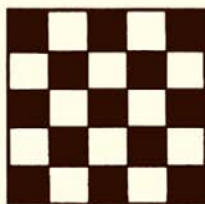


THE THIRTY FOURTH DIVISION

1915 – 1919

BY LIEUT. COLONEL J. SHAKESPEAR

C.M.G. C.I.E. D.S.O.



PUBLISHED BY
THE NAVAL & MILITARY PRESS

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THE THIRTY-FOURTH DIVISION
1915-1919

THE THIRTY FOURTH DIVISION

The Story of its Career from
Ripon to the Rhine

1915 – 1919

By
LIEUT.-COLONEL J. SHAKESPEAR,
C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O.

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Digital edition converted and distributed in 2012 by
Andrews UK Limited
www.andrewsuk.com



MAJOR-GENERAL E. C. INGOUVILLE-WILLIAMS, C.B., D.S.O.
Who made the 34th Division

[Frontispiece]

PREFACE

DEAR COMRADES OF THE 34TH DIVISION,—I am very sorry this is such an inadequate account of what you did, and I am also sorry that I have been so long writing it. Although it is far from being the sort of book that the 34th Division deserves, yet I hope that some of you will find it interesting, and if some of you think that what you yourselves did has not been sufficiently described you are probably right, but I've done my best with the material and the space at my disposal, and I have honestly tried to give everyone a fair show, so please don't shoot the Author—he's done his best.

My thanks are due to our late G.O.C. for so kindly wading through the typescript, for giving me many useful hints and much very valuable information, and also for the loan of his diaries and maps, without which the book could not have been written. I have also to thank many others for help and loans of maps, diaries, etc. ; among these are Colonel Simpson, Lieutenant-Colonel Vignoles, Majors Pery-Knox-Gore, Glendenning, Anderson, and Rought ; Captains Grieg, Willis and Wilson ; Lieutenant Robson, and Corporal Brierley.

PREFACE

If some of the spacé has been occupied with the trivialities of war I hope you will not feel that it has been wasted. I want to bring back to you the good times as well as the days of stress and trial. I don't know what you think, but personally I consider the three years I spent in the 34th Division as the happiest time in my life.

Wishing you all the best of luck, and asking your pardon for the inadequacy of my story, I remain, yours ever.

JOHN SHAKESPEAR

THE THIRTY-FOURTH DIVISION 1915-1919

CHAPTER I

THE RAISING OF THE DIVISION

It was my original intention to give full particulars of the raising of the different units of the Division, for every detail connected with the raising and equipment of the immense force, which was called into being to meet the German onslaught, is of interest, and the names of all those who found the money, and gave their labour gratuitously and unsparingly, to create the force, and to supply their units with comforts and assist the dependents through the weary years of war, should certainly be placed on record. But I have had to abandon the idea on account of the necessity of keeping the record within the limits of space allowed me, and therefore, I can only in the name of the Division thank our numerous "Raisers" for their very great kindness and liberality to us and our dependents, and assure them that we are grateful and shall never forget.

The 34th was a typical New Army Division. By the time it came to be raised most of the old hands, whether in the commissioned or non-commissioned ranks, had joined up, and our units were composed almost entirely of new men, with little, if any,

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military training, and very few indeed had ever been on active service. Prior to our embarkation, however, some senior officers from the B.E.F. joined various units.

The composition of the Division is shown below :

DIVISIONAL ARTILLERY.

152nd Brigade R.F.A.—Raised by the Mayor of Nottingham's Recruiting Committee.

160th Brigade R.F.A.—Raised early in 1915 by Alderman Stanefield Richardson, the Mayor of Sunderland, and Recruiting Committee. First Commanding Officer, Colonel C. W. P. Barker, R.G.A. (T).

175th Brigade R.F.A.—Raised in Staffordshire by Colonel E. C. Meisey Thompson.

176th Brigade R.F.A. (Howitzers).—Raised in June, 1915, by a Committee in Leicester, presided over by the Duke of Rutland and Alderman J. North, Mayor of Leicester. First Commanding Officer, Colonel L. E. Coker, R.F.A.

Divisional Ammunition Column.—Raised in Nottingham during the summer of 1915, and later moved to Codford. The personnel had but little experience of horsemaster-ship, and when Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. Simpson took over command in November, 1915, he found much to be done, but all ranks were keen, and by the time came for embarkation the Column was fit to take the field. Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson held command until the 34th Division gave place to the Eastern Division.

ROYAL ENGINEERS.

207th Field Company.	} All the Companies were raised in Norwich, by the Mayor (Gordon Munn, Esq.) and a Committee. Colonel A. C. MacDonnell, R.E., took command, and organised the units, becoming the first C.R.E. of 34th Division.
208th Field Company.	
209th Field Company.	
Signal Company.	

INFANTRY.

101st *Brigade*.—Brigadier-General H. G. Fitton, C.B., D.S.O. A.D.C. The Brigade was first brought together at Ripon, in June, 1915.

15th Royal Scots.—Raised in September, 1914, half in Edinburgh, by the Lord Provost, and half in Manchester, by the Lord Mayor. First Commanding Officer, Sir R. Cranston, K.C.V.O., C.B.

