

AUGUST 31.

At daybreak we continued the retreat and took up a position in a field. A German aeroplane flew over us, and Lieut. Spread let off his machine guns for the first time in earnest. We heard afterwards it had been forced to come down, but whether due to him or not I cannot say. We moved off again and about 11-a.m. for the night about 18 miles short of Soissons.

SEPTEMBER 1st.

Next day we marched through Soissons and billeted in a field two and half miles beyond. Loomes left us during the day; he was ill. It was a terrible job getting up the hill outside Soissons. Wallace fainted, and so did several men. It was a case of halting for ten minutes and marching slowly for fifteen. On getting to the top we wheeled off at right angles into a field and lay on our backs for three hours. With the aid of a little tea we were then able to proceed to our camping field a couple of miles on.

SEPTEMBER 2nd.

Next morning we continue and move back as far as Villers-Cotterets, where we halt for an hour and let the 2nd Division pass in front of us; they have been engaged and we expect to be shortly. "B" Company is on outpost duty, and I am put in a wood where I have to guard several roads. I took up a more or less central position where more of the roads joined and got busy making it fit to resist - felled trees and made obstacles with barbed wire. Late in the afternoon we heard firing. It seemed quite close, so I took a man and went to try and find out what it was; I could find nothing, although more firing was heard; I suppose noise is deceiving in a wood. Towards 9 at night Allason sent back and asked about retiring; he was told to do so at once - evidently we had been left a little too long. We crossed a river (the Marne), and scarcely had we done so when the Engineers blew up the bridge; we were the last Regiment to cross. We only go a few miles, then wheel into a field and snatch an hour or two's sleep; we are roused before daybreak and march off once more.

SEPTEMBER 2nd.

Move forward and billet in a village. We are in a Grocery store and take what we want, the agreement being that we left our names and what we took the survivors were to pay for.

SEPTEMBER 3rd.

Move off next morning and pass over most beautiful hilly country - I think the place was St. Denis - ultimately billeting in a farm, where we managed to bag some fowls and eggs.

SEPTEMBER 4th.

Next morning we are rear Guard and take up a position at a farm just outside Coulommiers. The place is a fruit growing establishment, and the owners complained bitterly that the English cavalry had taken all the fruit -, the Germans came next, so I suppose they took the rest. I am sent as escort to the guns; recalled hurriedly and ordered to entrench on the left of the battery, so we dig in with entrenching tools.

I go off to the..../

SEPTEMBER 4th. I go off to the flank to reconnoitre and meet a French cavalry officer; I was suspicious and kept him covered with my revolver while I questioned him; he talked excellent English and asked for the 9th Lancers - as they were only a short way back I directed him to them. I proceeded about a mile before returning, but could find no signs of the enemy or the Brigade who were supposed to be on our left. I report and go back to my platoon. A battery of guns comes through us and comes into action, but does not open fire. Our German friends open fire and "C" Company (Major Burrows) get a shelling. No casualties. At nightfall all is quiet and I am left on outpost while the Regiment retires; towards morning I am ordered to follow. About two miles on I come across dead Germans - five of them and half a dozen horses. I heard they had got round us and tried to break through, but the Black Watch had killed or captured all (10).

SEPTEMBER 5th. We move on and about mid-day catch up with the rest of the Battalion. We are all very tired, but march on until 3-p.m. We are now at the village of Bernay, and we are told we shall not retire any more; the Great retreat is ended and we shall move forward soon. We spend the whole of the next day (6th) getting ready.

SEPTEMBER 7th. We move out and the Marne battle begins; we are in reserve and only move a mile or so, then billet(?) for the night in a field, with only our waterproof sheets to cover us.

SEPTEMBER 8th. Next day we move forward in skirmishing order, expecting a fight any time. We come to a farm where all the contents have been thrown out of window over the road; the Huns have taken everything they wanted and damaged all they didn't! We go on and meet a cavalry man, who tells us the Germans are in a wood in front, so we move forward and presently come across a dead German; we advanced up to the wood, and when within 50 yards do the rest with a rush, but find it empty. We push on through the wood and entrench in an open field; the German cavalry can be seen about 2,400 yards in front, but they soon disappear. Towards mid-day we push forward once more and come across many signs of German flight. We billet for the night in a field.

