backs?

"Stand, or the Fatherland is doomed, and you with her."

This cry of despair from the highest German command brought home to us more than anything else how fast the sands were running out.

As always in France, our outlook had been restricted. We had been so preoccupied with our own narrow horizon that we had forgotten we were but

a fraction of the great allied hosts that for the past month had been sweeping forward from the coast of Belgium to the Swiss frontier, raining blow after blow upon the weakened German armies. We did not know that behind the scenes, Hindenburg and Ludendorff were faced with mutiny and civil war. That Austria and Turkey and Bulgaria had collapsed; that the Kaiser was about to abdicate and flee his country, and that already the German leaders were negotiating for a surrender.

The paper before us did not tell us all this, but it told us enough to show that the mighty drama was hastening to its close, and that at long last the end was in sight, though we did not know that the Great War had less than a fortnight to run.

On the 29th of October our Battalion was relieved by the Staffords. It was high time, for we had a bare two hundred men left. I was ordered to proceed by Romeries and Solesmes to Bévillers, where a camp had been erected for our gas patients. When we marched through Solesmes we were, I think, the first troops back from the firing line of those who had helped to drive the enemy out of range, and the civilian population warmly welcomed us. Flags waved and people ran cheering beside us. Our pipe band played, and I rode at the head of the column with my tin hat cocked, pretending I was used to ovations.

At Bévillers we went into camp with the Royal Scots and the Shrops., also withdrawn from the line.

I had swallowed a considerable quantity of gas in the orchards at Ruesnes, and was far from well.

Here again General Fisher did me a good turn. He knew that if I went to hospital I would miss the end of the war, now plainly in sight, so he lent me a car instead, and suggested that I should take fresh air by paying a visit to my South African friends at the Abbeville Field Ambulance.

I went through Cambrai, which I had hitherto viewed only at a distance, with German troops between, and from there to my destination by what had been Bapaume and Albert. Along the roads were thousands of German prisoners at work salving shells and other war material, and already French peasants were returning to the devastated area to look for the places where once their homes had stood.

I spent three days at the Field Ambulance, and thanks to the care of Dr. Brebner, of Johannesburg, my throat and lungs improved so much that I could start back. I found the Battalion quartered at Solesmes; fresh drafts had come up and we were almost at full strength once more.

During our rest period, the Guards Division had driven the Germans from where we had left them at le Quesnoy and Ruesnes, and the British line was now much advanced. On November 10th, we went to a village near le Quesnoy, with instructions to move at dawn to reinforce the Guards, who were fighting in the direction of Maubeuge and the Mormal Forest.

Capt. Gosling, our Brigade-Major, in handing me my orders, said a German delegation was crossing into the French lines to ask for peace terms, but the attack was not to be stayed on that account.

At daybreak on the morning of November 11th we marched out. In front and behind us were thousands of other troops going forward, and one could feel the suppressed excitement in the air, for every man realised that this was the final thrust. By ii o’clock we were in the battle zone, British and German guns were firing, and there came the crackle of rifles and machine-guns ahead.

Suddenly, far off, we heard the faint sound of cheering borne upon the wind. It gathered volume as it rolled towards us, and then we saw our Brigade-Major slowly making his way through the troops on the road. He carried good tidings, for around him the shouts grew deafening, and when at

last he came up, he handed me a despatch which I have carefully preserved. It contained momentous news:

"To 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers.

"M.2. 11 Nov.

"Corps wire aaa Hostilities will cease at 11.00 hours to-day 11th Nov. aaa Troops will stand fast on line reached at that hour which will be reported to Corps H.Q. aaa There is to be no intercourse with the enemy and no Germans are to be allowed to enter our lines, any doing so will be taken prisoners.

"From 8th Inf. Brig.

"11.00 hours

"G. H. Ewing, Capt. and Actg. Brig.-Major."

Amid the demonstrations of the other troops, the Scots Fusiliers remained comparatively unmoved. A few cheers were raised, and there was solemn handshaking and slapping of backs, but otherwise they received the great event with calm. To me it was a supreme moment. I saw the beginnings of a new era for the world and for my country. Splendid visions raced through my brain which I felt an urge to communicate. I told Shaw to form the Battalion in a hollow square beside the road and, sitting my horse, I prepared to address the men. When I faced them, however, I was overcome with stage fright; the inspired thoughts of a moment before had vanished completely and I could only stumble through a few halting phrases. The ceremony was a failure, but at any rate the guns were silent, the war was at an end, and one could once again make plans for the future.

