

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 in which 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 1st 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 4th, 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 near the village of Missy, Belgium, on September 14th, 1914.

In August 1914 the 1st Battalion The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (DCLI) was part of The 14th Infantry Brigade, along with The 2nd Suffolk Regiment, 1st The East Surrey Regiment and the 2nd The Manchester regiment. The 14th 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 23rd 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 5th. 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 regiment suffered heavy losses. On September 5th the order was given to end the withdrawal and retrace their steps northward. By September 13th 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.

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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 4th 1914 – September 14th 1914

Between these dates the DCLI 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)

Diary extracts and commentary

August 4th

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

August 13th

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

August 14th

“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 15th

Landed at HAVRE. Marched to a stubble field in inclement weather *“The ground was completely swamped, the men wet through and tired”*.

August 16th

“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 in the evening. Marched at nightfall to LANDRECIES, where we arrived at midnight”.

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 and south banks of the canal at PETIT CREPIN, digging over a dozen trenches on the north bank.

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 Plt. 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.

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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.

WAR DIARY

OR

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Erase heading not required.)

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 ~~this~~ 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

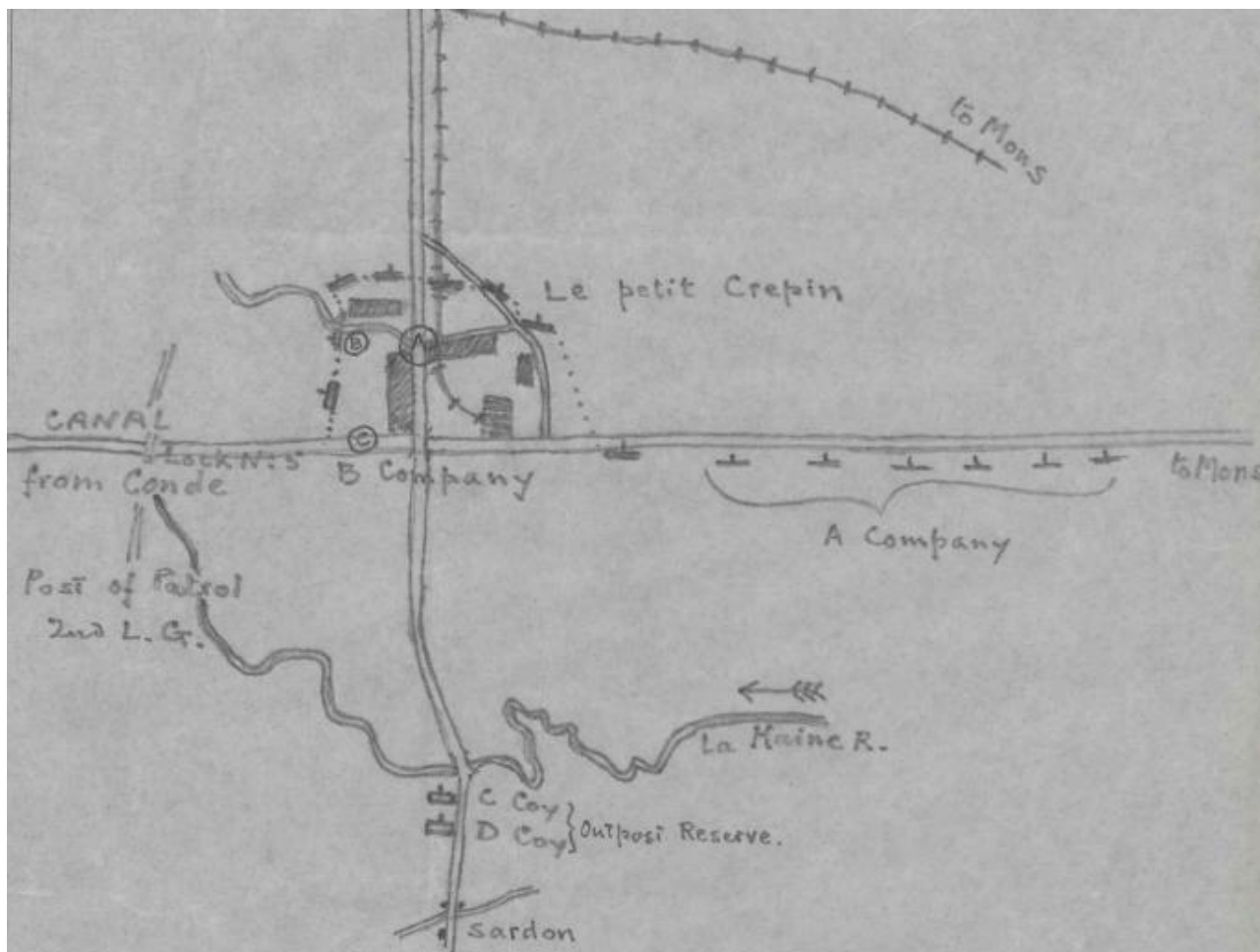
WAR DIARY
or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY
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<p>Page 9</p> <p>Hour, Date, Place</p>	<p>Summary of Events and Information</p> <p>to the Reserve of the Outposts. Subsequently the medical officer reported that, from his observations of the man's vomit, his stomach 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.</p> <p>No further encounters took place at this point.</p>	<p>Remarks</p>
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Later in the day portions of 'C' and 'D' companies supported mounted troops and cyclists who came into contact with the enemy. "On their return neither our advanced troops nor any other persons gave the smallest piece of information to the O.C. Outposts at LE PETIT CREPIN as to what he might find himself opposed to, but this was merely a symptom of the extraordinary secrecy in all things great and small which is maintained by one and all throughout this war".

