

## Notes on:

### Casualties of the First World War, 1914 – 1918, who are associated with the Parishes of St Andrew, Congresbury and St Anne, Hewish.

#### Annex 1: The campaign of Lieutenant Oliver Dunham Melville Garsia 1st Bn., Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

##### Introduction

For the most part it is difficult to research the history of individual soldiers and the campaigns that they fought. The names of NCOs and other ranks were rarely recorded in the war diary of their regiment. Individual officers were named, however, when they were killed, wounded or missing in action. We know, from a letter, that Lieut. Garsia was with his regiment when it was mobilised. His death was recorded in the Battalion war diary six weeks later, so it is possible to explore the day-by-day events in which Lieut. Garsia would have been involved.

The source is the War Diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. A private letter shows that Lieut. Garsia was with his regiment, in Curragh, days after it was mobilised on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914; and it is reasonable to assume that he would have been involved in the events described in the War Diary until he was fatally wounded on a hill above the village of Missy-en-Aisne, Belgium, on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

In August 1914 The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) was part of The 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, along with The 2<sup>nd</sup> Suffolk Regiment, 1st The East Surrey Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> The Manchester regiment. The 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was, in turn, part of The 5th Division of the British army. This Division was under the command of II Corps and was part of the original British Expeditionary Force.

Once the battalion disembarked at Havre there were few days of rest. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> the battalion's northward advance into Belgium was halted at the Mons-Conde canal. The battalion then took part in a general retirement southward that lasted until September 5<sup>th</sup>. This was not a continuous march. It also involved days of entrenching and fighting. There was little sleep, food and water were scarce. Soldiers were exhausted and the battalion suffered heavy losses. On September 5<sup>th</sup> the order was given to end the withdrawal and retrace their steps northward. By September 13<sup>th</sup> the battalion reached and crossed the River Aisne. The battle which followed, in which Lieut. Garsia lost his life, saw the development of the trench warfare that was to characterise the next 4 years of conflict.

This account is based on extracts from the War Diary of the 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry: 1914 Aug. - 1915 Dec.

Held by: The National Archives, Kew: Reference: WO 95/1564/1. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C7352264>

It contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. the terms of which are found at: [Open Government Licence \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/open-government-licence/)

*Direct quotes from the diary are given in italic.*

## Extracts and commentary upon the War Diary of 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914 – September 14<sup>th</sup> 1914

Between these dates the Battalion was involved in

- The Battle of Mons (23-24 August) and subsequent retreat (to 5 September), including
  - The Battle of Le Cateau (26 August)
- The Battle of the Marne (7-10 September)
- The Battle of the Aisne (12-15 September)

### August

August 4<sup>th</sup>

Curragh Camp: mobilization ordered. The battalion had recently returned from detachment at Newry and Dundalk because of the political situation in the North of Ireland.

August 13<sup>th</sup>

The battalion entrained at Curragh siding in two trains for Dublin, and then embarked on the S.S. LANGFRANC

August 14<sup>th</sup>

*“At sea Lord Kitchener’s memorandum to the troops was issued and the Commanding Officer (Lt. Col. M. N. Turner) read to all ranks His Majesty’s gracious message which was received with spontaneous cheers.”*

August 15<sup>th</sup>

Landed at HAVRE. Marched to a stubble field in inclement weather ..... *“the men wet through dirty and tired”*.

August 16<sup>th</sup>

*“After nightfall the battalion quitted the rest camp and marched through the streets of HAVRE in order to entrain. The weather had cleared and our reception was most enthusiastic. Entrained; destination absolutely unknown.”*

August 17

Detrained at LE CATEAU and marched to LANDRECIES

August 21

Marched from LANDRECIES to LE PISSOTIAU.

*"At every town and village on the line of march we are received with unbounded enthusiasm and every kindness".*

August 22nd

Marched to MONS-CONDE canal; arrived at about 4.00 p.m. having crossed the Belgian border at 9 a.m. Took up position for outpost duty on the north bank of the canal at PETIT CREPIN.

