

DURHAM
AT **WAR**



**MY EXPERIENCES & IMPRESSIONS SINCE THE
DECLARATION OF WAR (volume 1)
by Hubert Horatio Shirley Morant**

The Story of the 10th Battalion Durham Light Infantry
in the First World War
by its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Morant

PART 4: Pages 62-80 August – November 1915

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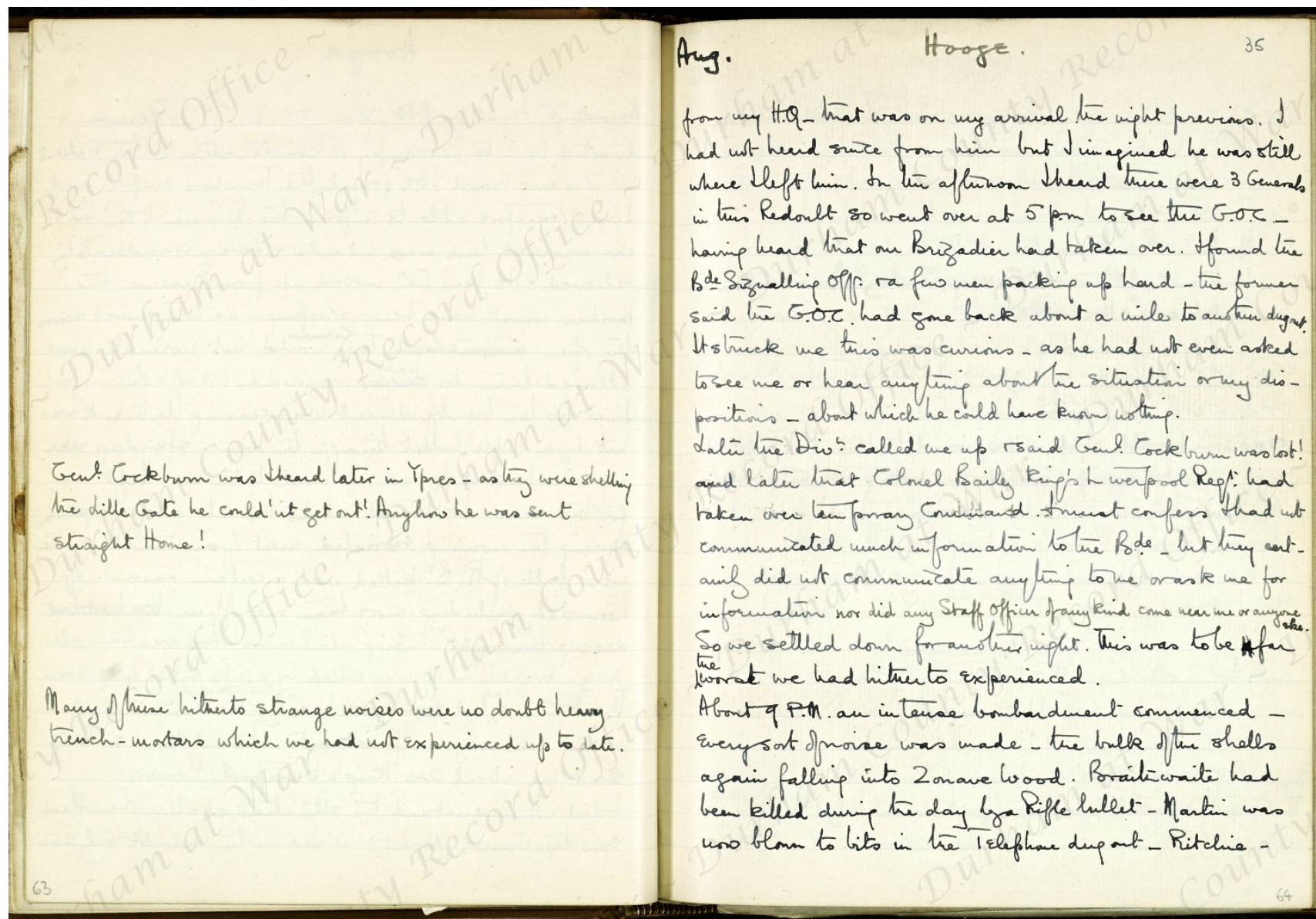
Aug.

