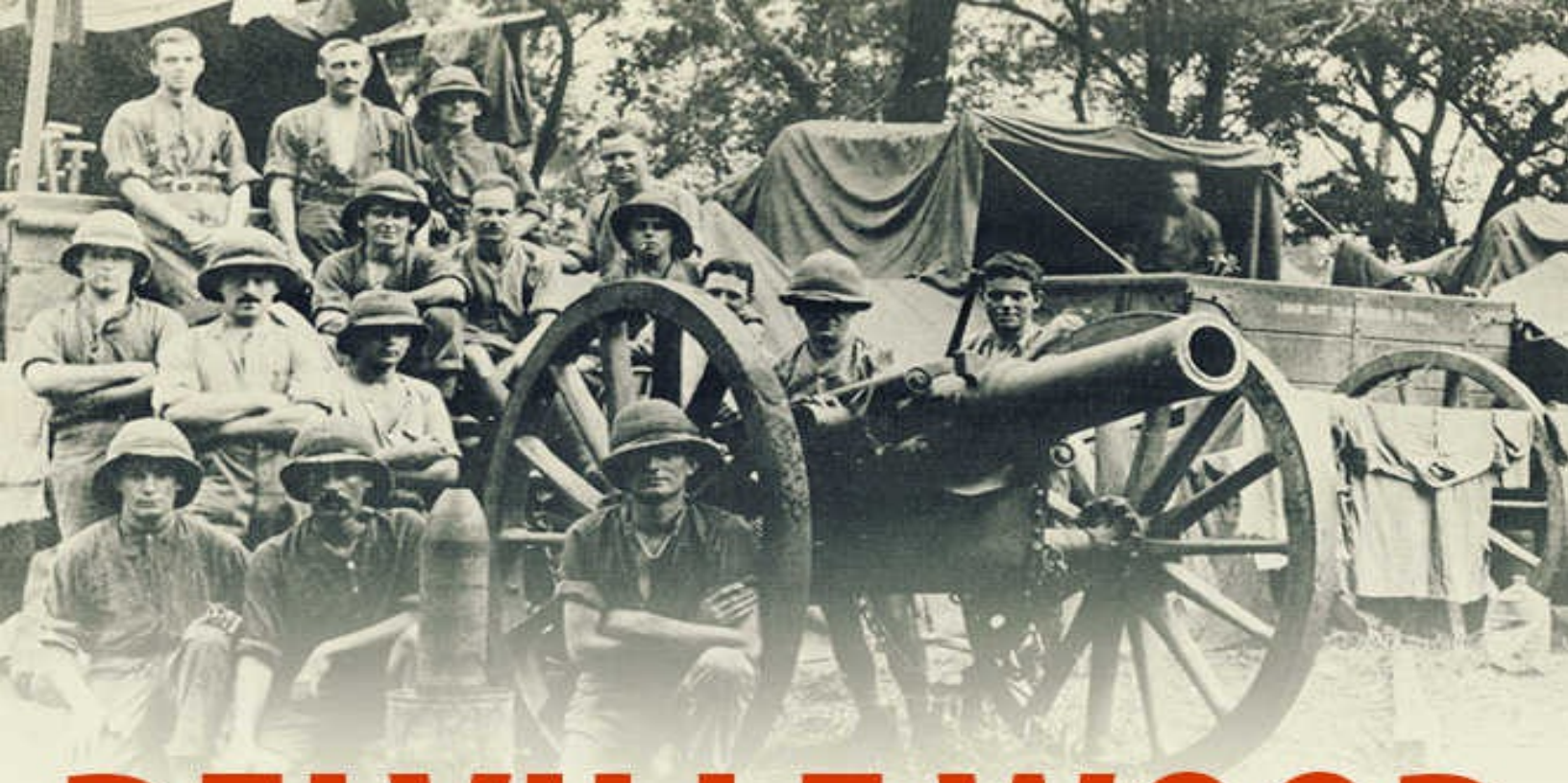


DELVILLE WOOD

IAN UYS

The bloodiest battle
hell of 1916...

DELVILLE WOOD
July 1916

IAN UYS

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Devil's Wood

"No battlefield on all the Western Front was more bitterly contested than was "Devil's Wood", where fighting, practically uninterrupted and intense, went on for six consecutive weeks from mid July till August 26 of 1916. It was in the first week of the struggle that the South African forces won their imperishable fame — grimly hanging on against overwhelming odds and repulsing counter-attacks by troops five and six times their number."

(*The Times*, London, 1917)

The bloodiest battle hell of 1916

"… In the depths of Delville Wood, during the ensuing days, the South Africans made their supreme sacrifice of the war — where today a white stone collonade of peaceful beauty commemorates, and contrasts with, the bloodiest battle hell of 1916."

(Sir Basil Liddell Hart in *History of the First World War*)

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Foreword

I regard it as an honour that I should have been invited by the author of this publication to contribute a foreword thereto.

The personal experiences of some of the survivors of the battle of Delville Wood have already appeared in print as a result of overseas writers asking them to furnish written particulars, but I think Mr Uys is the first South African to have undertaken the task by means of personal interviews.

I myself have been unable to offer much contribution to this collection, as I was the victim of shell fire and was carried out before my unit had even reached the wood, but the descriptions which Mr Uys has gone to so much trouble to collect are of particular interest to me, some having been obtained from survivors whom I personally knew. Regrettably most are no longer with us.

The story of Delville Wood has oft been told, originally by John Buchan in his *The South African Forces in France*, now long out of print. Many subsequent publications have recorded the factual story of the event, but the personal touch which Mr Uys has been able to offer presents a fresh light and makes fascinating reading.

I wish him all success in his undertaking.

A W Liefeldt.
Chairman, Cape Town Branch.
SA Overseas Brigade Association.

Introduction

The Battle of the Somme marked a turning point in warfare. Beforehand cavalry was the supreme weapon, afterwards the tank and aircraft reigned. Cavalry was used at the beginning of the Delville Wood fight and tanks at the conclusion in September 1916. For a brief spell it was the war of the infantryman alone. At Delville Wood the 1st South African Infantry Brigade was to show what that meant. Their feat can never be surpassed.

Delville Wood is commemorated in South Africa by an annual service. Yet ironically no South African military unit carries it as a battle honour on a regimental colour. In addition, though it is generally known as the bloodiest battle ever fought by South Africans, very little is known of the men who were there.

On 14 July, 121 officers and 3,052 other ranks comprised the 1st South African Infantry Brigade. Six days later Col Edward Thackeray marched out with two wounded officers and 140 other ranks. Of these survivors one officer and 59 men of the light trench mortar battery had joined as reinforcements two days earlier.

The bare statistics of the battle have sufficed for too long. In these pages we learn of the men who came out of the hell of “Devil’s Wood” and of the men who didn’t. Some years ago I was shown a booklet in which a grieving father recorded his tribute to his son — one of the South Africans who still lie in the wood. “It is very hard to part with him, but I glory in his glorious end, my splendid, chivalrous boy …”

The South Africans, both English and Dutch speaking, took and held the wood. For six days and five nights they fought and died in an inferno of

exploding shells, flame-throwers, machine-gun and rifle fire. The shelling which reached seven shells a second reduced the wood to a wasteland.

The Springboks hurled back overwhelming attacks by masses of enemy infantry until overrun and virtually destroyed. They fought hand-to-hand with the best troops in the German army.

Outnumbered and attacked from three sides, their orders were to hold the wood and they did so. Colonel Thackeray inspired the bone-weary men by his example. He fought as a private would, with rifle and Mills bombs. When the survivors eventually paraded before Gen Lukin he took the salute with tears in his eyes.

Why should Delville Wood be commemorated when other battles are not? In answer John Buchan wrote, “There were positions as difficult, but they were not held so long; there were cases of as protracted a defence, but the assault was not so violent and continuous … As a feat of human daring and fortitude the fight is worthy of eternal remembrance by South Africa and Britain, but no historian’s pen can give that memory the sharp outline and the glowing colour which it deserves. Only the sight of the place in the midst of the battle — that corner of splinters and churned earth and tortured humanity — could reveal the full epic of Delville Wood”.

Bearing this in mind, I have borrowed liberally from accounts given by the men who were there and in this respect it is their book. Accordingly I make no apology for the large number of quotations used. Publishers’ names are given only for books not mentioned in the bibliography.

An overall picture is presented of each day’s fighting. The official accounts of the brigade, attached units and the four regiments follow. The experiences of the individuals involved are recorded within these units and listed in company order. It is thus possible to follow any one man’s reminiscences by referring to his company in each chapter.

As far as possible the day-to-day events have been recorded by company for ease of reference. Where the company is not known the relevant text is included with that of the battalion headquarters. Imperial measures, units and ranks are recorded as they were at the time.

In addition the Battles of Bernafay Wood and Trones Wood are included, as they preceded Delville Wood and the latter should not be seen in isolation.

The brigade was to endure much in the remaining years of the Great War — and many Delville Wood veterans were yet to pay the supreme sacrifice. I am grateful to the veterans of this epic battle who have assisted me in compiling this book. It is to them and their departed comrades that this book is dedicated.

Chapter 1 — The First South African Infantry Brigade

In common with other epic events the story of Delville Wood had humble beginnings — the dry, dusty parade ground at Potchefstroom, Transvaal. A scene far removed from the cool, green woods and rolling grass covered hills of the Somme in France — the last scene that many South Africans would see.

The August winds of 1914 whipped up the powdery surface to coat the marching recruits with dirt. Their sweat ran it in rivulets from faces and necks into tunic collars. Though the men muttered and cursed under their breaths, their vigilant officers knew the value of well-disciplined, hardened troops — and the parade ground was the first step in shaping the brigade.

Most of the volunteers had served through the arduous German South West African Campaign and had participated in forced marches under the searing desert sun. Their overriding desire was to serve in France and many feared that the war would end before they saw the poppies of Flanders.

The prime minister, Gen Louis Botha, had personally commanded the Union troops in SWA, with Gen Jan Smuts as his second-in-command. The decision to form the brigade for overseas service had been theirs — a decision which would radically alter the lives of thousands of men.

The Union Government’s offer to send a contingent of South African soldiers to fight in Europe was accepted by the Imperial Government in July 1915. The War Office specifically requested an infantry unit, which meant that it had less attraction for the Afrikaners who had proved themselves superb light cavalrymen during the South African War and the German SWA campaign. Thus only about 15% of the original brigade comprised South

Africans of Dutch extraction.

In view of the small white population it was decided that a brigade would be all that South Africa could raise. It would comprise four battalions representing the main divisions of the Union. The 1st South African Infantry Battalion was from the Cape Province, the 2nd SAI from Natal, the Border (Kaffrarian Rifles) and the Orange Free State, the 3rd SAI from the Transvaal and Rhodesia and the 4th SAI was drawn from various SA Scottish regiments in South Africa.

There were few if any brigades in the world with a better class of men. The level of education and breeding of these “colonials” was very high. Most had previous military experience in territorial, volunteer and irregular units and some had served in the regular army. The middle-class men who volunteered for service overseas were those who fought because they had much to fight for.

*

Brigadier-General H T Lukin CMG DSO, was appointed to command the brigade. Henry Timson Lukin, 55, was the Inspector-General of the Union Forces. Born in Fulham, England, in 1860, his ambition and family tradition pointed to a military career. He sailed for South Africa to serve in the Zulu War of 1879, was commissioned in Bengough’s Horse, and was seriously wounded during the Battle of Ulundi.

Lukin served with the Cape Mounted Riflemen in the Basutoland Campaign of 1881. In 1891 he married Lily Quinn while stationed with the CMR in Alice. Two years later he was sent to England to attend courses in gunnery and military signalling. On his return to South Africa in 1894 Lukin was promoted to captain. He commanded the CMR Artillery troop and was also the signalling instructor. During the Langeberg Campaign of 1896-7 he commanded the Maxim-guns and signalling staff and served as field-adjutant

of the Bechuanaland Field Force, being often mentioned in despatches.

During the South African War Lukin commanded the CMR Artillery at the Siege of Wepener, for which he was awarded the DSO. Thereafter he led a mounted column in the Cape before taking command of the 1st Colonial Division in the Cape (CMG 1902). He was granted the honorary rank of lieutenant-colonel in the Imperial Army in recognition of his service during the war.

In 1903 Lukin was promoted to colonel, commanding the CMR, a regiment which he said in later years he was extremely proud to command. In June the following year he was also promoted to the rank of commandant-general of the Cape Colonial Forces.

In May 1911 Lukin proceeded to England in command of the contingent of the Union of South Africa at the Coronation of King George V. He then travelled to Switzerland to study the Swiss Military system, before returning to South Africa in January 1912.

When the SA Defence Act of 1912 was passed Lukin was appointed Inspector-General of the Permanent Force of the Union Defence Forces, with the rank of brigadier-general.

When the First World War began he commanded the SA Mounted Riflemen Column and subsequently the SAMR Brigade in German SWA between September 1914 and July 1915. After Gen Botha’s departure Lukin took over command of the Union Forces in SWA. Despite his arduous life of campaigning he retained his inherent humanity and was a respected and much loved commander.

*

Volunteers were encouraged to join the battalion of their choice, which generally represented their province. The political situation was still unsettled following the suppression of the Rebellion by the Union Defence Force. To

send the Permanent Force to Europe would not be wise, especially as it became obvious that South Africa would have to assist in the East African Campaign. The brigade would thus consist only of volunteers and would fight in the British Army and be paid at the rate applicable to British regular soldiers.

The brigade assembled at its depot at Potchefstroom, where there were facilities for mobilisation. Major James Mitchell-Baker of the UDF General Staff was appointed as brigade-major, Captain Arthur Pepper as staff captain and Lieut-Col P G Stock as senior medical officer.

James Mitchell-Baker, 36, had left his law studies in Glasgow in 1895 to join the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and came with them as a lance-corporal to serve in the South African War. In March 1901 he joined the Scottish Horse for the duration of the war and resigned his commission in the British Army in July 1902.

In 1908 Baker resigned from the army and went to Pretoria. He represented South Africa at the Olympic Games in London that year, taking part in the marathon. He was appointed as a second-lieutenant in the Transvaal Scottish Volunteers in 1909 and was promoted to lieutenant the following year. In 1912 at the request of Gen Smuts he rejoined the Permanent Force with the rank of captain and became the first staff officer of the Union Defence Force.

Baker was promoted to major in 1914 and accompanied Gen Botha to SWA where he was acting chief staff officer to the Northern Force. He was recalled to Defence Headquarters as staff officer for general staff duties, then in August 1915 appointed brigade-major to the 1st SA Infantry Brigade.

General Lukin’s choice of the four battalion commanders was significant. In the Somme offensive one was to be killed, one badly wounded, one recommended for the Victoria Cross and the other would survive to command the brigade in its greatest defeat, when he would be taken prisoner.

*

The Cape of Good Hope Battalion's commanding officer, Lieut-Col F S Dawson had recently commanded the 4th South African Mounted Rifles. Frederick Stuart Dawson, 40, was born at Brighton, England in 1873. He was commissioned in the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers and served in India and Malaya from 1893 to 1897.

In October 1896 Dawson married Miss R Hewitt who died shortly after. He came to South Africa to serve in Robert's Horse in January 1900. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the SA Constabulary a year later and promoted to captain in July 1901 and was mentioned in despatches.

In 1908 Dawson was transferred to be Inspector of the Orange River Colony Police. In April 1910 he married Miss Eileen Braby at Bloemfontein. Three years later Dawson was promoted to lieutenant-colonel of the SA Mounted Riflemen and during the SWA Campaign he commanded the 4th SAMR. The Cape Battalion's four companies were:

A Company (*Representative of* Western Province; *Commanded by* Capt P J Jowett)

B Company (Eastern Province; Capt G J Miller)

C Company (Kimberley (Workers); Capt H H Jenkins)

D Company (Cape Town (Clerical); Major E T Burges)

*

The Natal and OFS Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel W E C Tanner, the district staff officer of Pietermaritzburg. William Ernest Collins Tanner, 40, was born at Fort Jackson, Cape, in 1875. He was educated at Hilton College, Natal, then in 1893 joined the Natal Carbineers. Four years later he represented the Carbineers in the Natal Militia Contingent at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

During the South African War he took part in the Defence of Ladysmith,

then served with the Scottish Horse in the Transvaal and on the Zululand frontier. At the conclusion of hostilities he transferred to the Natal Militia Staff.

Captain Tanner fought against the Zulus in the 1906 Bambata Rebellion. In 1909 he married Isobel Erskine at Pietermaritzburg and they had two sons, Erskine and Brian. During 1909-10 he attended the Royal Staff College at Camberley, England, and graduated psc (passed staff college). Tanner then transferred to the Union Defence Force with the rank of major.

During the SWA Campaign Tanner served with Brig-Gen D McKenzie's staff. In September 1915 he was appointed a brevet lieutenant-colonel commanding the 2nd SAI. His four companies' senior officers were:

A Company (*Commander* Captain D R Heenan; *Second-in-Command* —)

B Company (Captain J D Walsh; Capt E S Barlow)

C Company (Captain H E Clifford ; Capt W Gray)

D Company (Major H H A Gee; Capt W Hoptroff)

Major Gee served as the battalion second-in-command.

*

The battalion commander, Edward Francis Thackeray, 45, was the eldest son of Col Sir E T Thackeray VC KCB.

On 16 September 1857 his father, Sec-Lieut Edward Talbot Thackeray, 20, of the Bengal Engineers "had extinguished a fire in the Delhi Magazine enclosure under a close and heavy musketry fire from the enemy, at the imminent risk of his life from the explosion of combustible stores in the shed in which the fire occurred." His Victoria Cross award was gazetted on 29 April 1862.

In 1886, at the age of 16, Thackeray went to America where he became a cowboy and spent four years ranching. When he lost all his possessions in a disastrous fire he gave up his western lifestyle to accept a Queen's cadetship

and joined the East Surreys. This decision would turn defeat into victory at Delville Wood 26 years later.

Thackeray was commissioned in the East Surrey Regt in 1890. Two years later he enlisted as a corporal in the 11th Hussars, then was stationed in Pietermaritzburg, before being sent to India for service in the Chitral Campaign. Thackeray bought himself out in 1896 and sailed for South Africa where he served as sergeant-major in the Matabeleland Relief Force during the Matabele Rebellion.

During the South African War Thackeray served as a trooper in the Southern Rhodesian Volunteers and was present at the Relief of Mafeking. From May 1901 to July 1902 he was an officer in Kitchener's Fighting Scouts and took part in operations in the Cape, OFS and the Transvaal.

From 1902 to 1905 Thackeray served in the SA Constabulary, then was appointed as captain and adjutant of the Witwatersrand Rifles. In 1912 Thackeray joined the staff of the Union Defence Force as a captain and two years later was appointed district staff officer and promoted to major.

In SWA Major Thackeray served as chief staff officer, Eastern Force, under Brig-Gen C Berrange and staff officer to the GOC Northern Lines of communication. After the SWA Campaign he became district staff officer of Kimberley. In August 1915 Thackeray was appointed officer commanding the 3rd SAI Regiment, which consisted of the following four companies:

A Company (*Representative of* —; *Commanded by* Capt E Vivian)

B Company (Witwatersrand Rifles; Capt R F Medlicott)

C Company (Rand Light Infantry (Railway); Capt J W Jackson, Capt D R McLachlan)

D Company (—; Capt L W Tomlinson)

After Major Hemming of A Coy was wounded in Egypt, Acting-Major J W Jackson became the battalion second-in-command.

The regiment's mascot "Jackie" was a baboon which belonged to Pte Albert Marr, 26, a Pretoria plumber. When he was mobilised Pte Marr was allowed to keep his pet, which later accompanied the battalion to France.

*

The South African Scottish Regiment was commanded by Lieut-Col Frank Aubrey (Fatty) Jones DSO, 42, the district staff officer of Johannesburg. He was born at Bristol, England, and was to serve with the Welsh Regiment in the South African War, where as a lieutenant he was awarded the DSO. In German SWA he had been brigade-major to the 1st Infantry Brigade. His men loved him for his humour as well as his coolness and gallantry.

The battalion's mascot was a springbok named "Nancy". It had been presented to the regiment in August 1915 by Mr D McLaren Kennedy of Vierfontein, OFS. The regiment wore the tartan of the Atholl Murrays, as it descended from the 77th (Atholl) Highlanders through the Scottish Horse and the Transvaal Scottish regiments.

The South African Scottish Regiment was affectionately known in the brigade as "Our Jocks". Some of the Afrikaners who joined were called "real Scotsmen" because they could not speak English. Later some Gaelic-speaking Scotsmen of the 9th Division thought that the Afrikaans they spoke was a form of Gaelic.

The second-in-command was Major Donald MacLeod who took charge of A and D Coys. Major Donald Hunt commanded B and C Coys, which were originally the 1st and 2nd Transvaal Scottish battalions. The various companies of the SA Scottish were:

A Company (*Representative of* Cape Province partly from Cape Town Highlanders; *Commanded by* Capt S C Russell)

B Company (Largely from 1st Transvaal Scottish; Capt T H Ross)

C Company (Largely from 2nd Transvaal Scottish; Capt G E W Marshall)

D Company (Natal and Caledonian Societies throughout the Union; Capt E G Clerk)

*

In many cases the camaraderie among the South Africans arose from their having served together in SWA. In addition some had attended the same school. Many of the 3rd SAI men were old Johannians from St John's College, Johannesburg.

Probably the most loved man in the brigade was Father Eustace Hill, 43, who had left his teaching post at St John's to serve with his "boys", first in SWA then in France. As the son of Major-General J T Hill and the grandson of a Peninsula and Waterloo veteran he was no stranger to the army. At the age of 22 he came from a curacy at Wrexham to become chaplain to the Grahamstown Sisters (St Peters House) in 1895.

Hill served as army chaplain during the South African War and became notorious for his unconventional behaviour. One of the rules he flouted was one which compelled volunteer chaplains to purchase their own uniforms. Hill resented this and refused to do so. When he was discovered in civilian clothes among the troops, he was dramatically arrested as a spy. When matters were eventually settled Padre Hill had a uniform, though one suspects not at his expense. He was later commended for his bravery in action.

Hill became associated with St John's College in 1906 and during the next eight years grew to know intimately the boys he would serve with. In August 1914 he was attached to the Rand Light Infantry and Wits Rifles for service in the SWA Campaign.

In October 1914 Hill wrote to Rev Nash, a colleague at the school, about a discussion he had with 16 old boys "… I told them I hoped none had any white handkerchiefs. I loathe war, but if it is on I don't want its redeeming feature of self-sacrifice to be robbed by any unnecessary surrenders. One man

should never surrender even to 2,000, if he can knock one out before he dies. Our time is coming. When we've finished this (SWA operations), a reward has been suggested, viz going as one force to Europe. They won't find these fellows lack pluck, even if they've not the parade snap."

On joining the brigade Padre Hill was attached to the 1st SAI, as the Rev George Cook of King William's Town was the 3rd Regiment's padre.

Two school friends who were reunited at Potchefstroom were Dudley Beresford Fynn, 20, and Dudley Meredith, 19. Fynn had served in the Transvaal Scottish Rhodesia contingent in SWA. Meredith was nicknamed Moses for his religious convictions. On Fynn's recommendations Meredith joined the 3rd SAI, where he found himself with many more old Johannians in C Company.

*

Dudley Meredith found his new life to be strange, yet exciting.

"The transformation of the motley crowd of civilians into soldiers now began to move apace: uniforms and rifles were issued, and exercises and drill assisted in the organisation of what was without doubt a fine body of men. All types were represented; miners, farmers, tradesmen, old soldiers who had seen service in the South African War, men who had endured the campaign in South West Africa, and raw recruits such as ourselves.

"At first the rough life was strange and we did not take kindly to army cooking, to sleeping on the floors without mattresses, and to the mixing with men from all strata of society, but the very evident spirit of comradeship and good humour and the prospect of an almost immediate trip to England, followed by a period of training there, soon resulted in our feeling at ease and very much interested in our new life.

"It soon became apparent that we should be leaving almost immediately for England, so Mother, Dad and Edith came down from Johannesburg by taxi to

say goodbye.

"The leave taking came all too soon, and we all felt very sad when the time came to part. As I turned away there were tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat, while the feeling lingered that enlisting for active service was a bitter trial for parents.

"There was not much time for reflection, however, for rumour turned out to be truth, and after an inspection by Gen Smuts, A and C companies left for the Cape. Exactly one week after joining the brigade, we left for Cape Town, arriving at the dockside in the late afternoon of the Friday. The mountains were clothed in mist as we left, but the delicious freshness of the green grass and cool atmosphere, were most refreshing after the journey through the Karroo, and it was with light hearts that we filed on board the *Dunvegan Castle*."

*

The brigade arrived in England early in November 1915. The infantry consisted of 160 officers and 5,648 other ranks. They were initially quartered at Halton Camp in Buckinghamshire, then moved to Bordon in Hampshire where for two months they were busy with training and inspections! Notable events there were:

3 November — The brigade was reviewed by Gen Sir Archibald Hunter

9 November — A detachment was sent to the Lord Mayor's show

19 November — The 4th Bn was visited by the Duke of Atholl and Gen Hunter

21 November — Senior officers went to France for three days' duty

2 December — The brigade was reviewed by HM the Queen.

A certain amount of sorting out was also done. Many volunteers had changed their ages and names. Among them was Hugh Boustead, 20, who had deserted from the Royal Navy at Cape Town. Midshipman Boustead

joined C Coy, the Transvaal Company, of the 4th SAI as Private “McLaren”.

The first Sunday afternoon Sgt James Ainslie, a grizzled ex-sergeant of the Seaforths and a South African War veteran, called Boustead. “Private McLaren, you’re wanted in the orderly room — there’s been folk to see you. Aye, a man and a woman and they’re in black.” Boustead realised that they must be his parents.

Capt Claude Browne, the adjutant, sat at his desk and stared stonily at Boustead, “Private McLaren, what is your real name?” Boustead dropped all subterfuge and answered, “Boustead!” Browne then told him that his parents were there and that Col Jones was sympathetic. Boustead was reunited with his parents after an absence of two-and-a-half years.

The admiralty had a shrewd idea that Boustead had joined the South African Brigade. The Transvaal Scottish appeared most likely, so his father had gone through the nominal role of C Company. The home address, Annathwaite Hall in Cumberland, had been his father’s and a certain McLaren had been a gamekeeper on the Estate.

His parents were aghast at the thought of him serving on the Western Front, however, they eventually agreed to it. Boustead’s mother’s cousin was secretary of the Imperial Defence Committee of the War Cabinet. He approached their Lordships, who were prepared to be lenient in view of Boustead’s age. Col Jones was inscrutable when he asked Boustead under what name he wished to re-enlist. “Private John Edmund Hugh Boustead, Sir!” Jones laughed and told the adjutant to put it in orders.

Another recruit with a false name was the runaway apprentice, L/Cpl Richard Unwin, 20, who was in fact Richard Postlethwaite, whose father had died in 1899. On the outbreak of the war he was told by the recruiting sergeant to continue with his electrical apprenticeship. Postlethwaite then used his stepfathers’ surname, Unwin, and was accepted into the

Witwatersrand Rifles.

After the SWA Campaign “Dick Unwin” re-enlisted in the 3rd SAI and was placed in Captain Medlicott’s B Company. He recalled that at the medical inspection Brig Lukin had turned men away who wore campaign ribbons, as he wanted young men.

As 18 years was the minimum age, Victor Casson, 17, of the 1st Battalion C Coy gave his age as 18 and his name as Victor Clark! Henry Jones of the 3rd Battalion D Coy was in fact William Henry Shapcott.

An Afrikaner enlisted in the 3rd SAI, D Coy, as Private Breytenbach. As he had fought against the British 14 years earlier his family and friends may have been appalled at his now fighting alongside them. Another recruit with a false name was J Sprenger Harrison of the 4th SAI. The Transvaal Scottish Regimental Museum has his medals named to Sgt J Beaumont. The number of false names used reminds one of the French Foreign Legion!

*

Private Edward Henry Fitz, 18, a learner electrician from East London drifted into the signalling section because of his experience with telephones and telegraphs. His father, Capt Edward Fitz, was an American sailing skipper from Portland, Maine. He became ill while off-loading cargo at the Kowie River mouth and was taken to hospital at Grahamstown. Meanwhile, his ship sailed before he recovered. Captain Fitz married Bessie Moore, an English immigrant, in 1896, and worked at Kowie River and the Buffalo River harbour (East London).

Eddie Fitz joined the Kaffrarian Rifles for service in SWA, however, took no active part other than for being at Luderitzbucht. On formation of the brigade, he and other men from the border were drafted into the 2nd SAI.

Fitz had visited England in 1909 and 1912 where he fell in love with his cousin, Edeline (Bessie) Moore, of Southampton. A return visit, albeit with

the army, was welcomed. He was impressed by the British hospitality, especially after one of his friends met a young lady and her friend in London, then accompanied them home and spent the night being entertained in bed by both ladies.

Eddie Fitz was philosophical about being sent to Egypt. “At Bordon the winter was cold and wet and in no time everyone was sick with bronchitis. The government very wisely sent us to Egypt.”

*

Dudley Meredith wrote that he and Dudley Fynn had volunteered for the “Grenadiers” (bomb-throwing section). “We didn’t know till after we joined that it is known as the Suicide Club. Still, it is very interesting work as there are about a dozen different kinds of bombs. The action in throwing them is the same as that of bowling in cricket, but I never pretended to be an extra good bowler! It’s nice to meet old St John’s boys among the companies. At present I know Allan Weir, Everett Murray, James Oddy and Egerton Bissett. Of course, Father Hill is with us, and has started work in his systematic way. We are very glad to have him with us.”

At the same time Egerton Bissett wrote describing the inspection by Queen Mary on 2 December: “General Lukin read out a message from the King, short and sweet, wishing us ‘Good-bye and Good Luck’, which makes us think we shall soon be leaving here. Rumour has it we are going to Egypt: the 2nd Regiment, the Natal boys, have had helmets issued to them, which seems to point to a hot climate … Father Hill is still knocking around, doing good. He is a fine chap. The other day I was not feeling well, so I went to the quiet room at the Soldiers’ Home. He turned up and gave me a glass of milk and a bun. It was jolly decent of him.”

*

The South African Brigade was attached to the 16th (Irish) Division for

service in France. On 7 December 1915, plans were altered as it became necessary to employ them in Egypt — work for which they seemed specially fitted in view of their experience in German SWA. The four battalions embarked from Devonport on 30 December.

The situation in Egypt was that the Turks threatened the Suez Canal in the East and the Senussi Tribes had been stirred up in the West. Under Gaafer Pasha they intended to overrun Egypt.

The British posts were drawn in to Mersa Matruh. Major-General Wallace, commander of the Western Egyptian Force, suffered severe losses in dispersing 1,200 Senussi near Beit Hussein. At the end of December he dispersed 5,000 Senussi under Gaafer Pasha himself, but early in January they reappeared near Mersa Matruh.

The South African Brigade disembarked at Alexandria early in January 1916.

*

Dudley Meredith recalled that while at Mex Camp, Alexandria, the beer canteen was a large marquee. One of the barrels bulged out of the rear canvas. A pioneer sergeant appeared with a brace and bit. Word spread like lightning and in no time the barrel had been emptied into all types of containers. When the theft was discovered the cost of the beer was deducted from the pay of all in the company.

*

While stationed at Mex Camp, the springbok mascot, “Nancy”, parted her rope leash and went AWOL. Bugler Alfred Edmund Peterson of D Coy, her official keeper, scoured the lines of the surrounding camps. The homes of Egyptians living nearby were also searched, but to no avail!

In desperation skirling pipers were sent out in different directions into the desert in the hope that the wailing bagpipes would succeed in attracting

Nancy. It worked like magic for Nancy reappeared and walked nonchalantly into camp. Jock Greggor, a drummer in the pipe band, clearly recalled the pandemonium when Nancy was officially AWOL.

*

The 2nd SAI were sent to Gen Wallace's aid. They took part in his attack on 23 January on the Senussi camp at Halazin. The 15th Sikhs led the attack with the 2nd SAI in support. Fighting took place in swampy open ground with little cover against artillery and machine-gun fire. Despite heavy losses the attack succeeded and the Senussi fled. The South African casualties were severe, so no pursuit was undertaken.

After this action, Gen Wallace, whose health gave way, was replaced by Major-Gen W E Peyton. The South Africans and the Royal Scots were the only infantry units left in the force.

*

Captain J D Walsh was killed during the action. He was succeeded as company commander by Capt Ernest Barlow, 38. Capt H C Creed became the second-in-command.

Ernest (Billy) Barlow was born at Bury, England in 1877, the youngest son in an old Lancashire family of woollen manufacturers.

Barlow was educated at Roxall School, near Blackpool, and matriculated at University College, Oxford. He was admitted to University College to take a degree, however the opportunity of participating in the South African War proved to be more attractive.

He came to Natal in 1899 with the Lancashire Fusiliers, under the command of Col Charles Blomfield, after whom he later named his elder son "Charles". Barlow was an excellent golfer and, while serving as Blomfield's aide-de-camp at Dundee, established the Dundee Golf Club.

Barlow was also an excellent pianist. The nickname of "Billy" was

bestowed on him, reputedly, after a well-known stage personality of the time whose sobriquet was “Billy Barlow”. At this time, he met his future wife, Anne Montgomery, an Irish nurse, whom he married in October 1902 in England.

After the war Barlow resigned his commission as he had decided to establish his own firm in Durban. He had no previous business experience, however with faith in the future of the country and the determination to succeed he founded Thomas Barlow & Sons in 1902.

Barlow was a popular man whose sense of humour and sportsmanship won him many friends. He was a first-rate golfer and became the Natal champion in 1906. In 1912 Barlow recruited the services of a capable man, Frank Euting. His staff now consisted of Euting as manager, a small office staff, and two engineers. On the formation of the brigade Barlow felt the call of duty strongly. He left Euting to run the business and enlisted as a captain in the 2nd SAI.

*

Agagia 26.2.1916

In February 1916 the Senussi forces were concentrated at the ports of Barrani and Sollum. As the harbours were mined, Gen Lukin decided on an overland advance along the coast. The scorching sun and wind and lack of water would make it an extremely arduous march. The only respite would be occasional sea bathing.

On 22 February Gen Lukin left the advanced depot with his column, which comprised the Notts Battery RHA, 1st SAI, 3rd SAI, l/6th Royal Scots, Dorset Yeomanry and one squadron of the Royal Bucks Hussars. Late on the afternoon of the 25th they were shelled by the enemy.

They attacked at Agagia at 11 am the following day when Lieut-Col Thackeray advanced with the 3rd SAI, flanked by the yeomanry and

armoured cars. The enemy attacked his left flank only to be beaten back by a company of the 1st SAI who had been sent there from the reserve. They were followed through the broken enemy line by the 3rd SAI.

The cavalry of the Dorsets then charged at 3 pm, which completely broke and dispersed the enemy. Among the many prisoners taken was the Senussi commander, Gaafer Pasha, and his staff. General Lukin's textbook victory was due to his brilliant co-ordination of infantry and cavalry. Barrani and Sollum were then occupied without further resistance.

*

Private Henry Sherman, 19, of Walmer, Port Elizabeth was guarding ammunition stores when the shelling began and later wrote to his father of their first action.

"… The only man in our platoon to get hit was an old Walmer postman, in fact he used to live at 9th Avenue for a while. He was with our General Staff, and a stray bullet got him in the stomach. He has gone to hospital marked 'Severe Case'.

"One of the 3rds who was wounded in the lungs, was gasping for breath when I came across him. I could see he was far gone, I gave him my water and called for an ambulance cart. I came across several men dead and wounded on both sides, but it is not much of a subject to write on.

"The general was well pleased with our work and thanked us all. Compliments came in from all over the country. I was surprised to see how calmly and fearlessly our boys went into the fire. We just duck our heads when we hear the bullets and shells whizz by.

"The fight lasted all day and we covered about 10 to 12 miles of their country. The next day search parties were out to bring in the fallen and clear up the field."

*

Private Coenraad Nelson, 20, from Cape Town had served with the Cape Peninsula Rifles before volunteering for the brigade. After the battle at Agagia, he had been sickened by what Arabs had done to the dead.

"The next morning we brought them in. All killed and everything taken off them, identification, the lot. It was a bit too much for me and after a while I walked away. Then we marched on to a hill which we called 'Thurst Hill' because there was no water."

*

Private Albert Marr was shot in the right shoulder. His pet baboon, Jackie, was an inseparable friend, and was beside himself with grief. In his agitation he attempted to do what he could to comfort the prostrate Marr and licked his wound until the stretcher-bearers arrived.

At first Jackie's presence in the regiment had been ignored, but he was so well-behaved and had such an impressive bearing that he was officially adopted as the 3rd SAI mascot. He was taken on the strength of the regiment and when in England was provided with a special uniform and cap, complete with buttons and regimental badges. He became a comrade, rather than a pet, of all ranks. Jackie drew rations like any other soldier and drilled and marched with them.

Eustace Hill was in the middle of this battle and some days later wrote:

"I have a fig-tree, under the branches of which Fynn and Moses built a stone altar. I have daily Eucharist there at 7 am, but I don't find the atmosphere of war easy of course … I was a bit surprised at a quartermaster saying: 'My conviction is that the battlefield is no place for a clergyman, as he lessens the killing spirit.' — I have always felt that the Church has been, if anything, too generous in support of war, and wondered if we had been fair ourselves; and to have him criticising aroused me. I told him duty was the driving power in a fight, and not blood-lust, and duty we inculcated

continually.”

*

Dudley Fynn was wounded in the engagement. “Our regiment came into the thick of it. I got a bullet through the left hand, and another just under the skin of the leg — not very serious. I soon had the field-dressing out and a bandage on and was able to advance again. The enemy gave us a very hot time of it and it was wonderful that so many of us came out alive. My brother didn’t get a scratch. Moses (Meredith), Bissett and Weir were all in it and didn’t get a scratch either.”

The campaign ended when the Duke of Westminster pursued the enemy with ten armoured cars and rescued the prisoners whom the Senussi had at their camp deep in the interior.

The South African Brigade was then transferred to France.

Chapter 2 — Flanders and the Somme

The four transports carrying the brigade docked at Marseilles on 19 April 1916. Owing to a case of contagious sickness on board one of the troopships, HMT *Oriana*, the 4th SAI and 20 officers and 594 men of the 1st SAI were placed in quarantine and moved to a camp La Valentine, a farm outside Marseilles. The remainder of the brigade entrained for Flanders.

*

Arthur Betteridge, 19, was born at Birmingham, England. He was a railway telegraphist at Bloemhof when the war began and was eventually compelled to resign his position as the railway authorities would not release him for active service. He was to join C Company of the 4th SAI. Betteridge recalled the trip and reception at Marseilles.

"On board we were innoculated for every conceivable disease. Physical jerks and routine "look-out" duties for spotting enemy submarines passed the time away. We signallers occupied some of the time giving morse practice to the less experienced chaps.

"There was one regrettable incident, when one of our fellows jumped over the side because he was afraid of reporting he had VD which would be reported to his wife if he went to hospital.

"In spite of all the injections and other medical precautions, two days before arriving at Marseilles we had a case of spotted fever (spinal meningitis). As a result, the whole regiment was placed in quarantine when we landed. The improvised quarantine camp was two miles outside Marseilles.

"As we marched out of the docks and through the streets of this lovely

French seaport, women and children threw flowers and cheered the first kilted allied troops they had seen. The two weeks quarantine was a dreary business because we were forbidden to leave camp, and no one was allowed to visit us.

"Nevertheless a few of us managed to see the city the day before we left for the front. Numerous French people approached us offering coffee or beer, but there was a language difficulty we could not surmount at that time.

"At last we left that quarantine camp and marched to the station where we were packed into trucks stencilled '12 cheveaux — 40 hommes'. It was certain the most recent occupants of those trucks had been horses."

*

The population of Marseilles took the South Africans to their hearts. "Nancy" was led by Bugler Petersen at the head of the pipe band through the main street of Marseilles, much to the astonishment of the locals. Not only had they never seen a springbok, but it was also the first occasion that a "Highland" regiment had been quartered in the town.

George Warwick wrote that Nancy was a little wild when first presented to the regiment at Potchefstroom "… but by the time we had soldiered in Egypt she was quite tame. She would eat chocolate or porridge or tobacco. Nancy, led by Bugler Petersen, marched proudly at the head of the battalion as if she owned the regiment. She was greatly admired by the French people who spoke of her as 'votre si jolie gazelle'."

The quarantine regulations were not rigidly applied, and many of the wilder spirits enjoyed the delights of the seaport. When they marched to the railway station the crowds pressed sweets, flowers and chocolates on the troops and forced them to break column and march in single file. At the station they found champagne provided on long tables to sustain them on their journey.

*

The Brigade HQ was established at Bailleul, where it was attached to the 9th Scottish Division, to replace the 28th Brigade which had suffered severe losses. The divisional commander, Maj-Gen W T Furse was the brother of the Bishop of Pretoria.

A Scottish battalion commander, Lieut-Col W D Croft, summed up the initial feeling of resentment of those in the 9th Division. “Just before we left Plug Street the South African Brigade came to us; this caused the abolition of the 28th Brigade for three years. They were a fine lot, the South Africans, and any division in the army would have been proud to have them.

“But we were not particularly happy about the arrangement for, you see, we had been blooded at Loos together, and we all felt that it was a bit hard on a brigade which had died well to be cast aside like an old rag, however good the displacers might be.

“The original South Africans were mostly old soldiers with a fair sprinkling of Boers who had fought against us in the South African War. By gum! they were magnificent men and officers. There were not a few district commissioners serving in the ranks. Unfortunately, too many of them joined that far greater majority at Delville Wood.”

The 9th Division was composed of three infantry brigades, each of four battalions, and a pioneer battalion, altogether some 19,000 men.

26th Brigade Brig-Gen A B Ritchie

8th Black Watch Lieut-Col G W Gordon

7th Seaforth Highlanders Lieut-Col J Kennedy

5th Cameron Highlanders Lieut-Col G B Duff

10th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders Lieut-Col W J Tweedie

27th Brigade Brig-Gen S W Scrase-Dickens

11th Royal Scots Lieut-Col W D Croft

12th Royal Scots Lieut-Col H L Budge

9th Scottish Rifles Lieut-Col H A Fulton

6th Kings Own Scottish Borderers Lieut-Col J C Connell

1st South African Brigade Brig-Gen H T Lukin

1st Battalion Lieut-Col F S Dawson

2nd Battalion Lieut-Col W E Tanner

3rd Battalion Lieut-Col E F Thackeray

4th Battalion Lieut-Col F A Jones

Pioneer Battalion

9th Seaforth Highlanders Lieut-Col T Featherstonhaugh

Each infantry battalion consisted of some 36 officers and 1,000 men, organised into a headquarters staff and four rifle companies, each of approximately 240 men. The fighting strength would be less as personnel had to be detached to act as signallers, stretcher-bearers, cooks, clerks and sanitary and transport men.

Of the four platoons per company, one would act as a “carrying platoon” to bring up supplies of ammunition, rations and water. Each platoon consisted of four rifle sections of 10 men each, of whom three would be grenadiers each carrying 15 to 20 Mills bombs. The riflemen carried a .303 Lee Enfield rifle, sword bayonet and 170 rounds of ammunition. His kit altogether weighed 58 lbs

*

The infantry were armed with the trusty Lee-Metford rifle (.303), Mills bombs (hand grenades) and 17 inch (43 cm) Mark I bayonets. Each company had American Lewis guns (.303) the forerunner of the bren-gun. The Lewis gun could be carried and fired standing when supported. It has a round overhead drum magazine containing 47 or 97 rounds and a rate of fire of 450 rounds per minute. As it had no cooling apparatus it tended to overheat and jam if overused.

The heavier fixed water-cooled Vickers machine-guns were used by the Brigade machine-gun company. The South Africans inherited the 28th Machine-gun Coy from the 28th Brigade. Officers were armed with .455 revolvers.

Artillery support included 18 pounders, 9.2 howitzers and the light support trench mortars — the 3 inch stokes mortar was the darling of the men who served it. It had an enormous rate of fire and with a good team could have ten bombs in the air at the same time. The light trench mortar batteries were placed under brigade command for tactical reasons.

The "secret weapon" South Africans had was their incredible marksmanship. A British artillery officer, Lieut R Talbot Kelly, noted this when on an officers' course "… compared with the officers from the South African Brigade I did not impress at all. Daily their performance with a rifle amazed and staggered me, any of them being able to fire fifteen rounds in about 40 seconds, without ever taking his eye from his sights or allowing the stock to shift a fraction of an inch from his shoulder. And every one of those rounds would be a bull either at a stationary or a moving target."

The German high explosive shells were given appropriate nicknames — the sound of the whizzbang (77 mm) came with the shell, giving no warning. The Jack Johnson or Coalbox (5.9 Howitzer — 150 mm) gave off dirty black clouds of smoke. These shells bursting in soft ground would scoop a hole the size of a room. "Lachrymatory" (tear-gas) shells were fired and chlorine and mustard gas also used.

The German troops used water-cooled Maxim Model 1908 machine-guns, stick grenades, the 7 mm mauser and gewehr 98 rifle with five-round magazines (7.92 mm) with mauser action, 9 mm Luger parabellums, 52 cm or 37 cm bayonets and the new flammenwerfers (flame throwers).

Certainly the greatest advantage the Germans possessed on the Somme was

their prepared defences. In the nearly two years that they had occupied the area they had excavated dug-outs, some nearly forty feet deep. Churchill was to describe the Somme as “undoubtedly the strongest and most perfectly defended position in the world”.

*

This unit was also known as the SA Sharpshooters and served with the South African forces in France. The sharpshooters were posted to D Company of the reserve battalions at Bordon.

Sir Abe Bailey KCMG, 52, served as Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General and played an active part in recruiting, later being awarded the Croix-de-Guerre by France.

The sharpshooters did not take part in the Egyptian Campaign. They were recruited in South Africa and sailed on the RMS *Saxon*, arriving at Bordon in May 1916. Most of the men were allowed a week’s leave then immediately left for France where they disembarked on 30 May.

*

Private Cecil Rice, 19, from Klerksdorp was a signaller in the front lines near Armentieres.

“Whilst there I just about received a German shell to myself. I was on water fatigue for the signalling unit of HQ staff at the time. I took two petrol cans to get water and while walking along the trench I heard the shell coming. I had one of the other signallers with me and he was carrying a water bottle. I shouted ‘drop!’ I leaped into the bottom of the trench and got down between the water cans.

“This shell landed on top of the bank right in front of this trench and I was covered in mud and dirt. I couldn’t see my half-section. When I continued on to get the water he came running round the corner of the trench carrying his water bottle which was as flat as a pancake.”

*

Private Eddie Fitz found that the Germans were often too close for comfort.

"We were initiated into trench warfare by one of the Scottish battalions. They went in with us and used to show us the way around. We went in for a week, and out for a week at a time. We were so close to Jerry, about 35 yards in places, that their artillery couldn't do much about our front line. There was a gap of only 15 or 20 yards between our wire and their wire, so we could not even patrol. The situation was so tight that if you raised your head in the same place twice, you got a bullet through the middle of it.

"Then we had work parties, carrying iron and timber. One night we had to advance a trench which was too far from Jerry for take-off. It was 300 to 400 yards from Jerry and they wanted to get closer to him. They marked out a whole lot of lines and we went down with wooden spades to avoid making any noise. No lights, no smoking, no talking — just dig! We got to within about 150 yards of the Jerries, then dug a new front line. That was one sort of job we did."

*

Private Howard Douglas (Duggie) Brice-Bruce, 20, came from a farm in the Ixopo district and had served in SWA with the Natal Mounted Rifles. He found it ironic to be fighting in a Scottish division in France, as his great-grandfather, Col Robert Brice-Bruce of the 1st Royal Scots, had married the only daughter of a French general who was stationed in India.

"On 1.5.1916, we route-marched to link up with the 9th Highland Division commanded by Maj-Gen Furse. We were very proud of being associated with such a fine body of men. On approaching our destination, Plug Street, we were met by the 9th Division pipe band. What a difference it made marching to the pipe band, there is something about the pipes that gives one a boost.

"We were sent to learn trench warfare with the London Scottish, under the

command of a noted personality Col Winston Churchill. He was the colonel of the London Scottish.

“We found trench warfare quite different to the open warfare we had been used to. We were given part of the trench to man. During the daytime you had to keep your head low, only observing through a periscope. I have heard of men being killed by a sniper when looking through a periscope.

“During the evening we went out to repair wire entanglements. We were given strict instructions that when the Very lights went up, to keep still and look on the ground. It was a ghostly feeling out there at night. We had to keep a strict guard for enemy night patrols.

“Once we were standing on the step when suddenly an enemy machine-gun opened up and we all ducked. At that precise moment Col Churchill arrived on the scene and picked the closest chap, who happened to be the wrong one. Churchill proceeded to show us by climbing on top of the trench that there was nothing to be afraid of.

“Sergeant O’Mally, an old Boer War warrior, said, ‘Sir, this man was wounded in Egypt, a head wound.’ Churchill looked at him, turned and walked away. Long after, I was wondering what would have happened if he had been there when the bullets were passing. The ‘Battle of Britain’, would have had to be re-written.

“Rats — we had a novel way of killing them, the trench rats were the biggest I had ever seen, they used to pester us at night, so we used to get a lump of cheese and stick it on the end of a bayonet, lay the rifle on top of the trench, keeping very still. When the rat started to nibble, we pulled the trigger, with wonderful results.

“Latrines — we had a problem here, every time we wanted to use them, you had to lay down on your tummy and crawl until you arrived round the corner, the reason being that the enemy sniper had the entrance marked and woe to

the person who walked upright.

"Rum ration — the duty officer would march in front, with the corporal walking behind carrying a demijohn of rum. Each man was given a tablespoon of neat rum. Every now and again the corporal would take a mouthful without the officer seeing him, the final result was that by the time the duty was performed, they had a very happy corporal, without a care in the world."

*

Henry (Harry) Cooper, 18, had joined up as a drummer and bugler two years before. A professional blacksmith from Turffontein, Johannesburg, the 5 ft 4 ins bugler had served with the RLI for six months in the Active Citizen Force and for eight months in SWA. Cooper felt that the tough Scots were wary of them.

"We met the chaps at Ploegstreet (Plug Street) and Armentieres during our probation in trench warfare — after our efforts with the Senussi in Egypt. They did not appear to receive us with open arms; possibly they knew we were untried and were a little anxious about whether we would act when it came to a big job.

"Our first experience of heavy shell put the wind up us but we tried our best not to show the case-hardened 9th Div what we felt. After a while the 'heavy stuff' made us feel that we were able to take it and we learned when to duck."

*

Meredith's first day in the trenches was unforgettable. "We were drafted in small parties to the front line, where the men of the various Scottish regiments of the 9th Division, to which we had been attached, proceeded to teach us the art of trench warfare.

"It was with some trepidation that I started off with a batch of my comrades one morning when our turn came. In our billets we somehow seemed

removed from the war except for the anti-aircraft attacks against German planes high up over our lines. A trail of white smoke puffs right across the sky would often show us the path of the enemy aviator, usually so high he could just be seen.

