

## CHAPTER I.

### MOBILIZATION. EMBARKATION. THE AISNE.

#### THE MOVE TO THE NORTH.

**A**T the outbreak of the Great War of 1914-1918, the 1st Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment was stationed at BUTTEVANT, COUNTY CORK, forming part of the 17th Brigade, 6th Division, of the British Expeditionary Force.

The 2nd Battalion was stationed in India with the 2nd Indian (Rawalpindi) Division. This Battalion remained in India throughout the Great War and consequently the account of its services is deferred to later chapters of this history.

It was at 2-10 p.m. on the 30th July, 1914, that the 1st Battalion, which was engaged in training at Moore Park, near FERMOY, received the news that the "Precautionary Period" prior to Mobilization, had been proclaimed. Next day the Battalion returned by forced march to BUTTEVANT, and the fact that the march was accomplished in record time, without a man falling out, augured well for the fitness of all ranks for the strenuous tasks which lay ahead of them.

On August 1st most of the Battalion left BUTTEVANT to man and create the Queenstown defences, a duty which had been allotted to it, until the Special Reserve were ready to relieve it. Meanwhile, on August 4th, Mobilization had been ordered and proceeded apace, so much so that reservists flocked to the Depot, long before they had received any orders, and a considerable number surplus to War Establishment actually reached the Battalion, and had to be returned to the Depot.

Mobilization was completed five days later, and on August 14th the Battalion left BUTTEVANT, being played to the station by the village band and being given a most enthusiastic send-off. On arrival at CORK, where the Battalion embarked for England, it was given a very friendly reception by the Mayor and Corporation, and on its departure was cheered to the echo, while, as the ship passed down the river Lee to QUEENSTOWN, all kinds of flags were waved and every siren hooted. This was the more remarkable when it is remembered that the relations between the British Army and the Southern Irish had been somewhat strained for some time.

The Battalion reached CAMBRIDGE on August 17th, and remained in camp on Midsummer Common until August 30th. During this period the Officers were treated with the utmost kindness by King's College and were made Honorary Fellows of the College. The Officers presented a silver statuette of an Officer to the Provost and Fellows, and this is still to be seen on the high table.

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On August 31st the Battalion moved into camp on Warren Hill, NEWMARKET, and stayed there till September 7th, the time being spent in strenuous route marching to get the reservists fit for the hard times which lay ahead. The Officers were made honorary members of the Turf Club and the Hon. G. Lambton and Messrs. Marsh and Jarvis and the Brothers Leader all most kindly placed horses at the disposal of the Battalion. The Government had decided, as a precautionary measure, to retain the 4th and 6th Divisions for Home Defence, so that it was not until September 8th that the 17th Brigade, the other Battalions of which were the 1st Royal Fusiliers, the 2nd Leinster Regiment and the 3rd Rifle Brigade, embarked at Southampton for France, to join the British Expeditionary Force.

The following Officers embarked with the Battalion :—

Lieut.-Colonel V. W. de Falbe, D.S.O., Commanding  
Major L. J. Wyatt, 2nd in Command  
Major G. E. Leman, Officer Commanding "B" Company  
Captain R. J. Armes, Officer Commanding "A" Company  
Captain G. Hume-Kelly, Officer Commanding "D" Company  
Captain A. S. Conway, Officer Commanding "C" Company  
Captain E. B. Reid  
Captain J. Ridgeway  
Captain C. H. Lyon  
Lieut. P. Lyon, Machine Gun Officer  
Lieut. C. Fraser, Adjutant  
Lieut. A. C. F. Royle  
Lieut. H. C. Bridges  
Lieut. A. P. A. Hooper  
Lieut. R. F. Morgan  
Lieut. J. W. L. S. Hobart  
Lieut. C. F. Gordon  
Lieut. E. W. Anderson, Transport Officer  
2nd Lieut. A. R. A. Leggett  
2nd Lieut. V. V. Pope  
Lieut. and Quartermaster C. Langridge  
Regimental Sergeant-Major J. Dale  
Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant J. Brough

Attached :—

Major Anderson, R.A.M.C., Medical Officer  
Lieut. A. C. Adamson (3rd Battalion)  
Lieut. P. G. Harris (3rd Battalion)  
2nd Lieut. Bagot-Chester (3rd Battalion)

The 1st North Staffords were allotted the S.S. "Michigan," a Canadian emigrant ship, with very indifferent accommodation and worse catering arrangements, and arrived at ST. NAZAIRE on the night of September 10th/11th, after a calm voyage, but owing to lack of harbour accommodation lay off

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until September 12th, when they disembarked and entrained for an unknown destination. Two days later, after a slow and uncomfortable journey, 36 men to a horse-truck, they detrained at COULLOMIERES and marched to billets at ST. CYR. From ST. CYR the 17th Brigade commenced a five days' march to the AISNE battle area. It rained incessantly during this march, and, as each night was spent in bivouac, either in very wet fields or on the side of the road, the Battalion had an early taste of the discomforts which attend active service.