Elements of the DCLI continued to occupy 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"

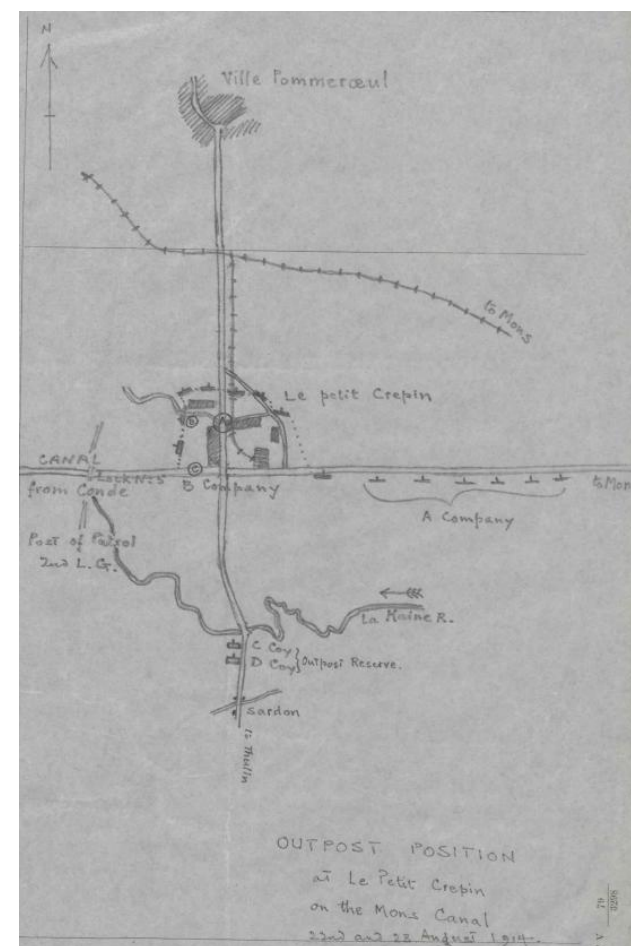


**Copy of part of the sketch map in the War Diary
showing point of first contact, 23 August 1914,
4.45 p.m. (Best viewed at 200% zoom)**

Point A: the only breastwork offering a line of fire along the road from VILLE POMMEROEL

Point C: location of 2 barges offering point of retreat across the canal

Enemy forces were gathered at VILLE
POMMEROEL



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 trench a few long range shots were fired at the mass of cavalry at VILLE POMMERËUL 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 "~~untenable~~". Apparently therefore it was his duty to "hang on" for the present. At that moment Major Petavel, 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 ^{the canal} by means of two barges ^(at point ©) 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.

POMMERÉUL.