RAISING OF THE DIVISION 3

- 16th Royal Scots.—Raised in Edinburgh in November, 1914, by Sir George McCrae and a Committee. First Commanding Officer, Sir George McCrae.
- 10th Lincoln Regiment.—Raised at Grimsby in September, 1914, by the Mayor and a Committee. First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable G. E. Heueage.
- 11th Suffolk Regiment.—Raised at Cambridge during September, 1914, and following months by Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Territorial Force Association. First Commanding Officer, Colonel C. W. Somerset, M.V.O.
- 102nd Brigade (*The Tyneside Scottish Brigade*).—Brigadier Trevor Ternan, C.M.G., D.S.O. The Brigade was concentrated in hutments at Alnwick by end of March, 1915. The Brigade was raised by Mr Johnstone Wallace (now Sir Johnstone Wallace, K.B.E.), Lord Mayor of Newcastle, and a representative Committee of Scotsmen.
- 20th Northumberland Fusiliers (1st Tyneside Scottish).—First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Innes Hopkins (late Scottish Rifles).
- 21st Northumberland Fusiliers (2nd Tyneside Scottish).—First Commanding Officer, Colonel V. M. Stockley (late Indian Cavalry).
- 22nd Northumberland Fusiliers (3rd Tyneside Scottish).—First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. A. Elphinstone (late Indian Army).
- 23rd Northumberland Fusiliers (4th Tyneside Scottish).—First Commanding Officer, Captain J. C. Campbell (Militia).
- 103rd Brigade (*The Tyneside Irish Brigade*).—Brigadier-General Collings, who was shortly succeeded by Brigadier-General O'Leary, who held command till September 1915, when he received another appointment, and Brigadier-General Malcolm took command, but was succeeded by Brigadier-General N. J. G. Cameron, C.M.G., before the Brigade left England. The Brigade was trained at Woolsington Camp. The Brigade was raised by a representative Committee of Irishmen, under the Presidency of Sir Charles Parsons. Both the Irish and Scottish Brigades were at first financed by Colonel Joseph Cowen, of Stella Hall, Blaydon-on-Tyne.
- 24th Northumberland Fusiliers (1st Tyneside Irish).—First Commanding Officer, Colonel V. M. Stockley (late Indian Cavalry).

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25th Northumberland Fusiliers (2nd Tyneside Irish).—First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel H. M. Hatchell, D.S.O. (late 18th Royal Irish).

26th Northumberland Fusiliers (3rd Tyneside Irish).—First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hussey-Walsh (late 1st Cheshire Regiment).

27th Northumberland Fusiliers (4th Tyneside Irish).—First Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel L. Grattan Esmonde (late Waterford R.F.A.).

Pioneer Battalion (18th Northumberland Fusiliers).—Raised by the Military Committee of Newcastle and Gateshead Chamber of Commerce. First Commanding Officer, Major R. Temperly, T.D. (late 6th Northumberland Fusiliers and Chairman of Military Committee Chamber of Commerce).

The raising and equipment of the different units was entrusted by the War Office to various local bodies, who found all the money necessary, and made all arrangements for clothing, housing, and equipping the troops, and later recovered from the War Office as much as they could of the cost. Units raised in this way fared better than those raised by the War Office direct, for the "Raisers" were unhampered by any of the rules and regulations which control a government department, and as they conducted their own recruiting campaigns, in some cases in opposition to a rival body in the same town or area, they were anxious to do their recruits as well as possible, and every want was promptly supplied, without any thought as to how much was going to be recovered. In almost every case a great many business men were to be found amongst the "Raisers," and these formed sub-committees, each of which dealt with the details of that portion of the task with which its members were most conversant.

The system worked well, in so far as the rapid raising and equipping of the force was concerned, and there is no doubt that these various local bodies saved the situation; without their aid the task could not

have been completed, and they certainly deserve well of their country.

Whether the country is justified in expecting individuals voluntarily, for no remuneration, to undertake such difficult tasks, and incur such heavy liabilities, is very doubtful.

What these local bodies were out of pocket, after recovering all they could from Government, it is impossible to say. The amounts probably varied considerably. The net cost to one such body, which raised about five thousand five hundred men, worked out to just over £50,000, of which about one-tenth is represented by the amounts paid in connection with the raising, which were not recovered from Government. Nearly four-fifths of the sum was expended on dependents and discharged men.

How was the force raised? How were the officers and non-commissioned officers obtained? Very simply. Once permission to recruit had been obtained from the War Office, which in some cases was not so simple, advertisements in the local press and a few posters, brought together groups of men of all classes, who lined up in some by-road, under the supervision of some local celebrity with a certain amount of military training. If a young fellow had O.T.C. training, he was at once hailed out, invested with authority, and turned on to drill the remainder. Commissions in those days were easily got. Generally some elderly retired officer of the Regular, Militia, Territorial, or Volunteer forces would be given command on the recommendation of the Mayor, Provost, or other head of the "Raisers." Before him would be paraded various aspirants for commissions, callow youths, young men, middle-aged men, nay, even old men. A few minutes' conversation, a few searching questions, and the applicant would withdraw. If he had met with approval, he would receive an order to join as soon as possible, with an intimation that his name had been submitted by

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the Mayor to the War Office for a commission as Second-Lieutenant in the ——. That was all. No competitive exams, no worrying delay. A casual system, no doubt, but how well it worked! There were, of course, cases in which the selections did not turn out satisfactory, but they were surprisingly few.

As numbers increased, sections, platoons, and companies were formed. Command of these was given without any regard for seniority. What was seniority worth when all were such recent recruits? Men with the necessary qualities of leaders and administrators were picked, and pushed on from rank to rank with a celerity which shocked some of the old regime.

Clothing and equipment, being in the hands of the " Raisers," came along fairly quickly, though khaki was not obtainable for some time. Arms, however, were scarce; the Infantry did not receive their final issue of rifles till very shortly before embarking. The Gunners were even worse off. The 176th Brigade, for instance, did not receive its first Howitzer till 13th August, 1915, and the full complement was not received till 24th November. The Brigade had only three days' gun practice before it embarked, and two of the Battery Commanders took over command less than ten days prior to embarkation.

In spite of all difficulties, however, training went on vigorously; the keenness of all ranks was wonderful. Esprit de corps was quickly evolved; platoon rivalled platoon; section rivalled section. The progress of other units was closely watched. Officers were sent off on courses of all sorts, and returned full of knowledge. Wounded officers soon appeared; not yet fit for active service, but fit to teach us. How eagerly we listened to them! So it went on, and rapidly the recruits of the autumn grew into soldiers, and by the summer of 1915 there were murmurings at the delay in despatching us overseas.