Hooge.

34.

Accordingly I sent for Atkinson O.C. D. Co. in Reserve & directed him to reoccupy or counter attack the Salient in Zonave Wood. He found the Trenches empty and I was therefore able to inform the Division H.Q. that our original line was intact - & I was considerably relieved. As this Co. moved up from Reserve the Boches must have been sleeping - as they moved across the open ~~where~~ ^{where} ~~which~~ ^{German} they would not normally have allowed them to ~~cross~~ ^{pass} unmolested - but not a shot was fired. Just as the bombardment was ceasing Untermyer was hit by a rifle bullet through the arm - standing near me - he had it bound up and later on left us for the rear. It turned out to be only a small punishment. During the morning visited most of our trenches - they were full of R. B. killed and a certain amount of wounded including more than one officer. ~~but that~~ ~~surprise~~ ~~discovered~~ Sniping into Zonave Wood was bad all day - Braithwaite was killed by a Rifle bullet during the morning. The D.C.L. ^{had} lost ~~for~~ ^{more} heavily ^{than we did.} The Div. asked if I would like any reinforcements - I said Yes - so they sent me about 200 King's Liverpool (Pioneers). I did not understand the situation at all - when Hast. saw the General (Nugent) he was in the redoubt only 250^x

62



Genl Cockburn was heard later in Ypres - as they were shelling the Lille Gate he could 'nt get out! Anyhow he was sent straight Home!

Many of these hitherto strange noises were no doubt heavy trench - motors which we had not experienced up to date.

Aug.

Hooze.

35

from my H.Q. - that was on my arrival the night previous. I had not heard since from him but I imagined he was still where I left him. In the afternoon I heard there were 3 Generals in this Redoubt so went over at 5 pm to see the G.O.C. - having heard that our Brigadier had taken over. I found the Bde Signalling Offr: a few men packing up hard - the former said the G.O.C. had gone back about a mile to another dugout. It struck me this was curious - as he had not even asked to see me or hear anything about the situation or my disposition - about which he could have known nothing.

Later the Div^y called me up & said Genl Cockburn was lost! and later that Colonel Bailey King's Liverpool Regt: had taken over temporary Command. I must confess I had not communicated much information to the Bde - but they certainly did not communicate anything to me or ask me for information nor did any Staff Officer of any kind come near me or anyone else. So we settled down for another night. This was to be ^{the} worst we had hitherto experienced.

About 9 P.M. an intense bombardment commenced - every sort of noise was made - the bulk of the shells again falling into Zouave Wood. Boraitwaite had been killed during the day by a Rifle bullet - Martin was now blown to bits in the Telephone dug out - Ritchie -

Co. Sgt. Major Harrington - A Coy was badly shocked & concussed. He had been behaving very gallantly setting a fine example.

* Martin Bonville waite killed.
 Underbank, Atkinson, Cherry, Euley, Marchant,
 Ritchie - Wounded.
 Total 8 Officers.

Saw some horrible sights walking round the Line. Two K.O.Y.L.I. men were standing up - quite dead - looking over the parapet. Apparently they were killed by concussion.

* This Trench was still forming our front line in July 15th 1917.

Aug.

Hooze.

36

Marchant - Atkinson ^{Euley} were wounded. Our men sat tight in their Trenches - which were very bad - but the wounded poured in to my H.Q. where a Doctor called Mackenzie did splendid work. The bombardment ceased about 12 or 1 A.M. Again H.Q. was not shelled. A Co. had had the worst time lost about 70 men - Parke being left in Command. Our losses were 2 off^r: killed + 6 ^{wounded} * about 170 men killed & wounded (during the 2 nights).