SEPTEMBER 9th. Lieut. Miller joined with a draft of 80 men. We cross the Marne (Dignon?) and push on through hilly country beyond. We come across a field where Germans had slept and billet several miles on in a field.

SEPTEMBER, 10th. Push off in a hurry in the early dawn and advance until about 10-a.m. The guns, which are in front, wheel into a field on left of road and we to right. We are told the Germans are in front and advance to attack. I am anxious about waterproof sheets the men are wearing (it was raining), so order my platoon to remove theirs and carry them on their backs; none of the others did this, with fatal results. We move forward in artillery formation, and soon come under fire; the wonder is that we escape being hit. I am fired at by our own Horse Gunners who mistake us for the enemy on account of the men of other platoons wearing waterproof sheets; I lose one killed (Dr. Richardson) and six wounded. We dig in and our gunners stop shooting at us and turn their attention to some other part of the line. We dig in. We move forward. I see several German mounted men, but they disappear very quickly. We are recalled and move down towards the village of Priez. We shelter under some bank while our gunners fire at the enemy, who are now retreating. About 2-30. We move into the village. Pass several of the Royal Sussex Regiment dead. They suffered heaviest of all, about 60 of 120 casualties in Brigade. We halt for a few hours. I go into a farm and see damage done by Huns. The farm has been striped of everything. In one room there are signs of a feast. Bottles in numbers are still on the table and all the plates are dirty. They had evidently had a royal time. In the kitchen everything had been pulled off the shelves and scattered about, and also the tap turned on and the place flooded. They were also not content with turning everything out on to the floors of the various rooms, but even fired bullets into the ceiling and paper on the wall. The damage done was beyond repair. We captured about 30 wounded Germans in the village. Towards dark we move forward about a mile and billet in a field for night. Move forward next morning (Sept:11th) and pass on march a French cavalry division. The men exchange remarks with ours and seem in excellent spirits. They don't shew much inclination to get off their animals, who look very thin and worn! We billet in a town for the night. Everything has been pillaged by the Germans. We have very good billets. Move forward early next morning (12th) and towards dusk meet French troops. They have evidently been fighting, as a few dead horses are lying about. The Germans had cleared off. We moved through them and worked to our right, where we were billeted in a farm.

SEPTEMBER 13th. Next morning was the commencement of the Aisne battle. We moved forward to a village and halted for several hours. Heavy Guns are just on our left, and have opened already at enemy's position across Aisne. Passage is forced by 1st Brigade and we move down and cross at Bourg. I noticed strong barricades and disguised trenches abandoned by the enemy which, if held, would certainly have cost us casualties. We held just one side of Bourg at Point "A". Just settling down to a meal when we are moved on to hill "X" and lie just beneath the crest. Musketry fire has begun. Sussex and Guards are hard at it. We are shelled and one Sergeant is wounded. Towards dusk the Regiment moved into billets at Moulins, except "A" Company, which is left out on the hill. Pass a good night, but called out hurriedly before daybreak and told to move. We fall in but are ordered to stand by for an hour. Fall out, and told to move off half an hour later. Rain began to fall and continued to do so for the remainder of the battle. We hear firing towards Vendresse. Move down road "B" to Vendresse and lie under cover of hedge "C". Things are beginning to liven up and bullets are falling all round us. Two men are wounded. One in foot and another in leg. Captain Body, who has taken over the Company, calls all Company officers and explains situation. We are shortly moved up to Tryon to support attack on factory. While he was explaining all this the bullets kept singing by, some fairly close. I felt uncommon like making a dash for the nearest cover. Lieut. Loomes turned up and rejoined; we were all glad to see him. He was delighted at being back. When he had reached the base he was told to go to England, but not liking the idea he had got on a train and, by changing trains and living from hand to mouth, had succeeded in joining up just before going into action. "C" Company are sent to support Guards. They return after about an hour, having suffered very severely. Knowles had gone on gallily attacking the whole German army until he found himself very nearly surrounded. He then made a bolt for it. "A" Company rejoined, and we move up to Troyon. Pass about 350 prisoners, a welcome sight. They were in tears. They had been told all they had to do was to march through to Paris, which had already been captured. They were surprised at their reception. On approaching crest of hill we come on signs of conflict. Helmets lying all over the place, and also rifles. A good deal of blood, and several wounded and dead lying about. We reach crest and halt just under it. The bullets now seem to be coming from all directions. After a short rest we are ordered forward to attack factory. I extend my platoon after Loomes (he is far in front of his platoon waving them on; this was the last I saw of him). Loomes is on my right and Goldie on my left. Had only gone about a hundred yards under a perfect hail of bullets when I heard a singing sound on my right. Two eight-inch shells had pitched 20