The 34th Division did not come into being till June, 1915.

In the beginning was
LOCK

On the 15th or 16th June there arrived at Ripon Major R. F. Lock, R.A., to take up his appointment as D.A.A. and Q.M.G. 34th Division. On his inquiring at Headquarters, 4th New Army, the whereabouts of the 34th Division, he was informed that he was IT, or words to that effect. Losing no time, Major Lock took two houses, and started getting together furniture and clerks. Officers of "G" arrived a few days later, and about a week later, came to train the new Division Major-General E. C. Ingouville-Williams, C.B., D.S.O., who had been brought from France, where, since the beginning of the War, he had been commanding the 16th Brigade.

The 34th Division was lucky in its first Commander. A thorough soldier, as much at home on the "Q" as on the "G" side. He knew what his men were entitled to, and he saw that they got it. Absolutely fearless, and apparently never tired, all ranks trusted and loved him, and there were few dry eyes among the crowd of mourners when he was laid to rest in Warloy cemetery on the 23rd July, 1916.

The rest of the Divisional Staff Officers soon arrived, and got busy collecting "other ranks" from various units to complete their office establishments.

The 101st Brigade collected at Fountains Abbey. The 102nd and 103rd remained at their training camps. The Divisional troops were encamped at Kirkby Malzeard, some six miles away.

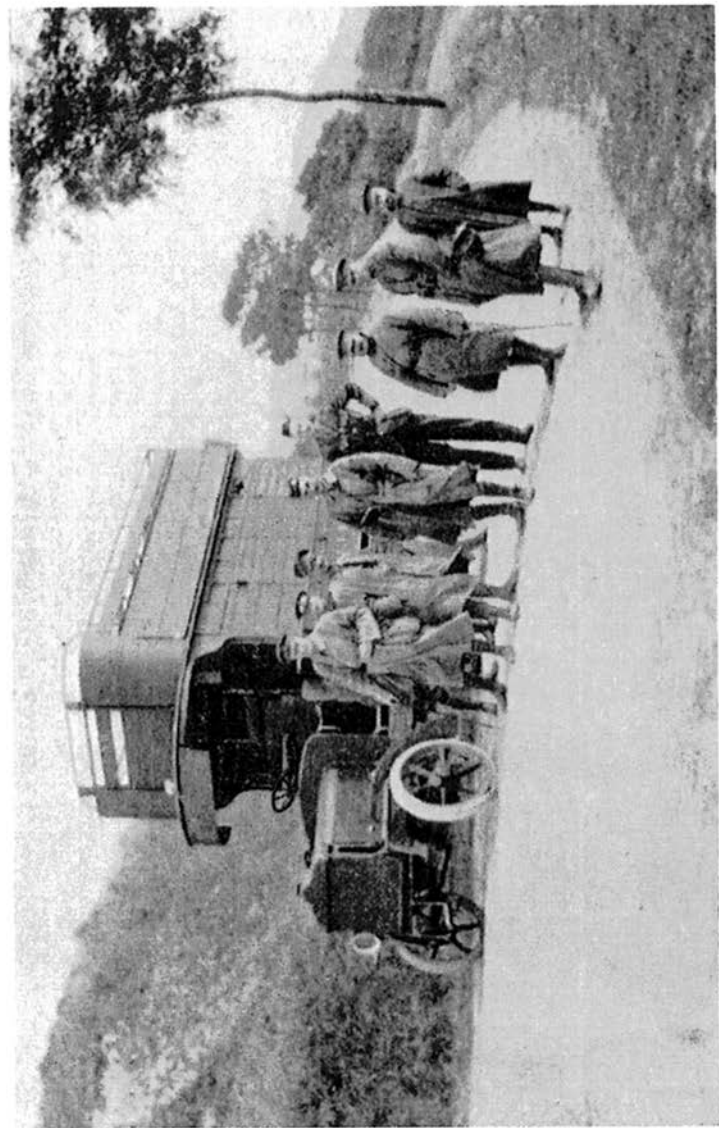
The arrival of the first batch of mules merits a paragraph. Major Lock one morning received a telegram to the effect that three hundred mules for the Division would reach Ripon next morning. On inquiring at the station, he was informed that the

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animals would be there within twenty minutes, and must be detrained at once. The nearest troops from whom help could be got were too far off to be of use, so with the help of the G.S.O.3 and 6 Mounted Military Policemen, Major Lock somehow or other got the creatures out of the train. Just when this was completed, and the station yard was a seething mass of squealing, kicking mules, another train arrived, and was found to contain three hundred mules for 34th Division. The gallant D.A. and Q.M.G. and his perspiring assistants had detrained the mules intended for the 31st Division!

It was originally intended that the training of the Division should be completed in the Ripon training area, but before a real start had been made, fresh orders were issued, and the various component parts proceeded by various routes to Salisbury Plain, and after brief halts elsewhere they were assembled at, or near, Sutton Veny by the end of September. An unfortunate motor-car accident put the G.O.C. on the sick list for about a month, and it was near the end of October before he was fit to resume command. This undoubtedly caused the training to get into arrears, for though all were working hard at useful jobs, and perfecting themselves as units, Divisional training was practically in abeyance during his absence, which necessitated work being carried on at very high pressure after his return.

The weather at this time showed pro-Boche tendencies, and the appearance of orders for any extensive operations was sufficient to ensure a soaking wet day, but, with truly Boche devilry, it remained doubtful, or promised fair, until the troops were well on their way to their respective stations, and then it came down with a vengeance. Endless were the arguments at the conclusion of these days between the defenders and their assailants, as to what would really have been the result had bullets been flying, fraught with trouble was the post of umpire, but these



A COOK'S TOURING PARTY IN 1915
Somewhere in France

experiences are common to all peace manœuvres and need not be dwelt on.