“Our trip to the front line passed off without incident until about half way down the communication trench, when several shells passed screaming just over our heads. Our reaction was natural and practically all of us bumped our knees on the duckboards — I know I did.

“Later we came to know these whizzbangs better and gradually we accustomed ourselves to them and other missiles of modern war. The front lines in our particular section were about 600 yards apart, so things were fairly quiet except at night when we blazed away more or less continuously at the rifle flashes on the enemy side.

“During the day the time passed fairly quickly with patrol work or trench duty with now and then sandbag filling or a rest in a dug-out. At periods during the day and to some extent at night, we would hear the distinctive whistling sound of heavy shells passing over and would listen for the explosions in the billets.

“During our stay in Steenwerck before we went into the trenches there occurred an incident which showed not only the youthfulness of myself and some of my comrades, but also the interest taken in his men by Brig-Gen Lukin.

“One afternoon I was walking along a road with Marsh from the signallers and another comrade whose name I now forget, when we met Gen Lukin and as we passed, of course we saluted. He halted us and came over and addressed us as follows:

‘Have you young fellows just come over from England?’

‘No, Sir, we were with the brigade in Egypt.’

‘Were you at Agagia with the Third?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Well, you’re looking jolly young on it still.’

“We went our different ways and about a week later Marsh was killed when a shell crashed right into the dug-out in which he was resting.”

*

Private Arthur Betteridge recalled the train journey to Flanders.

“After a day and night in that confined truck we were thrilled to see the Eiffel Tower two miles away as our train bypassed Paris. That night we reached Armentieres in Belgium, made famous in the song *Mamselle* of that town. We detrained at nightfall, having heard the rumble of guns five miles away.

“With rifle, ammunition, full packs and overcoat, total weight about 80 lbs, we marched in the dark along cobble-stoned main roads and many gravel-sunken roads, passing through villages until we reached the town of Le Bizet. The other three regiments of the brigade had been there while we were at Marseilles and had prepared billets for us in a number of shell-damaged two-storey houses.

“Le Bizet was only three miles from the front line trenches, not far from Plug Street trenches where Col Winston Churchill had recently commanded one of the famous Guards regiments, after he fell from favour as First Lord of the Admiralty when the attack on Gallipoli failed.

“We reached our billets exhausted after the long march; lay down on our kilts, boots for a pillow and overcoats to cover us, too tired to eat the hot meal that had been prepared for us. We were annoyed the next morning to find Le Bizet was only seven miles from Armentieres. In the total blackout our guides had marched us more than twice that distance.

“Soon afterwards our officers took a special course in map reading. In spite

of this we continued to get lost when marching in darkness with few road signs to help. There was practically no road motor transport for the infantry in those days and a serious shortage of small-scale maps of the terrain added to the problem. Some months later better and more correct maps became available.

“Probably the worst chore was carrying 100 lb mortar bombs commonly called ‘pigs’. These three-foot long instruments of death were carried on the shoulders of two men who staggered along the communication trench kicking each other’s heels, cursing the broken duckboards, the bursting of nasty whizzbangs and above all the trench mortar gunners who would later on fire the beastly bombs and immediately retreat to the rear, leaving the infantry to cope with the inevitable enemy reprisal, by the way of minenwerfers, the enemy’s mortars.

“These large bombs were more disliked than shells. It was possible to watch their trajectory immediately they were fired and no matter where they fell they seemed to be coming directly at the man watching them. Furthermore, they created deep holes and if they fell directly in the trench or very close to it, they caused a lot of damage and frequently, casualties. It will be realized that the trench-mortar gunners were not exactly popular with the infantrymen.

“The billets at Le Bizet were in two- and three-storey houses, many of them badly damaged by shell fire. Most of the houses were in long rows attached to each other. The morning after our unnecessarily long march from Armentieres, the German artillery rudely woke us up by sending several salvos of shells.

“The quartermaster’s store in the house next to ours received a direct hit, killing a sergeant and two privates. Several others were wounded. This was a shock because we had been told our sector was one of the quietest at that

time.

“In spite of the close proximity to the firing line, some civilians were still in occupation of their homes or small estaminets. Most of the civilians had been forced to leave all their possessions and it was pathetic to see damaged beds, pictures and a piano in one case hanging from the shell-blasted houses.

“The Scottish relieved the 2nd Regiment in the front line trenches where one German saphead filled with machine-gunners was only sixty yards from our line. That first morning in the line a notice appeared above the German saphead, chalked on a board, “Welkom Afrikan Skotch”, proof of the efficiency of German intelligence. We learned later there were several German spies in the area behind our lines.

“Two mornings later, just after stand-down from the usual dawn stand-to, I was on duty as signaller in the company dug-out, 25 yards behind the front line. We were keeping in contact on our instrument with battalion headquarters in the rear trenches. The Germans unexpectedly opened up an unusually heavy strafe on our front and rear support-line trenches.

“Unfortunately, one of C Company platoons was relieving another in the front line trench. Three men were killed and only two wounded. One of those killed was Cecil Paterson, an 18-year-old friend of mine who had joined the regiment with me at Potchefstroom. I had to write to his mother and sisters in Kimberley.

“It was a sorry business because of our inexperience in trench warfare. Only two men at a time should have been sent to take over two others’ duties and not gathered in numbers as they did. We were learning the hard way. Cecil and the others were buried in the beautiful French cemetery outside Le Bizet.

“The same evening I was again on “buzzer” duty when a staff officer from a Guards regiment, with red capband and tabs, asked the signals corporal in

the dug-out, in a rather affected tone of voice, where the company headquarters of the 2nd Regiment was situated. They were out of the line and we told the officer who proceeded along the communication trench.

"Some hours later frantic enquiries came from our headquarters, asking about the appearance of this officer. It appeared he was a German intelligence officer who had audaciously entered the lines on more than one occasion, checking the movement of British troops. He was not caught, but we all admired the courage of that German. Few of us would have liked to take the chances he took, in the interest of his country."

*

On Wednesday, 31 May, the brigade left Le Bizet and began their long march to the Somme, a distance of about 50 miles. They arrived at Enguingatte on Sunday, 4 June, where they would do most of their training for the coming "Big Push".

*

During the march Pte Eddie Fitz was working while his friends rested.

"From Armentieres we marched down to the Somme. Whenever we stopped we ran the telephones around to the company headquarters, so that the officers could talk and make arrangements for movements the next day. We had expert South African telegraphists, chaps who could do 30 odd words a minute on a key — far better than most of the British army. As an electrician I drifted into the job of linesman, responsible for laying and maintaining telephone lines."

*

The most highly decorated officer in the brigade was Lieut Alexander "Sandy" Young VC, 43, who was born at Balinona, Ireland, in 1873. He was an outstanding horseman and served with the Queen's Bays from 1890. He became a riding instructor in India, then served in the 2nd Dragoon Guards in

Egypt and the Sudan as a sergeant-major.

In 1897 Young performed his daring feats of horsemanship before Queen Victoria at Aldershot. While in charge of the 2nd Dragoon Guards' riding school at Canterbury he was severely kicked by a horse, which forced him to retire from the army.

Young fretted at inactivity and in August 1899 came to South Africa where he joined the Cape Mounted Police. During the South African War he served as a sergeant-major and was wounded at Stormberg. He was mentioned in despatches for his coolness during the saving of Bethulie Bridge in March 1900.

He won the Victoria Cross 17 months later, when he was again wounded. London Gazette, November 18, 1901: "Alexander Young, Sergt-Major, Cape Police. Towards the close of the action at Ruiter's Kraal on the 13th August, 1901, Sergt-Major Young, with a handful of men, rushed some kopjes which were being held by Commandant Erasmus and about 20 Boers. On reaching these kopjes, the enemy were seen galloping back to another kopje held by the Boers. Sergt-Major Young then galloped on some 50 yards ahead of his party, and, closing with the enemy, shot one of them and captured Commandant Erasmus, the latter firing at him three times at point-blank range before being taken prisoner."

After the war Young took part in the suppression of the Herero Rebellion in SWA in 1904. He then went farming near Bulwer in Natal and two years later served in the 1906 Zulu Rebellion where he was again wounded. He returned to farming near Bulwer, where he often broke in horses for other farmers. He was an unholy Irish terror, however loved children and all animals.

He would flatter the children's governess by telling her that she was the prettiest "colleen" he had seen since leaving Galway, then would ask her to give them a half-day holiday. No wonder they loved him. Whenever the

children asked him how he had won his VC, Young would say, “I chanced me arm.” When his troop horse, Paddy, on which he had won the VC, died, Young wept unashamedly.

On the outbreak of the War in 1914 Young became roaring drunk and went to the German Trappist Mission where he turned the priests and all out and made them sing “God save the King.”

Young served in SWA as regimental sergeant-major of the Natal Light Horse until February 1915, then as temporary lieutenant with the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. He was one of the first volunteers for the brigade and was commissioned in the 4th SAI and posted to D Company.

*

Lance-Corporal George Warwick, 18, had spent the first 12 years of his life in Mauritius where he learnt to speak French and Creole. He was serving an apprenticeship in Durban when the war began. His parents would not allow him to sign on for SWA, however when advertisements appeared for the brigade he immediately enlisted. This time his parents grudgingly approved. After serving in Egypt he found himself once more at training — this time in Flanders.

“We got down to intensive training with reveille at 5 am, parading at 6 am for bomb-throwing practice before breakfast at 8.30 am on Wednesday, 7 June. At 11 am there was a general present when we practised the attack. This was followed by bayonet-fighting drill. After dinner we marched to a field to attend a gas lecture and practise passing messages along while extended and lying in a prone position, followed by fire-control. News was received today that Lord Kitchener had been drowned.

“The next two days were spent practising the attack and with new bayonet-fighting instruction and practising rapid loading. We paraded for pay on Thursday.

“The events of Saturday, 10 June, had some interesting features, especially in the afternoon. The bomb-throwing practice in the morning had been followed by an attack uphill and an advance downhill under simulated artillery fire. But the real fun started after dinner when there was bomb-throwing with live bombs, to add to the fun there was thunder and rain.

“There were two officers present, Lieut Young, VC, and Lieut Duff. Private Cullen removed the safety-pin of a Mills bomb and, instead of holding on firmly to the lever before throwing the bomb, he released it. Realising what he had done, instead of flinging the bomb over the sand-bags, he placed the bomb on the ground and ran round the other side of the sand-bags. The two officers had hardly time to get round the sand-bags; indeed, Lieut Duff received a slight cut over one eye.

“Lieutenant Young, the bombing officer, who was himself an Irishman, addressed Pte Cullen thus:

Bombing Officer: ‘What is your name?’

Cullen: ‘Cullen, sir!’

Bombing Officer: ‘Where are you from?’

Cullen: ‘County Galway, sir!’

Bombing Officer: ‘I always thought that there was something of the Sinn Feiner about you!’

“The bombing officer then proceeded to demonstrate the use of the newly invented rifle-grenade. He placed a rifle-grenade into the muzzle of a rifle and said he would fire it into a field of barley. Right enough, on pressing the trigger, the rifle grenade sailed through the air and came down in the barley field; but it did not explode.

‘It must be a dud,’ said the bombing officer, ‘I’ll try another one’. This one also fell into the barley field and did not explode. ‘That can’t be a dud too. Perhaps I should have unscrewed this little screw here.’ He proceeded to do

so, while we wondered whether he was going to blow the lot of us up.

"He then placed the rifle-grenade in the rifle and pressed the trigger. For the third time a rifle-grenade dropped into the barley field, and this time exploded on contact. At this, Lieut Young said, 'It's a good job I didn't try any of these yesterday when the general was here. He'd have said, 'Young, you don't know anything about it, and faith, he'd have been right.'"

*

The intensive training at Enguingatte came to an end on 14 June. The South Africans were issued with gas helmets and ammunition, then marched to Ailly-sur-Somme where a new draft joined them. They reached Corbie on 24 June, had lunch, then continued on to Welcome Wood.

They remained there for two days. Warwick recalled that on the Sunday afternoon his platoon went on a route march! The brigade left at 9 pm the next night and marched via Bray-sur-Somme to Suzanne. There they fraternised with French soldiers and exchanged Boer tobacco for the French soldiers' bread and wine rations.

On Thursday, 29 June the brigade moved from Suzanne to Grove Town Camp, a large tented area with barbed-wire enclosures for German prisoners.

*

The Franco-British Somme offensive commenced with a bombardment of unprecedented fury on 24 June 1916. For a week the German positions were subjected to heavy artillery fire, from more than 1,500 guns; one for every 20 yards of front. This was a landmark in the history of the war as it marked the beginning of the British taking over the main burden of the Western Front Campaign. By then the French had been drained of their strength at Verdun.

The main attack on 1 July was on a fourteen mile front from Maricourt to Serre. Eleven divisions of Gen Henry Rawlinson's 4th Army were to head the attack. Five divisions plus two cavalry divisions were in close reserve.

In few battles on the Western Front was topography of such importance. The range of hills running north-west from Peronne had been in German hands since October 1914. They had command of the heights and observation over the allied lines — and beyond. They had strengthened their trench defences and built one stronghold after another — principally in the copses or woods. The offensive was launched uphill against an almost impenetrable series of fortresses. The British GOC was Gen Douglas Haig.

The British barrage flattened the enemy trenches, while the Germans sheltered in deep dug-outs and shell-holes. When the barrage lifted the Germans emerged and manned their machine-guns. As the massed waves of British infantrymen attacked the Germans retaliated with a hail of machine-gun fire. The Tommies had been taught to advance shoulder to shoulder at a slow walk with fixed bayonets upright. This resulted in the heaviest British loss of any one day's fighting in the war — over 54,000 casualties of whom more than 19,000 were killed or died of wounds. This was the heaviest loss suffered by any army in a single day in the First World War.

Rawlinson realised that he had to capitalise on the limited successes achieved. In addition he had to forestall the Germans from being reinforced and from rebuilding a fortified front. The second line could prove more formidable than the original. He chose to attack on a narrow four mile front stretching from Bazentin-le-Petit Wood on the left to Longueval village and Delville Wood on the right. But first Bernafay Wood and Trones Wood, which lay south of and below Delville Wood, would have to be taken.

Rawlinson deviated from usual tactics in opting for a night advance and dawn attack, preceded by a short barrage. Haig was strongly opposed to this and delayed the attack to 14 July. On the right flank the 3rd and 9th Divisions of the XIII Corps were commanded by Generals J Haldane and W Furse.

*

General Sixt von Armin commanded the 4th Corps at the Somme and proved himself one of the most original tacticians on the German side.

The 3rd Guards Division had been brought from the Russian Front in April 1916 and had been hailed by the Kaiser as the hope of his Empire. It contained three regiments, The Guards Fusiliers, the Lehr Regiment and the 9th Grenadiers.

The 5th Brandenburg Division were in the sector of the German second line (Longueval) on the Somme. Three Brandenburg regiments defended the Longueval/Delville Wood area. They were the best soldiers that Germany could produce.

Haig's delay had allowed the Germans to bring up fresh reserves. The German trenches ran in front of Bazentin-le-Grand and Bazentin-le-Petit Woods, Longueval and Delville Wood. The 21st British Division captured Bazentin-le-Petit, the 7th and 3rd Divisions Bazentin-le-Grand Wood and village respectively and the 9th Scottish Division fought its way with great difficulty through Montauban to the outskirts of Bernafay Wood. This was the extreme right of the British line, beyond which the French Army operated.

*

Lieutenant Percy Richardson Roseby, 39, of the 2nd SAI was attached to the brigade as intelligence officer and ADC to Gen Lukin. After immigrating from England he had served in the Natal Police then joined the SA Permanent Force and served in SWA with the 3rd SAMR. Roseby received a mention in despatches for his services. Shortly after arriving in Flanders he was wounded in the left arm and hospitalised. Roseby rejoined the brigade on 6 June.

Second-Lieutenant Frederick Burton of the 3rd SAI acted as the brigade signalling officer. He had enlisted on 2 September 1915 for the duration of

the war.

At the commencement of the Somme offensive the South African Brigade comprised the four infantry battalions, the 28th Brigade Machine-gun Company, the 64th Field Company Royal Engineers, the South African Brigade Light Trench Mortar Battery and the SA Field Ambulance. The brigade first moved to Grove Town, on the outskirts of Bray, then on 2 July moved to Billon Valley to relieve the 27th Brigade.

Two days later Gen Furse ordered Lukin to relieve the 21st Brigade in divisional reserve and the 89th Brigade in the "Glatz Redoubt" sector of the front. The 1st and 4th SAI then held the sector between the French in the east to the Bricqueterie Trench near Montauban, the 2nd SAI were in divisional reserve at Talus Boise and the 3rd were in support north-west of Montauban in old German front-line trenches. That night the 27th Brigade cleared Bernafay Wood and the 30th Division attacked Trones Wood.

On the 5th Gen Lukin personally toured the front-line trenches and was on his feet for over 15 hours. In this respect he was notable among brigade commanders. The following day there was a great deal of shelling. The South African casualties included two officers killed, Lieut W Brown of the 1st at Chimney Trench and Lieut H Oughterson of the 4th at Glatz Redoubt.

The shelling continued on the 7th. During a heavy downpour that afternoon the 1st SAI was relieved by the 18th Manchesters of the 21st Brigade. That evening preliminary orders were received for the second stage of the assault, the attack on Longueval village by the 9th Scottish Division.

*

Eddie Fitz had his own theories as to the purpose of the bombardment. "When the battle opened we were still in corps reserve. The battle started with about 48 hours of hellish bombardment over a front of about 15 miles. That was of course to try and persuade Jerry that he was not likely to know

where the heavy push was coming!

"We were brought into the area where field-guns were being used and we hung about there on the 'veld' for a few days. There was a double 18-pounder battery further down the hill in a copse. You'd hear in your sleep, 'Battery, prepare for action!' and the gunners running about and calling. Then, 'Battery, salvo!' The next minute your head would be blasted off with shells going up the hill about ten feet overhead."

*

Duggie Brice-Bruce was taken unaware by the offensive.

"We were at Maricourt on 1 July 1916 when the first attack took place during the early morning darkness. When we were woken up it felt as if hell was let loose, light and heavy artillery were putting over a concentrated barrage. It was so intense that you could feel everything vibrating round us; it was really something to see and hear.

"The whole place was lit up with Very lights of all colours, each colour giving a message, the bursting of shells, continual machine-gun and rifle fire, grenades and the thump of mortars. The artillery stood wheel to wheel. The whole attack was so well co-ordinated and planned that none of us knew anything about it. We of the 9th Div were in readiness in case anything went wrong."

*

Private Thomas Finlayson Heunis, 18, had left school at Willowmore to join the army two years before. He was with the Southern Rifles when Gen Beyers' body was found alongside the Vaal River in December 1914. Some time earlier Heunis had herded ostriches on his grandfather's 3,800 morgen farm near Trompetter's Poort. One afternoon he slept under a bush while the ostriches grazed. He awoke to stare into the eyes of a boomslang, the deadliest snake in Africa, swaying from a branch above him. In a flash he

slithered away on his back.

Heunis was used to the wide outdoors, however he preferred the safety of the old German dug-outs to the shelling. He and his friend, Pte Rudolph Blom, 19, sheltered in a dug-out which was loaded with ammunition. Blom was a 5 ft 6 in painter from Newclare, Johannesburg. He had blue eyes and light brown hair and sported a tattooed woman on his left forearm. Blom had served with the Rand Rifles in SWA before joining the brigade.

Heunis sat on a parapet near the entrance as he was afraid of being buried alive. A shell blew in the trench parapet at the entrance, so he ran out choking and groping his way.

He met Capt Stephen Liebson, the battalion's Jewish doctor, who enquired where he was going, Heunis replied "Away from the shelling". "OK", laughed Liebson, "Come with me". Heunis had a tremendous respect for the doctor and regarded him as a very brave man.

Heunis remembered that among the officers Capt Medlicott was a good man but not a great organiser, Lieut Hirtzel was about 42 years old and a game fighter, Sec-Lieut Ritchie had many medals and Sec-Lieut Guard had been commissioned shortly before the battle. He later became a successful Cape Town businessman.

*

Harry Cooper knew that the "Big Push" had started.

"While lying back in a valley, the whole world seemed to come to an end. To me it seemed that all the guns, large and small, had been assembled in one area — and they were giving it stick. Of course, we were on the safe side of the guns and it was wonderful to see and hear most of what was going on; but we were itching to get in and do something. We heard that one crowd had gone out dribbling footballs, had reached their objective and were holding on. This seemed very good news for we now knew that the promised 'Big Push'

had started.

"Later the brigade left this valley and we found ourselves in an area that had been knocked to smithereens. I believe this was called Ginchy (actually Montauban). Then came the big shock. We came across hundreds of bodies lying around, some in heaps and others singly. My stomach seemed to settle after a while and I tried not to see the ghastly mess. We moved farther on. In the distance were a number of woods where occasionally shell fire was coming from the Jerry lines.

"While taking it easy I noticed a peculiar smell not unlike pineapples and my eyes started to water. Someone yelled 'Gas', and did the old 'PH' gas helmets come out from the satchels we carried! This was one of the first types of helmet issued. They were in the form of a sack with goggles. They had to be taken from the satchels, placed over the head and the base tucked into the tunic. Speed in doing this counted for everything. And this time the regulation time was beaten hands down.

"After a while I noticed the men removing the smelly old masks and I tried to get mine off but the darned thing had stuck to my eyebrows. What a job getting it off; a sack over your head and full of chemicals. I had forgotten the vaseline part, 'to be applied over the eyes'."

*

Dudley Meredith's first impression of the Somme front-line following the bombardment was unforgettable.

"From horizon to horizon in front of us lay a broad belt of red earth a veritable desert of death, where all vegetation had been destroyed and the earth churned up by the fury of the shell fire. Tracks through this waste there were, and wounded men and working parties passed up and down, but the first impression remained — a dreadful red belt of death and destruction.

Our duties here were not arduous — carrying ammunition, keeping

ourselves in readiness, in reserve, and an occasional working party was more or less the sum total, while over the horizon in front of us the bombardment of the German front line went on practically without cessation.

“However, it was while we were in these comparatively quiet trenches that late one afternoon my military career came nearly to a sudden end. Lying on a firestep for a bit of rest, with my face towards the wall of clay, there was suddenly a tremendous explosion and I knew no more. After a second or two I opened my eyes and found I could see my feet, but no movement of my legs, body or arms was possible. The thought at once came to my mind that I was dying, and I thought to myself, “Well, Dudley, you’re finished now — it’s all over”.

“Just then my mates from either side came into the trench and picked me up. They found no wound or bones broken, and after a few moments I was able to sit up and speak.

“Lieutenant Baker also came up and asked me how I felt, adding that if I liked I could go back to the transport line and rest for a few days. On my expressing the wish to stay with my mates, he arranged with the sergeant to relieve me of practically all duties until I had recovered from the shock.

On examining the trench a little later, how narrow my escape had been became apparent. A large shell had fallen right in the trench, at the most seven or eight feet from my head and shoulders, completely blocking the trench. Had it fallen but three feet to the right there could have been no hope for me. As it was my neck and shoulders were bruised and very sore for several days, but otherwise there were no ill effects.

“The day after we moved into these trenches we were moving about where the old German lines had been, to see what we could see, and here I saw the first dead white man I had seen. He was lying in a shell-hole, without any visible wound, but I surmised he must have died from the effect of high-

explosive shell fire, as his face was turning black. This we had heard was the result of high explosive concussion.

"His name was on his haversack — Private May of the 19th Kings Liverpool Regiment — and as I stood and looked at him I wondered what sort of a man he had been and what he had thought of the war. He had no doubt been in the first wave of the attack and now here he lay — a stiff, slightly swollen and blackened figure — pathetic symbol of the ghastly futility of war."

*

Major Donald Rolfe Hunt, 41, was born in 1875 and educated at Haleybury College, England. His military career began in 1896 when he joined the CMR. In 1899 he was commissioned in the 3rd Norfolks and served through the South African War. He was mentioned in despatches twice and promoted to captain.

In 1902 Hunt was seconded to the Transvaal Native Affairs department and became Commissioner for Sekukuniland. In 1914 he resigned to serve as a captain of the 2nd Transvaal Scottish in the Rebellion and in SWA.

Major Hunt kept a personal diary of the Battle of the Somme. It was written before, during and immediately after the Delville Wood battle. Obviously it was written during a time of stress, is terse and generally only the immediate events affecting him are recorded.

"July 1st — Bivouacking at Grovetown. Clerk and I combine C and D Company officers' messes. Watched large number of German prisoners brought through the cages. July 2nd — Grovetown. Completed fighting equipment, carrying platoons, etc. Moved to Copse Valley during night and were shelled during night. Moved half company from one side of valley where shells were falling to the other side and thus escaped casualties.

July 3rd — Moved to Billon Valley where French heavies were and

occupied eastern side. Battalion washing and cleaning.

July 4th — Billon Valley. Some of our fellows playing football with French heavy gunners.

July 5th — Billon Valley. Moved forward and occupied Glatz Redoubt, Dublin and Casement trenches and built strong points at Glatz and Train. Knocked over but unhurt by shell at corner of Little Wood as C (Coy) moved up.

July 6th — Heavy rain and discomfort for all. C Company took over Bricqueterie Trench and began digging. Oughterson took over my tin shelter in Casement as I moved up the Dublin. He was killed there by shell a few minutes later. Regimental HQ at corner of Glatz. Colonel (Jones) very cheery and happy.

July 7th — Consolidating Bricqueterie Trench. Shelled all day. Wet day. Oughterson buried at Mariecourt.

July 8th — Dublin and Bricqueterie. Working in wet trenches. Shelled all day. Talked with 64th Company, RE, Subaltern Clave ring about guinea-fowl shooting in Sekukuniland. Fine, quick piece of wiring by C Company beyond road in front of Bricqueterie Trench. The French established mortars behind Dublin and shelled and attacked Faviere Wood on our right. A French soldier gave me a drink of ration wine from his water bottle. French soldiers fine big fellows. A few Germans came from Faviere Wood and surrendered to Farrell of A Coy. Old Farrell very cheery."

*

Arthur Betteridge was overawed by the scale of the "Big Push".

"On June 23 we moved to Corbie by train, accommodated in the inevitable horse trucks, from there marched a few miles to Welcome Wood where the dull roar of guns turned to thunder, making it difficult to hold a conversation. There was no letting up, the roar was continuous. In Happy Valley, about

three miles from the line the ground literally shook. It was surprising anyone could sleep even for short periods in these conditions.

“There were untold dumps of ammunition concealed in every imaginable place. Huge heavy guns were pulled into position by tractors, field artillery mingled on the roads with heavy six-inch guns. None of us had believed so many guns existed. Day and night the earth vibrated. We were told in the ten days’ preparatory bombardment on this front alone, twice as many shells were fired than the total used in three years of the South African War. It was quite understandable from the din we lived in for those few days before the attack; the roar and rumble of this incredible show of hate was heard more than fifty miles away.

“Some of our officers were taken to the front line at Maricourt where the sound of the bombardment was positively deafening. Never before in history had there been such a concentration of guns in so small an area. It seemed nothing could remain of the German lines after such deadly bombardment. Photographs of the front line taken from the air supported that assumption.

“It can be imagined how vast the administrative problems were to even move nearly half a million men, keep them supplied and accommodated in so small an area. Field-gun batteries were stationed almost wheel to wheel in preparation for the advance when they would be required to take up positions beyond the original front lines.

“Our first experience of German cunning was the German Prussian helmets, which were always regarded as trophies. Some of these were found in dug-outs attached to booby traps. Even some of the wardrobes were fitted with attachments to deadly bombs. One of our sergeants was killed as he entered a dug-out and picked up some trophy. Obviously the Hun had anticipated our arrival and laid innumerable traps for our men; as a result of these experiences we were warned not to touch anything in dug-outs until

engineers had inspected the places for booby traps.

“It is interesting to recall that whenever we mingled with the French troops we were welcomed and offered red wine which they received with their rations. After becoming accustomed to the French trench lice and other ‘beasties’ we were glad to accept their wine. They were always intrigued with our kilts and admired ‘The Scotch’ whose reputation as gallant fighters was well-known to our allies. It was difficult to get them to understand how Scotsmen could possibly come from South Africa.

“Most of our objectives the first day were reached in spite of unexpectedly fierce resistance in many parts of the line. British bayonets were used extensively as German supports arrived. On the second day of the advance our field artillery took up their new positions beyond the German lines sometimes within sight of German batteries.

“The way in which these gunners drove their horses attached to limbers of ammunition and field guns within sight of the enemy was a sight never to be forgotten. The incredible speed shown in bringing their guns into action was greatly admired by front-line troops. Several horses were hit but remarkably few gunners were casualties during the time they were immediately in front of our line. They were indeed a brave lot of chaps.

“For the first three days, Germans were steadily overrun and their artillery comparatively quiet because we had captured several hundred of them as well as thousands of prisoners.

“July 5th, the 1st Regt and we Scottish took over the new front line near Montauban, the Scottish at the extreme right of the British mingling with the French. Approaching this line my great friend, Bill Fisher was hit in the stomach by a large piece of shrapnel. He was sent to England and remained in hospital for many months. Several other men were killed and more wounded.

“The Germans were recovering from the shock of the original attack and bringing up numerous new divisions of men and artillery. In this manner the British command eased the pressure on the French at Verdun, one of the chief objectives of the attack.”

*

Hugh Boustead was shocked to hear that Lord Kitchener was drowned when HMS *Hampshire* was torpedoed in the North Sea on 5 June. “It is an astonishing thing but here among the South Africans and among all Kitchener’s Army it came as a devastating personal shock and a grave setback to the war. Whatever may have been written of Kitchener by politicians, the troops looked on him with nothing short of hero-worship. We could talk of little else for days, even in the midst of the battle.”

*

Private Gordon Forbes from Burgersdorp had joined up with his two brothers, Duncan and Haldane, leaving their father and sister to run the family farm. He was posted to the 2nd Battalion’s A Company, however was attached to the Trench Mortar Battery on 7 June.

Chapter 3 — Bernafay Wood and Trones Wood

The Battle of Delville Wood cannot be dealt with in isolation. The immediately preceding Battles of Bernafay Wood and Trones Wood occupied the second week of the Somme offensive, 7-13 July. The 2nd and 4th SAI were committed to battle there. Most of the men who survived would soon after find themselves in Delville Wood.

The two woods adjoin one another and lie south of Delville Wood. They were commanded by German artillery positions at Longueval and Guillemont; in turn they protected the Longueval heights as fire could be brought to bear on the flanks of assaulting troops. On the night of 4 July the 27th Bde cleared Bernafay Wood. The French attacked Maltzhorn Farm during the days which followed whereas the British 30th Division attempted to take Trones Wood.

On Saturday, 8 July the 2nd SAI's HQ and A and C Coys occupied Bernafay, relieving the 27th Bde. The following day they were joined by D Coy. Due to the heavy artillery fire a small garrison was left in the wood and a bombing party sent to occupy Longueval Alley, a trench which linked Bernafay with the northern edge of Trones Wood.

At 8 am that morning the 90th Bde and 17th Manchesters took Trones Wood. They found that capturing a wood was less costly than holding it. After a heavy bombardment they withdrew and the Germans re-took it.

At dawn on Monday the 10th the Germans withdrew from Trones Wood for the same reason. The wood was then attacked by the 16th Manchesters and A Coy of the 4th SAI. During their advance in the wood from south to north, isolated pockets of Germans inflicted heavy casualties on them; Capt Russell

of the 4th SAI being mortally wounded.

The 2nd SAI had meanwhile established a small post in Longueval Alley to cover the northern part of Trones Wood. An officer and four men were wounded by German snipers. Due to the heavy losses caused by the constant shelling, the 2nd SAI were then relieved by B and D Coys of the 4th SAL

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On 11 July Gen Erich von Falkenhayn, 53, the German GOC, halted his offensive at Verdun. The following day he visited Gen von Below on the Somme to discuss his disapproval of “premature withdrawals”, and to suggest that they could threaten the Allied flank along the line Hardecourt-Longueval. Von Below doubted the viability of such a counter-stroke without massive reinforcements.

The newly-created First Army north of the Somme would form Gen Von Below’s command. The sector from Longueval to the Ancre would fall under a new corps to be formed by Gen Sixt von Armin, who would take over his new command on 14 July. The troops in the area then were the Buckhardt Division, 183rd Division and the 3rd Guards Division. The defensive line running eastwards from Longueval through Waterlot Farm and Guillemont was held by the 10th Bavarian Division.

On the 11th the SA Scottish bombed along Longueval Alley. In Bernafay itself they were subjected to intense shell fire and suffered heavy casualties. Colonel Jones was killed by a shell splinter as he emerged from his dug-out. The following day most of the 4th SAI were relieved in Bernafay, leaving a small garrison holding Longueval Alley.

During the day the 89th Bde was involved in intensive fighting in Trones Wood. The attack of the 55th Bde of the 18th Div on Trones Wood that night failed. Most of the SAI Brigade were at Talus Boise on the 13th, to act as a reserve to the 9th Division’s assault on Longueval the following day.

The grim day-by-day accounts of the men in the various companies brings alive the horror of the week preceding Delville Wood; a week which cost South Africa over 500 casualties.

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On 10 July General Lukin set about organising the disengagement.

"In accordance with orders received on the night of 9/10th I sent a company of the 4th SAI to support the 90th Inf Bde in holding Trones Wood, and a platoon of the same battalion to support the garrison of the Bricqueterie. The company referred to took part in the fighting in the south end of Trones Wood on the night of the 9/10th and during the 10th, sustaining about 40 casualties. It was relieved on the night 10/11th, and the platoon which strengthened the garrison of the Bricqueterie was relieved on the afternoon of the 11th.

"Headquarters and two companies of the 4th SAI, relieved that portion of the 2nd SAI in Bernafay Wood on the night of the 10/11th. On the same night the dispositions of the 3rd SAI and the remainder of the 4th SAI were altered to bring these units within the area which had been laid down for this brigade; the 30th Division taking over that portion of the line which the 4th SAI had held, viz: Bricqueterie Trench and Dublin Trench down to Dublin Redoubt.

"The only portion of the line then held by this brigade was the eastern and south-eastern faces of Bernafay Wood and Longueval Avenue."

Brigade HQ was shelled and the mess blown in. The mess waiter was buried but hurriedly dug out.

*

Private Gordon Forbes' diary of 11 July reads:

"Moved from Maricourt to valley about a mile away. Built ourselves a sort of dug-out that was built up. Went over to see my friends in 2nd Regt. From

all accounts they must have had a terrible time in Bernafay Wood — were sent in to hold the position which was under heavy shell fire. Harold Alger was killed and many more comrades; all our old mess of seven still safe."

The SA light trench mortar battery had been equipped with French mortars. Two new emplacements were set up at Glatz Redoubt, west of the Maricourt-Montauban road on the 12th.

Gordon Forbes heard of death during the day and almost experienced it. "Fairly easy day. Was orderly for Bailey and spent a lively time dodging coal boxes on my way to brigade HQ. Cook, our Wesleyan chaplain, killed today (11th) helping wounded from battle. Almost his last words were 'I am glad to have died while helping our poor wounded boys along'.

"Went over and had a chat with Charlie, which was rudely interrupted by a coalbox that dropped five yards behind our dug-out, and strange to say, and luckily for us, it was a dud, made a sort of bottomless pit in the ground. Got a letter from Duncan and one from mother."

Forbes attended a funeral on the 13th "On ammunition fatigue in morning and arrived home to hear the sad news that Frank (Knight) and two others out of the TMBs had been knocked out by a shell. Frank lived till evening and we buried him in the divisional cemetery at Maricourt on the immediate right hand of Col Jones of the Scottish. Capt Harris read the burial service."

*

The depleted 28th Bde Machine-gun Company was commanded by Capt J Patterson. It was brought up to strength by drawing suitable men from the four South African battalions, who were hurriedly trained on the Vickers and Lewis guns. The brigade MG officer attached to the 28th Bde MG Coy was Capt R Deane.

Robert Deane from Cedarmont, near Standerton, had led the SASC machine-gun section in SWA. On joining the brigade he was appointed as

machine-gun officer and promoted to temporary major.

*

Private James John Simpson, 26, of Observatory, Cape Town, was a lithographic artist who had served for nine months in SWA with the CT Highlanders. He was 5 ft 7 ins tall and had a dark complexion. After joining the 4th SAI, A Coy, Simpson was transferred to the machine-gun company. Simpson graphically described the experience of a machine-gunner at Bernafay Wood.

"We were to relieve the (2nd) Regiment in Bernafay Wood. We entered the wood at the south-west end, and all the time we were under heavy shell-fire. When we got right into the wood the bombardment became terrific, shells whistled through the trees, and burst with awful cracks all around. Men were falling fast, and everyone was calling for the stretcher-bearers.

"To add to the confusion all the fellows were carrying extra loads of ammunition boxes, rolls of barb wire, tins of water and a hundred and one of other things. We in the gun section each had to carry two canvas buckets of Lewis gun magazines besides our rifle and equipment, and I can tell you every time we trekked the perspiration simply ran off me, and then came the shivers when we halted.

"To get back, we struggled through the wood, being tripped up almost every step by the thick undergrowth, barb wire, and falls into shell-holes, or else our equipment would get entangled in the brambles. The boys were falling right and left. How long we remained in the wood I don't know, but after some time the order came to take what cover we could in shell-holes."

*

On the 12th the machine-gun crews were in the thick of the fighting. The company war diary was written up at the headquarters at Talus Boise.

"Bailey remained in the wood (Bernafay). The relieved teams took over the

positions in Glatz Redoubt and Bord Alley which had been evacuated by No 4 Sections. These trenches pretty quiet nowadays as the wood is drawing most of the fire."

On 13 July Captain Patterson found difficulty in extricating his machine-gunners for the coming battle. "The SA Brigade came into divisional reserve today occupying the old British front line. Our four guns could not be relieved as it was impossible to find the OC, 55th MG Coy, as he was busy assisting in an attack by that brigade on Trones Wood.

"The 9th Division is to take part in an attack on the German second line tomorrow at 3.25 am, its chief objective being Longueval Village."

*

James Simpson had no use for his machine-gun as they were not attacked, however the artillery bombardment smashed their positions.

"The second day my gun was shifted up the communication trench, and what a time we had, for the enemy had the exact range of us, and started at one end of the trench and then came right down, then up again. Just after 5 o'clock the second evening things were looking terribly black. A coalbox landed in the trench opposite us.

"We dug about a couple of feet into the bank and placed a few sandbags at right angles, and I reckon that these bags saved the corporal and myself, for it killed three on the other side of me and wounded others, and although the corporal and myself were just as near we both got off without a scratch.

"My head appeared to expand twice its size, and my chest. Oh! The shock was awful, and had it not been for the rather funny sight of one of our fellows careering down the trench bringing a laugh to my lips I believe I should have had shell-shock like two others there. A fellow with shell-shock is just like a frightened child, trembles violently, weeps, and requires someone to take charge of him.

“I set to and dug out two of the poor mangled fellows; the third did not require anything, he was beyond requiring aid; the other two died in a few minutes. After that I took down one of the shell-shocked fellows to the dressing-station, while the NCO went off to try and get us shifted.”

James Simpson spent the night of the 12/13th carrying wounded men to a Cameron dressing-station, then slept until 2 pm. When he reported for duty he found that he had been reported as both wounded and dead. “Later that night we moved down to Carnoy among our guns, and tried to get a bit of sleep; but it was too cold, and after a few hours we were ordered to stand to, in case we were required.”

*

Staff-Sergeant Lionel Henry Walsh of the SAMC was from Cape Town. He was sent to assist Lieut Reid-Daly at Bernafay Wood. He continued to work among the wounded after the officer had left, dragging them to shelter, dressing their wounds and feeding them with iron rations which he took from the dead.

He continued to do this on Tuesday and the whole of Wednesday, during which time the shelling was so heavy that no other bearers could approach the wood. He refused to leave until he had personally supervised the removal of all the wounded.

Walsh appeared to bear a charmed life. He had an utter disregard for his own life and worked under conditions which precluded others from leaving cover. He showed no fear and his acts of bravery were many.

*

The 2nd SAI (A, C and D Coys) relieved two battalions of the 27th Bde (the 12th Royal Scots and 6th KOSB) in Bernafay Wood. They were heavily shelled during the next three days and incurred over 200 casualties, including Capt H E Clifford and Lieut C L H Mulcahy who died of wounds and Lieuts

L Greene and B MacFarlane.

Capt Herbert Edward Clifford had served in the South African War and been mentioned in despatches, then joined the Natal Police. In 1914 he served as a lieutenant in the Natal Horse during the Rebellion and thereafter joined the brigade as a captain and served in Egypt. He died on 10 July from wounds received at Bernafay.

Lieut Mulcahy was the son of Capt Mulcahy, formerly of the KOSB. He had been commissioned in the 1st Natal Carbineers and had fought in the Rebellion and SWA.

Lieut Brian Neill MacFarlane's father was a retired colonel living in Pietermaritzburg. Lieut MacFarlane had taken over the bombing post in Longueval Alley. On the 9th he carried out a reconnaissance along the trench to a point 100 yards from Trones, where they came under heavy rifle fire. One man was killed whereas Lieut MacFarlane and three others were badly wounded.

Although suffering from a badly fractured leg, he continued to control his party and ordered the men to retire to cover and leave the wounded where they lay. Later on he and the other wounded managed to crawl back some distance to where they were picked up and brought in. He was later to receive the MC.

A stretcher-bearer, Pte H Stephens, was carrying Lieut Lovell Greene to a dressing-station when they were captured, however, he succeeded in escaping with the officer. He was later to be wounded in his leg at Delville Wood.

*

Private Eddie Fitz found the enemy shell fire hellish during the next three days.

"When we went into Bernafay Wood it was our first experience of really terrific artillery bombardment. We were in that wood for nearly 60 hours.

During that time, we didn't suffer any counterattack by Jerry. They pulled out and we went in to hold the wood. Trones was fairly close on the eastern side and there was terrific activity from there.

"A chap named Fred Mitchell (L/Cpl) and I were the linesmen in this telegraph 'show'. When we got there Fred Mitchell and I looked at the map as to where the companies were and discussed it with our signals sergeant. We decided to run lines to three different points, left, centre, and right. The right faced Trones Wood.

"We ran out these lines and Fred and I decided to cross-connect them, so after we got them going we went across strapping them, because we used earth returns. We strapped them twice. By 12 o'clock that night the whole system was this — every damn line was cut! It was no use trying to maintain it on a basis of a 'net', so Fred and I spent our time, night and day, running new lines or going out and running along the line with your hand until you found the break, then trying to pick up the other bit and joining it.

"We carried on doing that. Most of the time we were drenched with lachrymatory gas and mustard and there was plenty of high explosive. The velocity of a whizzbang was as high as that of a rifle bullet. Strictly speaking you should not hear them coming as their velocity was higher than sound in air, but the thud of the gun exploding produces a sound wave in the earth and you could actually 'feel' the battery fire. If I was in the field of fire, I dropped flat … and boy, they came in thick and fast!

"This went on the whole period we were there. Our signal sergeant was wounded on the first day and was walked out by a runner. On the way out a shrapnel shell burst in the air above them. The signal sergeant got about six more 'bullets' (balls) in him and the runner was killed. That is the way it went on."

Private Robert Douthwaite assisted them and Col Tanner was extremely

impressed by the threesome. “For two days and nights in Bernafay Wood three men, L/Cpl Mitchell, Pte Fitz and Pte Douthwaite carried out their duties as signallers and linesmen under heavy fire without rest. Many of their fellows were killed or wounded and these three men remained constantly at their work going forward under heavy fire time after time to repair the telephone lines and by their courageous devotion to duty I was able to successfully keep in touch with my companies at a critical time.”

Private Eddie Fitz knew that although Bernafay lay behind them, the shelling did not.

“When we were finished there, we were simply pulled out on to the veld on the other side of the hill and parked there for one night or two. On one occasion Jerry shelled the area with very heavy stuff which we called Jack Johnsons. We were dispersed on the ground there when one of these things landed near one of our signallers. He was flat on the ground and was put out of action for the rest of the war by a hell of a clod of earth which went up in the air and landed smack on the middle of his back and knocked all the wind out of him and displaced his heart. The diaphragm was moved. No blood spilt! Nothing! That was our pre-entry into Delville Wood.”

*

That night Lieut Robert Beverley was accompanied by an excellent scout, L/Cpl John Dinnes. During their reconnaissance of Trones Wood Dinnes took back several messages through a heavy barrage. Lieutenant Beverley lay for two hours under heavy shell fire until he was blown up and lost consciousness. Dinnes then assisted him to regain their lines. Beverley was to be awarded the MC and Dinnes the MM.

Private William Holdsworth showed conspicuous gallantry as a stretcher-bearer. He dressed a number of wounded under fire and assisted to convey them to safety. At times he was seen to cover the wounded men with his own

body when shells fell near. He continued tirelessly at his duty until himself wounded.

*

Private Duggie Brice-Bruce was with a supply party taking rations to Bernafay Wood. “The Germans were pounding the lines of communication to try and stop supplies from getting through. I accompanied Lieut Mulcahy and Sgt Turner with rations. All we could do was lie flat and hope for the best. It was a rather terrifying experience; every shell that burst made one feel as if one was being torn in half. Our chaps stuck it out well, however our officer was struck in the back by a piece of shrapnel and did not live long.”

*

The stoicism of the wounded men was exemplified by two of them. Private Douglas William Sampson, 25, was a chemist from East London. He had served in SWA as a sergeant of The Kaffrarian Rifles and was mentioned in despatches. At Bernafay Wood he was shot in the face, chest and back, yet miraculously survived.

Private Harold Montague Tayler had served as a sergeant in SWA with the 2nd Field Ambulance, SAMC. In Egypt he was wounded at Mersa Matruh. At Bernafay Wood he acted as an orderly, carrying despatches to all parts of the line. He was wounded and shell-shocked, however continued in his duties.

*

Sergeant Wilfred Brink, 22, of the SA Medical Corps was in charge of the 3rd SAI stretcher-bearers. He was born at Jagersfontein, OFS, in 1893 and attended school at Marist Brothers, Johannesburg. He intended to be a doctor so joined the medical corps for service in SWA.

After serving in Egypt Brink was attached to the 3rd SAI and given two teams of stretcher-bearers. As this was insufficient, he had no qualms about

using German prisoners.

"We were using German prisoners to carry. They carry differently from our people. The Jerries put them on their shoulders."

*

The company's Wesleyan chaplain, Capt George Cook, asked Brink if he could help. As he was supervising a party at the time, Brink asked Cook to take some Germans and assist some men nearby.

George Thornhill Cook from King William's Town had once worked at Peacock Brothers in Queenstown. He joined the ministry in 1904 and spent two years training at Grahamstown where he became chaplain to Kingswood College. As he spoke Xhosa and Dutch he transferred to East Pondoland. After two years he visited England and then returned to Matatiele.

During the initial shelling at Bernafay Chaplain Cook confided in Padre Eustace Hill that he had overcome all fear. Shortly afterwards a shell killed Cook and all in his rescue party. His brother, H. Thornhill Cook, was wounded later in the fighting.

Padre Hill was privy to Cook's last moments. "We were together till a shell by Bernafay pierced his tin hat. I commended his soul to God. His last request was, 'Go to Longueval wounded.'"

*

Second-Lieutenant Abel's platoon suffered heavily from shell fire and Abel was wounded. Sergeant Robert McIntosh then took command and extricated the platoon. McIntosh later returned with Rev Hill to bury the men who had been killed. At the time the wood was so drenched with shell fire that Father Hill would not permit other members of the burial party to enter.

*

Harry Cooper and a friend found refuge from the shells on the 10th.

"One night we were instructed to bed down where possible and to put in an

appearance when the whistle blew in the morning. My pal and I found a German dug-out and down we went. It was very dark night and we had to feel our way.

“On reaching the bottom we felt around and managed to pile in where some other fellows were lying. The smell of war was all around us but we were tired and, rolling into our greatcoats, we were soon asleep.

“In the morning when the whistle blew I looked up and saw daylight. The dug-out had no roof and we might as well have been lying in the open. I then noticed the other chaps were not moving, so I gave one a push with my foot. Records must have been broken that day when my pal and I rushed up those steps.

“The chaps lying there were all dead Germans and we had kept them company all night. To me it appeared that one of our high-explosive shells had hit the roof and killed them all while they were asleep. (Before I go any further I must say that I had just turned 18, so the extra 10 years I appeared to put on can be understood.)

Cooper was stunned by the events of the following day.

“Daylight and some breakfast, and the world seemed so peaceful. Everyone must have been eating for there was not a shell or a sound from either side.

“Suddenly I heard a bird whistling and, on looking up, I saw what must have been a skylark. It was at a great height and appeared to be treading air. The next thing I heard the whine of a Jerry shell coming, bang! The bird, although far from the shell, plummeted to the ground dead. It never had a mark on it.

“Later I saw a crowd of our fellows gathered around the body of someone, so I went over to see. What I saw stunned me. A colonel of one of the regiments (Jones) was lying dead. To me this was terrible, one of our high-ranking officers, one whom we had treated with the greatest respect and awe,

was dead. An ordinary soldier, yes! but not a colonel. This was indeed a great shock to me. I then began to realise that this was not going to be the fun we had expected. This was WAR.

"I gathered myself together and went off to get a grip on myself. A lot of movement was going on and I did not see what happened to the colonel's body.

"Certain men were being sent forward to one of the smaller woods (Trones) where they were lost to sight. Then the works started again. The whole top of the wood appeared to be covered in green and yellow smoke. Jerry was pumping high explosive shrapnel over the wood.

"Then I saw the first lot of SAI casualties coming out of the wood. They nearly all had head wounds. A drum-major standing next to me remarked to me that there appeared to be a new fashion in headgear starting in the army.

"What worried me was that there were so many of them coming out that way. A pal of mine, an old school friend, passed by and asked for a light for his cigarette. He was wounded in the chest but was able to walk. He told me what a hell of a time they had had in there and was glad to get out. Sometime later I heard he had died of his wound."

*

The 4th SAI headquarters were with B and D companies in Bernafay Wood, whereas A and C companies were in the neighbourhood of Glatz Redoubt. All were to suffer under the heavy barrage the Germans sent over in preparation for their counter-attack.

*

Whenever the regiment went into the line, the springbok, Nancy, stayed behind with Petersen and the quartermaster. Bugler Petersen was nicknamed "buck-major", as looking after Nancy was a full-time occupation and left no time for the bugle.

*

The regimental signalling officer, Lieut J L Shenton, instilled a fine spirit and keen sense of duty into the signallers under his command. They never hesitated in exposing themselves while repairing broken wires. Shenton was himself wounded when returning from restoring communications between Trones Wood and Dublin Trench as he came across the open under heavy fire.

*

Chaplain Eustace Hill spoke with Lieut-Col Jones of the 4th SAI in Bernafay Wood. In discussing the fighting, Jones pointed to the row of campaign ribbons on his chest and said, “These other campaigns are nothing. This is a Crusade.” Later that evening Jones was killed by an exploding shell. Padre Hill was to write, “The shell that killed him cut those ribbons to bits, and sealed him as a Crusader.”