August 23rd

*1st contact: Annihilation of patrol of German lancers.*

23rd August, 1914.  
6.0 AM

At 6.0 A.M. the first actual contact with the enemy took place. On the south side of the bye-road at point (B) Second Lieut. Savile was occupying a trench with a section of No. 6 Platoon. A sentry post of three private soldiers was established at a bend in the road about a couple of hundred yards to his front. A strong officer's patrol of German dragoons, apparently unconscious of any danger, taking no military precautions but riding along in close order, laughing and talking, rode up to the group. Our men were in a ditch at the road-side and withheld their fire. The German officer suddenly saw them and began to fumble for his revolver, whereupon Pte. Sambrook, one of the group, shot him through the body at point blank. The patrol wheeled about and the remaining two men fired into them

(9 26 6) W 257-976 100,000 4/12 H W V 79  
3298

## WAR DIARY

or

## INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Erase heading not required.)

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Page 8

Hour, Date, Place

Summary of Events and Information

Re

23rd August 1914  
MONS CANAL  
6.30 AM.

with effect. The German officer fell forward on to the neck of his horse but was successfully led away by his men. The sentry post fell back untouched upon the trench in rear.

About half an hour later the hostile patrol returned apparently expecting to find the sentry post ~~whereas~~ in its original position. Being disappointed in this they advanced along the bye-road to within 100 yards or less of Sec. Lieut. Savile's trench. This was so admirably concealed as to be almost invisible. The first intimation of danger that they received was ~~then~~ a hail of bullets in their ranks. The estimates of the enemy's losses vary greatly, but it is a fact that the villagers brought in a number of trophies, arms, equipment + clothing, while several dead horses remained in the road.

8.0 AM.

At about 8 o'clock one of the German dragons was brought in by the villagers, badly wounded in the head, but quite sensible and able to stand. He was blubbering and begging for mercy and appeared to be quite unable to understand the kind treatment that he received at our hands. He was carried in a stretcher



# WAR DIARY

or

## INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Erase heading not required.)

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs., Part II, and the Staff Manual respectively. Title pages will be prepared in manuscript.