There was about this time some uncertainty as to our destination. In December we were all equipped with sun helmets, and thought we were off to India; but in fact we were detailed for East Africa, the day of our departure had, unknown to most of us, actually been fixed, and accommodation arranged for us in the transports which were waiting at Southampton. At the last moment the orders were cancelled, and our helmets returned to store, but a few days later fresh orders came to reissue them, which, in their turn, were cancelled before they could be carried out, and so France was ultimately our destination.

Besides the field days and much route marching, we dug trenches and practised occupying them. We completed a course of musketry. The R.E. and Pioneers made bridges and varieties of obstacles. There was one particular production of the R.E. yard which pleased us. It was a motor horn, fitted under a board, and was to be placed in large numbers in front of our trenches, to give us warning by plaintive hootings when trodden on by a Boche. As far as we can recollect, it must be added to the many magnificent ideas of which a hidebound War Office refused to take advantage. To these last must be added the ingenious device to propel grapnels into the Boche's wire by means of rockets, and then with a long pull and a strong pull transfer the said wire to our side of No-Man's-Land. This promising idea for economising labour and material failed, owing to the erratic behaviour of the rockets in its early trials, which nearly set fire to a camp some distance in rear of the firing point.

A grand ceremonial parade was practised in anticipation of a visit from the King, but the unfortunate accident which occurred during His Majesty's tour of the front, prevented our having the honour of

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marching past our Sovereign, and an inspection by a detachment of Japanese officers hardly compensated us, especially as the day was one of the vilest. The rain came down in continuous torrents, but the programme was carried out in every detail, and the Japanese were reported to have been much impressed by what General Ternan has aptly described as a "distinctly amphibian performance."

At last embarkation leave was put in orders, and we began to really feel like going. But the work went on just the same right up to the last moment, and most units only got their orders to move twenty-four hours before the hour of departure.

On the final parade a message of kindly good wishes and farewell from the King was read to each unit. Then they departed silently and unobserved; no cheering crowds sped them on their way, no columns of bombastic description announced the sailing of their transports. Those who had sailed to Table Bay noted the change with satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

SETTLING DOWN IN FRANCE

THE officers of "Q" staff crossed on 4th January, a cold, rough day, and motored to G.H.Q., then in St Omer, in misty weather, over muddy roads, losing their way more than once. By the time the first units put in an appearance they had made things fairly straight as regards billets.

The following extracts from an officer's letters will recall many memories.

"S.I.F. (Havre),

"Tuesday, 11th January, 1916.

" . . . I am quite well and fit, and had a good night last night under canvas. We have drawn three blankets for each officer, and I was as warm as a toast. . . . There is a café near by, where we had lunch and tea yesterday, and breakfast this morning—lovely rolls, delicious café au lait in bowls, splendid omelette, which I tackled bravely . . . and . . . apple jelly.

"The town is very quiet, not many people. All the gamins talk a few words of English, and beg cigarettes and biscuits, and sing 'Tipperary' for half-pennies.

"We had a good passage, very calm. . . . Nine of us in a stuffy cabin on our boat. . . . Colonel——had a state-room, with two large four-post beds, and lavatory attached."

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“ Somewhere in France (Wallon-Cappel, near Hazebrouck),
“ *Nine p.m., Friday, 14th January, 1916.*

“ We had a very tiring journey, leaving our camp there about one-thirty p.m. on Tuesday, and the train got away about six in the evening. The men were packed thirty-six in each cattle truck, and the officers a little better off in a second class carriage, but we could not lie down. . . . We did not leave the train till one p.m., the poor men having very little in the way of breakfast, and no lunch. We marched off at about two-thirty, and after we were clear of the town (Blendecque) we stopped and had a meal of bully beef and biscuit, and the men were quite ready for it! We reached this village at eight p.m., by which time the poor fellows were dead beat with the heavy load they were carrying (62½ lbs.), and, further than that, they had no rest the night before. . . .

“ I was allotted three farms for my men, but, to my great disgust, found that another battalion had pinched one of them, while we had to crowd into the other two. We are very comfortable; four of us are sleeping in the biggest farm, on beds, the other two in the other farm, also on beds. Here, in the larger farm, we have a room in which we feed, and another room where — and the other servants do the cooking. ‘Madame’ makes coffee for us, so we get along very well, and don’t mind how long we stay here.”

The difficulty of finding one’s friends, that so many of us experienced, is summarised thus: “We hope to see — soon, but as he cannot say where he is, and we may not say where we are, it is rather like a game of Blind Man’s Buff.” Boys will be boys, and we read: “Of course the subs have found a nice café in the nearest town, and run in when they have time

and get tea there!" Did the O.C. Company never go?

The Division was scattered over a considerable area south-east and east of St Omer, but only stayed there a short time, during which it was reviewed by General Joffre; that is to say, the Infantry of the Division was drawn up in line along a road, and the General passed by in his car at a good pace. We find that our kind friend who has lent us his letters, records that his battalion earned the special commendation of the great man. As far as we recollect the same was told to other units, and if the general commendation was, in repetition, converted into a special one, what harm. Troops that marched twenty miles to be gazed at for a few seconds would be none the worse for a pat on the back.

On the 19th January the Division suffered its first battle casualty. Brigadier-General Fitton, while on a visit of instruction to the 16th Brigade, near Ypres, in company with the G.O.C. the Brigade, was in the front line at night. Owing to a communication trench having been blown in, the party had to cross a bit of open, and the night being bright, they were spotted by a watchful sniper, who got the General through both thighs. Brigadier-General Nicholson, commanding the Brigade (later to become our Divisional Commander), and his Brigade-Major, Captain B. Tower, were the only ones present, and they had a difficult job getting the wounded General, who was a very big man, down the trench, though some stretcher-bearers of the K.S.L.I. came to their help. On the next day General Fitton died. One of his Staff records in his diary: "This was a great loss to the Brigade, as he was much liked and admired, and was a keen soldier." It was truly hard luck to be knocked over in this inglorious manner, before the troops which he had trained so well had even got into the line.

The command of the 101st Brigade went to

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Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Gore, C.M.G., Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who took over command on 28th January.