When Col Jones was killed, command of the battalion passed to Major Donald Macleary MacLeod MC DCM, aged 45. Donald MacLeod had joined the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders in 1888 at the age of 17, giving his age as 18, and was drilling recruits after only six weeks in the service. The Camerons went on foreign service, first to Gibraltar and then to Cairo where MacLeod was promoted to sergeant-major.

He was in action for the first time at the Battle of Atbara in April 1898, then fought at Omdurman in September, for which he was awarded the DCM. MacLeod then proceeded to South Africa and served with his regiment throughout the South African War. During the war MacLeod was recommended for the Victoria Cross for his gallantry at Lake Chrissie.

After the war MacLeod joined the permanent staff of the Transvaal Volunteers as instructor. In June 1903 he was appointed Permanent Staff RSM to the Transvaal Scottish Volunteers, a post which he held until 1905

when he left the Permanent Staff to join the regiment as the first Volunteer RSM. At the time he led the Wanderers Gymnastic Club. He married and had two children.

In 1912 MacLeod became adjutant and on the outbreak of war in 1914 he was a captain. During the SWA Campaign he served with the 1st Bn Transvaal Scottish and was awarded the MC. MacLeod thereafter joined the 4th SAI as second-in-command.

*

On the 9th the company evacuated a trench south of Trones Wood. Corporal Macmillan, who had been badly wounded, was overlooked so L/Cpl Arthur Chave remained behind under a heavy fire. Although the enemy advanced their bombing to within 30 yards he carried Cpl Macmillan out, literally retiring from shell-hole to shell-hole and finally got him safely away.

At 11 pm the company was sent to support the 90th Brigade (30th Division).

*

At dawn the company under Capt Russell supported the 30th Division's attack on Trones Wood.

Capt S C Russell was well known in Pretoria where he worked for the Central SA Railways. During the South African War he had served in the SA Constabulary and held the Queen's medal with five bars.

He was a captain in the Pretoria Regiment of the UDF and served with them in SWA. When he joined the brigade for France his wife returned to her home at Crieff, Scotland, to be closer to him.

His company advanced through the southern half but reported that because of the enemy artillery positions round about, it could not be held. The Germans counter-attacked that afternoon. When the company returned to its trenches it was heavily shelled and Capt Russell was mortally wounded.

*

The officer commanding B Company, Capt Thomas Hesketh Ross, was a handsome man who had enrolled in the Transvaal Scottish Volunteers in 1903. He had been commissioned the following year. Ross served with the Transvaal Scottish Volunteer Company (C Coy of Natal Rangers) in the Zulu Rebellion of 1906, then commanded the 1st Battalion Transvaal Scottish in SWA. This unit was to become B Company, 4th SAI, with which he proceeded overseas.

On entering Bernafay Wood the company came under shell fire and suffered heavy losses. With great coolness and pluck Coy-Sgt-Major James Wilson assisted Capt Ross in extricating the company. Wilson repeatedly carried messages to detached posts under heavy fire and led stretcher-bearing parties into the wood to look for wounded.

Lieutenant William Charlton was slightly wounded, however with the assistance of Pte R Quinton, repeatedly went out under heavy shell fire and fire from snipers and machine-guns to bring in wounded men who lay in the open.

*

Private Albert Victor Higgins, who had turned 19 nine days before, was born in Dublin, Ireland. He recollected the shelling in Bernafay Wood which killed many of his friends.

“B Company went to Bernafay. In my platoon alone we lost 19 men in five minutes. When we lost these men in Bernafay Wood Mickey Randall said, ‘Hell, Bert, maar daardie een was naby’ (Hell, Bert, but that one was close). The Germans were looking for the French 75 mm batteries which they thought were in the wood, but which were actually behind the wood, and we had very heavy casualties.”

*

Major Hunt noted the move to Trones Wood in his diary.

"July 9 'A' Company moved to Trones Wood and one 'C' Company platoon, No 11, under Lieut A H Brown, to Bricqueterie itself — a bad corner. Walked part of the way with Colonel (Jones) towards Trones, but he sent me back and he went on alone, no orderly!"

"July 10th — Manchesters smashed at Trones. A Manchester man, mad, came along Bricqueterie Trench shouting, 'Oh! what a day! What a day!'

"Captain Russell, OC, A Company, hit at Trones in stomach. Spoke to him as his stretcher was carried past Dublin. Shenton wounded while running telephone wire out from Dublin to Trones, but he ran the wire all right. "When visiting Lieut Brown at Bricqueterie I got knocked over by a heavy shell and lifted yards away but untouched. Lieut Brown excellent. Liverpools relieved us in evening in Dublin and Bricqueterie and we moved to Glatz Redoubt. Sinclair killed by picking up booby-trap in Glatz. (It was a string bomb with the string nailed to a board.)

"July 11 — Glatz. Sent for by General Lukin. On way passed Padre Hill and Tobias in shell-hole reading Bible. Soon after arriving at Brigade HQ, while talking to general, orderly came in with message on note saying Colonel Jones killed in Bernafay at 6.45 pm.

"General Lukin sent me up to take over Bernafay. On way up had just passed Corpl Hockly and ration party in open trench when shellfire killed whole ration party and partially buried me. Helped out by two Black Watch men and went on to Bernafay.

"Heavy shell fire over whole wood. Found Forbes (medical officer) in the wood in midst of many wounded, his bare arms covered with blood, and a large knife in his hand. He directed me to Battalion HQ in wood. Took over. Captain Russell died today of wounds."

Major Hunt was impressed by the bravery his men displayed.

“July 12 — MacLeod came up to Bernafay and took over from me and I returned to Glatz. Artillery dump near Glatz set on fire; fire put out by C Company men, especially Pte Veitch who pulled off the burning camouflage covering, and dump did not go up.

“July 13th — Middlesex under Kemp — Welch relieved ours in Bernafay and whole battalion concentrated at Talus Boise.”

*

Hugh Boustead was particularly impressed by the cavalry on the 9th.

“At daybreak a regiment of Canadian Cavalry appeared suddenly out of the morning mist and rain in the valley below our bivouac. With them were two squadrons of Bengal Lancers. Steel helmeted, on shining horses with jingling harness, they presented a superb picture as they rode past with a cheer. A stir of rising excitement swept us; we had visions of a break through into the open plains of Picardy.

“The call came that afternoon. The division moved up to Bernafay and Trones Wood in preparation for the attack on Delville Wood. Our brigade crossed the scarred fields through the stricken squadrons. Dead and dying horses split by shell-fire, with bursting entrails and torn limbs, lay astride the road that led to battle. Their fallen riders stared into the weeping skies. In front, steady bursts of machine-gun fire vibrated on the air. Caught by a barrage, these brave men and fine horses had been literally swept from the Longueval road.

“The South African Scottish spent the night in the support lines; I was called by the colonel as a runner to his HQ. The next days we spent in a trench called Dublin Trench after my brother’s regiment, a battalion of which had been in action here, and I had to move about from company to company with messages from HQ.”

Hugh Boustead narrowly escaped being killed alongside Col Jones. “It was

a bad day. Colonel Jones, the kindest of men and the most loved of commanding officers, was killed by a shell in the support trenches that same evening, just after he had sent me down with a message."

A fresh draft of recruits had joined the South Africans in Egypt. Boustead was especially struck by a young American.

"It was about this time that I first met a remarkable lad whose name and memory has lived with me ever since. His name was Veitch, but we naturally called him Yank; he was a young American boy, only seventeen. He came of a wealthy Boston family but was very wild, and had determined to go to the front in France and see the fighting.

"He had come over to join the French Army first, but he was pushed back on board again and was not allowed to stay with them. I think they thought that he was too young to be a soldier. Anyway, he managed to get into the South African Scottish draft in Cape Town and arrived in Alexandria while we were there.

"We were in the same section. The first thing that struck me on that march was the extraordinary selflessness of his behaviour. If any man was limping or absolutely whacked, he would immediately take his rifle from him without a word and carry it himself. He would share his rations, and he would share his last drop of water with a comrade.

"Never had I seen anyone who bore the marks of utter selflessness more unconcernedly and more naturally. He aroused the admiration of all the young South Africans who met him and knew him. And his selflessness was only excelled by his valour in the field later in the Somme Battle." Pte F E Veitch, who was 5 ft 9 ins tall, became a regimental bomber.

Boustead had more to say about his American friends heroism on 12 July:

"About two o'clock that afternoon the Bosche guns opened up on a battery position at one end of Dublin Trench. The gunners were fully occupied

replying and didn't notice that some oily waste lying on top of a tarpaulin on the cordite dump had caught fire.

"At this particular moment young Veitch happened to be passing, spotted it immediately and without hesitation went over and pulled the whole blazing tarpaulin off the cordite. Yank then walked on down the trench as if nothing had happened.

"The battery commander had seen him, however, and rushed over to find out who was the kilted soldier who had saved the battery. Yank merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders: 'Say, that's nothing.' He was recommended by the battery commander for an award for his cool and courageous conduct."

*

Arthur Betteridge was appalled by the casualties at Bernafay Wood. Wood.

"On the main sunken road alongside the wood we made a deep German dug-out battalion headquarters. Several casualties occurred at this time. The German gunners knew the territory and were virtually sniping at us with whizzbangs. Lieut Oughterson was killed at Glatz Redoubt. Capt Shenton, our signals officer, was wounded in the foot. Lieut Guest was also wounded. Our casualties were rising significantly."

Arthur Betteridge was present when his colonel was killed.

"I had brought a message from C Company in the front line, to headquarters at Bernafay Wood. The opening to this dug-out naturally faced the new German front lines. Within seconds of leaving, a salvo of German shells burst a few yards away, knocking me sideways. Two men nearby were killed and one of those shells entered the dug-out I had just left.

"Colonel Jones and an orderly were climbing up the steps at that moment. As the shell exploded, both of them were killed instantly and several in the dug-out wounded and shocked. The body of that popular officer commanding

was taken to a nearby cemetery.

“This loss was felt by all ranks of the Scottish. Major Hunt took command until Major D MacLeod arrived from divisional headquarters the next morning. From this day our casualties increased rapidly. New arrivals at the reserve camp in Happy Valley were rushed to the front line to replace wounded and killed.

“I rushed down the dug-out after the explosion and assisted in bringing the colonel’s body to the road where we placed it on a stretcher and covered it with a ground sheet. I took a map of the area from the dead hand of our OC and gave it to Major Hunt. He told me to keep it as he already had one. Major Hunt there and then appointed me as his temporary orderly and signaller.

“I was sent with a message to C Company in the front line and returned to find the major in a trench near headquarters, half buried. Corporal Hockly who was with him was killed and three men of a ration party all badly wounded. The major told me that a shell burst almost in front of him, killing Hockly, who was at the back of him. An astonishing escape.

“I had evidence that day of the several escapes from death “Dolly” Hunt, as he was affectionately known, was to experience. Two privates of the Black Watch regiment were about 20 feet from that shell-burst, and they ran to help the major to his feet. One of them told me the shell burst almost next to the major and it was a miracle he was not blown to pieces.

“A few hours after this incident I had to accompany Major Hunt on a round of the shallow trenches leading to the new front line. Most of these trenches were clearly within sight of German gunners. I tried to get a line back to headquarters through wires which had been run along the trenches. We stopped half a dozen times to do this and were never successful. All lines of communication had been damaged by shell fire.

“It was most noticeable that immediately we left one of these stopping

places, a salvo of whizzbangs exploded near the spot we had just left. After the fourth instance, I looked anxiously at the major when my impossible task was done. ‘Yes, Betteridge’, he said, ‘I think it’s time for them to have reloaded their beastly whizzbangs — let’s go.’ He must have been a mind reader because the next salvo arrived immediately we departed. I never met a luckier man, nor a braver one.

“Just at that time our front line was sparsely occupied and the hurriedly dug trench was little more than four feet deep. All of these trenches were dug by hand, the hard way, mostly with entrenching tools, the size of small fire shovels found in firegrates. Believe me, those implements were put to good use when we were ordered to dig ourselves in. We were waiting for orders to continue the attack which had been delayed owing to bad weather.

“While we were out of the line, an ammunition dump next to Glatz Redoubt received a direct hit. Luckily it did not blow up. C Company chaps promptly tore off the covers of the dump camouflage and saved a nasty situation. We learned the brigade had sustained more than a thousand casualties since entering the Somme Battle eight days earlier. Little did we realise that this large number would be trebled during the next six days.

“On 13th we were relieved by the British Middlesex Regiment. These fine fellows and those of the Royal Surrey’s had concentrated at Talus Boise with the 9th Division. Some 550 SA brigade replacements had arrived there from Bordon to replace some of our casualties.

“On reaching the support line we found another dug-out near that in which Col Jones had been killed, had received a direct hit from a heavy shell, blasting the beams of the dug-out and burying all six of the occupants. Only three of the buried men were brought out alive. One of them was a signalling pal of mine, Jim Scott, who was badly crushed. He had a streak of white hair showing through his normally black hair. This was supposed to be

biologically impossible at that time, but several of us who knew Jim well, actually saw it."

*

George Warwick and five others were posted to a listening post on the edge of Bernafay, facing Delville Wood.

"We came under machine-gun fire as well as terrific shell fire that was bringing down the trees in the wood. We were relieved by another six men and, on returning to the dug-out, learnt that Colonel F A Jones DSO, our colonel, had been killed in Bernafay Wood …

"On Wednesday, 12 July 1916, the Germans concentrated their artillery on Bernafay Wood. Every square yard was shelled. The entrance of our dug-out was in real danger of being blown in on top of us. At 8 pm Sergeant Bunce took six of us to set us on guard at the listening post. As we emerged from the entrance of the dug-out we raced through the shelling, to be met with rifle and machine-gun fire from the direction of Delville Wood.

"We flung ourselves down and hurried to dig ourselves in with our entrenching tool. I was lucky enough to have a shell-hole to start with. After I had deepened it to my satisfaction, I felt reasonably safe from rifle and machine-gun bullets.

"At 9 pm a shell burst over the six men. Private R Wardrop was wounded in the left hand. Next to him, Pte R Burleigh was killed by the concussion of the shell, there being neither mark nor bruise on his body. I was next and received seven pieces of shrapnel, the worst wounding me in both thighs. Private Gordon Young received shrapnel through his throat and lived half-an-hour.

"The other two men were unhurt and ran back to the dug-out to tell the sergeant what had happened. The sergeant came first to me, but I directed him to Pte G Young who was mortally wounded. The sergeant then told me

to try and run to the trench where the other half of 14 Platoon was. I managed it and slid feet first into the trench. No doubt, in this way, dirt must have got into the wounds.

"A stretcher-bearer, Pte J Cooper, nicknamed 'Chinaman Cooper', and another carried me on a stretcher to a dug-out. They attended to my wounds and gave me a tot of rum. They brought me out of the dug-out, placed me on a stretcher and carried me along the trench. That was the end of my share in the fight for Delville Wood — a sight of the wood and injury from the wood."

*

Orders were received on the 13th for the attack on the German second line. The 9th Division was to take the village of Longueval and the adjacent Delville Wood. The 4th SAI were relieved by two battalions of the 55th brigade (18th Division). The South African brigade camped at Talus Boise that night, as the 9th Division's reserve brigade.

*

General Lukin reported that he at last had his brigade together again.

"On the evening of the 13th the 2nd Queens and a company of the 7th Middlesex took over Bernafay Wood and Longueval Avenue and this brigade concentrated in Talus Boise, behind the British original front line trenches. It then became the brigade of the 9th Division in reserve." By 8 pm the brigade were all at Talus Boise.

*

The casualties during the previous week had been occasioned mainly by the heavy German shelling, in which seven officers had been killed and nine wounded. The total casualties were:

1st Battalion … 50 (In the front lines near Montauban)

2nd Battalion … 205 (Mainly at Bernafay Wood)

3rd Battalion … 91 (In support trenches)

4th Battalion … 191 (In Trones Wood and Bernafay Wood) … 537

The strength of the brigade was now 3,153 all ranks, comprising 121 officers and 3,032 other ranks.

*

In anticipation of the impending assault Gen Furse sent out a divisional circular:

“I want every officer, NCO and man in the 9th Division to know that, in the opinion of the commander-in chief, the battle which is imminent is likely to prove to be the most decisive in the whole campaign.

“Up to date in these operations the division, with the exception of the artillery, has had little chance of killing. It has had to work and to live — some, I regret to say, to die — night and day under very heavy shell fire.

“It is now to have its chance to get to grips with the enemy, and I know it will welcome the chance and make full use of it.

“The 9th Division has been given a great task. It will accomplish it fully, because I know that every single man in the division is going into the fight determined to go on fighting to the end. With the splendid spirit the division has constantly shown and with God’s blessing on our fighting, we cannot but win complete victory.

“I want to thank you all for your gallant and loyal work since I have had the great honour of commanding the division, and I wish you all good luck.”

*

Private Geoffrey George Lawrence, 20, an ex-St Andrews College boarder at Grahamstown, had spent his post-school years learning practical farm management. His years on the open veld and three months’ service from March 1915 in the Natal Light Horse had hardened him physically.

“On the evening of the 13th we left our trenches at Maricourt and dug

ourselves in on a hillside some distance in front. Here we were given our orders for the big advance the next morning in support of the 26th Highland Brigade. Our trench being sufficiently deep, I moved aside to a higher point and watched the intense shelling of the wood we were to assault the next day.

"It was a most fearsome sight to see the wood a mass of flames rising to the full height of the trees, a perfect hell, and this was our objective for the following day. I felt terribly afraid. I think all of us before battle were jolted into facing the facts of fear and death and knew they must be fully dealt with. In my case I was granted a peace that remained throughout my days in the wood.

"Returning to my place in our trench I was keeping a sharp lookout with my rifle at the ready and must for an instant have fallen asleep with my eyes open when a major peered at me from in front of the trench and said, 'Are you awake?'

"I jerked to reality and promptly said 'Yes, Sir'. Warning us to be wakeful he passed on. Our officers were constantly on the move in front of us that night seeing that we were wakeful, evidently expecting an enemy counter-attack."

*

Duggie Brice-Bruce saw the consequences of false bravado and of fear on the eve of Delville Wood.

"On the evening of the 13th we rested outside the wood in a sunken road. With us was a troop of the Bengal Lancers, who spent most of their time sharpening their swords. Every time we looked towards them they made signs of what they were going to do to the Germans, by drawing the blade across their throats.

"Tragically, they made one sortie without success and were mowed down by machine-gun fire. It was difficult terrain for horses to negotiate; what with

shell holes, funk holes, broken trees and barbed wire entanglements, it was near impossible. Reports had it that forty thousand of our finest cavalry were waiting to break through. If this had been achieved it would have shortened the war.

"I was on last guard with another chap, no names as it ended tragically. We had about ten minutes to go when I heard a shot. My duty pal stumbled towards me and looked as if he was in pain. I managed to get him in a sitting position and asked him what had happened? He did not hide anything. It appears that he had placed a tin of bullybeef on his instep and fired. His idea was to eliminate any trace of powder burn. All I could say was 'Why did you do it?' He said that he could not stand up to the shelling.

"I sat him down and removed the boot, it was a horrible looking wound and he was bleeding badly, I then shouted for the stretcher-bearer and was cursed for waking him up; you cannot blame them as they were overworked. No one could point a finger, as we all went through the same thing, there was a period when you would have given anything to get out of it.

"This chap was with us in Bernafay, and went through the shelling. He saw Lieut Mulcahy suffering from his wound before he died; he saw the wounded coming out with terrible head wounds and limbs blown off. It was sad to see such a fine boy breaking up. He was suffering from shell-shock. I think that what was a great help to me was the fear of showing fear in front of my comrades. I have been so close to death many times, but had a strong feeling that my Guardian Angel was taking care of me."

Chapter 4 — Longueval village

Friday 14th

The village of Longueval is situated on a ridge at the junction of four vital roads; one runs south to Montauban, one south-east to Guillemont past Waterlot Farm with a branch road to Ginchy, one north along a sunken road to Flers and the fourth west to Bazentin-le-Grand.

In the angle between the village and the Flers and Ginchy roads lies Delville Wood, 156 acres of dense oak and birch with entangled hazel undergrowth and crossed by grassy rides. The north-eastern face of the wood lies on the reverse slope of the ridge, affording a covered approach to the Germans.

Waterlot Farm was a beet factory which the Germans had fortified with heavy Maxim machine-guns, which provided enfilade fire on any attack on the village or wood up the gentle slope from Montauban.

The 9th Division's 26th and 27th Brigades formed up at 12.30 am under cover of an artillery bombardment of the village and wood. The assembly was successful and the attack was launched when the barrage ceased at 3.25 am.

The attack on Longueval and Delville Wood was the most difficult on the front as both the village and wood were strongly fortified, criss-crossed by trenches, tunnels and machine-gun posts, under artillery and small-arms fire from three sides and athwart a ridge up which the attacking force had to move without cover. The house basements were connected by tunnels, which would enable the Germans to pop up in the rear of attacking troops and shoot them in the back. In addition the cream of the German army opposed them

and had orders not to lose an inch of ground.

The 26th Brigade launched a dawn attack on Longueval — the 8th Black Watch and 10th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in front with the 9th Seaforths in support and the 5th Cameron Highlanders in reserve. After desperate hand-to-hand fighting they took the western and south-western parts of the village by noon. The 27th Brigade and 1st SAI moved up behind them to “mop up”.

The Black Watch encountered stubborn resistance in the southeastern part of the village, where a machine-gun nest was covered by the fire of two field-guns situated in the south-west corner of Delville Wood. These guns were later removed. That afternoon the Black Watch were reinforced by the Seaforths and a company of the Camerons. The position fell to a converging attack, the garrison being bayoneted and three machine-guns captured.

Captain J Dingwall Carswell, 36, of the Black Watch was 6 ft 4 ins tall. He had served with the Glasgow Highlanders up to 1903 then left to join the Bank of Africa at Cape Town. After transferring to the Lourenco Marques branch he became secretary and later manager of a forwarding house there. In 1913 he became manager of a company at Jacobs, Natal, then resigned to join the army. He was killed while leading his Highlanders at Longueval.

The 1st SAI were brought through a heavy barrage in eight lines of sections without incurring a single casualty. At 2 pm the battalion under Lieut-Col Dawson attacked the remainder of the village and by 4 pm A and B companies had reached their first objectives, but were held up by machine-gun fire from front and flank.

At midnight the Argylls held the southern half of Longueval with their front-line on Clarges Street, the western extension of Princes Street in Delville Wood.

That night three parties were sent out to capture the enemy posts which

were holding up the advance. They returned to report that the whole northern part of the village was a nest of machine-guns.

The remainder of the brigade were subjected to heavy tear-gas shelling as they moved up to occupy trenches near Montauban.

*

The 2/16th Bavarian Regiment checked the British 26th and 27th Brigades at the Longueval market place. The Bavarians were reinforced by a battalion of the 26th Infantry Regiment, which occupied parts of Longueval and the southern edge of Delville Wood.

A German battalion consisted of 750 to 800 men and had formidable machine-gun fire. There were three battalions to a regiment and three regiments to a division.

Resistance soon stiffened as Falkenhayn had issued instructions to his men not to yield an inch. ‘Nur über Leichen darf der Feind seinen Weg vörwärts finden.’ (The enemy must not be allowed to advance except over corpses.)

When offered quarter by a body of Highlanders a German officer replied, “I and my men have orders to defend this position with our lives. German soldiers know how to obey orders. We thank you for your offer, but we die where we stand.” And they did.

One of the German artillerists in action that day, Anno Noack, 25, was a Silesian coalminer, originally from Aachen. At the time he was ADC to the commander of the German light artillery in that section of the front. His day was to begin with a shock.

“One of your bombs which rained down on us in preparation of your attack on Delville Wood smashed the entrance to my dug-out. As our battery was behind the fighting line I was sent to direct the fire of our artillery and investigate the position.

“Fortunately for us … I could report as a result of my reconnaissance that

the advance of the enemy had been stopped, partly owing to the fall of night. In fact your infantry had broken through our foremost ranks."

On the night of the 14th the German 52nd Infantry Regiment was mustered for the journey to the Somme. With them was Offizierstellvertreter Rambow, a veteran of the 1871 Franco Prussian war and then in his mid-sixties.

*

Brigadier Tim Lukin's later report to Gen Furse set out how the operation was set in motion with patrols and officer "order groups".

"On the morning of the 14th July I received orders to move forward a battalion to report to the GOC 27th Infantry Brigade. I immediately instructed Lieut-Col Dawson, commanding the 1st SAI to report himself accordingly.

"At 1 pm orders were received by me that 'as soon as Longueval is in our hands you will capture and consolidate the outer edge of the whole of Delville Wood; the whole of your brigade less the 1st Battalion will be at your disposal.' I was further ordered to move my HQ to Montauban.

"The 2nd and 3rd SAI had already been ordered to move forward and the 4th SAI followed in support.

"I met the officers commanding 2nd and 3rd SAI (Lieut-Cols Tanner and Thackeray) outside Montauban and explained to them the operation which they were to carry out, giving them their written orders, copy of which attached. (Operation Order No 48.)

"I then proceeded to the HQ of the 26th Infantry Brigade in Montauban. On arriving there I ascertained that Longueval was not entirely in our hands and I accordingly instructed the officers commanding 2nd and 3rd SAI to await further orders.

"As the result of a telephonic conversation with you Operation Order No 48 was suspended.

"In the meantime I sent forward a staff officer (Lieut Roseby) to ascertain

the position in Longueval, and an officer and two NCO's from each company of the 2nd and 3rd SAI were also sent forward to reconnoitre the routes to Longueval.

"A report was received from Lieut Roseby from which it was clear that if the brigade formed up on a line west of Longueval the left half would be exposed to heavy machine-gun fire from the enemy. It further appeared from the report that as the northern portion of Longueval was not in our hands it would be impossible to advance to the attack of the wood through that portion without heavy fighting.

"At 8.30 pm you held a conference of brigadiers at the HQ of the 26th Infantry Brigade in Montauban when it was decided that the attack on Delville Wood should take place at 5 am (on Saturday 15th) and I received orders that the wood must be taken at all costs.

"In reply to a question put by me you informed me that if the 26th and 27th Brigades failed to capture the northern portion of Longueval I was, nevertheless, to attack with my brigade.

"After the meeting I met my battalion commanders and gave them their orders. I explained to them the situation as it then stood, and impressed upon them that whether or not the 26th and 27th Brigades were successful in occupying the northern portion of Longueval we were to attack Delville Wood at 5 am.

"I instructed them that if, on arrival at Longueval, they found the northern portion still held by the enemy they should attack the wood from the south-west corner, moving to the attack on a one battalion front. My battalion commanders returned to their units."

*

Sergeant Leonard Louis Arrons was attached to Brigade HQ in charge of one of the carrying parties — a vital task as the troops continually required

replenishment of rations, water and ammunition. He wryly recalled the gas shelling which they were subjected to at the HQ in Montauban.

"We removed our dump to the valley beyond Montauban, and saw the cavalry advancing on the ridge in front.

"That evening I shall not forget for many a long day. At 6 pm the Allemand sent over tear-shells, and as time went on they came over in salvoes. Unfortunately our tear-shell goggles are useless, and I can assure you we had a very trying time. The eyes water and smart, and one can hardly breathe. The best cure I found was to don a gas helmet, and soon the boys did likewise. Anyhow, they shelled us right through the night, and the work having to be done, we bucked the boys up, and I must say they worked like Trojans.

"Our reception in the valley between Longueval and Montauban was coalboxes and Jack Johnsons, blended with plenty of high-explosive shrapnel. However, the sergeant and myself began to dig in, and we had some very narrow escapes; in fact, we were quite prepared for the seemingly inevitable. We cooped ourselves up and tried hard to snatch a few hours' sleep, but it was simply impossible."

*

The remainder of the Trench Mortar Battery moved from Talus Boise to Glatz Redoubt, remained there an hour, then continued to Montauban Alley. One platoon of the 4th SAI was detached to assist them in the move, in which each man carried one box of ammunition. Nearly every man vomited from the effect of the lachrymatory (gas) shells which were falling.

Gordon Forbes was one of the TMB men affected by the gas. "Nothing of any importance. Raining some. Leave our camp at Maricourt, proceed to Montauban through a valley where we suffered agonies as the Germans were dropping tear-shells in it. My eyes were smarting like fire and streaming tears, and was pretty well choked with the fumes of the gas. Slept a few hours

in a trench in Montauban, and left at three next morning for Longueval, being exposed to shell fire the whole time."

*

Captain Patterson ensured that he could provide four teams for the attack on Longueval — then allocated others to the other battalions.

"After an intensive bombardment lasting ¼ hour the attack was launched. We were in reserve and standing by. Arranged with OC 55th Coy to have four guides from the guns in Bernafay Wood to be at Bricqueterie sunken road at 6 am to lead relieving teams to positions. Sent extra carriers to help to bring guns etc out of the wood.

"Four teams under Sec-Lieuts Birkenshaw and Willmer were attached to the 1st SAI who moved off to Montauban Alley at about 8 am.

"Two teams were ordered to be attached to the 3rd SAI so sent Sec-Lieut Cuthbert and two of his teams to Montauban Alley whence this regiment had moved.

"Nothing of importance happened till about 4 pm when the Brigade HQ moved to take up its battle position in Montauban where it occupied a dug-out.

"Just before moving off I was ordered to attach four guns to the 2nd SAI and six to the 3rd SAI. The attachment was somewhat delayed owing to the 55th MG Coy making some mistake over the relief of the guns in Bernafay Wood. However, by about 8 pm the following was the disposition of the guns: Sec-Lieuts Birkenshaw and Willmer with four guns attached to the 1st SAI, Sec-Lieut Patrick and his four guns with the 2nd SAI. Lieut Bailey and Sec-Lieuts Wood and Nicholas with six guns attached to the 3rd SAI. Sec-Lieut Cuthbert and two guns with the 4th SAI. "(One of these guns and six men were knocked out by a shell just outside Brigade HQ while they were waiting to go up to the front".)

*

Private James Simpson spent an uneventful yet uncomfortable day at Carnoy.

"The following morning the wounded Highlanders came pouring down, many on railway trolleys. They had been attacking Longueval and Delville Wood, and they got cut up, although they went right through, for nothing can stop the 9th Division. Great numbers of cavalry began to arrive and camp alongside us, waiting for the time to break through.

About 5 o'clock that evening we again moved up to No 2 trench along with the (3rd) regiment, the idea being to move up to Delville Wood just before daybreak. We were all dog-tired, and had been without anything like real sleep for four days, and to make matters worse, Fritz started sending over tear-shells.

"These shells are non-poisonous, but irritate the eyes terribly, causing tears to flow; also burn the nose and throat. We had all to wear our goggles, which give a certain amount of relief. My goggles were useless, so I had to wear my gas helmet, with combination tear-shell goggles, and that only made things more unpleasant, and the glasses became dim until I was almost unable to see.

"I simply had to sit and wait for time to pass, and then I went on guard at 12 midnight till about 1 am. At 1.30 am we fell in, and moved off through the ruined village of Montauban, towards Longueval. On the way we saw many traces of the morning's battle."

*

Corporal Alfred Charles Smith, 30, was a motor mechanic from Doornfontein, Johannesburg. He left his wife, Ellen, and one child to serve in the mechanical transport in SWA. In France Smith served with the SA Service Corps (Motor Transport) and was attached to the 1st SAFA. He was killed while evacuating wounded at Longueval.

*

Reveille was at 3 am and the regiment was ready to move an hour later. Lukin instructed Lieut-Col Dawson to take the regiment along Montauban Alley to Longueval. At 11 am Dawson was called to the HQ of the 27th Brigade and informed that the advance was held up by snipers and machine-gun fire in the northern part of the village. Dawson was to deploy his regiment and attack this part of the village at 2 pm.

The battalion second-in-command, Major Edward Travers Burges, 38, came to South Africa from Bristol in 1896. He served through the South African War and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Burges took part in the Damaraland Border and Herero troubles then was commissioned in the Cape Mounted Police.

Major Burges was mentioned in despatches for his services in SWA. He enrolled as a lieutenant in the ILH then transferred to the 9th Mounted Brigade Permanent Force and thereafter to the 5th SAMR as captain and adjutant. After joining the brigade Burges was promoted to major and given command of D Coy (Clerical Coy) of Cape Town. Burges also acted as adjutant to the battalion.

As Dawson went ahead to ascertain the position, Major Burges brought the regiment up in eight lines of sections in file. This was done without a casualty although there was a fair amount of shelling. It was difficult to recognise the objective as there had been no time for studying the ground, which had been much altered by the artillery fire, and the officers had received very elementary training in map reading.

Capt Miller of B Coy reported that he had reached what he thought was his objective, then Capt Jowett reported that A Coy had occupied a certain trench, the position of which was not clear from his report. D Coy under Major Burges was about in the centre of the village. At 6 pm Dawson

instructed Capt Jenkins of C Coy to surround and capture a machine-gun post which was firing from a position called “The Chateau”. In doing so Jenkins was wounded.

Three other officers were wounded during the afternoon: Lieut Larmuth of D Coy was wounded by British artillery fire, whereas in A Company Lieut William Stanley Dent, 26, from Port Elizabeth had his right arm shattered. Lieutenant Chauncey Reid was also wounded.

At 11 pm urgent orders were received from the OC of 27th Brigade that the machine-gun holding up the advance was to be captured and that small parties were to carry this out. Three parties under Lieutenants Edwin Burgess, Walter Henry and Cron Bate left at midnight to capture the enemy posts.

*

Private Charles Edward Donald Dunn, 19, was born in Cornwall in August 1896 and came to Cape Town with his father and two sisters, where he worked in the leather industry. His war-time diary records the training for trench warfare at the dreaded “Bullring” at Etaples in May. Early in July he had been partly buried by a shell while carrying a can of water in a trench.

He recollected that his first day in Delville Wood involved bringing up rations.

“I was attached to No 3 platoon of A Company, for carrying rations up to the front line of the trenches. The transport brings the rations up just behind the lines, then we have to fetch them ourselves. It was not very pleasant work to do, but it had to be done. I remember one night quite well when six of us were detailed off to take rations up to the front line; it was a black night in itself, shells were falling fast, bullets were flying about, star lights were being sent up. Yes it was lively in Delville those five days.

“This one particular night we were taking rations to the front line and we had to pass through a very dense part of the wood. It was a very dark night as

the six of us were going along and we were all obliged to be continually lying down on our stomachs or to stand dead still. It was only necessary to take these steps each time star shells went up. If we did not take shelter or stand quite still, then we would stand a good chance of being shot down by the enemy.

"We managed to get the rations up to the lines all right, but as we commenced our return journey, two of us got separated from the other four, being so dark we could not see where we were going. All that we could see was the flashes from the shells, as they exploded, and also the different coloured star lights.

"Not knowing what was best to be done, we both lay down behind a big hedge in the wood with the intention of waiting for daylight to come. It was not very pleasant lying there listening to the awful din of the guns, whistling of bullets, and to see shells bursting all round you. Luckily, we did not have to lie there very long. I think we had only been lying there for one hour when we heard footsteps coming along through the trees. Who was it? is what we thought.

"It happened to be our officer. I am sure it was a stroke of luck that he should come along, for we were simply shivering in our boots, whether from fear or cold, I can't remember — I should think it was the latter though. He was kind enough to put us on the right road back to where we started from. We were not very sorry to crouch into our little dug-out to sleep for the rest of the night, not a peaceful sleep though."

*

The company commander, Capt George John Miller, 35, was born in London. He served in the South African War and remained afterwards at Ladybrand, OFS. He became a well-known journalist on "The Friend" newspaper in Bloemfontein.

He was married in Kimberley in November 1914, then served as a lieutenant in the 1st Bn Kimberley Regt in SWA where his company bore the brunt of the Trekkopjes fight.

Miller was an excellent public speaker and recruited for the brigade in Kimberley. He joined the brigade as second-in-command of C Coy (Kimberley Company), 1st SAI, but was transferred to command B Coy in France. His wife, Mary, moved to Norfolk, England, to be closer to him.

*

Private Henry Sherman took part in the street-to-street fighting in the village.

“On the Friday we cleared a village (Longueval) and many a Port Elizabeth boy was hit, but not any of our lucky platoon. In No 5 Percy Allen was shot above the heart and soon afterwards died. Port Elizabeth loses a footballer in him.

“Several others were wounded, including an old school mate Maynard Atkinson, shot through the arm and leg and some other part.

“Well, we were chasing all over the village, some sections bombing the Huns out of the houses, others doing all sorts of murderous jobs.

“In the evening we advanced into Delville Wood, without a casualty again. When we entered Delville Wood the Germans withdrew and in my estimation we should have followed them and there would have been no Delville Wood tragedy.

“But we had to stop there and dig ourselves in in slit trenches two or three feet deep. That night the Germans came over but we managed to hold them with rifle and Lewis machine-gun fire.

“I was attached to the machine-gunners, and two were killed alongside me. One poor Cape Town lad was shot in the eye whilst aiming his gun — of course, stone dead. I slept soundly that Friday night.”

*

Sergeant Stanley Griffiths, 19, was the company's instructor on the Lewis gun and prided himself on personally siting each gun in the front line. When he and his two brothers Grif, 22, and Eric, 20, had enlisted the year before at Uitenhage, the recruiter had drily commented that as the enlistment age was 21 (without parents' consent) he had not been aware that they were triplets.

During the attack that morning Stan Griffiths picked up a man who had been shot and lay in the road. As he carried him to safety the soldier mumbled, "Sergeant, I think you're a sergeant! … this will never be forgotten!"

A fellow Uitenhager, Charles Ingram, 20 had volunteered for active service in August 1914 and served with Prince Alfred's Guard until July 1915, then enlisted in the brigade the following month.

He was well aware of the importance of their objective.

"The South African Brigade was detailed to capture Delville Wood and hold it at all costs. The wood was a very strategic position on high ground commanding the view of the surrounding country. By the time we arrived at a position on 14 July to attack the wood we had lost 450 men."

*

Geoffrey Lawrence accompanied his company in the dawn attack.

"We were up at 2.30 am the next morning, 14 July (Bastille Day), and moved off at dawn. We made our way up through a valley alongside a light railway line passing on the way streams of Highlanders wounded in the taking of Longueval at daybreak.

"Higher up the valley we saw a fine and unusual sight, a squadron of Bengal Lancers mounted on horses, their long lances at the ready and the metal tips glinting in the sun. Understandably they were soon spotted by the enemy observation balloons, heavily shelled and dispersed with a number of losses. Even to us it seemed a wasteful and misguided appreciation of the

stubborn enemy defences held in strength behind wire ahead of them.

“We filed into a captured German communication trench and remained there until our call came to advance two hours later. In this time we were able to have a meal, though the trench was packed with dead Germans laid out in rows inside and outside on the parapet and very old. Our shelling here must have been deadly.

“From here we moved out into the open plain and headed for Longueval. We soon came under fire from shrapnel bursting overhead, also high-explosive and tear-gas shells. The latter forced us to put on eye goggles partially blinding us. It seemed to be indirect fire and luckily our platoon escaped casualties.

“The next company, not so lucky, had several casualties here from shrapnel balls, amongst them my later friend, Mackay. We reached the German line of trenches on the outskirts of Longueval and occupied them all afternoon. The enemy gunners had the exact range and shelled us with uncomfortable accuracy.

“In mid-afternoon I was told to go off on a fatigue party to carry plum-pudding type mortar shells through the village to the mortar battery on the fringe of the wood in front of us. It was a very tricky affair carrying a 60 lb bomb on one’s shoulder plus our usual equipment.

“Our route took us through broken-down houses and streets where many of our dead were lying. At one corner we dodged around, quickly stepped over two dead men, and round the next shelter before the snipers could get us. Bullets pinged and ricochetted everywhere. We were relieved to return to the less dangerous shelter of our trench.

“That night we had a bad time and little sleep. Added to the type of shelling we had all afternoon, a battery of long-distance heavy naval guns was ranged onto us and fired all night.”

*

Private Cyril Pemberton Barnes, 25, of Beaconsfield, Kimberley, was the second youngest of seven sons. His brother Lesley joined the Australian forces as their rates of pay were better, whereas his younger brother, Vernon, served in East Africa.

Cyril Barnes left municipal service and joined the Griqualand West Mounted Rifles for service in the Rebellion, but was invalided home after getting sunstroke at Upington. He then joined the brigade and served in Egypt and France.

When the 1st SAI moved into Longueval Barnes entered a ruined shell of a house. A shell had exploded inside, blowing the roof off. He saw an expensive pair of German shoes in a corner and on closer inspection saw to his horror that they were neatly laced up with the feet still inside. The man had presumably been blown to pieces.

*

Corporal Emanuel Doitsh, 38, was a commercial traveller from Cape Town who had left his wife, Fanny, and three children behind. He had previously served in the Cape Infantry, Cape Medical Corps, Rand Rifles and SAMC. While in Egypt Doitsh had been severely reprimanded for neglect of duty. His promotion to sergeant four days later remained unconfirmed.

Corporal Doitsh assisted in taking ammunition to one of the Scottish regiments, thus being one of the first South Africans to enter Delville Wood.

“As we advanced with the weighty boxes, the high explosive shells of the enemy were flying round us in frightful fury. The delivery of the ammunition being a matter of great urgency, we could not take any cover from the inferno.

“The regiments were crying out for ammunition, their machine-guns could not hold out, and the situation was desperate. We had to face the music (and

the German Jack Johnsons take some facing too!).

“We had only advanced a few hundred yards, when our platoon officer went up into the air by the explosion of a shell, but, luckily for him, it was only a case of shell-shock.

“I had to ‘carry on’ with the men. A few paces farther on they seemed to drop round me in all directions. This was a disastrous state of affairs. I called a halt and tried to discover the cause. Screening my eyes, I looked all over the wood, which was thickly studded with trees, and after a moment noticed a movement in one of them.

“Ordering two men to accompany me, I went towards the wood. Upon reaching the tree and discerning a boot, I exclaimed: ‘I have discovered the source of the trouble; come down, my beautiful Bosch!’ At the same time I grabbed the boot and hauled for all I was worth.

“Realising that the game was up, he came down crying for mercy, saying, ‘Comrade, mercy, comrade!’ in the best English he could muster. He was a sight to behold, covered in branches, and when he was up in the tree it was difficult to see between them. Even his face was painted green. He had a fine machine-gun up the tree, and must have slaughtered our men in the wood that day had I not brought his little game to an end.

“The men were furious with him, but he was put with the other prisoners. We carried on, and eventually delivered the ammunition.

“The firing in the wood came from all directions, as Delville was the most advanced portion of the line, and therefore a salient. Men were being blown in all directions. Those who survived it all will remember it for life.

“The arrival of my party, minus casualties, which I unfortunately had to leave behind, was heralded by cheers, for now the regiment was able to carry on.

“The next problem that confronted us was how we were to go back.

However, this we managed with no casualties; but it was something wonderful to achieve, because on the way we had to pass through the village of Longueval, where the houses were toppling in all directions, first one of us being hit by falling debris, and then another.

"It was courting death to try and take cover behind them. We were confronted by two evils — a house toppling on us or a shell hitting us; so chose the latter, thinking there was less risk. The dead lay about in large numbers, a sight I never wish to witness again."

*

Private George Bruce Miller, 18, was one of the company Lewis gunners. He was born at Graaff Reinet in January 1898, however lived near Miller Station in the Karroo. He attended Grey College in Port Elizabeth and joined up in 1914 at the age of 16. His letters home had referred to the arduous marches and fighting in Egypt. From France he wrote mainly of casualties — Norman Featherstone wounded before Delville Wood, Cecil Featherstone wounded in shoulder, Jim Foxcroft killed, etc.

*

Private Thomas Herbert Holiday, 19, served in the Cape Peninsula Rifles for 10 months before joining the brigade. He had light brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion and came from the Gardens, Cape Town.

"I went up to the village of Longueval on the morning it had been taken. I was with the adjutant (Lieut Thomas Priday) and machine-gun officer (Capt Robert Deane). We approached the village and when we reached a corner we were advised to double across, as there was a German machine-gun playing on it.

"Fritz fired on us as we ran across, but fortunately he missed us. The next man to follow was shot through the shoulder, then afterwards shot through the arm; two others got over scot free; then another two attempted to cross

but were shot dead one after the other. That was a very hot corner.

"We (adjutant and the MGO) proceeded up the road. The adjutant went into some buildings on the left, and the MGO carried on, followed by me some paces in the rear. When we reached the end of the road, we saw Huns running.

"The MGO thereupon drew his revolver and brought down two. He called me to take up a position alongside a ruined house. The MGO went back a little way, leaving me alone. I fired at Fritz running across, the distance being about 80 yards.

"Whilst firing, one of our own shells dropped short and struck the building. It did not damage me, but caused a lot of dust; so afraid of being cut off, I fixed a bayonet on my rifle, which bayonet I took off a dead Scotsman lying a few feet away from me. The adjutant then came up, and said I had a lucky escape."

*

Private Fred Hampson, 20, a telephonist from Cape Town, had been deprived of one day's pay by Dawson early in July for not being in possession of sugar in his iron rations. He was in Lieut Aubrey Liefeldt's platoon en route to Longueval when shells began falling.

"They pounded us with everything they had. They sent over tear-gas shells and chlorine gas, as well as hitting us with their field-guns. The ground was open and there was no cover. We marched to Longueval. Every house there was a machine-gun nest. My platoon was deployed around the back of the houses to clean up any snipers there. The main street was literally littered with bodies."

*

Private Ronald Rawbone, 20, was a six-foot farmer with blue eyes and brown hair, who had previously served in the CT Highlanders. He wrote to his

father, Capt Murray Rawbone, of the shelling they were subjected to.

"We went into Longueval with the Scots, but that evening we retired and took over the German trenches that the Scots had captured that day. The trenches were full of German dead. Some of their dug-outs were quite 30 feet deep, but they did not stop our shells, and numbers of Germans were buried alive.

"The Germans started shelling us, and they did not half give it to us hot; of course they knew every inch of the trenches. They started at the one end and finished up at the other end, both ends of the trenches were blown to bits, and numbers of our fellows were wounded, and as we stood there the word would come down. 'Gangway for stretcher-bearers.'

"Well, we were like rats in a trap, we could not get one way or another. That evening they stopped shelling, and we had orders to leave the trenches. We then went to our left and dug ourselves in under a bank, but we were not to have a rest, and the next morning we were on the move again, this time for Delville Wood, or, as we call it, 'Devil's Wood'."

*

The 2nd, 3rd and 4th battalions meanwhile moved up in support. Among the Transvaalers was a qualified attorney, Ernest Solomon. Lance-Corporal Ernest Heitz Solomon, 35, came from Kimberley where he had served in the Town Guard during the South African War. He qualified and practised as a solicitor afterwards, then served with the Rand Rifles in SWA. He was later to write a book about his experiences in France.

"It was not, however, until late the next afternoon that we made a move. Earlier in the day British and Indian cavalry had passed us, so it was with a feeling of great things to come that we passed through Montauban, halted to one side of it, and then filed into trenches on the other side overlooking a valley, with Longueval away on our right.

“I should say we passed over, rather than through Montauban, as that one-time village had been razed to the ground and its remains were barely visible at a distance. The cavalry were seen to gallop up and halt for the night on the opposite slopes of the valley, and an aeroplane flying low, its pilot waved to us as he passed overhead.

“We passed the night in those trenches as best we could. Greatcoats had been left behind when we moved off that afternoon, but we did not find it cold. During the night the Germans sent over tear-shells, and, our eyes streaming and sore, we were obliged to wear the goggles issued for the purpose as, very early on the morning of the 15th, we left the trenches and marched in the direction of Longueval.”

*

Dudley Meredith’s account of the battalion’s movement is similar to Solomon’s in most respects.

“The 14th July now drew nigh, and we were warned to hold ourselves in readiness for the next big attack. On the evening of the 13th we moved out of our trenches and concentrated in a little valley at Talus Boise. Here we parted company with our greatcoats so we knew that it would not be long before we were in action.

“Next morning there was a sudden cessation in the artillery fire, followed by a crackling of rifle fire and machine-guns up and down the front line and we knew the second big attack had started.

“It was a long day of suspense unrelieved by anything more than alternating rumours of success and check; the order to move in the late afternoon, therefore, came as a welcome diversion, although in my own case a feeling of apprehension arose in my mind at the same time. True, in the afternoon English and Indian Cavalry regiments as well as Horse artillery detachments had passed us going up towards the battle front, but many of us felt that

although this cheered us, the battle would be long and arduous.

“We rested awhile on the slope behind Montauban, where we saw Brig-Gen Lukin in conference with his officers. Just before dusk we filed over the hill through the village of Montauban to a trench half way down the slope beyond. This trench was “Dublin Street” and from here the attack had been launched in the early morning. Montauban as we passed through it was a mere collection of heaps of bricks and cavernous shell-holes. As a village it had more or less been razed from the map.

“Filing along Dublin Street we spread ourselves out and made ourselves as comfortable as we could for the night, in small excavations in the trench walls. No sooner had we done so than a bombardment of our trench started with big shells as well as tear-gas shells, and intermittently it was maintained all night. This was our first experience and a most unpleasant one, of tear-gas. Fortunately not much harm was done by the tear-gas, while our casualties from the other shells were very few.

“Before dawn we left our trench and marched up the road leading up the slope to Longueval and Delville Wood. It was still dark and quiet — a lull having fallen on both sides in the great struggle. Quietly, therefore, with mixed feelings of apprehension, excitement and elation, we marched along in the warm air, towards our objective — Delville Wood.”

*

Private Bert Higgins recalled friends killed that day.

“We came out of Bernafay Wood and on the night of 14 July we went up again into the redoubts. The Germans were shelling heavily all the time. Jock Stewart from Benoni was killed. I had a little friend, Mickey Randall. The Randalls were two cousins from Boksburg. I almost said they were brothers they looked so alike. Mickey came to me and said, ‘Bertie, where’s my cousin?’ I said, ‘He was here just now!’ We scratched and found he was

buried in a funk hole. We got him out but he was dead from shell-blast. They were shelling us with gas-shells then. We had gas masks but we used to suffocate with them."

*

Major Hunt recorded the move of the battalion from Dublin Trench.

"July 14. Highland Brigade go for Longueval. In evening we moved to Montauban Road but Germans saw us settle in and sent over tear-shells and crumps. Taylor wounded. Farrell gassed. Bad night."

*

Betteridge would never forget the sights they saw in the advance that day.

"As we advanced I saw many dead kilties; one of the Cameronians had rammed his bayonet into the chest of a German when both were killed by the blast of a German shell. This was a gruesome sight among many others in the vicinity of Longueval village.

"That afternoon we moved up to the fringe of Longueval, digging shallow trenches when time allowed. The Germans had started a frightening barrage on our exposed positions and sent over a gas attack. Captain Farrell was gassed and wounded and Lieut Taylor was among others taken by stretcher to the field hospital erected at the side of Bernafay Wood. This hospital was within range of the German heavy guns and carried on attending to the thousands of wounded under shell-fire."