Colonel Bailey ^{acting Brig.} appeared during the morning - also Genl. Congreve (VIth Div^y) - but no one ~~else~~ from Div^y or Bde Staff. The K.O.Y.L.I. were sent up to relieve the D.C.L.I. and later the Somerset L.I. or 2 Coys of them. Second-ly relieved A Co. first - sent them into Sanctuary Wood. ~~Then~~ The remainder of the Somersets arrived next day took over the front line from me - and we withdrew into Reserve ^{into shelter} in Sanctuary Wood that evening.

(the only 300-400 yds away)
 This was a quiet place - practically no shells - but a good deal of laid M. Gun & rifle fire - from which we had a few casualties.

Reconnoitred the surroundings next morning & decided ^{supporting} * on a line to entrench in the wood - this was marked out by the R.E. before we left an excellent trench which

Whilst we were in Reserve in Sanctuary Wood - Lt. Pumphrey carried out several reconnaissances of the Trenches leading up to the Enemy's position. In the course of one of these he advanced so close that he was stopped by our own shells bombarding the enemy's trenches. Lt. Pumphrey reconnoitred "the Strand" Comm. Trench until he could see the Sentry behind the German barbed wire through the loophole.

His report was ~~passed~~^{assaulting} to the VIth Divⁿ & distributed by them to all Units. He was recommended by the G.O.C. for M.C. Cross which was subsequently awarded.

Pte Shelton of B Co. came to HQ. by day when I asked him if they had got their Rations all right he replied - "Yes - the rations is come but the Trench is that narrow ye's cant distribute them". It was I know a very narrow as well as wet trench.

Aug.

Hooze.

37

This was always known as Durham Trench. was never shelled had been constructed by the Bde. had ordered a trench to be dug diagonally across Zouave Wood - this order was not taken seriously as they had never seen the ground. About the 4th day - the G.S.O 1. of the Divⁿ appeared & seemed very pleased at our work. Pumphrey had done a lot of wire entanglement among the trees - in fact in two nights he wired our whole front.

The Army Corps Commander sent a congratulatory telegram on the 2nd day on the way we had maintained our positions & the Divⁿ one on the 4th day on the way we had improved our defences.

We now had very few casualties - but the R.O.T.L. had suffered a good deal in the salient of Zouave Wood and the Somerset L.I. had certain losses.

We were told the position we had to hold if the Germans broke through - which was to be held to the last - as on it being held depended the security of the Brigade on our right. It would have been quite untenable as a matter of fact. I was ^{also} told to put a platoon in Yewman's post - a ruined farm - sent B Co. there by night with orders to entrench by night but to keep absolutely still by day - which they did & were not discovered & had no casualties. Beustkin (R.E.) & myself made great friends in our efforts.

68

A BRITISH SUCCESS AT HOOGE.

1,200 YARDS OF TRENCHES CAPTURED.

(FROM SIR JOHN FRENCH.)

The Field-Marshal commanding the British Forces in France reports as follows :—

August 9.

Since my *communiqué* of Augt. 1, the artillery on both sides has been active north and east of Ypres. In these exchanges the advantage has been with us.

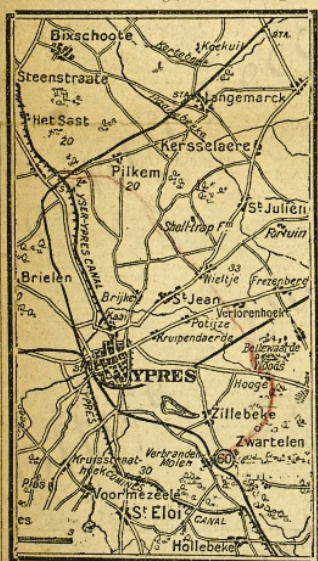
This morning, after a successful artillery bombardment in which the French on our left cooperated effectively, we attacked the trenches at Hooge captured by the enemy on July 30. These were all retaken, and following up this success we made further progress north and west of Hooge, extending the front of the trenches captured to 1,200 yards.

During this fighting our artillery shelled a German train at Langemarck, derailing and setting fire to five trucks.

The captures reported amount to three officers, 124 other ranks, and two machine-guns.

THE RECENT OPERATIONS.