I was instructed to march for a neighbouring village and remain there till further orders, the other troops going in different directions in search of cantonments.

As we came in, an old French *curé* was waiting for us, and when I

dismounted, he flung his arms around my shoulders, and to my embarrassment gave me a resounding kiss on either cheek, before the whole Battalion. The men tittered, but dutifully restrained themselves. Captain Hester, our Quartermaster, tried to hide his smiles behind his hand, and the *curé*, releasing me, made a dash at him, and imprinted two more hearty smacks on his rubicund countenance. The men had been too polite to laugh at their Commanding Officer in trouble, but they made up for it by bursting into a roar of merriment at Hester's discomfited looks.

That night we celebrated the armistice by a rum ration to the men, and at the *curé*'s house we toasted the occasion with a similar round or two before turning in.

Next day I rode to le Quesnoy, which thus far I had only seen from the outside. The town was a picturesque relic of the Middle Ages, enclosed by a moat and battlements, ravelins and counterscarps. The streets were crowded with civilians and refugees from the surrounding countryside, who were housed in the subterranean galleries beneath the ramparts.

There was plenty of news. Up to now I had scarcely had time to grasp the full import of recent happenings, but I got a London *Daily Express* of the day before, which I still have. The mere headlines were staggering enough:

German Envoys pass into French Lines at Château de Francport.

Foch's Historic Reception in a Train.

Kaiser Abdicates and Crown Prince goes with him. Reported to have fled to Holland.

Red Flag waves over Ruins of an Empire.

Revolution in Germany

Socialists in complete command. They set up a central Republican People's Government.

Liebknecht released. Minority Socialists in control of Hamburg and

Bremen.

Everywhere troops and sailors acclaim the Revolution.

Fighting with officers proceeding in Berlin. Workmen's and Soldiers' Council control the City. Policed by Red Guards.

Red Flag on Kaiser's Palace.

Hanover, Cologne, Brunswick, Magdeburg, Frankfort and other important centres declare for the Revolution.

Bavaria an Independent Republic.

The King and Prince Rupprecht have fled.

Schleswig-Holstein a Republic.

Famine Threatened.

Austria in the Throes of Anarchy.

Hungary an Independent State.

British Warships anchor at Constantinople.

Greatest day in History.

We are the Masters of the Starlit Roads.

On a back page was a short paragraph giving the approximate cost of the Great War:

Killed — 10,000,000.

Wounded — 15,000,000.

Expenditure — £30,000,000,000.

It was borne in on me that for one coming from a small village on the South African veld I was in the midst of great events and I rode back from le Quesnoy with my head in a whirl, for Europe seemed to be in the melting-pot.

Chapter XVI — We go into Germany

Now we were to march to the Rhine. Each unit forming the Army of Occupation was selected on its fighting record, and our whole IIIrd Division was included.

We started on the 15th November, the villagers shouting “Vivent nos libérateurs, vivent les Ecossais!” and waving flags.

We trekked to Frasnoy the first day, skirting by le Quesnoy. At Frasnoy our mess was billeted on a pleasant family, one of whom was a pretty little schoolmistress. The Germans had made her work in the sawmills of the Mormal Forest, and she held up her hands for us to see how hardened they had grown. Mademoiselle and the rest of the family fiercely hated the Germans. She hissed through her clenched teeth that they were “des brigands et des brutes”, but she told me of a colonel of artillery who had been quartered on them. On the last day he kept telephoning to the rear for “mehr Munition, mehr Munition”, and finally, as the British advance approached, his car drove up and he bade them good-bye. He said: “Mademoiselle, there come the English, you will soon be liberated, and happiness awaits you, but I go to sorrow and ruin.”

He drove off, accompanied by a young lieutenant, and as they were leaving the village a shell struck the car, killing them both. Mademoiselle said she regretted his death, for he had been kind to them.