*

Boustead noted with trepidation that German balloons above Delville Wood kept them under close observation.

"Our guides led us into a broken-down fire trench where the original parados which was to form our parapet had been blown in by our guns while the Germans were holding it. The trench offered little shelter. The balloons continued to watch us and presently a salvo of 5.9 inch shells pitched over us,

quickly followed by a short bracket. I thought immediately, ‘The next one will be ours’. And it was.

“Although a shell pitched practically in the middle of the section, the three of us in the centre escaped any hurt other than a tremendous shock and blast which blew the equipment off our shoulders, our steel hats away, and poured tear-gas in great clouds all over the trench.

“Coughing and spitting and weeping and blinded by the tear-gas we could hear those of our comrades who were wounded moaning under the debris. Six of the section, three on either side of us were utterly destroyed, torn to pieces, and six more were wounded.

“Yank was the first up; he jumped up to the parados immediately shouting for a stretcher. None appeared, so we went over to get one and started to carry the wounded through the mist of tear-gas down to a clearing-station half a mile back. It was already getting dark and the mist and our tear blindness made the going very difficult. It must have been midnight before we had got the remaining casualties cleared and searched ineffectively for our equipment and rifles.

“Our move to Montauban Alley was a preliminary step for the main advance of the South African Brigade on to Delville Wood next morning. Without a doubt the balloons had picked us up and it was clearly a mistake to have moved up before dark into a trench with no adequate shelter. Late that night we collected rifles and equipment off the dead and lay down exhausted, sleeping fitfully, waiting for the signal to move before first light.”

Chapter 5 — Taking the wood

Saturday 15th

Delville Wood is named because of its proximity to the village of Longueval. It was known as Bois de la Ville (wood of the village) by the locals. Long open avenues had been cleared within the wood to allow the local landowner to ride his horse to all parts. These “rides” were also used to bring out the cut wood. The local sawmill in the village had also constructed a narrow-gauge railway line through the wood.

The wood is slightly less than a mile square (156 acres). At the time it was overgrown with gorse and thick grass and underbrush. It was described by someone who knew it before the war as “a thick tangle of trees, chiefly oak and birch, and a dense hazel underbrush”.

Fighting had taken place in the area when the Germans overran the countryside in late 1914. The Germans fortified the north-west corner strongly as this covered the village and the road to Flers. Deep trenches and bunkers criss-crossed the area.

With the exception of the rides, vision within the wood was limited to approximately thirty yards between the trees. The rides were given names by the British — the main one. Princes Street, bisected the wood from east to west. Names of London streets were given to the rides running northwards from Princes Street and names of Edinburgh streets to those running south. Rotten Row ran parallel to Princes Street for half its distance in the south.

*

The 1st Regiment under Dawson occupied the south-east of Longueval. Lieut-Col Tanner left Montauban with the remaining three battalions at 2.30

am. When the brigade advanced their ammunition dump was set on fire by enemy shell fire. Private Frederick Govan of the 3rd SAI assisted in extinguishing the flames under heavy shell fire and danger from exploding grenades. He displayed great coolness in issuing material under heavy shell fire.

Many of the men still suffered from the effects of tear-gas. They had been told not to rub their eyes, so walked towards Delville Wood with tears running down their cheeks.

Two companies of the SA Scottish under Major Hunt were detached to assist the 26th Brigade in the attack on Waterlot Farm.

Captains Ross and Marshall with their B and C companies were to occupy the orchards between Delville Wood and Waterlot Farms. They later each supplied a platoon to cover the flank of the Cameron's attack on the German strong-point.

It was a cloudy, misty morning. The 3rd SAI led the 2nd and two companies of the 4th. Where the road entered Longueval the battalions were left sheltering in old German trenches while Colonels Tanner and Thackeray reconnoitred. They found that the northern parts of Longueval were still in German hands.

In the south-west of Delville Wood the 1st SAI and 5th Camerons were engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Germans. A Highlander from the Camerons then guided the 3rd SAI along disused German trenches into the wood.

Colonel Tanner spoke some words of encouragement to the men, then they advanced eastwards. Despite close German fire in the tangled shell-torn wood, with the assistance of one company of the 2nd SAI, they soon reached the south-eastern perimeter where they began digging in.

Parties under Captains Medlicott and Tomlinson (B and D companies

respectively) attacked German positions east of the wood and took a number of prisoners.

The other two companies cleared the area between Princes Street and the northern perimeter from the east. Resistance was weak as the garrison had been thinned out on account of the shelling. The Springboks were soon exhausted by the tangle of fallen trees and branches and the thick undergrowth. When they stumbled to the edge of the wood they were subjected to a fierce bombardment and rifle and machine-gun fire. They did their best to dig themselves in and erect wire, however, with a front of 1,300 yards to hold they were spread very thinly.

At 11.30 am the 2/107th Reserve Regiment attacked. Rifle fire opened up at 600 yards, however they closed to 50 yards before a group of 4th SAI reinforcement came up and stopped them with accurate and rapid rifle and machine-gun fire. The Germans then dug in 80 yards from the wood.

An attack by the 3/107th Reserve Regiment in the east was also beaten back. These two battalions lost 28 officers and 500 men. At 1.30 pm the l/72nd Regiment (8th Division) lost nearly all its officers during the attack on the north-eastern side of the wood.

By 2 pm Tanner could report to Gen Lukin that he held practically the whole wood. He was, however, being strongly counter-attacked and requested reinforcements. One of Major Macleod’s Scottish companies was then sent to him.

*

At 3 pm the 6th Regiment of the 10th Bavarian Division attacked in the east, astride the Ginchy Road, but were driven back by rifle fire. At 4.40 pm the Germans attacked from the sunken Flers Road in the north but were repulsed.

At 6.30 pm Tanner spoke to Lukin by telephone. He said that the casualties were extremely heavy and added that one company of the 2nd SAI was

virtually destroyed. This was probably Captain Barlow's B Company, where only two junior officers (Errol Tatham and Walter Hill) were left standing.

Lukin sent Macleod's remaining company, together with one company of the 1st SAI, as reinforcements. Dawson was ordered to detail carrying platoons, as additional picks and shovels were necessary for the consolidation of the positions in the wood.

As dusk set in the German rate of shell fire increased — at times reaching 400 shells per minute. The South Africans were by this time fully deployed around the perimeter of the wood with the exception of the north-west corner.

The Springboks' position that evening was that twelve weakened companies of infantry were holding a rambling perimeter of a wood a little less than a mile square. It was threatened at close quarters by German trenches on three sides in addition to which, as the enemy held the north-west corner, they had access to a large part of the wood. The only reserves were one company of the 1st SAI and the two companies (B and C) of the 4th SAI which had been lent to the 26th Brigade.

*

General Furse's decision to send the Springboks in was conveyed to Gen Lukin shortly before 1 am. Lukin's report on the day's events follows (with added information in brackets):

"At 12.55 am on July 15 orders were received that the brigade must attack the wood at dawn.

"I immediately sent for my battalion commanders and informed them that they must move at once in order to be in position to attack at daybreak.

"At 2 am I received the following telegram from division: 'Before forming up for the attack on Delville Wood at 5 am to be sure to obtain reliable information regarding situation in Longueval. It may be unsafe to form up west of village unless village is in our hands. If enemy is still north of village

and we are in occupation of south-east of same it would probably be better to enter wood at south-west corner.'

"The following order was then issued to Lieut-Col Tanner: 'A copy of 9th Division telegram G 527 timed 1.15 am is attached for your information. On arrival at Longueval you will ascertain the position and then confer with Lieut-Col Thackeray. If the position is such as to necessitate an attack from the south-west it will be made on a one battalion front; the 3rd SAI leading, supported by the 2nd SAI. If the enemy is not in possession of Longueval, the attack on Delville Wood will be launched as originally ordered. The attack will be launched at 5 am.'

"Similar orders were issued to Lieut-Col Thackeray, and the Officer Commanding 4th SAI (Major MacLeod) was ordered to move in support of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions.

"The three battalions were clear of Montauban at 2.30 am.

"At 2.40 am an order was received to place two companies of this brigade at the disposal of the 26th Brigade.

"The Officer Commanding 4th SAI (Major MacLeod) was instructed accordingly, and two companies (B and C) reported to the Officer Commanding, 5th Camerons, at the square in Longueval, at 5 am. These companies returned to my command at 6 am on the 16th.

"At 6 am the 3rd SAI entered the south-west corner of Delville Wood.

"By 7 am that portion of the wood south of Princes Street was in our possession.

"By 9 am a company of the 2nd SAI had moved up via the Strand and gained the northern edge of the wood, where consolidation was immediately commenced.

"The wood was shelled by the enemy as soon as our men gained the northern perimeter.

“Prior to our occupation of the wood the enemy had a system of trenches dug to the north and south-east of it. These in places came to within 70 yards of the wood.

“Machine-gun and rifle fire from the enemy in these trenches, combined with the fact that the ground was a mass of tree roots, rendered digging-in extremely difficult.

“Many casualties were incurred in attempting to wire the face of the wood.

“Our men were kept fully occupied in holding off the enemy and in harassing him in every way possible.

“On two occasions they advanced against parties of the enemy, and succeeded in capturing 3 officers and 130 other ranks, and a machine-gun. (These were raiding parties under Captains Medlicott and Tomlinson of the 3rd SAI.)

“The 1st SAI had returned to my command at 11.15 am.

“At 2.40 pm Lieut-Col Tanner reported that he was holding the whole of the wood, excepting the strong points portion in the northwest; he was being strongly counter-attacked and asked for reinforcements, and I accordingly sent forward a company of the 4th SAI.

“My intention was to thin out the troops in the wood as soon as the perimeter was seized, leaving the machine-guns with small detachments of infantry to hold it. The enemy, by launching counterattacks at once, prevented this intention being carried out and Lieut-Col Tanner reported that he required all the men under his command to hold off the enemy. He stated that the enemy’s counterattacks were ‘most determined and sustained’ and that the enemy was ‘now massing men on the northern face and may resume attack.’

“Later (6.30 pm), he reported that the enemy was massing large numbers to the north and north-east of the wood.

“I spoke to Lieut-Col Tanner over the telephone and discussed with him the question of the number of men necessary to hold the wood. He informed me that our casualties had been very heavy and asked for further reinforcements.

“I accordingly sent him a company of the 1st SAI and another company of the 4th SAI to reinforce the 2nd and 3rd Battalions respectively.

“A staff officer (probably Lieut P Roseby) was despatched to the wood at 7 pm to obtain full particulars regarding our dispositions there.

“The Officer Commanding 1st SAI (Lieut-Col Dawson) was ordered to detail special carrying platoons to keep up the supply of ammunition in the wood, and he was further instructed to put a Vickers and Lewis gun at the south-west corner of the wood to cover the southern face.

“Additional picks and shovels were also sent forward to enable the men in the wood to dig themselves in, and the Officers Commanding 2nd (Tanner) and 3rd (Thackeray) SAI, were urged: ‘that despite the fatigue of the men this necessary work should be undertaken without fail, as it is probable they will be exposed to heavy shell fire tomorrow.’

“The system of consolidation in Delville Wood was as follows:

(1) Rifle pits were dug immediately the objective was gained. Pits in most cases to hold two.

(2) Lewis guns were brought up and placed in position around the perimeter.

(3) Vickers guns were brought up as soon as possible and placed around the perimeter.

(4) Rifle pits were connected up to form a continuous trench, and strong points formed at salients.

(5) Supporting trenches were dug in Buchanan Street and Princes Street.

(6) Trench was dug in Strand Street by the Engineers.

(7) A strong point was made by the Engineers about 150 yards north-east of

the junction of Buchanan and Princes streets.

“I was in constant touch with the Officer Commanding, 64th Field Coy RE — Major Hearn — regarding consolidation in the wood, and B Company, 9th Seaforth Highlanders, worked under his orders.

“The Field Coy RE and Pioneers carried out such work as was possible in consolidating the position.”

*

Two brigade signallers, Privates Marcel Smuts and Richard Holmes, were sent into the wood as linesmen to establish communications. Throughout the whole time the wood was occupied they attended to their duties under fire. Holmes was hit by a shell splinter but remained at his post. They went out several times repairing the lines under fire. They were both awarded MMs and mentioned in despatches.

*

In the early morning the trench mortar battery, including the 4th SAI platoon attached to it, moved to Longueval to support the assault. A gun which was placed near the church accounted for a German machine-gun nest and a sniper. The remainder of the battery then retired to Montauban Alley.

Gordon Forbes was appalled by the horror of the Longueval street-fighting.

“Officers lost their way and led the whole lot of us up to the 3rd Division trench and over the field they had charged the day before. It was most pitiful and gruesome to see numbers of our men lying dead on the ground still grasping their rifles with fixed bayonets, although cold and stiff like marble. After wandering round for some time we found the SA Brigade and took two guns up to do some straffing which brought on a heavy bombardment by the Germans.

“The 2nd and 3rd Regts were attacking a wood (Delville Wood) just in front of us, and the rifle and machine-gun fire was appalling and we had to

keep well down to escape the bullets which were whistling like hell over our only partially-constructed trench, and several times I was covered with ground thrown up from big shells dropping only a few yards wide of the trench.

"About 4 pm we got orders to file out with the Stokes guns and retired to a big communication trench a mile back. The 2nd and 3rd took their objective but at a big death roll, of which I am very anxious to know details. Lieut Brude-Wold and Capt Gray were killed in this fight, two of our very best officers. Schultz in our gun team wounded in the eye and two of the Scottish TMB's killed. The village of Longueval was a sight, too. Men lying dead in every street, buildings burning and rifles, equipment, etc., strewn all over the place. The town itself is wholly demolished, tom up by high explosive and raked by shrapnel."

*

The 28th Brigade MG Coy war diary was written up at Brigade HQ at Montauban.

"The SA Brigade attacked Delville Wood and took it this morning. The northern end of Longueval is still held by the enemy which is rather disconcerting to anyone going through, on account of the snipers and MG fire.

"Went up to Delville Wood this evening and after a stormy journey managed to see the guns in the south and south-east edges of the wood. Colonel Thackeray of the 3rd SAI asked for more guns if possible so, after seeing the adjutant of the 1st SAI, took four guns from that regiment and ordered two each to go to the north-east and south-east edges of the wood."

*

The company which Pte James Simpson was attached to (probably 4th Battalion, D Coy) entered Delville Wood much later than the leading

companies.

“We remained on the road just outside Longueval till long after sun up; in fact, till about 11.30 am. We were now carrying the extra weight of the day’s rations. The regiment now started to move off into the village and wood by companies, and a young fellow who had been sitting next to me was killed three minutes after leaving, for we were being shelled all the time.

“The company my gun was attached to now moved up, and we passed through the ruined Longueval. There I saw a number of dead, including the little fellow I had just been speaking to a few minutes before. We continued through the village into the wood.

“Here things were terribly confusing, for fighting was going on there at the time, and no one seemed to know just which direction to fire, and fellows in trenches in the centre of the wood did not know which direction from which to expect an attack.

“Our lot went right through to the far edge of the wood (probably to the north-east side) and there dug ourselves in. We could see the Germans moving about in the open, about 1,100 yards away. There was a valley between us and them. For all we knew there may have been thousands down there. A number crept up to about 50 yards of us, and started shooting, and as a matter of fact the ground from 50 yards was practically full of them.

“We amused ourselves shooting them from behind trees. It was impossible to know what was really going on except on our own little front. Our fellows were being moved about from one place to another till we had no idea where the regiment got to.

“The second regiment got cut up driving the enemy out of the wood. After a time orders became very confused; at one time we would get the order to face about as the enemy was in the wood. That meant holding two fronts. Then another came to leave our positions and wheel round on the left, and drive

them out, but we just sat still, and no Germans appeared our way from within the wood.

"We were now with the (3rd) Regiment. Our left (2nd) was continually asking for reinforcements, and men were being taken away from the front of the wood to strengthen the left, which was being attacked. All that day and the following night we were being heavily shelled.

"During the night there were six counter-attacks on our left of the wood, and they were still calling for reinforcements from the front side. Orders would come along that they were coming on us, and then that they were advancing in four columns in front. Sure enough, we could just see four dark masses but these later turned out to be trees in the distance."

*

Of the three assault parties sent out in Longueval, that under Lieut Edwin Burgess returned to report that the position was clear. Lieuts Walter Henry and Cron Bate of C Coy searched the houses on both sides of North Street until they came under very heavy machine-gun fire from a house. Bombs were also thrown at them and Very lights sent up. They established themselves in the house opposite and attempted to snipe the machine-gunner, but without success. They withdrew without incurring any casualties and returned to the headquarters by daylight.

That afternoon arrangements were made for a trench mortar to bombard the house. Altogether seven houses were destroyed, four of which were burnt. One of the enemy was blown up into the air.

*

Private Charles Dunn was horrified by the dead of Longueval and Delville Wood.

"The following day we happened to walk through the same part of the wood as the night before. The same hedge that we had crouched under —

what should we see but a Tommy lying dead with his head smashed to atoms, he was covered over with a water-proof sheet. The sight of him sent a shudder through me. On the left (west) of the wood was a large village and cemetery. This of course was nothing but a mass of ruins.

"Dead men were lying all about. At some parts one was obliged to step over the dead bodies of Germans, Britishers, South Africans and Highlanders. And some awful sights they were. Some men with half bodies, heads off, some were really in an awful state. All the time that I spent in Delville Wood in one large shell-hole a dead Jock was sitting upright, he had evidently died from loss of blood. On his left lay only half a man — he was a Jock too. All that could be seen of him was his kilt and two legs. Yes, there were some awful sights to see in Delville Wood.

"Then there was one night that I still remember when myself and three other pals set to make ourselves beds for the night in a shell-hole. It was a large hole and we made our beds side by side on the side of the shell-hole. It was a very dark night; it was also raining. All we had for covering was our waterproofs, no overcoats, as they were taken from us before coming to the front line.

"The Germans were shelling us like old boots but we all, being so dead tired, paid no heed to the danger of the shells and bullets, but instead slept peacefully on — dreaming of home, I don't think! As I said before, it was a very dark night and raining. I continually woke up with the continuous explosions of the shells. It was just in one of my little dozes when all at once a shell of some kind fell right in the centre of our shell-hole. The explosion was terrific — it lifted me from the ground a few inches. We were covered in mud and sand but none of the four of us got hurt, only the shock knocked us up."

*

Sherman had a peaceful first night in Delville Wood.

“When I woke up on the Saturday morning I was surprised to see how close we were to the German trench — not 25 yards off.

“We had two good men killed, Old Dad Macdonald, who brought down several snipers, and Willie Ferguson (son of the baker). He was a good sort.

“Several were wounded. We had no rations that day, but we had emergency ones which I tackled. All the excitement makes one forget one’s appetite, but still one gets thirsty.

“Our rations were bully beef and biscuits. We drank from our water bottles. We were not supposed to smoke but we did.

“I might mention that that night they made a strong counterattack, but we beat them off. The row was beyond description, and we fired where we thought they were.

“The Germans are very treacherous, and you can believe all you hear of them now, for they have played their tricks on us. One sniper was shot in a tree covered with twigs and on his arm a Red Cross.

“A dressing-station of theirs in a village with Red Cross flags flying had machine-guns in. They fired on two of our stretcher-bearers carrying a wounded man, and he was killed in the stretcher (witnessed it).

“They fight like merry dickens until you get within bayonet reach; then up go their hands and they cry for mercy, but they found very little.

“We were vastly outnumbered. That day we lay low, crouching in the trenches as they were too shallow to stand up in. We slept crouching too.”

*

Lawrence and his companions spent a sleepless night in the Longueval trench due to the large naval guns which pounded their position.

“In the early morning one of those heavy ones fell on our parapet and buried a man close to me. We dug him out as quickly as possible though I

was too shocked by the blast to help much. He was carried away unconscious but we heard recovered only to be lost in Delville Wood later.

"On the 15th our company was needed to press forward an attack in the wood. We filed out of our trench and took up a position next to some of the Argylls. We lay down amongst the bracken for orders to advance, meanwhile keeping very low and quiet.

"A young Scottie of the Argylls, about my age, had opened a tin of sardines and was thoughtfully and carefully selecting and eating one at a time, slowly as if they were to be his last. I wondered at him not offering me one when I spotted the worsted star of a second-lieutenant on the shoulder strap of his Tommies' tunic.

"Just then there was a great shouting and cheers and a long rattle of machine-gun fire. It seemed Captain Jenkins had given an order to his men around him to prepare to charge a strong point, and blown his whistle and as his men rose with him were swept down by the machine-gun. Captain Jenkins and five men were wounded and one was killed. Owing to a gap in our extended line the order did not reach us.

"There was heavy shelling all that day after we returned to our trench. At dusk we moved into the wood and dug ourselves in. Amongst the tree roots digging was difficult and slow so that we worked until the early hours of the 16th."

*

Captain Herbert Harold Jenkins, the company commander, was wounded in his right arm. At the time his wife, Lucy, was living at Taungs in the Cape.

Cyril Barnes's initial impression of Delville Wood was shared by most others. "When we went in it was just a matter of walking in. There was no resistance. The foliage and undergrowth in Delville Wood was thick … we had to hold the perimeter of the wood and had to dig trenches."

*

Private Victor Casson, who had turned 18 two days earlier, used the surname “Clark” as he was under age when he joined up. Victor attended the Christian Brothers’ College in Kimberley then ran away at the age of 16 to become a Maxim-gunner in the Bechuanaland Rifles in SWA.

In France Casson served in No 9 Platoon under Lieut Cron Bate of Harrismith.

Lieutenant Cron Ivor Bate, 34, was a bank accountant who had served in the Western Province Mounted Rifles and as a Harrismith despatch rider. He left his fiancée, Bella MacDonald, in Harrismith when he enlisted in August 1915 and was commissioned a month later. The 5 ft 8 in blue-eyed officer was promoted to temporary captain in June 1916.

Casson was made a sniper and took part in the village fighting at Longueval. “On the night of the 15th at Longueval we were sheltering behind a wall when Capt Jenkins, a De Beers security guard, led the company in a charge and they were mown down. Capt Jenkins was wounded in the arm and came crawling back on his hands and knees. We then went into Delville Wood which was a beautiful thick wood.”

Casson found that they had no time to admire the view of the wood. “My best friend, James McGregor, 25, was with me. When we attained our objective in the wood we both dug frantically and before daybreak had a funk-hole three foot deep and about five foot square. We remained in this position for two days and two nights and repulsed three German attacks on our position with Mills hand grenades and rifle fire.”

*

Lieutenant Aubrey Liefeldt, 23, led No 13 Platoon toward the wood. “We had marched only about fifty yards when a shell landed a few yards away. Bits of shrapnel went through my right arm and into my chest, but none into my

lungs, and hundreds of tiny splinters embedded themselves in my face, but my eyes were untouched. It was extraordinary."

Lieutenant Liefeldt was carried out of the wood with his arm shattered and face and chest covered in blood.

"I can't remember the details as I couldn't see or hear. I have a dim recollection of being carried down to headquarters and somebody said, 'Who's that?' Somebody else said, 'That is Liefeldt.' He said, 'Oh dear! He's finished, isn't he?'

"The next thing that I can remember is that I was in hospital in Rouen. I still today have specks of shrapnel around my eyes. By extraordinary good fortune my eyes were not permanently damaged."

*

Private Domingo Balini, 22, was a first generation Italian South African. As he had been a crack-shot in the CPR, Col Dawson insisted that he do a sniping course in England. When the brigade entered Delville Wood the snipers were sent in first to clear it of German marksmen. Balini was to be one of the first Delville Wood casualties.

"We scattered all over to see if we could see any Germans. They were all over and a lot of our chaps got wounded and killed. Then all of a sudden one of our shells came along and dropped short and I was wounded. This was at about 6.20 am.

"Some of our men bandaged me up as I had a big piece of shrapnel in the calf of my leg and a couple of splinters in my body. I found a stick to walk with, but went the wrong way. When I saw Germans running in front of me I turned around. Once in the wood it is easy to lose oneself.

"Of the seven of us who came out of the wood at the time three were subsequently killed by a German shell."

*

Coenraad Nelson was a Vickers-gunner with No 14 Platoon, when the Germans counter-attacked that day.

"We were put into a little section and put into a shell-hole … We were there for about four to five hours when the Germans came down in mass formation. They came downhill and we could see through the wood. They came on top of us and we started firing and frankly I don't remember much about what was happening …

"Just looking through between the trees we could see the Brandenburgers coming down in force close to one another. I have never seen anything as brave as that. They came up right close to us. The 'condensed milk' grenades were all around us … it was an inferno as far as I was concerned.

"I was No 2 on the gun. The chap who was working the gun was a corporal who was given the MM afterwards. The Germans were almost on top of us — a matter of about 30 to 40 yards.

"As I was feeding the gun I got it in the arm. I went back to get a few more guns and as I came to put them down I got it in the side and I didn't know very much about it after that, except that my half-section was wounded and taken a prisoner of war …

"I woke up in the dressing-station. I do remember they plastered me up or something and they were going to take us away in wagons drawn by horses. I offered to walk and they said no."

Private Thomas Holiday was acting as orderly to Col Dawson. When the telegraph wires were cut he took a message through the front line during a heavy barrage. He had hardly returned when he was sent again.

*

Corporal Archibald Augustus Francis Dagnin, 23, was born in Cape Town in 1882. He was engaged in a furniture removal business before the war, then served for a year with the Cape Peninsula Rifles. In France he served in No

14 platoon, D company.

A comrade was to describe him as “an unpretentious man of modest demeanour and slight physique, quiet and matter of fact in manner, his high sense of duty and self-disciplined endurance in conditions of stress and danger, were a source of encouragement to many.”

Archie Dagnin fought throughout the day. “We took Longueval Village and advanced into Delville Wood, the Germans fighting like furies, yet we advanced through a hail of bullets and shells. We had the Prussian Guards and Brandenburgers against us. Every time we advanced and halted we had to dig ourselves in as there were no trenches. We had to retire once about 100 yards but we rallied and threw the Germans back.

“By that time we had occupied half the wood and I had over half of my platoon killed and wounded. We had lost count of the hour, day and month, which shows that we had no time to ourselves. Before we knew where we were, we had gone without breakfast, dinner and tea. We found that the day had gone and the night just coming. We were hungry and had no food or water … the Germans had blown up our ration dump.”

*

Private Ronald Rawbone had been wounded twice since leaving Cape Town. This day would be his third …

“We were told we had to drive some snipers out of the wood; we put the trench mortars on to them, and I think we drove them out, but the following day they were back again, and I concluded they had an underground passage leading from their trenches into the wood, as it afterwards turned out to be the case.

“We then started to dig ourselves in, each man digging his own little place. I dug mine pretty deep, and am glad I did so, as they turned their machine-guns on to us, and the bullets were just going over my head.

“We were then told the Germans were massing for a counterattack; the first attack came off at about 12.30 pm, but they were driven off by our machine-gun fire. All this time it was pouring with rain, and I was wet through and covered with mud from head to foot. It must have been at about 2.30 pm when they attacked us again; this time they managed to get right up to us. I heard a fellow shout, and the next minute our machine-guns started again.

“I was standing up with two bombs in my hands, and the next minute I felt as if something big had hit me on the arm; it knocked me over, and I sat for quite five minutes before I quite knew what had happened, and then I looked down and saw the blood running out of the sleeve of my tunic; then I realized I was wounded, and I wasted no time in getting to the dressing-station. I had my arm dressed, and found a bullet had gone right through the muscle.”

*

Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner commanded the brigade in the wood and later described his first day.

“On 15 July, 1916 … this wood was a beautiful plantation of large oaks with a very thick matt of spruce undergrowth some eight feet high. So thick was the undergrowth, that it had to be brushed aside to permit passage through it.

“The battle line had been advanced the day before in a hard-fought engagement at the end of which the right flank of the 26th Infantry Brigade was on the village of Longueval, and from this point the line made an almost right angle turn to the eastern point of Trones Wood. In front of this apex stood Delville Wood, a salient to be defended on three sides.

“The head of the column detailed for the attack arrived at Longueval from Montauban at 5 am, and after a reconnaissance of the position, a plan of attack was decided upon and orders issued for its execution.

“We were fortunate in finding that during the night a company of the 5th

Cameron Highlanders had occupied Buchanan Street. This gave us a most helpful line on which to base our attack, and it was from there that the assault was made.

“The morning was that of a fine summer’s day, with light ground mist which, fortunately, covered our approach; so much so that, although we did not enter the wood until 7 am, it was not until the battalion had assembled in front of Buchanan Street that the opposing guns began to shell the point at which we were entering the wood, and opened for us our second engagement in the great Battle of the Somme.

“Our artillery were unable to give us any immediate support owing to the presence of the tall oak trees, and added to this was the thick undergrowth which made the men almost entirely dependent on their bayonets for clearing the wood.

“The most difficult side was the northern one, owing to the sunken road which connects Longueval with Flers. Along this road large numbers of men (Germans) could approach to within assaulting distance quite unobserved, and did so on several occasions in attempts to dislodge us. It was also known that the houses in the north-west corner were strongly held by machine-gun detachments, so that it was decided that a separate operation would be necessary to deal with this corner. In view of this, therefore, provision was made to occupy the perimeter of the wood as far as the exit of Strand Street, and to protect that flank by continuing the line along the length of Strand Street to its junction with Princes Street.

“The attack was launched shortly after 7 am. One battalion first occupied the southern half, viz: the portion south of Princes Street; whilst the other battalion lined Princes Street facing north for the purpose of attacking the northern portion once the southern half was occupied.

“The southern portion was quickly occupied, and in doing so, our men

surprised and captured 130 Germans in the open, south of the eastern exit of Princes Street. The northern drive took some little time owing to strong opposition being encountered. However, by about midday, we were in possession of what we set out to capture and now began the task of trying to hold the positions gained. Several enemy counter-attacks were launched on the northern face arising from the sunken road between Longueval and Flers.

"The Germans on several occasions penetrated our lines, and had to be dislodged by organised counter-attacks. This constant fighting and almost continuous shelling soon began to tell on our strength, and although the two battalions had been reinforced by the equivalent of another battalion, the line at the end of four days, viz, the 18th July, was held by but a handful of men."

Tanner was unable to give an estimate of his losses for the day due to the large area his command covered. Gen Lukin spoke with him by telephone that evening.

*

Private Eddie Fitz found that he would not need to repeat the hectic two days he had experienced as a linesman at Bernafay.

"We marched through the early hours of the morning and we arrived at Delville, through the village of Longueval, just after first light. To avoid any immediate reaction from Jerry we sort of moved right along the sides of the buildings or over some of the rubble. Then we went into an orchard and through it into the wood — to more or less where our OC (Col Tanner) had reckoned his point of entry would be. Because the other chaps had to deploy to other parts of the wood, we deployed in the south-west corner, the section which was never lost.

"When we got in there the OC said that he would not require telephone lines. His experience of Bernafay was such that he felt that it was too much of a thing to try and keep up telephone communications so he decided to

utilise runners. We never established any signals communications with our units because the wood didn't allow visual and he dispensed with telephone lines. So we were used as runners and other activities around battalion HQ, digging of trenches for them and all that kind of thing.

"After we got in, other units were coming in. I think it was a section of the (SA) Scottish that came in from our left. While they were standing about there in columns of 'lumps' a big 'heavy' came into them and four of those chaps simply disappeared! It landed right in the middle of them.

"Of course, to start with there was very little activity. Jerry came awake to this rather late. One of my company signallers was going along with his rifle slung over his shoulder, bayonet stuck up in the air, and a telephone hanging from his shoulder. They had the equipment; whether or not they were going to connect it up at that stage didn't matter. He was pushing his way through because there was bush and undergrowth at that particular stage. He pushed some undergrowth apart only to discover a Jerry sitting in a shell-hole just behind. The Jerry grabbed for his rifle and sort of up and fired — and missed this chap. The signaller in the meantime whipped his rifle off his shoulder and jumped into the trench bayonet first and pinned this fellow to the ground. That's how Jerry was taken — just like that!

"In the course of the morning and toward lunch things had warmed up very considerably as Jerry had started to counter-attack both by artillery and infantry fire. Round about 3 pm the cry was 'ammunition!'

"We were instructed under a sergeant to go scrounging for ammunition. We scrounged all about and went into Longueval, into a temporary dressing-station we found there and we all came back, strapped around the neck with eight or ten khaki bandoliers — loaded with them. Then we had to distribute them down to our companies and we were sniped at. I didn't shoot at anybody. I wasn't in a position to do much as we were occupied. In the

normal course of events I would have had to be running lines.

“My real buddy, Les Mandy, was with me. All the way from Armentieres we stuck together. Early in the afternoon, after the ammunition stint, six or eight of us were gathered in a helluva big shell-hole, just waiting for instructions. As we moved down to this area there was a burst of machine-gun fire. I suppose they saw us coming. Les fell, shot through the chest. We took him into the shell-hole.

“Meantime a Vickers gun had come along and went into action just alongside us. The men were about to fire when there was a rifle shot. Some of us were looking at the gun waiting to see what would happen and this gunner went flying backwards. We thought he had been shot in the head, but a bullet had absolutely cut a score right past his skull and stunned him. So we weren’t looking for keeping our heads up. You can understand that. In the meantime poor old Les was expiring in the shell-hole from internal bleeding.

“We were told to just disperse around headquarters and dig ourselves in — just to get ourselves below ground. A chap named Henry Oldfield and I did so. We only had trenching tools — no spades. We chopped out and put the stuff over. A shell hit a tree above us and exploded and we got some of the down-draft from it. He got a piece past his head and in the shoulder muscle. It stuck in the back of his shoulder blade. He was moaning about this thing, but we decided the only thing to do was to keep digging and get ourselves properly down.

“I said to him, ‘You know this trench is muddy. It’s getting water. How can this be?’ Anyhow it proved to be that my hand was bleeding. No bones were broken but the flesh was torn open. So in the light of a match he got hold of a dressing and dressed my hand up.”

*

Captain Claude Heenan had displayed a fearless example in Bernafay Wood

where he had held an exposed position of the line and, although wounded, remained at his post. His company was practically destroyed in the north of the wood where he was again wounded.

*

Two young officers of the 2nd SAI, Errol and Russell Tatham, were second cousins and were both originally from Ladysmith, Natal. Their respective grandfathers were Edmund and Robert Tatham, who had come to Natal separately as Byrne settlers in 1850. Edmund was the surveyor, engineer and secretary of the company which built the first railroad from the Point to Durban and the "protector of Indians" when they arrived in 1860.

Russell Pears Tatham, 24, grandson of Edmund Tatham, had been employed in the Dept of Education as a master at the Troyeville Central School in Johannesburg.

On the outbreak of the war he joined up and served in SWA with his brothers and cousins. He re-enlisted in the 2nd SAI as a private and was soon promoted to sergeant. As a reward for his gallantry and devotion to duty in Egypt, Tatham was given a commission.

*

Robert Bristow Tatham was a rolling stone. He fought in the Frontier Wars where he was promoted to and demoted from sergeant five times. He fell in love with Susan Noon at a Durban ball. Her sister was married to Dick King and she lived with them at Isipingo. Robert arrived there with a lady's saddle and a special licence and she rode away with him. They later went to the diamond fields where they had many children. Their second son, Frederic, was employed as a diamond sorter and water-seller at the age of seven years.

Errol Victor Tatham, 25, grandson of Robert Tatham, was the second son of Lieut-Col Frederic Spence Tatham, KC, who had fought in the Basuto War of 1881 and served on Gen George White's staff during the siege of Ladysmith.

Errol Tatham was educated at Merchiston and then Michaelhouse. Between 1904 and 1908 he attended Marlborough College, England, then returned to South Africa to study law.

In 1912 Tatham completed his final law examination, then at the age of 21 entered his father's firm of Tatham, Wilkes & Co of Pietermaritzburg. Two years later he joined up as a private to serve in SWA. His elder brother, Capt Arthur Tatham, distinguished himself in charge of an artillery battery.

Tatham was commissioned in the 2nd SAI and at Bordon Camp was assistant adjutant to the battalion. His father volunteered for service at the front and was on the headquarters staff of the 2nd Anzacs in France, whilst his younger brother, William, 19, was an acting sub-lieutenant in a submarine.

*

Both of the company's captains, Ernest Barlow and Harold Creed, became casualties. Harold Elvey Frederick Creed was born in England but came to South Africa as a youngster and attended St Andrews College in Grahamstown.

During the South African War Creed was a trooper in Rimington's Guides and was present at the siege of Kimberley. He was to represent the Guides at King Edward's Coronation in 1902. After the war he joined the Transvaal Public Works department, then went to Bloemfontein to become the OFS Chief Inspector of Roads.

Creed served in the Rebellion and as a lieutenant in Botha's Natal Horse in SWA. While he was in Egypt with the 2nd SAI, a younger brother was a flight commander in the RFC in East Africa.

During the attack Capt Creed was killed and Capt Barlow wounded. Lance-Corporal Arthur Jacobs, 21, of Durban, then assisted Barlow. Jacobs was born near Harrismith, attended Durban High School and then returned to join

the Bank of Africa at Harrismith, later being transferred to Pietermaritzburg and Durban.

Jacobs was with Capt Barlow's party making their way through the wood when Barlow was wounded. Jacobs assisted the stretcher-bearers in bandaging and evacuating the officer. While assisting Barlow to safety Jacobs was shot and killed outright by a sniper.

*

Private Nicholas Vlok, 49, had served as a Boer officer under Gen Louis Botha during the South African War. He thereafter farmed near Boshoff in the Orange Free State, was married in 1903 and had four sons and two daughters. During the advance into Delville Wood he was shot in his leg.

"I reported I was wounded, but said I could fight on. This was on 15 July. Captain Creed and Capt Barlow were killed and wounded respectively after this. Later in the day I was wounded again through the shoulder.

"Lieutenant Tatham saw me drop my rifle. I was about two yards from him. He said: 'Are you badly hit?' I said: 'I am done, Sir.' He said: 'Wait! I will see you right.' Then hard fighting at close-quarters followed, and our men drove the Germans back.

"At this time I think the only officers left were Lieut Hill and Lieut Tatham. Lieut Tatham was with the men, fighting hard and encouraging the men. I did not see Lieut Hill. He was on the other flank.

"After driving the Germans away, Lieut Tatham came back to me and told a man to take me away as he thought I was bleeding to death. He used his own handkerchief and tried to bind me up. He had already used his own field-dressing to bind up another man. This man took me away a short distance, but the shelling was so heavy that he left me. I did not see Lieut Tatham again this day."

After Capt Bamford of the 2nd SAI was wounded Lieut Tatham took his

place as adjutant.

Captain Harry Bamford, the battalion adjutant, had assisted Tanner greatly with communications at Bernafay Wood. At Delville Wood he continued keeping in touch with outlying companies at great personal risk until himself wounded.

*

On the other flank Lieut Walter Hill and his platoon led the advance along Strand Street toward the northern edge of the wood. Hill was a fine officer and much loved by his men, among whom were Privates Duggie Brice-Bruce and Henry Pauls.

Duggie Brice-Bruce had as great a respect for the enemy as he had for his allies.

“At dawn we entered the wood to take over from the Highlanders We saw these brave Highlanders lying dead everywhere, some still caught up in the wire entanglements. These Highlanders were very fine brave men. We came in contact with the enemy, the Bavarians. To give them credit, they were very fine fighters and well-disciplined soldiers.

“We attacked on the eastern and northern flanks, contacting at very close quarters, using machine-guns in support. Hand grenades, rifle fire and bayonets were mostly used; it was a gruelling affair. I saw a lot of brave deeds done on both sides. Our stretcher-bearers were wonderful. You could hear the wounded groaning and screaming, there were many casualties on both sides.

“Captain Gray of C Coy was killed, he was very much loved by his men, a great loss. Capt Bamford our adjutant had a miraculous escape, he was shot through the cheeks, through one side and out of the other; he must have been giving an order with his mouth open. Lieut Bru-de-Wold fell quite close to us, he was shot through the head. We managed to chase the Germans out of

the wood, with a considerable number of casualties on both sides.

“What was left of us were assembled, a tired and hungry lot. Lieut Hill, our platoon officer picked out the following seven men — Sgt Turner, Cpl E Brickhill, L/Cpl J Servant, L/Cpl D Davey, Pte P Richards, Pte Garland and Pte H Bruce (myself). I was the youngest, 20 years of age, and proud to be included with this bunch. We found a deep shell-hole about 30 yards from the edge of the wood, and settled down for the night.

“There was no time for sleeping as we could hear a heavy bombardment going on behind us and on our left flank. At dawn, Lieut Hill told me to go out and reconnoitre. It was hard going, what with broken trees and branches it was difficult to get a good view of anything.

“I crawled along tensed for the slightest movements. About 15 yards from the edge of the wood, I came across a broken tree and lifting myself up to get over I came face to face with a German sniper who was lying on his tummy. I don’t know who was the most frightened, he or I. Fortunately my reflexes worked and I shot him in the face. It was horrible, something which has haunted me all my life.

“I now had to go back and report. Arriving at the shell-hole I found them still there and thinking at the time, why had they not spread out.

“There was no time to report as the Germans opened up on us from behind and on our left flank, with grenades and rifle fire. We fought back. By now we were completely isolated and surrounded. It appeared that our chaps had withdrawn to new positions under cover of darkness. The enemy had infiltrated during the night and got behind us.

“We were not the only ones caught up, as most of the pockets on the edge of the wood were cut off. Lieut Hill had a hard decision to make, either to take a chance and sacrifice his men, or surrender He surrendered. Sgt Turner was badly wounded. Pte Richards slightly and I had a splinter in the right

shin. It did not worry me for a few days, but it started festering and pieces of bone came out, it took some time to heal."

*

Henry Pauls later related what happened to the platoon.

"Lieutenant Hill and about 20 of us were ordered to advance through a portion of the wood still in the enemy's hands and we found ourselves surrounded by about 150 Germans.

"We fought to the very last, every bomb being used, and then Lieut Hill surrendered, as to fight on and be killed would not have helped the general operations.

"The enemy conducted 12 of us, half of whom were wounded, through their lines and put us in different shell-holes. Lieutenant Hill and four of us were put in one hole, disarmed, and a strong-looking armed German with fixed bayonet put over us as guard.

"Lieutenant Hill gave us quiet word that he intended to escape and after being prisoners for an hour or more Lieut Hill sprang on the sentry and stunned or killed him and shouted to us, 'Come on boys! Come along sergeant.'

"We had to go through the German lines and they were firing at us continuously. Lieut Hill carried the rifle belonging to the guard whom he had overpowered. On three sides of us there were Germans at distances from 20 to 50 yards. There was only one side free of the enemy which was the side towards our own lines and which we took when we escaped. The Germans who were in this horseshoe fired on us while we ran to our own lines … Lieut Hill and myself being untouched, the other three killed or wounded."

*

That night the bombardment lit up the wood. The northern perimeter was mercilessly shelled and Germans threw themselves at the thin line holding the

edge of the wood. They overran sections of the line, cutting groups off and forcing most of the survivors to fall back to new positions.

*

Lance-Corporal Clifford Osborn Connock, 23, came from East London. He served in the Natal Carbineers in SWA, then joined the brigade and was wounded at Mersa Matruh. He recalled that at Delville Wood they had passed through a barrage of tear-gas into “this beautiful wood” with lots of undergrowth and lovely trees.

“Near the centre of the wood I was detailed with a number of others, to establish lines of communication for battalion headquarters, which entailed digging cables and manholes.

“All went well at first, and for the first half-hour it was very quiet, and then we were in the middle of rifle and machine-gun fire, and casualties.

“After the task was completed my company was ordered to move and clear the enemy from the north-west corner of the wood. But it became increasingly difficult, and the company had to fight every inch of the way, using hand-grenades, machine-guns and rifles.

“Throughout the day and night we fought. Then I was severely wounded (shot in the chest). I lay for some time till nightfall before realising help was unlikely. I crawled back to the edge of the wood and sheltered under wrecked railway trucks.”

His brother, Sec-Lieut Joseph Connock, 30, had farmed near Cala in the Cape. He served in the South African War with Brabant’s Horse for eleven months and as a sergeant with the Natal Carbineers in SWA for ten months. His tanned complexion, blue eyes and dark hair combined to make him stand out among the junior officers in Delville Wood.

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Corporal Hermann Bloom, 29, had served with the Eastern Rifles (First City

Regiment) of Grahamstown in SWA. He had black hair, stood 5 ft 9 ins tall and came from Durban. He recalled that the objective was to take Delville Wood and then dig in and retain the position at all costs. They camped for the night on the outskirts of the village and set out at dawn.

"We did not meet with much opposition. After a little scrapping we cleared our part of the wood and took about 150 prisoners, and then set to entrench ourselves. It was no 'tea-party'; we had only started when we were deluged with gas and tear-shells, whizzbangs, Jack Johnsons, and all the diabolical stuff that Krupps ever invented. At this period our losses were severe, too heavy for our liking.

"We got orders to advance. It absolutely rained lead, but we still went on until we came to close-quarters, and then, crash! It was terrible; there was no quarter given. We steadily pushed them back, took their trenches, and their part of the wood. How I stood up I don't know.

"On taking a roll I found I was the senior NCO and had about 17 men left out of the whole platoon. I have since heard that I and five more are the sole survivors. We lost our officer, sergeants and about 45 men. Our company suffered, and the brigade losses must have been heavy. I have no idea to what extent.

"At this period we had been cut off from the rest of the company. When we went into the wood the growth was so dense you could hardly see ten yards in front of you, but before long there was neither a bough nor a leaf left; the bare trees stood out riddled with lead, and the wood a mass of dead and wounded — it was awful!

"I rallied our chaps together, posted them, and left them in charge of a corporal, and went out on my own to try and get in touch with the rest of the company. I had only gone a few yards when I was thrown into the air and buried up to my waist — no bones broken and no shrapnel. I was buried on

account of the ground being soft.

"I crawled out, very much dazed and bruised. I got up and went a few more yards, when a bullet passed between my legs, and one over my head. I lay down for a while, and then continued very slowly.

"I looked up and found I was covered by a sniper. It was too late to cover him, and he knew I had seen him. I dodged quickly, and then I got one in the leg, which I believe came from a machine-gun.

"I dropped and lay down, as though dead. They must have thought I was finished, because I heard no more from them. I managed to crawl to a barn. There was no roof on, and the shells were falling like rain. I thought every minute was my last."

Bloom was to lie in the ruined barn from midnight Saturday night until 11 pm on Sunday.

*

Second-Lieutenant Alfred Hanks, 40, was a crack-shot who had served for 15 years in the 15th Hussars. He had won a gold medal for shooting in India. After obtaining his discharge from the regular army he came to South Africa to join the railways.

Hanks was about to marry when the war began and he joined up. He was offered a commission but declined it as he preferred to "earn" it. This he did by great bravery and excellent service. He had not worn the star a week when he was mortally wounded at Delville Wood.

*

Acting-Sergeant John Webb Adams, 39, from Mayfair, Johannesburg, had black hair and blue eyes. He had served in the ILH during the South African War and in the Dukes and SA Engineers in SWA. By trade he was a plumber. When he joined the brigade he left behind his wife, Magdalena, and three children.

Adams was promoted to acting-sergeant before serving in Egypt. He recalled later that at Delville Wood they had moved forward on the evening of the 14th and taken up their positions at dawn.

“We could see the Germans moving about just on the outskirts of the wood. The (3rd) Regiment entered the wood first through the village of Longueval, which was in an awful state, not a house left standing. The streets were full of dead Germans; they were piled up on the side of the street.

“As soon as the Germans saw us they opened fire, and we replied immediately, and here our losses were heavy, chiefly because our chaps were too eager, and through not keeping their heads down. When the Germans found they could not shift us with rifle fire and machine-guns, they tried their artillery and trench mortars on us.

“I think they must have brought every available gun they had to try to flatten out the wood and kill every living thing in it. The Battle of Spionkop was only a flea-bite in comparison. All the time I was there the bombardment never ceased; it was a continuous roar all the time; high-explosive shells, Jack Johnsons, which kill within an area of 200 yards.

“While the bombardment was going on the Germans made repeated infantry attacks in close formation. How we managed to keep them off I do not know. Before attacking they sent over tear-shells, which blind your eyes with tears, tears streaming down your face. The pain is awful. The idea is to interfere with your shooting; you cannot see the sight on your rifle.

“Now that the Germans are on the move they cannot use poisonous gases against us, thank goodness.”

*

Ernest Solomon described the results of the Longueval fighting as they passed by that morning.

“At about 7 am we passed through the ruins of the village. Traces of recent

fighting were seen at every step; dead bodies, some very much mutilated by shell fire, lay about. Kilted men of the 9th Division they were, and amongst them probably some of those we had seen off to the attack two nights before. Longueval had been taken by the British, but not entirely, as was evidenced by sharp exchanges of rifle fire in parts.

“Between ruined buildings, over debris strewn roads and lanes, we moved, until we came to that part of the village where the last of its houses mingled with the first trees of Delville Wood.

“Delville Wood covered a large area; its trees, closely set, towered to a great height, where the leafy branches intermingled and formed a screen so thick that, in parts, the view of the sky was almost obscured. Here and there was a clearing, here and there a narrow road, here and there a footpath: but for the most part nothing but trees and thick undergrowth. Seen in any other circumstances its grandeur would have excited comment, but not so on the occasion I write of. True, that quality impressed itself subconsciously on our minds, but it led to no voiced appreciation at the time.

“In order to explain my inability to record other than the events in the vicinity of the company I belonged to, it should be stated that the irregular contour of the wood, and the abundant foliage, rendered the observation of movements in other parts of the line eventually taken up, a matter of great difficulty.

“Our regiment’s position extended over a long curved line, and except to men on the flanks and to those whose duties took them from place to place, the activities even of adjoining companies were veiled from us.

“Word reached us from time to time as to the general state of affairs all round, and although the conditions under which we were placed may have applied equally to others, yet the diversity of incidents at the various points was so great, that a complete account is impossible without collaboration.

“A short distance inside the wood was a section of trench then occupied by a few men of the Cameron Highlanders, and there our headquarters established themselves. Some time before, a certain number of men had been told off as water-carriers, and it was their duty to take supplies as far as headquarters, where parties from the firing line called for same at a certain hour every day. In the same way rations were to be brought up and called for.

“A first-aid station had been set up in a house on the near edge of the village, and a secure, sandbagged dressing-station farther back at Bernafay Wood.

“The enemy was believed not to have entirely vacated the wood, and our orders were to clear a certain section and then to hold it until further orders.

“Bearing off to the right, we formed into what were known as fighting sections, and in that formation, the extreme righthand section almost on the edge of the wood, the others, abreast at intervals, extending towards the interior, each section in touch with its neighbour, others in support, all in single file, we continued to advance.

“It was impossible to see clearly any distance ahead, the enemy might easily have been concealed close by, so it was slowly and deliberately, peering behind possible cover, screening our movements to the utmost, rifles with bayonets fixed ready for emergencies, that we made our way forward. Trees devoid of lower branches, but runged for scaling purposes with transfixed horse-shoes, were encountered and recognised as snipers’ posts. They were unoccupied, but we realised that danger might also lurk in tree tops.