On September 19th the 17th Brigade went into billets at DHUIZEL, in the battle area, and on September 20th was ordered to relieve part of the 5th Brigade and the 4th Guards' Brigade in the line just north of SOUPIR.

The battle of the AISNE was drawing to its close, all efforts of the British and French Armies to drive the enemy from his prepared positions having proved abortive. Local attacks were, however, still being made and counter attacks by the enemy were of daily occurrence.

In these circumstances the 1st North Staffords moved forward on the night of September 21st/22nd, crossed the river Aisne over a partially destroyed pontoon bridge, and bivouacked in a wet cornfield just outside SOUPIR.

From this bivouac an Officer's Patrol, consisting of Lieut. C. F. Gordon, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Gould and two men, was sent forward to gain information about the enemy. The British troops in the front line had only taken over that night and were unable to give any information except as to the general direction of the enemy lines. Lieut. Gordon therefore decided to find out what he could for himself. He approached the German lines and ordered his Patrol to lie down and observe, while he crept forward to reconnoitre. If he did not return within a stated time, it was to retire to our lines and report, which it eventually did. Lieut. Gordon penetrated the German lines, but lost his way in the darkness, so lay up behind them till early dawn. He then recrossed the enemy front trench at a run, but being heavily fired on, again lay up in a fold of the ground in "No man's land" until dark. He then regained our trenches, which had meanwhile been taken over by his Battalion, securing the attention of the sentries by whistling the regimental march. He had obtained valuable information as to the enemy trenches.

The 1st North Staffords had relieved the 2nd South Staffords in these trenches on September 22nd. They remained in this neighbourhood till the end of the month. They were heavily shelled throughout this period and had their first experience of "Jack Johnsons" and "Black Marias," nicknames given by the troops to German high explosive shells which burst with a loud noise and a very black smoke. Enemy snipers were also active but no actual attack took place on the Battalion front. Casualties were somewhat heavy, Lieut. Royle and 2nd Lieut. Hill were killed and 19 other ranks were killed or wounded. 2nd Lieut. Hill, who had been outside the parapet, under cover of a haystack, trying to get a view of the enemy position, had got back safely, but found he had left his field glasses behind, so went back to recover them

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and was shot in doing so. Sergeant Redfern, with great gallantry, went out in face of a heavy fire and brought him in. For this brave act Sergeant Redfern was subsequently awarded the D.C.M. and thus secured the first honour awarded to the Battalion in the Great War. Major Green, Brigade Major 17th Brigade, was unfortunately killed in the Battalion lines.