When A, B + ~~C~~ Companies had reached THULIN (about a mile from the MONS CANAL) they were met by Bdr. General de Lisle, commanding 3rd Cavalry Brigade, who appeared to be in command. This officer peremptorily ordered them to return to the firing line at the river. The order was promptly obeyed and, until long after darkness had set in, an incessant fusillade and artillery fire continued. Several machine guns also opened fire upon both sides. The shrapnel fire of the enemy had no effect whatever, except upon the trees. Upon neither side could the infantry see each other, and the effect of the enemy's fire was out of all proportion to his expenditure of ammunition. After nightfall both combatants endeavoured to enfilade the lines of their opponents with machine gun fire by taking advantage of the bends in the river line. Our men acquired a very poor opinion of German marksmanship and a still poorer one of their artillery fire. As the 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 to 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 was to last 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 *“the so-called prepared position”* of DOUR. The front faced northwards. 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.*

Except for the annihilation of a cavalry patrol which, after the manner of German cavalry patrols, rode straight up to our position in search of its certain fate, our regiment never struck a blow.

.....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 24th/25th

March to LE CATEAU via BAVAY with little rest, little water and little food. Halts were called twice to cover the retirement of firstly the Manchester regiment and then some artillery and infantry still evacuating DOUR. Overnight the order was received to entrench a position overlooking ST-WAST. The anticipated German attack did not take place and at 5 a.m. on the 25th the retirement continued.

At BAVAY the Battalion took up the position of rear guard to cover the rest of the Brigade and its attached artillery. By about 9 a.m. the Regiment commenced their retirement through the town.

A Regiment of the 1st Army Corps (Berkas) (which was residing on LANDRICIES) was holding the north East portion of the Town and materially assisted our retirement. But for this, it is doubtful whether the Regiment would have got away without heavy casualties. As it was, no casualty occurred.

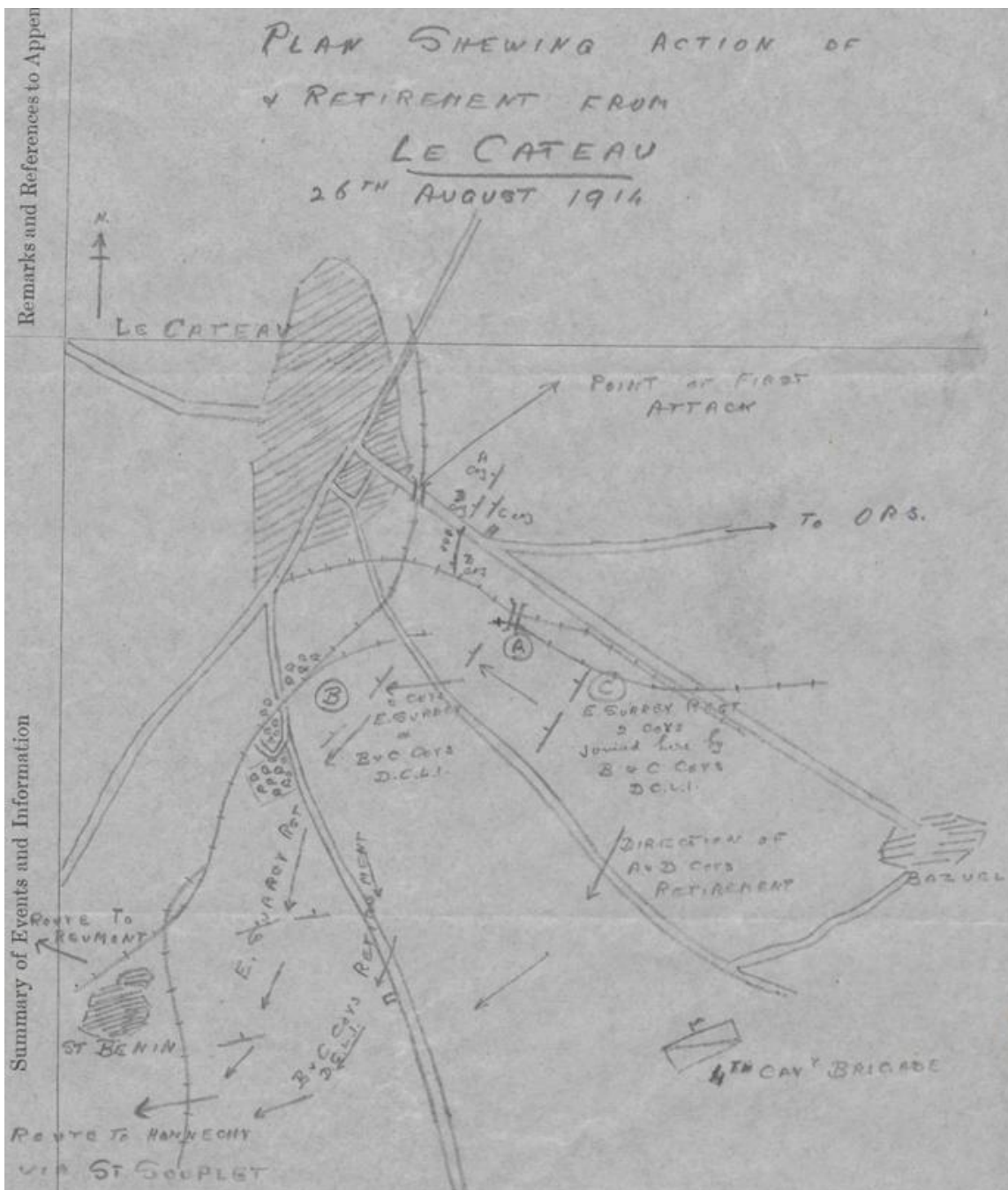
The route now lay along a long straight road towards LE CATEAU. The heat was very great and was much felt by our hungry & tired men. The constant deployments necessary, made the march still more trying and a large number of men fell out from exhaustion. However, at about 2 pm a halt of about 1 hour was called when the Battalion passed through the East Surrey Regiment who took over the duties of Rear Guard.

