

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 13: Pages 195-205 January – April 1917

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Whilst at Sibville I saw a Fox several times - Pheasant -
Woodcock, Snipe & grouse Partridges.

When we were holding this H 2 Sector there was little
doubt that a "Spring Offensive" was in prospect.
Staff Officers wearing black Red White Red
Armbands were unusually common objects of interest
in proximity to the front line. "Old Bert" has
noticed this is a sure sign of a coming offensive.
So it proved to be.

H2 Sector Raid. Jan^y 1917.

(Whilst at rest at Silville the Batiⁿ won the Bde Football Competition as soon as we came out - but it was not until we were returning in the middle of Dec^r that we rec^d. a big draft of about 100. About 18th Dec^r on way to Arras received a telegram that my mother was seriously ill & I obtained 10 days leave from the 19th. On return on 1st Jan^y I found the Batiⁿ was under orders to make a Raid. This raid which was to go to first line only had been postponed and was eventually on the 5th ordered to take place on 6th & to go to 3rd Line. There was therefore very little time to arrange the details & explain their duties to the men. The raid came off at 3.15 pm on the 6th after a heavy bombardment. 2 Lt. Bell & 8 men went to near the 3rd Line - but the 2nd Line contingent did not get to 2nd Line & first & 2nd lines parties returned before the 3rd line part. About 150 men went over there were about 50 casualties. Sup^t Mallet & others did not go over he was tied by C. M & awarded 4 gp. P.S. This was subsequently remitted for gallant conduct on the 9th April. Berisford - Todd & Bell were the off^r taking part. The latter rec^d M.C. & about 6 Mil^l Medals were awarded. The raid was not an unqualified success owing to change of plan at last moment.

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The alteration in the scheme of this raid was considered bad Staff work and I have never heard of any similar action before or since. The plan having been to go to the first line only for the previous fortnight - the day before the raid the orders are suddenly changed to go to the 3rd line - entailing an entirely new scheme with not the remotest chance of instructing anyone in their duties - no wonder the raid was not an unqualified success! Shortly afterwards another Batt. in the Bde did a similar raid. A gallant old Provost or Q. M. Sgt. volunteered first. At some period of the operation he fell down a well in No Man's land just outside the Boche Wire that had to be left. 5 days later the Boches withdrew on this front & he was found still alive & well. The rescuing party attempted to haul him up with Telephone Wire. This broke & the poor man again dropped to the bottom of the well and broke at least one leg. Some stronger material was then obtained to which the gallant old soldier attached himself & was safely hauled to the surface.

Divl School - Feb. 1917

Raids by both sides all through the winter were frequent and stern measures were taken against C.O's who were raided had not taken every conceivable precaution. Fortunately the enemy never attempted a raid on me - as no one knew the precautions deemed to be necessary until after the raid had taken place. The biggest Gas Attack ever known was planned about this time - Early in Jan? - however for some reason it was cancelled and fortunately as from now on for one or two months the wind was consistently unfavourable. ~~About~~ About the 25th Jan? I was appointed Comm'dt of Divl Depot Batt. School. I was bitterly cold for weeks & contracted "Flue" & was sent down to 5th Pol Hospital about 8th Feb? - returned about 12th. About 25th Feb? came home on leave owing to the death of my Mother - for 10 days. On return I rejoined the Batt. which was then at Grand Pully court. We were now training up to attack the German front line system of trenches opposite H2 Sector. However about the 5th March he evacuated his front system retired to the Tojeul Switch about 2000 x yards further back.