Page 9

Hour, Date, Place

Summary of Events and Information

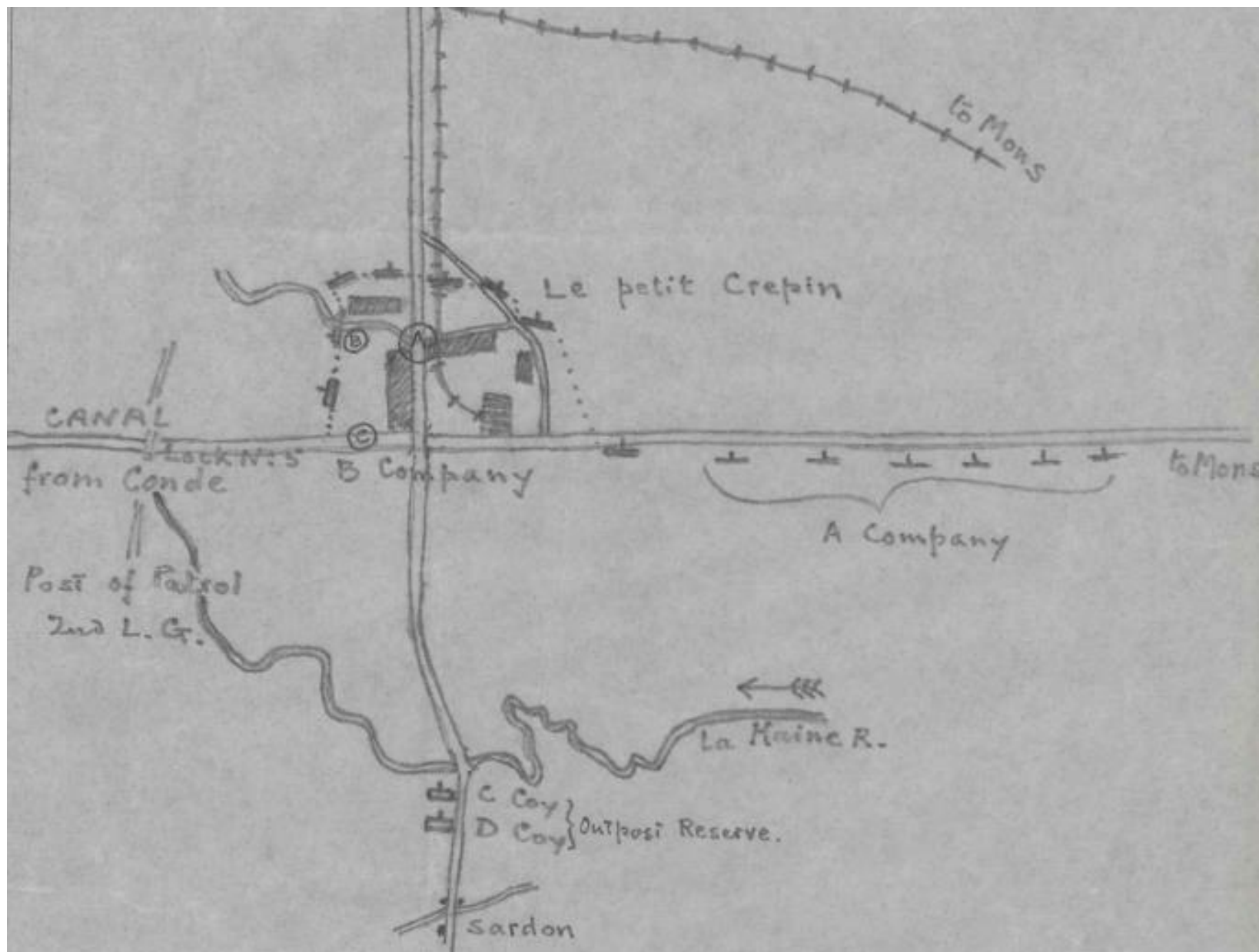
Remarks

to the Reserve of the Outposts. Subsequently the medical officer reported that, from his observation of the man's vomit, his stomach was absolutely empty except for some oats which he has evidently been sharing with his horse, thus testifying to the arduous nature of recent German operations.  
No further encounters took place at this point.

7 AM

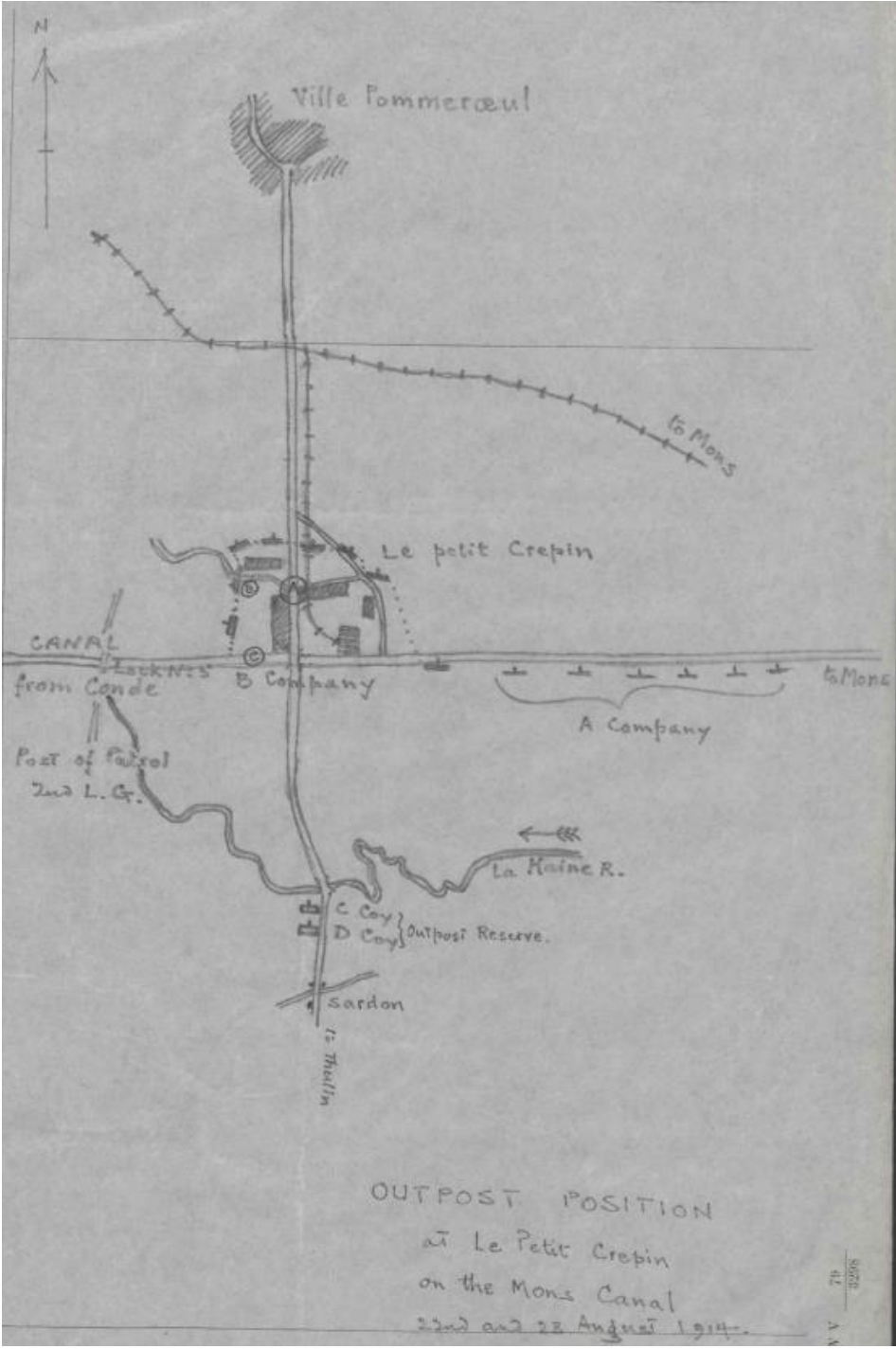
Elements of the DCLI occupied forward positions near the bridge over the canal. Initially their orders were "to hang on until the place becomes untenable owing to attack by too superior numbers and then retire"