At 6.30 p.m. LE CATEAU was reached and a halt was called. It had been raining heavily since 5 p.m. and soldiers were drenched, exhausted and hungry.

August 26th

Battle of LE CATEAU

The Germans launched a surprise attack 6.30 a.m. The Battalion, massed in column of route, was attacked by volleys of rifle fire and artillery. During the next five hours it took heavy losses which would have been worse without the intervention of the 4th Cavalry Brigade and their attached artillery.



The enemy were in considerable force, holding not only the outskirts of the town but also the railway running to the southwest of the town and high ground to the north-east. British forces retreated to the southwest along the line of ditches and embankments, taking advantage of high ground where they could. The retreat was handicapped by lines of hedges and wire fencing.

All companies suffered heavy casualties throughout this retirement, especially about points 'A', 'B' and 'C'..... It was about point 'B' that the heaviest casualties occurred to 'B' and 'C' Companies, as at times a very hot fire was brought to bear from the woods. Due to the confusion and the wounding of several officers a large number of NCOs and men lost direction and were separated from the Battalion.

All riding horses, along with the 1st Line Transport, also became separated from the Battalion.

At REUMONT, west of St Benin a mixed party of about 100 men that had become detached from the Battalion reformed and became hotly engaged with the enemy at about 12 noon. From this point the party fought a series of delaying actions during the retreat of the 5th Division who had been heavily engaged with a far superior force of the enemy throughout the whole day.

(Map best viewed at 200% zoom).

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 series 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 5th 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.