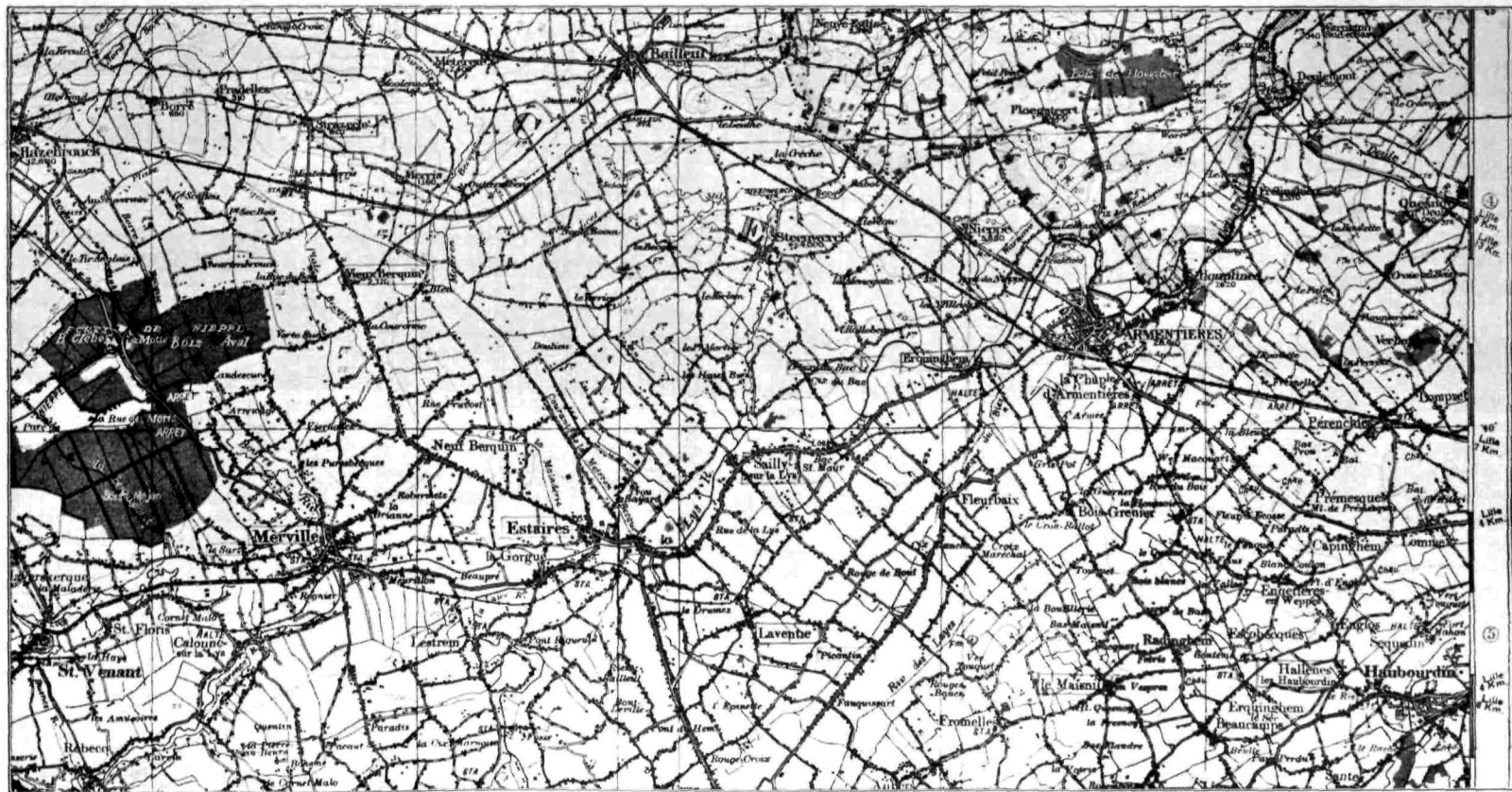
It was towards the end of the Battalion's first experience of close contact with the enemy that an incident occurred which well illustrated the high morale and spirit of devotion to duty which existed among all ranks both now and throughout the War. The Higher Command were confident that, as a result of the "Race to the Sea" which was just beginning, the Germans would withdraw from their position and once more fall back. Accordingly, each Battalion in the 17th Brigade was ordered to ascertain if the Germans were still holding their trenches in strength. The reconnaissances were to be made in daylight, but it was left to Battalion Commanders to decide in what strength they were to be carried out. Some detailed a complete company, but Lieut.-Colonel de Falbe, being convinced from his own observation, that the German trenches were fully occupied, and that consequently the troops detailed for the work of daylight reconnaissance were likely to get a warm reception, decided to send out only one section of "D" Company under a Non-commissioned Officer. Corporal Brown was chosen for this duty, and at the appointed time he and his section climbed over the parapet and set out in short rushes for the German trench. They were immediately met by a heavy fire but continued to advance until most of them had been hit, Corporal Brown himself being shot through the left arm.

A feature of these early days of what was almost trench warfare was the great gusts of "Wind up" which used to shake miles of the British front almost nightly. The night would be quiet and almost peaceful, when suddenly far away on the right or the left the sound of heavy rifle fire would be heard. It would creep closer and closer, like a *feu de joie*, until all at once both British and Germans would seize their rifles and fire madly into the night. As suddenly as it had come it would pass away and an intermittent silence would again prevail. Later, as control developed and was more rigidly maintained, these false alarms became less frequent, but when they did occur it was by no means easy to remain assured that "No man's land" was not full of stealthily approaching Germans.