(continued)



Copy of part of the sketch map in the War Diary showing point of first contact (1 of 2).

Copy of part of the sketch map in the War Diary showing point of first contact (2 of 2).



At about 4.45 p.m. the enemy began moving along the road southward from VILLE POMMEROEUL towards the canal. He presented an extraordinary appearance, mounted men, preceded by jägers all in close order, marching slowly and deliberately forward in one solid mass and occupying the entire roadway. As has already been stated the only fire that could be brought to bear was from the breastwork at point (A). The o.c. post waited until the head of the advancing enemy reached the level crossing the range of which was known to be exactly 750 yards. Then, with combined sights at 750 and 800 yards fire was opened. The number of rifles was all too few, but every shot must have taken effect. The result upon the enemy was miraculous. In a moment the road was clear except for a few skirmishers at the level



who opened fire at so long a range as to be absolutely harmless. From our trenches a few long range shots were fired at the mass of cavalry at VILLE POMMEROEUL but we failed to find the range.

The O.C. Post was now wondering how to interpret his orders. The enemy had been effectually checked in enormously superior numbers, but the post had not yet become in any way "~~intenable~~" <sup>intenable</sup>. Apparently therefore it was his duty to "hang on" for the present. At that moment Major Petaval, who has a genius for finding himself in any spot where bullets may be falling, appeared from nowhere in particular with orders for the two companies to fall back to the south side of the canal. "B" company accordingly vacated their trenches and retired over the bridge, the range of which the enemy had not yet found, while "C" company went across country and crossed <sup>the canal</sup> by means of two barges <sup>(at point ©)</sup> ~~moored~~ that had been moored together under the supervision of the Adjutant (Lieut. Acland) as an alternative line of retreat. These barges were successfully unlasher, and unmoored and cast adrift after the last man had crossed.

Incessant fire was exchanged across the canal until well after dark.

*“As a result of several hours fire we had one man killed and five wounded. We withdrew without any difficulty at 11 p.m.*

*The news reached us later that a great battle had been fought from our position on the extreme left of MONS on the right and that certain units had suffered terrible losses.*

*..... Thence the march lay southward. It was in fact a retirement, the beginning of a retrograde movement which was destined to continue for many a day. Then we began to witness the horrors of war. No longer were we greeted with the welcome cries of “Vive l’Angleterre”, “Vivent les Anglais”, on all sides there were tears and moaning. The advance of the dreaded Germans was now certain. Throughout the first night there passed a continuous stream of fugitives old and young, men and women each bearing a bundle containing their worldly possessions – all fleeing for safety”.*

The withdrawal lasted several days. It was not a continuous march. It involved entrenching and covering the withdrawal of other battalions, who then covered the withdrawal of the DCLI. There was little sleep. Food and water were scarce. Soldiers were exhausted.