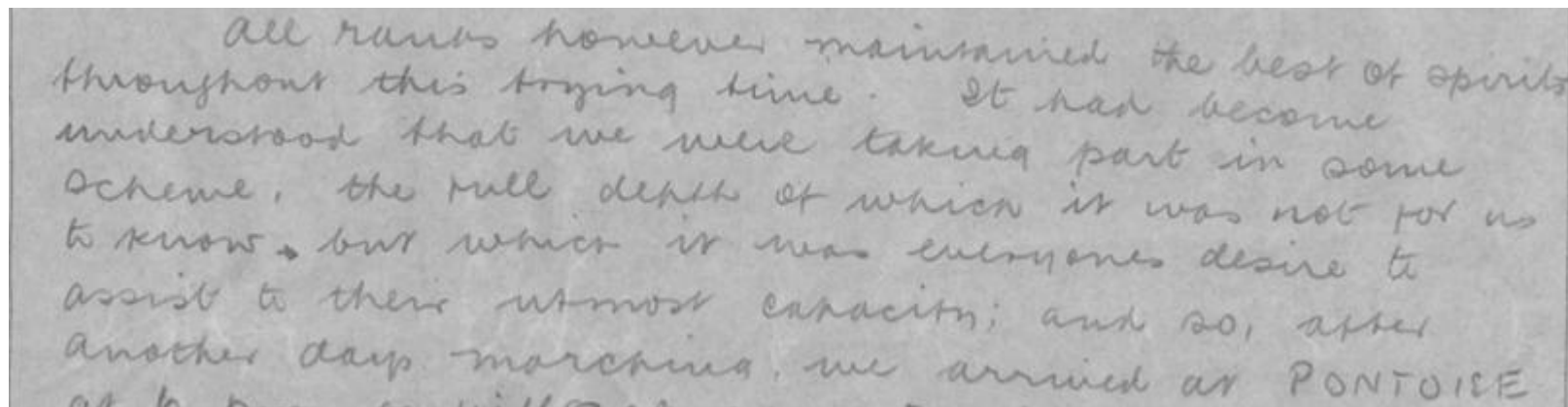
August 27th

1 a.m. the retirement continued. ST. QUENTIN was reached at 5.30 a.m. with some losses due to falling out from exhaustion, made worse by the lack of horses and transport. 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.

There was great difficulty in getting supplies to the troops, made worse by the frequency with which companies had to be detached from the Battalion.



All ranks however maintained the best of spirits throughout this trying time. It had become understood that we were taking part in some scheme, the full depth of which it was not for us to know, but which it was everyone's desire to assist to their utmost capacity; and so, after another day's marching, we arrived at PONTOISE

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 27th 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

14th Brigade moved south of the town to cover the retirement of troops still to the north of the town who were engaging the enemy. 4 p.m. marched south by west to NANTEUIL; reached by 7 p.m.

September 2nd

"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 21st.

September 3rd

5 a.m. marched to BOULERS where the regiment again went into billets.

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 this order which was received."*

The retreat of the BEF had covered some 200 miles. Next day the DCLI again headed north, finding the enemy forces that had hounded them now themselves retreating.

September 6th

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

September 7th

12 noon marched to COULOMIER, bivouacked at 8.30 p.m. The march was very hot and trying, during which many signs of the enemy's hasty retreat were seen.