On October 1st the 1st North Staffords were relieved and marched to billets at OEULLY, whence they found guards over the Aisne bridges, the 17th Brigade being in Corps reserve.

On October 6th they were ordered to march to VIOLAINE. The enemy were shelling the bridges as the Battalion crossed, but were luckily a little wide of the mark. Two hours later orders were received to proceed to DHUIZEL instead of VIOLAINE and here the first reinforcement, under Captain F. C. T. Ewald, joined.

On October 7th the Battalion said good-bye to the AISNE and prepared to take its part in the move of the British Army to the north. After three days'



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marching, with very wet and cold nights, which had to be spent in bivouac owing to all billets being crowded with French troops, it entrained at COMPIEGNE on October 10th, and reached ST. OMER next day.

On October 11th it marched to ARGUES and received orders to be ready to proceed to HAZEBROUCK by 'bus at dawn. The 'buses, however, were delayed by breakdowns and fog and did not arrive till 2 p.m. HAZEBROUCK was reached in the evening and the Battalion billeted there for the night.

The 6th Division were now ordered to advance, and accordingly marched eastward on MERRIS on October 13th.

At 5-30 a.m. the 17th Brigade, with the 1st North Staffords as advanced guard, moved on STRAZEELE, the 18th Brigade moving on a parallel line on their right. "C" and "D" Companies formed the vanguard, and at about 8 a.m. were in touch with the enemy near STRAZEELE. "D" Company was ordered to advance on MERRIS and "C" Company on a small village called NORD HELF. Both Companies came under shell fire, but MERRIS was occupied by the Divisional Cavalry and Cyclists, and the advance continued.

On attempting to debouch from MERRIS the advance guard came under artillery and small arms fire from the Outtersteene Ridge, which was sufficiently heavy and accurate to check further movement across the bare fields which lay between it and the enemy.

While the Battalion was waiting for other troops to come up, and for definite orders to be issued, the Germans amused themselves by sniping with machine guns at any movement east of MERRIS and by shelling alternately the Church and the Monastery. The 1st North Staffords passed the time of waiting in spying out the country over which they would eventually have to advance.

Considerable alarm was caused to one Platoon Commander by his Platoon Sergeant remarking "My God! look at that for an entanglement! Well, come on, we shall have to have it!" The "entanglement" was actually a hop field with its gigantic poles.

Eventually the 3rd Rifle Brigade came up on the left and the 17th Brigade issued the following operation order:—

"17th Infantry Brigade will attack the Bailleul Ridge as follows:—The 1st "North Stafford Regiment with their right on the railway running east "from HAZEBROUCK and their left on the road running east and west just "north of MERRIS. The 3rd Rifle Brigade with their right in touch with "the 1st North Stafford Regiment and their left in touch with the 4th "Division. The attack will start at 1-30 p.m."

"C" and "D" Companies were in the firing line with "A" and "B" in support. The attack began at a great pace, but had it not been for the mist casualties must have been much heavier than they actually were.

The German position was formidable, as the country west of the ridge formed an almost perfect glacis. Thanks, however, to the mist and rain,

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which had now commenced to fall heavily, the enemy consistently over-estimated the range, and their machine gun fire, though sufficiently alarming, was just too high to be deadly. It was accurate enough, nevertheless, to slow up the attack considerably as it approached the shorter ranges.

Owing to the mist and the lack of suitable positions, the Artillery were unable to afford much assistance, but Lieut. P. Lyon got two machine guns into the upper windows of a house in MERRIS and thence supported the attack.

There was a short pause in the attack while Colonel de Falbe, who had discovered that no troops had yet come up on his right, formed a defensive flank there with a Reserve Platoon, but when this had been done the advance was resumed, and at about 5 p.m. the village of OUTERSTEENE was captured, together with two machine guns and some prisoners. During this attack some incidents occurred, which besides being amusing, will serve to illustrate the excellent spirit which prevailed in the Battalion.

Owing to the mist and the skill with which the Germans had concealed themselves, it was not easy to find those "prominent objects" in the landscape so necessary to the approved issue of fire orders. There was, however, one isolated tree, and the Section Commanders did not fail to observe it. Up and down the firing line ran the order "Lone tree; 15 rounds rapid fire!" It was not until the village had been captured that it was discovered that a German machine gun section had, unfortunately for themselves, chosen to site their guns a short distance in front of this tree. Two machine guns were found in a trench there, riddled with bullets, and a German Officer, dead, with a brand new Iron Cross in his pocket.