From Frasnoy we marched to Maubeuge via Bavay. As soon as we got clear of the village we found the road thronged for miles with allied prisoners of war, who had walked out of their camps, their German guards having

disappeared. There were men from almost every nation. We saw British, French, Americans, Italians, Serbs, Roumanians and Belgians streaming by, mostly in rags and half starved, but smiling cheerfully as they passed. Mingled with these, came thousands more of civilian refugees returning from Belgium (whither they had been removed). They trudged by with bundles or pushing barrows and handcarts, and so great was the congestion that at times we had difficulty in making headway at all.

I shall always remember this day's march, for it was like a triumphal progress. The sun shone brightly, our pipe band played merry tunes, and I rode at the head of a splendid battalion.

All along our course the prisoners and refugees cheered us, and often crowded round, nearly pulling me from my horse in their efforts to shake hands. The children clapped and crowed at the sound of the pipes, and their mothers held them up to see the soldiers go by, and in spite of their pinched faces, due to the trials which these poor people had endured, something of the courage of France still stood in their eyes.

Once, while we were halted on the road, a tattered figure stopped to look us over. He was dressed in an old French tunic, and he had wooden clogs on his feet. The men took him for a French prisoner of war, so they saluted him with the usual cries of "Boche napoo, guerre fini, vive la France!" during which the fellow quizzically surveyed them, then he said in broad Scotch: "Ahm frae Glesgie maself — cheerio, lads," and there was a roar of delighted laughter.

We reached Maubeuge by dark, going into billets in the Mon Plaisir suburb along the River Sambre.

Our method of finding billets was for an officer and a party of men to go ahead in the morning on bicycles to the place at which we were halting for the night. They called on the Maire and told him how many billets were

required. As a rule the men were quartered in threes and fours on families, and whether in France, Belgium, or Germany, the system worked satisfactorily. The men liked being with the civilians, who washed and cooked for them, and who in turn benefited by sharing their rations. Besides, it was the fixed custom for each billet to contribute a small sum of money on departure.

At Mon Plaisir we occupied a large house belonging to people named du Haut. The daughter, Solange, came to tea at our mess, and her artless prattle so captivated one officer's susceptible heart that for a long time after he carried on a correspondence with her, mostly dictated by me, for his French was limited.

Solange told me what I had not known before, that in August 1914, General Fournier had surrendered Maubeuge to the Germans with its garrison of forty-five thousand men and seven hundred guns. She said he was prevailed upon to do so by the wealthier classes, who wished to save their property from the perils of a siege, and the citizens were going to demand a court-martial on him.

From Mon Plaisir suburb we marched through Maubeuge, entering by the great archway. We went with the pipes skirling, and hundreds of citizens following us through the streets. We crossed the Sambre by a temporary bridge, for the Germans had destroyed the other, and then left by the gateway at Malplaquet Barracks for Ferrier le Grand about four kilometres distant, where we halted for five days. This long delay was meant to give the German Army time to fall back in terms of the armistice conditions, and whenever we pressed too close upon their rear we had to lie over to give them more room.

At Ferrier le Grand, General Fisher borrowed a car from Division, and lent it to Henderson, Burne and me to drive to Brussels to see the King of Belgium make his entry. Crossing the Belgian frontier, we went first to

Mons, now occupied by Canadian troops. Henderson had taken part in the Mons retreat in 1914, and he pointed out many places along the road where there had been fighting during the first weeks of the war.

The Belgian population in the towns and villages and at the farms, were decked in their Sunday best, and they cheered us at every turn as we sped by. The houses were gay with bunting, and across the streets and roads stood be-flowered arches with inscriptions in French, Flemish and English. The English greetings read: “You are the welcomes”; and there were large *médallions*: “De tous les Gaules, les plus braves sont les Belges. *Julius Cæsar*.”

Other placards on the walls and arches gibed at the unfortunate Kaiser:

“Guillaume II
Roi des Barbares
Chevalier des Bouffeurs de Choucroute”

and there were caricatures of him, and of the Crown Prince, hotly pursued by Belgian soldiers.

When we reached Brussels the entire population was on the streets, wild with enthusiasm. Our car was boarded by pretty girls wearing their national colours, and Belgian Boy Scouts clung to steps and mudguards to show us the sights.