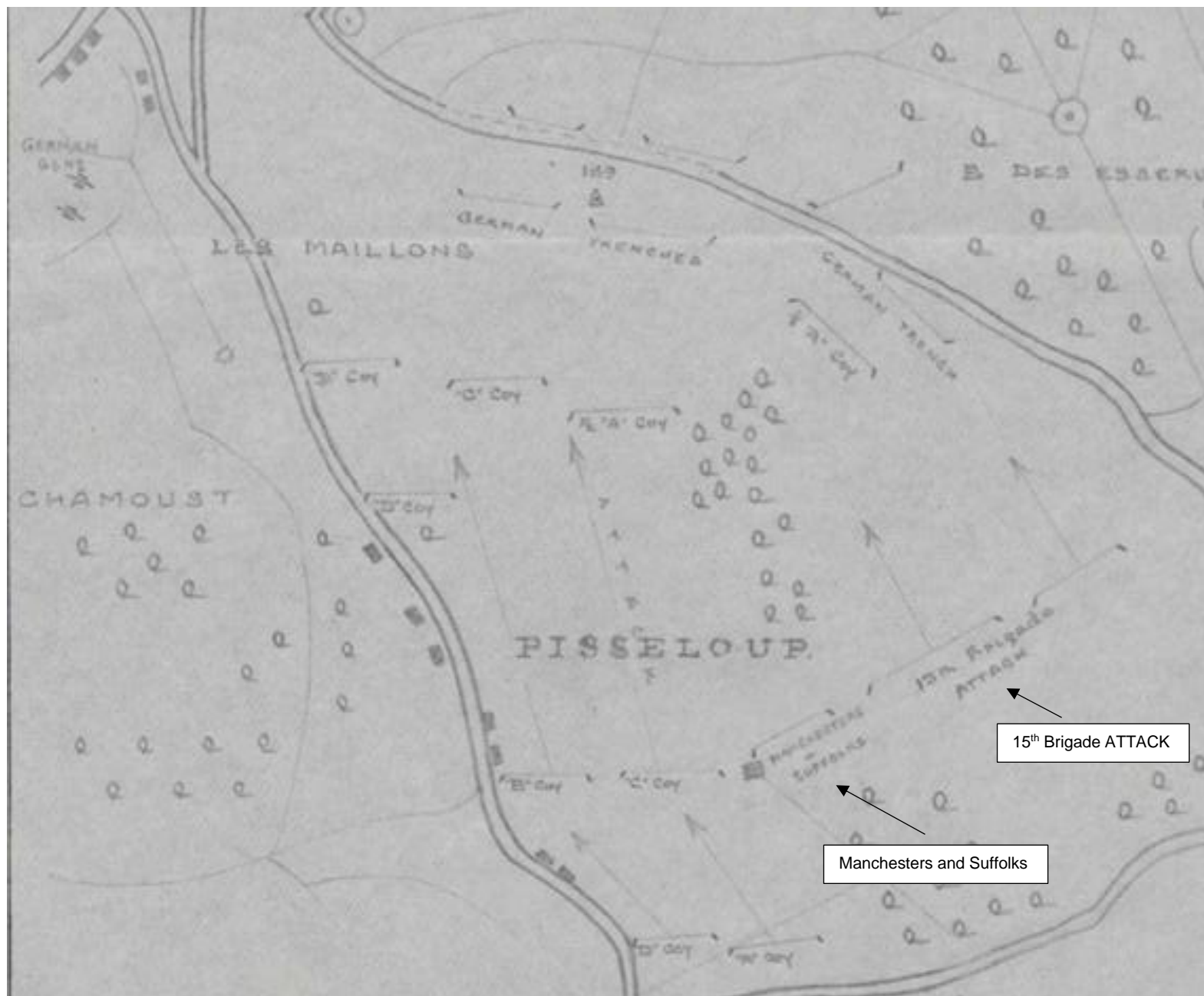
September 8th

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. Advanced initially over open country with no difficulty, but then heavily wooded terrain with cliffs denying a direct line of advance. Two deep rivers and enemy machine gun and artillery fire impeded the advance. By 4 p.m. the advance of the 14th Infantry Brigade, of which the DCLI was part, forced the enemy to retire from ST OUEN.

September 9th

The advance was continued with the DCLI forming part of the advanced guard. When contact with enemy artillery was made the 1st DCLI was ordered to advance (eastwards) with all speed to MONTREUIL. Surprised to find fairly large bodies of enemy infantry and cavalry to the north, the DCLI wheeled northwest to advance towards them across bog and through thick woods. 'B' and 'C' Coy. led the advance, supported by 'D' and 'A' coy. The 2nd Battn. Manchester regiment were ordered to advance to their right, with the East Surrey Regiment and Suffolk Regiment in support.

The map following shows the lines of engagement south of MONTREUIL. Emerging from woodland the DCLI Companies found themselves within yards of the German trenches.



(Best viewed at 200% zoom)

The enclosed nature of the country, with steep slopes, 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 (see map above). The right-hand line continued to advance. Emerging from the woodland they found themselves some 70 – 80 yards from the enemy's firing line and came under heavy fire. Meanwhile 'B' and 'C' Companies continued to advance and found themselves some 250 yards from the enemy's main line and came under very heavy fire from close range. To this was added severe fire from enemy artillery positions.

"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 15th Infantry brigade and the 3rd Division relieved the pressure on the DCLI, but did not prevent an attempted German counter-attack, promptly dealt with by British gunners. British forces formed a defensive line along the road to the south of the PISSELOUP spur.

"The Germans, in a half-hearted manner, had followed up our retirement but made no particular effort to force us back and during the night they withdrew."

The following day the advance was resumed and 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.