August 24th

March to DOUR via ELOUGES, WIHERIES.

Daybreak found the DCLI at DOUR. Here having had neither rest nor rations *“the men took to their picks and shovels with a will”* in the expectation that *“here and now the great battle of the war was to be fought, that at DOUR, with our assistance, France was about to stay the further advance of her foe.*

*.....At 11 o’clock the surprising order was received – a general retirement. The regimental officer can see no further than his nose and he is not in the confidence of the chiefs of the army. According to some theories it had never been the intention to hold DOURS, according to others the place had been turned, while some have it that the French have been forced to retire, leaving us unsupported. Whatever the true reason all that remained for us was to comply with our instructions. Many units suffered great losses in withdrawing, but again fortune favoured us. Although from every point of vantage the hills were belching forth fire and shells, and although death and destruction surrounded our men upon all sides we escaped from the inferno without the loss of more than four or five men, wounded or captured.*

August 25th

March to LE CATEAU via BAVAY.

At BAVAY the Battalion took up the position of rear guard to cover the rest of the Brigade and its attached artillery, reaching LE CATEAU at about 6.30 p.m.

August 26th

#### Battle of LE CATEAU

Suffered surprise attack 6.30 a.m. The Battalion, massed in column of route, was attacked by volleys of rifle fire and during the next five hours it took heavy losses which would have been worse without the intervention of the 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade and their attached artillery. Six officers were wounded or missing while 185 NCOs and men were reported killed, wounded and missing – although some 90 of them had become separated in the confusion and re-joined the Battalion on August 31<sup>st</sup>.

The Battalion's War Diary records that:

*“From the commencement of this action it had been a more or less assumed fact that the enemy, or portions of them, were dressed in our uniforms, consequently ..... the word was passed along to the effect that our men were not to fire as it seemed doubtful whether we were firing on our own men or the enemy; also owing to the fact that we believed the enemy were in our uniforms it was extremely difficult for officers to decide whether the Troops, seen at a distance, were friend or foe and in consequence lines were formed facing in many directions at various times, thereby causing a great deal of confusion.”*

A day of hotly contested engagements continued until approximately 5.30 p.m. when various companies of the battalion acted as rear and flank guard as the 5<sup>th</sup> Division withdrew to the south and reformed around MARETZ. This was followed by a march through the night until ESTREES was reached at about 10 p.m. Fine rain drenched the troops, and rations were scarce.

August 27th

1 a.m. the retirement continued. ST. QUENTIN was reached at 5.30 a.m. with some losses due to falling out from exhaustion. A brief rest (1/2 hour) and the march recommenced, reaching OLLEZY at 6.30 p.m.

August 28th

7 a.m. march began; 6 p.m. arrived at PONTOISE 3 miles southeast of NOYON

August 29th

A day's reorganisation: march recommenced at 7 p.m. but only covered a distance of 6 miles (outskirts of BAILLY)

August 30th

3 a.m. march resumed. 3 p.m. reached ATTICHY on the River Aisne, some 18 miles west of SOISSONS

Since August 27<sup>th</sup> the march had taken place largely without incident, other than the sighting of Uhlan patrols that were never far from the rear of the column throughout the retirement. On the horizon were *“volumes of flame and smoke, issuing from the farms, set alight by the same Uhlans (their apparently invariable practice, a practice which no doubt cost them dearly in later days)”*

August 31st

The most trying days march yet. CHELLE – ST ETIENNE – PIERRE FONDS – MORIENVAL – FRESNOY.