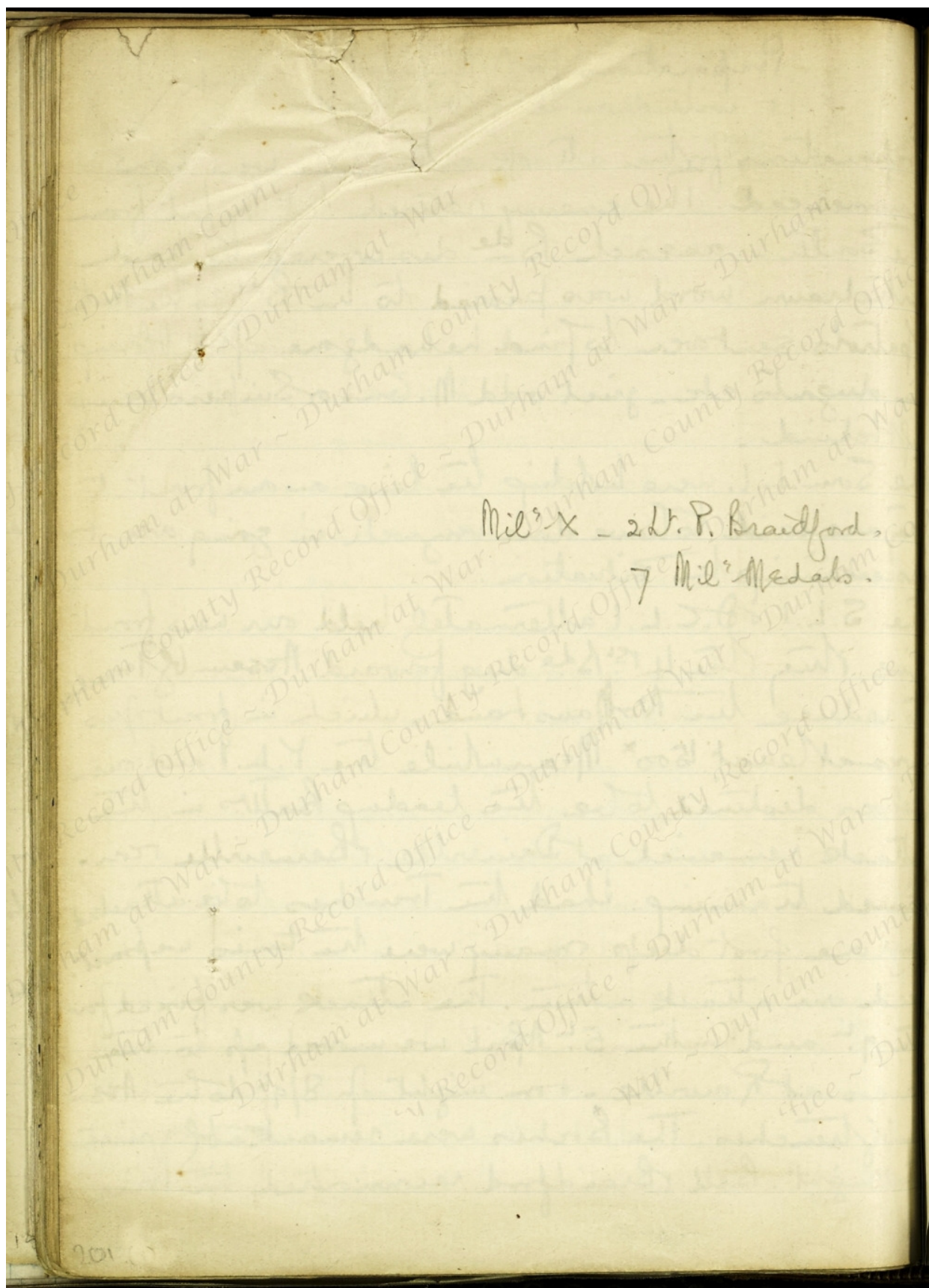
Whilst holding the line on this Area front no less than 3 officers were killed by our own people. 2 Lt. Dorell going out to wire at night was shot dead by a sentry. Lt. Clarke was shot dead by a sentry in his own Company when coming in from patrol. 2 Lt. Daves was shot dead by an officer who had been creeping about on patrol for some hours in a foggy evening who imagined he was crawling along the German wire whereas he was really creeping along our own. An amusing story was told of a patrol belonging to a Bn. in an adjacent sector. An officer & sergeant were leading a patrol along their own wire imagining it was the enemy's. They spotted two men in a Saps and made a dash for them. The officer fell head over heels into a shell hole but the Sgt. reached the sap-head whereupon the supposed Germans threw down their arms and cried "Comrades". The blood-thirsty sergeant bawled over one man & pursued the other hurling every conceivable weapon at him as he ran down the Saps. Finally they reached the front line trench but to the Sgt's dismay he recognised it as his own. Both the "enemy" were tried by Court Martial but succeeded in obtaining an acquittal. Both however on return to their Bn. were awarded the maximum punishment that could be given by their C.O.