During a short rush in the course of the attack, a man was seen to get up under heavy fire, run back a short distance, pick up something, and return to the firing line. Later, at a more convenient season, his Platoon Commander asked him why he had done this, only to be told that the object, which had to be retrieved at all costs, was the section pot of jam, expostulations being met with the reply, "I had to go back, Sir! They'd all have been cribbin' if I'd lost it!"

After the capture of OUTERSTEENE, "C" and "D" Companies took up an outpost line in touch with the 3rd Rifle Brigade, which had also taken its objective on the Bailleul Ridge, and with the 18th Brigade on the right, which was, however, two miles away.

The remainder of the Battalion billeted in OUTERSTEENE and received congratulations on its successful attack from the Divisional and Brigade Commanders, Major-General Keir and Brigadier-General Doran. Its casualties on October 13th had been: killed, 2nd Lieut. Bagot-Chester and 13 other ranks; wounded, Lieuts. Bridges, Hooper and Morgan, and 37 other ranks. The losses of the 3rd Corps had been 708, all ranks. During the morning of October 14th the 17th Brigade consolidated the Bailleul Ridge position.

At 2-10 p.m. the advance was continued, the 1st North Staffords moving on STEENWERCK as advanced guard. They were soon held up by rifle fire from woods on the flanks and the houses in NOUVE BOON. These were

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eventually cleared of the enemy, but the country was much enclosed and difficult and the subsequent advance was slow.

About 7 p.m., when it was quite dark, the Brigade bivouacked about three miles west of STEENWERCK in pouring rain. On this occasion the 17th Brigade adopted a formation somewhat unusual in modern warfare, forming three sides of a hollow square, with two Battalions facing STEENWERCK and one Battalion thrown back on each flank.

The 1st North Staffords spent a damp and dismal night on battle outposts and not even the exciting message duly passed down the line, that there was a German gun in the middle of the square and that it was to be prevented from breaking out at all costs, was able to dispel the general gloom. Nobody really knew where the enemy was or what he might be up to. During the night Lieut. Gordon took out a Cyclist Patrol and found the enemy holding the roads. He was exceedingly lucky to get away with his Patrol intact.

Just before dawn on October 15th, 2nd Lieut. Pope went out with a Patrol with instructions to meet a similar Patrol from the 3rd Rifle Brigade at an Estaminet just outside STEENWERCK. 2nd Lieut. Pope's Patrol happened to strike a gap in the German outposts, through which it slipped, as they withdrew, but the Rifle Brigade Patrol met the enemy and were unable to get on. 2nd Lieut. Pope's Patrol thus entered STEENWERCK ahead of the Cavalry and, passing through to the far end of the town, was in time to drive off a German Cavalry Patrol which was attempting to enter. 2nd Lieut. Pope led this Patrol with great skill and initiative, and it was his report that enabled the 6th Division to resume the advance. The confused state of affairs in STEENWERCK early that morning is shown by the fact that Private Raven, who had been sent back with a message from the Patrol, was collected by the Germans, and thus became the first, and for a long time, the only prisoner of war belonging to the Battalion.

Acting on 2nd Lieut. Pope's information, the Division again advanced, and the 1st North Staffords entered STEENWERCK at 11-30 a.m., hoping to billet there for the night. It was a bitter disappointment when orders were received to resume the advance at 6 p.m., though "C" Company managed to snatch a hasty meal off the dinner ordered by their German predecessors in their billets.

At midnight the 1st North Staffords took up an outpost position on the right of the 1st Royal Fusiliers. In order to keep in touch with the 18th Brigade it was found necessary to have all four Companies in line, and "D" Company, under Captain Hume-Kelly, in taking up ground to the right, fell foul of a French Vidette, who, having lost direction in the dark, had constructed a bridgehead on a culvert crossing a small tributary of the river Lys, having mistaken the tributary for the main river. This Vidette opened fire on "D" Company and a sharp skirmish ensued, resulting in one French soldier being killed and one of "D" Company being wounded. Captain Hume-Kelly promptly realised the mistake and stopped his Company firing, but the French Officer could not be persuaded that his opponents were English, and

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it was not until Colonel de Falbe, who had heard the firing, ran forward and acted as interpreter, that peace was restored.