For the last three months or so Hooge has been the scene of as sharp fighting as any that has occurred on the British front. On May 24 the Germans launched a severe gas attack against our positions here, and in the adjoining portions of the Ypres salient, and, though counter-attacks subsequently gave us back much of the lost ground, the Germans retained a footing in our front line near a farm near Wielje and forced us to establish ourselves in retrenched lines near the Bellewaarde Lake, north of Hooge. On the night of May 30—31 we seized some out-buildings of the ruined château at Hooge, and at one time, as Sir John French admitted in his dispatch of June 4, we were compelled to evacuate the buildings, but on the night of



June 3 we recaptured them. In this continuous fighting the 3rd Dragoon Guards played a very important part. Ten days later we again took the offensive here, and we not only occupied some first and second line trenches, but took 157 prisoners and inflicted losses on the enemy which were said to have been proportionately very heavy. The fighting went on from day to day, and reporting on June 19 Sir John French stated that during the week we had captured 213 prisoners, including two officers, three machine guns, and a full gas cylinder.

The following month was comparatively uneventful, but on July 19 we blew up a mine west of the château and then gained 150 yards of German trenches, capturing 15 prisoners (including two officers) and two machine-guns. The Germans replied on July 30 by a heavy bombardment of our line and by an attack with "flame projectors" which enabled them to penetrate our first line of trenches on a front of about 500 yards. We at once counter-attacked and recaptured a portion of the lost trenches west of the village. Our success reported to-day is the most extensive that we have won during the period under review.

Aug.

Rest.

38

to continue to strengthen our defences - which seemed liable to be broken at any moment.

However on the night of 6th Aug we were relieved by the VIth Division ^(2/D.L.I.) & we gladly left for bivouacs - west of Hamontinghe.

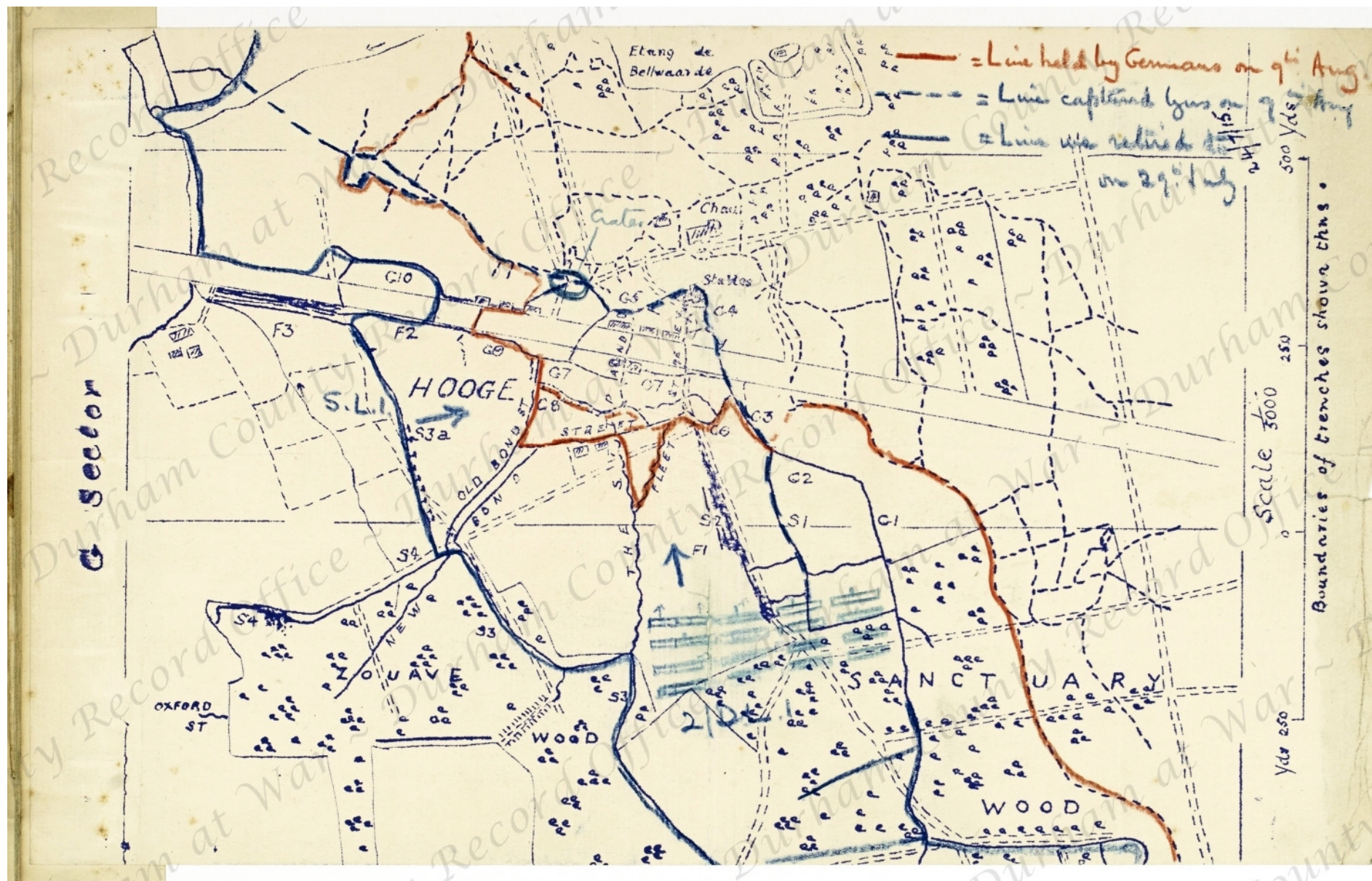
We halted from 2 - 3 a.m. on the road near the level crossing between west of the Ypres Asylum for Tea. Just as we were finishing the enemy commenced to shell either us or the Guns located about here but no one was hit - though they ^{also} shelled Hamontinghe as we were marching through it.