Preparations for Offensive March & withdrawal of the Boches

Preparations for the attack on this line were now commenced. The enemy retired hit by fire from the South - a search Bde discovered he had withdrawn word was passed to the Bde to the North. Patrols sent over to find he had gone after blowing in dugouts etc. - just odd M. Gns or Snipers being left behind.

The Som. L.I. were holding the line on our front & they are said to have done very well in going over & ascertaining the situation.

The S.L.I. & D.C.L.I. alternately held our new front line. The 4th Bde dug forward Assembly Trenches to reduce the Wolf's head - which in front of us was at least 1500'. Meanwhile the Y.L.I. and ourselves destined to be the leading battalions in the attack remained at Dainville. Berneville continued training. Had the Trenches to be attacked dug one foot deep & many were the times we practised our attack on them. The attack was fixed for the 9th and on the 5th April we moved up to the Trenches at Renville - on night of 8/9th to the Assembly Trenches. The Boches were remarkably quiet that night. Bell & Bradford recommended the wire





QUEEN'S WESTMINSTER & CIVIL SERVICE RIFLES,

58, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W.1.

VICTORIA 2008.

11th August 1937

Dear General,

I am most faithfully sorry not to have replied to your letter before - When I last saw you I was on the verge of going to camp, from which I returned last Sunday. I now feel I have more leisure to deal with my correspondence!

With regard to April 9th 1917. I think I cannot do better than quote from our Regimental History. This runs -

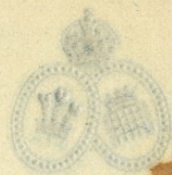
" At 5.30 a.m. on April 9th the Third and First Armies..... delivered a general attack on the front CROISILLES - BLANGY in the South, and on VIMY RIDGE in the North. The VII Corps being on the right of the Southern attack. The 30th Division was on the right, the 56th Division in the centre, and the 14th Division on the left of the Corps front..... At the end of the first

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QUEEN'S WESTMINSTER & CIVIL SERVICE RIFLES

1, W. 2, STAG MAHONUE, 2, W. 1.

VICTORIA 1904



day's attack, NEUVILLE VITASSE had been captured by the 56th Division, and considerable progress had been made by the 14th Division on the left.

On April 10th a further advance took place. On the right the 56th Division captured practically the whole of the COJEUL SWITCH and on the left the 14th Division established itself in the WANCOURT LINE. The latter Division had lost direction to some extent with the result that there was a large gap between its right and the left of the 56th Division.

On the evening of April 11th the Queens Westminsters moved up to the COJEUL SWITCH in Brigade Reserve.

..... On April 12th attacked. At the end of the day the 2nd battalions had established themselves on the WANCOURT TOWER RIDGE, about 1000 yards south-east of HENINEL, and were in touch with the 14th Division which had reached the western edge of WANCOURT."

This is the last mention of the 14th Division until we meet again on

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QUEEN'S WESTMINSTER & CIVIL SERVICE RIFLES,

58, BUCKINGHAM GATE, S.W.1.

VICTORIA 2008.

3rd May in the Third Battle of the Scarpe, so I imagine you were withdrawn by that time, because the 56th went on fighting on the 14th April and the Queens Westminsters had very heavy casualties on that day.