We arrived too late to see King Albert, but we spent an interesting day. Of all the troops, the French contingent made the bravest show. They were neater and marched better than the British battalions, whilst the Belgian soldiers looked slovenly and untrained.

General Leman, who had defended Liege, rode at their head, bowing to the populace, who gave him a frantic welcome. After the King, Burgomaster Max was the most popular figure, and then Cardinal Mercier.

We were astonished at the countless number of flags that draped the

buildings, and the innumerable scrolls and mottoes on the walls, and we wondered where they had come from so suddenly. A waiter at Joseph's famous restaurant explained that a German firm at Mannheim had made the best of a bad job by manufacturing them, and the moment the last German soldier had left Brussels, they flooded the country with allied flags and inscriptions of welcome, making huge profits.

In the afternoon we went to Waterloo to see the battlefield. I had been here as a boy of twelve, and I showed my two companions where French students had pulled off the British lion's tail many years ago.

An old woman who sold postcards said that on the eleventh the German soldiers posted here had mutinied. They mobbed their officers, broke up their machine-guns, and went off with red cockades in their caps.

When we got back to Brussels, the newsboys were distributing leaflets containing a message from Burgomaster Max, of which I kept a copy:

"CITIZENS. On behalf of the Municipal Council I make known that Brussels, after having been occupied by the Germans since Aug. 20th, 1914, has at length been freed.

"Defeated by the victorious armies of civilisation, the enemy is now fleeing before the bayonets of our soldiers.

"Our victorious troops have entered the Capital.

"Amid them, our King and Supreme Chief of the Army, the Queen and the Royal Family, pass saluted by our delirious acclamations.

"Our flags are flying.

"Our eyes are wet with tears; our hearts beat tumultuously in our bosoms.

"Happiness beyond bearing; happiness unbounded!

"Four years of misery beneath the invader's heel are effaced.

"And let one united oath affirm our joy.

"We have recovered our independence.

"Let us swear to render our country great and true.

"Vive la Belgique. Vive le Roi. Vive 1'armée."

That evening we returned to Ferrier le Grand via Nivelle and Manuge. We passed several abandoned German lorries, and at one point there was a large German bombing plane standing on its nose in the middle of the road, which caused us some difficulty.

From Ferrier, on the 25th November, we crossed the Belgian frontier and marched to Boussignies, an old-world hamlet lying in wooded hills. The château about which the village stood was fiercely burning. The inhabitants were looking on unperturbed, and when I enquired why they viewed the destruction of their chief building so calmly they told me that the retiring German soldiery had set it alight in the belief that it belonged to a Belgian landowner, whereas it really belonged to old Fraulein Weber, lately dead, whose three heirs were Prussian officers.

From Boussignies we went through the fortressed burgh of Thuin, perched on a height overlooking the Sambre, and thence to Cozee and Tarciennes. All along the way the road was strewn with the litter of the German Army ahead of us, and we passed dozens of Schutte Lanz motors, field guns, and other wreckage.

From Tarciennes, on November 28th, via Hanzinelle to Denée. At Hanzinelle stood a park of a hundred and fifty heavy guns, and a hundred and fifty machine-guns neatly aligned beside the road, in charge of German soldiers. Under the armistice agreement, surrendered war material was to be collected at stated intervals, and this was one of the places agreed upon.

I had not originally known the full text of the armistice conditions, but they had since appeared in the English newspapers that came up with our mail. The terms were almost as harsh as those of the Austrian ultimatum that started the war.

Germany had to surrender:

Five thousand guns.

Three thousand aeroplanes.

Five thousand railway engines.

One hundred and thirty thousand railway trucks.

Their entire fleet except squadron flagships.

The whole of their merchant fleet to be at the disposal of the allies to revictual Europe.

Mainz, Coblenz and Cologne bridgeheads to be handed over.

Strasbourg and Metz to go to France.

All German troops withdrawn forty miles east of the Rhine.

Allied prisoners of war to be delivered at once.

War indemnity to be fixed by the Allies.

Poland to be an independent Republic.

Hard terms for a proud nation.

At Oret we passed three hundred motor lorries and long lines of railway trucks laden with surrendered material. Close to Denée we found six Fokker aeroplanes standing in a row, and in the same field a number of Halberstadts, but these were burnt out.