*“It is hard to say why this day was found so trying. Perhaps the long distance covered each day was beginning to tell on the strength of the men. Perhaps the continual retirement was beginning to effect (sic) the spirit of the troops. Suffice it to say that the road seemed interminable and that every hill took the aspect of a mountain.*

*Towards dark, the roll of those falling out was becoming large, and it was a very tired force which marched into bivouac at MERMONT which is on the high ground just north of the town of CREPY-EN-VALOUS at 10.30 p.m. that night.*

September

September 1st

14 Brigade moved south of the town. 4 p.m. marched south by west to NANTEUIL; reached by 7 p.m.

September 2<sup>nd</sup>

*“The remainder of this great retirement, so far as the regiment is concerned, consisted of a series of marches of varying lengths.*

3 a.m. marched to MONTGE; reached by 11 a.m. and went into billets, the first since Aug 21<sup>st</sup>.

September 3rd

5 a.m. marched to BOULERS

September 4th

11 p.m. march recommenced

September 5th

8 a.m. bivouacked at TOURNAN.

*“Thereafter we expected to take the rest we had been waiting for so long. We laid down that night little expecting to receive the order ‘Army Advancing be prepared to move at any minute’. However it is the unexpected which occurs in war, and at about 12 midnight, it was the order which was received.”*



September 6th

8 a.m. retraced steps to the hamlet of LE PLESSIS ST AVOYE reached at 5 p.m.

September 7th

12 noon marched to COULOMIER, bivouacked at 8.30 p.m.

September 8th

6 a.m. marched to the village of DOUE, receiving orders at 12 noon to attack and clear the village of ST OUEN and the high ground on its northern side. Heavily wooded terrain, cliffs denying a direct line of advance, 2 deep rivers and friendly artillery fire eventually halted the advance. By 4 p.m. the advance of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade forced the enemy to retire from ST OUEN.

September 9th

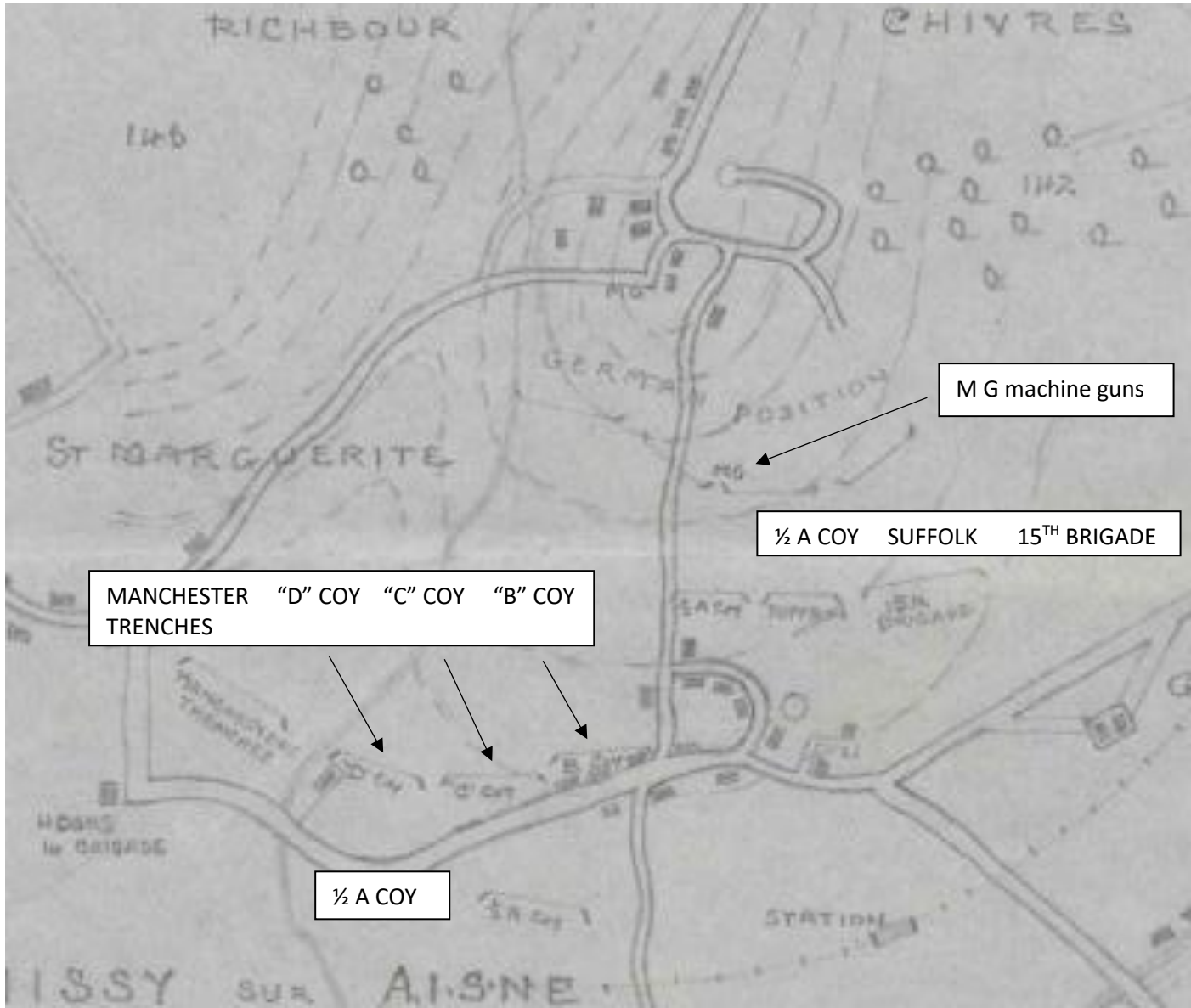
The advance was continued with the DCLI forming part of the advanced guard. The advance northward across thickly wooded ground and boggy bottoms was led by B Company, supported by D Company, and C Company, supported by B company. Large bodies of enemy infantry and cavalry were on high ground to their left. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion The Manchester Regiment, supported by the Suffolk regiment advanced to their right, while the Suffolk Regiment supported the DCLI.