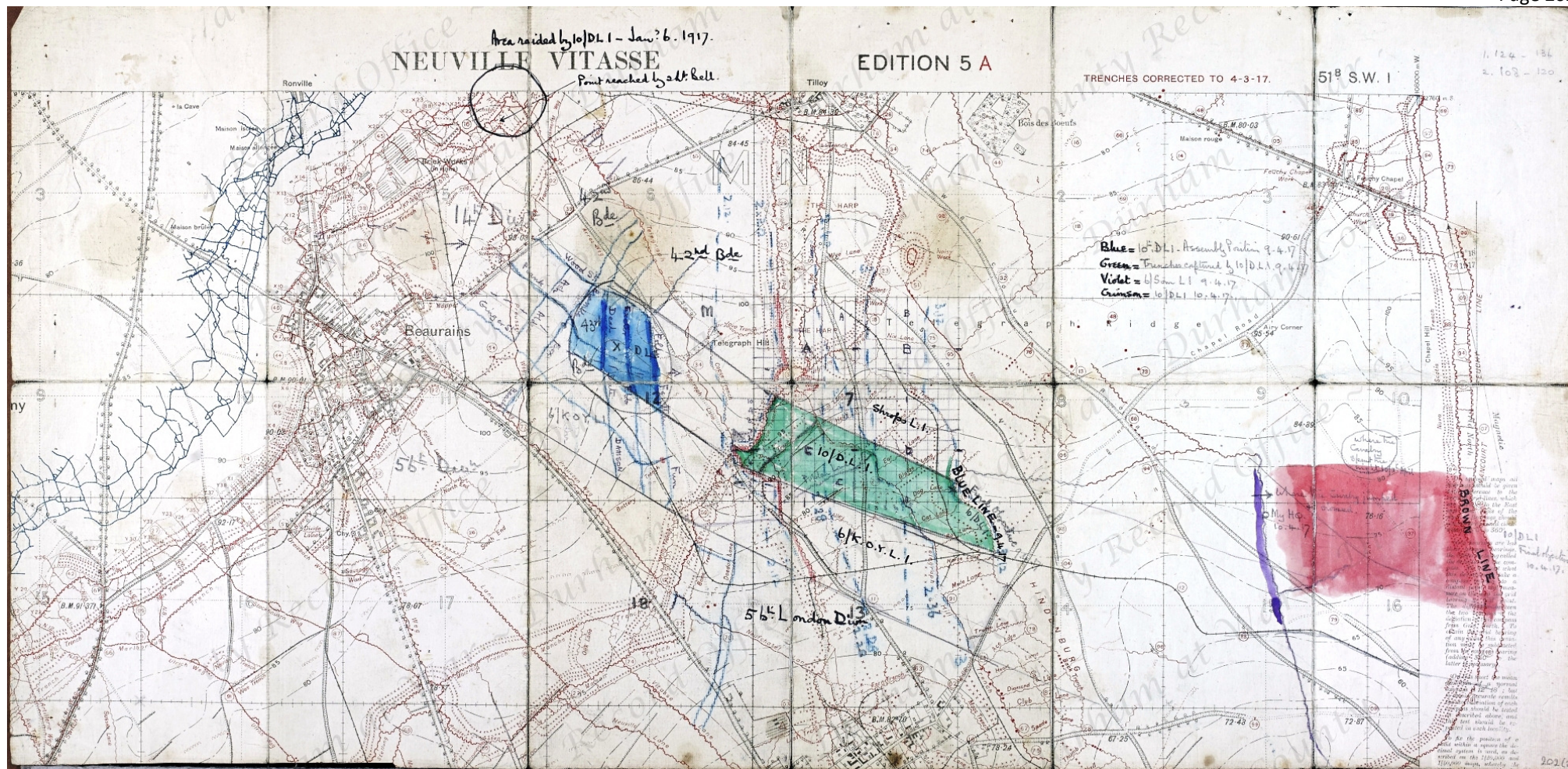
I hope this clears up the point you wanted to know about. It certainly explains why you didn't see 56th Division on your right on 10th April, and it is amusing how we both charge each other with losing direction.

I hope to see you again at the reunion dinner whenever it happens. Twelve of my retired officers who knew the Durhams have said they will attend and I expect you will know some of them.