yards to my./

SEPTEMBER 13th
(continued)

yards to my left and blew sky high a few of my platoon. The shells emitted a tall cloud of black dust and smoke. Truly terrible missiles. We go on forward, but as yet I can see nothing. At last we reach the firing line. How anyone reached it is beyond comprehending. And such a line. All manner of regiments are there, and the dead and wounded are lying round in scores. We carry the factory and hold on like Grim death. Allason is a little to my right, and Goldie landed up to me. He shortly afterwards moved off to the left by rolling on his side, and that was the last I saw of him. The man next to me, just as he was getting down, suddenly pitched forward and lay in front moaning the whole of the time we were there. We opened a sharp fire on the German line, but are not able to see very much. Allason, on my right, is bandaging up a wounded Guards' officer. He was a fine example and seemed to shew no fear. He would not lie properly down. The German machine guns are nasty; they keep traversing up and down our line. A great increase in the noise of cracking whips overhead always heralded their return. Many men are hit and the casualties become truly appalling. We get no reinforcements or ammunition, and soon exhaust our supply. Germans heavily counter-attack. I noticed their way of carrying machine guns on stretchers. We used not to fire at these until we knew their contents. Goldie sends back word that he has been wounded in the leg and is going to crawl back to the rear. That was the last news I heard of him. / Allason orders me to retire, and I do so with two Loyal North Lancs., three Black Watch, two Cameron Highlanders.// We move back at a fast double and, coming to a donga, take shelter there. We are subject to a terrific bombardment and it is death to shew a hand. The shells seem to come right in and sweep the hole out. We lie there for some time and then move a little further back. I strike the Gloucester Regiment, who are the 3rd Brigade. They have come up to support and have had no casualties. They are all very eager to go on. I have already lost my Loyal North Lancs., and the Highlanders go off to try and find their regiment. I decide I will attach myself to the Gloucesters. I am absolutely done. 2nd/Lieut. Harding and I settle down to eat something. I supply the jam, he the bread. This revives us. The fire is still tremendous, but we are sheltered under a steep cliff and do not suffer. It is not safe to go on top. A party tried to bring in a wounded man, but all of them were either killed or wounded. Towards darkness the Gloucesters are ordered to attempt to advance on factory via village of Tryon. They ask me to come and I do so, there being no chance of finding my unit. We move off and have several escapes from "Jack Johnsons" and move up the road. Reach top of road when half battalion in front get panic. The General's escort bolted and the half battalion Welsh opened fire on us. Luckily they fired high so no damage was done. The Gloucester Regiment's leading Company had scattered, and it seemed as if we were in for

another fight../

SEPTEMBER 13th.
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another fight, for we did not know who was firing at us. The officers exerted themselves and quickly succeeded in getting the regiment together again. We then lay down and shouted to those in front to cease fire. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun. We all thought the thing closed, but no, suddenly a black wall seemed to rise in front of us and a crown of charging men came through us. They were the Welsh. They bayoneted two Gloucesters in their passage through. They went on a couple of hundred yards and lay down, and once more opened fire on us. Again no one was hit and it stopped. After a good deal of not knowing what to do, we got orders to retire down to the bottom of the road and entrench. This we did, moving a platoon at a time from the head of the column. I am glad to say I was able to help several of our wounded down. They were lying very thickly up there. Of my Company, no fewer than 3 officers out of 5 and 175 men out of 220 were either killed or wounded. It was terrible not being able to help them and still to hear them cry out "North Lincs". I passed the night after having supped off biscuits and jam, under a waterproof sheet, and, as it rained the whole time, I had a very uncomfortable time. Harding (Gloucesters) slept next me; he was afterwards killed.

SEPTEMBER 15th.