At Denée I was billeted in a beautiful chateau. It belonged to a Belgian aristocrat, Frédéric de Montpellier, a relative of the King of Spain. He and his wife and their two fine boys gave us a hearty welcome. They were very religious and there was an altar on the main staircase at which there was generally one or other of the family kneeling in prayer. I saw a signed photograph of the Pope, and numerous crucifixes and other Catholic emblems. We dined in a magnificent baronial hall with good paintings and old panelling, and oaken beams.

On November 29th we crossed the River Meuse, at Yvoir, marching

through very lovely country, like the scenery on the Thames. On our way along the river bank we again passed many derelict motor cars, and at Bioue were six Fokker planes and other damaged machines.

At Yvoir the Germans had thrown guns and limbers into the river below the lock, and we could see wheels and barrels protruding above the water. They had, besides, left machine-guns and trench mortars in the streets, and in the flower gardens in front of the houses. At the railway station stood a train loaded with 5.9 guns and two captured British tanks.

I was quartered in a neat little villa opposite the lock, whose owner told me that the Germans had executed a number of inhabitants of Yvoir in 1914, to keep the rest quiet, he said.

On November 30th we marched up the steep road leading from the river to the village of Spontin, passing searchlights, repair lorries, and other flotsam on the way. Spontin had been destroyed by the Germans in 1914. I had never believed all the German atrocities of which one read in the British newspapers during the war, but they had certainly acted with ruthless severity against this unfortunate little place. They had entered Spontin at daybreak on the 23rd of August 1914. Alleging that the villagers had fired on them, they burned down every house. Then they arrested the Maire, the Cure, and forty-eight other men, and executed them against a bank at the railway station. The gravestone of each dead man in the little cemetery above the village reads “victime de la terrible journée du 23 Aout 1914”, which was all that the survivors dared write on the tombs during the occupation of the enemy.

An old lady, in whose half-burned house I was lodging, showed me the spot in her back garden where her husband’s brother and their servant were shot dead as they rushed out to escape the flames.

We stayed three days at Spontin to allow the German retreat to get on. Most of the men lived in a deserted manor house close by, for Spontin was in ruins.

I visited a château three miles away, belonging to an old man of eighty-two, lying bedridden upstairs. He told me he was the Belgian Minister of the Interior.

On December 2nd I rode to Dinant on the River Meuse. This town too had been destroyed in August 1914, and here over four hundred townspeople had been executed. At the various spots where the shootings had been carried out there were painted notices, put up since the Germans had left:

"Ici les hordes Saxonnes ont martyrisés nos Innocents."

On December 4th we marched to Braibant, where I stayed in the house of a Belgian nobleman, Baron de Selys Long-champs. The Baron was a quiet unobtrusive man, but his wife was a keen politician. She waxed very fierce against the Flemish activists, whom she accused of treachery. She said that they put their race and their language before their country, and instead of standing by Belgium, their mother, in her need, they had divided the nation in time of war. It sounded to me like a very good description of some of our nationalist friends in South Africa.

Madame la Baronesse prided herself on having no class prejudices. She said "Quoique nous sommes nobles, nous sommes libéraux," which she seemed to think was an unheard-of combination. When I asked her about the massacres at Dinant, Spontin, and elsewhere, the concentrated fury on her face made me realise the terrible legacy of hatred that the slaughter of so many civilians has left among the people of these territories, through which we were passing.

From Braibant we marched to Nettine via Ciney, again passing much war material — motor cars, aeroplanes and caterpillar tractors. Next day we reached Melreux, crossing the River Ourthe. At Melreux was a German supply dump, the biggest I ever saw. Rows of guns and limbers, great stacks of shells, harness, saddlery, cookers, uniforms, etc., worth millions of pounds. It was an extraordinary collection. The German soldiers had partially

looted it, and had smashed valuable range-finders, field glasses and other articles, and around the goods trains lay the contents of boxes and crates, scattered with prodigal confusion for hundreds of yards.

7th December. To Soy, via Ny. Billeted in the Post Office. The postmistress said she had been allowed to carry on her duties unmolested all through the war. She told me the German soldiers that came through two days before had fought among themselves, and there were shots fired in the village. The men put up red cockades and hooted their officers, derisively calling them "Kamerad".