On the 23rd the Division moved into the 3rd Corps area, as Division in Corps reserve, being disposed approximately as follows: D.H.Q. at Blairingham; R.A. round Lynde, Wittes, Blairingham, and La Croquet; 101st Infantry Brigade round or in Morbecque; 102nd, round or in Steenbecque; 103rd at La Belle Hotesse and Sercus; Pioneer Battalion at Les Ciseaux; C.R.E. and 207th and 208th Field Companies, R.E., between Steenbecque and Morbecque; 209th F.C., Nouveau Monde. The Field Ambulances were disposed: 104th at Morbecque; 102nd and 103rd at Estaires; Divisional Ammunition Column was at Neuf Berquin, and Ammunition Sub Park at Vieux Berquin.

We had been engaged in route marching and being put through gas drill and other courses, and we now began to get practice of a more practical nature, units, or portions of them, being attached to the 23rd and 8th Divisions, which were holding the sector of the line allotted to the Corps. The marches from the billeting to the front area were good practice, and had apparently their pleasant intervals: "Very comfortable place (Vieux Berquin) last night. P—found it, and also discovered a very pretty girl in the billet. It was screamingly funny to hear him talking to her in 'pidgin' English. The girl was, of course, a great attraction to my subs (Only to the subs?), and they were taking French lessons all the evening." During these periods of instruction the new-comers were attached to corresponding units of the Division in the line, and were most kindly received.

The records of those early days, and of the first experiences in the line, are interesting, the comments on various objects and events then so new, but soon to become so common as to pass unnoticed. The

“pretty little puffs of smoke against the lovely blue sky,” amid which the planes floated calmly along. “It was wonderfully pretty to *watch*, but I don’t know how the beggar in the plane felt about it.” The novelty of the trench life: “It was really quite comfortable. One could not quite have a bath . . . one had to sleep in one’s clothes.” “We had a very quiet time, and I will say that the Boche behaved in a gentlemanly manner while we were in.” But this was not always the Boche’s way, for the records of another kind friend state that the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, during their tour, were very heavily bombarded. “They behaved splendidly, and were perfectly cool and steady.” We had our first experience of being bombed from the air, but the only casualty recorded “was a bird killed by flying glass.”

On the 24th February General Ingouville-Williams assumed command of the Left Division 3rd Corps front, 8th Division on right and 21st on left, his headquarters being at Croix du Bac, where also lived the C.R.A. and C.R.E. The 101st Infantry Brigade held the right sector, and the 103rd the left. General Gore’s headquarters was at Rolanderie Farm, a pleasant, old-fashioned pile of buildings, in which a warm welcome and a good meal awaited all visitors in the cosy mess-room. General Cameron was not so lucky in his billet, which was in a medium-sized house in Rue Marle, on the outskirts of Armentières. The 102nd Brigade, which was in reserve, had its headquarters in Erquinghem, but it had previously been attached to the 8th Division and held the right sub-sector of that Division’s front from 14th to 21st February. The gunners were, of course, considerably scattered. Lieutenant-Colonel Kincaid Smith, commanding 152nd Brigade, had his headquarters in a farm at the junction of the Rue De Lettrée and Rue des Charles. This farm escaped all unwelcome attention from the Boche, who, owing to all absence of movement near it, must have concluded that it was

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unoccupied. All ingress and egress was from the rear, under cover of hedges. A poor groom, who, in all innocence, tried to take his master's horse through the front gate, nearly had to be admitted to hospital suffering from "shock" after meeting the Brigade Commander. The batteries were : A at Le Crombalot ; B, La Toulette ; C, North of Bois Grenier ; D, Rue des Charles.

The Left Group Commander, Major W. Furnival, 175th Brigade, had his headquarters in Rue Marles, on the Chapelle d'Armentières road, the batteries being : A at Rue 'Allee ; B on Rue Fleurie ; C at l'Armée ; D at the brick-fields Chapelle d'Armentières. The 176th Brigade (Howitzers), Colonel G. R. Rundle, C.B., had its headquarters also in Rue Marles, the batteries being : A at Le Crombalot ; C, South of Rue Marles ; D, Grispot. The 160th Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Warburton, headquarters in Erquinghem ; batteries : 'A, B, and D in Rue Fleurie ; C, Rue des Charles.

The three Field Companies were billeted : 207th attached to 101st Infantry Brigade, commanded by Major McMahon, in Erquinghem ; 208th attached to 102nd Brigade, commanded by Captain J. Stephens, in Rue Marles ; 209th attached to 103rd Infantry Brigade, commanded by Major Hilder Daw, in Erquinghem. The Field Companies, however, did not move when the brigades left the line on relief, the continuity of the engineering policy in the trench system requiring them to be shifted as little as possible. 209th Field Company looked after all work behind the front line system, and the R.E. yard, which was in Erquinghem.

The Pioneer Battalion headquarters was in Rue Marles with one company in dug-outs in the B.G. line at the foot of Haystack Avenue, and one in Rue des Acquis. One company was attached to the 8th Division, which had no Pioneer Battalion, and one company was in the Forêt de Nieppe making

fascines, etc. The three Field Ambulances were: 102nd, Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. S. Irvine, D.S.O., at Fort Rompu; 103rd, Lieutenant-Colonel Ligertwood, at Steenwerk; 104th, Major P. S. Stewart, at Erquinghem. The latter was attached to the 101st Infantry Brigade, the other two to the brigades bearing their numbers.

Lieutenant-Colonel R. H. Mangles joined the Divisional Staff as G.S.O. on 9th of February; he had been Brigade-Major to the G.O.C. when he held command of the 16th Infantry Brigade. It was curious that the lines we were now occupying were originally constructed by that brigade when the race to the coast in 1914 ended in the temporary stale mate of trench warfare, and it was most interesting to accompany General Ingouville-Williams and Colonel Mangles and listen to their recollections of the period when these lines were being created, when sand-bags were doled out by twenty-fives, and three shells a day per gun was thought a good allowance.