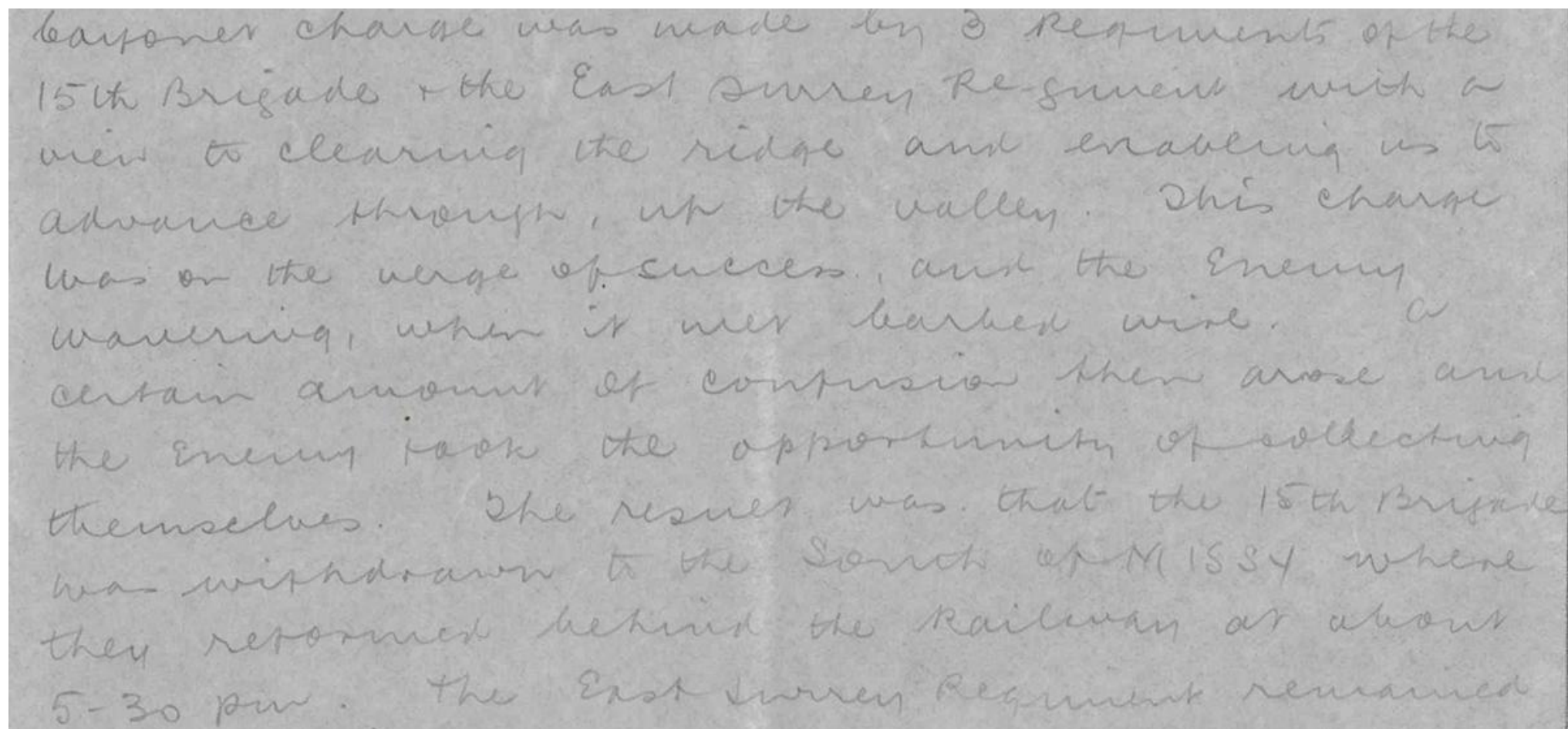


September 14th

The 14th Brigade was ordered to take the village of MISSY.

(Best viewed at 200% zoom)

The DCLI was ordered to attack from the western slopes of the spur North of the village of MISSY to allow the 15th Bde., which had crossed the river during the night, to advance to their right. 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. With elements of the DCLI remaining in MISSY a (*"bayonet charge was made by 3 Regiments of the 15th Brigade and the East Surrey Regiment"*).....

A photograph of a handwritten document, likely a war diary or letter, written in cursive ink on aged paper. The text describes a bayonet charge during a battle. The handwriting is somewhat slanted and shows signs of being written quickly. The paper has a slightly textured, off-white appearance. The text is written in a single column, filling most of the page. The ink is dark, possibly black or dark blue. The overall tone of the document is historical and personal.

bayonet charge was made by 3 Regiments of the 15th Brigade & the East Surrey Regiment with a view to clearing the ridge and enabling us to advance through, up the valley. This charge was on the verge of success, and the Enemy wavering, when it was barred wire. A certain amount of confusion then arose and the Enemy took the opportunity of collecting themselves. The result was that the 15th Brigade was withdrawn to the South of MISSY where they reformed behind the Railway at about 5-30 pm. The East Surrey Regiment remained

in possession of the southern end of the spur
north of MISSY. A & B Companies holding
the western end of the village itself. C & D Coy
still being in position amongst the woods
in the valley.

At about 6 pm the East Surrey Regiment
were ordered to withdraw to ST MARGUERITE, the
P.C.L.I. & Chesters being left in possession of
MISSY for the night.

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"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."