8th-9th. To Malempré in rain and snow.

10th. To Provedoux, close to the border of Germany. Slept at Salm Château, a rambling country seat, whose owner told me that he had assisted many French prisoners of war to escape through the woods to Maastricht in Holland.

On December 12th we crossed the German frontier at Beho. General Deveril stood by the boundary stone to take the salute as the men filed past. Most of the British battalions crossed into Germany on a wide front on this day.

We spent our first night on German soil at Espeler, a poverty-stricken village where the inhabitants stared dully at us.

The woman I was billeted with said her husband and three of her brothers were dead, and nineteen other men from here had been killed in the war. She favoured Germany becoming a republic.

From Espeler, on the 13th, to Braunlauf, an equally wretched little place.

14th. Long march to Schonberg via St. Vith, a fairly large town. The people in the streets of St. Vith raised their hats, but here and there I caught sight of better-class German women gazing through the windows at the invading troops, despair written on their faces.

I entered the Post Office to ask for a *Kölnische Zeitung*, as I wished to see how the revolution in Berlin was getting on. The clerk behind the counter said the newspapers belonged to subscribers, and I could not have one.

He was a good specimen of officialdom. His country was tottering about his ears, and through the open door he could see a hostile army marching through his town, but when I insisted on having a paper, he produced a set of postal regulations, and pointed me out a clause that prohibited the handing-over of printed matter without written authority from the addressee. When I vaulted the counter and helped myself from one of the pigeon-holes, he looked as if the heavens were falling.

Many disbanded officers and soldiers stood about the streets, and they punctiliously clicked their heels and saluted me, as I rode by with the Regiment.

15th December to Hahlschlag.

16th. To Blankenheim. This town was a centre of boar hunting, and most of the photographs on the walls of the hotel where I was quartered showed groups of sportsmen posed beside dead hogs.

17th. To Münstereifel, a walled town that looked in the snow like a Christmas card. In my bedroom at the Gasthof-an-der-Posten was an illuminated scroll painted on the wall to say that the “Hochseelige” Kaiser Frederich had occupied the chamber in 1847 when he was a Corps Student at Bonn.

As we moved out of town the following morning, we passed a shop with a large sign over the door, “Mathias Reitz, Schumacher”, and I heard one of my men in the ranks behind say in a stage whisper that he “didn’t know the Colonel was a Boche”. Later on, in the Cologne telephone directory, I found dozens of them, for my people originally came from these parts, four hundred years ago.

18th December. To Obergarten. In the dining-room of the house I was billeted in was a book entitled *Deutschlands Seemachty* with pictures of dreadnoughts and submarines. On the front page was an inscription to the effect that the work had been presented to “Tertianer” Franz Muller by His Majesty the Kaiser, who had evidently been in the habit of presenting books of this kind as school prizes, to encourage the youth of Germany to take an interest in the navy he had built up, and which now, according to the newspapers, was in the process of being handed over to the British.

19th December. Marched to Disternich via Zülpich. Visited a fine old country mansion surrounded by a moat, where General Fisher was staying. The place, Muddersheim, belonged to Von Gehr, a German artillery officer just back from the war. He was very polite, and his wife, who spoke perfect English, came down the wide staircase beautifully gowned and smoking a cigarette.

On December the 20th we reached Merzenich, a small town on the outskirts of Cologne, and we now received instructions that we were to go into winter quarters here for an indefinite period.

We therefore settled down. The men were billeted on the people, and I requisitioned an hotel for the officers. I foisted myself on old Arnold Haase, the richest landowner in these parts. He was very friendly, and his wife looked after me like a mother.

Cologne and all the neighbouring towns and villages on the left bank of the Rhine were being occupied by British troops. Below us were Belgian forces, and upstream a French army of occupation was taking over the other bridgeheads.

In Berlin and elsewhere in Germany there was civil war and revolution, but owing to the presence of the allied soldiers there was peace along the river, although there had been riots and fighting in Cologne and Düren before our

arrival.

Arnold Haase told me that when the retreating German troops came through they were a disorganised mob carrying red flags, and selling their arms and ammunition to the Bolshevist industrial workers at the factories. Marines from Bremershafen had terrorised the whole area, with the help of a band of riff-raff from the paper mills, and any officer who ventured to show himself on the streets was insulted and stripped of his insignia.