On October 16th the 17th Brigade again advanced, crossing the river Lys, and held a line covering the bridgeheads at BAC ST. MAUR, in touch with the 18th Brigade at SAILLY.

At noon on October 17th, the 6th Division was ordered to occupy the line ROUGE DE BOUT—BOIS GRENIER—CHAPELLE D'ARMENTIERES. This order was carried out and the 1st North Staffords spent the night on outpost duty in front of RUE DU BOIS. Next morning the 6th Division was ordered to reconnoitre the line LA VALLEE—PERENCHIES, to test the strength of the defence, and the 17th Brigade accordingly sent forward the 2nd Leinsters and 3rd Rifle Brigade against PREMESQUES and PERENCHIES respectively. Continuous opposition was met, but by 10 a.m. the 2nd Leinsters were on the ridge near PREMESQUES and in sight of LILLE. They could get no further. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, owing to its left flank not being covered by other troops, could not make much progress. At 11-30 a.m. the 3rd Corps ordered the 6th Division to press the enemy vigorously eastwards, while the 4th Division contained them on its front. On this order the 1st Royal Fusiliers were sent forward by the 17th Brigade on the left of the 3rd Rifle Brigade. This Battalion took L'EPINETTE but little progress could be made, and at 5 p.m. the three Battalions in the front line were ordered to entrench on the line PREMESQUES—L'EPINETTE.

The 1st North Staffords, who had spent the day in reserve at CHAPELLE D'ARMENTIERES, moved up after dark to WEZ-MARQUART, whence "D" Company was sent forward to fill a gap between the left of the 2nd Leinsters and the right of the 3rd Rifle Brigade.

The line thus established was held without much interference by the enemy until October 20th, though WEZ-MARQUART was heavily shelled. Early on October 20th the 2nd Leinsters were heavily attacked and driven out of their trenches. The attack developed very rapidly and a gap in the line was soon formed and the Germans were beginning to exploit it, when news of the situation reached Colonel de Falbe. He had no time or opportunity to consult the Brigadier, so acting with great promptitude and initiative, he launched his Companies to a counter attack on his own account, and they held and finally repulsed the enemy. "A" and "C" Companies led the counter attack, and 2nd Lieut. Leggett led his Platoon with great gallantry. He found some remnants of the 2nd Leinsters holding on to the west of PREMESQUES and went to their assistance, and though the situation on both his flanks was critical, he refused to retire and held on to the ground he had occupied till night fall. He subsequently received a well-earned mention in dispatches for his gallantry on this occasion.

Captain E. B. Reid was killed during "A" Company's successful counter attack. "D" Company, which, as mentioned above, was holding a portion of the front line between the 2nd Leinsters and the 3rd Rifle Brigade, had been attacked on both flanks and was isolated, so that Battalion Headquarters

hardly hoped to see them again. Captain Hume-Kelly had been killed while running from trench to trench encouraging his men. He had only one other Officer with him, and his Company were distributed in section trenches not joined together. The Company held on with grim determination and eventually the attackers were beaten off, thanks mainly to the fine leadership of Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Gould. Private Blundred also showed conspicuous bravery in fetching bandoliers of S.A.A. and distributing them to the Company, who were running short of ammunition. He was subsequently decorated with the Russian Order of St. George. After dark Company Sergeant-Major Keeling went up to try and find "D" Company. He not only did so but brought them back without further loss. He was afterwards awarded the M.C. for his gallantry on this occasion. About 11 a.m. on this day the Battalion machine guns, under Lieut. Hobart, got a magnificent target from a position previously prepared near the road junction at LA BLEU. The enemy attempted to attack from the shelter of a group of cottages, but were caught as they came out, and the attack was broken up with heavy loss. Unfortunately the enemy located the position, and the result was a tornado of shells which knocked out several of the machine gunners.

Though the Battalion was getting used to being under fire, and had carried out a successful set-piece attack at OUTERSTEENE, this was the first occasion on which it had been called upon to meet a sudden emergency. It owed much to Colonel de Falbe's prompt appreciation of the situation, but even so the Companies, necessarily spread out over a wide area, were flung suddenly into action, when all was confusion around them. Nobody quite knew what was happening, but it was obvious that something had gone badly wrong, as broken troops were met everywhere as the Battalion moved up towards the battle. The men were not unaffected by this disorder, but nevertheless, pressed steadily on to meet the enemy and eventually to repulse them.