Next morning early the Germans attempted to push through, but, after suffering severe casualties, they were compelled to desist. I waited a short time, then thinking I would be of much more use elsewhere, proceeded to try and find my Regiment. I had one or two narrow shaves from snipers going down the road. Met the transport of the Welsh Regiment and the officer in charge gave me tea. This revived me very much for I was still very exhausted, besides being drenched through by the night's rain. I went on through the village of Chivy and asked a staff officer the way. He took me in and took me to see the General. He was very kind and directed me on my way. He told me 3rd Brigade had captured about two hundred prisoners that morning. I went along and came on H.Q. Guards Brigade. The General, Maxse, was also very kind and sent one of his staff officers to direct me to the 2nd Brigade. I was able to give them the news of the morning's capture. He at once ordered it to be given out to his Brigade. We were just then in a state that news like that was very cheering. We had to hug the cliff very carefully as the shells were pitching just over the crest very close every time. I reached H.Q. 2nd Brigade and see Troyte, also the General who was very kind. He told me the Regiment was only a few hundred yards further on. I went on and saw Captain Allen. He waved his hand frantically at me, and then I saw several more heads bob up from under a haystack. Soon I was shaking hands all round. They all thought I had been killed and had given me up for lost. We were soon exchanging all our adventures, and I had a really good meal. Jack Miller had a marvellous escape. He was blown up by a shell and rendered unconscious.

When he came to../

SEPTEMBER 15th.
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When he came to he found himself a prisoner of war. He managed to make his escape when we pushed them back again. Captain Prince was grazed at the knee. In fact, we all had wonderful escapes from death. We were, including M.O., 10 officers in all, having lost 14 during the previous day's fighting; our losses in men were about 400. My Company only mustered just over 50. We were dug in, in shallow trenches, just below the crest and out of sight of the Germans. The day passed very quietly except for shell fire. I went down to Vendresse and found Spread in hospital. He was badly wounded and not expected to live. His first question was, what had happened to Goldie.

SEPTEMBER 16th.

Next day, Wednesday, we had deepened the trenches, and they were a good deal safer. Night was very cold and rainy. Several stragglers turned up, and also wounded crawled into our lines. I went out to try and find out if anything was coming on. German advanced post was forced to get back again. In the afternoon of the 16th, Germans, who had got reinforcements, attempted to counter attack on our extreme ~~left~~ right. They were driven back at the point of the bayonet with heavy loss and some prisoners. A rather curious thing happened during the action. Both sides ceased fire and stood up, each thinking the other wished to surrender. Captain Watson, Queen's Regiment, who was acting Brigade Major, galloped out to them to accept this surrender, but on getting up to the officer in command was informed that they thought we wanted to. He turned round and came away, being fired at but not hurt, and the fight was resumed. We who had been watching the whole thing a M.G. on the enemy with visible results. The 2nd K.R.R.L. were mostly responsible for this gallant affair. I began to feel the effects of the rain and cold, and had to spend a day in the Regiment hospital, which was immediately behind our trenches. We now settled down to trench warfare. Our trenches were deepened and improved daily. Night attacks by the enemy were frequent, but produced no results. On the night of the 20th an officer and 25 men of the Guards captured a small German advance work without loss, and killed all the occupants. Stories began to go about. One wit called out "Waiter!" and about heads popped up from the German trenches. They were promptly shot. Each side used to signal hits. I saw a duel between a L/Cpl. of the Sussex and a German sniper. It ended after three-quarters of an hour by the Sussex man being shot through the head. We held on until 21st September when we were relieved by the 18th Brigade just out from England. We were all glad of the rest and went back to the village of -----, where we were quartered in caves. We got a draft of 350 men. Lieut Lucy joined September 22nd, 1914. Spies were very numerous. We arrested two in mistake for them. They turned out to be well known local people. Griffith was sent after one behind our position, but, although

he was...../

SEPTEMBER 16th:etc.
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he was wounded, he got away. Another was arrested in Troyon village in the act of despatching pigeons. Another was discovered installed with a telephone which communicated with the German position. The usual procedure was to hand them over to the French Authorities to be dealt with. We rested only for two days when we called out to support 18th Brigade, whose trenches had been taken. The Northhamptons and Rifles were only used, but we lost one officer and 32 men from shell fire. I was left behind to gather all the tools together and come on alone. We had to advance in extended order, being shelled from the flank. I was lucky in escaping without any hit. We went to Paissy and stayed there while the action was going on, and then went back to our billets via Moulins.