There was a Workers' and Soldiers' Council in Merzenich — Arbeiter und Soldaten Rat, as they called themselves; Angst und Sorgen Rat according to Haase. Their leader was a one-legged blacksmith who had been wounded at Verdun. He claimed that all landed estates should be divided among the people, greatly to my host's indignation, who declared that the fellow had stolen one of his pigs the other night.

There was an army order to arrest all Bolshevists, but these village orators seemed so harmless that I let them be, and sometimes attended their meetings, held in a large barn. On one occasion the blacksmith made a violent attack on Hindenburg and Ludendorff. He referred to them as "diese verdammte Hetzbrüder, mit ihre Siegesfriede" (those damned firebrands with their Victory Peace). He said anyone could have foretold last April that Germany could not hold out, for the people were starving, but these two sabre-rattlers had pushed the country into a disastrous offensive by promises of a great victory, with peace to follow. There was something to be said for the ranter's opinion, as I had seen broadcasted photographs of Hindenburg bearing a signed message: "Ohne Opfer kein Sieg; ohne Sieg kein Friede" (Without sacrifice, no victory; without victory, no peace), and certainly he and Ludendorff had helped to lure the nation to its doom.

In a tobacconist's shop which I entered in Düren was a notice of a football match between the local *Verein* and some other team from a village close by.

A revolutionary walked in, and tearing down the placard said angrily to the proprietor: “Is this a time for sport? I suppose the shooting-down of the sailors was sport too!” He was referring to the killing of a number of marines in Berlin that morning, the news of which had just come through, and soon there were a number of other men shouting and gesticulating around the unfortunate shopkeeper.

My duties at Merzenich were light. I was responsible for the administration of the town and the area around it, with the Burgermeister and his councillors under me. The people addressed me as “Herr Orts Kommandant”, and respectfully doffed their hats when I passed.

As I had plenty of time on my hands, I often rode into Cologne. It is a fine city with its cathedral, and great iron bridge spanning the Rhine. At the entrance to the bridge is a statue of the Kaiser, after whom it was named.

I went across the river several times to see the wired strong-points on the far bank.

One morning every wall in Cologne was placarded with an appeal from the Moderates:

“Must a nation of whom 90 per cent desire Peace and Liberty and Work bow to an armed minority of Revolutionaries?

“Is nothing to be spared us; have we to drain this cup of bitterness to the dregs?

“STOP THE CIVIL WAR.

“STOP THE STREET FIGHTING.

“Let a National Assembly be constituted.”

Not that there was any fighting in the occupied area along the Rhine, but there was turmoil in the rest of Germany, and dozens of rival political parties were in the field. It was all very confusing, but the attitude of the British was to keep aloof and let the Germans fight out their domestic quarrels among

themselves.

I met civilians and also ex-officers and soldiers and was able to listen to their experiences during the war, and to their opinions of Germany's present plight. Several times I heard the view expressed that submarining passenger steamers and bombing towns was no worse than the allied blockade, which also killed women and children and non-combatants.

Once I fell into conversation with a German cavalry officer newly returned from the Ukraine. He had crossed the Russian border only three days before, and he said that on December 21st he had seen about forty Russian officers massacred at Kiev. They were hauled out of their camp by their men, and shot or clubbed to death at the railway station. He was obliged to sell his horse to a peasant to buy food, and when he ultimately reached the Russian frontier he was deprived of his arms and money, and the buttons and shoulder straps were slashed from his uniform. He had passed through Berlin on his way to Cologne, and when I enquired how things were going there, he shrugged his shoulders and said: "Na, in Berlin revolutioniert mann noch immer."

Old Haase sometimes took me the rounds of his estate in an antiquated motor car with steel springs round the wheels instead of rubber tyres, which had been unprocurable all through the war. He also invited me to a deer hunt on another property of his in the hills, but I was unable to go.

He had been a mighty Nimrod in his day, for the walls of his house were hung with antlers, boar heads, stuffed pointer dogs behind glass, and other trophies of the chase. He looked on me with great respect because I told him of the big game I had seen in Africa, and because I praised von Lettow. His one great fear in life was that the German war loans would never be repaid, and as he had sunk a vast sum in them his anxiety was justified. His wife was a homely body, and I ended by calling her "Ma", a title which she smilingly

accepted.