as our billets -
We were given a wet wood full of "stubs" with hardly any bivouac shelters - and it rained during our first sleep. I slept & messed in a small farmhouse simply swarming with flies.

Brig. Genl. Wood had taken over command of the Bde during our last few days in Sanctuary Wood & inspected us on Monday 9th Aug. He admired the physique of our Bombers immensely and said our turn - it was very good that we were "the best or at any rate second best in the Brigade".

On Monday we were ordered to be ready to move at half hour's notice (this order was not cancelled until we returned to the trenches on the 10th - so we did not have

70



Aug.

Attack by VIth Divⁿ - Hooge.

39

a comfortable rest. Rosher & Humphrey had to reconnoitre the Sector to the North of the R^r: the approach to it was reconnoitred by myself - on the 8th Aug.

At dawn on the 9th of Aug. the 18th Brigade VIth Divⁿ on the right & 17th Bde on the left attacked the last position at Hooge. The 2nd D.L.I. supported by Sherwood Foresters attacked on the right - the Shropshire L.I. on the left.

The enemy trenches had been heavily bombarded for over a week & were taken without much difficulty - but in the subsequent Boche Bombardment we lost heavily - in fact some of the ^{captured} trenches could not actually be occupied.

At night fall the Battr^{ns} (2/ D.L.I. & S.L.I.) in the front line in fact the whole 18th Bde were withdrawn & another Bde (VIth Divⁿ) took over. About 100 or more of 2/ D.L.I. ^{did not} ~~received~~ received the order to withdraw until 9 A.M. next morning - however they hung on all night & four of them received Military Crosses. Briggs - Wiehe -

It was considered a brilliant piece of work on the part of all concerned. Orders report attached.

Met the 2nd Bⁿ returning to rest as we were parading for the Trenches - they consisted of Col Adj^t about 3 Off^{rs} & 150 men. They lost 498 casualties - the officers killed included Bowers.

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BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, FRANCE,
Aug. 19.

If I revert once more to our success at Hooge on August 9 it is because the more one hears of this engagement the more one is justified in proclaiming the affair of good augury for the future.