“We had proceeded in that way for some distance without encountering the enemy, when from outside the wood a rocket was sent up. It was distinctly heard and recognised, though not visible to all. One man took it for a rifle grenade, but he was promptly snubbed.

“It was a signal to the enemy artillery, for immediately shells began to fall in our vicinity. To the accompaniment of those opening bars of the bombardment which was destined to last, with varying intensity, until 4 pm on the 18th, we continued on our way. The enemy’s shell fire rendered improbable the existence of his infantry in that quarter, but our forward movements were nevertheless carried out with caution.

“Then it was that the presence of the enemy outside was reported, and A Company swinging round to the right took up positions on the fringe of the wood, inside the last row of trees, while B and D Companies ranged themselves similarly on its left and C Company on its right, thus covering the section originally allotted to the battalion.

“Some cover was afforded by the tree trunks, but not sufficient for a large body of men. Through the spaces between and under the overhanging branches we had a clear view before us. About 50 yards in front was a trench leading to others behind, to our right front stood what looked like a decayed reed fence through the gaps of which we could see the gradual slope of a low rise with another trench, visibly peopled, running along its crest. In the near front of the right flank of our company was a large haystack.

“Lewis guns were allotted positions along our line, one covering the mouth of what appeared to have been a German trench communicating with the wood.

“We opened rifle fire immediately on the then visible enemy, and to our overtures drew rapid response, as our movements also were visible to him. There were no trenches where we were, and the enemy’s rifle-and shell fire rendered our positions somewhat unsafe despite the fact that we had prostrated ourselves on arrival. We therefore commenced to dig ourselves in without relaxing our efforts too much. We had only entrenching tools, and hacking away at the earth with them while lying on our stomachs was a slow

process.

“Instead of constructing a continuous trench, each man dug a hole for himself sufficiently deep to afford him, when sitting, some protection from flying shrapnel and sufficiently long to enable him to stretch himself at full length. Those holes when eventually completed after many hours of labour, resembling shallow open graves with the loose earth thrown up and compressed in front and rear for additional protection.

“We could not help exposing ourselves from time to time; the physical strain of digging and scraping in a prostrate position was so great that moments of relaxation had to be taken, also later when, as the holes increased in depth, we worked in crouched positions. Meanwhile we had to devote a certain amount of attention to our front as the enemy showed signs of being very much alive.

“The rain of shells and bullets was bound to bear fruit, and the first casualty in my neighbourhood came early.

“A young fellow three or four yards away uttered a queer little cry and lay still on his face.

“‘Stretcher-bearer,’ someone called, ‘here’s a case for you.’

“A stretcher-bearer came up and bent over the man. ‘I can’t do anything for him,’ he said, and removed the body to the rear.

“More casualties occurred.

“Then a curious thing happened.

“The word went round to cease fire. It appeared there was some doubt as to whether the men in front were Germans or Frenchmen. A sergeant-major ran along in front of our line shouting out the order. With mixed feelings we obeyed.

“From the near trench in front arose a German officer, he was unmistakably a German and clearly an officer, and beckoned us over. Some thought he

wanted to surrender, so they rose and went forward suspiciously. One, his excitement getting the better of his discretion, rushed right up to the German, who snatched the rifle from his hand and pushed him into the trench, a prisoner.

"Seeing this, the others started back to their lines, one, an officer having quite an altercation with the German, who approached and invited him to enter his trench. Neither displayed arms.

"From somewhere in the opposite trench a shot rang out and one of the returning men fell with a bullet in his leg and had to be assisted back, while immediately after a rifle spoke from our line and the German officer crumpled up like a concertina. His body lay where it fell in full view for the next four days. The man responsible for the shot said he had kept his rifle trained on him from the moment he appeared.

"It appeared afterwards that the Germans had misconstrued the shouts and subsequent cessation of our fire as a desire to surrender. A voice was heard bawling to us from the opposite trench, and one of our men who had lived in South West Africa and could speak German, was told to ask what he wanted.

"'They want us to surrender,' he said, after some shouted remarks had been exchanged.

"'Tell them to go to h--l, and call for their surrender.'

"The incident closed, but no further doubts existed as to their nationality.

"That day we had many casualties. Captain Vivian was wounded and taken back; the officer who had declined the German's invitation later received a bullet in the upper part of his leg, and numerous other officers and men were killed and wounded. One man who had joined us at Celestine Wood with a draft was cut clean in half by a shell, and one disappeared and was not heard of again. Whether he was buried or blown to pieces was never found out. He just disappeared.

“A report came from C Company: ‘Capt McLachlan has been killed and Capt Elliot (actually Lieut) is now in command of C.’

“As the bombardment increased the ground behind and before us became littered with shell-holes. Bushes and small trees were torn up, large trees uprooted. Many a grand monarch of the wood, lifted from its roots and projected forward, was seen to crash through the branches of other trees and settle down full length to earth. Others borne up by neighbourly branches rested in that position like so many tired giants.

“Rations and water were brought up and distributed, and the days gradually drew to a close. At night there was little rest. Men off duty stretched themselves in their open shelters for a little sleep, but repeated bursts of rifle fire brought them up alert and watchful for an attack.

“Then it rained and the shelter holes receiving and retaining the water and consequent mud, rendered sleep in the orthodox position out of the question. Steel helmets of dead men were collected and placed upturned in the mud, and seated on them, backs rested against shelter walls, knees drawn up, waterproof sheets over heads and bodies for protection from the rain, men tried to snatch a few moments’ sleep.

“In those circumstances however, it was impossible to sink into a restful unconsciousness of what was going on around us. Much as we were accustomed to the tumult of guns and shells, brief intervals of dozing brought no rest. To say we slept would be mere travesty.”

*

Private A Davis worked as a stretcher-bearer under heavy shell fire and fearlessly exposed himself to great danger. He worked continually through the day and night.

*

The company commander, Capt Richard Frederick Cavendish Medlicott MC,

originally came from Ireland. He served as a lieutenant in SWA in the Witwatersrand Rifles, was promoted to temporary captain and acted as adjutant to the UDF Left Wing. Capt Medlicott was awarded the MC for his distinguished services in the field.

He joined the brigade as a captain and was wounded at the Battle of Agagia in Egypt.

After reaching their position on the eastern side of the wood, Captains Medlicott and Tomlinson led raids on German trenches nearby. Medlicott's raiding party in the south-east captured one officer and 100 men. Medlicott ordered L/Cpl Dick Unwin to take six men and carry a wounded German sergeant-major to the rear. The men used their haversacks like a blanket while Unwin carried their rifles.

Shortly afterwards Lieut-Col Thackeray saw the procession and shouted out, 'What have you got there?' When told, he ordered them to take him back. 'What do you want to bring him here for?' Unwin was in a quandary so he compromised by leaving the sergeant-major with the first group of wounded German POWs he came across.

*

Before entering Delville Wood Tom Heunis stopped beside a man who had been killed by a sniper. Nearby a British soldier had dug himself a place against a bank to shelter in. A shell had burst before him and split his head in half. There would be no place to hide in the days ahead.

Heunis found himself caught in the open with a friend when a German machine-gun opened up. "We dug our way into the ground with our bodies while the bullets went over our backs." His action was reminiscent of the day he had slithered on his back beneath a boomslang years before.

*

Dudley Meredith remembered the day's events vividly.

“As we marched up to the road to Longueval which lay at the end of Delville Wood facing us, the dawn began to break, and we could distinguish objects about us. From the number of corpses we could see we soon gained an idea as to the severity of the fighting during the previous day.

“Just as the sun rose we halted outside Longueval close to a trench occupied by Scotties. They were very cheerful and bade us be of good cheer, telling us the enemy was fairly on the run. Here we dumped our shovels and rockets, and a case of bullybeef having been found on the roadside, we proceeded to snatch a quick meal.

“From this spot it was but a few hundred yards into Longueval, but the road was torn up and as we picked our way along we noted many of our mates of the 1st SAI dead at the side of the road. There was a bank along the German side of the road, and evidently they had been sheltering there when the road had been shelled by the Germans. Those who were still alive were very tired, owing to the strenuous fighting of the previous day.

“Longueval as we entered, was a mere collection of smoking heaps of bricks and shell-holes filled with water, but we could see what had been the main street, which was more than could be seen in Montauban. Numbers of dead Scotties and Germans were lying about, but a little way down the street was a large number of dead Germans, most of them horribly mutilated.

“The Germans now started to bombard Longueval and every minute or so a large shell would land in the village, however, without doing much harm. They only seemed to stir the heaps of bricks and make huge smoke clouds. We now turned out of the main street through a garden where, owing to shell-holes, we could make our way only with difficulty. After this we passed through some more ruined houses, across a railway track on which stood a truck of wood badly smashed by shell fire, through an orchard, and we were in Delville Wood itself.

“Our first glimpse of Delville Wood was one of great beauty — the wood had not been shelled much and the stately trees and leafy undergrowth in the hazy dawn of a midsummer morning had such a peaceful look. Except for the quiet tramp of man and the periodical bursting of the German shells in Longueval all was still.

“A short distance into the wood we came to a shallow trench, barely waist deep, manned by Cameron Highlanders. This trench, known as Buchanan Street, marked the spearhead of the advance of the previous day. Crossing this trench we deployed in front of it, and silently awaited the order to advance.

“Delville Wood was just a little less than a square mile in extent according to the official history, and this large area had to be taken and held by three regiments. In all, about twelve companies were concerned — a small number to take and hold a strategic position of this size jutting into the German lines. However, our orders were to take the wood and dig ourselves in along the outer edge.

“Soon after we moved off our company wheeled to the right and before long we found ourselves at the edge of the wood. Just here there was a low bank with a row of hedge trees along the top — lying on the bank and peering through at the base of the trees we saw a road with a field of beet on the other side. Three or four hundred yards across the fields was a ruined factory. We learned afterwards that this was Waterlot Farm.

“On the skyline we could see figures moving about, and for half an hour there was much confusion and argument as to whether they were French or Germans. We were on the right of the British line so there was some justification for the fellows who stoutly maintained they were Frenchmen. Word was sent down-the line after a while that they were Germans and we were to fire. The hot fire we were subjected to about an hour after we reached

our position was convincing proof if it were needed, that this was indeed the enemy.

"A few bullets had come whizzing through the leaves and occasional shells had landed in the wood since we had first entered it, but about two hours after we occupied our positions the fire increased in intensity, while we learnt that we were in a salient as the bullets came from three directions. We had been digging ourselves in with our entrenching tools and the whizzing of bullets made us set to with redoubled vigour.

"It was very slow work though, trying to dig in the hard clay and matted tree roots, but having dumped our shovels we had to do as best we could. Most of us, after several hours' work, had only a shallow shelter not more than eighteen inches deep. The result was that our casualties were very heavy, as may be gauged from the fact that five out of six of C Company's officers were wounded by the time we had been in the wood two hours.

"One of the first to go was Dudley Fynn who had been my strongest competitor in school and who had been instrumental in our joining C Company. We hastily dug a shallow grave and buried him during a lull in the shelling."

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The confusion over whether to open fire was also experienced by Pte Douglas Grylls Davey who was a week short of his 19th birthday. He was born in England, immigrated to South Africa with his family and became a gold mine reduction worker at Germiston.

He had missed the fighting in Egypt as he was a witness in a murder trial at Alexandria, concerning a Pte Matthews who had shot Pte Beckley in the head after an argument.

"When we went into Delville Wood about 6 am on 15 July 1916 with fixed bayonets everything was a beautiful green. We managed to dig small

individual trenches at the edge of the wood facing a slight rise. It was a hazy morning. We could actually see some very indistinct figures on the horizon; we were ordered not to shoot — were threatened with dire results if we did as our captain (Jackson) said they were French. How wrong he was. Not long after in the morning one of our chaps standing just behind us got a bullet in the head from a German sniper."

*

Harry Cooper went with his company toward the larger wood, which he later learned was Delville.

"Our way led along a sunken road through a smashed-up village, Longueval, which we had captured. We were shocked when we saw one side of this sunken road had been used as a front line. Men were standing in the firing position facing the wood. Not one of them would ever fire a shot again. They were all dead, hundreds of them, and everything seemed so quiet and peaceful. Only the movements of our regiment were to be heard, no shells or rifle fire, only dead silence.

"It is hard to banish this picture from my mind, even after all these years. My thoughts went out to the near and dear ones waiting to hear from them. What a day of sorrow for poor old England.

"No stretch of imagination can picture the scene. The only comparison being once when I went into a butcher's shop and saw a fly paper covered with thousands of dead flies. This was the lot that had gone at the beginning of the 'Great Push' on July 1, 1916. Our introduction to the rough side of war was here and I was sure that our lot had guts enough to face it unflinchingly, especially when we realised that we were now going forward and into … what?

"Plodding on farther we came across some army kitchens, mobile type, but their mobility had gone. Men, mules and mobile kitchens appeared to have

been through a mangle. Wiped out completely — and still the great silence. Further on we rested and I noticed that a number of our senior sergeants had removed their chevrons and were wearing officers' stars. My sergeant happened to pass by and I called out in a friendly way, 'Hello, Sarge.'

"When I noticed the cloth 'pip' he grinned at me and said something about, 'Keep your chin up', for I must have looked pretty green. He only answered to 'Sir' for a very short time. He was one of the first to be killed.

"What a man! Medals and ribbons of the South African War on his chest. I was proud of my sergeant. These old soldiers often kidded us about soldiering and what it was to be a hero, fighting for your country. I was fascinated with the ribbons they wore and I used to wonder what it felt like to wear them.

"On we went. We had now reached the edge of the wood and the first thing I noticed was all the dead were wearing a different uniform. Then I saw they were Jerries — and very dead ones.

"We were now in Delville Wood and I can only relate what I did and saw. The wood seemed very peaceful and not unlike any forest I have been into in South Africa. There were large and small trees and plenty of vegetation. I might mention here that I had been appointed a 'runner', red stripes on sleeves, which meant that I had to deliver messages from headquarters to anywhere I was sent.

"The brigade had taken up certain positions and I was standing near our Col Thackeray when hell broke loose. My opinion is that Jerry waited and, after seeing us enter the wood, started giving us the works. The shells came from all angles. Machine-guns opened up and the game was on. I saw men digging in with entrenching tools all over the place battling to get some cover.

"Many times I was sent with messages to officers from the centre of the wood, and what a job it was to find them. Running zigzag, ducking and

diving behind trees and feeling about as brave as a mouse. Sometimes I was lucky and found who I was looking for. Others? Well, they did not need any information nor could they give any replies."

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The company spread out to occupy and consolidate the eastern and north-eastern edge of Delville Wood. While his comrades dug, L/Cpl William Shapcott climbed a tree and from this vantage point sighted seven Germans and a machine-gun close by.

William Henry Shapcott, 46, was born at Tiverton in Devon and had served with the 7th Hussars for seven years, the BSA Police for eight years and in Cullinan's Horse in SWA. He had enlisted as Henry Jones, but assumed his correct name in May 1916.

They then came under heavy fire from infantry and machine-guns in an uncharted German trench some 150 yards east of the wood. As heavy casualties were being inflicted on the troops, on his own initiative Capt Tomlinson led an attack on the enemy trenches.

Leonard Tomlinson had served as a lieutenant in the machine-gun section of the Pretoria Regt in SWA. His wife, Ethel, stayed in Pietermaritzburg at the time. Owing to previous service he was awarded the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Long Service Medal.

His small fighting section rushed the trench. It transpired that there were more Germans than Shapcott had seen, so Capt Medlicott and some of his men from B Coy came to their rescue. Together they killed 32 Germans and captured two officers, 70 men and a machine-gun. All then came under heavy fire from enemy machine-guns and rifles. Of the prisoners taken only two officers and 35 men were brought in safely.

Members of Tomlinson's party behaved with the utmost gallantry.

Company-Sgt-Major J Bryant personally shot two of the enemy machine-

gunners. Lance-Corporal O Chapman rendered splendid service as a sniper. Shapcott was the soul of the enterprise: During the bombing raid he was fearless and dashing and continued to fight after being wounded through the right elbow.

Shapcott was ably supported by Sgt W S McDonald who was himself seriously wounded in the chest. Private W Hollingberry threw his bombs superbly until he was dangerously wounded in the abdomen. He was to die of his wound on 31 July.

The following decorations were awarded to members of the raiding party: Capt Tomlinson — DSO; Sergeant McDonald — MM; L/Cpl Shapcott — DCM; Pte Hollingberry — MM.

Tomlinson was wounded later in the day.

*

A Swede who had served as an officer during the South African War was to fight alongside an Afrikaner, a former enemy, whom he grew to respect and depend on.

Private John Augustus Lawson, 41, was born at Warberg, Sweden. He served through the South African War as a trooper in the Colonial Scouts, as a lieutenant in the Field Intelligence Dept (with Gen Woolf Murray) and as a captain in Steinacker's Horse. He stood almost six foot tall and had a light Nordic complexion with blue eyes and fair hair.

Between the wars Lawson was a beacon inspector in the Mines Dept at Pilgrim's Rest. He was of great assistance to the resident magistrate during the Rebellion. The magistrate recommended Lawson for a commission in the brigade — however he was to serve as a private in No 15 Platoon, D Coy.

His wife, Betty, and two children stayed at Anstey, Castle Hederingham, Essex, while he served in France.

John Lawson enjoyed locating German snipers and machine-guns.

“I had just scored a success and was congratulating myself, when a cheery voice at my side joined in the congratulations with the remark, ‘You have got the range of that gun all right.’ I turned, and it was then I met Breytenbach. A smile lit up his face. A man of medium height, dark, with a strong, calm face — a good man to fight by the side of. We could not then enter into conversation, as our attention became riveted on a party to our right, just starting off to attack enemy trenches about eighty yards ahead. (Capt Tomlinson’s raiding party.)

“This party had orders to take prisoners and anything else they could lay their hands on, and return. Away they went, crawling and taking cover, for about thirty yards. Then, with a furious rush, they reached their objective. The overwhelmed ‘Kamerads’ appeared willing enough to leave their trenches and rush for safety to our lines. Our attacking party then entered the now empty trenches and secured a machine-gun.

“It was pitiful to see how the Germans now picked off their own men, shooting them in the back as they came running towards safety. It was a hideous sight, and I could see that this moving spectacle of callous inhumanity touched my friend to the quick. Intense disapproval and disgust had changed his cheerful expression of a few minutes ago to pallor, a set jaw, and trembling lips — a face of resolution and determination.

“Out of the garrison of the raided trenches forty or fifty reached our lines. The others dropped in no-man’s-land, shot through the back by the very men who had been fighting side by side with them until their power of resistance had to give way to the tenacity and courage of the men from South Africa — by this time we had been well tried in Egypt and Flanders.

“Early morning merged into day, and then came the first counterattack against our line. This was completely broken by our rifle and machine-gun fire before the enemy had half crossed no-man’s-land. Then came our turn to

let them ‘have it in the back,’ and when it was over the old smile again suffused my friend’s face.

“I felt he had got something back on behalf of those of the enemy who, after faithful service, had been so cruelly murdered in cold blood by their own comrades before our eyes.

“After the counter-attack, a welcome lull. Shelling us in what may be called a moderate way, the Huns commenced reorganising their formations. They could be seen at the double, taking advantage of all cover in these preparations. The range was long, but anything up to 800 yards proved a tempting target to good riflemen, and, with nothing else to do, we settled down to independent rifle fire for the day.

“As the sun went down the enemy’s activity increased, the angry crescendo rising and gathering volume till, at 9 or 10 pm, the wood, illuminated by the fireworks of the missiles of death, became the centre of an orgy of havoc and destruction beyond all description. Counter-attack followed counter-attack only to find us alert and ready, and be broken down by our fire.

“But shell fire steadily thinned our lines — the same mechanical slaughter proceeding on both flanks as well as in the centre. By midnight we had to be reinforced from the 4th Battalion (the South African Scottish). Our machine-guns were put out of action and the crews with them. Fresh guns and crews came in only to meet with the same fate. It was a dark night that dealt out death and destruction.”

*

Lance-Corporal Cecil Rice was fortunate to leave the wood through a minor injury.

“Unfortunately I had developed a sore heel and the march to Longueval made it worse. I got into the wood and after about half a day the heel got so painful I thought I’d go along to the medical HQ and get some dressing.

“I showed the doctor and he took one look and said, ‘You had better get out as quick as you can. Make your own way back.’

“At the time the wood was being very heavily shelled and I managed to get out without being wounded and got to the nearest dressing-station I could find. When I got there I was put on a stretcher and sent down the line.”

*

One of the most popular NCOs of the SA Scottish was Regimental-Sgt-Major J Cameron. He had joined the Highland Artillery Brigade in 1892 and transferred to the Seaforth Highlanders two years later. After serving through the South African War, Cameron joined the Transvaal Scottish Volunteers as an instructor. He was an excellent marksman who participated in many Bisley meetings.

Cameron was appointed RSM to the 2nd Battalion of the Transvaal Scottish and served through the SWA Campaign. Thereafter he helped to mobilise the 4th SAI Overseas Contingent. For many years he had been the right hand man of Major Donald MacLeod on the staff HQ of the Transvaal Scottish at Johannesburg. He was killed during the operations at Delville Wood on the 15th.

*

Two companies, B and C, were to follow up and consolidate after the 5th Camerons attacked Waterlot Farm. The position was not taken until the following day so their role was principally in protecting the flank of the Cameron attack.

Captain Thomas Hesketh Ross, OC of B Coy, reported on the day’s events.

“On morning of 15 July SA Scottish arrived at Sunken road. Commanders of B and C Coys were ordered by OC (Major Macleod) to report to OC Camerons at Longueval. They were ordered by OC Camerons to occupy orchards north-west of Waterlot Farm and to remain there as reserve garrison.

B and C Coys moved up to this positions under heavy shell fire which caused about 25 casualties.

“About 10.30 am OC Camerons moved those companies to communication trench leading to Waterlot Farm and explained that he was attacking the farm at 11 am and wished B and C Coys to furnish a party to follow and consolidate. OC B Coy proceeded with one platoon from each company for this purpose. B Coy Platoon on reaching farm, doubled out as covering party while C Coy Platoon commenced a block facing south when machine-guns were placed to cover enemy’s approach by main road. This was done under shell fire and very persistent sniping from concealed posts south of farm and trenches east of farm.

“Attempts to mark strong points east of farm were frustrated by fire from the trenches — so the following dispositions were made. The block in the road now improved as much as possible and machine-gun then proceeded to retaliate the fire from south and east of farm.

“South-west of farm a strong point was established to prevent enemy flank attack, further, any enemy crossing from east or from neighbourhood of Trones Wood. From block in road, a series of picquets were posted in shell-holes and connected by cordons of men extending in north-east direction towards Delville Wood.

“This cordon covered any approach of enemy from south and east. One Lewis gun was placed to enfilade enemy’s trench east of farm — another to strengthen cordon mentioned. In addition to these two platoons of B and C Coys, SA Scottish, there was a detachment of Camerons — including a MG section.

“All MGs suffered very heavily — one gun at length having no crew — the reserved being used up. Casualties at the farm this day were between 20 and 30 including one officer killed (Lieut Thorburn). These dispositions were

retained throughout the day with the view to complete consolidation after dark.

"About 7 pm an enemy force estimated at a battalion were seen approaching from the direction of Guillemont. Cordons and picquets east of farm were opened out so as to bring all rifles into action and Lewis guns were placed to enfilade enemy on approach.

"When the latter were about 1,000 yards from farm — artillery answered on request for barrage — which though not of heavy calibre, was apparently effective, as enemy who had entered falling ground were not seen again. They apparently were driven east as they now crossed in front of our block. Shortly after this, about 7 pm, a party at the farm was recalled by OC Camerons to communication trench south-west of Delville Wood — an observation post alone remaining at the farm.

"Acting on orders C Coy then built strong point at northern end of trench leading from Waterlot Farm to Longueval.

"At daybreak (16th) B and C Coys were ordered back to trench by Sunken Road from which they started in the morning (of the 15th)."

*

Major Hunt's diary provides a synopsis of Capt Ross' report.

"July 15. Left Montauban, 2.30 am, and advanced rapidly towards Delville. Macleod with A and D Companies into Delville. B and C Companies under me to small orchard south of Longueval to 5th Camerons. Midday to Waterlot Farm. Kirby wounded. Sent Brown's and Thorburn's platoons to flanks north and south of farm. Thorburn killed.

"Held on during day. In afternoon Ross and I were able to stand out and watch our barrage on Germans coming from Guillemont. Built strong point east of junction of trench coming from Trones, but in doing so Germans nearly got us all with 5.9s. Many casualties today."

*

The ‘Kirby wounded’ was Sec-Lieut Walter Houx Kirby, 28, who had been born in San Diego, USA. He was educated in England and came to South Africa in 1896. Kirby served as a trooper in the Natal Light Horse in SWA and was wounded and captured at Gibeon in April 1915, however managed to escape. He joined the 4th SAI as a sergeant and served through the Egyptian Campaign.

*

Private Bert Higgins, recalled the attack on Waterlot Farm.

“George Thorburn, who was Pipe Major of Johannesburg Callies, was Pipe Major of the 1st and 2nd in SWA, led the remnants of the Camerons to take a sugar refinery where the Germans had their guns in concrete reinforced dugouts. The Germans sent over a terrific bombardment with coalboxes and very heavy shells, and all that could be seen was black smoke, shell-holes and blokes falling all over the place.”

Lieutenant R B Thorburn had served with the Cameronians. He rejoined as a Pipe-major in the Transvaal Scottish for SWA and was subsequently promoted in the field. He showed remarkable courage and skill in organising an excellent line of trenches at Waterlot Farm.

Thorburn was killed while gallantly leading a covering party to protect those of his old regiment who were endeavouring to consolidate the captured position. He was reputedly killed by a bomb thrown by “surrendering” Germans.

*

Private Charles Stanley Slade, 38, a merchant from Mowbray stood over six feet tall. He served for eight months in the Potchefstroom Commando, then joined the brigade. During his absence overseas his wife, Clarice, lived in Durban.

On 21 May he had been burnt on his head and neck. He acted as stretcher-bearer at Waterlot Farm, where he steadily and continuously collected and evacuated the wounded.

He and Pte J Royan worked together as stretcher-bearers, collecting and evacuating wounded at Waterlot Farm and later in Delville Wood. They carried wounded men through the barrages and worked unceasingly day and night until Royan was killed. Slade continued to fearlessly bandage and bring in wounded under fire.

*

Despite the escalating battle Arthur Betteridge noted many details, especially what he had to carry. “At 2 am on the 15th, B and C companies of the Scottish attacked a small orchard alongside the Cameronians. Our boys were led by Major Hunt and I accompanied them as signaller, carrying rifle and ammunition, hand grenades, shovel and trenching tool with a small haversack on my back filled with emergency rations, a few personal possessions, small towel, hair brush and comb and my diary. I was wearing an overcoat owing to the rain.

“A and D companies led by Lieut-Col MacLeod at the same time moved rapidly into Delville Wood on our right. Our artillery had been brought forward and put up an intensive barrage on the enemy infantry advancing from Guillemont. Many of our Field Artillery fired with open sights and inflicted serious damage on them.

“From this day onwards German gunners drenched Longueval, Delville Wood and the back areas with shells, almost obliterating the wood and reducing the houses in the village to rubble. Within 24 hours no wall of any house was higher than three feet. All of the hundreds of trees in the wood were reduced to a tangle of greenery and stumps. Not one tree was intact. The whole area was a shambles.

“Under this unbelievable rain of shells we had to clear paths and small communication trenches of rubble to bring up ammunition and what replacements we could find for the casualties. It was not possible to bring out the wounded for hours at a time, and then a lot of them were killed or wounded again on their way to the back lines.”

*

Captain R Anderson was later to write his observations on the holding of Delville Wood. “Men did not show enough eagerness in digging themselves in, probably they were not aware of the large number of enemy opposing them. It would have been better to have paid less attention to the approach of the enemy in the distance and to have persevered in getting good protection as soon as possible.

“Lewis guns had very poor protection. Trenches along the northeast side were in some cases never connected up and there was a lack of sandbags. Probably well-protected and well manned machine-guns would have proved as effective with less than half the men who actually manned the very bad trenches.”

Chapter 6 — In-fighting

Sunday 16th

Throughout the night the troops in Delville Wood had dug entrenchments. The soil was matted by roots and wire and they made slow headway with their entrenching tools. By daybreak a semblance of two-man trenches ringed the wood.

At 12.35 am Gen Lukin was ordered by Gen Furse to block the northern entrance to Longueval. The 11th Royal Scots (27th Brigade) would push northwards through the village to link up with the South Africans who would have advanced north from the Princes Street line.

Between North Street and Flers Road lay an orchard which was strongly held by the enemy. This had to be taken if Longueval and the wood were to be secured.

In order to win and hold Delville Wood it became obvious that the village would have to be taken and held. Similarly, in order to take the village the wood would have to be held. Without them the stability of the right wing of the new front was endangered. No fresh troops were available so the job had to be done by the tired and battered battalions who were there.

Accordingly Gen Furse ordered Lukin to liaise and operate together with the 27th Scottish Brigade.

The concerted attack was launched at 10 am. The Cape Regiments A and B Coys under Captains Jowett and Miller rose from their trenches and charged forward — to be met by a hail of machine-gun and rifle fire.

The attack wavered and then broke in the face of the withering fire. Those not killed or wounded tried to return to their positions. Many men found

themselves pinned down by the German fire, so crawled into whatever cover they could find.

Many acts of heroism were to take place that morning. One of these was when Lieut Arthur Craig led a bombing party against a German trench. He was wounded and most of his men killed. Craig lay in the open under machine-gun fire. Privates Faulds, Baker and Estment then went to his aid and dragged him back to cover. Baker was badly hit during the rescue attempt.

The troops who fell back to the trenches on Princes Street had to endure shell fire for the rest of the day. It was impossible to bring up rations, ammunition or water or to evacuate the casualties owing to the shell fire.

Major Hunt's two companies returned to the brigade and were ordered into Delville Wood by Dawson, to reinforce the 1st SAI Battalion's B and C Coy positions on Princes Street. They endured the shelling during the day and retired to the Longueval sunken road that evening.

General Lukin went to Longueval and Delville Wood to meet with his three battalion commanders. He was told that the men were exhausted and replied that there was no likelihood of their being relieved for another two days. On his return to Brigade HQ Lukin advised Divisional HQ of the state of the Springboks.

Fighting continued in all areas of the wood. Heavy shelling, particularly on the perimeters, blew trees over and smashed the shallow entrenchments. The South Africans were subjected to artillery fire and sniping throughout the day.

On the evening of the 16th orders were received that all infantry was to withdraw to south of Princes Street and east of the Strand so that the Corps heavy artillery could bombard the German positions. The aborted attack of that morning would then be repeated.

General Furse had requested the Corps to fire their heavy guns on Longueval at 4 am, but was overruled by Gen Rawlinson who ordered the bombardment for 11 pm on the 16th. This had to be postponed to 12.30 am owing to the difficulty of withdrawing infantry hurriedly from the village.

The German 153rd Regiment attacked at 11 pm. Many South Africans used five or more rifles taken from the dead and wounded and by a heavy fire repulsed the attack.

*

General Lukin's report for the day mainly concerned the fighting in the north-west corner of the wood.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner having reported very heavy casualties in one company during the night, the Officer Commanding, 1st SAI (Col Dawson), was ordered to send a further company to reinforce the 2nd SAI.

"On the morning of the 16th (2.35 am) orders were received that the northern approach to Longueval must be closed at all costs, and for this purpose the South African Brigade would 'complete their capture of the northern perimeter of the wood at once and advance westwards until they join hands with the 27th Infantry Brigade at North Street (the continuation of the village main street), making good against the enemy to the north every yard of their advance westwards. Similarly, the 27th Brigade will advance their connecting line northwards until they join hands with the South African Brigade at North Street'.

"I was instructed to concert measures with the GOC 27th Brigade and 'to exert the utmost energy to carry out this order at once'.

"It was arranged, in conjunction with the GOC, 27th Brigade, that two companies of the 1st SAI should attack the enemy from the line of Princes Street northwards, keeping to the right of North Street, and that simultaneously the enemy should be attacked in the sector to the left of North

Street by the 11th Royal Scots — the attack to be launched at 10 am.

"The 2 inch Trench Mortar Battery was to assist by a preliminary bombardment; the GOC, 27th Brigade, did not favour a bombardment by artillery.

"This attack failed as the 11th Royal Scots were held up by a strongly wired stone redoubt, and the two companies of the 1st SAI by machine-gun fire.

"When I was in Longueval that afternoon Lieut-Col Dawson, Commanding the 1st SAI, represented to me that his men were very exhausted and asked whether it was not possible that they could be relieved soon. I told him I had been informed by the divisional commander that there was no likelihood of our being relieved for a day or two.

"It was evident to me, however, that what Lieut-Col Dawson said was true, and that the men were very fatigued.

"I accordingly, on my return to headquarters, sent a telegram to division on the subject, adding that I had received reports from my battalion commanders in Delville Wood drawing special attention to the same fact as regards their men.

"At 10.30 pm orders were received to withdraw all infantry in the village to the south of Princes Street, and in the wood from the area west of the Strand, in order that we might 'bombard with safety to ourselves the northern edge of the village and the northwest comer of the wood'. The bombardment was to last until 2 am, at which hour the infantry were to assault."

*

Sergeant Leonard Arrons led his carrying parties in and out of the wood and personally witnessed the fighting at close-quarters.

"Next day our boys were fighting in the woods. Talk about murder! It was indescribable. Our chaps went to their death like heroes. They swept from the parapets and gave the Huns no quarter. Sniper, machine-gun fire, shells —

nothing could stop them; and it is said nine German battalions of their finest troops were hurled against our boys en masse, but to no avail.

“Here I must mention the Padre — our chaplain. During the whole time we were in action he worked among the wounded, regardless of himself; in shell fire, machine-gun fire, or snipers, he unceasingly worked like a Trojan, and if ever a man deserved a VC he does; I have a profound respect for parsons, and he in particular, one of the best men that ever lived.

“Our stretcher-bearers worked like superhuman men, in fact every South African was wonderful.

“When you see your comrades blown to pieces, you can just imagine the feeling. During that time with my party — I was carrying right into the firing line — I saw thousands of shells, and sometimes it was very trying.

“A shell would fall among the party. A shout, a rush to help the wounded, a few killed, but the remainder push on, and all along the road shells would continuously fall.

“We went through Longueval Village, which was ablaze with shells falling and snipers galore. And yet the work went on.”

*

A second mortar was set up in Longueval, about 50 yards from the first and 250 rounds were fired. Two snipers ceased to fire and one leg was seen to somersault through the air.

Gordon Forbes had a bit more to say. “In Capt Jameson’s gun team No 2. Went up to trenches in Longueval and dug a gun emplacement. Did some firing. Just settled down for night when got orders to move to Royal Scots trenches, which were overcrowded and had to go back to our own quarters near Montauban. Carmichael killed. Only 123 men left out of 1st Regiment.”

The unit’s diary records that “On the evening of the 16th all mortars were removed from Longueval and returned to headquarters.”

*

The day began badly, as recorded in the unit's diary.

"Lieutenant Willmer called in at Brigade HQ early this morning to report that he had lost himself in the wood while taking his two teams to the north-east corner, and that he had run into some Germans who opened fire on him. He had a slight wound in the hand and the teams had scattered and had been lost in the dark. During the day the men of the teams began to appear at Brigade HQ, there having been one or two casualties amongst them. I ordered them to return and report to Lieut Bailey in the wood.

"In the evening I went up and under instruction from the brigade got one of Lieut Patrick's guns at the northern edge of the wood to keep firing on a road running from Delville Wood to High Wood on which the enemy were reported to be digging in. It was most unpleasant in the wood as 5.9s were dropping everywhere. Lieut Bailey and Sec-Lieut Cuthbert were wounded today.

*

Private James Simpson and his gun-team were in for an unpleasant surprise that morning. "All that night we never had a single flare light put up on the whole of the long front of the wood to assist us in watching for any approach of the enemy. The result was that just as dawn was breaking we discovered that the Germans had advanced to about 50 yards and had dug themselves in.

"This could never have happened had we the flares to guide us to use the machine-guns on them. Flares did go up on our extreme right and left, and at times it looked as if we were surrounded. In the early morning we could see the enemy digging himself in, and then look up at us. Some were only about 40 yards away, and we had no wire between us.

"How sleepy we all felt, and I had the greatest difficulty to get some of the (3rd) Regiment fellows to awake and warn them that the enemy was so near.

They did not seem to care, they were so tired.

"It was about 4 am that I got hit by a bullet (in the left forearm). I simply dropped everything, rushed over to the gun, and the boys bound up the wound. All I wanted was to get away. I had to walk back to Maricourt to the big dressing-station before I could receive proper treatment, about six miles. On the way I fainted three times.

"While passing through the ruined village one of the Seaforths, also wounded, gave me some water from my bottle to bring me round. I remember he was wonderfully happy, for he had received a Blighty.

"After coming round I sat down for a bit, but he was too impatient to get on, so he left me, but he hadn't gone more than 15 yards when a shell burst, killing him and left him lying in a big water hole, completely submerged except for a small portion of his kilt, so he will be one of the missing."

*

Private Ivan Merle McCusker, 24, of Victoria West was in charge of a Lewis gun. He was 6 ft tall, weighed 173 lbs and had a scar on his forehead, possibly due to his job as a developing shift boss on the mines. Although originally in A Coy, 3rd SAI, he was transferred to the machine-gun section and attached to B Coy. In a letter to his father he recalled their passing through Montauban.

"There was not a wall left standing; everywhere fallen masonry and trees. The shells had fallen so thickly that the shell holes overlapped to such an extent that we had to walk through them, there being no part of the ground that had not been rent asunder.

"Some of these holes were about 10 feet deep and 20 feet in diameter. The Germans had some splendid dug-outs in the village, which our shells had not touched. We stayed that night in the old German last-line trench of the first line of defences.

“On the morning of the 16th, at 1.30 am, we moved on to the Longueval Village and Delville Wood. The previous morning the other two brigades of the 9th Division had taken the village and a part of Delville Wood. What a horrible sight the village was. It was battered almost as much as Montauban, but the dead were still lying thick in it; some men, battered out of all semblance of man by a huge bursting shell, lying in grotesque attitudes, probably some yards from their legs or arms.

“Well, we went on into the wood, up to where the Camerons had entrenched themselves. Well, we took the rest of the wood without losing many men or much fighting. The regiment here took some 200 prisoners. We then established ourselves on the fringe of the wood. The (4th) Regiment came up and reinforced us some while after. The (1st) and (2nd) were somewhere to our left. I am not sure whether they took their part of the wood. Anyhow, I am dealing now about the (3rd) and (4th). The Germans were, of course, shelling us all the time, and we were losing a lot of men.

“Meanwhile they were massing about eight or nine regiments for a tremendous counter-attack. As you know, I am No 1 on the gun, and so I am in charge of it, and of course do the actual firing. My No 2 was Charles Hugo, from Beaufort West. He was as game as a fighting-cock. Well, I managed to fire over 3,500 rounds into Germans in massed formation at ranges varying from 300 to 800 yards.

“So I guess I put over 300 Germans out of action with my little Lewis before I was hit; the targets were too good to miss, and the Lewis is very accurate. It is a fine gun, and is aptly described as ‘the hose of death’. Well, the shelling was getting heavier and heavier; shells were bursting all around us and very, very near. I said to Hugo: ‘Charles, our numbers are up.’ He just grinned. Not long after, about 4 pm, a 5.9-inch shell plunged right amongst us, and put my whole gun-team out of action.”

McCusker was hit by a shell fragment, just over the crest of his hip. Private C N Hugo is also recorded amongst the wounded.

One of the machine-gunners captured by the Germans was a young Jew, Pte Joel Emanuel, 18, who was a learner printers' compositor from Durban. Emanuel had joined A Coy of the 2nd SAI, however was transferred to the 28th Machine-Gun Coy.

In the face of a counter-attack L/Cpl James Taylor's crew of five were killed or wounded. He carried on alone until the gun jammed, then removed it to safety for repairs.

*

The 1st SAI's A and B Coys were to suffer heavily in the fighting on the 16th. The battalion's war diary describes what happened.

"C and D Coys were early today put under the orders of the OC 2nd SAI for the defence of other portions of Delville Wood. At 6 am orders were received from brigade-major SA Bde that the portion of the town in possession of the enemy was to be attacked at 10 am. The Royal Scots attacking from the west and two companies of the 1st SAI from the south. There would be a preparation by trench mortars and stokes guns.

"The necessary arrangements were made and orders were issued that at 10 am a bombing section should rush across from the trench marked D into the German trench about 40 degrees to the north and bomb along it. A Coy advancing to the north from the trench E and one platoon of B Coy from the trench D, the objective being the northern boundary of the wood. Two companies of the 4th SAI were to be in support.

"At 10 am a start was made by all of these except the platoon of B Coy which was delayed by a platoon of D Coy which had got into the trench by mistake. The parties advancing came immediately under an exceedingly heavy machine-gun fire from not less than three machine-guns and were

practically annihilated. No further progress was possible and although the trench mortars and stokes guns fired on the enemy's position at intervals throughout the day, the machine-guns were not silenced.

"The two companies of the 4th SAI had been instructed to remain in support along Princes Street but for an unknown reason did not do so and some parties of them occupied the trench marked EE. It had also been arranged that the company of the 1st SAI which was holding the line of the Strand, under the orders of OC 2nd SAI should advance to the west, but they also were held up by machine-gun fire. At sunset no progress had been made nor was there any hope of making any."

The regiment's losses during the day were heavy. The officers killed were Capt G J Miller, Lieut C B Parsons, Sec-Lieuts E A L Hahn, A E Brown, A C Haarhoff and J Hollingsworth; those wounded were Capt and Adj T O Priday, Lieut A W Craig, Sec-Lieuts H G Chapman and U Tempany.

The war diary continued, "It was impossible to ascertain the casualties of other ranks owing to the killed being left out and it being impossible to get in the severely wounded until after dark; also some joined other units, the numbers of them it being impossible to verify for some days. At 10 pm the CO returned to battalion HQ issuing orders that the two companies of the 4th SAI were to occupy the trenches previously occupied by C Coy."

*

Padre Eustace Hill continued to succour the wounded, oblivious of shells and bullets. When asking for volunteers to act as stretcher-bearers he would shout "Do you believe in God? If you do, follow me!" There were always those who did. One of the more reluctant men is believed to have replied "It's all very well for you, father, if hit you know where you'd go!"

Second-Lieutenant Arthur E Brown, the fifth son of the late Mr J Brown of Sea Point, who had once represented Cape Town in the old Cape House of

Assembly, was killed during the attack.

When the adjutant, Lieut Thomas Priday, was wounded, Lieut Sydney Style of King William's Town took over his duties. During the following days he was to cross ground many times which was swept by hostile enemy rifle and machine-gun fire to give orders or to ascertain the situation. He also organised the supply of rations, water and ammunition to exposed positions.

*

That night L/Cpl George Arthur Hort displayed utter fearlessness in removing wounded men from in front of the front-line trenches. Very lights lit up the wood and severe rifle and machine-gun fire made the rescues extremely hazardous. Thereafter Hort assisted in evacuating the wounded from the front dressing-station under heavy shell fire.

*

Captain Percy Jowett led his company "over the top" in the attack on the north-west corner. The men charged through the brambles, leaping over broken branches and shattered tree trunks, — then dived for cover and hurriedly searched about for camouflaged and hidden German snipers. The momentum of the attack flagged in the face of heavy machine-gun fire.

Shells dropped among them and bullets whistled past. Private Charles Dunn was hit by shrapnel in the chest and knocked over. Fortunately his left breast pocket contained a small bible which absorbed the impact of a jagged piece of metal. It cut through the pages and stopped over a celluloid cross bookmark.

He rose shakily to continue the advance. A sniper's bullet then bowled him over. The bullet tore through his pocket watch, sending pieces into his left chest. He lay dazed for a while as blood saturated his uniform, then lurched to his feet and headed back for the starting line.

"… I staggered towards a trench with blood pouring from my mouth and

wound. The feeling was terrible. I can see myself now as I staggered along shouting for help. Some of the men kept telling me to lie down. On my reaching the trench I collapsed from weakness and loss of blood. This happened about half an hour after going over the top. I lay in that trench for twelve hours — I was bleeding most of the time and really thought my last day had come. It was awful lying helpless with shells bursting all round.

"The Cameron Scottish took over the trench I lay in and were really very kind to me. They did everything in their power to make me comfortable. At about 7 pm that same evening, it commenced to rain and all that I had over me was a waterproof. It was not very long before I got wet through to the skin. The fighting that night was terrible. The Germans continually made counter-attacks on all sides. If I thought once that I was going to be blown up, I must have thought it a dozen times over. Some of the shells would explode so near that stones and mud would keep on falling in the trench."

*

Private Frederick Edward Dromgoole, a storeman from Wynberg, Cape Town, later wrote to his wife, Frances, from a London hospital: "I had rather a rough time on that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning of July 16, and will now tell you how I was hit. It was 10 o'clock in the morning when we went over the parapet to charge the Germans.

"A corporal, myself and another chap went in advance as a bombing party to try and find their machine-guns and, if possible, put them out of action. Everything was going fine. We were dishing out bombs to the Huns all right when suddenly a sniper caught me in the arm with an explosive bullet.

"Luckily for me it just touched the bone and only splintered it a bit. It was enough to make the bullet expand, and this made a nasty hole in coming out. As soon as I was hit my fingers curled up and my hand became useless. I got one of the boys to bandage it for me, but as the blood was running like a tap it

was soon soaked.

“Our officer, coming up, ordered me to the dressing-station at once. By this time things had become pretty hot. Bullets and shells were flying in all directions. I started for our trenches (to get to the dressing-station) when I got souvenir No 2. A bullet went clean through my steel helmet and gave me a nasty wound in the head.

“As things were getting too hot for my liking I decided to take cover. I lay flat, thinking to wait for a lull in the entertainment, but my luck was out. I had hardly lain there five minutes when I got No 3. A piece of shrapnel hit me in the back. This, however, was not much, although it was a bit painful.

“I also got some small pieces in my left shoulder, and was hit in the right thigh, when I made another attempt at leaving the wood. So, taking it all round, I had a pretty hot time, and think myself lucky in getting out alive. It was at first thought that I would have to lose my arm, but fortunately for me, it is healing quite nicely now.”

*

Private Emile Mathis, 17, was in No 3 platoon (the Yiddisher platoon) under Sec-Lieut Jack Hollingsworth to whom he acted as batman. Mathis was later to write of the attack that morning.

“When we attacked on the morning of July 16, 1916, from the waist-high trench we had dug in the wood we were almost immediately pinned down by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire.

“It swept in purposefully from the front and the flanks and took its toll. A slight rise in the ground gave some cover to a few of us.

“Behind this six of us were lying — they were Lieut Isaacs (B Coy), Cpl Healy (D Coy — Lewis guns), myself, Johnny Grimes, ‘Daddy’ Neilson and Lange, four of us out of A Coy.

“Corporal Healy was later awarded the DCM. I brought up ammunition for

him as the rest of his gun-crew were put out of action as soon as we attacked.

"Lieutenant Isaacs asked me to take a despatch back to headquarters asking for reinforcements. I managed to get back and found men of C Company of the 4th Regiment (the Scottish) occupying the trench we had hastily dug and from which our attack had been made.

"I told the officer in charge that Isaacs and Healey would try to get back under cover of darkness that night. Their withdrawal was successful; Grimes and Neilson managed to crawl back during a heavy shower of rain. Lange, in the same attempt, was killed."

Lieutenant Hollingsworth never returned from the attack and was posted as missing, assumed killed.

*

This company was in the centre of the attack on the north-west corner. Casualties were heavy as the South Africans advanced in the face of heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. Captain George Miller was killed while leading the company.

One of the runners in action was William Frederick Faulds, 21. He came from Cradock, Cape, where he had attended school. "Mannie" as he was known to all, was of a shy and retiring disposition, yet full of fun among his friends. He worked for the Midland Motor Garage until the Rebellion, when he joined the Cradock Commando for service in SWA.

Faulds re-enlisted in B Company of the 1st SAI and had his baptism of fire in Egypt. His mother, Wilhelmina, was a widow with seven children, two of whom served in the 1st SAI; his brother, Paisley, being with him at Delville Wood.

Faulds' platoon commander, Lieut Arthur Craig, used him as a messenger and said of Faulds: "He did not know the meaning of fear. Day after day he would carry messages through the hottest corners, run the gauntlet of snipers

and machine-guns and then push through a galling barrage fire. Delivering the message he would have to return by the same route with probably intensified efforts of the enemy to prevent his rejoining us. In this work Faulds was of inestimable service to me and his platoon."

Lieutenant Arthur Craig, originally from County Donegal, Ireland, led a bombing party which came under heavy machine-gun and rifle fire. He was to be thankful that his runner, Mannie Faulds, was nearby.

Craig later reported: "It was on July 16, near Delville Wood. We were ordered to attack a section of German trench strongly held and supported at either end by machine-guns. Rushing across 40 yards of no-man's-land under a heavy enfilading fire from the machine-guns we got held up. Our trench ran at right angles to the German trench; between the two was about 15 yards clear with barricades at each end.

"It was just short of the German trench that I dropped. Most of my men, too, had fallen. I managed to roll some yards to the intervening 'trench' between the opposing barricades. I call it a trench but the ground had been practically levelled by shell fire.

"Seventy-five yards away the machine-guns were blazing at me. I got hit twice in the left shoulder. It seemed that I hadn't an earthly hope. Then Faulds in broad daylight — it was about 10.30 am — climbed the barricade and crawled to me. He was accompanied by Private (George F) Baker and another man (Pte Alexander Estment).

"It took them twenty-five minutes to drag me over the barricade. They pulled me by the left leg. One of my rescuers (Baker) was badly hit and it was a miracle that any of us got out alive.

"I was particularly impressed with the masterly way Faulds, the leading spirit, handled the situation. While lying on the ground my tunic was torn to shreds by machine-gun bullets, my equipment cut to pieces and my water

bottle splintered to pieces.

"I must say this: Faulds was my only chance — it was a millionth chance, but he pulled it off." During the episode Baker received two bad wounds.

*

During the course of the day Gen Lukin and Gen Scrase-Dickens, the OC of the 27th Brigade, visited "D" trench facing the enemy strong point and came to the conclusion that it could only be taken after artillery preparation. Sec-Lieut Frederick English displayed great courage and resource at trench D, in bombing the enemy and firing on them over the parapet whenever they moved along their trench. It was then possible for his sentries to keep their heads above the parapet without being fired at.

The enemy undoubtedly suffered a fair number of casualties, for as the trench mortars made them run along their trench from one place to another Lieut English and his men poured a heavy fire into them with Lewis guns and rifles.

*

Henry Sherman's second day in the wood was to be his last.

"On Sunday morning, July 16, at 10.30 am we had to make our first really big bayonet charge. We went over as a whole unit and that is where we copped it. We were decimated. I was one of the lucky ones. We went over on the blast of a whistle and then our boys fell like flies. As I was going over with two bags of Lewis ammunition a machine-gunner got it in the throat. He fell on me, knocking me right back into the trench.