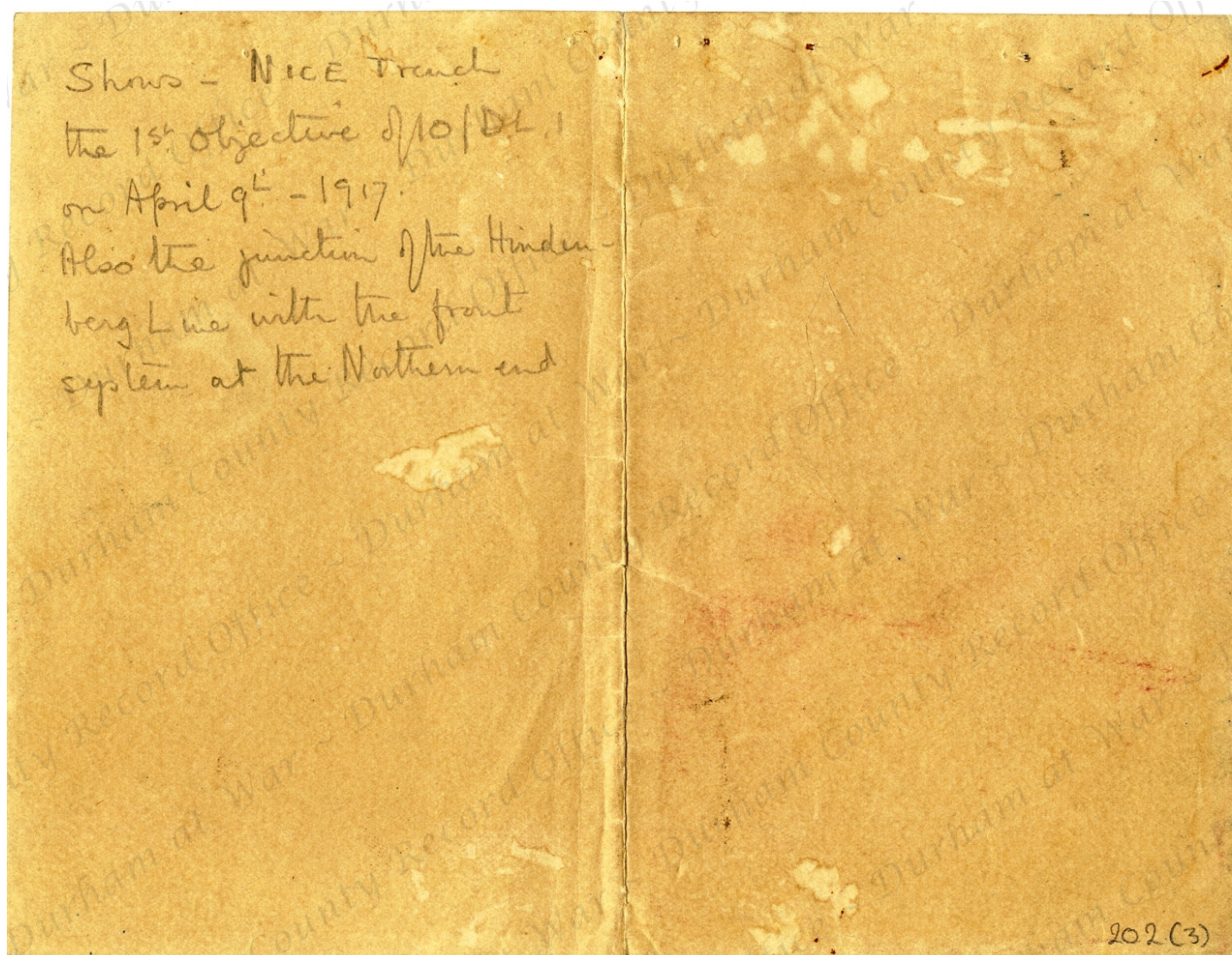
So sorry for the long delay in replying to your letter.

Yours sincerely,
B. C. May

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Letter from H. H. H. to Helen

11-4-17.

We had a great battle starting at 7.34 A.M. on the 9th. We carried all before us for 2000 yds! It was very exciting. I was in a trench about 300 yds behind the front line & could see the whole thing start. We went up the night before, it was a miserable wet night & the trenches very wet & muddy. I had a cosy little shelter compared to the open trench- just room for 4 to sit- but only about a foot of earth on it. Next morning ^{just as it was getting light} the first thing was a solemn procession of half a dozen Tanks right down the slope to-wards the enemy in full view of them- but they did nothing to them. ^{or they sat on our front line till Zero.} They were inconspicuously painted. They crossed our trench in their stride- when the time came to advance (for the Infantry) the Tanks did so too but behind the Infantry- anyhow I think they did quite well for a time & then came to a standstill. The enemy then set to work to shell them till he had knocked them out. They moved quicker than they used to & did look quaint. We took the first trench fairly easily - tho' we had some of our best killed over it- including poor Stewart, the late Adj^t. Is'nt it awful for his people & me-I had a presentiment he would be killed. He was a charming fellow & very good with his Coy. As soon as I saw the Trench was taken which I recognized by the prisoners bundling out of it - I got out of my Trench & went forward. I was supposed to stop at the first Trench taken but seeing the Batt. wandering on I went on after it, they had to go on about a 1000 yds further- over all sorts of blown in Trenches which one knew by heart from the Map, but they were so mangled as to be difficult to recognize. Boches kept appearing out of Dug-outs & after being searched they only wanted to know the direction back- which they really knew of course, & they would dash off at once, approaching any of us with their