The enclosed nature of the country, with woods and vineyards, and the close proximity of the enemy made reconnaissance and communication difficult. Just when it was thought that the advance would continue uneventfully, A Company came under heavy fire. The Company shook out and formed two firing lines, one facing left and one right of the line of advance.. The right-hand line continued to advance and, emerging from the wood, found themselves some 70 – 80 yards from the enemy's firing line. Meanwhile B and C Companies continued to advance and found themselves some 250 yards from the enemy's main line. *The whole system of the enemy's defence was one of carefully considered enfilade, which made the attack a particularly difficult one.....B Company particularly suffered from the enemy's high explosive shells".* B and C Companies initially held their position "until the ever increasing roll of casualties made it imperative to withdraw." Attacks by the 15<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry brigades relieved the pressure on the DCLI. This success enabled the advance to continue the following morning, with the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including the DCLI, now at the rear.

The next few days developed into a series of marches, via BILLY SUROURCQ (sic) and CHACRIESE.

September 13th

At 4 a.m. marched to the RIVER AISNE, reached at midday just to the south west of the village of MISSY. A river crossing by pontoon raft was completed by the Brigade by 6.30 p.m. with little opposition. At 7.30 p.m. the village of ST MARGUERITE was secured without significant opposition.



September 14<sup>th</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade was ordered to take the village of MISSY.