"Now I was in a fix. Wounded were crawling back in the trench, but I had to walk over them and to another spot as the original one was marked. I got over safely and wriggled myself along the ground to within ten yards of their trench. Our boys were lying down waiting for the next rush.

"In the meantime I spotted a German officer, had a shot at him, but missed.

He was in their support trench which was lined with machine-guns.

"A chap in A Company was going to pot at him, but I got my second shot off before him and the officer fell like a log. Some fine language was thrown at me by the A Company man. I knew the Hun by his helmet.

"We waited for about twenty minutes for the next rush and got tired of it. Word was passed along for any officer, but not one could be found, so I threw off all my pack, rifle as well, a silly thing to do, and crawled along to the right about 25 yards to see if any officer was near, but all were hit, so back I crawled to my kit. As I was buckling it on, Mr Sniper caught me napping.

"He must have been up a tree as I had good cover behind a stump. He was a good shot. I was wounded in the shoulder by the sniper shooting from a platform in a tree. I managed to wriggle back to my own trench and fall into it.

"I told an A Company man about the officers being hit, but he advised me to crawl once more. So off goes all my kit again and I crawled in agony. Bullets seemed to fall thicker than ever, but I think it was a delirious imagination.

"At the back of our irregular trench I came across a dump of bread and water. I ate half a loaf ravenously, had a drink, and then worked my way into an old German dug-out where I found a man of the 2nd battalion who dressed my wound. He had a sprained knee.

"The Huns spotted us there and sent some gentle reminders. Out I dashed this time and came across one of my mates wounded. A Black Watch stretcher-bearer hurried us along to a dressing-station. In order to get out of the shell-fire as soon as possible, we picked up another wounded mate and the three of us set out on a good pace, being walking patients. We passed through several dressing-stations, had our wounds dressed and, of course,

plenty of good things to eat. Those RAMC boys do wonderful work, and at every station there are tons of eatable luxuries."

Sherman's greatest praise was for his company's two stretcher-bearers, Van Loggenberg and Willis, from South End, Port Elizabeth, who had worked in Victoria Park before joining up.

*

Another Port Elizabeth man in the thick of it was Pte Jack Clifford Atterbury, 18, who had been a feather-sorter before the war. He was born on New Year's day 1898. After the fighting in Delville Wood he recalled the bravery of Mannie Faulds, the charmed life Lieut Fred English bore and that Lieut Leonard Isaacs from Kimberley was "a hell of a nice guy!"

*

Sergeant John Charles Hurlin, 23, came from Wynberg. His father, Charles Hurlin, was from Bethnal Green, London, and had enlisted in 1886 at the age of 21 in the East Yorkshire Regiment. After serving in Jamaica he was posted to South Africa where he bought himself out of the army to open a grocery and drapers' shop in Main Road, Wynberg. He married Ann Bridget Clark from Kimberley and they had 13 children.

One of the sons, Eddie, fell in with bad company so was promptly packed off to Australia. The eldest son, John Charles, generally known as Charlie, was 5 ft 4 ins tall and weighed 130 lbs. He served in the CPR for two years before joining the brigade and was promoted to sergeant in January 1916. He was wounded at Delville Wood and later wrote to his father, who recounted the day's events.

"He was hit just below the right knee and fell into a shell-hole, and then another bullet hit him in the helmet. His chum was immediately killed and fell on top of him. He then had to run about 50 yards to get to the dressing-station, with snipers firing at him all the time.

“He says he does not know how he managed to come out alive. He hopes to be back again in about a month’s time to have another pot at Mr Fritz. He says you must not think the Germans are all boys and old men, because they are not; the men they had up against them were six-footers, and very good shots.”

*

Private Harold George Litton Hall, 21, was a clerk from Cradock. He joined the SA Railways in 1910, then served in Prince Alfred’s Guards before joining the brigade. He was extremely ill in Alexandria, suffering from diarrhoea, enteritis and enteric. He survived to suffer a severe gunshot wound in the thigh during the Delville Wood fighting.

*

The company left Strand Street to reinforce the north-eastern side of the wood, where they were later shelled.

*

Victor Casson was to lose his friend, Jimmy McGregor, in the bombardment.

“About 7 am an order came along the line to advance and occupy the remaining 30 yards of the wood. There was no shell fire or resistance. About 40 men of C Company reached the edge of the wood and faced the entrenched Germans about 100 yards away.

“We started to dig ourselves in to consolidate our position when suddenly all hell was let loose. A battery of German artillery raked our position, killing and wounding all but McGregor and I. A chap in my sector was badly wounded and between us we managed to take him with us. The badly wounded and maimed were scattered about calling for help and no help came. What a tragedy to see one’s friends and not be able to help them.

“McGregor and I retreated to our original funk-hole. At this stage the wood was subjected to a rain of shell fire, the whole wood appeared to be hit by an

earthquake. The wood heaved and shook, blowing up trees and men. Mutilated bodies lay everywhere. The dying and the maimed called out for water and help — but there was none to be had. It rained hell-fire and steel; the whole wood was subjected to massive shell fire on the ground and in the air. McGregor and I were safe in our funk-hole unless we received a direct hit from a coalbox, a 100 lb shell."

Jimmy McGregor later left their shelter and Casson never saw him again.

*

Geoffrey Lawrence would never forget his second day in the wood.

"At dawn we were ordered to move deeper into the wood. We filed carefully through the dense and beautiful forest to the furthest corner and were told to dig again and to dig quickly as the enemy was very near. Gussie Harrison (Pte G A Harrison from Glasgow, Scotland) and I paired off and dug down about three feet with only just room for us to squat. Lying close to us were two strapping young Bavarians killed during the night and many wounded Germans. I went over and took the water bottles, still full, from the bodies.

"All was quiet for a short spell and we were able to look about us and admire the beautiful wood of tall trees above us and bracken and brambles below. The sun shone and everywhere great spider webs glistened with dew. The noise in the wood was terrific though in our area no shells were falling at the time.

"Standing up and keeping a good lookout for an enemy attack, I noticed the tree leaves close above our heads dropping steadily every now and then. It suddenly struck me that it was not yet autumn — those leaves should not be falling — they were being cut down by bullets.

"We got down very quickly and soon machine-guns were raking us from two sides. The fresh earth on our parapet came tumbling down on us as the

bullets swept along it. Two men close by were wounded by this fire, one very badly.

“There was, as it were, a blanket of stupendous noise everywhere, yet only now, as heavy shells and falling trees crashed near us, did we hear it. As the day wore on new artillery tactics were used on our line of slit trenches. At about 3 o’clock they used high velocity shells, the ones we called whizzbangs, searching up and down our line. They burst in pairs just above our heads.

“We heard them exploding on their way up over us, past and then coming down again. On the second trip up, the two burst just above our trench with a crash. A piece came flying back past my ear and drawn up legs and struck in my right thigh. There was a scream from the next little trench as a poor sergeant was badly smashed up and mortally wounded by the same shell.

“Gussie at once bandaged my leg and said ‘You have a lovely Blighty, get out’. I was dazed and shocked by the concussion and at first refused to leave for what seemed a small wound. Soon the leg stiffened and I realized I would be useless in combat.

“Waiting for a lull, two of us made our way slowly back through the wood. Midway we had to take shelter in a shell-hole from the heavy explosions close around us. We went on though it seemed impossible to get through.

“We reached a log-and-sandbag shelter full of wounded in the care of a medical orderly, hoping to shelter from the terrific bombardment. The orderly said, ‘Don’t stay, rather take a chance outside. We expect to go up any moment’. With the heavy shells falling we feelingly agreed there was little future for these poor fellows and went on.

“With the aid of a branch as a stick I hopped along and somehow by watching the spots where there seemed fewer bursts we got through to the road leading to Montauban.

“There we were joined by a young fellow named Botha wearing a German overcoat. His bare chest was bandaged and as we passed a dressing-station sited in a shelter dug into the bank of the sunken road, a doctor ran out and looked at our late-comer in surprise for he had been shot clean through the chest, where the doctor said his heart should have been. (Pte John Grabil Botha of Pretoria survived this severe wound only to be severely wounded in the last weeks of the war.)

“The doctor then looked at us two and advised us to keep moving. We needed little encouragement for the Bosch was sending over regular salvos and the road was littered with dead. I suggested getting off the road and walking a little distance off and parallel to it.

“This we did and escaped the heavy stuff we could hear coming before they landed on the road. We reached Montauban and here returned to the now fairly quiet road. All along our way men ran out from these funk holes and gave us cups of lovely hot tea.

“Passing through the village we reached a light rail line and joined a number of wounded on a trolley that ran us down to a dressing-station, and from there were taken by ambulance to a clearing-station some miles back. Here, of all luxuries, a warm bed on the grassed floor of the large tented ward, and a hot meal.”

*

Corporal Ernest Doitsh was proud of the way in which his men fought hand-to-hand with the enemy.

“The South African war-cry in these woods on these two nights was most inspiring. We were itching to get at the enemy and to go to the assistance of our boys. But what were we to do? The trench I was in had to be held, but it was with great difficulty that I held the boys back.

“However, the lads were equal to the occasion when it came, and they got

at the enemy with cold steel. Our turn came on the second night … Well, our turn was short and merry. The enemy made the next attempt from my front. I waited for the right moment then with bombs and bayonet illustrated to the Bosch the stuff South Africa is made of.

"In the general mêlée I suddenly bumped against a Bosch weighing about 20 stone (280 lbs). I parried his bayonet, missed the mark with my own, and found myself sitting on his face, knocking spots off him and doing my best to alter his good looks. But it was an unsavoury job, with his teeth firmly gripped in my thigh.

"The bayonet must have gone through his skin, judging by the blood about him. We had both fallen into a shell-hole; he had fallen on the top of our rifles, and I could not release my bayonet from under him. He had gripped my leg and the pain was agonising, but at the same time I was losing no time in inflicting all the damage I could upon him.

"A timely bullet from one of our officers who had come up, being attracted by the yelling that was coming from Fritz and myself, put an end to his earthly career.

"I pulled myself together again, and was in the scrap when we had to tackle a retreating foe. Bombs served the occasion well. After a hot encounter on both sides, I returned to my trench.

"Sleep for any of us, and I found myself with only eight men, was impossible. We had to be on the alert all night, as one of the regiments of our division was ordered to clear the wood of the enemy who had broken through at our weak points, and the firing from them was hard to distinguish from that of the enemy.

"We had continually to alter our front, one moment facing the front, and the next the rear, and this meant a very keen lookout. When it is a matter of life and death, I fancy sleep is far from one's thoughts, as the intense excitement

counteracts it. But at the same time one cannot do without this necessary asset, and I found myself falling off to sleep standing up, a thing I had never done before."

*

William Healy, 22, a cabinet-maker from Cape Town, had served with the CPR for nine months. He trained as a Lewis gunner and was placed in the machine-gun section. He stood 5 ft 6V2 ins and weighed 132 lbs.

When the 1st SAI went over the parapet to the attack he stuck to his gun after the balance of his team were killed or wounded. When his gun jammed he repaired the damage under heavy fire and continued alone. He served his gun the whole day in front of the parapet and carried it safely back to the trench when exposed to the enemy's snipers and machine-guns. That night he served the gun alone in the face of terrific machine-gun and rifle fire.

*

Another CPR man in the machine-gun section was Arthur Stanley, who captured a German who knew South Africa well.

"I am No 1 on a machine-gun, that is the man who actually fires, and as we fought in dense formation a few yards away I believe I had a very decent score. One prisoner we took used to have a barber's shop in Johannesburg, and he enquired very anxiously for South African news when he recognised his captors.

"The terrible, awful fear that a concentrated bombardment gives you is indescribable. You hear the shell coming, and cower in the bottom of the trench, and then, say 50 yards away, the trench flies in the air in a blinding flash and an awful noise, and men you know have been utterly blotted out. No piece is ever found, and if it was a 12-inch there is a hole that an oxwagon could hide in, and this goes on at the rate of thousands of shells per hour on a front of 500 yards, yards.

“The great consolation is our guns fire about 10 shells to the Huns’ one, and ours never cease. On one unfortunate night they fired a few rounds short and quite spoilt my evening.”

*

Private Thomas Holiday was detailed to guide Gen Lukin to Col Dawson.

“Another time I took a general (Lukin) and staff officer up to our colonel, who was in the trenches whilst an attack was on. We arrived safely, but had not been there very long when Fritz shelled us heavily, during which the staff officer got hit in the hand, and I being near him seized his hand and stopped the blood flowing. I then took out my own field-dressing and bandaged him up and had to take him with some other wounded men out of the trenches through the village, which was being heavily shelled all the way.”

*

Lance-Corporal William Walter Daniel Ryan, 25, was formerly a boilermaker at the Salt River Works. He was 5 ft 6 ins tall and had served a year with the Cape Garrison Artillery and a year with the CTH. At Delville Wood he was to know the horror of being buried alive.

“On Sunday morning they started to shell us, and one did not know where to stand. They seemed to follow one all over the show. Well, the unlucky one came along and it fell about six yards from me.

“I was sitting in a dug-out I made, and all of a sudden I was buried alive, and my chums had to dig me out. My officer and six men were wounded in my platoon. When I got out there I felt a bit shaky and faint, but it all wore off and I carried on.

“Then my sergeant told me and another fellow to take a box of ammunition up to the front line. We had just got round the corner of the trench when another shell came along and fell about four or five yards from us and threw the two of us twelve yards along the trench, and that finished me.

“It was about 10 o’clock in the morning, and I was unconscious until 4 o’clock that afternoon, to find myself in a dug-out used as a dressing-station, formerly belonging to ‘square-heads’. On asking how I came there and how soon I could rejoin my platoon, I was told I could not go back, as I was unfit.”

*

Archie Dagnin was buried twice by the shelling.

“The following morning we advanced and took the whole wood and then dug ourselves in. We weren’t in possession of the wood more than half an hour before we were shelled out of our positions. The Germans threw over 32,000 shells in 24 hrs and had 600 guns trained on the wood alone, which broke our brigade.

“I then had three men and myself left out of fifty. I was blown out of a trench three times and buried twice but one of my chums pulled me out in time.”

*

Sergeant John Adams received his Blighty at 11 pm.

“I was struck by a piece of shrapnel on the right foot, just missing my instep; it is not a serious wound. Without a doubt my heavy army boots saved my foot, and I consider myself very lucky getting off so lightly.

“It was raining and a very dark night. Our dressing-station was about a mile away. I managed to walk about half-way, when the hole in my foot pained so much that I was unable to walk further, so I crawled on my hands and knees, but had to give it up at last. I was afraid I would crawl into the German lines, so laid down in an old shell-hole. By this time I was covered in mud, and waited for the daylight.

“In the morning two of our chaps found me and, assisted by an officer, carried me to our dressing-station, an old French house in the village of

Longueval. As I was being carried in, the Germans were shelling the place, and I quite expected the place to come down on us. From here the stretcher-bearers carried me about a mile to the motor ambulances, and very soon I was in England."

*

Colonel Tanner was aware of the strategic importance of his headquarters position at the junction of Buchanan and Princes streets. He requested the sappers of the 64th Royal Engineers to construct a proper trench to enable his men to protect their flank and rear. A covered communication trench to Longueval was opened as well. This defensive position around the headquarters in the wood was to prove invaluable later.

*

Private Eddie Fitz assisted Henry Oldfield in clambering over the fallen trees and shell-torn earth as they left the wood.

"In the early morning we went to a dressing-station which I had noted was just outside the wood's boundary. We got his arm in a sling to keep his shoulder up. As soon as we got into this dressing-station a chap said, 'No, I can't look after you — get back down the road!'

"So we went down the road toward Bernafay Wood. When we got there they wouldn't look at either of us. They simply gave us an anti-tetanus injection, put an anti-tetanus label on us and said, 'Get the hell out of it.' When we came out of the wood in the morning you could hear the 'dickie' birds calling, it was so quiet.

"The thing warmed up again during the day. In the meantime Henry Oldfield and I had disappeared out of the scene."

*

When all other stretcher-bearers became casualties three men. Privates Walter Peacock, Clifford Heath and W Bennewith worked day and night to save

many wounded men's lives. They were tireless in their efforts and remarkably brave in fetching in wounded under heavy fire. They repeatedly passed through an area continuously under extremely heavy shell fire and exposed to enemy snipers. Although exhausted they refused to rest and continued to collect wounded.

*

At about 3 pm Pte Vlok, who lay with blood-soaked dressings covering his leg and shoulder, again saw Lieut Errol Tatham.

"He spoke to me. I was lying unable to move. He said 'Vlok, are you still alive? Why are you still here?' He called two men and told them to take me to the dressing-station out of the firing line.

"While he was tying me up a stretcher was brought and I was put on to it. Before this Lieut Tatham gave me all the water that was left in his water bottle. We were under heavy fire all the time. He told the men to take me away.

"They moved off with me, but came under the barrage fire and put me down. They said the fire was too heavy. Lieut Tatham must have seen them put me down, and he came up to us and ordered the men to pick up the stretcher again and then he went along with us through the barrage.

"I did not think we could possibly get through alive — but we did. He came along with us till we were through the barrage and then he left us and I saw him turn to go back again through the barrage to rejoin his men …

"He was very cool and cheerful. Soon after he left us a German high-explosive shell burst very close to him and covered him with earth and smoke. I thought he was killed, but I saw him come out of the smoke and dust, still going on back towards his men.

"I owe my life to him. He saved my life. I was so grateful to Lieut Tatham for saving my life that I got a man named Almond to write a letter for me

from Etaples Hospital thanking Lieut Tatham …”

*

Sergeant Tertius Brook, from Durban, the orderly sergeant of the 2nd SAI, was impressed by Lieut Tatham’s conduct while at the headquarters in the wood.

“During that time he carried out his duties with great calmness, which everybody noticed. He went out a great deal visiting company commanders, to see how things were going, and to see about rationing the men. He freely exposed himself in doing this. The fire was very heavy all the day. He took practically no rest during the three days. He just sat down occasionally in the trench and got short snatches of sleep”.

*

Colonel Tanner ordered Lieut Walter Hill to take a party to the northern edge of the wood. Private Henry Pauls was included. “No matter how often the Germans attacked, Lieut Hill led us to meet them and with bombs and bayonet we killed many more Germans than our own number.

“This was all due to Lieut Hill’s bravery and I remember him asking Major Burges if he should lead us out through the other side of the wood and capture a German trench. Major Burges would not allow this.”

*

Private Charlie Stuart, 22, was with his company on the southern perimeter. His attempts to dig in were frustrated by the tree roots and the incessant shelling and machine-gun fire. His first impression of the wood on the 15th had been of the hundreds of dead Highlanders lying strewn about haphazardly. During the fighting which followed he marvelled at the bravery of the stretcher-bearers, who continued ministering to the wounded in the face of murderous fire.

Charles Birnie Stuart was born at Cala, Transkei, and attended the Kokstad

Public School, then worked at the local bank until volunteering for service in the brigade. Stuart saw his first action at the Battle of Halazin in Egypt.

At dawn Charlie Stuart found that he was alone. The enemy had overrun his position and his friends were dead or missing. German infantry had infiltrated the area and he had the uncanny sensation that he was the sole survivor of the brigade!

Stuart was grateful that, although a bullet had pierced the metal drinking cup on his back pack, he was unscathed. He felt compelled to seek his comrades. He could see a ruined summer-house ahead, an ideal shelter and observation post.

As he ran toward the derelict building he saw a German drop onto one knee and take aim at him. Stuart swung his rifle around and fired hurriedly. The bullet flew wide, however the German dived for cover, enabling Stuart to reach his destination and slide gratefully into a shell-crater behind the summer-house.

After he recovered from the dash, Stuart crawled to the lip of the crater from where he saw three German officers facing away from him. They were peering through field-glasses and discussing the situation ahead. Stuart decided that his contribution to the war effort would include the threesome, whom he duly despatched. Surprisingly, when he shot one through the head the officers cap shot several feet into the air.

Shortly afterwards a young German soldier who was seeking cover jumped into Stuart’s shell-crater. They stared at each other in the shocked stillness, then the German began shouting that he wished to surrender. Stuart forced him to share the shell-hole, then tried to indicate to the German that no harm would come to him if only he would keep quiet. The German continued shouting for mercy and making such a din that Stuart had to shoot him.

He never forgave himself for this, the horror of which would haunt him to

his grave. If only he had not reacted so instinctively, yet this was what training and self-preservation did to one. Later Stuart saw a party of Germans escorting South African prisoners, so glumly raised his arms and stepped out to meet them.

*

Lieutenant Lovell Greene had been slightly wounded in Bernafay Wood on the 10th, nevertheless returned to duty. In Delville Wood he went forward in front of the trench line to observe the enemy movements and though severely wounded continued his duty for some hours. He was again severely wounded on his way to the dressing-station.

*

Corporal Hermann Bloom lay in the ruined barn throughout the day and until 11 pm that night. As the bullet had smashed the bone of his left leg he could only drag himself around.

"It rained all day Sunday, and I expected the barn to be blown up any minute. They had started a huge counter-attack, but our boys pushed them back, and their losses must have been terrible. The ground was literally covered with dead Germans.

"When things got quieter, I blew my whistle, and some of my own company came in and found me. One chap said: 'Look, boys, there's our poor corporal; let's get a stretcher and get him out of this.' I shall remember this incident as long as I live.

"Well they came back, and we started for the dressing-station, which was at the edge of the village. It was no easy task. The Germans had our place spotted; their snipers were potting at us when we came in, and I may say lots of wounded chaps and stretcher-bearers were killed in this way.

"Here I had a cup of tea — the first I had had since Friday afternoon — and my wounds dressed. I was very weak from the loss of blood and from the

shell-shock, and I never expected to come out!

"The doctor asked for volunteers to carry us (the wounded) to another casualty dressing-station, out of danger. Some chaps came forward. It was a very risky job, as they had started another counterattack, and they threw flares in the air which lit up the whole sky.

"It had now started to rain, but after the good wishes of the doctors and the boys we set off, a grave little party, in Indian file. We had to go very slow, as they were sweeping the roads with machine-gun fire. After a momentous journey we all arrived safe. I have since heard that two of the party of carriers were killed on the return journey, poor chaps; it's the heroes who suffer most.

"I had my wounds once more dressed, and was placed on an ambulance wagon, and arrived at the hospital at Montauban."

*

Rarely did a father and son find themselves fighting shoulder to shoulder in France. Private Holtman was to see his father struck down 12 yards away. "I felt awful. I was sure he was killed. I thought of mother all alone in Johannesburg. Twenty yards further on a big piece of shell knocked me over. Later I met father at the dressing-station, nursing a lame arm. 'Allemachtig' boy, is it you?' he said.

*

Sergeant William Stericker had served as a trooper in the SA Light Horse during the South African War and been awarded the Queen's Medal with 7 bars, as well as the Coronation Medal. He then served with the Transvaal Mounted Rifles in the Natal 1906 Zulu Rebellion. Zulu Rebellion.

Bill Stericker married and set up home near Florida, Transvaal. He served with the SA Irish in 1914 and was soon promoted to sergeant. After joining the brigade his military experience proved of great value until he was killed in Delville Wood on 16 July.

*

For the first two days in the wood Capt Stephen Liebson, SAMC, attached to 3rd SAI, had attended to the wounded with nothing but a small trench to shelter in. He was himself wounded on the 16th but remained at his post which he had set up in Longueval. In some cases enemy machine-gun emplacements and snipers were within 50 yards of the regimental aid post.

When the order came at 10.30 pm to evacuate Longueval as the British intended bombing it until 2 am, Capt Liebson asked for volunteers to remain with him at the dressing-station. Drummer R Scott and Privates J Maudlen, W Noble and R Thompson stepped forward.

*

Ernest Solomon, like all in the wood, had the greatest respect for the overworked stretcher-bearers.

“And all the time, night and day, the stretcher-bearers, unfortunately few in number, worked like heroes though ready to drop from fatigue. Continually exposed, ever on the move, dressing wounds, bearing the serious cases back over ways encumbered with fallen trees and shell holes, they were at the beck and call of all who required their assistance. I saw only two with our company and there was sufficient work for a couple of dozen.

“It was ‘stretcher-bearer,’ ‘stretcher-bearer,’ ‘stretcher-bearer,’ from a multitude of directions where wounded lay.

“‘Coming, coming,’ they shouted, running from one to another.

“Throughout almost the whole of one night, there came the cry from a wounded man somewhere behind in the darkness ‘stretcher-bearer, stretcher-bearer.’ An interval of silence, then again ‘stretcher-bearer, stretcher-bearer’ in a voice of great pain, heard between the crashes of bursting shells.

“‘I hear him,’ said one of the bearers when his attention was directed to the call, ‘I have been looking for him, but God knows where he is, I can’t find

him.’

“He was eventually discovered and taken back.

“The two could not cope with all the cases, and assistance had occasionally to be rendered by the men.

“‘Private … is badly wounded’ said an NCO to an officer on one occasion, ‘and will bleed to death unless attended to at once. May we take him back as the stretcher-bearers are busy?’

“The necessary permission was accorded and the man removed.

“Those were but a few of the incidents that crowded our days and nights.

“We were not short of food but did not have anything warm. Not a drop of tea or coffee, not an ounce of hot food, only cold rations and water, the latter in carefully distributed quantities. Occasionally an issue of rum, but passing through the hands of some unscrupulous persons, it had been freely diluted with water by the time it reached us, and had consequently lost all warming qualities. A cup of tea or coffee would have put new life into one, but it was not forthcoming.

“It is no idle boast to say that, in spite of the hardships, the men never lost heart, never felt but they were experiencing only what others had experienced before them, and that it was ‘up to them’ to have their share. Where hardships were necessary in order ‘to carry on’ they were accepted unquestioningly.

“Our ranks were being lamentably thinned out hour after hour. At intervals along the line gaping cavities marked the spots where shells had pitched clean onto shelters and blown their occupants to eternity. Men were put out of action singly and in bunches.

“One Lewis gun team was wiped out to a man. All around, in and out of shell-holes, in and out of their one-time shelters, lay the dead bodies of men. As soon as possible they received burial, sixteen one day being buried in a single grave.

“Shells pitching clear of men’s positions scattered ‘whirring’ jagged pieces of iron broadcast to maim and to kill. Others finding no human billets vented their spleen on nature. Clearings in the wood appearing where none had previously existed; bare decapitated trunks stood where once had been clusters of lofty trees.

“‘This is hell,’ we said, ‘things can’t go on like this. Why don’t they send us on to take the trenches in front?’

“Our orders however, were to hold on. The taking of the trenches in front would have created too great a salient.

“A shell burst in front of the position I occupied. Shrapnel damaged my rifle lying on the parapet before me, and smashed the bayonet. I picked up another lying near, its owner having been killed. The man next to me uttered a soft cry.

“‘Are you hit?’ I asked.

“There was a small scratch above one of his eyes and he held his right hand over his heart.

“‘I think so,’ he replied, and undoing his shirt discovered that a piece of shrapnel had lodged under the skin over his heart. It had passed through a book in the left hand breast pocket of his tunic. Taking up his rifle, and with full equipment on, he made his way calmly to the dressing-station.

“Two well-known Johannesburg footballers lay with broken legs. One died, the other today wears an artificial limb. One man, whose singing had so often delighted us at camp concerts, lay in a shell-hole, his face calm, his body bearing no outward signs of mutilation. They said he had been killed by concussion.

“Another young fellow, a mere boy, had both his legs blown off. At the dressing-station he is reported to have told the doctor not to worry about him as he had no chance, but to attend to others. He died.

“During the second day some officers of another division came to our positions to spy out the land. They said they were going to relieve us the next day. To our left front and behind the German front line stood a village with a prominent church steeple (Ginchy). That village, they said, was to be their objective in a coming attack.

“The rain came down in torrents and the expected relief did not materialise. Our boots, strong as they were, could not withstand the pressure of water and mud; waterproof sheets protected only our shoulders, and the other parts of our bodies received the rain and became soaked through.”

That afternoon the company numbered 100 men.

*

Tom Heunis found that race and creed meant nothing in the holocaust of Delville Wood. “Some men had coloured blood in them — but it never bothered us in those days … Two Afrikaner brothers called Geldenhuis were with us. One rambled all over the wood. He returned once with iron rations he had found on a dead German officer in a dug-out.

“A man named Hugo from the Cape carried water for us. A bullet went through the can and he stood and cried in frustration as the water ran out. He later became a sergeant and was killed in the 1917 offensive.”

*

Frank Dadd’s drawing of the Delville Wood battle was published in The Graphic of August 19, 1916. It was based on a sketch by a British officer. The caption quotes from one of the despatches of W Beach Thomas of the Daily Mail: “Yet one other tale must be told, a tale of the South Africans who first made the wood famous. One group of them who had already borne the brunt of the fighting, asked not to be relieved, and continued to fight without pause for seven days and nights.

“From this group one company became separated. But they were not

forgotten: and I trust the tale of their struggle will never be forgotten. How it all happened no one perhaps knows; but a hundred or so found themselves at twilight in occupation of a part of a trench running north and south up the wood. As the Germans came up they began to throw bombs at a venture, hoping so to discover the enemy, but, on instructions, not a man among the South Africans responded.

"Every man held his fire and waited till the figures of the enemy, not sure of their prey, were close and distinct. Then, attacking with rifle and bomb, they drove them back in panic with heavy losses. A remnant of this lost garrison finally made good its retreat."

*

As a regimental runner Harry Cooper was to see much of what transpired in the rest of the wood.

"As I was now on the move a great deal I saw many acts of bravery and I was proud to know that our 'Senussi Ragtime bob-a-day tourists' (a name we picked up while in Egypt) were really tough. We were a body of men and boys, some had not used a razor yet, but what they lacked in beard they made up for in guts. Straight from desert warfare into a hell like this.

"One man was doing a one-man army job with a machine-gun placed on a mound of earth and cannon shells. Who was helping him I could not know or see. He looked towards where I was running and in a second I was facing the business end of his gun. His grin was a pleasure to see when he turned it Jerry-wards again — and so was mine, perhaps.

"Looking towards the centre of the wood, I heard one of the 'big ones' coming and hit the grass. The next thing I saw was that this 'chap' had skidded in some way, hit a large tree and stood upright on its base — a very big 'dud'. Later some wag placed a tiny shell alongside it and wrote 'The long and the short' with some kind of white powder. This lot had gone when

I passed a day later. Something must have disliked the joke, only a big crater remained. Possibly it was delayed action, I could not say.

"News came through that Jerry had put up a white flag in order to collect some of his wounded and while our chaps rested and did what they could for our wounded, the Jerries opened fire and played havoc with our front-line. I was sent up to find out what the position was from headquarters, and to leave a message with an officer. The only ones I found were dead and among them was my captain (McLachlan) and the captain of another company.

"These two were nearly always together and two finer gentlemen you could not wish to meet. I met the wives of these two gallant men while I was on convalescence in Eastbourne.

"Our padre (this would be Padre Hill as Padre Cook had been killed at Bernafay earlier) came across my pal and I while we were trying to do something for the bad cases. He asked me if I would like to be 'OC Fires'. At first I thought he was joking but he said to me, 'Come on, let's get a fire going and give some of the wounded something hot to drink, and to my pal he said, 'Get what Oxo cubes you can'. This is the middle of the wood and hell all around us.

"Needless to say, my pal and I pleaded guilty to sheer funk. He said 'Yes, I can understand that, but we have got to do something.' I believe he found an old cellar farther back, but how far he got with the hot drinks I do not know. Later I saw him with both hands bandaged and still battling with the wounded. What a man — and if top decorations were to be given, he should have had 'Double Rations.'"

*

At 1 pm Lieut Elliott, who now commanded the company on South Street, wrote a message to Thackeray. "The men under my command are rapidly becoming non-efficient through want of sleep and cannot last out for many

hours longer.”

*

Private Douglas Davey was hit in his right knee by a piece of a whizzbang shell casing. He had time afterwards to reflect on his half-section’s narrow escape.

“The chap I shared our little trench with was called Marsh, that could also be a guess, his tunic was cut right across his back with the piece of shell casing which wounded me.”

*

Dudley Meredith found that fetching rations could be unusual.

“On one occasion I was sent back with a party to fetch rations and ammunition, which we found eventually in charge of a Scottie who had evidently had a good go at the rum. However, we took up a few bags of food, some ammunition, water and letters — the last lot of supplies that we saw.”

*

When the company was hard-pressed and ammunition running out, Company Sgt-Major Bryant returned to the dump under shell fire to fetch a box of ammunition and was killed on the return journey.

*

Lawson and Breytenbach, erstwhile foes, laboured together feverishly on Sunday morning.

“Time, before dawn on Sunday morning, was to us as dear life. Furiously we dug ourselves in, a work commenced during the night, when every moment of respite was a precious moment of toil at digging. Never did men dig as we dug, and sunrise lit up a workmanlike trench, upon which our mutual congratulations were hearty. Then came the sad burying of our dead. The soldier puts his fallen comrade out of sight with a joke on his lips — to dodge the sigh and tear.

“There was no help for the wounded who could not walk, as we were now totally cut off, and beyond the reach of the welcome stretcher-bearers and field dressing-stations. Our last communication with commissariat was between 7 and 8 pm on Saturday, when rations came in. With the rations came a new and timely reminder of what we were fighting for, in the form of letters from home.

“Here I must mention the magnificent display of care for his men of that gallant officer, Lieutenant Somerset.”

Lieutenant Francis Henry Somerset, 33, came to South Africa with the British Forces in January 1901, aged 18, and subsequently joined the SA Constabulary. After the war he joined the Forest Service and attended the Tokai Forest School in 1913.

Somerset served with the ILH in SWA and received a commission. He was extremely popular — “a chum of every man yet an officer and gentleman.” His brother, Burchall Somerset of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, was killed in action in May 1916. At the time his mother lived in British Columbia.

Lawson recalled how Somerset took care of them. “He was in command of the 16th Platoon at the south-east corner of the wood bearing west. About 9 am on Sunday, whilst the shell fire still raged in all its fury, he came to the ration dump, which was in the centre of the edge of the wood. He calmly sat down and sorted out the rations for his men, and then carried them himself to their part of the trench. He next fetched water for them from battalion headquarters, some 100 yards behind us in the wood. On his return he finished up these labours of love by setting out and bringing his men their letters, received with the rations the previous evening.

“Beyond the work of adding minor improvements to our trench, Sunday proved a day of rest though not a day of peace. To sit down amid the bursting of shells, witnessing a pal killed here, another wounded trying to limp to

safety somewhere else — and wondering whose turn it is to be next — is a severe strain.

“In this ordeal the South Africans proved their metal by a display of calmness such as to suggest they did not realise the danger — but they did, only they faced it bravely. The only cheer and comfort men in the first line trench, suffering from shell fire, can get is the fire of their own artillery, concentrated to silence the enemy’s guns. At this time the enemy’s guns opposite to and firing on us enjoyed immunity, whilst we had to wait inactive.

“The enemy infantry were apparently resting. There seemed no prospect of any fighting in which our trusty rifles and machine-guns could play a part. The Germans saw they had us like rats in a trap, and determined to thin our numbers and try to wear down our courage and spirit by artillery fire. As events proved, it required more than this to bring the spirit of the lads from South Africa to submission.

“So passed Sunday, the 16th, for a party of soldiers as useful with the rifle as any that ever fought, but unable to bring their pet weapon into play. The night that followed seemed even worse. The Imperial machine-guns and crews by which we had been reinforced met the fate of our own. By midnight the last machine-gun in our section of the line had been put out, whilst the line itself had grown steadily thinner. Yet each man realised and manfully accepted with composure that we had not yet seen the worst.

“We all looked to our rifles which now seemed indeed the friend in need. The hand that gripped the small of the stock did so with the trust and affection of a child for his mother; and so, still facing the thunderous enemy guns, which never diminished for a second their intense onslaught, we waited, with the confidence inspired in South Africans by their rifles, whatever was in store.

“Some small enemy parties tried to feel their way towards us. Revealed by the flashes of shell explosions, they were easily driven back by our rifle fire, no doubt jubilant that they had not drawn a single round of machine-gun fire.”

*

Early in the morning a strong enemy bombing party attempted to breach the company’s front. With great promptness L/Cpl Andrew Aitken brought his Lewis gun to bear on them and succeeded in stopping the attack single-handed, killing or wounding most of the enemy. His example at a critical time undoubtedly saved the situation.

Later during the day he covered the retirement and remained at his post, inflicting much damage on the enemy.

*

Bert Higgins had a miraculous escape from death.

“On the morning of the 16th July we went into the sunken road. While sitting with our backs to the Germans, a whizzbang killed the 12 men next to me. We then moved into Delville Wood. The Scots were there, worn out and bleary-eyed. They had taken a terrible hammering, so we took over from them.

“The ground at Delville Wood wasn’t difficult. It was muddy. All you had was your little entrenching tools and you dug like a rat to try and cover yourself in. The shrapnel and trees were falling all the time and when the coalboxes exploded you would see the smoke and men staggering around. We had no option but to split up into small groups.

“It was disorganised and that is why some of them never got out because they didn’t know they had been relieved. There was no routine of trenches, we were all in shell-holes, digging the best holes we could. We also took shelter behind tree trunks. We were armed with 303s and had the Lewis gun

— very few, two to a company — but we had plenty of Mills hand grenades. There was no communications or food — you lived off cold rations. Things were absolutely disorganised with this terrific shelling.

"At one time I asked an observation officer what was the rate of shelling and he said 2,000 an hour. When we went into the wood it was like a plantation and afterwards the wood was sticks.

"On the night of the 16th the Germans had us surrounded but they didn't know it. They were as confused as we were. We recognised them by their uniforms and helmets. You dug in where you could and lay in the mud and slush. It was cold and wet.

"One of our men said at a reunion that he was a stretcher case and when being brought out by four RAMC men they were shelled and dropped him in the road. When they returned he asked, 'What about me?' They replied, 'Oh, there is only one of you and four of us.'"

*

Corporal B D Tretheway volunteered to carry an important message through heavy fire, then returned to find that all the stretcher-bearers were killed or wounded so he carried the wounded to shelter. Although himself wounded he continued to fight in the firing line until compelled to have his wounds attended to.

*

Major Hunt recorded his company's entrance into Delville Wood.

"July 16th. At Daybreak Camerons relieved us and we moved to sunken road just behind Longueval. Heavily shelled. B and C Companies ordered into wood by Dawson. Moved in past church and lay in front of Princes Street.

"Heavily shelled all day, especially into Cameron mound to our left rear. Lieutenant A H Brown killed by machine-gun fire at shallow trench to west.

Big chunks of trees coming down with shell fire. Young Murdoch-Keith, the youngest of my company laughed at these and seemed to think it great fun.

"Sent for by Dawson in Longueval and on my way met Lukin and showed him back where Thackeray and Tanner were. Dawson ordered us to get back at nightfall to sunken road, which we did and carried some wounded to (Major) Power at dressing station."

*

Lieutenant Arthur Hugh Brown, 38, son of the Rev James Brown of Glasgow, had studied business at his home town where he became a captain in the local volunteers. He then went farming in the Orange Free State for nine years. After serving in SWA Brown joined the 4th SAI.

He had disposed his men well at Waterlot Farm on the 15th. The cool way he went about his work gave confidence to all. He met his death in Delville Wood while leading his men forward to occupy a trench in the face of heavy machine-gun fire.

At Bordon in England Sgt James Ainslie, 46, had marched Boustead before the adjutant. A Scotsman by birth, Ainslie had served in the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, the Border Rifles and the Transvaal Scottish Volunteers. By trade he was a baker and confectioner.

During heavy shelling and rifle and maxim-fire Ainslie showed exceptional coolness and courage in keeping his men in hand. He volunteered to go through a heavy barrage to fetch a desperately needed Lewis gun.

He ran ducking and weaving through the shell blasts and was soon lost to sight in the smoke. After an appreciable time the men raised a cheer as their sergeant stumbled back into their positions clutching the gun.

Private Angus Murdoch-Keith, 18, was born at Kimberley, attended King Edward School in Johannesburg and then started an engineering apprenticeship. Keith joined the brigade on its formation. His recollections of

Egypt centred on the long, dry march from Mersa Matruh to Sollum and the large mosquitos they encountered.

At Delville Wood he thought that Lieut Arthur Brown was killed by shell concussion and their platoon sergeant wounded. His leaderless platoon fought in the wood, then came out. He had no idea why Major Hunt should have thought that he enjoyed the experience. Keith was against their re-entering the wood. About 30 men went in and within ten minutes they had all been killed.

Keith recalled that an ex-King Edward scholar, Lieut Griffiths, who was attached to the Royal Artillery, had been sent forward to observe whether their shells were falling short. A large German shell exploded nearby and he dived into a shell-hole, where he came face to face with an old school chum.

*

Hugh Boustead attested to the accuracy of the German snipers:

"It was still dark when we reached the outskirts of Longueval which was to form the pivot of the next four days' fierce fighting for Delville Wood. After tea in the Longueval Road we were given our platoon objectives in the wood. Ours ran through an orchard.

"The wood was the first I had seen in the front line which was still unscathed with its trees green and branches unshattered by shellfire. The Germans had stocked it with snipers, their hands and faces painted green, and leaves and branches over their heads and shoulders.

"We could hear the continual crack of rifles but could see nothing. It was uncanny. We moved forward through an orchard in single file led by the platoon officer. Smith, the second-lieutenant, got through but the next seven who followed him were shot dead in a circle of a few yards, picked off by clean shooting without a murmur.

"I was not an NCO, but to follow these seven seemed madness, so I led the

remainder round the edge of the orchard to the rise we were told to occupy. We dug for dear life with our entrenching tools, making as little movement as possible.

“The crack of snipers’ rifles went on continually and the gaps increased in the lines of chaps digging themselves in. We had with us the bare iron rations we were carrying and a water bottle and when night fell those of us who had not been picked off were both hungry and thirsty.

“It was impossible to get food or water up in day time, so under cover of darkness two of us went back to bring up tins of bully beef and cans of water. I passed a young South African boy, sixteen years old, lying in a fox hole, wounded in the stomach. He begged for water and I urged him not to have a drink as it would be fatal and said we would try and get him help. The journey through the wood was eerie, with the flares shining on the leaves and branches of the trees.

“In the meantime the German soldiers ahead of us started to attack our lines at intervals. It must have been some three hours later when we got back from Longueval with the bully beef and water cans for the remainder of the now decimated platoon. The cans had not been cleaned out properly and the water was nauseating, tasting of petrol. For the next four days this horrible taste and smell lived with us, and you had to hold your nose to drink.

“The night battles went on ceaselessly. The German officers seemed to us to be very brave and led their men well in advance and with great courage. It was clear that they had reinforced the wood now, but still there was little shelling except into Longueval and outside it.

“On the second night we nearly suffered complete annihilation from our own ‘steel footballs’ — circular bombs with a long stick on which the charge is propelled. They went on pitching among us for hours on end, curiously causing no casualties, but they added to our terror.

“There were already six South African Scottish laying dead in their firing places ahead of us, but we were able to effect quite a good shoot on the Germans moving from Waterlot and after a number of hits they stopped.

“When night fell I moved into one of our trenches on the edge of Delville Wood when suddenly a heavy shrapnel barrage opened on the trench. It was a deep trench with safe dug-outs on the sides where I had hoped to get some sleep after a meal. The last thing I remember was a tremendous bang on the head.”

*

The extreme circumstances forced many ordinary men to display their inborn qualities of leadership.

Private A McLachlan showed initiative and gallantry in leading the men around him in a counter-attack on the enemy. He and a man of the Black Watch then went forward on patrol and made contact with the enemy. Neither were seen again.

*

Arthur Betteridge found that no quarter was asked for nor given in the wood.

“In the wood itself the few men still surviving repulsed numerous counter-attacks of the enemy. Germans recaptured a small portion of the wood, but all of them were killed by the few South Africans still standing and capable of firing a rifle or using a bayonet. For a time there was a shortage of hand grenades, but somehow or other supplies were brought through that hellish hail of shells.

“It is a sorry fact to record that on recapturing that bit of the wood, it was found that two of our badly wounded men who could not be evacuated, had been killed by Prussians bayoneting them. This news flashed through to the men still alive and fighting, who were very bitter. No Germans were taken prisoner by our chaps in the few days following this sorry, inhuman act.

“By this time we had become thoroughly fatalistic. So many of our pals had been killed or wounded, we simply carried on, half-dazed by the interminable shell fire, doing just what we had been trained to do. We lived mostly on our emergency rations and surprisingly enough had a cup of hot tea brewed somewhere in the wood by our chaps.

“Only rarely was food or tea safely delivered from the rear. Many of the attempts to bring rations through ended in the carriers becoming casualties in that continuous rain of shells on what was left of the wood. Lack of sleep, after hours of continuous action was beginning to take its toll.

“On the night of the 16th our platoon was relieved by a platoon of the 2nd Regiment. We staggered back to the support line behind Longueval, only to find the shelling there was nearly as intense as in the village and wood. Through it all, we did manage to get a hot meal from our field kitchens and a welcome cup of really hot tea, before collapsing to sleep for nearly six hours.

“Even during this spell away from the wood our casualties continued to rise. I never shall forget the magnificent work of the Scottish medical officer, Major Power. He set up an advanced dressing-station in a small hollow in the ground two hundred yards behind the sunken road at the edge of the wood. He and his small staff were constantly under fire.

“Only badly wounded men were attended there, others walked or were carried to the medical clearing-stations further in the rear, there was always a collection of a dozen or more badly injured cases There was always a collection of a dozen or more badly injured cases in the small space in which the doctor and his staff worked; no be taken to the rear; I saw at least twenty bodies near that dressing station covered with groundsheets.

“Many men were killed or wounded while snatching a few minutes sleep in the open, uncaring about the rain or the constant blasting of shells immediately around them. At times it seemed to be safer in the front line

itself even though dazed from the shelling and lack of sleep. No less than five fresh German divisions were brought up to take the wood and nearby territory while we held it. The 9th Division facing these fresh enemy divisions continued to hold the ground gained, but at a dreadful cost in men killed and wounded."

Chapter 7 — Holding on

Monday 17th

The bombardment of the north-west corner ceased at 2 am. Shortly before dawn the 27th Brigade and A and B Companies of the 1st SAI repeated their attack of the preceding day and again it failed. Thereafter the depleted 27th Brigade was withdrawn and replaced by fresh troops from the 3rd Division.

The Cameron Highlanders of the 26th Brigade, supported by two companies of the 4th SAI, captured Waterlot Farm at 9 am. The position was rushed, the garrison slaughtered, and the area rapidly consolidated.

General Lukin knew that there was no substitute for a personal on-the-spot appraisal of events at the front, so visited Delville Wood with his staff for discussions with his battalion commanders.

Lukin noted how fatigued the men were. By then all his troops had been in action for at least 48 hours. On his return to Brigade HQ he telephoned Gen Furse, who told him that the wood was to be held at all costs. Lukin requested that General Rawlinson be advised of the exhausted state of the South Africans. The prospect of the wood becoming a death-trap for the brigades appeared very likely.

At 2 pm German batteries to the east of Ginchy began bombarding the wood. Shelling increased in intensity throughout the day and German snipers in the wood became more active.

Colonel Tanner sent a party of SA Scottish to the north-west corner. After skirmishing with the enemy they returned at 4.30 pm and erroneously reported the enemy to be east of Strand Street. Tanner advised Lukin, who promptly sent Lieut Percy Roseby, the brigade intelligence officer, forward to

investigate. During the course of his reconnaisance Roseby was seriously wounded. Meanwhile Major Harry Gee of the 2nd SAI was mortally wounded.

At 6.40 pm Tanner advised Lukin of the error. Twenty minutes later Tanner received a severe gunshot wound in the thigh. His wound was bandaged and despite his protests he was carried out of the wood by stretcher-bearers. Thackeray then took over the command.

Within a few minutes Thackeray was ordered by the Divisional HQ to attack and occupy the German positions south-east of the wood. Thackeray replied that he could not spare more than 200 men to do so. With Lukin's support the order was cancelled.

"At 10.30 pm Lukin was informed by Corps HQ that the 3rd Division would occupy Longueval and set up machine-guns on the north-western side of the wood. The attack would take place at 3.45 am the following morning and would push east as far as the Strand.

That night all available reinforcements were sent to the perimeters to counter a strong enemy assault. The Germans pushed south in the western part of the wood, forcing the Springboks out of some of their trenches, however were stopped at Princes Street. A counterattack drove them back, however the South Africans suffered heavy casualties.

The German artillery, consisting of 116 field-guns and over 70 medium guns and howitzers, bombarded the wood with high explosives and gas at 11.45 pm. The rate of fire reached 400 rounds per minute, turning the night into a shrieking crescendo of falling shells and shattering explosions which caused the earth to heave convulsively.

The wood was often lit up by the rapid succession of explosions. Whole groups of men disappeared in the fire and smoke. Later a heavy rain turned the shell-holes and trenches into mud-holes and ponds.

A party of Germans managed to infiltrate from the north-east corner of Longueval into the wood north of Buchanan Street. Thackeray's men repulsed the assault however German snipers slipped between the South African lines and did great damage.

*

A South African pilot meanwhile flew "cover" over the wood. Captain Allister Mackintosh Miller, 23, was born in Swaziland and educated at SACS College, Cape Town, and St Aidan's College and Rhodes University in Grahamstown. He went to England in 1912 to study engineering. On the outbreak of war, Miller enlisted in the Royal Scots Greys and in March 1915 transferred to the RFC.

The value of air support became apparent during the battle. Arthur Betteridge of C Coy, 4th SAI, was not aware that Capt Allister Miller was the intrepid pilot who flew back and forth over Delville Wood.

"I must record an unusual episode which gave the infantry holding Longueval and trenches in Delville Wood a lot of encouragement. For several days a reconnaissance aircraft flew low over the German positions, pinpointing enemy gun positions for our artillery. He always appeared to be in the middle of archie shell bursts but carried on imperturbably.

"This exhibition of bravery was also cheered by the troops in the trenches. Thanks to our fighter air patrols few German aircraft were seen from the front line. For that vital period of our advance, control of the air was imperative. This particular Morane Parasol had a speed of only 80 miles an hour and the pilot for some reason or other was named by troops 'The Mad Major'. He seemed to bear a charmed life.

"On 17 July the front line troops had been worried by a specially constructed and defended redoubt of German machine-gunners. Repeated attempts by our artillery had failed to get a direct hit on this nest of hate. That

afternoon ‘The Mad Major’ came over at about 2,000 feet, obviously determined to give our gun batteries the exact pinpoint of German gun emplacements.

“Our shells were falling short or over the target, doing no damage. The pilot then did a series of dives with his aircraft onto the concentrated nest of machine-guns. This enabled the artillery observers to direct their gunfire right onto the target, which was eliminated. I have never seen a braver action, for that pilot to deliberately dive repeatedly into the concentration of machine-gun bullets several times, required great courage.

“It was later learnt ‘The Mad Major’ had specially arranged with our artillery observers, to get the range and eliminate this vicious enemy nest at all costs. On occasions he pulled out of his dive only 50 feet from the ground before darting up and away, only to repeat the effort. The pilot faced almost certain death in every dive he made.