It may be said that on this day, October 20th, 1914, the Battalion definitely found itself, and thereafter the men would sing cheerfully on the march:

"We beat you on the Marne, we beat you on the Aisne,

We drove you back at Armentears and here we are again!"

During the night of October 20th the loss of LA VALLEE and ENNETIERES by the 18th Brigade caused the withdrawal of the 17th Brigade to the line RUE DU BOIS—PORT EGAL FERME—L'EPINETTE. This line was occupied without interference by daybreak on October 21st, the 1st North Stafford Regiment being astride the Armentieres-Lille Road on a double frontage including that allotted to the 2nd Leinster Regiment, who were re-organising, with the 3rd Rifle Brigade on its immediate left and the 1st Royal Fusiliers beyond at L'EPINETTE. The enemy followed cautiously but eventually brought up a field gun near WEZ-MARQUART, which knocked out two machine guns under Lieut. Hobart, who had placed them in a good position near cross roads, whence they could fire right down the main road to WEZ-MARQUART.

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At 10-30 p.m. the enemy made a determined attack on the 3rd Rifle Brigade and the left of the 1st North Staffords, and a few of them succeeded in breaking through. The line, however, was held intact and "B" Company, under Captain G. E. Leman, did good work in helping to repel the enemy, who left behind the bodies of one Officer and several other ranks, and some wounded prisoners. The German Officer's sword is preserved as a trophy in the 1st Battalion Officers' Mess, together with the following description of how it fell into their hands:—

"This sword belonged to an Officer of a Saxon Regiment, who was killed  
"on the 21st October, 1914, in front of Chapelle d'Armentieres, north of  
"the Armentieres-Lille Road.

"The trenches on our left had been lost, and, during the night our line was  
"heavily attacked, and a considerable number of Germans working round  
"our flanks attempted to surround the left sentry group of the outpost line.  
"This was held by a section of "B" Company.

"The men fought magnificently, and drove the enemy off, killing 14 of them,  
"and the Saxon Officer who led the charge on the trench was bayoneted in  
"the throat by No. 6920, Private Nuttall, but at the same time he cut down  
"Private Nuttall with his sword. This is a very fine example of the excellent  
"state of the discipline in the Regiment, and the determination of all ranks  
"to hold their positions at all costs.

"This was one of the many gallant deeds performed by the Battalion in  
"the Great War."

It is of interest to note that at this period the 3rd Corps was holding a twelve mile front against the attacks of two German Corps, the 19th and 13th.

Throughout October 22nd the position was shelled and there were several threats of attack, which did not materialize.

On October 22nd Lieut. Fraser went sick and was eventually evacuated to England and Lieut. Hobart was appointed Adjutant.

On October 23rd the 17th Brigade was relieved by the 12th Brigade, and went into reserve, the 1st North Stafford Regiment being billeted in FLEURBAIX. During the period 20th to 23rd October, the Battalion had lost two Officers and 12 other ranks killed, and one Officer and 68 other ranks wounded, a total of 83 casualties.

The Battalion reached FLEURBAIX about 5 a.m. on the 24th. That evening half of the Battalion was occupied digging support trenches. Orders for a similar working party of the other half of the Battalion for the evening of the 25th were cancelled, and the Battalion marched to the neighbourhood of NEUVE CHAPELLE with orders to report to the Brigadier-General Commanding the 18th Brigade. The Adjutant, Lieut. Hobart, was sent on in advance and being very tired went to sleep and fell off his horse en route.

Colonel de Falbe followed as soon as he had issued the necessary orders, and found on arrival at 18th Brigade Headquarters at about 8 p.m., that the 1st North Staffords were required to counter attack next morning to recover

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some trenches which had been lost the day before. The Battalion, under Major Wyatt, arrived at midnight and lay down to rest.

Orders and counter orders during the night resulted in the Battalion taking up positions preparatory to the attack at 6 a.m. on October 26th; however, final orders to return to FLEURBAIX were eventually received and promptly complied with.

FLEURBAIX was reached at about 2-30 p.m., after a 15 mile march.

At 4 p.m. orders were received that the Battalion would take over trenches at RUE DU BOIS in relief of the 1st East Yorkshire Regiment (18th Brigade) who had been badly knocked about. This relief was carried out after dark on October 28th.

