CHAPTER XXI

CHANGES IN COMPOSITION OF THE CORPS

The 8th and 49th West Riding Divisions attached to the Corps—The Highland Division transferred to the 4th Corps—Strength of the Indian Corps on the 5th June—Arrival of the 69th and 89th Punjabis, relieving the 9th Bhopals and 125th Rifles—Success of sanitary measures under Colonel Pike, D.S.O., R.A.M.C.—Minor operation by the 1st Highland Light Infantry—Temporary success of the 4th Corps—49th Division transferred to the 2nd Army—The Highland Division rejoins, the 8th Division going to the 3rd Corps—Adventures of Naik Ayub Khan, 129th Baluchis—Indian units taken out of the line for reorganization—Opportunity thus given for Musalmans to observe the Ramazan—The 19th Division joins the Corps—Gallant work by Captain Roe, 1/4th Gurkhas—Bravery of Subadar-Major Senbir Gurung—Fall of Warsaw—The 6th Jats, the 15th Sikhs, and 41st Dogras leave for another theatre of war.

On the 31st May, 1915, the 51st Highland Division was transferred to the 4th Corps, while the 8th Division of that Corps and the newly arrived 49th West Riding Division of the New Army were attached to the Indian Corps. The month of June then opened with the line held by portions of the Meerut, Lahore, 8th, and 49th Divisions.

This month was destined to see many changes in the composition of the Corps, and the departure for fresh battlefields of several regiments which had carved their names deep on the roll of honour of the Indian Army.

The strength of the Corps on the 5th June was as follows:—

Formation.	British officers.	Indian officers.	Sabres or lances.	British rifles.	Indian rifles.	Artillery personnel, British.	Artillery personnel, Indian.	Guns.	Machine guns.
Lahore Division	346	129	440	5077	4916	2438	283	64	42
Meerut Division	390	158	482	4734	6216	2460	280	68	48
8th Division	539	—	132	14,345	—	2818	—	58	60
49th Division	483	—	127	12,007	—	2793	—	52	48
Corps Troops	12	1	—	257	98	—	—	5	9
Totals	1770	288	1181	36,420	11,230	10,509	563	247	207

The total strength of the Corps, including artillery, therefore amounted to 59,903, a striking contrast to the 15,700, all told, with which it held the front taken over from the 2nd Corps in 1914.

On the 4th June the 89th Punjabis, and on the 5th June the 69th Punjabis, arrived to take the place respectively of the 9th Bhopals and the 125th Rifles, the two latter battalions leaving for Egypt. The 89th were posted to the Ferozepore Brigade, and the 69th to Bareilly.

The weather, as a whole, throughout the month, was an agreeable contrast to that experienced during May, being generally fine and warm. It was feared that the advent of warm weather might cause an epidemic of typhus, to which the inhabitants of the surrounding country are, even in normal years,

particularly liable. This fear, however, happily proved to be unfounded, but the immunity of the troops must be ascribed to the perfection of the sanitary measures carried out by the medical officers under Colonel W. W. Pike, D.S.O., the Deputy Director of Medical Services, to which more detailed reference will be made hereafter.

On the 15th June the 4th Corps on the left of the Indian Corps resumed the offensive in the direction of the Rue d'Ouvert, on the northern end of which the 51st Highland Division was directed, while the 7th Division attacked the southern end and Chapelle St Roch, the Canadian Division forming a defensive flank. In conjunction with this the Lahore Division carried out a minor operation for which the Sirhind Brigade and other troops were detailed.

The general idea of this operation was to capture an advanced post and then to bomb down the enemy's trenches until a point was reached in a salient in his line from which a trench could be dug to connect with our front. The artillery preparation was to commence at 5.25 p.m. on the 15th, the assault being delivered at 6 p.m. The assaulting party consisted of two detachments of the 1st Highland Light Infantry, in each of which were 4 bayonet men, 4 bombers, 1 non-commissioned officer, and an extra man for communication and signalling purposes.

Punctually at 6 p.m. the first bombing party crept out by an exit which had been prepared in our listening post, although it was evident that the German barricade and defences generally were practically undamaged by our bombardment. The party got nearly half-way across the open ground without any casualty, and immediately threw six

bombs, of which two or three landed right on the German barricade, which the enemy was still manning, apparently little disturbed by our artillery, for the moment our attack started they kept up an accurate fire on our periscopes. As soon as our bombs were thrown, the Germans replied in kind, as well as with machine-gun and rifle fire, killing two and wounding six of the ten men of the party, which was consequently forced to retire as best it could, although one man succeeded in getting to the foot of the barricade before he was killed.

Captain Alston, who was in command of the operation, was then directed to withdraw his men to a distance of 150 yards from the barricade, when the 9·2 howitzer would fire 9 rounds, after which another assault was to be launched, if Captain Alston considered that there was a chance of success. This second bombardment, however, did little more damage than the first. The Germans opened a steady fire and were seen observing with a periscope from their barricade. It was evident that they were fully prepared to receive another assault. Under these circumstances Captain Alston reported that there appeared to be no chance of success, with which opinion Lt-Colonel Hill, Commanding the 1st Highland Light Infantry, and Brigadier-General Walker agreed, and the attempt was abandoned.

The 4th Corps twice captured the entire front line of the enemy, but on each occasion was driven back by concentrated gun and bomb fire.

On the 26th June the 51st Highland Division again joined the Corps, the 8th Division going to the 3rd Corps. The Indian Corps now consisted of the Lahore, Meerut, and 51st Highland Divisions,

the 49th (West Riding) Division joining the 2nd Army.

On the night of the 21st June Naik Ayub Khan, 129th Baluchis, was ordered to go out with a patrol between the lines. When the patrol returned, Ayub Khan was missing. He had last been seen close to the German wire, and it was feared that he had either been killed or taken prisoner. Failing either of these contingencies, the only remaining supposition was that he had deserted to the enemy. This, however, the officers of the regiment stoutly refused to admit as possible, for the naik in question was well known as a good and courageous soldier.

On the 22nd June Sir James Willcocks visited the trenches south-east of Neuve Chapelle which were held by the 129th Baluchis. Lieutenant Lewis, M.C., to whose company Ayub Khan belonged, at once begged Sir James to allow him to go out at night and search for the naik, who, he was sure, was lying either dead or wounded near the German line. General Willcocks, while fully appreciating the spirit which inspired the request, felt unable to give permission for an officer to undertake such risk with so little prospect of success.

The 22nd passed and the night of the 23rd arrived, and at 11.30 p.m. in stalked Naik Ayub Khan, none the worse for his experiences, bringing with him his rifle and ammunition.

The story of his adventures is unique in the history of the war, and illustrates the peculiar histrionic capabilities which are possessed by so many Orientals, coupled with a sangfroid under circumstances of concentrated danger which could hardly be surpassed. It appeared that, on nearing the

German wire, Naik Ayub Khan made up his mind to visit the enemy in his trench and to pick up whatever useful information he could obtain. He concealed his rifle and ammunition, and then, taking his life in both hands, boldly walked up to the wire, where he stood calling out "Musalman." German heads appeared over the parapet, and for a moment his life hung in the balance. An officer came up, however, and called to him to come in, which he did. At first the occupants of the trench, fearing a ruse, were all for shooting Ayub Khan offhand, but milder counsels prevailed, and he was conducted along the trench to the Bois du Biez, through which he was taken behind the lines, and eventually found himself at the head quarters, presumably of the 13th Division VIIth Corps, at Marquillies. All this time Ayub Khan was keeping his eyes and ears very wide open, and making mental notes of everything of value.

At Marquillies he was taken before the General, and was closely interrogated by the Staff through the medium of an officer who spoke extremely bad Hindustani, learned doubtless during a tour in India with a view to the future discomfiture of his hosts. This interrogation was a very trying ordeal, for on the nature of his answers the naik's life hung. He was anxious, of course, not to give any information of value to the enemy, but had at the same time to avoid arousing suspicion. He was asked, amongst other matters, many questions about our troops in this portion of the line and particularly about the new regiments, the 69th and 89th Punjabis, which had recently arrived. To unimportant questions he sometimes replied correctly; in other cases,

while giving a general appearance of truth to his answers, he nullified their value by supplying incorrect details.

The Germans talked about the supposed disaffection in India, and impressed on Ayub Khan that it was very wrong of Musalmans to fight against the friends of Turkey, dexterously ignoring the fact that the policy of these friends of Islam has been to undermine the Mahomedan religion in their colonies by every possible means, as has been proved by secret documents captured in Africa. Ayub Khan was asked whether there was not considerable disaffection in his regiment, and whether a large number of men were willing to desert as he had done. To these questions he returned a vigorous affirmative, and offered to bring back with him at least 20 men. This offer was greedily accepted, and he was promised 400 marks (Rs. 300) if he brought over 20 men, *i.e.* at the rate of 20 marks per man.

He remained at the head quarters throughout the 22nd, and was well fed and looked after, evidently with a view to impressing on him the kindly nature of the Germans. Many men came to see him, and he kept a careful note in his mind of the numbers on shoulder-straps, the various kinds of uniform, etc., details which were subsequently fully confirmed by the statements of prisoners and deserters, and were of considerable value to our Intelligence Department.

On the night of the 23rd he was taken by a Staff officer and the interpreter in a motor car to the Bois du Biez, and thence through the trenches to the spot at which he had entered them. There he bade an affectionate farewell, and with one eye over his

shoulder in case the Germans might at the last moment change their minds and put a bullet through the departing guest, he returned to our trench, retrieving on the way his rifle and ammunition.

Naik Ayub Khan was able to describe the paths through the Bois du Biez, and to give a good idea of the strength and the units by which the enemy's line was held. Further, he was able to report that there was no installation of asphyxiating gas in the trenches through which he had passed, a detail of no small importance to us at the time.

His story was an extraordinary one, but as before stated, any lingering doubt of its veracity was removed by corroborative evidence obtained from other sources. In order to make the enemy believe that we had discovered Ayub Khan's intention of deserting with 20 of his comrades, a notice was put up outside our trench to the effect that the traitor had been shot by us. Whether the Germans credited the statement or not was never discovered.

For his great daring and skill Naik Ayub Khan was promoted to Jemadar and was awarded the 2nd Class of the Indian Order of Merit.

There were no further events of special interest during June. The weather underwent a change for the worse towards the end of the month, heavy rain falling at intervals, which rendered life in the trenches once more uncomfortable.

July found the Corps holding a line from La Quinque Rue to a point slightly south-east of Picantin, opposite Laventie. Each of the three Divisions had 2 Brigades in the front line and a Brigade in reserve, the front of each Division being roughly 3400 yards.

The casualties up to the 1st July, 1915, were as under :—

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Other deaths.
British officers . .	223	531	58	2
Indian officers . .	88	274	35	4
Other ranks, British .	1465	6,517	1747	?
Other ranks, Indian .	2002	11,285	2508	483
Total . .	3778	18,607	4348	489

On the 9th July instructions were received from the 1st Army for the 1st Corps to take over, as a temporary measure, a portion of the Indian Corps front. This change was made with a view to the reorganization of the Indian units of the Corps, a measure of which they stood sadly in need. The heavy fighting in which they had been engaged at Neuve Chapelle in March, at Ypres in April and during May, had necessitated the repletion of the ranks, for which purpose drafts of other units or recruits from India had arrived. The immediate result was that a large proportion of the men were quite unknown to their officers, and required, moreover, thorough training in the methods of warfare obtaining in France.

Sir James Willcocks, with his usual solicitude for the welfare, moral as well as physical, of his troops, suggested to Sir John French that the period of reorganization might be so arranged as to coincide as far as possible with the Musalman Fast of Ramazan. The suggestion was approved, and the Musalmans of the Corps were thus enabled to observe their religious rites during at least a portion of the prescribed period, a boon for which they were sincerely grateful.

All the British units were now grouped together

in the Lahore Division, which was to continue to hold the line, the Indian battalions being assembled in the Meerut Division, which was withdrawn into reserve.

Units were exchanged by Brigades as follows: Dehra Dun with Jullundur, Garhwal with Sirhind, and Bareilly with Ferozepore.

This reorganization was completed on the night of the 15th–16th July, the Lahore Division thus being composed entirely of British and the Meerut of Indian units.

The original intention was that the Indian regiments should remain in reserve for a full month, but war necessities made shipwreck of this expectation. On the 19th July instructions were received for the Lahore Division to relieve the Highland Division south of the Fauquissart—Aubers road by 6 a.m. on the 23rd.

In order to carry this out it was necessary to strengthen each Brigade of Lahore by about 1000 rifles of Indian units taken from the affiliated Brigade in the Meerut Division. This relief took place on the night of the 23rd, and the rest of a large proportion of the Indian troops came to an abrupt conclusion.

On the 24th July the 19th Division, under the command of Major-General Fasken, joined the Corps, its strength being as follows: 552 officers, 133 sabres, 13,379 British rifles, 2783 artillery personnel, 64 guns, 39 machine guns.

At the commencement of July a very skilful and daring reconnaissance was carried out by Captain C. D. Roe, 1/4th Gurkhas. The battalion was then in trenches near Neuve Chapelle. In front of the

position, "No Man's Land" was covered with thick long grass, which lent itself to daylight reconnaissance by either side, and tussles between patrols were frequent.

On the night of the 1st July, Captain Roe, accompanied by Lieutenant Manson and acting Subadar-Major Senbir Gurung, made a reconnaissance, and the following morning the same party, strengthened by two riflemen, went out at 3 a.m., with a view to ascertaining which of the network of trenches in front was actually held by the enemy, whether some ruined houses were occupied, the exact position of two snipers' posts (the occupants of which had been giving considerable trouble), the amount of wire in front of the German trenches, and finally, what use the enemy was making of a re-entrant in their line.

The party crawled out through the long grass, and meeting with no opposition, managed to get right up to the front line of trench, which they investigated, and ascertained exactly which position was occupied by day. Creeping along, Captain Roe explored the buildings in the hope of finding a sniper asleep, but failed in his quest, although he made a systematic search through each house. He was able, however, to locate the haunt of the snipers by finding about 100 empty cartridge cases which had evidently been recently fired, while five yards to the left was a dummy machine gun.

Still crawling along, the party found that the whole of that part of the line was wired in the most formidable manner, and that unless cut by artillery fire, passage through it would be impossible. Further, a most important point was now cleared up. It

was evident from the arrangement of the wire that the enemy intended to use the re-entrant as a trap for us in any future attack, hoping that we would make for it and thus be taken from every angle by machine-gun fire. At another point Captain Roe found a barricade which was occupied and doubtless concealed a machine gun.

The adventure was destined to end with some excitement, for as the party was creeping on, they saw a German officer at a distance of about 250 yards in the act of getting over the parapet. Captain Roe and the Subadar-Major fired together and hit the officer in the hip, knocking him backwards. Immediately another man showed his head and shoulders, evidently trying to discover where the bullets came from. Captain Roe fired again, and the man fell. The result of a third attempt at another man who looked over could not be observed. The only reply was one wild shot fired at an angle of about 45 degrees away to the left. The party eventually returned in safety, having completely carried out their programme.

On the 3rd July two men of the battalion were hit while on listening patrol. Captain Roe decided to go out next morning and try to discover their fate, and further, to ascertain whether the enemy had occupied the ruins near which his men had fallen.

In view of the probability that some opposition would occur, the preparations were now more elaborate. Covering fire was to be supplied from the trench of the 1/1st Gurkhas, and a small party under Lieutenant Manson was posted in a suitable position to assist in case of emergency. Another party under Subadar-Major Senbir Gurung was put out

on the right of Captain Roe's line of advance, and six men accompanied the officer to search the ruins. At the same time the 84th Battery R.F.A. was to assist with the fire of one gun towards the left, and on a new communication trench made by the enemy. Captain Roe carried five bombs himself, while the Subadar-Major also had five, and 24 were kept handy in reserve.

At 8.10 a.m. the expedition started, and after posting Lieutenant Manson's party, Captain Roe pushed along up a communication trench, and had just arrived at his pre-arranged position when the 84th Battery fired its first shell. At this moment three bombs were thrown at the party from a distance of about 20 yards, followed almost at once by two more. All five exploded round Captain Roe and his orderly, partially burying them. The six men behind them, thinking they were killed, retired towards the British line. Subadar-Major Senbir, however, at once rallied and brought them up to where Captain Roe was busily engaged in bombing the Germans. Lance-Naik Lachman Gurung, a bomber, rushed up and took the enemy from the front, and with this assistance they were driven back with the loss of five of their number. They retreated until they were joined by an officer and about 25 men.

Captain Roe had now used all his bombs, and had to retire to the spot where he had left his reserve supply. Armed with these, he again advanced and bombed the officer's party steadily back. Then it was found that the enemy had got round on both flanks, and they soon made their presence felt by bombing and firing.

Subadar-Major Senbir was now hit by a bomb which shattered his left leg, but in spite of his suffering he held on in the most gallant way, and continued to direct his men. At this juncture Lieutenant Manson caught sight of the Germans and at once opened rapid fire. The enemy were seized with panic, and were bolting through the ruins, when two shrapnel shells fired by the 84th Battery burst right over them and added wings to their flight.

By good luck our bombs had outlasted those of the enemy, and it was due to this fact and the assistance of the 84th Battery that Captain Roe was able to return with only one casualty, Subadar-Major Senbir Gurung. This Gurkha officer had throughout the campaign behaved with the greatest gallantry, having especially distinguished himself at Ypres, and whenever he got near the enemy, to use the words of his Commanding Officer, Lt-Colonel H. B. Champain, "he showed amazing coolness and resource."

Thus ended a most dashing little episode, the skilful and daring execution of which obtained for us information of considerable value and proved the worth of our men, when led by British officers, in hand-to-hand fighting against superior numbers. For his conspicuous gallantry and leadership Captain Roe was awarded the D.S.O., while Lieutenant Manson received the Military Cross, and Subadar-Major Senbir Gurung the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit.

Lance-Naiks Lachman Gurung and Asbir Rana with Rifleman Garbha Sing Gurung, who had stuck to the two officers and had behaved throughout

with the greatest bravery, were awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

On the 1st August a melancholy illustration of the chances of war occurred.

Lieutenant E. G. Bullard, of the Indian Postal Service, was proceeding on duty in a car near Croix Barbée, when a German shell exploded practically in the motor, killing him and the chauffeur instantaneously.

This young officer had, by his kindly disposition and zeal in the performance of his important duties, endeared himself to his comrades in the Corps, and his loss was keenly felt.

The occurrence was particularly unfortunate, as Lieutenant Bullard was to have proceeded on leave the next day, while the chauffeur was only taking the duty of another man.

By the 2nd August the Corps had once more been reorganized into its normal formation, and the front was held by the Lahore and Meerut Divisions, while the 19th Division, in reserve billets, was receiving instruction in trench warfare.

On the 5th August loud cheering was heard in the German lines, after which a notice board was placed just outside their wire with the following inscription: "Warchaou * conquered." To this we replied by a similar board bearing the legend, "Another Zeppelin brought down."

The German notice remained in position, although riddled with bullets by us, and several unsuccessful attempts were made to bring it in under cover of darkness. On the night of the 16th August, however, Lance-Naiks Kale Singh and But Singh, of the 47th

* Warsaw.

Sikhs, succeeded in crawling up to the board and cutting the wire which attached it to the German parapet. While doing this, four bombs were thrown at them, but they escaped uninjured, and bore the notice back in triumph to the 47th, by whom it is treasured as a souvenir of an audacious deed.

The remainder of the month passed without any event of special importance. A deserter gave himself up on the night of the 28th August, and, apparently by way of justifying his existence, informed us that the enemy had installed gas in his trenches with a view to an attack on the 30th August. To ascertain the truth or otherwise of his story, a bombardment of the enemy's front line took place on the 29th and again on the 30th, but although the parapet was badly damaged and heavy timber, sandbags and earth were thrown up into the air, there were no signs of any preparation for a gas attack.

On the 17th August the 6th Jats under the command of Captain Ross, the 15th Sikhs under Colonel Hill, and the 41st Dogras under Lt-Colonel Tribe, left for another theatre of war, where they have since fully maintained the great reputation which they had won in France. It is pleasing to note, as testifying to the spirit which existed between our Allies and ourselves, that the War Diary of the 6th Jats records the great reluctance with which the regiment parted with their interpreter, Monsieur Henri Le Gros, who, it is remarked, had served with them since their arrival in France, in October, 1914, without a day's absence, having rendered invaluable service and become almost one of the regiment.