“We learnt later this brave man managed to stagger back to an emergency landing ground where it was found hundreds of bullets had hit that sturdy aircraft. The pilot found four bullets had pierced his flying coat but he was not wounded. No individual feat of bravery in that vast battle gave greater pleasure to the troops who were delighted to learn ‘The Mad Major’ was given the immediate award of the DSO.

“The sequel to this incident occurred 27 years later when I was a major in the South African Air Force. I was spending the evening at a training squadron in Queenstown. Lieut-Col Allister Miller was the Officer Commanding. In the course of our chat, ‘Mac’ as he was affectionately called, learnt I had been wounded in Delville Wood.

“I explained to him the brave action I had witnessed with so many others in the wood. ‘Mac’ smiled and said he was glad not to have been among the footsloggers on the ground during the Somme Battle. When I explained in

detail what we had seen that brave pilot do at a vital period of the battle, ‘Mac’ smiled and said I was the first infantryman he had met who saw ‘The Mad Major’ and especially that effort 27 years earlier.

“‘That good old Morane literally fell to pieces when I landed’ he said. ‘I was only a captain then, fanatically determined to get our gunners onto that beastly machine-gun nest. That’s when they gave me this DSO’, he concluded.”

*

General Lukin’s report began by describing the dawn attack on the north-west corner.

“Two companies of the South African Infantry were to assist the 27th Brigade, if required, in carrying out this operation. (1st Battalion A and B Coys.)

“I ordered the Officer Commanding, 1st SAI to detail two companies to be ready to assist the 27th Brigade, if required, and the Officer Commanding, 2nd SAI was instructed to order his men holding Strand Street (B Coy) to move forward slowly to narrow down the front of our troops attacking from Princes Street as soon as that attack started.

“This attack was duly made, but it also failed to dislodge the enemy.

“The company which moved forward from Strand Street to co-operate met with strong resistance and had to fall back on to its original line.

“I visited Delville Wood on the morning of the 17th and discussed the situation fully with Lieut-Colonels Tanner and Thackeray.

“Although I took the opportunity of again impressing upon these officers the necessity of digging-in to the utmost, I was satisfied in my own mind that everything that could be done in that direction under the existing circumstances was being done.

“Officers and men were undoubtedly fully aware of the advantage to be

obtained from digging-in, and they were only too eager to do so for their own sakes.

“I was impressed with the signs of strain and fatigue visible on the faces of officers and men, and fully appreciated what both Lieut-Colonels Tanner and Thackeray stated — that the strain and fatigue were seriously telling on their men.

“On my return to Brigade Headquarters I was told that you (Gen Furse) wished to speak to me on the telephone.

“On your doing so you informed me that the corps commander desired you to impress upon me the grave responsibility of holding Delville Wood at all costs. I replied that I fully realised this from the various orders which I had received.

“At the same time, in justice to the brigade, I asked that the corps commander should be informed that I had just returned from Delville Wood and desired to draw his attention to the condition of the men, who were much exhausted after capturing the wood and with the strain of holding it for two days and two nights.

“In the course of the day a party of the 4th SAI, sent out by Lieut-Col Tanner to endeavour to clear up the situation in the north-west corner of the wood, encountered the enemy in considerable force.

“Some 30 or 40 of the enemy were in a trench which the officer in charge of the party erroneously placed as being to the east of Strand Street.

“On receiving this report (4.30 pm) Lieut-Colonel Tanner immediately reported to me that he feared that the company which had held Strand Street had been forced, in the operations in the earlier part of the day, to fall back considerably — possibly as far as Regent Street — and that in the meantime the enemy had dug a trench between Strand and Regent streets.

“I reported this at once to divisional headquarters.

“Lieut-Colonel Tanner was ordered by me to take immediate steps to attack the enemy and drive him back west to Strand Street.

“At 6.40 pm a further report was received from Lieut-Col Tanner to the effect that the officer in charge of the patrol had mistaken the streets, taking Strand Street for Regent Street, and that the report regarding the enemy being east of Strand Street was wrong.

“The position, he stated, was exactly as it had been since we first occupied the wood.

“Immediately he received the report of the officer in charge of the patrol referred to above, he had taken steps to confirm it or otherwise, but as he considered the matter of vital importance he wasted no time in reporting it.

“Shortly after this Lieut-Colonel Tanner was wounded, and Lieut-Colonel Thackeray took over the command of the troops in the wood.

“At 7.30 pm orders were received to occupy, before dawn the following day, the trench dug by Germans which runs parallel to and 200 yards distant from the south-east edge of Delville Wood”.

“I immediately got in touch with the Officer Commanding 3rd SAI (Thackeray), who reported that the trench referred to had been carefully reconnoitred and that it was reported to be strongly held by the enemy with several machine-guns in it.

“The Officer Commanding, 3rd SAI, stated that he could not furnish more than 200 men for this operation without endangering Delville Wood.

“On the matter being represented in this light to divisional headquarters the order to occupy the enemy trench referred to was cancelled.”

*

The men doing commissariat work had to move about where others hugged shelter. Sergeant Leonard Arrons found July 17 to be an eventful day, never to be forgotten.

“Our lads simply did superhuman work. The cost may have been terrific, but it was well worth the price paid. We gained our objective and held it.

“That day the Huns opened a terrific bombardment on our line. Do not be surprised or think it impossible, but they hurled 15,000 shells at us. Just think, 15,000 shells!!!

“The roads were impassable and the woods untenable, men were being blown all over the place. In the woods and village nothing could live. Yet our lads held on, dug in a few feet, and hung on like grim death. Things became so intense that we were told we would be required as reinforcements.

“To go or attempt to run through that fire meant certain death, but it had to be done, and halfway up the road a message came through that we were not required and so we had to run the gauntlet back to the dump. How we got through is beyond me, but some lives were lost.

“That night water was required urgently, and we had a very trying time, but succeeded. After the bombardment ceased, the Germans advanced, and the remnants of our brigade charged them, and the Huns ran like h--l. I am also pleased to state our fellows held on to their objective until relieved, so all was well.

“General Lukin is a gentleman and a great soldier. One could see him continuously to and from the firing line, always bucking us up and talking to the wounded; the staff officers likewise. That front was vital for us, and had to be gained and held at all costs.

“Shells — why I should think during the time we were in action there must have been 30,000 shells hurled at us, apart from bombs, machine-gun fire, and snipers’ bullets, and all sorts of shells — coalboxes, Jack Johnsons, whizzbangs, tear-shells, delayed action gas shells, high explosive, shrapnel and every diabolical method of murder was used by the Huns. Yet we successfully did the work allotted to us.”

*

The mortar battery at Montauban was heavily shelled and of the three mortars in action one was blown up. As the safety pins had been removed from 28 mortar shells in its vicinity only five exploded.

Gordon Forbes had a surprisingly restful day. “Got wet through and spent a miserable early morning. Had a good sleep from 9 am to dinner time though ordered up to Longueval but could not pass as the Bosches had a machine-gun trained on the road. Back again.”

*

Captain Patterson and Capt Deane found it necessary to move about a great deal in organising the logistics.

“Received word from Lieut Patrick that one of his guns had been badly hit and teams very much reduced. Went to Talus Boise, where I had left the sergeant-major and an orderly to look after our things, and to Glatz Redoubt. As a result of the wanderings I got a team together and sent them off with the gun we had saved from Bernafay Wood together with belt boxes I had found, a tripod, spare parts etc. Told the corporal in charge to report to Lieut Patrick.

“Nothing of importance occurred until 10 pm when the enemy began to bombard with gas shells. They searched all the ground from Montauban to Maricourt. It was most unpleasant in Bn HQ outside which several shells burst. We had two mules killed on the road outside and Lieut Connal received a good dose of gas. The bombardment was practically continuous till about 3.30 am 18.7.16.

“Two of our drivers were gassed also two mules.”

*

John Buchan, in his book The South African Forces in France, praised the work of the SAMC.

“The work of the Field Ambulance and of the regimental medical officers

during these days deserved the highest praise, and it was due to their gallantry and resource that the sufferings of the men in the wood were not more horrible. The weather was now hot sun, now drenching rain, and the task of getting out the casualties was one long nightmare."

Major RN Pringle of the 1st SA Field Ambulance was in charge of the bearer-section and had first cleared the ground of wounded men of the Black Watch, Gordons, Yorks and Wilts.

On one occasion he took a party of 35 men to Longueval in response to an urgent appeal and worked until five of his men were wounded. He then withdrew in the face of severe fire. At all times his example inspired his bearer-party.

*

An SAMC private later wrote to his parents describing that evening's work.

"We did not have to go on duty again until the morning of the 17th, as the RAMC had relieved us. We proceeded to Bernafay Wood, which was under an extremely heavy shell fire, and owing to this we could not go up to Longueval to fetch the wounded. As the fire had not abated by about 6 pm our officer decided to go up, as there were a large number of cases waiting to be removed from the village.

"Accordingly we started off, four men to a stretcher, at a distance of about 20 yards apart. We had not done more than half a mile when ten of our bearers were knocked over and had to be taken back to the wood. We then went up again (about 24 of us in all), and reached the village in safety, though we had some very narrow escapes on the way.

"It was a horrible job removing the patients, as the roads were one mass of shell-craters, at a distance, in a large number of places, of only 2 feet apart; and as it had been raining for nearly five days these were mostly half-full of water, and we were constantly falling into them, patient and all. Our

greatcoats and equipment we had disposed of long before, and we were all wet through to the skin.

“We were knocked down twice owing to the concussion of shells bursting quite near us, and it was a miracle that we were not all blown to pieces. Three trips we managed safely, but on the fourth a shell burst very close to us — we were carrying the stretcher on our shoulders, one man to each handle — and we were all flung down again. The patient was killed, the three other bearers wounded, while I escaped with a piece of shrapnel through my coat and my steel helmet being knocked off. I patched the other bearers up as best I could, and we managed to get safely down to the wood.”

*

Staff-Sergeant L H Walsh, who was with the stretcher-bearers, vividly recalled the difficulties they faced in evacuating the wounded.

“The road from Longueval to Bernafay Wood was in an indescribable condition. It was impossible to carry from the front of the regimental aid posts at Longueval, owing to the sniping, which was at times very severe and accurate. The rear was a mass of ruins, wire entanglements, garden fences, fallen and falling trees, together with every description of debris and shattered building material.

“It is one thing to clear a path along which reinforcements may be brought, but quite another to make a track on which four men may carry a stretcher with a modicum of comfort to the patient …

“Besides this road there was a narrow sunken lane, which at first afforded some safety, but later became so pitted with shell-holes that the bearers were compelled to take to the open.

“In addition to these difficulties, it must be remembered that these roads were shelled heavily day and night. At times the enemy would put up a barrage with heavy stuff, which meant that no stretcher-bearing could be

done until the fire was over. Parties who were unfortunate enough to be caught in one of these barrages spent moments of nerve-racking suspense, crouching in shell-holes or under banks, or wherever cover was available.

“One of the worst experiences of this kind was when it was decided to shell Longueval once more. Very short notice was given to clear all the regimental aid posts, and only two men per stretcher could be spared. Padres, doctors, and odd men were pressed into service to enable all patients to be removed.

“As the party left, the bombardment began on both sides. Scrambling, pushing, and slipping amid a tornado of shell fire, they headed for Bernafay Wood. It was impossible to keep together, and in the darkness squads easily became detached and lost touch.

“The noise of bursting shells was incessant and deafening, while the continuous sing of the rifle and machine-gun bullets overhead tried the nerves of the hardiest. To crown all, it was raining, and the roads were almost impassable for stretcher work. In fact, had it not been for the light of the German star shells, the thing could not have been worked at all.

“As the night wore on squad after squad of tired, soaked, and mud-covered men stumbled into Bernafay Wood. Here came a medical officer covered with grime and mud from top to toe, carrying a stretcher with a kilted Scot. Then a tall parson (probably Hill) unrecognisable under a coating of mud, with a stretcher-bearer as partner, whose orders he obeyed implicitly. When word was passed round in the morning that all had returned alive, some were so incredulous that they started an inquiry of their own.”

*

Private William Harris, 18, had been promoted to medical officer’s orderly on 3 March. He was possibly transferred from the infantry on account of his size, being 5 ft 2 ins tall and weighing 136 lbs. After leaving school at Kimberley, Harris had served with the 9th Dismounted Rifles and the

Veterans Regiment in SWA.

When the regimental aid posts were cleared in Longueval, Harris displayed great courage. He ensured that all the patients were dressed properly and assisted in making arrangements for evacuating the wounded. At all times he showed exceptional courage and did much for their relief.

*

Private Charles Dunn lay in the muddy trench for over twelve hours, drifting in and out of consciousness. At one stage some friends who thought he was dead began digging his grave with their bayonets, but were told by their sergeant that there was no time for that and that they should move on. When stretcher-bearers eventually collected him he heard the mud sucking loudly as they pulled him out of its grip.

“It was about 1 am early Monday morning 17 July 1916, that a stretcher-bearer came along. To tell the truth I was that far gone from sheer weakness that I did not care what happened to me. It took six men to lift me out of the trench onto a stretcher — it was still very dark when I was carried out.

“The bearers had not gone far before they were obliged to put me down and to lie flat down themselves. The reason for this was that Maxim bullets were flying pretty close by so we were obliged to keep very low.

“On getting me out of the wood they had to get me to the first dressing-station in the village — the village itself was nothing but a mass of ruins with dead men lying everywhere. Some of the shells fell so close that the stretcher that I lay on got quite full of mud from the explosions. On our arrival at the dressing-station the doctor gave the order that all wounded had to be taken to the dumps — that is right behind the lines altogether.

“So another terrible journey commenced. How I managed to live through it all, I don’t know. Now all this time my wound had not been seen to and each time I tried to move the blood would pour out like a river. It was still raining

and the stretcher was simply full of water.

“It was at 6 am on the Monday morning that we reached the dumps. The first thing that was done to me was the dressing of my wound. As the doctor was dressing it, he told me that I was a very lucky man. I was shot through the left breast just above the heart. The watch which I had in my pocket was knocked into me — it was smashed to pieces. I also had a New Testament, which also saved my life. It was either a sniper or Maxim bullets that popped me over as it must have been two shots to have done all that damage.

“After dressing my wound he then innoculated me after which I was given something to drink. The RAMC bearers carried me to the ambulance, which then conveyed me to a larger dressing-station in Corbie. On arriving at this station my uniform had to be cut from me — my clothes simply stuck to my body and my tunic was drenched in blood. I was unable to move at all. I had got that weak that the nurse had to cut my clothes off with a pair of scissors.”

By then A Coy had been reduced to 17 men.

*

At 1 am the British heavy artillery opened fire on the German strong point and trenches, only 40 yards distant from Lieut English. He had no warning of the bombardment, however removed his men without incurring casualties. At noon Lieut English and his men were withdrawn to a trench previously occupied by D Coy. The King’s Own Scottish Borderers then took over the infamous trench D.

Eric Griffiths was with the signallers and when they were annihilated he joined his brother, Sgt Stan Griffiths, as a Lewis gunner. He was wounded, so Stan carried him through the shell fire to the battalion aid post, then returned to the wood.

On his return Stan Griffiths was surprised to find a bitch with its puppies cowering under a fallen tree. In the midst of the battle he found the

compassion to comfort the quivering dog.

B Coy had dwindled to 46 men.

*

Corporal Doitsh found himself the target of a German sniper.

“In the daylight a sniper had been trying to hit me, and I had had to keep a keen lookout. I wish I could have located him, as I had with me a young traveller who was not known to miss a flying springbok at 800 yards, and Fritz could not have been half that distance away.

“The nearest he got to me was to put a bullet in my emergency ration bag, immediately behind my head, at the back of the trench. I opened it, and found the bullet had gone into the tin of bully beef, which I afterwards ate, but could not find the bullet, so perchance I may have eaten that as well. But better this than having it through my head.

“The Bosch trenches faced us at this point, about 300 yards away. Everything seemed as silent as the grave over there, but to show one’s head above the three feet of trench meant death, as the enemy lurked in every conceivable spot in the grass in front of their trenches.

“At intervals we could discern them endeavouring to dart to another part of the position over the open country, and this afforded great sport, as there was a definite object to aim at. They showed wonderful courage in this adventure, which required nerves of iron.

“We could fathom their scheme, which was to strengthen their flanks, where they were mustering in great numbers to launch their attack, which they did the next day.

“It can be understood why we were without anything warm to drink while we were in the extreme front of the wood. To make a fire of any description or to show smoke of any kind would be to give the exact position away. It was the most dangerous job imaginable for the ration-party to keep up the

supplies, and it was only accomplished with loss of life on each occasion rations were served out. Bully and mud make a nice mixture; this was our daily menu.

"Every one of the stretcher-bearers was worthy of recognition, as it was heroic work to carry the wounded to the dressing-station, for the nearest one was about a mile and a half through the wood. This was accomplished at a time when the high explosive shells were raising fountains of mud, slush, and earth, and the terrific roar of the explosions was deafening."

*

Victor Casson found that being a sniper was less useful than acting as a bombardier during action, so took to throwing Mills bombs. He had seen most of his company slaughtered by artillery the previous day, so returned to his funk hole, from where he helped repulse the night attacks.

"Between the hours of 5 am and 10 am of the 17th during the lull, I observed some distance away Gen Lukin accompanied by some of his staff peering through the fallen trees. Presumably they came to take note of the dispositions, after the awful bombardment of the night before. (The 'staff were Gen Dawson, Capt Pepper and Lieut Sharpe formerly of the Wits Rifles).

"I approached Gen Lukin and said to him 'Sir, apparently I am the only one of my company alive; everybody I can see are either dead or wounded.' The general replied that I must remain at my position, as the brigade was about to be relieved. I retreated to my shell-hole cover to wait for what was going to happen next. That night I again used Mills bombs, boxes of them, when the Germans attacked. Most of the time they were only about 100 yards from my funk hole.

"On the night of the 17th all hell was let loose."

*

Private Maurice Cistel, 23, was born at Streatham, London, and at 16 years of age left home and emmigrated to South Africa. He became one of the founder members of the SA Defence Force, being No A61, serving in the CPR. At Delville Wood his overriding recollection was of spending his time wandering around looking for friends.

Fred Hampson found the fighting in the wood frustrating. “We were pinned down by snipers, unable to move, and we had no one to shoot at as they were camouflaged and dug in.”

*

Private Thomas Holiday received his Blighty at about 7 pm.

“I was at battalion headquarters when three high-explosive shells burst there. One burst about two yards from me, and a splinter struck me in the face, missing my eye by an inch. I noticed a lot of blood dropping from my face, and obtained permission from an officer to go to the field dressing-station.

“From the latter place I was sent to the village of Maricourt, and whilst proceeding along the road, which was being heavily shelled at the time, my nerves gave way from exhaustion, and I had to be assisted to the dressing-station.”

*

When Lieut-Col Tanner was hit by a bullet in the thigh about 7 pm his second-in-command, Major Gee of D Coy took over the 2nd battalion.

Major Harry Gee, 48, had joined the (Cape) Railway Service in 1889 and been employed in the Uitenhage Railway Workshop. He served throughout the South African War and commanded the Uitenhage Volunteer Rifles. Gee served as a captain in SWA and was specially selected for overseas service. He was promoted to major shortly after his arrival in England.

Major Gee was mortally wounded soon after and as there were no senior

officers left in the 2nd, Major Heal of the 1st SAI took over the command. Lieut-Col Thackeray took over the command of the garrison in the wood.

*

Second-Lieutenant A T Wales, 23, was the son of Col Wales VD, of Pretoria. After schooling at Pietermaritzburg he worked at the Premier Mine. Wales joined the Natal Light Horse then transferred to the NMR for service in SWA. He joined the 2nd SAI as a lance-corporal and served in Egypt. He had just been commissioned when he was mortally wounded at Delville Wood and died on 17 July.

*

Private William Philip Pitout, 42, had been an excellent athlete in his youth. The amputation of four toes on his right foot ended that. Willie Pitout came from Willowmore, Cape. After leaving school he opened a store and in 1898 married a widow, Maggie Barnard, born Pace. They had two sons, Solomon (Lomie) born in 1900, and Robert Reginald (Reggie), born in 1902. When Maggie died from childbirth complications in 1905, Reggie, 3, never forgot that Lomie had picked him up to see his dead mother through a window.

Willie Pitout remarried Bertha Snyman in 1907 and they had a son and a daughter. Pitout then worked as a water-boring engineer. When the war began he joined the Midland Mounted Rifles, then after 18 months transferred to the Irrigation Engineering Corps.

At Delville Wood Pitout found himself dodging falling trees. It was a frightening experience for a man from the arid Karroo, where large trees were few and far between. He felt that more men were killed and injured by the falling trees than by bullets. Some of those crushed or pinned down by the shattered trees were later killed by shell-fire or by the enemy when they swept over the positions.

*

Private Stanley Dunston, 30, was a steel metal worker from Umzinto, Natal. He had served in the Durban Light Infantry for eight years. In Delville Wood he and Pte J L Grainger handled and worked a Lewis gun with the greatest gallantry.

Their company suffered heavy losses. Despite a galling fire they stuck to and worked their gun with such efficiency as to drive an enemy attack back when only 15 yards distant.

*

George Garnet Tanner, 22, of East London was no relation to Col Tanner. His two brothers, Douglas, 28 and Stanley, 25, also served but were not in the wood. Garnet had served four years in the Kaffrarian Rifles, including service in SWA, before being discharged in March 1915 for defective vision. He joined the brigade and had a relapse of eye trouble in Egypt.

He was sent back by his company commander (Major Gee) at a critical moment to explain the serious position the company was placed in, as the majority had been killed or wounded.

To carry out his instructions he had to penetrate a devastating barrage and unflinchingly faced it and although successful in making the report to battalion headquarters, it was seen that he was badly shell-shocked, having been blown up.

In spite of this and although suffering considerably and very badly shaken, Tanner insisted upon returning with the reply. Colonel Tanner did not consider that he was in a fit state to make the attempt, but no other man was available and he was permitted to go, although he recognised that he had been given and accepted a most dangerous task owing to the terrific fire of all description.

He later described how he was blown up and buried alive. “A shell landed alongside me. Fortunately the ground was very soft and the shell must have

penetrated quite far before it exploded. All I knew was that I was blown up into the air and must have gone fairly high because it was enough for me to turn a somersault and come down head first into the crater.

"When I fell the sides of the shell-hole piled in on me and pinned me so that I couldn't move and I felt myself suffocating. But I could feel that I had one leg free so waved it like the very devil to try and attract attention. Other chaps lying nearby saw me and managed to extricate me."

Garnet Tanner was well aware of the risks he ran. "I was a despatch runner from company to brigade. Very few despatch runners came out alive, as you were subject to fire from all directions when you were out in the open.

"The last message I took down from Coy HQ was to say that the Germans were attacking and the message was asking for reinforcements. I brought up a major who was then in command, as the colonel had been hit. All the men he could gather was about 25."

*

Sergeant Wilfred Brink set up his casualty collecting post at the entrance to the wood near Col Thackeray's headquarters. Padre Eustace Hill made a fire to brew tea nearby and soon afterwards shells began falling around them. Thackeray rose from his dug-out and shouted, 'Who's that bloody fool there?'

'It's Father Hill, sir … making tea!' came the reply. Brink was amused by the colonel's rejoinder. 'Well tell him to get the hell out of it. He's attracting fire.' Brink continued supervising the evacuation of the wounded.

"We couldn't get too far into the wood because the shelling was so bad. We had a regimental aid-post and a first field dressing-station near Longueval. So we worked from the wood into Longueval. I lost two squads of bearers there.

"While I was supervising we came under terrific machine-gun fire. You always had to cast your eyes from left to right looking for a shell-hole to drop

into to get below the surface from the machine-guns. It was then that I got a terrific blow on my left arm like from a cricket bat. It knocked me over and killed the fellows who were with me.

"I was bleeding like anything. A wounded sergeant of the Black Watch, a broad Scot, was in a nearby shell-hole. He helped me in. My shirt was coated in blood, but he took it and tied up my shattered upper arm. I lost a lot of blood and got terribly thirsty. The Scot disappeared from the shell-hole later. I think he died. Fortunately I remained conscious or I would have been buried alive by the incessant shelling."

*

Meanwhile urgently needed supplies were being held up at Montauban. The transport of the 3rd and 4th SAI was blocked in the road by a barrage of shells and gas. Quartermaster-Sgt W F Davies and Sec-Lieut R D Grierson of the 4th SAI man-handled wagons loaded with French mortars and assisted in clearing the jam at the time. The drivers could not be called from their animals to assist him.

*

Ernest Solomon records that it was not only the Germans that shelled them.

"Shells from our artillery began to fall among us. One gun, it appeared, had been misdirected, and hasty and frequent messages had to be sent by runners to the artillery officer concerned before it lifted, but not before it had killed several of our men.

"We cursed that artillery officer, whoever he was, as an incompetent ass.

"During the night of the 17th, some duty took me to headquarters and to the first-aid station. At the former place lay one of our two stretcher-bearers, badly wounded and unable to be moved at the time. He was very cheerful and quite pleased when he told me he had a Blighty. Poor fellow, he was killed the next day before he could be taken to a place of safety.

“At the first-aid station was Father Hill, chaplain to the 3rd, sitting over a fire in the open making coffee for the wounded, quite regardless of his own personal safety. The artillery officers objected to his fire as it was too conspicuous, and told him to extinguish it, but he ignored them. Many a wounded man blessed him for his untiring and unselfish efforts on their behalf.”

*

Tom Heunis’ half-section, Pte Rudolph Blom, was shot by a sniper. The bullet cut across his eyes. He was blinded by blood and pain, so Heunis bandaged him then left his rifle and half-carried him to a dressing-station at the edge of the wood (probably in the southwest). Dr Liebson was using a ruined barn which was filled with casualties.

Blom’s blood-soaked bandage was in his hand when Heunis left. He then saw a shell-shocked youngster holding his stomach and crying for his mother. Heunis assisted him to the dressing-station. On leaving the second time he looked toward Longueval and saw a sea of kilts. Hundreds of dead Scotsmen covered the ground. A sight he would never forget. With a heavy heart and empty hands he trudged back to his company’s position.

*

Dick Unwin was one of the sharpshooters of the company. The snipers’ insignia on his sleeve meant that in a brigade of crack-shots he was outstanding. The mud and water which collected in their trenches forced them to tie sacking around their legs and boots. This together with his brown webbing and uniform blended in the muddy shell-torn wood to form a perfect sniper’s camouflage.

He could hold his own against the enemy snipers — but had no defence against the German shells. Those which hit the trees exploded, blowing the trees to pieces and spraying the men who crouched below in the trenches with

hot shrapnel balls and jagged slivers of shell casing.

At about 2 pm a shell burst above Unwin, sending shrapnel ripping through his steel helmet to wound him behind his neck. One of his friends removed his smashed helmet and placed a dressing on the gash behind his head.

*

Dudley Meredith and his group were on their own in South Street.

“On our side of the wood we were in small batches in isolated small trenches. We saw very little of officers or NCOs and as we had no means of communication, orders were passed down the line from group to group. Gradually, as the German bombardment increased in severity, the distance between the knots of survivors lengthened. One evening during a lull I took a can of water along our lines and was amazed to find as much as fifty and seventy-five yards between the different detachments.

“The Germans were fairly methodical in their bombardment of the wood and we experienced a lull usually in the early morning and again in the late afternoon. During the rest of the day, however, the area was constantly under heavy shell fire, while during the night it was an inferno of flame and smoke. Our orders were to hold on and so we crouched in our little trenches, while our numbers dwindled as our comrades were wounded or killed.

“At the end of the first day in the wood C Coy had a strength of about forty-eight men — at the end of the third day one company in the front edge could muster only eight men. It was no wonder that without Very lights or telephones and with the constant expectations of counter-attacks, added to the reduction in our numbers, we began to feel very apprehensive, although there was no wavering in our intention to hold on until we were relieved or killed.

“Rain now added to our discomfort and crouching in our miserable little trenches we and our rifles became covered with a pasty yellow layer of mud, while clods and broken branches showered down upon us and acrid fumes

almost choked us. There could be no hope of relief, no hope of respite in the face of such violent shell fire and grimly we determined to face another day."

*

Harry Cooper would never forget the bravery and fortitude of the wounded.

"The smell of blood, iodine and cordite began to get really bad. High-explosive shells were uprooting trees as you would pull up a weed and the smoke from bursting shells was like a pall over the whole wood.

"Men were dying and many were lying badly wounded all over the place and some of the sights were ghastly. It was marvellous how some of them, disembowelled, were living, asking for cigarettes or water when they should have been dead long ago.

"During one of my trips I saw a couple of fellows trying to help another fellow to a place of safety. I saw his face, or what was left of it, and recognised him. One of the most likeable fellows you could wish to meet, always had a joke on hand and he was what you might term my 'buddy'.

"The grin was there but what a mess his body was in. He was put somewhere to be picked up later, but I never saw him again and can only surmise that he was placed among the growing heap of dead.

"On another trip I saw some men carrying an officer, a colonel of one of the other regiments (Col Tanner), on an improvised stretcher. He was in a bad way and kept shouting, 'Take me back to my men'; but these men carried on oblivious to all the shelling and bullets … The colonel reached safety and lived to fight in many more battles.

"Things were getting very bad now, wounded were not able to get much attention and water was hard to get. A pal of mine, also a runner, joined me in helping our regimental doctor (Capt Liebson) do what we could for the wounded.

"This doctor was only a young chap of Jewish extraction, and what a man!

He appeared to fear nothing and worked like a Trojan dishing out tablets and bandaging with what he could get hold of; but he was facing a hopeless task.

"I noticed that he was bleeding from the lobes of both ears, bits of shrapnel were sticking into the lobes and told him so but he told me to forget it and keep on doing what we could for the bad cases.

"There were not enough stretcher-bearers to deal with the large number of badly wounded. Walking wounded were battling their way out alone.

"One chap wearing no jacket or shirt came towards me shouting, 'Where is the b … doctor?' He was carrying his rifle slung over one shoulder, a bandage round his chest, three German helmets in his hand and was escorting five German prisoners, who had had enough, back to the edge of the wood. He got through all right. I saw him in Blighty on one of my leaves.

"The shelling never seemed to stop and, to cap it, some of our own guns had not got the proper range and were helping the Germans!

"I heard that someone had been sent to stop those guns or to get them to increase their range. Signals had also been sent from the centre of the wood, black and white flaps to attract the attention of our planes, but the smoke was too thick above the wood for the signals to be of any use.

"The news got around that this battery had been cut off by the Germans and the crews captured. How true this was I do not know, but they seemed to have quit firing."

*

Lawson returned from a dawn recce to an unexpected surprise.

"Returning from a visit to the right flank of our centre, I found that Breytenbach, during my absence, with unselfish and considerate care for others, had prepared a royal spread of bully beef, jam and bread and butter. Notwithstanding our surroundings, it was a cheery sight. Dawn broke on Monday morning to find us engaged in doing full justice to this hearty meal.

“Our first duty on Monday morning was to remove from the trench our dead, shell-holes providing a temporary resting place for them. This duty was luckily accomplished without further casualties, and certainly in the minimum time, as the intensity of shell fire had not abated. Thereafter, the only remaining duty was to keep a sharp watchfulness, which we did, trusting to Providence to turn the tide.

“Monday passed as the previous day and night had done. There was for us only to wait, facing death as the Voortrekkers had done on South African soil. They established a standard when, at most perhaps a dozen, armed with muzzle-loaders, they stood fast against overwhelming odds. So today were the men from South Africa called upon, on foreign soil, and amid a greater peril to the world, to stand fast.

“Breytenbach felt keenly the solemnity of the time, and responsibility rested heavily upon him. We were of about equal age and that would be about double the average age of the brave boys who so nobly stood by us. He and I were in opposite camps during the South African War. I am glad I never met him then. Here we met in a common cause. When he first spoke to me on the Saturday morning the impression I immediately got was that we had no other man so good with us; I was glad to see him there, and sought his companionship as much as possible.

“Whenever we conversed, I always found he turned conversation to the one subject of the Great War. We had exchanged reminiscences of the South African War, humorous and serious, but he made of everything a text to speak of the appalling horror of war as we had seen it in Flanders and France. On the Monday we sat side by side in our cramped narrow trench. I knew by this time I was in the presence of a serious man, and I found my place in the conversation as an eager and fascinated listener. In all our talks his mind was full of the old problem of good and evil in the world.

“The example of this man and his conversation, as I have already mentioned, make the most vivid impressions I carry with me of Delville Wood. His words at times were burning — I wish I could reproduce them. I cannot remember the words themselves, but their import and the impression they made I cannot and would not forget. It was as if the shrieking and bursting of shells all around had lifted off him the weariness of all we had gone through, and filled him with a holy wrath.

“At the time I resolved that, should I ever get back to South Africa, I would do what I could to convey to others the tenor and import of Breytenbach’s conversation at different times during the battle, but more particularly on this fateful day. Having just returned, I am attempting to do so in this tribute to my friend’s memory.

“He contrasted the present war with the war of seventeen years ago in South Africa, the occurrence of which he deplored. He found that an unnatural war waged between two peoples united in religion, in moral aspirations, largely united by intermarriage and the virile off-spring of this. Two peoples living and sharing things together, and, above all, sharing a common love of peace. He found the best evidence of this in the manner in which the game of war was played by both sides — clean and chivalrous. In contrast with the present war he found the conflict in South Africa was not war at all.

“In Europe he realised — as I did — that we had witnessed war for the first time. He had never dreamt war could be like this. Like all who had been to Flanders and France he knew of the loathsome passions that had been battening upon the inoffensive population — the murders, rapes, and all the horrors that issued from complete disregard of human feelings.

“He shared with the rest of the world the shock of the consciousness that human nature could be brought lower than was realised before. He shrunk

from nothing the enemy could do in the field. Till now, the wars of his day were wars waged between armies and governments, not by armies and governments upon helpless women and children.

“On Saturday had we not seen the cold-blooded murder of Germans by their own people? Breytenbach expressed deep thankfulness that the enemy who fought his people were not the Germans, and that his beloved country did not pass under the heel of the loathsome Hun conquerors.

“He spoke of the causes of war. He believed the prime root cause to be a horrible lust of power and dominion, that made everything subservient to its gratification. Moral and religious teaching, all that had been built up to make the world good — civilisation to its foundations — all had to go into the swill-tub for the feeding of this foul appetite. Nothing was to stand in the way. This was war arising from the will to war.

“How then, he questioned, came the South African War, which was not waged like this? What sinister power could have set at war two peoples who did not will war, but peace, and so could not make war? He saw in the world a malevolent influence, cunning and in league with the Powers of Darkness, devoted exclusively to the one fell work. Such a Power, never happy without war, and plans of war.

“Breytenbach thought he could make his dupes the two sides to a dispute. By subtle intrigue bad blood is fostered, to be heated by the fever of national pride. Then came false promises, and the ground is prepared for the conflict. But for this malevolent influence, Breytenbach did not believe it possible for two civilised peoples, without the stomach for war, to go to war with one another.

“The issue in this great world struggle which had brought us together was plain to Breytenbach. He could see nothing national in the war. He saw that what we were fighting for was an ideal, and he saw the plain question this

ideal put: for or against? For the right to live as free peoples, believing in ourselves, and desiring to hold our destiny in our hands; or, against this simple right, and for the yoke of an intolerable Prussianised system of world dominion and power — the system that had brought upon humanity the existing misery and pain, and would continue to do this as long as there lived men who loved liberty more than life?

"Those who could not understand the question he regarded as incapable of thinking. Simple and convincing, the question divided the world into two opposing camps. To him the answer was just as simple as had the question been: 'Are you in favour of letting loose upon the world a deadly plague, beyond the skill and science of man to control?'

"In our trench, on this Monday, in the face of almost certain death, he seemed overwhelmed, not with the spirit of apprehension and fear, but that of thankfulness. He audibly thanked God, as he had done more than once before in my hearing, that he had understood the question.

"He said he was clear (his words were beautifully simple and clear) that on that very day he was engaged in the greatest and noblest work man could be called upon to do. He was humbly thankful to have a part, ranged with the forces of good, in the fight against the powers of evil. He saw a purpose in his life, and wished for nothing more than the strength to make the most of his opportunity.

"Breytenbach's courage could not be excelled, and he took manifest pleasure in the physical execution of the task allotted to him with his deadly rifle. Uneducated, in the conventional sense, his mind had reached lofty heights of clear thought. It seemed to me at the time, and still seems so, that he spoke as no man had ever spoken to me. Under the teaching of his simple words I caught a clearer consciousness of the presence in the world of opposing powers of good and evil than I had experienced before.

“On the Monday, when few interruptions broke the spell, he seemed to have lost the names that designate the groups and countries at war — to have forgotten them — as if he would absolve humanity from the crime. As he spoke I also seemed to forget these names, and I could see in the war only a conflict between powers of darkness and the powers of light; and welling up in the heart I could feel a great wave of compassion for humanity.

“In surroundings of death, on this third day of terrible strain, I wonder did Breytenbach get a glimpse of the beyond — so near to us — where our human anxieties and perplexing doubts are set at rest and cleared up. With the steady light of faith (or was it revelation?) he saw ahead victory for the cause of right. Not victory to make the people delirious with joy, but to be accepted with chastened hearts full of contrite thankfulness — a victory for both sides, a purging of the world, the dawn of the better day.

“To have intimately known Breytenbach at Delville Wood, as I did, was to undergo a change for the better and for all time.

“Three days and two nights of terrible strain had now passed. The two or three hundred yards of trench that D Company had been called upon to hold looked battered and stricken. What remained of the defenders had been tried beyond all endurance. Deaf to the roar of hundreds of guns and explosions of shells all around, the boys were answering the overpowering call of nature, and taking respite from the horror in the oblivion of sound sleep.

“It was now everyone for himself; the non-commissioned officers of our party had all paid toll. Breytenbach then suggested to me that together we should maintain a watch, relieving each other every two hours. The duties of each two-hour watch were, first to patrol the trench, and then take position in no-man’s-land, about twenty five yards ahead. The alarm signal was to be a violent pull on a length of wire rope which formed the connecting link between him and me, and was fastened at the trench end to the sleeper’s arm.

The first part of this (Monday) night passed as the day had passed, but for a downpour of rain.”

*

Lance-Corporal S du Plessis showed coolness under heavy shell-fire in bringing up rations and water, and in collecting and distributing ammunition along the line under shell fire.

*

Private Walter Arthur Stewart, 18, was born at Langlaagte, Transvaal. He became a sail and tent maker at Johannesburg and did some cadet training before joining up. Stewart was 5 ft 7 ins tall and was a stretcher-bearer at Delville Wood, where he showed outstanding heroism.

Despite being bruised and exhausted Stewart insisted on going through a hail of fire to bring a wounded man in. On two occasions he made a tour of all the company’s lines, bringing back wounded and rendering a report regarding untended wounded. Stewart saved many lives by risking his own. He was slightly wounded on the 17th.

*

During a heavy attack two teams of a Lewis gun were killed. Under heavy fire Pte Victor Allen left his trench, recovered the gun and carried it to another position from where he continued to work it. Eventually the gun was smashed by shell fire. The same feat was performed by Pte Ernest Hollington.

Private Walter Prentice acted as runner between the brigade and battalion headquarters. He repeatedly went through zones swept by shell fire and exhibited great eagerness in keeping up communications.

When Major Donald MacLeod was wounded Major Donald Hunt took over command of the battalion.

Second-Lieutenant R D Grierson was severely gassed at Montauban.

Nevertheless, while subjected to heavy artillery fire, and suffering from gas poisoning, he twice assisted to clear the road in order that the transport of the 3rd and 4th SAI could be moved out of the barrage of shell and gas.

*

Second-Lieutenant D Jenner handled his platoon efficiently during the fight until he was compelled to leave the wood badly wounded.

*

Oswald Lovegrove, 19, was a 5 ft 9 in tall mechanic and had a scar on his chin. He had joined the Cape Town Highlanders as a volunteer and remained with them for four years, including 11 months in SWA. He was promoted to corporal on 25 June 1916, the day after he had been severely reprimanded for gambling! After the battle he wrote to his mother in Sea Point of his experiences commencing shortly before Trones Wood.

"I had seven narrow escapes: first a shell burst ten yards from the parapet and buried me under seven bags of sand, and a lot of loose sand. Fortunately some fellows were there and dug me out.

"Second, when retiring from the position in Trones Wood in the dark I fell into a shell-crater, and as I landed in it, a high explosive burst just 15 yards off the top of the hole. Third, got blown down flat on my face by what we call a coalbox. It's a big shell with very high explosives, used for blowing up trenches; its 'bark is worse than its bite'. It makes a terrible concussion when it explodes.

"Fourth, I was again buried. Fifth I had to run through a sheet of bursting shrapnel. I could hear the pieces striking the ground in all directions around me, and it is still a marvel to me how I got through without being hit at all.

"Sixth and seventh, I was blown into the air, the first time only five yards, but the second time I cannot say how high I went, as I did not know what had happened until I found myself at the dressing-station, with a frightful pain in

my back and left leg, so I think I must have landed on my back.

"I am told by one of our sergeants that poor little Aubrey Fockens was blown to pieces by a high explosive (on the 16th). Our poor old commanding officer, Colonel Jones, has gone under. A shell burst in his dug-out, and a piece of shrapnel pierced his heart. This was just before the big fight at Delville Wood. We then had Major MacLeod in command until he was seriously wounded in nine places, and I believe he was riddled from head to foot."

Lovegrove was evacuated as a case of shell-shock to Dulwich Hospital.

*

Private Clive Swales Canning, 19, of Tamboerskloof, Cape Town, was 5 ft 7 ins tall, had dark hair and was a bank clerk in civilian life. He had served in the Cape Town Highlanders for two and a half years, including a spell in SWA. He recalled the shelling of the previous day when they had entered the wood.

"They shelled us for two hours with gas shells that night, but we advanced up to the far edge of the wood and started digging ourselves in. We had some exciting times in bombing the Germans in the woods. We used to go out on our own, bomb the Allemande for about an hour, and then skedaddle back to our own trench, if we had one.

"Now there are about two bombers left, officers and all being on the casualty list. The Germans had used liquid fire the night before, but they were too far away to use it that night. They were out in the open by then, and were too busily occupied in digging themselves in to worry us much; but about 12 noon the next day the artillery got on to us and gave us a lively time of it, until I tried conclusions with a piece from a coalbox.

"Like the thoughtful chap I am, I tried to protect government property by endeavouring to stop a piece of shrapnel from going through my boot, with

the result that it not only went through the boot but through my foot also. I immediately started off to England for my week's leave, but my rate of progress was rather slow, as there were snipers in most of the trees of the wood. In fact, it took me about five hours to crawl 100 yards; but after that I managed to get the aid of a limber (not an ideal Red Cross conveyance), and rode, or rather jolted, six miles to the field ambulance.

Another piece of shrapnel might have done a little more damage than the other, had it not been for the book given to me by Mr Irwin just before I left South Africa. I kept it in my left-hand breast pocket, and a piece of 'shrap' tore into it about half-way, making rather a bit of a hole in the book, but saving me from another Blighty.

My half-section, Tommy White, got hit in the head after we had brought some ammunition for the company, and then I went and got it in the foot.

"… I lost absolutely everything except what I stood up in, even my gas helmet and steel helmet. I had quite a lot of souvenirs, such as badges off helmets (the helmets themselves were too big to bring), German sword-bayonet, German gas-helmet, and quite a lot of other odds and ends, like nose-caps off German shells, but I had to leave them all behind and clear out, as there were no stretcher-bearers left.

"It was a jolly good job I cleared out when I did, as a Jack Johnson came in the place where I had been lying and blew five chaps up."

*

Private Bert Higgins was wounded by shrapnel from a shell.

"We were up against the German Grenadier Guards — big chaps with double eagles and brass on their helmets. Very tough boys — and we were so disorganised. We broke up into small groups and those not killed from the blasts were killed by trees falling.

"On 17 July I was wounded and didn't get out until the 18th. I got a

shrapnel ball in above the left knee, which missed the main artery. I was very lucky.

"I walked out. There were stretcher-bearers but they were few and far between. If you get wounded, a Blighty as we called it, we just said goodbye boys, I'm off to Blighty, off to England. But you had to get up and that wasn't so easy."

*

Major Hunt's diary dwelt on his major problem — casualties.

"July 17. C Company in sunken road and B in trench nearby. Heavy casualties. Marshall shell-shocked, he got the shock of a shell that dropped just above Smith and me. Getting weak in men — L/Cpl Horn killed in trench as I was giving him an order. Standing with Dawson and Stuckey in quarry when shell landed and knocked out 26 men of 1st Regiment."

*

The "Marshall" referred to was Capt George Edmund Wood Marshall from Middelburg. He had served as a sergeant with the 2nd Transvaal Scottish in SWA and was commissioned in July 1915. His promotion to captain following in April 1916.

*

Boustead was rudely woken in the early morning by a South African Scottish sergeant who stood on him.

"He was an enormous man called Maclean, weighing about fifteen stone, and this apparently brought me to. My head was throbbing considerably and my hair was covered in blood from a cut in my skull. My steel helmet which was lying beside me was caved in on top, evidently by shrapnel. Maclean picked me up and I had the head treated at the dressing-station, and after some aspirin was OK.

"I rejoined my platoon which was back beyond the orchard trench again,

only to come out that evening for a rest in the Longueval Road, lying in holes cut in the bank and hoping for the best. By now the shelling was almost incessant, but the snipers had done the main work and the toll of death among the South African Brigade was very heavy.

"By the third night we were practically worn out through lack of sleep. We had been living on biscuits, cold bully beef and petrol-water under continuous fire by day from snipers and by night from attacking Germans. Reliefs came in and we moved to the edge of Longueval to sleep in some trenches outside the wood."

*

Betteridge was impressed by the bravery shown by the Germans in their counter-attacks.

"By 17 July there were only three (*sic*) officers remaining in the wood. Lewis gunners in the front line lost 80 per cent of their men, but the remainder still inflicted serious damage on the numerous German troops who made repeated attacks, some of them in close formation when their ranks were decimated. It was evident that a handful of men holding higher ground had a great advantage over far greater numbers attacking over open ground.

"This day every available man was pressed into service. Batmen, headquarters sanitarymen, even some of the cooks were given rifles and hand grenades to replace the large number of casualties. The few inexperienced new arrivals from Borden had already been rushed up as replacements; many of them became casualties within hours of their first taste of war.

"The previous night our boys had been able to erect a few strands of wire in front of the trenches. This proved helpful when a regiment of Prussian Guards attacked in daylight in massed formation from German trenches half a mile away.

"Gunners took a heavy toll of these massed troops. Our chaps fired

incessantly into the bunched infantry. A handful managed to reach those few strands of wire before being killed. This was one of the most stupid attacks made by brave, determined soldiers. The valley was strewn with dead and dying men who had been repulsed by a handful of tired but resolute South African troops.

“It was a clear illustration that the High Commands of both sides were willing to send their best troops to certain death in order to secure negligible results. In spite of their ferocity we had to admire those brave men who carried out orders without breaking line in their abortive attack.

“On the 17th I saw Capt Marshall of C Company blown into the air by the explosion of a large shell which killed four men in the advance dressing-station. The captain was unconscious and badly shell-shocked but by some miracle unwounded. He never recovered completely from that experience.

“Whenever possible, troops frantically dug their shallow trenches deeper to avoid the deadly shrapnel shells. Cries for stretcher-bearers were heard from every quarter, but these Red Cross men had also sustained serious casualties. Most of the seriously wounded lay unattended for several hours.

“Quite a number of slightly wounded men stayed in the wood helping the dwindling number of their pals still firing at those persistent Germans, or assisting machine-gunners reload their hot guns. Some of the less seriously wounded men did a good job of work trying to assist those unable to move. Lots of the latter simply lay where they were hit and fell asleep from exhaustion.

“The earth still shook and heaved under the roar of uncountable explosions of heavy shells and crump of shrapnel missiles. Then an unusual roar was heard from the rear, followed by the most terrifying explosion ever heard. It was an 18 inch shell fired from almost 15 miles behind our salient. The Germans had a special train for this huge naval gun.

“One of these incredible explosions fell a few hundred yards from us, among other Scotties of the 9th Division, every hour for more than ten hours. Most of them thought our guns were firing short of the German positions. Such havoc was caused by this outsized missile that some of a Scottish regiment, dazed and bewildered, ran to the rear of their front trench.

“This happened just as General Tim Lukin was inspecting that particular sector. He stopped the terrified men and turned them back. An officer, one of the few Cameronians still alive, came running up and apologised to the general.

“He explained his men were so shocked and exhausted, they repeated an order to retire when some unknown person started a rumour that our gunners were doing the firing of that huge missile. That junior officer was most grateful that the general had stopped what could have been a bad incident.

“It must be mentioned that our popular General ‘Tim’ was right among the shells near the front line on numerous occasions seeing for himself what his men had to contend with and giving much encouragement to those of us who saw him.”

*

During a partial withdrawal L/Cpl R H Morgan was in charge of the covering party. He remained facing the advancing Germans until the movement was complete then brought away his party under heavy fire.

Morgan was later to constructively criticise aspects of the defence. “Trenches should have been hidden with branches of trees and leaves on both sides. In most cases a bank of brown earth was left as an excellent mark for snipers — as opposed to our hopeless view of stumps of trees, broken branches, dead men and wounded moving about, etc.

“Trenches should have been improved as soon as possible. In most cases they were not deep enough and too narrow. In one case trenches occupied by

a company for two nights were little better than the ordinary body cover about two feet in depth.

“Digging should have been continued as long as possible and at every opportunity they should have been deepened but not made too wide. Small recesses were necessary for men to get into while officers or wounded were passing, preventing them from being exposed on the parapet to sniping and other fire as well as exposing the position to the enemy.”

He added that trenches should have been connected up and screened with canvas or fallen branches. Each individual should also have been told of the objectives in the wood and the position of other trenches and their machine-gun strong points.

The presence of officers invariably established confidence, especially after heavy bombardment, and they should therefore not unnecessarily expose themselves in dangerous zones. Passing of orders verbally was difficult during heavy fire or deafening bombardment. Written messages were quicker and more accurate, especially messages as regards wounded or fallen officers, want of immediate reinforcements and other messages calculated to dishearten the troops.

There was a tendency for cartridges to jam in the chamber after firing 15 to 30 rounds. He suggested that this was due to bad powder. On one occasion four men out of six near him had their rifles jammed at the same time. The remedy was to clean the chamber with a rag and stick when the bolt showed stiffness. Spare rifles from the dead and wounded should also have been available in case of counter-attack.

*

Lieutenant Sandy Young VC was wounded in the arm. During his evacuation they came under heavy rifle and shell fire. He saw a French officer, whose leg had been shattered by a shell, lying in the open. Despite his own wound

Young crawled from shelter and dragged the officer to safety. The Frenchman tore off his decoration of the Legion d’Honneur and insisted on pinning it on the breast of the gallant Connaught man.

Chapter 8 — The bombardment

Tuesday 18th

At 3.45 am the 76th Brigade of the 3rd Division managed to secure portion of the orchard between North Street and Flers Road. The see-saw backward and forward fighting had finally resulted in the Springboks joining up with the Scots in the north-west corner of the wood.