That night and the following night the Battalion was very heavily shelled, and it was not until the 31st that the enemy battery, which had been causing the damage, was located by Lieut. Hobart, and quickly knocked out by a single Howitzer pushed up to the front trenches for the purpose. There were a large number of enemy dead just outside the trenches and they were getting very "high," but as "No man's land" was only about 60 yards wide, it was impossible to go out and bring them in.

Colonel de Falbe therefore applied direct to Ordnance for grappling hooks and rope, intending to sling out the hooks and haul in the bodies. Ordnance responded by a wire to Brigade Headquarters, asking what length of rope was required for the purpose. Brigade Headquarters, knowing nothing of the original application, thought someone was having a joke, and circulated Battalions as follows:—

"Report at once by telegram what length of rope is required for the purpose  
"of hauling in dead bodies of the enemy A.A.A. B.G.C. offers prize of one  
"bottle of Black and White to Battalion which furnishes the correct answer  
"to above query A.A.A."

The winning answer was adjudged to be

"The higher the longer."

This episode is related because it caused a lot of amusement at a time when it was very difficult to find anything to laugh about.

On November 2nd the enemy, after a heavy bombardment, attacked the junction of the 1st North Staffords and King's Shropshire Light Infantry trenches. This attack, though vigorously pressed by superior numbers, was repulsed with heavy loss to the enemy, and the position remained intact.

Corporal Lawless of "B" Company led his Platoon with conspicuous bravery in this affair.

The Battalion remained in these trenches for 21 days. The weather was wet the whole time and the men were continually knee deep in the mud and water. At times the water was as much as four feet deep in the trenches, such parapets as there were soon crumbled away in the wet, and as materials for revetting were not available, it was very difficult to maintain any parapet at all. To add to the discomforts the stench was terrific, as it was impossible

to bury all the dead. Casualties were numerous, chiefly due to shell fire. 2nd Lieuts. Leggett and Hughes and 28 other ranks were killed, and Captains Leman and Conway and 147 other ranks wounded. 2nd Lieut. Hughes had only been with the Battalion two days.

The Battalion was relieved on November 17th, and went into billets at BAC ST. MAUR, where it rejoined the 17th Brigade.

In spite of all the dangers and discomforts of these strenuous three weeks the men remained cheerful throughout, and had worked untiringly in maintaining and improving their trenches. Brigadier-General Congreve, V.C., came round the Battalion trenches almost daily, spoke freely to the men as a fellow Staffordshire man, and helped enormously by his simple friendliness and quiet courage to keep the men in good heart, under circumstances in which a fussy commander, with the best intentions, could easily have created a panic.

The Battalion had thoroughly earned the praise which was conveyed to it in the following letters:—

Copy of a letter from Brigadier-General Congreve, V.C., Commanding 18th Brigade, to Brigadier-General Doran, Commanding 17th Brigade:—

“Your North Stafford Regiment has done excellently in every way and I am very sorry to lose them. They were always cheery and made light of everything.”

Copy of a letter from Brigadier-General Doran, Commanding 17th Brigade, to Lieut.-Colonel V. de Falbe, D.S.O., Commanding 1st North Staffordshire Regiment:—

“I think you, your Officers, N.C.O.’s and men will like to know the excellent character you have gained for yourselves by the good work you have done in the trenches. I feel that I can put the North Staffords in the tightest of corners, and that they will always come out with credit to themselves. I hope that you will get some rest for a bit, after your long and strenuous time in the trenches.”

The following extract from the Official History will serve to illustrate the critical nature of the fighting on the 3rd Corps front during the Battle of Ypres-Armentieres:—

“On the 1st November the retirement of Allenby’s Cavalry Corps from MESSINES made the position of the 3rd Corps very critical, apart from the fact that it was holding over twelve miles of front with weakened Battalions and without any reserves worth mentioning. General Pulteney reported to G.H.Q. that the line was so extended and the men so exhausted that he doubted whether a serious attack could be stopped. Sir John French sent him from the 2nd Corps the 3rd Worcesters and the 1st Dorsets, which came to WULVERGHEM as reserve to the 4th Division, and he warned the 3rd Corps to be prepared to retire to the line FLEURBAIX-NIEPPE-NEUVE EGLISE. But he doubled the daily dole of gun ammunition, which for some days had been forty rounds per 18 pdr. and twenty per 4.5 inch Howitzer. The straight shooting of the Infantry of the 4th and 6th Divisions did the rest.”