The Divisional front extended from the Lille road on the left to just beyond Bridoux salient on the right. There was also another salient, the Rue du Bois, near the centre. Both were unhealthy spots, the former especially, being very near to the Boche line. The front line was a continuous breast work with a ditch in front and trench behind, the latter very shallow on account of the nearness of surface water.

Some one thousand yards in rear was the reserve line, generally known as the B.G. line, from the village of Bois Grenier (Boise Greener), which was one of the main features of its defences. From this rather weak earth work, which ran along the whole front, led the communication trenches forward to the front line. For sake of auld lang syne let us put down some of them, commencing from the left: Haystack, Wellington, Park Row for the left Brigade, and Shaftesbury, Moat Farm, and, later, Greatwood for the right. On our arrival we found the trenches in

far from good order. The winter had been a wet one, the land was low and almost level, so that drainage was a very difficult problem. Before we left, the Pioneers had drained Greatwood and laid a tramway in it from the B.G. line to the support line at White City, and the Field Companies and infantry working parties had effected vast improvements by constant labour. But though the weather improved during our stay it was a constant struggle to keep the lines dry.

The whole of our position was overlooked by the Boche from the top of Radinghem Ridge, and it did not make us any happier to know that our G.O.C. and his 16th Brigade had once held the top of that ridge, whence they had been obliged to retire "in accordance with plan."

It was during these early days that we got our Trench Mortar Batteries. The days of jam-pot bombs hurled from catapults had passed, but the trench mortar was still in its infancy, and those who used it were still looked on with ill-disguised mistrust by the garrison of the front line, who felt doubtful as to the amount of damage they could do the Boche, but none whatever regarding the amount of retaliation the Boche would send over in reply.

Our Medium Batteries were originally numbered 60, 61, and 70, and were renumbered X, Y, and Z 34th, on 11th March. The Light Trench Mortar Batteries, which were numbered according to the brigades of which they formed a part, were also formed about this time. On the 13th March, Stokes' three inch mortars were used for the first time, and, judging from the language used by the Boche, the result was satisfactory. X and Z Batteries were in the Rue du Bois and Bridoux salients, and fired a good deal, but had hardly got started before we were relieved.

For those not actually in the trenches our sector

had many advantages; the billets were generally excellent, though Chapelle d'Armentières, where lived a battalion of the left brigade, was at times extremely uncomfortable, but that it was possible to occupy it showed how well the Boche was behaved, for it was very far forward. Some of the best known billets were Charley's Farm, Streaky Bacon Farm, Canteen Farm, La Vesée, Grisport, the farms along Rue Fleurie and l'Armée, all of which were comfortable, and though often shelled, not unduly unhealthy. Farther back were Erquinghem, Jesus Farm, Fort Rompu, and "Hallobaloo." Erquinghem and Armentières were still going concerns, many shop's estaminets and pâtisseries being still open. The Au Bœuf and Lucienne's gave good dinners at moderate prices. A Staff Officer records: "March 1st. Had tea at the tea shop which everyone knows. It was crowded as usual. Wonder if the cakes or the pretty waitress is the chief attraction to the subs?" (The subs again, but what took our Red Tab there?)

The Boche generally was on his good behaviour, but lest it should be thought that life was all beer and skittles, the following extract from a once well-known periodical is repeated: "Summary, six a.m. 29th to six a.m. 1st March. The enemy's artillery fairly active during the day; Chapelle d'Armentières was shelled in the morning. Between ten-thirty a.m. and one-thirty p.m., the enemy shelled I.8.a.3.8 and I.13.c.3.7 with 4.2's, but did no damage. Roads in H.36.b received about sixty shells from 77 m.m. battery, about O.7.d.7.a. About fifty 77 m.m. shells fell near White City. Between two p.m. and five p.m. about fifty shells were fired in the direction of l'Armée and H.12.d, and about seventy-five 5.9's were fired between H.11.d and the railway. The estaminet I.14.b.4½ and Grisport Corner got their *usual* shelling."

Our friend the Red Tab, above quoted, records against the 12th March, "An auspicious day, fine

and sunny, and the first day since we came into the line when we had no man killed or wounded (in the Brigade)." Our average daily battle casualties at this period was about ten.

The following extract shows that our gunners had learnt their job by this time: "I was up in another artillery observation post the other day. The officer was showing me two points on the enemy's parapet between which he had to fire. He was describing them to me, and suddenly said, 'Half a minute,' gave an order down the speaking tube, and in fifteen seconds a round hit the parapet fairly. 'That is the right point,' he remarked, gave another order, another round fired. 'That is the left point,' said he. It was just as if he had reached out a gigantic arm to touch the points he wished to show me on the enemy's parapet nearly a mile away."

The 102nd Infantry Brigade relieved the 103rd in the left section on 4th March, and on 14th the 103rd relieved 101st in the right section, and 101st on 23rd relieved the 116th Infantry Brigade of the 8th Division in the left section of that Division's front, which came under G.O.C. 34th Division, the 8th going off to "the Somme area," whither also went the headquarters of 3rd Corps, and the 34th Division became a portion of 2nd Corps, 2nd Army. A bad spell of snowy weather caused us all much discomfort about this time. It seemed to anger the Boche, for I find on record that in the new area "The Boches had an energetic fit one week, and knocked out seven of our batteries."

On the 7th April we were relieved by the 2nd Australian Division. Sir George McCrae tells an amusing tale of this relief. His opposite number paid him a visit in the morning, and was highly pleased to find how comfortable the farm was in which the headquarters was located. He left after a good lunch, expressing his opinion that he was in luck this time. Unfortunately for him, the Boche took a dislike

to the farm, and before the hour of relief it had ceased to exist. In the midst of the hottest part of the "straf," a signaller crawled from his sand-bagged shelter to a similar edifice, in which Sir George was pretending he liked it, and tendered him a message from O.C. "B" Company, announcing "Battalion Headquarters are being shelled." What the Australian C.O. said is better left unrecorded.

We proceeded by route march to the 2nd Army Training area behind St Omer. (Shortly before this G.H.Q. had vacated that town for Montreuil.) We certainly had not had a very exciting time during our first spell of the line, but we had done a lot of useful work, and had got accustomed to be shelled, and had found our feet.

The move to the training area was completed by 14th April. D.H.Q. was at Tilques, and the troops in good billets in the neighbourhood. A thorough brush up and polish was commenced at once, and there was some grumbling among the war-tried warriors at having to go back to "Right turn, left turn, take the beggar's name down" sort of work. Apparently there were relaxations, for I read in a diary of a gunner, "Expended thirty-two francs on an American cane rod, reel, line, casts, six flies, three worm hooks, and a minnow." I find also references of sports being held, and to the delights of lying in the grass among apple trees bursting into blossom, and listening to the birds singing instead of to the whistling of the shells. Later, there were strenuous field days, necessitating early rising. "The ground was laid out in trenches named and modelled on those we afterwards took on the Somme."

Early in May we left those peaceful regions, and partly by train, and partly on our own feet, we wended our way back to the line, reaching it at Albert, where we rejoined the 3rd Corps, and were again between the 8th and 21st Divisions, but this time the former was on our left, and the latter on our right. We also

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found our Pioneer Battalion, which had come on ahead to straighten out things for us, and had been here nearly a month, their rest and training having been compressed into four days.

D.H.Q. was now in the château at Basieux, and the G.O.C. took over command of right sector of 3rd Corps front on 10th May. The 103rd Infantry Brigade took over the line from 70th Infantry Brigade, 23rd Division, 101st Brigade was at Bresle, and 102nd at Franvillers. The C.R.A. established himself in Moulin Viviers, a comfortable billet. The C.R.E. headquarters and yard were at Dernacourt. The Field Ambulances were placed: 102nd at Franvillers, 103rd at Moulin Viviers, and 104th at La Houssoye. The two Field Companies detailed for duty in the front area were 207th and 209th. The Pioneers, having been early on the scene, had secured good billets in Albert, their headquarters being in a fine house belonging to Monsieur Bompert, a lawyer.

The headquarters of the Brigade in the line was in Bellevue Farm, which is described as the worst possible place for the purpose, being in the middle of a nest of batteries of all sorts, which were constantly getting shelled, and the Brigade Headquarters shared in the trouble, and disliked the constant noise made by our own guns.

The front here was much shorter than that at Armentières, about two thousand yards against over three thousand, so that at first it was held by one brigade, which had two battalions in the trenches, one in Albert, and one in Dernacourt. The two Infantry Brigades in the back area were occupied with training, and between 20th and 31st May carried out several practices with aircraft, communicating with flare lamps and ground sheet signals. The gunners had a very strenuous time preparing gun positions and O.P.'s, for instead of inheriting ready-made positions, as at Armentières, they had to make new ones, as

the number of guns was vastly in excess of what it had been before. The Artillery Brigades went out in turn to train in the back area.

The country hereabouts was very different to the damp muddy flats we had come from, and it reminded us greatly of Salisbury Plain. Rolling downs with a chalk subsoil, few trees, and no hedges. The villages were old fashioned, clusters of houses with considerable distances between them. There were some fine châteaux, which made good billets for the Corps and Division, and sometimes Brigade Headquarters, but the lesser folk missed the comfortable farms they had got accustomed to.

The town of Albert had been occupied by the Boche in the very early days, and the mark of the beast had been left on it, but it still contained some good billets, and some shops were open, and a *pâtisserie* carried on bravely. The town lies in the valley of the Ancre, the ground rising to east and west immediately outside, but very gradually, and to no great elevation, so that the top of the belfry of the basilica, with its statue of the Virgin holding up her child, was visible from the plateau east of La Boisselle, which accounted for the damage done it by the Boche. Eastward from the town ran three roads, one to Ovimiers la Boisselle, one direct to Bapaume, just passing to the north of La Boisselle, and the most southerly to Becourt Château, and thence to Fricourt. The first was in the 8th Division area. The second ascended the slope, and for about one thousand yards from the outskirts of the town was in dead ground, but then it became necessary to enter either Perth or St Andrew's Avenue, which ran on the south and north of the road from The Barrier. This was the limit to which transport could go, and its name will recall many uncomfortable hours waiting with carrying parties for wagons that seemed never coming. Near it were the kitchens of the battalion in the line, whence the meals were carried in huge thermos flasks, slung on poles,

to the hungry men on the other side of the slope, which was too much in view to allow of any cooking being done there. Not far beyond The Barrier, the road passed through a slight depression in the Usna-Tara Ridge, and descended somewhat abruptly to the Mash Valley, about four hundred yards wide, on far side of which the ground rose again, and on this slope was the village of La Boisselle, merely a collection of ruins, which, with immense labour, the Boche had converted into a strong fortress—a network of trenches and machine gun emplacements, with thick belts of barbed wire above ground, and a labyrinth of deep dug-outs and passages below.

The plateau, on the south-west edge of which lies Pozières, throws out three spurs, which are the chief features of the area over which the Division fought early in July. Of these three the most westerly, known as Chapes Spur, falls first south-west to La Boisselle, and then south to Becourt Château, a strongly built pile of buildings in a pleasant wood, but little damaged by shell fire. To the north of La Boisselle the valley was called Mash, and to the south Sausage. On the northern slope of the Mash Valley lies Owillers la Boisselle, one thousand three hundred yards north of La Boisselle, and facing the 8th Division front.

The centre spur, which is broad and flat, falls in a southerly direction to between Fricourt and Becourt, and at its southern end is split by a ravine running north and south, at the head of which lies Round Wood. To the east of this ravine are the Crucifix and the Poodles.

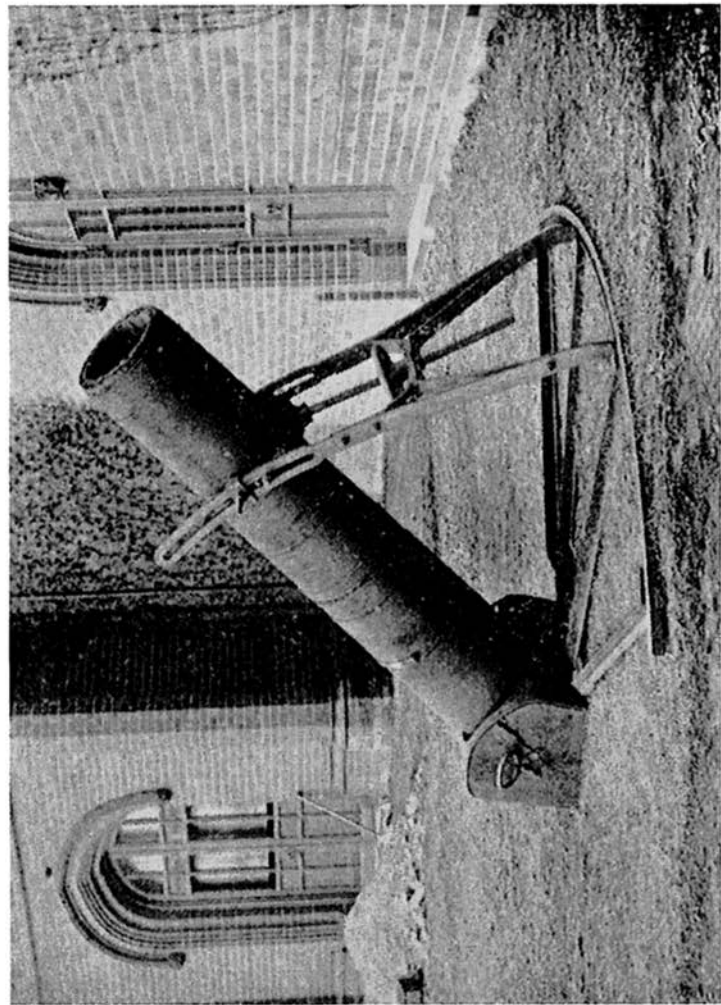
At the northern end of the eastern spur is Contalmaison, thence the spur falls in a southerly direction to Railway Copse, which lies in the valley between the eastern and centre spurs. Higher up this valley lies Shelter Wood, and still higher up, close to Contalmaison, is Peake Wood. On the eastern spur are Bottom Wood and the Quadrangle.

The 34th Divisional front was, roughly, from the centre of the Mash to the centre of the Sausage Valleys. At its two extremities it was from four hundred to eight hundred yards from the Boche line, but in the centre, at La Boisselle, the two lines were practically touching. This was a region of mine craters of all sizes, a chalky waste, a perfect maze of trenches, many of them abandoned, and in a constant state of flux, into which it was unwise to venture without a guide, or you might find yourself suddenly confronted by the muzzle of a Boche rifle poking through a loop hole in a sand-bag wall, newly built across the trench. This portion of the line was held by isolated bombing posts, to which access by day was difficult, in each of which a few men, well supplied with bombs, kept ceaseless watch, through little loop-holes, on the Boches, often not more than fifteen yards away. This area was popularly known as "The Glory Hole"; behind it ran Tummel and Monifieth streets. The whole of our front line system was overlooked from the Boche's lines, for on their side the ground rose steadily, and each successive line of their defences had a better view. On our side the ground was less favourable; on the left the Usna-Tara Ridge rose so abruptly behind our front line that our defensive lines in this sector were much cramped, and the ridge itself was lower than the Boche front line, except a few yards just north of La Boisselle.

The Boche front line was strongly protected with massive lines of wire, and to the north of La Boisselle he had thrown out what we called, from its shape, the Y sap, a system of deep trenches, whence he troubled us constantly with "Oilcans" and "Minnies." We never had a chance of examining the Y sap, for at Zero two minutes, on the 1st July, it went to glory. In a blaze, the 179th Tunnelling Company's accurately placed charge leaving nothing of it but a vast hole strewn with the debris of the deep dug-outs' timbers.

The method of propulsion of the "Oilcans" puzzled us, for the great cylindrical tins used to lob slowly over, with very little noise, but, on landing, burst with terrific force and noise. Later, we discovered that they were fired from wooden muzzle-loading guns, by means of fuzes from the muzzle. The Boche was in a worse temper here than at Armentières, and trench life was far from pleasant. Occasionally bombardments of La Boisselle and the Y sap were tried, all the heavies assisting, but generally not more than a quarter of an hour elapsed between the firing of the last round and the arrival of another "Oilcan" or "Minnie."

On 22nd May 101st Brigade relieved 103rd in the line, and on 4th June the 102nd Brigade relieved the 101st in the trenches at eight a.m., but the Boche had a word to say first. An intensive bombardment began at twelve-thirty a.m., and the Brigade Headquarters came in for a heavy dose, getting both H.E. and lachrymatory shells. The communications were considerably interfered with, and things were pretty warm. In the middle of it came a message from the right battalion in the line, saying the Boche had got into their trenches, and asking for reinforcements. General Gore's only comment was "Pushing beggars, these Germans." Before any reinforcements could get up, the enemy had been ejected, leaving behind one prisoner and one corpse. Our casualty list was small. The battalion concerned was the 21st Northumberland Fusiliers. The Divisional Commander records that the battalion did well, and it seems that the 15th Royal Scots, which was in process of being relieved, also deserve a word of praise. On the following night the "pushing Germans" repeated the experiment, some three hundred attacking the same spot, after a heavy bombardment of about an hour. They were beaten back by rifle fire and bombs, but another party of bombers effected an entrance through a breach which the guns had made in the parapet on



"MINNIE" THROWER
Captured at La Boisselle by 207th Field Company R.E.