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hands up & calling out "Camarades" terrified. Lots of course were put on to stretcher bearing. One party came past me - one smoking a cigar - I knocked it out of his hand & asked him what the H... he meant by it - He looked quite alarmed! When we had got to our furthest point we were ordered to go to - with your glasses - I discovered quite a lot of Boches holding the same trench we were in about 800yds off. So I got 2 Mach:Guns & 2 Lewis Guns & got them on to them. It was very exciting as we looked right down along the trench & could see them dodging our bullets and they eventually vacated the trench. Achilles was after souvenirs at once. As our H.Q. I made in a German Dug-out with a wounded Boche inside who was cursing the Kaiser freely. In the afternoon it came on to snow & the men spent a wretched night in the open - as also did the officers.

Next day we had to do another attack another 3000yds or more. That went off very well. Then when it was over the Cavalry appeared! I left out of the trench with excitement at a chance of seeing what would happen.

Well they sent out a patrol or two to nearly as far as we had got! ^{asking} after us all about the situation. We were always taught to ask the Cav: all about it before we did anything, but now the Cav^{ly} ask the Infantry!

Shortly after the patrols went out 2 riderless horses came back & there was a good deal of "Come Hopping" & hauling at the horses to get them over the trenches. There were a lot of them & they all got over the trench close to me & they went forward to behind the crest of the hill we had taken. Then when we were just starting home thinking the battle was over - suddenly the Boche began to shell our trench where there were still some crossing. This was the unpleasantest shelling I have had. It went on for half an hour long after the Cavalry had gone all at this one place. We lay tight at the bottom of the trench cursing the Cavalry like anything. One of our men lying next to me in the trench got a terrible gash

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inside the thigh & has died - I thought he was dead at the time. No one else of our party was hurt though we had chalk ^{and} bits flying about us.

When I thought they had stopped we sallied forth over the open - to my horror we met alot more ^{Cav?} who crossed us. The Boche immediately started again - short of the Cavalry & right round us. We dived into shell holes, I got a very shallow one & had just got out to get a deeper one when crash one came & seemed to pitch right under my face as I was stooping down - covering my face with chalk - but no splinters. I believe it pitched 3yds off me. It was lucky. Then it came on to snow & has been very cold & snowing ever since, its now 8P.M. 11th. Well I think we have finished for a bit, but I suppose we will be at it again before long.

I must say it is a change. We gave them a terrific bombardment before the original attack & they were fairly cowed & sick of it. They are still splendid with their M-Guns & hang on with these & hold up any amount. We captured 4 & brought them back - also a snipers rifle and Telescopic Sight in my dug-out. A loaf of black bread weighed about a ~~X~~ ton - there was any amount of German Sausage & cigars. Not many dead Boche as they have such good dug-outs. It was a great change & really yesterday it worked out quite like Aldershot watching the troops advancing in the way we used to practise on Long Valley & country really rather like it. It was very exciting & I am glad everything has gone so well. I have lost some splendid men of course.

P.S.

I forgot to add the Cavalry did not get any futher - that is than where we had got to but withdrew to spend a night in the open in the snow. I believe they have more or less gone through in some places - I am still wondering if they will ever succeed against these M- Guns.

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The progress of the 56th Div. had so far been insufficient to
 allow the 30th Div. in its right to advance. Similarly the fact that
 the 56th had not been able to drive the German MGs off Hill
 90 SW France¹ seriously hampered 14 Div on its left.

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