I was surprised at the attitude of our men towards the Germans. When we were marching through Belgium I used to hear snatches of their talk. They were angered by the stories they had heard at Spontin and other places of the German treatment of the civilian population, and they were going to do this and that to the —— Boche when they got to the Rhine. But now that they were here I had trouble in preventing them from giving away the entire contents of the battalion store-room to the local inhabitants, and there was the utmost good feeling among them.

We celebrated Hogmanay Nicht in the riotous fashion demanded by the regimental tradition of the Scots Fusiliers, and I was piped round next morning with a terrible headache, to toast the New Year at the messroom of each of the four companies.

I spent the first fortnight of 1919 attending to my duties, and riding about the country that lay all blanketed in snow.

The prospect, however, of spending the rest of the winter in these bleak surroundings was unattractive, and now that the excitement of war was gone, reaction had set in, and I was eager to return to South Africa. I applied for leave to proceed to London for the purpose of getting demobilised, and with the help of General Fisher my request was granted.

Then I rode over to the neighbouring villages where the 2nd Royal Scots and the 7th Shrops. were quartered, and there said good-bye to Henderson and Burne, and to the men of the two battalions with which I had been so long and so intimately associated.

Next I parted from Shaw and Robertson, Keegan, Sleep and Hester and Corporal Noble, and many other good friends, and from the men of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, and I was done with the Great War.

To me it had been terrible but not degrading, and I came away with a

higher, not a lower opinion of my fellow men. My chief memory is of great friendships, and of millions of men on both sides, who did what they thought they had to do without becoming the brutes that some writers say they were.

After visiting Düren to take farewell of General Fisher and General Deveril I travelled by train via Charleroi and Liege to Boulogne, and crossing by the channel leave-boat for the last time, arrived in London in due course. I soon found that it was easier to get into the British Army than to get out of it, and I spent several weeks frequenting the corridors of the War Office with hundreds of others, all vainly trying to get their demobilisation papers.

During the intervals of importuning the higher powers, I made several visits to General Botha and General Smuts, who were making ready to attend the Peace Conference at Versailles. General Botha had just arrived from the Union for the purpose. He looked ill and worn, for the long strain had told upon him, and the knowledge that so many of his own race misunderstood his actions and looked upon him as an enemy was breaking his heart.

He said to me that remembering how we had tasted the bitterness of defeat in days gone by and how the sting had been softened by magnanimous peace terms, he and General Smuts were opposed to a treaty that would leave the Germans a broken people.

Of the position in South Africa he spoke sadly. He said narrow men were still conducting a relentless racial campaign that was dividing the people, and a united nation was far off.

He died soon after his return to the Union, and I did not see him again. He was the most honourable and most lovable man I ever knew. From that night of the Spion Kop battle, eighteen years before, I had been his follower, and in South Africa we who hold his faith are still treading the road upon which he set us.

I grew weary of official delays, and as I was informed that it would be

months before my turn came on the roster, I manœuvred three months' leave of absence and went to America, a country I had always wanted to see. I left on a troopship carrying the famous Sunrise Division, and I made many friends among the officers and men.

On my return to England in June 1919 my demobilisation papers were ready, and I was free to go home.

The *Guildford Castle* was sailing for Capetown with seven hundred South Africans returning from the war, and I was O.C. Ship.

There was the usual battle at Madeira with the Portuguese gendarmes, in which some of our men came off second best, but otherwise the voyage was pleasant and uneventful, and at length we saw Table Mountain rise out of the sea, with all Africa and a new life stretching away behind it.

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[1] McBride was executed in Dublin in 1916 for taking part in the Easter rising.

[2] Jacques Lebaudy some years later fitted out a filibustering expedition to North Africa, where he proclaimed himself Emperor of the Sahara. He was ultimately murdered in New York.

[3] Since published. *Commando*: *A Boer Journal of the Boer War*, by Deneys Reitz. Faber & Faber. London.

[4] The figures were: Men of English descent 27,500; of Dutch descent 22,500.

[5] See *Commando.*

[6] See *Commando.*

[7] M.Z.O. was the code index of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers.