

CHAPTER IX

THE ACTION OF FESTUBERT

Conditions obtaining at time of battle of Festubert—Indian Corps heavily handicapped, but line never broken—Description of sapping operations—Relief of Meerut Division by Lahore—Heavy attack by enemy before relief completed—Gallant defence by Connaught Company—34th Sikh Pioneers, 9th Bhopal Infantry and 58th Rifles forced out of their trenches—Lt-Colonel Southey saves position on left flank—Captain Bull, 58th Rifles—Corps Commander orders trenches to be retaken at all costs before dawn—Counter-attack in the afternoon—Major Cassels and 2/8th Gurkhas—Held up by bombs—1/39th Garhwalis attack under Lt-Colonel Swiney—Plan suggested by Lieutenant Robson, R.E.—Bombing party of 57th Rifles led with great bravery by Lieutenant Robson with Captain Acworth—58th Rifles retake their trenches—Gallantry of four privates of the 2nd Black Watch—Success of the 1/39th Garhwalis—Naik Darwan Sing Negi earns the Victoria Cross.

BEFORE proceeding to an account of the action of Festubert, it seems advisable to give a brief sketch of the conditions which obtained at the moment.

For a month past, the Indian Corps, numbering only some 14,000 rifles and 1700 sabres, with the usual proportion of artillery, had been holding the line previously occupied by the 2nd Corps strengthened by an extra Brigade, its total numbers amounting roughly to 32,000 men.

It can thus be easily seen that the position was extremely hazardous, in view of the pitiful weakness of our line and the proximity of a daring and pertinacious enemy, whose numbers greatly exceeded ours, while his resources in guns, trench mortars

and grenades were vastly superior to anything which we could oppose to them. The Corps had therefore been pinned down to a defensive attitude, varied only by the necessity for occasional local attacks when the enemy's sapping operations brought him into such dangerous proximity to our line as to threaten to render our trenches untenable.

In spite of all the disadvantages under which it laboured, the Corps had so far won through without relinquishing any material portion of its original line. Wherever the Germans had succeeded in making a breach, the position had always been restored. From the enemy's continuous and determined efforts to bring his line up as close as possible to ours, it was obviously his intention to make, at some not distant date, a determined attempt to break through our front.

The term "sap" has occurred very frequently in this history, and its precise meaning may not be clearly understood by the non-military reader. As sapping operations have played, and continue to play, a very important part in the general scheme, a short and non-technical explanation may be helpful.

The distance between the opposing trenches varied at different points in the line from between 500 to 50 yards, or even less, being governed chiefly by the configuration of the ground. Everywhere the ground between the trenches, known as "No Man's Land," could be swept by machine-gun and rifle fire. Where the trenches were divided by a sufficient interval, artillery fire of an appalling density could be brought to bear. It was obvious, therefore, that in order to give an attack the best

chance of success, it was necessary, as far as possible, to curtail the distance to be traversed in the open before reaching the hostile trenches. The closer to our trenches, as before remarked, the less had the enemy to fear from our artillery. Moreover, the existence of approaches below surface-level rendered reinforcement of the front line a safer operation.

The method pursued by the enemy to accomplish these ends was briefly as follows.

Saps, or winding trenches, were commenced as a rule from points in the enemy's line some 300 to 400 yards from our trenches. After progressing perhaps 100 yards, the various saps would be connected by a new firing trench, parallel to the original trench from which the saps proceeded. As the distance became less, the difficulties of course increased, and it was necessary to establish a fire to cover the diggers. This was managed by making short lines of trench, with loopholes at the bends or angles of the saps from which men could keep up fire.

At last, by repeated advances, the front trench was established at a distance of perhaps fifty yards from our line. From this a further sap was frequently (in the days when we were scantily provided with bombs and grenades) pushed up to within a few feet of our parapet. The advantages resulting to the enemy are, of course, obvious. His men could be massed within a very short distance of their objective. Our artillery could do them no harm without certain damage to our own men. The successive lines in rear could be occupied quietly by supports which could come up at the required moment under cover of the zig-zag approaches.

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Finally, when all was ready, our men were attacked with bombs and grenades. If this succeeded, the sections opposite the sapheads were rendered untenable, and the defence was split up. The bombs and grenades supplied the place of the enemy's artillery which could not shell our trenches without injuring his own men.

The attack commenced on the 23rd November, and was preceded by extensive operations of the foregoing character which were greatly assisted by the nature of the ground. The saps had been brought up to within a few yards of our trenches, with the result that, by incessant bombing, the position of the 34th Pioneers on the left of the right section of the defence, and the 9th Bhopal Infantry on the right, was rendered untenable, and they were forced to evacuate their trenches.

The enemy had, from one point of view, chosen his time well. The relief of the Meerut Division by Lahore was fixed for the nights of the 22nd-23rd and 23rd-24th November. On the morning of the 23rd, half of the left section, east of Richebourg l'Avoué, and the left and centre sub-sections of the right section east of Festubert had been relieved. The right section of our line was thus composed of units of both Divisions.

From left to right, the troops were in the following order :—

129th	57th	1 Company	34th	9th
Baluchis	Rifles	1st Connaughts	Pioneers	Bhopals

These all belonged to the Lahore Division, but to their right were two units of the Meerut Division, the 58th Rifles and a half-battalion Black Watch.

The enemy doubtless counted on this state of affairs as a likely cause of confusion.

On the other hand, the units of the Meerut Division, which had just been relieved, were still in proximity to our line, and were thus readily available as reinforcements. These were the other half of the Black Watch, the 41st Dogras, 2/8th Gurkhas and 107th Pioneers, while the 6th Jats were in reserve near Festubert. Major-General Macbean of the Bareilly Brigade was still in command of this section of the line.

During the night of the 23rd November, the enemy pushed up his sap to within five yards of the trenches of the 34th, and as dawn broke, he commenced a storm of hand grenades from his nearest sapheads, with especial violence at the junction of the 34th and the company of Connaughts on their left, where a maxim of the 34th was in position.

Subadar Natha Singh was near the machine gun, round which bombs fell fast, killing a number of men. He at once took charge and held his position against the enemy, who had broken in, until he was eventually forced to retire. This officer had previously distinguished himself on several occasions, and now received the Indian Order of Merit, 2nd Class.

Havildar Nikka Singh, when all the men of the machine-gun team had been killed or wounded, carried the gun by himself under a withering fire back to the support trenches, for which act of bravery he also received the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit.

Captain Mackain was in command of the company

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next to Subadar Natha Singh, and was slightly wounded by a bomb. When the Germans broke into the trench, he got his men behind a traverse, over which a fire duel took place. Captain Mackain killed several of the enemy with his revolver, but was himself shot through the head and died shortly afterwards, having been carried into safety by his men, for which act of devotion Sepoy Ishar Singh received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, Captain Mackain being mentioned in despatches.

Lance-Naik Tota Singh stuck to Captain Mackain to the last, and was killed by his side after giving every proof of fidelity and valour. He received the Indian Order of Merit, 2nd Class, his widow being thus enabled to draw a pension.

During this attack, the building in which the regimental aid post was established came under heavy shell fire, the house being repeatedly struck. Sub-Assistant-Surgeon Harnam Singh and Havildar Pala Singh, who was the hospital havildar, removed all the wounded, the stretcher-bearers being away near the firing line, and carried them into safety along the road, which was being shelled. These two men showed absolute disregard of danger, and were awarded the Indian Order of Merit, 2nd Class.

The 34th were overpowered by numbers and by bombs, and their left was pushed out into the Connaught trench, while the Germans continued to clear out each traverse with grenades as they advanced. A brave attempt was then made by Captain Cruikshank with one company to retake the trench, but just as they were advancing, a machine gun enfiladed them, and they were forced

to fall back, and with them No. 3 Company and the 9th Bhopals.

This left the right of the Connaughts, under Captain Callaghan, in the air, and the enemy with a machine gun and bombs were forcing their way through the communication trench. The Connaughts fought them traverse by traverse, but owing to the want of bombs they suffered considerable loss and could do little injury to the enemy. Step by step they retreated, until, to avoid being taken both in flank and rear, they had to seek cover in the trench on the right of the 57th Rifles, where they erected a hasty barricade and continued to hold out.

A counter-attack was immediately organized, which was carried out by the 34th with portions of the 6th Jats and 9th Bhopals, but they were at once held up by machine guns. At 9.30 a.m., some of the 58th Rifles on the left of the right section of the defence were forced out of their trench, and affairs began to look critical. At 12.30 p.m., Brigadier-General Egerton of the Ferozepore Brigade was sent up to take command of the centre.

The position here was saved by the coolness and grasp of Lt-Colonel Southey of the 129th Baluchis, who sent $1\frac{1}{2}$ companies to entrench themselves on the road from Festubert to Ligny-le-Petit and to hold some houses near there. This refusal by Colonel Southey of his right flank, and the determination with which the position was held by his detachment, prevented the enemy from extending his operations to the left.

Before evacuating their trenches, the 58th had gone through a trying time. Lieutenant Reilly had been killed in a gallant and successful attempt to

carry bombs and ammunition up to the firing line. Havildar Hawinda immediately took out a party under very heavy fire and brought his body in, having already rescued a mortally wounded havildar. For these brave acts he was promoted to Jemadar and received the Military Cross.

Captain Baldwin found a ditch which enfiladed the enemy's approach, in which he held on with great determination, but he was killed later in a counter-attack. The command of the company was then taken by Havildar Indar Singh, who held the position against heavy attacks until relieved next morning, for which he also was promoted to Jemadar and received the Military Cross.

Captain Willis, D.S.O., was wounded in the head by a bomb at noon, but continued to command his men, and was finally ordered out of action after taking part in the counter-attack in the afternoon.

Captain Lind's company was heavily bombed and enfiladed by a machine gun, with the result that it lost nearly 75 per cent. of its strength, including its gallant commander.

Captain Bull had been sent up to relieve the wounded Captain Willis, who, however, declined to be relieved. Captain Bull then got into a ditch with a few men of the 58th and Black Watch, and there they held out with grim determination, stopping the German advance with their fire, although they were heavily bombed from a distance of fifteen yards. The enemy was dominated at this point; the bombing stopped and the position was secured.

There is little doubt that Colonel Southey's action on the left and Captain Bull's on the right saved the situation for us, for had they been less

determined in holding their ground at all costs, the whole of this section of our line must have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

The position at 1.30 p.m. was by no means satisfactory : on the extreme right the Black Watch, under Major Harvey, had succeeded in keeping their line intact, but the whole line of the 58th had been evacuated, except the small portion where Captain Bull and his devoted little party of Black Watch and 58th still held out. The entire front of the 34th Pioneers and 9th Bhopals was in the hands of the enemy, as was that of the company of the Connaughts, who were, however, still holding out behind their barricade. On the left, the 57th Rifles and 129th Baluchis, under Colonel Southey, had not budged.

At this juncture uncompromising orders were received from Sir James Willcocks that the original line must be restored before dawn and held at all costs.

General Egerton had come to the conclusion that a preliminary artillery preparation was necessary to the success of a counter-attack, and arrangements were made for all our available guns to shell the trenches taken by the enemy, prior to the counter-attack at 4.30 p.m. On the right, three companies of the 2/8th Gurkhas, under Major Cassels, were ordered to assault the trenches formerly occupied by the Bhopals. At the same time, the detachment of 34th Pioneers and 6th Jats in support under Colonel Roche were to move forward, and carrying with them the troops under Major Dundas, which were immediately in front of them, to reoccupy the original 34th Pioneer trenches, in co-operation with 3 companies 2/8th Gurkhas and supported by the Connaughts.

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The support trenches vacated by Colonel Roche were to be occupied by the 107th Pioneers. At the same time the 58th were to recapture their own trenches.

The artillery opened fire at the appointed time and got the range at once, a large number of dead and wounded being found when the attack was pushed home, while the trenches themselves were much battered. At 4.30 p.m. the infantry attack was launched and at first made good progress on the right. By 8.30 p.m. Major Cassels was able to report that the 2/8th Gurkhas had reoccupied the right trenches, that the 58th Rifles had also got into their old position, while some of the Bhopals had captured part of the original line, taking some prisoners, including an officer.

The movements of our men were greatly hampered by the snow-covered ground, which showed them up distinctly and made them an easy mark, with the result that the casualties, in face of heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, were severe, especially in the case of officers.

Much of the success of the 2/8th Gurkhas was due to the determined and skilful leading of Captain Buckland, who headed a party of his regiment which bombed and bayoneted the enemy out of traverse after traverse until the whole of the right trenches had been retaken.

The business of clearing a position at night is a most eerie one under the best of circumstances, but in this case it was rendered doubly difficult because the 2/8th had been split into two parts, three companies being on the right under Major Cassels and three on the left. The result was that

as both parties were working inwards towards each other, neither knew whether they would meet friend or foe round the next traverse.

The difficulty was solved by the use of the Gurkha language. As Captain Buckland at the head of his party crept up to a traverse, bombs and bayonets ready for whatever might be round the corner, one of his men whispered "Koho?" ("Who?"). If there was an answering grunt of "Mon" ("Me"), all was well; if not, the party at once rushed round the corner, hurling bombs and stabbing with the bayonet anyone they met. In this way Captain Buckland cleared a long stretch of trench in the inky darkness, being wounded in the process, and for his gallantry in this as well as other actions received the D.S.O.

Havildar Hari Parshad Thapa, 2/8th Gurkhas, greatly distinguished himself by heading a party which, advancing in single file, rushed traverse after traverse and killed a number of Germans. The Havildar, who was severely wounded during the fight, was awarded the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit, for his gallant conduct.

Lieutenant Macpherson having been severely wounded, Major Cassels was left without another British officer, but on being joined by some of the 6th Jats, went on gradually working towards the left of the line.

The Jats, too, had suffered severely. Captain Dudley was killed by a sniper at about ten yards' distance, when standing by the side of Colonel Roche. Major Dundas and Captain Moore were severely wounded. Lieutenant Cockburn, since killed in Mesopotamia, showed great gallantry in leading his

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men to the assault, and afterwards in heading bombing parties of Gurkhas, with whom he drove the Germans from traverse to traverse, capturing some prisoners in doing so. For his bravery he received the Military Cross.

The 6th Jats lost between 150 and 200 men, and by this time were reduced to a total of 300. At one point, where a very heavy machine-gun fire was making the men hesitate to advance, two men of the 6th Jats earned the Indian Distinguished Service Medal by rushing on and carrying the company forward.

Major Cassels, who had by this time been wounded, continued to work towards the left with his own Gurkhas and a collection of men of other units, until he was held up by bombs, to which he had no means of reply. The 107th were then ordered to hold on to the line and to try to get into touch with the 58th on their right. At the same time, the 1/39th Garhwalis, under Lt-Colonel Swiney, were sent in to attack the left flank of the centre section in order to work inwards towards the right.

It is now necessary to leave this part of the line for a time, and to turn to the doings of the 58th further to the right.

Major Davidson-Houston, Commanding the 58th, himself led the assault, which was carried through without a check and without firing. Thanks to the close and accurate support of our artillery, the 58th trenches were reoccupied with very slight casualties. Sergeant-Major Kennedy and fifty men of the Black Watch were with the 58th, and were among the first to reach the trench.

An incident occurred here which showed once

again the spirit of comradeship pervading all ranks, British and Indian. Just as the 58th were about to make the final rush into the trench, there was a slight momentary hesitation. Four men of the Black Watch, Privates Venters, Boyd, McIntosh, and Stewart, dashed in front of the Dogra Company and headed the charge by the side of Major Davidson-Houston, thus helping him to take the company on; and the trench was carried at once. Major Houston then put the four men into a sap which had been cut right into our old line, where they held out against heavy bombing until relieved. He testified that their sangfroid and cheeriness made a most marked impression on the men of the 58th. For their gallant bearing on this occasion they received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

The losses of the 58th during the action were:— Killed: Captain Baldwin, Lieutenants Gaisford and Reilly, Jemadar Wazir Singh and 42 other ranks. Wounded: Captains Lind and Willis, Subadar Gujar Singh and 61 other ranks, while 11 men were missing.

Major Davidson-Houston received the D.S.O. in recognition of his determined leadership.

Leaving the 58th firmly re-established in their old trenches, we must retrace our steps to follow the fortunes of the 1/39th Garhwalis under Lt-Colonel Swiney, who had been ordered to attack the left of the centre section.

The original idea was to make a frontal attack on a length of 300 yards of the trench. Colonel Swiney saw that there were serious objections to such an attempt. The ground in front was flat and coverless. The battalion was required to advance over a distance

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of 600 yards, during which time every movement on the snow-covered ground would have been clearly visible to a distance of at least 300 yards. It was ascertained, too, that the Germans were in force in the trench with several machine guns. Colonel Swiney represented these facts, and after discussion, General Egerton directed him to attack at once, using his own discretion as to his method.

At this moment a very valuable suggestion was made by Lieutenant Robson, R.E., who will be remembered as having been the first to use a trench mortar on our side. He suggested that in place of any frontal attack, an attempt should be made to enter the German trench from a flank, bomb the occupants out, and follow up with the bayonet. It is said that, in order to prove the feasibility of his plan, Lieutenant Robson proceeded to worm his way alone over to the German trench, whence he safely returned after bombing a machine gun. The story, which is not without support, is very probable, for this officer was entirely without fear.

Colonel Swiney decided to follow this procedure, which has since been adopted by us with the greatest success, and has undoubtedly prevented much of the loss of life attendant on frontal attacks.

The left flank of the German trench was selected for the operation, and Major Wardell led with his company from the point where the trench of the 57th Rifles commenced. The attack was preceded by a bombing party, headed by Lieutenant Robson and Captain Acworth of the 55th Rifles, who was attached to the 57th. With them were eight Afridis of the 57th.

Moving forward along the trench, the little party

first hurled bombs into a house on the left flank, which was occupied by German snipers, and then bombed the Germans, to their utter dismay, out of traverse after traverse, covering the ground with dead and wounded. Many of the enemy at once threw up their hands and surrendered, thirty or forty being captured in this way in the first two traverses.

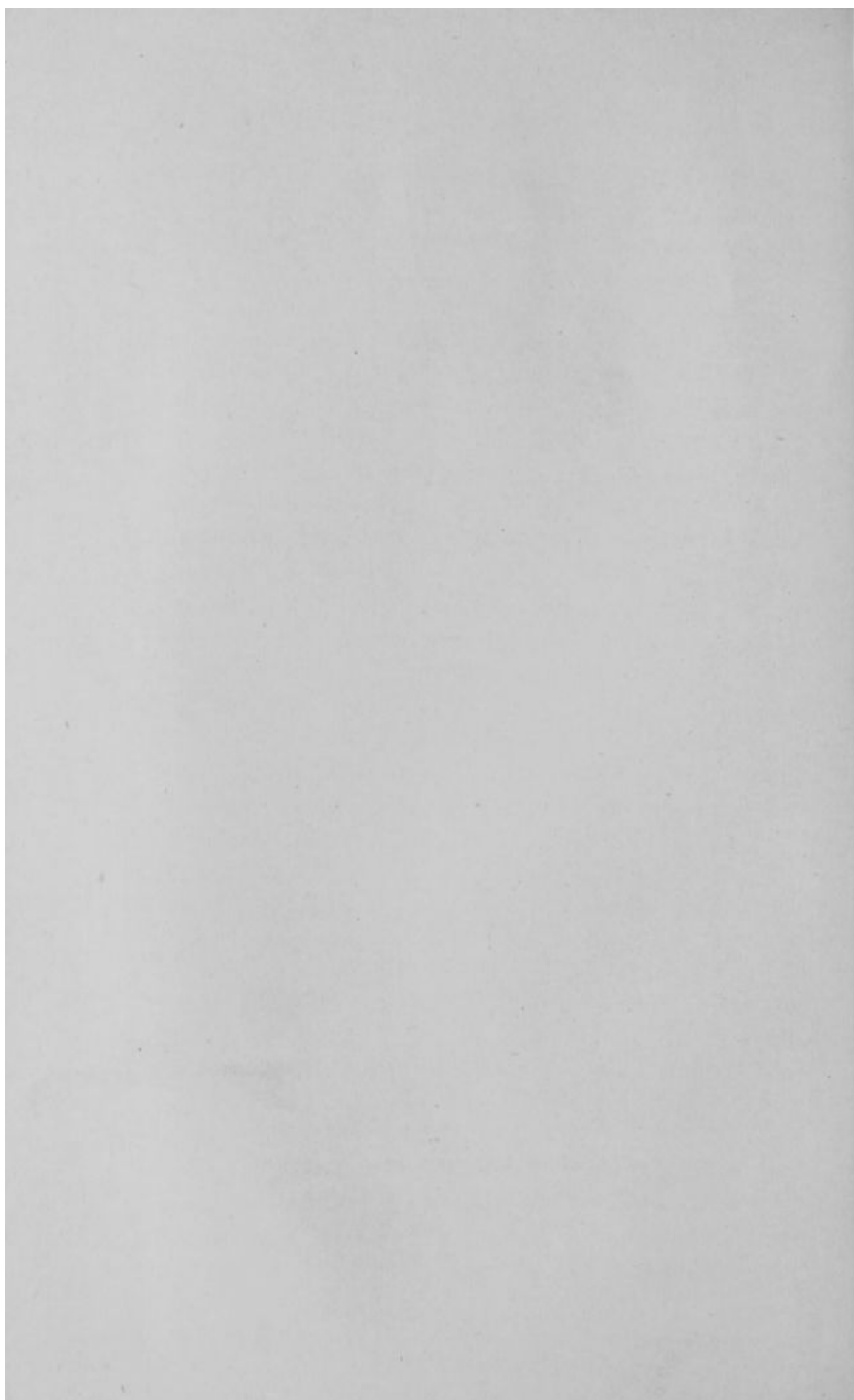
Major Wardell and his men followed up, bayoneting all who resisted. Captain Lumb, not to be outdone, and finding himself blocked by Major Wardell's men, jumped with a section and a half into the trench ahead of Major Wardell and proceeded to rush the traverses, bayoneting many of the enemy and taking some prisoners. In this work Lance-Naik Sankaru Gusain and Rifleman Kalamu Bisht showed great courage, and earned the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit.

Affairs then began to look a little awkward, as Major Wardell's party had been much weakened by casualties during this operation, and could do no more than hold the portion of trench already taken. A gap was thus fast arising between him and Captain Lumb. Luckily, at this moment, Lieutenant Welchman brought up the remainder of Captain Lumb's men, and together they pushed on along the trench.

Conspicuous among them, ever in the van, was Naik Darwan Sing Negi. This non-commissioned officer, from the beginning to the end, was either the first, or among the first, to push round each successive traverse, facing a hail of bombs and grenades. Although twice wounded in the head and once in the arm, he refused to give in, and continued fighting without even reporting that he was wounded. When the fight was over and the company fell in, his



NAIK DARWAN SING NEGI, V.C., 1ST BN 39TH GARHWAL, RIFLES.



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company commander saw that he was streaming with blood from head to foot. For this most conspicuous bravery Naik Darwan Sing was awarded the Victoria Cross, being the second Indian soldier to receive this honour.

The remainder of the trench having being taken, the 39th joined hands with the 107th just as dawn was breaking. While this was taking place, Captain Lane brought up reinforcements of the 1/39th, but while occupying the left of the recaptured trench, he came under a murderous enfilade fire which knocked over a number of his men. Equal to the occasion, as the British officer generally is, Captain Lane improvised a barricade out of the debris lying round, although exposed all the time to the enemy's fire, and held it until relieved, for which he received the Military Cross.

An outstanding figure of this action was undoubtedly Lieutenant R. G. G. Robson, R.E., who not only suggested the plan of bombing the Germans from the flank instead of making a costly and doubtful frontal attack, but carried it out himself with the greatest gallantry, ably seconded by Captain Acworth who received the Military Cross, while Lieutenant Robson was mentioned in despatches. Sad to relate, his valiant and most promising career was cut short, as he was killed exactly one month later while carrying out an almost equally dangerous enterprise.

On the 23rd December, our trenches near Port Arthur, already deep in water, became flooded to such a degree and so rapidly as to threaten to become untenable. Although our men did everything possible with the primitive appliances then available, the water still gained on them. The Officer

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Commanding on the spot came to the conclusion that the enemy was deliberately pumping water out of his trenches, which were here quite close, into ours.

As usual in moments of doubt and difficulty, a Sapper officer was summoned and arrived in the person of Lieutenant Robson, who agreed with the Commanding Officer's opinion, and characteristically at once took the danger on himself. Borrowing a shovel, he crawled out towards the German trench with the intention of listening for the sounds of pumping and endeavouring to find the channel through which the water flowed towards our trenches.

The enemy was keeping up a heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, and a little later a non-commissioned officer in our trench, observing a shovel sticking up in the air, and being aware that Lieutenant Robson had not returned, crept out to reconnoitre. Lying near the German trench, he found the gallant officer dead, killed apparently by machine-gun fire. Such was the end of as brave an officer as ever wore His Majesty's uniform.

Of the eight men of the 57th, four received the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit, and four the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

For his determined leadership, Captain Lumb of the Garhwalis received the Military Cross, which was also awarded to Subadar Dhan Sing Negi, while Subadar Jagat Sing Rawat received the Order of British India, 2nd Class. Seven men received the Indian Order of Merit, 2nd Class, and five men the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

Lt-Colonel Swiney's valuable services were recognized by the grant of a brevet Colonelcy. It was greatly owing to this officer's careful preparation

and foresight, and to the skilful manner in which the attack was carried out, that the losses of the regiment were comparatively small, while the results were large.

The casualties were:—Major Wardell wounded and missing; Captain Orton severely wounded; 1 Garhwali officer and 17 men killed; 2 Garhwali officers and 33 men wounded.

The 1/39th Garhwalis, having only been raised in 1887, had had little chance until this war of showing their mettle, but they have most valiantly proved their right to take place beside the best regiments in the army. It is noteworthy that the Victoria Cross has been won by men of both the 1/39th and 2/39th Garhwalis.

The losses of the 2/8th Gurkhas were:—Major Elliott and Lieutenant Macpherson, both attached from the 7th Gurkhas, killed; Major Cassels, 2/8th Gurkhas, and Lieutenant Peploe, 2/6th Gurkhas, wounded; Lieutenant Maxwell, missing; 1 Gurkha officer killed, 2 missing, the casualties in the ranks being 71.

Shortly after the 1/39th were sent up to attack on the left, General Egerton decided to make a further attempt on the right flank, where the 107th Pioneers had previously been held up by bombs.

Accordingly, two companies of the 2nd Leicesters under Major Gordon, and two companies of the 107th Pioneers got into position at about 4 a.m. on the 24th, by moving up a communication trench to within about seventy yards of the Germans. B Company of the Leicesters was on the right of one company of the 107th in the front line. On the advance commencing, some confusion was caused by the left

company crowding in on the right. Captain Grant of the Leicesters led his men through a heavy machine-gun and rifle fire into the enemy's trench, where he and Lieutenant Seton-Browne were almost immediately killed. Sergeant Foister gained the Distinguished Conduct Medal by a gallant attempt to rescue the last-named officer.

After a short rough-and-tumble fight, the enemy bolted, as was generally the case even then when they came to grips with our men, and a number of them were killed in their flight.

With this party of the Leicesters a few men of the 107th had entered the trench, but the remainder of the company had suffered severely and were unable to advance. On learning the situation, General Egerton ordered a retirement, which was effected at about 6 a.m., the last wounded being removed by 7 a.m. In the meantime, as before mentioned, the 1/39th Garhwalis joined hands with the 107th.

In this brief but sharp fight the Leicesters lost two British officers and 3 men killed, 14 wounded and 12 missing. Major Gordon received the D.S.O. for his gallant leading ; Captain Grant and Lieutenant Seton-Browne were mentioned in despatches ; and Privates Chatten, Chamberlain, and Taylor were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

The 107th lost Major Bruce and 17 other ranks killed ; Captains McLaughlin, Davis, Turnbull, and Mangin, Lieutenant Wallis, one Indian officer and 39 men wounded.

The services of Subadar-Major Labh Singh, Subadar Hashmat Dad Khan and Havildar Bhagat Singh were recognized by the award of the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

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Little has hitherto been said of the work done by the 2nd Black Watch under Major Harvey. This magnificent regiment had, however, been true to its traditions and had not given one inch of ground. The regiment as a whole was not called on to attack during the fight, but a party of 50 men, under Company Sergeant-Major Kennedy, as before mentioned, materially assisted the 58th Rifles in regaining their trenches, for which Sergeant-Major Kennedy, Sergeant Drummond and Private Swan received the Distinguished Conduct Medal, while a few of the men were with Captain Bull in his gallant defence of a portion of the 58th trench.

Major Wauchope of the Black Watch, as always when fighting was forward, was in the thick of it, and assisted the final attack by leading a charge of about twenty men under Lieutenant McMicking against the nearest German saphead. He then found that a gap of about 300 yards existed between the left of the 58th Rifles and the right of the 2/8th Gurkhas. Calmly occupying this gap were the four men of the Black Watch who had been posted there by Major Davidson-Houston. Quite undaunted by the showers of bombs and grenades to which they were being treated by the Germans, they were keeping up a steady and very effective fire. They only retired when Major Wauchope ordered them to do so, taking with them one of their number who had been severely wounded.

Throughout this action, our artillery, under Lt-Colonel Duffus, continued to render most active support to the infantry ; evidence of the accuracy of their fire was everywhere forthcoming when the trenches were retaken. The parapets were much

battered and the German losses were fairly heavy, as in one place 100 corpses were found, and over 100 prisoners were taken, including 3 officers, as well as three machine guns and a trench mortar.

This, the most important battle in which the Indian Corps as a whole had hitherto been engaged, ended with our reoccupation of all the trenches seized by the enemy. The chief lesson learnt from the action was the vital necessity for more guns, more high explosives, more machine guns, more bombs and grenades.

However stubbornly our men might fight, it was trying them very severely to expect them to hold out, without the means of replying, against an enemy numerically greatly superior and provided in superabundance with the weapons which we lacked. How well the Corps did its duty under such unequal conditions was recognized in a message received from Sir John French, in which he congratulated the troops on the counter-attack, and remarked that the units engaged had done splendidly.

On the 23rd November, a detachment of the 34th Poona Horse, under the command of Captain Grimshaw, took over a portion of the trenches of the Ferozepore Brigade.

On arrival, at 4 a.m., it was found that the enemy had driven a sap right up to the parapet which had been blown in, a breach of some 8 feet in breadth being created, which exposed our trench to fire from the sap.

As soon as it was daylight, Captain Grimshaw inspected the breach, which had been guarded by a party under Lieutenant F. A. De Pass, and called for a volunteer to reconnoitre along the sap towards





[Rugby Memorials.]

LIEUT F. A. DE PASS, V.C., 34TH POONA HORSE.

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the German line. Sowar Abdulla Khan at once came forward and proceeded to crawl out.

On his return, he reported that the enemy had erected a sand-bag traverse at a distance of about ten yards from our trench at the first bend in the sap. The traverse was loopholed and a German was on guard, a fact which Abdulla Khan ascertained by being fired at and missed.

At 8 a.m., the enemy began to throw bombs into our trench from their side of the traverse. This went on all day and caused several casualties.

Early in the morning of the 24th, Lieutenant De Pass determined at all costs to put an end to this state of affairs, and, accompanied by Sowars Fateh Khan and Firman Shah, he entered the sap and crawled along it until he reached the enemy's traverse. With the utmost coolness, he proceeded to place a charge of guncotton in the loophole and fired it, with the result that the traverse was completely demolished, and the bend of the sap was rounded off to such an extent as to expose some thirty yards to our fire. While this was going on, the enemy threw a bomb at our little party, but by good luck it exploded behind Lieutenant De Pass and did no damage, the trio returning to our trench in safety.

All bombing on the part of the enemy was put a stop to during the remainder of the 24th, and there was only one casualty, compared with six on the previous day and nine on the 25th, by which time, under cover of darkness, the Germans had managed to replace their traverse.

On the 24th, Lieutenant De Pass visited the neighbouring trench which was occupied by the 7th Dragoon Guards. On his way he observed a sepoy

of the 58th Rifles lying wounded outside our trench. Accompanied by Private C. Cook of the 7th, he at once went out in broad daylight and brought the sepoy in, although exposed to the enemy's fire for a distance of about 200 yards. De Pass then again volunteered to enter the enemy's sap and attempt to blow up the traverse, but as this meant almost certain death, permission was refused.

On the 26th, the enemy's bombing increased in violence, and De Pass went to the saphead to superintend the repair of our parapet which had again been seriously damaged. Observing a sniper at work behind the traverse, he tried to shoot him, but was himself shot through the head and killed.

Many brave deeds have been performed during this war, but there are few instances of gallantry more conspicuous than that displayed by this heroic young soldier. He was the very perfect type of the British officer. He united to singular personal beauty a charm of manner and a degree of valour which made him the idol of his men. He was honoured in death by the Victoria Cross. No one in the war earned it better.

Sowars Abdulla Khan, Fateh Khan, and Firman Shah, who so gallantly seconded their officer, received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, while Private Cook was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

By the 24th November the Lahore Division had completed its relief of the Meerut Division, and Lt-General Watkis took over command of the line.

On the 26th, the two first anti-aircraft guns joined the Corps. About this time the weather was warmer, but the sky very cloudy, rendering air reconnaissance impossible.

On the night of the 27th-28th November, a party of twenty men of the Manchesters, under 2nd Lieutenant Connell, with Lieutenant Buller, R.E., rushed two German saps about 40 yards from our trench. The enemy were completely taken by surprise, and were still working when our men got in. A hand-to-hand fight took place, in which about ten of the enemy were killed. After the saps had been searched and one partly filled in, the party retired. In doing so, they were caught by machine-gun fire, Lieutenant Connell and 2 men being killed; 6 men were wounded, and 2 were missing. Lieutenant Buller got back safely, but at once went out again to bring in a wounded man, and was himself wounded. For his gallantry he received the Military Cross, while Lieutenant Connell was mentioned in despatches.

The remainder of the month passed in a manner which is known as "quietly." The usual bombing went on wherever the trenches were close enough to each other, while at intervals the artillery on each side woke into spasmodic activity.

On the 30th November, a party of the Poona Horse was bombed out, the enemy having pushed a saphead right into the trench in front of Le Plantin. Sergeant Coldwell and four men of the Connaughts rushed into the gap, drove the Germans out and built a "block." For his courageous conduct Sergeant Coldwell received the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

This non-commissioned officer is described by an officer of the regiment as "the bravest of the brave." He subsequently distinguished himself at the second battle of Ypres, when all his company officers were

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hit, and he received the 4th Class of the Russian Cross of St. George. Unfortunately, he was killed on the 14th October, 1915, when reconstructing in front of our line a listening post which had been blown in by an 8-inch shell.

The 57th Rifles and 129th Baluchis suffered a great loss on the 23rd November by the death of their Medical Officers, Captain Indrajit Singh and Major Atal.

The combined dressing stations had been established at about 1500 yards behind the fire trench. In the afternoon the enemy put several large shells into the house, which was entirely demolished. Working parties made desperate efforts to clear away the ruins and get out those who had been buried; but apparently a spy was concealed somewhere near, for as soon as the men approached the ruins, heavy shell fire was opened on them, and the place was speedily in a blaze, which exploded quantities of ammunition. Major Atal's body was eventually recovered, but Captain Singh's remains were not found till a day later. Both these officers had greatly distinguished themselves by their gallantry in attending wounded under fire, and their loss was deeply felt by their regiments. In a gazette published after his death, Captain Indrajit Singh was awarded the Military Cross.