It turned out that the 18th Brigade were caught unprepared by the Germans who, pretending they wished to surrender, surrounded and caught most of them. The plan was, a line of unarmed men came in front and were followed by a crowd of armed Germans. Before the unfortunate 18th Brigade were able to make out what was the matter, the Germans were among them shooting all with arms in their hands and taking others prisoners.

We had an unpleasant job when orderly officer. We had to go and watch the trenches from behind a Brigade of French 75.m.m. Guns. As the German 16-inch shells used to pitch very often within 100 yards of the spot where we sat, it was by no means pleasant. One shell burst in a house. The house was absolutely wrecked and several French artillery men were killed. A Division of French Moroccan Troops were camped just below the hill. We stayed in ----- until the 29th September, when we once more went into the trenches and stayed there until October 18th.

It was one continual round of trench warfare. The trenches of the West Yorkshire Regiment were still full of their dead, and it was almost impossible to dig in places without coming on dead bodies. We were subject to several attacks and continual heavy bombardment. We repulsed all attacks, and in no case did the enemy set foot in our trench. The bombardment was the worst and we suffered several casualties. One day Major Burrows, Allason, Allen, Calrow, Reid (who only joined that day), and myself were all sitting in the mess talking when a shell burst just at the door. Allason and Calrow were killed. Reid was wounded and also Major Burrows. Allen and myself were not touched, although I was knocked over. For a few seconds I thought I had been hit, but recovered sufficiently to dash away. One of the mess carts was blown up completely. On another occasion a Meenen Weeper came into a trench and burst in a trench where five officers and a few men were standing and only wounded three of them slightly.

OCTOBER 16. We were relieved by French troops. Miller and I were standing talking when we thought we heard words of command from the enemy lines. They were immediately followed by six heavy shells. By the direction of the burst we knew that they must have caught something. The head of the French column had been caught and 12 killed and 60 wounded. A sure sign of spies in the neighbourhood. A dense fog impeded the operations very much. We got away and marched until nine next morning.

OCTOBER 17. Recrossed the Aisne in early dawn. Billeted in a village where we had commenced the Battle of the Aisne. We were very exhausted and slept most of the day. Night of the 17th we marched to Fismes and entrained for an unknown destination. Eventually on the 18th we arrived at Boulogne, via St. Denis, Amiens and Abbeville. We were delayed owing to a smash on the line. Had a good meal at Boulogne - eggs for the first time for over a month. I laid in a supply of things. We went on via Calais, and detrained night of 18th - 19th at Cassel. Marched into billets. We frightened an old farmer by knocking him up at two in the morning and demanding accommodation. He was quite good and behaved very well when he discovered we were English. It turned out that the German cavalry had been seen quite close. We had by this time begun to hear the guns. Next morning we took up new billets and were able to get a bath.

OCTOBER 20. Next morning early we moved into fresh billets and spent quite a comfortable twenty four hours, having everything we wanted.

OCTOBER 21. We commenced our march and passed through Steenvoorde and Poperinghe, and went into billets at a distance of two miles from Ypres. Poperinghe looked war-worn. Thousands of troops, both French and English, passed through. Commander Samson and his armoured cars had rounded up all the German cavalry and stray parties of infantry. In one case, about 200 had been shut up in a church and forced to surrender. We slept about 250 in a house that night. Many refugees were met leaving with all they could carry.

OCTOBER 22. We parade at 9-a.m., but do not move off until near noon. I heard that I had been mentioned in despatches on this day. Everybody was very kind and congratulated me. Move forward about a mile. Fighting is going on all round, but we are not able to get any news. We know the Germans have been thrown back, and are told our objective is Roulers. Towards dusk we move on and march until 8-p.m. when we finally land at our billets. No one seemed to know the name of the village. We found out next day that it was called Boesenghe, on the Yser Canal. Next day we are shown our line of defence in case of attack. As a general line it was the canal. We spend a quiet day until 5-p.m. when we are hurriedly told to fall in. In a short time we are on the move

across the.../