One point which deserves special emphasis is the unusual distance which had to be covered by our attack. This was no mere question of leaping out of our trenches and hurling ourselves over 30 or 50 yards of ground into the enemy's positions. Our troops had for the most part upwards of 500 yards—and that nearly all uphill—to cover before they could come to grips with an enemy who had been fully warned by the sustained bombardments, not only of the previous days, but of the half-hour immediately preceding our advance. Only the most perfect cooperation between our infantry and artillery offered us the least chance of success, and at the risk of being wearisome one must insist again upon the scientific accuracy of our arrangements, which enabled us to rush an extensive and comparatively distant position so completely as to surprise the forewarned defenders. The moral effect of this admirable coordination has undoubtedly been very great among the battalions actually engaged, and when the news of it has spread more widely still our whole Army will be encouraged by the knowledge that we are as well protected by our guns as are even the French by their 75's.

And yet when all this has been said, the struggle after the first hour or so was mainly one of the junior officers and men. One can see this clearly in the fortunes of the battalion to which it fell to carry the part of the German lines about the crater near the Hooge château. It was a pitch dark night when they assembled for the attack somewhere to the south of Hooge. The ground to be traversed was sown with barbed-wire entanglements and was strewn with the bodies that were the relics of previous engagements.

SHOT WITH THEIR OWN GUN.

With magnificent courage and confidence, however, the men advanced up to the very edge of our own shell fire, and then when our guns lengthened and began to play upon the German positions to the north the advance was made with great rapidity. The bombing parties, as usual, did excellent work. One such party came upon a German machine-gun detachment in a communication trench which had escaped our bombardment, and after the enemy had been killed the gun was employed to good effect against the Germans. The bombers, too, accounted for most of the 200 Germans or so who were killed fighting in the crater. It had been anticipated that the battalion which was operating to the left would reach this spot first, but the bombers of the battalion whose fortunes I am following anticipated them by a few minutes, and fairly pelted the Germans as they tried to resist after emerging from the tiers of dug-outs with which they had lined the pulverized sides of the crater.

The men pressing up with the bombing parties also met a considerable number of the enemy still lurking amidst the battered trenches, but these Germans had little stomach for the fight. They had been badly shaken by our shell fire, and such as did not escape were either taken prisoners or bayoneted. The sharpest fight of all perhaps was in the trenches near the stables, the ruins of which have now been alternately in our and the enemy's hands for months. The Germans here had suffered much less from our fire, and 300 of them were bayoneted before we captured their lines and began hastily to organize our defences.

About 9.30—that is to say, some 6½ hours after the opening of our preparatory bombardment—the Germans began to open upon us with heavy shells—apparently from the direction of Hill 60—and for the remainder of the day our troops had to endure a never-ceasing fire of every description. The first troops, naturally, had gone up light, but the reinforcements brought up further supplies of ammunition, sandbags, and shovels. Moreover, a body of sappers had been pushed up at the outset, and, in spite of a heavy fire, had succeeded with the utmost gallantry in putting up wire entanglements in front of our conquered positions. The vital wisdom of these precautions having been taken betimes became apparent as the day wore on. The German fire, playing upon ground which had already been churned up by our own guns, made the bringing up of supplies more and more difficult. Even the barest communication with the men who were holding that death-swept ridge was a matter of much difficulty. Twice the telephone wires were shot away; visual signalling was untrustworthy owing to the clouds of smoke and dust which thickened the air, and at last messages had to be carried to and fro by orderlies.

WOUNDED OFFICER WHO HELD ON.

Towards nightfall it was decided that the battalion which attacked the crater should be relieved in their trenches, and orders were sent up to them to withdraw. The order was not received by all the battalion, and four officers, with 200 of their men, held on all night on the ridge between the crater and the stables, and were not relieved until 9 o'clock the following morning. One in particular was privileged—for such surely is not an inappropriate term to use of such very gallant gentlemen—to suffer much and to display extraordinary bravery and tenacity. Not long after his arrival on the ridge he was smothered by a shell, and was wounded in the leg and shoulder. He insisted, however, on remaining with his men, and was again wounded, this time in the jaw, on the following day. He continued to hold on, and did not leave his men until they were back in billets. One is glad to be able to say that he is now progressing well in hospital.

Lance-Corporal Smith and 24 men who were posted in the stables had an even longer ordeal. They too had not received the order to retire, and it was only later, when the colonel of the relieving regiment heard that Smith had sent down asking for reinforcements and more bombs, that the presence of the party up there was realized.

MANY HEROIC DEEDS.

If the brunt of the attack along this section of the line fell to certain units, others also did some very gallant deeds, of which the following are typical. A machine-gun which had been put under the charge of Lance-Corporal Whibberley was buried by a shell, together with several men of the section. Whibberley at once set to work to dig out his companions, and succeeded in rescuing two. He also dug out the gun, and then, mounting it in position, brought it again into action.

Private W. Ray came upon a German machine-gun which had been blown out of position, and, though a steady fire was kept upon the place by the enemy, he managed to remount the gun and to turn it upon the Germans. Later in the day he also did excellent service in carrying messages backwards and forwards repeatedly under heavy shell fire.

Aug.

4th Tour - Y Wood Salient

40

On the 10th Aug - about 7 A.M. - I rode into Ypres with Plt Cameron - ~~visited~~ ^{visited} 4th Bde H.Q. and went up to R^g Wood and the Trenches. O.C. Coys also went up. The trenches - especially in front of Y-wood had been battered out of all recognition - having been included ^{by the Boches} in the bombardment of the Hoge trenches. The 4th Bde - Markham Wood - strongly advised me to put very few men in the front line trenches. They had lost very heavily - especially in the Y Wood Salient where big trees were lying right across the trenches - + their dead were still lying about unburied.

In the evening we marched up relieved the 5th Oxford & Bucks. The Grand Place in Ypres was absolutely packed with troops about 9 p.m. - digging parties - relieving troops & all sorts.

We had D Coy in the Salient & C Coy in H. 17 & 18.

After 2 nights I relieved these Coys by B & A. One Coy was in G.H.Q. & one in L Dup Out - where I made my H.Q.

The Somersets were in R^g Wood - the O.C. Somersets was to command troops in front line.

Nothing much happened in our Sector - the whizzbanged us a good deal & our Heavies shelled us badly several

74

Aug.

Wounded.

41

times killed several of our men. The sniping in this Sector was nil - when we occupied these same trenches on the 24th June the sniping was very bad. This improvement was due to the capture of the German Redoubt Q.20 in the attack on the 9th.

During this time both sides vehemently bombarded the captured trenches at Hooze. It was difficult to make out what trenches we held & what they held. The 3rd Division was again in possession of the Hooze Sector. On the 13th as I was going round a small bit of high explosive cut my cap & later a Whizz bang struck the parapet about 5 yards in front of me - but nothing happened - a man had been killed by a Whizz bang at the same spot about two minutes previously.

On the 14th after I had left the trenches our own Q.2 Guns shelled our trenches - killed & buried several of our M-Gunners & I believe Rother did very well in digging them out. Parkiss - Somerset, L.I. was wounded at the same time.

As I was crossing the Menin Road to L. Dup Out on my return a party of wounded men about 150 yards up the road were being shrapnelled. I crossed the road & was walking across the field to

75

Aug.

Fd Ambulance - Poperinghe.

42

the Dug Outs - when I was struck in the back of the ^{right} calf of my leg by a Shrapnel bullet - it felt like a kick from a horse. I ran behind the hedge & got under cover - and did not feel much pain from it.

On reaching my dug-out - a stretcher bearer dressed it & later the Doctor did the same.

I thought I was only slightly wounded & reported myself so and that I was at duty. Later however my leg got stiffer & I found it difficult to walk. At 9.30 p.m. when the ambulance should have come there was a fairly heavy bombardment in progress. On the cessation of this about 10.30 p.m. the Ambulance arrived - I walked to it with some difficulty and proceeded to the Prison at Ypres - but did not look at me here but sent me onto the Fd Ambulance at Poperinghe - where I arrived about midnight. Here I met Rev. Green-Wilkinson - who was very kind & wrote to Helen about me. Purkiss - San. L.H. was also in the same room as I was. This Fd Ambulance was in a private house or school - there were lots of wounded men being attended to.