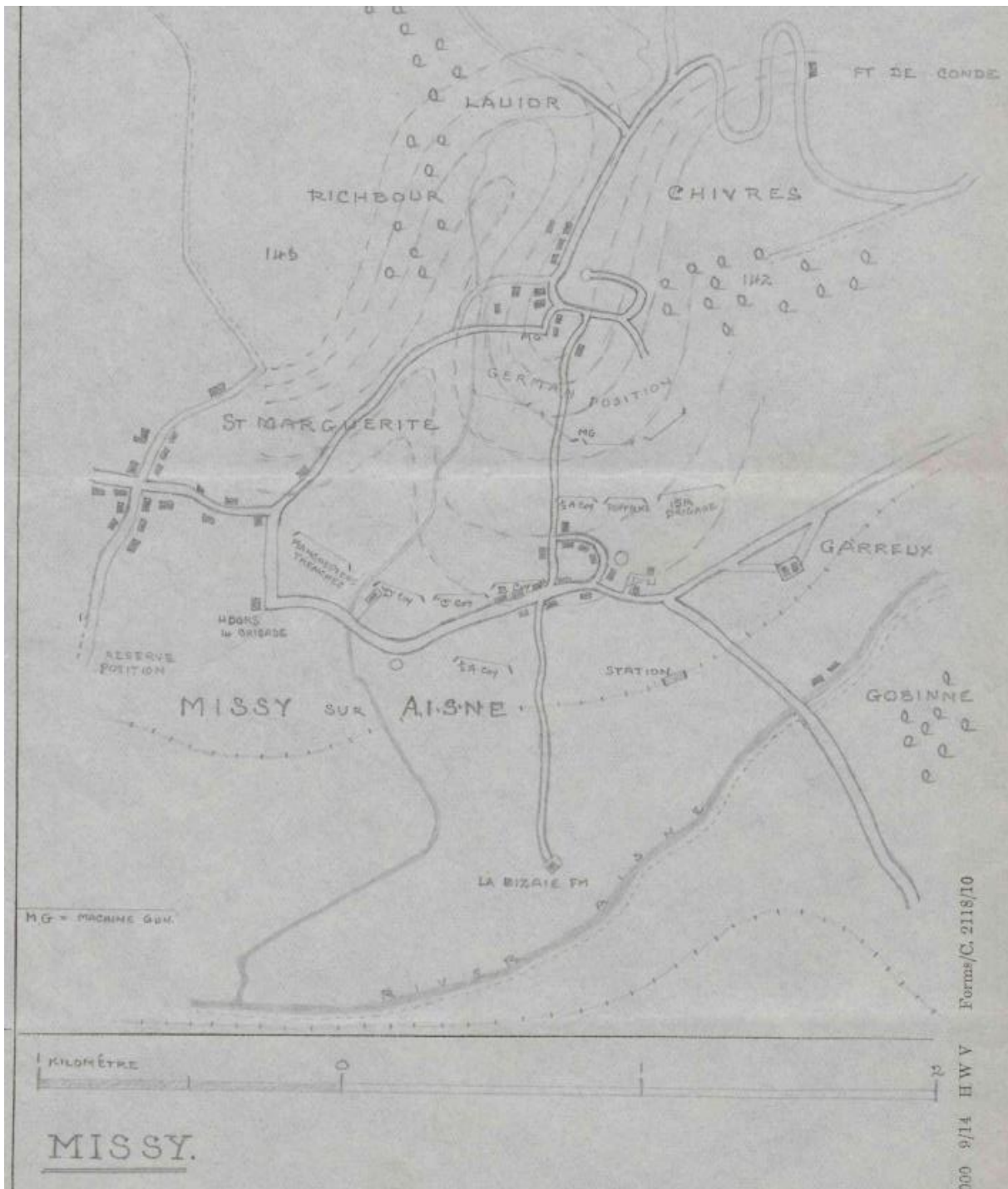
Copy of part of the sketch map in the 1<sup>st</sup> Btn. DCLI War Diary showing the battle at Missy-sur-Aisne (1 of 2)

M G machine guns

½ A COY SUFFOLK 15<sup>TH</sup> BRIGADE

MANCHESTER "D" COY "C" COY "B" COY TRENCHES

½ A COY



Copy of the sketch map in the 1<sup>st</sup> Btn. DCLI War Diary showing the battle at Missy-sur-Aisne (2 of 2).

The DCLI was ordered to attack from the western slopes of the spur North of the village. The attack was led by C and D Companies, with A and B companies in support. It was found to be impossible due to very severe crossfire from the enemy's trenches on the western slope of the Missy height and from machine gun fire from the village of CHIVIES. C Company and D Company held their position in the valley to the west of Missy height. A and B Companies with the exception of half of A Company who were held in reserve just west of MISSY itself, moved round and attacked the western slopes from the south via MISSY. There the company and a half were able to make good the village but were unable to get beyond that point. An attack by the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the East Sussex Regiment initially gained ground on the German position but their failed bayonet charge led to the withdrawal of the 15<sup>th</sup> Brigade to a position south MISSY.

The DCLI was ordered to remain in position in the village overnight.

*“Casualties among officers were very heavy this day. Capt. R. H. Oliver was killed soon after the attack of “C” Company in the valley. Capt. JES Trelawney, Lieut. ODM Garsia, Lieut. NR Daniell and Lieut. CE Crane being all severely wounded on the same day.*

*Lieut. Garsia and Lieut. Crane died within a few days from the effects of wounds.*

*Casualties otherwise amounted to 145 NCOs and men.”*