We should have left here between 8 - 9 AM next morning - but no ambulance came till 5 or 6 p.m.

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TO {

Mrs Morant The Leadenham North
Regret to inform you that
Lt Col H. S. Morant 10th
Durham Light Infantry was wounded
15th August further details will
be worked when received
Secretary War Office

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Handed
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.M.,

Received
here at

7-35 .M.

TO { Morant The Leazes Durham Road
Lieut Col St Morant D.L.
admitted Red Cross hospital
Letouquet 14th August with
gunshot wound right leg progress
will be reported
Secretary War Office

Aug.

Casualty Clearing Station.

43

We then proceeded in it to the Casualty Clearing Station at Abeele - about 3 miles further on. This was a tented hospital camp close to the Railway.

Meanwhile the Battalion was relieved by the R. O. Y. L. I. and we went into the Ramparts at Ypres - in Reserve. The next night - when fortunately nearly every one was out digging the Germans shelled the ~~shelters~~ ^{shells} ~~into~~ on the Ramparts with big shells. The Serp. Major + Bugler Shelton did excellent work - searching the dugouts to turn out men who might be asleep.

Serp. Major Toome - a first class man was badly wounded in the hand during this bombardment & thus finished his ^{Military career.} On the 16th I had the bullet removed under chloroform and left the same evening about 5 P.M. by Hospital Train for Boulogne & went onto Etaples to the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital where I arrived about midnight.

On the 17th I had the wound explored & the piece of my bones removed. They said they found Gas Gangrene had started - so they opened up my leg with 2 large ~~slit~~ ^{slits} - about 4" + 6" long. They treated it with Hyposulphite for about 4 or 5 days - then with Peroxide.

78

Aug.

Duchess of Westminster - Hosp^l.

44

Left this Hospital at 6.45 A.M. on the 25th by Hospital Train to Calais - thence by Hospital Ship to Dover. We had to go down Channel to near opposite Boulogne to get behind the Submarine Nets - the Buoy of which extended to within a mile or two of Folkestone. At the Duchess' Hospital - were Cherry & Bryant. Untham^{ant} had been there returned from leave on the 23rd and came to see me.

St. John had been left in command when I left. The Duchess returned the day before I left - and came round the Wards - looking charming - that morning. The Hospital was in the Casino at de Tongret was a splendid building for at any rate a Summer hospital. The nurses were very nice & attentive & the House Surgeons ditto. The head Surgeon - Gordon was also said to be a very good man.

On the journey I received every attention - and was taken in a private ambulance to King Edward VII Hospital - 9 Grosvenor Gardens. I was put into the next bed to Turner - 2/D-2.1.

Halcyon arrived to see me also on the 27th. The former stayed first with Billy Baker & on the 30th came to stay at 15 Chester St. - At this hospital I

79

Sept - Nov. Kemp Ed VIIth Hosp^l + 43 Belgrave Sq. 45

was under charge of Dr. Sherran. He ordered me to be dressed with Vaseline - Next day I ordered myself to be dressed with Per Oxide! This was carried out.

On the 18th Sept^r. I moved into 43 Belgrave Square - (Good Aberconway's). This was a charming ward - everything - nurses - food - drink & accommodation were of the very best. Lady Aberconway was also very kind & looked after everything well.

Turner came into this ward also - and Peate arrived later ~~also~~ suffering from Sciatica. ^{W.D.L.I.}

I used to drive out in their private motor in the mornings & hired motors several times to drive with Helen.

Richmond Park was our usual objective.

On the 13th I was seen by a Medical Board & given leave till 13th Dec^r.

On the 11th there was a Zeppelin Raid on London - the Zepp could be plainly seen from the ward. It did a good deal of damage about Liverpool Street & the City.

On the 14th I left for the Leazars. Helen used to dress my wound daily: in about 10 days time - it had healed over & I began to have the leg rubbed. It therefore had taken nearly 6 weeks to heal.

About the end of October I applied for a Medical