General Lukin had instructed Major Burges to lead his company to the north-west corner, which he succeeded in doing. Their victory was to be short-lived.

The Germans appeared to be resigned to the loss of the Bazentin ridges to the west, however concentrated all their guns and troops on the reconquest of Longueval and Delville Wood. The 7th and 8th Divisions of the Magdeburg Corps moved up to the assault.

At 8 am an intensive bombardment began, worse than anything which had come before and which was to last for seven-and-a-half hours. The shelling obliterated the defences on the perimeters and blasted the wood to pieces. It was the heaviest cannonade the division had ever experienced.

The 76th Brigade was then driven back and Germans began infiltrating on Burges' flank. He was wounded shortly after reaching his objective. At 9 am an officer was sent with 50 men to reinforce Burges. Three hours later three of this party returned, saying that they had been ordered to retire as there only 12 of the original 50 left.

An SOS signal was seen in the wood and village after 2 pm. Men were then noticed dribbling back. Whole sections of the perimeter trenches with their occupants had been annihilated. The few stupefied survivors fell back on

Thackeray's HQ in Buchanan Street. In some cases their ammunition had run out and they returned to HQ looking for more. Thackeray sent an urgent message to Lukin outlining the position and saying that he would endeavour to hold the line.

At 2.30 pm Sec-Lieut Edward Phillips and 79 men of the Trench Mortar Battery were sent to Dawson as infantry reinforcements. At the same time Dawson was ordered to advance into the wood with all the men at his command. They numbered 150 and had been in action for four days, yet were eager to attack once more. Dawson found many wounded officers and men lying in the trenches near Thackeray's HQ, so detailed some of his men to act as stretcher-bearers. Lieut Phillips and 100 men reinforced Thackeray.

Shortly after 3 pm Lieut Errol Tatham, the acting adjutant of the 2nd SAI, left the Buchanan Street dug-out to assist at the northern perimeter. Major Burges asked him to fetch reinforcements, but by the time he returned with a few men Burges had been killed.

Captain Wallace Hoptroff, who had taken Major Gee's command, was killed on the northern perimeter. On the southern flank Capt John Jackson of the 3rd was killed, whereas Major MacLeod of the 4th was badly wounded.

At 3.30 pm the bombardment suddenly ceased. Three German regiments (1/104th Reserve followed by the 3/197th and 2/107th Reserve Regiments) were seen advancing in the east, north of the Ginchy Road. The attack dissolved before intense mortar, machine-gun and rifle fire.

In the north, eight companies of the 153rd Regiment emerged from the sunken Flers Road and attacked the 2nd SAI. One of their officers recorded in his diary: "The wood was a wasteland — corpses everywhere."

The German massed infantry attack came from the north and east, driving through the wood and sweeping the scattered bodies of survivors before its irresistible momentum. The Springboks fought in desperation. Each man

fought as he judged best, taking advantage of the cover from shattered trees, and fought until he was knocked out or overwhelmed.

Remnants of the companies which had held the northern perimeter and Strand Street fell back on the Princes/Buchanan Street HQ, where a semblance of defences had survived. Under Thackeray's orders they dug in, in a last-ditch effort to stop the Germans from retaking the whole wood.

If Delville Wood fell, Longueval would follow and the whole flank of the British offensive would be exposed. A wedge would be driven between the British and French Armies and the massed British artillery in Caterpillar Valley would be vulnerable to capture by the enemy.

The German troops forced their way to Princes Street, then moved around Buchanan Street to the southern edge of Delville Wood, where they were stopped by concentrated artillery and machine-gun fire from Montauban and Longueval. The 2/153rd and 3/153rd Regiments were held up at Princes Street.

Some of the 2nd SAI broke through to fight with the 3rd SAI in the east where artillery fire was causing heavy losses. When they realised that the Germans had cut them off from Thackeray's headquarters some broke through to Buchanan Street.

The eastern edge was now defended only by Capt Medlicott's B Company of the 3rd SAI. That night 18 men who were prisoners of the Germans escaped in the dark and joined up with B Company.

A fresh German unit, the 52nd Infantry Regiment, arrived in the afternoon. On the 18th the regiment was deployed in the Longueval/Delville Wood area. In the evening their II Battalion advanced through the lines of the 153rd towards Delville Wood; the 5th Company in the first line, the 6th and 7th in the second and the 8th in the third. Heavy losses were experienced and "Rainbow", the veteran of the 1870-71 War, was wounded by shrapnel in the

knee.

Parts of the 5th and 6th Companies penetrated the wood but were halted by machine-gun fire. The 7th Company also seemed to have been in the wood and later joined up with the 5th and 6th. There was heavy fighting over the “Tommies” machine-gun nests.

The Springboks found that they had to face both front and rear. The l/52nd Regiment attacked with fixed bayonets and captured five officers, 195 other ranks and several machine-guns. At the same time they released 17 men of the 153rd Regiment.

The crisis in Longueval occurred at about 6 pm. Lieutenant-Colonels Gordon of the Black Watch, Kennedy of the Seaforths and Duff of the Camerons held a hurried consultation in the shattered village. It was realised that if the enemy broke through they would force a gap between the British and French armies and capture all the guns in the valley before Montauban.

A few hundred men of all regiments were collected together along the railway line in the south of the village. The thin line then advanced up the main street, stepping around craters and rubble from the ruined buildings. As they cleared the main square they came face to face with the enemy who were emerging from the south-west corner of the wood.

For a split second both sides hesitated, then a command rang out, “Forward, boys!” The Highlanders of the 26th surged forward. The Germans wavered, fired a few shots, then turned and ran. The motley force charged across the square, routing the fresh German troops of four times their number. Some of the more impetuous Scots followed the enemy into the wood where they were surrounded and slain.

Between them Lieut-Cols Gordon and Kennedy then rallied the men. The counter-attack would have failed had the whole force pursued the enemy into the wood. Already there was a danger of their being outflanked and a

machine-gun they had missed had killed a number of men. Lieutenant-Colonel Duff of the Camerons had his arm blown off by a bomb thrown by one of the retreating Germans. The line had been held, however, in one of the most thrilling moments of the war.

The 26th Brigade attempted to relieve the South Africans and was partially successful. At midnight Dawson with two companies of the 1st SAI and Hunt with the remnants of his two companies of the 4th SAI were relieved.

Three massed attacks were launched on Thackeray's HQ that night, but were repulsed with heavy losses.

*

General Lukin was optimistic as the day began; a day which would be the blackest in the brigade's history.

"In connection with the attack on the northern portion of Longueval by the 76th Brigade on the morning of the 18th, of which I had been informed, I instructed Lieut-Col Thackeray (at 8 am) to send out patrols to gain touch with the 76th Brigade in the direction of the orchard on the north-west of the wood.

"The company occupying Strand Street and the portion of Princes Street to the west of Strand Street was accordingly ordered to move forward and hold the perimeter of the north-west portion of the wood, and to join up with the 76th Brigade.

"This movement was carried out successfully, little or no opposition being met with as the company passed through the north-west corner of the wood. Our men gained touch with the Gordon Highlanders just west of the orchard.

"On arrival at the outskirts of the wood they commenced to dig in, but shortly afterwards the enemy opened an intense bombardment.

"Although all portions of the road were shelled, the shelling was intense around the perimeter and down Strand Street.

“Major Burges, who was in command of the company which had moved onto the northern edge of the north-west portion of the wood, was wounded shortly after he reached there.

“About this time the troops of the 76th Brigade retired (driven back) on his left, and the enemy began to enter the wood from the north-west on his exposed flank.

“Major Burges was killed shortly afterwards.

“About 9 o’clock a party of one officer and fifty other ranks was despatched as reinforcements to Major Burges.

“About 2.30 pm a report was received from Lieut-Col Dawson that Lieut Burgess has returned wounded and reported that Major Burges had very few men left when he came away from the wood.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson was ordered to take forward at once all available men under his command. These numbered approximately 150.

“He was further ordered to arrange for a systematic examination of our front, and to report without delay how it was held.

“On arrival at Longueval he placed his men in a trench at the south-east end of the village, and himself proceeded to Lieut-Col Thackeray to ascertain the position.

“The Light Trench Mortar Battery personnel — approximately 3 officers and 75 other ranks — who were in Montauban, were sent forward at 2.30 pm under the command of Lieut Phillips, who, on his arrival at Longueval reported to Lieut-Col Dawson.

“A message from Lieut-Col Thackeray, timed 1.50 pm read: ‘Over three hours’ intense bombardment of trenches on north-west, northern and eastern sides. We have suffered terribly. Many have no garrison left; in others the few left have been forced to retire. Such men as are falling back I am detaining in support trench, Buchanan Street, and will endeavour to hold that

line.’

“Battle stops had been placed around the southern end of Longueval.

“On reaching Lieut-Col Thackeray, who was holding Buchanan Street and a portion of Princes Street, Lieut-Col Dawson found many wounded officers in the trench. It had not been possible to remove them, as all the stretcher-bearers of the 3rd SAI were casualties, and Lieut-Col Thackeray could not spare any of his men to act as stretcher-bearers.

“Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson accordingly returned and detailed men to go forward to bring out the wounded.

“At the same time he sent Lieut Phillips with about 100 men — as many as there was room for in the trench — to reinforce Lieut-Col Thackeray.”

“At 6.05 pm orders were received that the 26th Brigade would relieve the South African Brigade that night. This relief was partially carried out about midnight, portions of the two companies of the 1st SAI and two companies of the 4th SAI in the trenches in the southeast corner of Longueval being relieved.

“Throughout that night — 18/19th — the enemy made three counter-attacks against the Buchanan Street trench, but with the aid of the reinforcements sent to him Lieut-Col Thackeray repulsed these with heavy losses to the enemy.

“In these attacks against Lieut-Col Thackeray the enemy pushed forward bombers and snipers and then attacked in mass formation from the north, north-east and west.

“The enemy now occupied the whole of the wood with the exception of the south-west corner.

“A company of the Camerons, which had been on Lieut-Col Thackeray’s left, had been withdrawn, and through the gap thus made the enemy came in. In the last counter-attack on the night of the 18/19th Lieut-Col Thackeray was

attacked from both sides.”

*

The arrival of Sec-Lieut Edward Phillips and his reinforcements was the turning point of the battle. Without them the wood would probably have fallen.

Edward James Phillips, 33, was born at Queenstown, Cape. He acted as a merchant when not doing military service which included the Queenstown Rifle Volunteers, Driscoll’s Scouts and the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles. He was 5 ft 11 ins tall, blond with blue eyes and a fresh complexion. His wife, Alice and two children, aged 10 and 11, lived at Cape Town during his absence overseas.

Phillips brought his reinforcements up through an intense barrage at a critical time in the fighting. He led them to the northern portions of Longueval and Delville Wood, closest to the enemy, thereby enabling exhausted troops to be relieved.

Phillips was severely wounded in the shoulder during the night fighting, however remained at his post and was conspicuous in leading out bombing attacks to meet the enemy’s assaults. He single-handedly accounted for seven Germans with his rifle and five with bombs, making 12 in all.

He completely organised his defence and personally led up further reinforcements, which he also posted. Phillips showed great coolness and devotion to duty for the remainder of his time in Delville Wood.

*

Gordon Forbes was one of the TMB men sent to fight in Delville Wood. “Fairly easy day until 4 pm. Trench mortar battery converted into a company of infantry and proceeded to wood beyond Longueval to assist SA Brigade. Advanced in extended order under heavy artillery fire. Poor old Glazier dropped. Met Edwards coming down wounded. Told me Pringle wounded

and Little dead. Took up positions in front line and kept a sharp look-out all night. Germans attacked but were driven off."

*

Captain Patterson was to lose most of his company in the bombardment.

"The enemy made a bombing attack on the wood early this morning but were repulsed, our guns doing good work. The enemy then heavily bombarded the wood the whole morning and attacked in the afternoon. Most of our guns were knocked out and the teams wiped out, none of the four officers in the wood returning.

"I collected one gun and some stragglers which I made into a team and attached to an officer of the trench mortar battery (Lieut Phillips) who was going up to the wood with the men of his battery to reinforce. Spent some time questioning stragglers to try and find out situation and if possible the fate of any guns.

"Returned to Bn HQ to report. On return found that this company had been attached to the 26th Brigade. Went round and reported to 26th Brigade and explained situation as far as I was concerned."

*

The SAMC private continued carrying stretchers until his bearer party was blown up. His letter continued.

"It was about 2 am by now and I was sent up to the village to see if I could be of any help. As I was nearing Longueval I saw a walking patient coming down, and when about 20 yards from me a shell burst almost next to him.

"Seeing him fall I ran up and found that his left foot had been taken clean off, so I tied up the artery, and as there was nobody in sight to give me a hand I managed to get him on my back (pick-a-back) and started carrying him to the Scottish regimental aid post, which was about a hundred yards away.

"I had not gone more than ten yards when a big shell burst under me, and I

was picked up and flung about ten feet away into a shell-crater, landing on the side of my head. I just remember coming round again and starting to climb out, when I heard a terrific explosion, and the earth seemed to hit me in the face.

"When I came round again I had a splitting headache, and was bleeding from my nose, ear and mouth. The second shell had completely buried me, but luckily some Camerons saw me getting up, and they dug me out as quickly as possible.

"At first I thought part of my head had been blown off, but I found that everything was all right, with the exception of my one ear, which was quite deaf.

"On remembering my patient, we went to look for him, but found him smashed to pieces. He was one of the … Regiment, but I do not know what his name was. They then helped me down to the wood, and as I was feeling pretty bad I was sent to hospital at Rouen the following day."

*

Despite the shelling Capt Lawrie and the Field Ambulance remained at Longueval. Padre Eustace Hill was with them. The records of the Field Ambulance attested to his bravery.

"On the 18th it was again decided to shell Longueval, in which Capt Lawrie had established a regimental aid post. It was found to be quite impossible to move all the stretcher cases, so he decided to remain behind in his station.

"The aid post was in a building, and as the Germans were counter-attacking and our troops going out, the windows and doors were barricaded with mattresses, furniture and anything that might stop a bullet.

"The bombardment was opened by both British and German guns, and for about nine hours a hurricane of shells was poured into the village. By nothing short of a miracle the regimental aid post was practically the only place that

did not get a direct hit.

"During the night, dressing of the wounded was carried out under great difficulty, as only a small electric torch or candle could be used. Captain the Rev E Hill, who had also remained to help, managed to keep up a constant supply of tea and coffee, apparently from supernatural sources.

"On the morning of the 19th a counter-attack was driven well home, and Capt Lawrie's party was thus saved from capture."

*

Lieut-Col Dawson did everything he could to support Thackeray in the wood. The regiment's diary records:

"Hostile shelling on Delville Wood and Longueval very heavy. At about 8 am orders were received to send 50 men to reinforce C and D Coys of 1st SAI in the Strand. This was carried out. Shortly after noon three men of the party returned and said they had orders to retire, there being only about 12 men left of the original 50. This report was forwarded to Brigade HQ, also others, to the effect that the two companies of this regiment had suffered very severely — principally from shell fire, and had given ground.

"At 3.30 pm Lieut-Col Dawson received orders to take up all the men of the 1st and 4th SAI that were available to the Strand and northern boundary of the wood to reinforce the two Coys under Major Burges.

"These orders were followed at a very short interval by others, brought by Lieut Roseby that on his arrival at Delville Wood officers' patrols were to be sent out to ascertain the situation. The numbers available were about 80 men of A and B Coys 1st SAI and a similar number of the 4th SAI. The hostile barrage was at that time exceedingly heavy and it seemed very doubtful if it could be traversed without heavy loss. At 4.10 pm the party went out.

"Officers had in the meantime come in from the northern and north-eastern boundaries of the wood, who reported that the troops had been practically

annihilated by the artillery fire and there were none left to hold the wood. The members of the 1st and 4th SAI were put by Col Dawson in the old German front line trenches south-west of the village, while it was ascertained where our front troops were.

“Men of all units were at this time streaming out of the village disorganised and without officers and it was reported that the enemy had occupied the village. As, however, it was ascertained that the 3rd SAI were still holding their support trenches in Buchanan St, Col Dawson took the men into the town and put them into the trenches at K which were held very lightly or not at all, those on the left being strongly held by the 26th Bde.

“Germans were at this time seen in the wood about 200 yards east-north-east of the church. At about 9 pm a report was received from Major Hunt commanding the remnant of the 4th SAI, that he was in touch with the 3rd SAI. About the same time Sgt Vincent, 1st SAI, brought a message from the OC 3rd SAI (Col Thackeray) to the effect that his left was in the air and reinforcements were urgently needed to connect with the next unit on the left.

“Bombs and ammunition were urgently needed also. Immediately on receipt of this Col Dawson despatched the light trench mortar detachment and some detail under Lieut Phillips, over 100 in number, to the OC 3rd SAI. Some 25 men of the 4th SAI were sent shortly afterwards.

“At about 11 pm Col Dawson went to the HQ of 3rd SAI and found it full of wounded officers, there being no 3rd SAI stretcher-bearers left. It not being possible to obtain other stretcher-bearers, some 16 men of the 1st SAI were told off for this duty. These were taken round by Capt S W E Style who was wounded in the throat while taking the wounded out. This officer had taken over the duties of adjutant when Capt Priday was wounded.

(The acting adjutant, Lieut Sydney Style, heard that a number of wounded had been lying for 24 hours in the trench occupied by the 3rd SAI. Under

great difficulties he found some stretcher-bearers and led them through the wood. While helping to bring out the wounded, Style was himself severely wounded in the throat.)

"While this was going on a message arrived from Bde HQ to the effect that all regiments of the SA Bde were to be relieved by the 26th Bde and that the SA Bde were to return to the Talus Boise.

"No regiment coming to relieve the SA regiments after the DLI (Durham Light Infantry) having arrived in the town, Col Dawson went to see Col Gordon of the Gordons who was responsible for the disposal of troops and suggested that this regiment should relieve the 3rd SAI in the wood. Col Gordon agreeable went with Col Dawson to the CO of the DLI, giving him orders in the presence of Col Dawson to take his regiment to relieve the 3rd SAI. The leading company marched off for this purpose with Lieut Phillips as guide. The trenches where the 1st SAI were, were by now very congested. Col Dawson asked Col Gordon if he might withdraw his men and Col Gordon acquiesced.

"They were never in the slightest degree demoralised or shaken and when returning to Longueval on the afternoon of the 18th under artillery fire which appeared impassable, their one desire was to get to close quarters with the enemy. It would be impossible to find better troops."

*

Captain Robert Taylor, the regiment's medical officer, worked devotedly at the Longueval dressing-station. He attended to the evacuation of the wounded, the whole time under exceptionally heavy shell fire and was later commended for this and recommended for the MC.

Privates George Thomas Baker and George Thomas acted as runners between the battalion and brigade HQ. They repeatedly went through zones swept by shell fire and exhibited great eagerness in keeping up

communications. Baker was eventually wounded.

*

Private Albert Johannes Loubser, 33, farmed near Sir Lowry's Pass and had left his wife, Elizabeth, and six children behind. Loubser stood 6 ft 2 ins and weighed 216 lbs, with a swarthy complexion and a tattoo on his left arm.

Between the 16th and 18th he carried out the arduous duties of stretcher-bearer under severe artillery and machine-gun fire. During a heavy shrapnel barrage his officers witnessed him carrying two wounded men from Longueval to the ambulance station in Bernafay Wood.

Loubser's strength and bravery was recalled 50 years later by one of the men in his company. "We had a stretcher-bearer by the name of Loubser. He was a big man, over 6 ft. This man was bringing out six wounded at a time — carrying one under each arm … on his back … hanging on to him. He was about the strongest man I ever met in my life. He was a terrific chap. A big Afrikaner but, my God! was he a man.

"When we were relieving, the Jerries put a shell in there and wounded a lot. Loubser ran in there where one of the Jocks was lying with his brains on the ground. Loubser put the brains back into his head and bandaged him up and took him out — and that man lived. Although he wasn't right after that — he lived! He was a very brave man this Loubser."

*

One of Mannie Faulds' friends reported his continuing courage: "… the Germans were making the place a hell with their big guns, and a wee man of the King's Own Scottish Borderers got knocked out through a piece of shell hitting him in the spine.

"No sooner had he dropped than out jumped Mannie into the hail of shell, put him on his back and carried the lad 800 yards to the dressing-station …"

This act was performed in full view of a detachment of stretcher-bearers

who regarded it as certain death to venture out of the trench as the barrage in that area was extremely severe at the time.

*

When the company was relieved that night Sgt Stan Griffiths found himself in company with Lieut Fred English, who was also miraculously unscathed.

*

The bombardment tore the woods to pieces, shattering trees and gouging large holes in the earth. In the midst of the inferno Cyril Barnes was to have a humbling experience.

“The fellow right next to me and the one on the other side were killed and I was left. It was just as if it was your number on the shell. The fellow in charge of my section, Joe Hall, was next to me after this fellow was killed.

“We had to keep a lookout in front. There were supposed to be two or three guards and I was doing six hours. I said, ‘Why not ask Heathcote to keep watch?’ because he was sitting on the side of the trench with his back to the German lines, sleeping. Joe said, ‘He’s dead!’”

*

Corporal Doitsh was woken by the barrage at 5 am and noted that nothing but stumps remained where huge trees had stood at 3 am.

“The onslaught was hell let loose. Every mother’s son of us was worked up to a fever pitch awaiting the attack. We knew and fully expected what was coming, but did not anticipate that the attack would begin as early as it did.

“I was cleaning the mud from my rifle, and was in the act of polishing my bayonet, when a Jack Johnson bursting by the side of the parapet caught me in the foot, all but severing this member from my body. The boot was blown clean off. The situation was so bad that my comrades dared not venture to my aid.

“I shouted for a stretcher-bearer, but the only one left there had just been

hit. I implored one of the men to get me some bandages, but search as he would, the medical haversack could not be found. It was in another trench. All I had was the small field dressing carried by every soldier.

“I was badly bleeding, and the small dressing had no effect in stopping it. I removed the puttee from the other leg, and managed to tie the battered foot, which was only hanging on by the skin, to my leg to keep it on.

“Two of my comrades took me a few yards to one of the dug-outs that were constructed by the Germans before we took the wood from them, and there found a lieutenant and sergeant of my regiment, and six others that had all been wounded at about the same time.

“One man suffering from shell-shock fell down the dug-out on top of us. Poor fellow! he was bad. These high-explosive shells are more than a human being can stand.

“We tried to make ourselves comfortable, but the din and roar about us made us all feel far from pleased with our lot. The bursting shells hit the top of our dug-out, and I had my doubts about it holding out. But for huge piles of earth being blown in upon us, the dug-out mastered the tempest without.

“The CO of my company came to us and said he would go and try to get stretchers for us all, but while engaged on this errand a shell killed him.

“We waited for hours, when one of the men came into the dug-out and imparted the cheery information to us that the enemy were in the wood. Upon hearing this, the lieutenant said, ‘I am not going to be made a prisoner.’ We all echoed his sentiments, and were not going to fall out on the point, either. So they struggled the best way they could.

“I found myself unable to escape, and the lieutenant said to me, ‘Make the best of a bad job if you cannot get away.’ The prospects of falling a prisoner were not at all pleasant. There was I alone in the wood, for when I put my head out, with tremendous effort, I found that the boys had had orders to fall

back and strengthen another company in the interior of the wood.

“I resolved to myself that I would not fall a prisoner. By hook or crook I was going to try and find my own lines. I got out of the dug-out with difficulty, and, picking up two rifles, I tried to use them as crutches. I could not make any progress at all with them. The deep mud beat me. The muzzles sunk down deeply into it, and I fell over.

“The rifle fire and the machine-guns playing on the wood were terrific at this time. I lay on my back absolutely exposed to the murderous fire, and it is a wonder I am here to record my experiences.

“The bullets whizzed by me, and the experience was like being out in a real South African hailstorm. The rattle of the missiles was likened to that of hail falling on a galvanised roof.

“Discretion being the better part of valour, I deemed it advisable to adjourn to the dug-out again, which I did. I was once more left to my thoughts and the fear of becoming a prisoner with the Huns again took possession of me. Again I resolved that this should not be.

“I emerged once again, and made another attempt with the rifles. I struggled desperately with them, and was going along proudly, when I encountered the fallen trees, which offered a substantial obstruction to my further progress, and I fell all in a heap among them.

“I extricated myself, and struggled once again back to the only fairly safe place I knew of, the dug-out. I looked at my watch and it showed that it was eight o’clock. I reflected whether to lie there and bleed or starve to death, or to try and make a superhuman effort to get back.

“When the thought of my wife and children flashed through my brain, I was up in an instant, and carrying my injured limb in the air, I snatched up a bag containing emergency rations, knowing this would keep me from starving for at least twenty four hours.

“I commenced to move off, when I became faint, and had once more to return to the dug-out. I lay there about five minutes, when I heard a fearful screaming coming from the direction of the dug-out.

“Ten Germans or thereabouts peered into the dug-out, and on seeing me screamed: ‘Arous, arous, arous! Loos, loos!’ One was in the act of throwing a bomb on the top of me, and I thanked heaven he altered his mind. Seeing by their gestures that they wanted me to come out, I did so.

“They inquired if there were any more of my comrades in there, and I replied in the negative. They thereupon unmercifully kicked me and struck me with the butts of their rifles, and then told me to get up. The language I used to them was the choicest Billingsgate, I can assure you, and if they had understood it it would have been worse for me.

“Their maltreatment did not affect me much, as my wound was troubling me, and I was in great pain. They then moved on farther, clearing the wood, and I felt happier, and at last succeeded in getting along past the fallen trees, but my cardigan caught in the branches.

“My first objective was the road dividing the wood (Princes St), which was in two portions. I made for this, and on the way came across the bodies of dead Germans in their hundreds, and here and there the bodies of our own brave boys, a gruesome sight.

“One in his kit was lying in a peaceful attitude, with one hand resting on his head, and the expression on his blood-stained face seemed to say: ‘Those who may happen to see me, tell my comrades, tell South Africa, I died willingly for her honour.’

“I had not got very far, when I ran into about fifty of the enemy, and if looks would kill a person I should have died on the spot. They surrounded me, screaming like madmen. They then held a war council, as it were, over me.

“By their attitude, it seemed as if they wanted to end my earthly career at once. The leader of the mob, whom I took to be a sergeant-major, who spoke English fairly well, said to me: ‘We intend to kill you.’

“I answered: ‘If you wish to be so cowardly, you can do so.’ He replied: ‘We Prussians are not cowards.’ He then turned to the remainder, and, after a good deal of talking among themselves, said: ‘Your people kill our wounded.’ I there and then denied this.

“After a time he again turned to me, and said: ‘We think you are wounded enough; we have decided to let you go: clear out.’ They went on again, as if bereft of their senses, some waving bombs, others brandishing their rifles, some flashing their bayonets, screaming: ‘Arous, arous, arous!’

“I said: ‘All right! keep your hair on.’ I then continued my way along the path, and still ran into batches who looked daggers at me. I fancy the sight of their dead comrades lying about made them more vicious towards me.

“Sometimes I lay perfectly still until they had passed me. In the distance, as I was coming nearer the road I was making for, I saw about 1,000 of them coming to the second portion of the wood which the road divided, so I pushed forward and made for Longueval, where I knew our first dressing-station was.

“But I could see it was useless going in that direction, as I should be asking for the very thing I was attempting to avoid. I reached the road, and darkness by this time was setting in.

“I looked into a trench that the regiment had been holding previous to their strategical retirement. Feeling parched, and a man when wounded gets thirsty very easily, I searched for water, and found a petrol tin lying on the parapet, which, to my intense surprise and pleasure, I found to contain a good quantity of water.

“I struggled down into the trench to ease my thirst and to collect my

thoughts, in order to plan my next move.

“In part of the trench a machine-gun stood, left by the regiment in their rapid retirement. I call it a retirement, but it was really not so; it was a clever move, as I afterwards learned. The word ‘retire’ was not in our vocabulary, as orders, prior to my being hit, were sent along the trench that there must be no such thing.

“A captain was sitting in the trench on an ammunition box, stone dead. What wound caused his death I could not discern, as there was no blood about. He was sitting quite upright, and looked as if he had been gassed. I sat near his body and was left alone with my thoughts.

“My almost severed foot was giving me terrible pain, the prospects of falling into the hands of the enemy were ever before me, it was bitterly cold, and the rain had not stopped for some days. I could not be recognized for mud, and my uniform was in rags.

“The man who had tried to assist me in bandaging my foot had cut my pants all up the seam to get at the femoral artery, a point I put him up to, as, thanks to previous training, I knew what to do, but had not the things to do it with.

“It was more than my life was worth to go out into no-man’s-land in the twilight. I discovered a waterproof sheet in the trench, and with that covered myself up, and awaited the time to move off. From utter fatigue and weakness I fell asleep.”

*

Geoffrey Lawrence recalled the generosity of Pte E G Kensit from Wynberg.

“Even after sixty years a memory of comradeship and kindness in that wood (Welcome Wood near Corbie) is indelibly etched in my mind. I looked up a friend named Kensit in another company who, with two others, was just about to finish the last of his parcel from home, a tin of canned peaches. The

generous fellow insisted on me joining in though it meant one less peach all round. With the dull roar of the great bombardment as orchestra, those peaches were eaten with deliberate and thoughtful relish.

"This was a man with a lovely unselfish spirit, very cultured and knowledgeable. He was killed in Delville Wood two weeks later, mortally wounded whilst trying to run through an impassable barrage of bursting shells with an urgent message to our command post. He struggled through, delivered the message and collapsed and died almost immediately. One of the four of us besides myself survived the battle and told me of his death."

*

Victor Casson was to assist his friend, Bill Helfrich, a stretcher-bearer who had been given the nickname of "Senussi Bill" in Egypt. William Helfrich, 33, came from Beaconsfield, Kimberley, where he worked at the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*. He served with the 2nd Bn, Kimberley Regiment, in SWA, then joined C Coy (Kimberley Company) of the 1st SAI.

Casson observed 'Senussi Bill' Helfrich, and called out to him to come over. "He asked me if I was wounded and I said, 'No Bill, I am only hungry and tired, and I wish I could get out of this hell'. He told me he could not take any wounded chaps out as all his stretcher-bearers were dead, and could only dress the wounds of the chaps injured and give them a shot of morphine to ease their pains.

"A few yards from my shell-hole hide-out was a huge shell-hole sheltering five German wounded. Between Bill and I we applied fresh dressings to their wounds. As a parting gift he gave each one a shot of morphine to ease their pain. A young German officer was alive, but beyond human aid. He had a fractured spine. Bill Helfrich gave him a good shot of morphine, which ended this young officers pain for ever. Bill left and wended his way through the fallen trees, and that was the last time I saw old Bill.

“At about 11 am the Germans intensified the shelling of the wood, till it became a rain of death from the skies. It intensified to such an extent that the remaining trees and undergrowth were blasted and eliminated from a once beautiful wooded park.

“A few men of the brigade who were lucky to survive this holocaust, had only one option, and that was to stay put in their funk holes, head well down, hoping that a shell would not find a direct hit. Unfortunately many direct hits were made, and it took its toll.

“About 5 pm the beautiful rain of hell fire, ceased as if it never occurred. It became dead silent except for the dying and wounded calling for water and help, and the occasional burst of small-arms fire. I realised that I was the only live man standing on my feet among the many dead and wounded laying in grotesque shapes among the fallen tree trunks and numerous shell-craters.

“At this stage I decided to call it a day and proceeded to make my way out of the wood. In my opinion the Germans advanced and broke through a section of weakened defences, and had advanced into the wood unbeknown to me. I was confronted by a party of Germans led by an officer. I was paralysed and could not believe my eyes. The soldiers levelled their rifles to shoot me and luckily for me the officer restrained them from firing.

“The officer approached me and levelling his revolver, told me to throw down my rifle and to raise my arms. He proceeded to search my pockets. Concealed in my pockets were a couple of Mills hand grenades. He relieved me of these lethal grenades and, carefully placing them on the ground, ordered two men to take me over to the German lines.

“While being escorted out of the wood I came across well-constructed German trenches about 100 yards from the wood, which was filled to capacity with a fresh German brigade. From this vantage point I looked back on what had been a beautiful wooded park. Now I gazed on what appeared to

be an earthquake upheaval. A few trunks of trees pointed skywards, as if in shame.

"I was then taken to a village for interrogation, where I was treated with courtesy. A German colonel informed me that the South Africans had fought bravely in a difficult position. He was full of praise for the brigade's tenacity in holding the wood and he let me know that we were a brave lot, but were led by a lot of bloody fools!"

*

Major Edward Burges was in the front line at the northern edge of the wood, where Coenraad Nelson was an eye-witness to his end.

"I saw Major Burges, our (former) adjutant, receive something from his runner and all of a sudden there was a blast and we never saw them again. Both of them were gone. A very brave man."

*

Private O Struck of Kalk Bay felt that German snipers picked out machine-gunners specially. He was to find the shelling to be a greater danger, especially when one killed four of the men at his gun.

"Fortunately, I was buried, but had to scratch myself out, being the only one left after the explosion. My gun being blown 30 feet into the air, I had to report to another. But just as I arrived it also was sent 'on leave.' I then had to go back and report myself to the officer in charge. He being a decent sort gave us a tot of rum and some cigarettes to buck us up, as we had had no sleep for a few days.

"The only injuries I received were a sprained wrist and some bits of shrapnel in my shoulder. After that we had our turn at the Huns, bombing them as they came on us … I myself was buried three times."

*

Major Frank Heal had trained the men of D Company, however could not be

with them in the wood as he had been placed in charge of the brigade's transport. His frustration grew as reports reached him. He later recalled some of them.

"Can you see that boy in 'D' who was sent back with an urgent message, badly wounded and realised he couldn't last out, crawled back and handed the message all bloodstained to the officer with: 'I'm sorry, sir, but I couldn't get through with it,' and fell dead.

"One man in 16 platoon broke his finger, but insisted on going into the fight, was with seven or eight of them — all that was left — the officer had just been shot through the head; saw the Germans advancing and only about 12 yards away; only had half a dozen rounds of ammunition, which they decided to hold on to, and so charged with the bayonet.

"This man was hit in the stomach at about eight yards' range and knocked over into a shell-hole. His pal said: 'My God! they have killed you,' and he rolled over and said: 'Never mind, it can't be helped. Carry on.'

"This man crawled away later, but as he couldn't find any blood, decided it wasn't bad enough to go to the dressing-station, and so carried on, was afterwards blown up by a shell and sent back with shell-shock. He's still alive. That bullet hit his belt buckle, tore it to pieces and his clothes and stomach as well, but nothing penetrated. You would have thought he had been scored like a piece of pork, though. He's here now.

"Then there was an officer (Lieut Sydney Style) who was sent to see how the fight was progressing, found another officer of the … Regiment badly wounded and tried to get him out; was shot through the throat, wrote a note, which we still have, to the colonel: 'I'm awfully sorry, sir, but it wasn't my fault; I'll get back as soon as I can.' The blood had dropped all over the paper as he wrote.

"There are dozens of other cases like that. That will show you the spirit.

Ask the Germans — if any of them got away. They know.

"The rotten part of it all is that I had to sit at the back and look on — see all and say nothing. The colonel refused to get hit, and as 'Orders is Orders', I had to wait in comparative safety.

"Poor Dent — a lieutenant in 'A' Company. One arm gone and the other useless. It's just awful."

*

Private Fred Hampson and the survivors of No 13 platoon were forced by the bombardment to hug their meagre cover.

"The Germans opened up with everything they had. It was like hail. There were three of us who'd been together all along — Billy Yeo, L/Cpl Robinson and myself. Yeo and I had dug a little hole, about 18 inches deep and we crouched in there.

"The shells rained down on us. The debris being thrown up by these shells was so intense that it was actually filling up the hole that we were sitting in. My companion and I took a groundsheet and held it over our heads to catch the debris. By some miracle we weren't touched.

"Huge trees were crashing all around us and the branches of trees were falling. A green forest before, it suddenly became a shambles of broken tree trunks and broken branches.

"Eventually we made our way to a shell-hole near the edge of the wood, where we found other troops. The German infantry came over in massed formation and this time we let them have it. Our artillery blazed away, but it was mainly the rifle and machine-gun fire that repulsed them.

"Yeo, Robinson and I fired at everything we saw. They were easy targets as they were virtually in the open, from 50 to about 200 yards away. But they were superior in number. It was marvellous that we weren't hit at all. Everywhere you looked there were dead bodies. Germans and our own

fellows. They were all over the place."

*

Private Roy Makepeace, 17, of Richmond, Cape, was born in Cardiff, Wales. He was a lanky, dark youth with blue eyes. After immigrating he attended SACS school in Cape Town, then joined the Murraysburg Commando for service in SWA with the Graaff-Reinet Ruiters at 15½ years, having lied about his age. He was taken prisoner on 24 December and released seven months later. He then wired home "Coming, going to Europe next."

Makepeace wrote to his parents about Delville Wood.

"This affair in Delville Wood was about the worst thing I have ever heard of; for a brigade of British Infantry, 5,000 when complete, ours consisted of about 1,500 at the time, to hold up 13,000 Germans is beyond comprehension; and the artillery bombardment that preceeded it, why there has never been a bombardment in the history of the world that was as intense as that was. The Germans turned every available gun they had on to a bit of wood about the size of Richmond native location, and sent over every conceivable form and size of shell for about 12 hours, and then attacked what was left of the men in it.

"Well, I don't think one could gather a better representation of hell than the bombardment and the attack combined. Also I don't think there is a better soldier in the world than the man who 'pushed a pen' in some firm in South Africa; the boys were marvellous.

"When the bombardment ceased and the Germans advanced the boys got out of the trenches and scrapped them in the open, throwing bombs, firing and charging at them, and having hand-to-hand fights with them.

"Nearly every officer has been killed or wounded, but the boys didn't lack in the initiative; when they thought it an opportune time to charge, a voice sang out: 'All together, Springboks,' and forward went what was left of them

like one man. I am afraid Fritz has had enough of the conquerors of South-West Africa. I think the Kaiser will be fierce about his pet regiment being cut up; our casualties were numerous, but they had the rougher time of it.

"Well, I accounted for my share of them. I killed seven myself, so I think I have rewarded them amply for the holiday they gave me in South-West. I went through three charges, and I assure you that by the time we left the trenches on the other side of the wood, and got back to comparative safety, I was about done in, physically and mentally.

"While entering the wood Henry Thomson was shot through the head by a machine-gun, and the fact of him 'going under' made me feel doubly fierce. Kuys was wounded at the same time, and I made up my mind to avenge these two. Poor old 'Tommy'. Tell Mr Thomson and his sister that he and I stuck together through the whole thing, and that he proved a staunch pal. He feared nothing, did 'Tommy.' He took everything in a philosophical way, and didn't care a rap for any German. Just before we scaled the parapet he said to me: 'Well, thank God we've got a chance at last to get at the devils.' However, he was killed before he reached them.

"D--n Fritz, his artillery, and his machine-guns, as man to man Fritz is the biggest funk out; he'll never stand up to a bayonet charge; but their artillery kill our fellows off by the hundred, and his machine-guns are the curse of the war. The machine-gunners are handcuffed to the guns, or they would run when we advanced; however, they are there and we have got to smash them, and the sooner it's done the better.

"Well, we have made our name, and that is all we care about. We had orders to hold the wood whatever happened — and we held it. It has been the most important battle in the advance, and I am glad to say that after having been in from the beginning to the end, I have come out safe and sound.

"My steel helmet has two holes in it caused by lumps of shell; my rifle has

a bullet buried in its stock. I have two cuts in my hand made by shrapnel, and a scratch on my arm caused by a German bayonet, and still I live."

*

Acting RSM Elger Prebble had displayed great courage under heavy fire in Egypt, for which he had been recommended for the DCM. In Bernafay Wood and Delville Wood he attended to wounded under fire. His example at all times was of great value. He was reported as wounded, then missing believed killed.

*

Private G Strachan had showed great bravery as a stretcher-bearer in Bernafay Wood and Trones Wood. When the shelling was intense in Delville Wood he was continually up and down the line, dressing wounded which necessitated his being constantly under fire.

He carried on stretcher work until he was wounded in the thigh at Longueval, then carried on until his regiment left the trenches when he reported at a dressing-station and was sent to hospital.

*

Private Gerard Charles Saunders, 19, was articled to a Durban accounting firm and lived on the Esplanade. He enlisted in October 1915 and after training joined the brigade in France on 30 June 1916. Eighteen days later the war ended for him when his position was overrun and he was taken prisoner.

*

Corporal Frances Hill Wiley, 31, was a clerk from Bloemfontein who had enlisted on the formation of the brigade. He was promoted to lance-corporal in January 1916 and corporal in May. At Delville Wood he was shot in the legs and left ear, which was to leave a large scar on the left side of his neck.

*

Sergeant Brook at the HQ dug-out recalled that Lieut Errol Tatham had given

him instruction on leaving the shelter. “At about 3 pm on the 18th, things were getting very serious in the front line trench and he went out to see if he could do anything. He left his haversack with me saying that if anything happened to him I was to take care of it as it had papers connected with the orderly room duties. It also contained some personal effects of dead men, such as a Bible and pocketbook which he had taken from the body of a man who had been killed.

“He had shown great bravery during the three days in leaving the trench to succour wounded. He did it a great many times, especially on the first day. He freely exposed himself in doing this, and did it over and over again. After handing me the haversack, he left for the front trenches.”

Meanwhile, while leading a bombing party against a German attacking force, Lieut Walter Hill was killed. Shortly afterwards Private Henry Pauls was wounded.

Lieutenant Tatham made his way through the shattered wood to the front line where he sought out Major Burges. Private Pauls overheard him ask whether there was anything he could do. Burges requested that he try to get reinforcements. Tatham returned after a while with some men he had collected, but found that in the meantime Major Burges had been killed. Shortly afterwards Tatham was cut down by a welter of bullets.

*

Private William Poole, 2nd SAI, from Durban was in the frontline trenches that afternoon with Errol Tatham.

“I saw him lying in the trench wounded in the shoulder. He had the wound dressed. After lying there for a time, during which he looked very pale, I saw him get up and encourage the men and give orders.

“He was then the only officer left. He was evidently in great pain but continued encouraging the men for about half an hour. He then lay down for

about five minutes, looking very pale. He then got up and left the trench, evidently very weak, and went in the direction of the dressing-station, as I thought.

"That was the last I saw of him. I wanted to go with him because I saw he was weak and wanted to take him to the dressing-station. He said I was not to do so, but was to stay behind and help to hold the trench as there were so few men left. If I had gone with him I should have got him to the dressing-station, but he would not let me."

*

Sergeant Brook was at the HQ dug-out when Tatham returned. "He did not return for about 1½ hours and I became very anxious about him. After about 1½ hours I saw him coming back towards the HQ trench.

"He was wounded in the right shoulder, and he looked very pale. I could see he was wounded by the fact that his arm was in a sling and the blood on his shoulder.

When about 20 or 25 yards from the headquarters' trench he collapsed near a shell-hole where two stretcher-bearers were sheltering."

*

Private Bill Helfrich recalled what took place that hellish day.

"On 18 July 1916 I was acting as a stretcher-bearer at the headquarters in Delville Wood, France.

"On that day I and three other stretcher-bearers were bringing down a casualty from the front line trench to the dressing-station and, on reaching the centre of the wood, we could not proceed any further on account of the intensity of the shelling by the German artillery; so we decided to wait at the headquarters' trenches until the bombardment slackened.

"As we deposited the casualty in a place of safety (a sandbagged shelter) the other stretcher-bearers took cover elsewhere, and I remained with the

casualty. Some time early in the afternoon the Germans were advancing and there was heavy machine-gun and rifle fire going on.

"At this time an officer, whom I afterwards learnt was Lieut Tatham, appeared on the parapet above us. He had his left arm in a sling, and the shots were raining about him, and I told him to jump down quickly as they were firing at him. He seemed dazed, hesitated, and swayed forwards as if he were going to fall, and I said: 'Don't fall on this man as he has got a fractured leg,' indicating the case on the stretcher. Just then he pitched forward, and I touched him so that he fell clear of the stretcher.

"He then sat up and said: 'Look at this,' waving his broken arm, 'the bounders,' or some such word to that effect, 'are using explosive bullets.' I went over to him and took off his tunic and started to put a tourniquet on his arm. (Tatham's right arm had been almost shot away, both above and below the elbow.)

"I then enquired what regiment he belonged to and he told me the 2nd South African Infantry. I then asked him if he knew my brother Charlie Helfrich who was in the same regiment, and he said he did not. I enquired if he came from Bloemfontein, and he said: 'No, Maritzburg' and added that his name was Lieut Tatham.

"He then said: 'Don't trouble about me, I am finished.' I said: 'No, they will amputate your arm and you will be all right again.' He then said: 'No, there are other wounds' and told me to look at his chest. I opened his shirt and found that his right breast had been shot away, and he had a bullet wound through the left side of his chest just above the heart. (In addition a finger of his left hand was missing.)

"He then asked: 'What would happen if I took off the tourniquet?' I told him he would bleed to death. He then implored me to loosen it. I replied: 'No, sir, I could not.' I then gave him a drink and he asked me if I had any

morphia, and I told him I was sorry I had not.

"He then asked me to transfer his identification disc from his right arm to his left; and, in taking off his wristlet watch, he told me to keep it. This watch I have since handed to Lieut Tatham's sister.

"Just then the casualty whom I had on the stretcher called me and, after attending to him, I returned to the lieutenant and found he had loosened the tourniquet with his teeth, and he was then practically unconscious and murmuring: 'Oh, rain, beautiful rain, lovely rain!' I raised his head and, within a few minutes, he passed away."

Lieutenant Russell Tatham was also killed in action. A triple tragedy was to strike the family when it became known that Errol's brother, acting Sub-Lieut William Tatham's submarine hit a stray mine in the South Adriatic on 15 July and was lost with all hands.

Shortly afterwards the Germans reached the shelter and Helfrich held up his hands, being quite unarmed; but a German fired a rifle at him, grazing his temple. Then another tried to bayonet him, but the third was more humane, and pushed his comrade aside and began asking Helfrich questions as to how many there were, and where, etc.

Helfrich then pretended to faint, being wounded in several places by this time, and the Germans left him. After it was dark, he managed to move the wounded man a little way, but not far, and then tried to sleep. A bomb was then thrown so near to him that it tore his mackintosch to shreds and wounded his knee badly.

He had to leave the unfortunate man on the stretcher, and creeping away, managed to get out of the wood. Helfrich was making for a dressing-station when he came across an English regiment and was then taken up by their stretcher-bearers.

The man he had left on the stretcher was evacuated from the wood four

days later, more dead than alive, having had neither food nor drink during this time.

*

As the company had lost its last officer, Sec-Lieut Garnet George Green, 26, of B Coy was sent to lead C Coy. Green had served as a trooper in the 1st Royal Natal Carbineers in SWA. He was commissioned on 12 May 1916.

By his gallantry and coolness under heavy fire Garnet Green put fresh energy and confidence into the remaining men. He kept up communications with Col Thackeray, then moved with his men to support him in Buchanan Street.

*

CSM Francis Wilkie, 39, of C Company, 2nd SAI, was court-martialled in Egypt for being AWOL from 26 to 28 December.

Wilkie was born at Glasgow, was 5 ft 10 ins tall and had blue eyes and reddish hair. He served in the Scottish Rifles for 15 years, fighting in India in 1895, the South African War and again in India in 1908. He joined the SA Engineers for service in SWA and was attached to the Armoured Train.

Before leaving England for Egypt Wilkie went on a spree, possibly visiting his relatives in Scotland. He was found guilty and reduced to the ranks.

Wilkie, was a corporal at Delville Wood and was wounded in his left wrist on the 18th.

*

After Major Gee was killed, his second-in-command, Capt W F Hoptroff took command. He had been wounded in action in Egypt in January. After a month in a Cairo hospital he had rejoined his company. Captain Hoptroff was killed during the bombardment.

Lieutenants Letchford and Davis then took command of the company. Davis was to recommend Sgt George Edmund Marshall, 30, for the DCM.

Marshall was born at Ficksburg, OFS. After serving for three and a half years in the Transkei Mounted Rifles he became a bank clerk. The six foot tall Marshall was promoted to corporal in January and lance-sergeant in June 1916.

In Delville Wood he showed conspicuous bravery in commanding a platoon under trying circumstances. On several occasions, at great personal risk, he dug out wounded who were buried by the shell fire. He held his sector of the line until shot in the chest and right hand.

Private Harold Taylor, who was shell-shocked at Bernafay Wood, had been sent to the rear and told to remain with the transport when his company entered Delville Wood. His zeal brought him into action in the wood where he was severely wounded by shell fire.

*

Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Thackeray recalled the day's events in an interview 40 years later. "The enemy completely smothered the area with shells. Things got worse as the day advanced and we were driven back and I actually found myself holding only the south-west corner of the wood.

"The trenches were full of wounded. All the stretcher-bearers were casualties so the poor fellows just had to lie there. That evening we were told the welcome news that we would be relieved that night. But relief under such conditions was a slow and risky business. By midnight the relief had been partly carried out."

*

Albert William Harvey MacDonald served as a staff-sergeant and lieutenant on the UDF staff in SWA and was mentioned in despatches. He then served as a lieutenant and quartermaster of Prince Alfred's Guards.

After joining the brigade MacDonald's wife and five children went to live in London. He assumed the duties of adjutant in December 1915 and was

promoted to temporary captain in May 1916. He took leave from 14 to 20 June then returned to the front.

Captain MacDonald was among those ordered to leave the wood. Despite being wounded in the left arm he had remained at the Buchanan Street HQ. He proceeded to Longueval for reinforcements and ammunition and only retired when ordered to do so by the medical officer.

*

Solomon recalled that whereas they had wondered what the 15th, 16th and 17th would bring forth, the 18th was ushered into being with a shock so fierce, so unexpected, that nature groaned under the strain.

“For at an early hour on that morning the German gunners, seeming to open the very floodgates of their resources, launched upon us an attack that reached a pitch of violence and intensity the like of which we had never before experienced. The air was filled with the shrieks of shells that rained upon us unceasingly; the atmosphere seemed to be rent asunder by the endless succession of terrific explosions; sand and stones hurled up by the force showered over us clattering onto our steel helmets; the earth shook; trees crashed over; and men waiting for the storm to abate, helpless under its fury, saw or experienced death dealt out lavishly.

“But the storm did not abate; was not to abate for many hours. Instead it increased in vigour. It was unsafe to move, impossible to remove wounded, impossible to bring up rations and water; so we had to subsist on what we had, take as much cover as possible, and trust to providence to intervene where it could in that raging inferno.

“The shriek of shells, the hiss of their approach and descent, brief moments of speculation as to whose turn was coming next, and then more and more, and yet more, crowding into the seconds as the minutes and hours dragged on.

“The scene beggars description. What impressions of the grim reality can cold print convey? The three previous days, eventful and trying as they had been, were to the 18th as is the calm to the storm that it precedes.

“And yet men lived through it, some even unwounded.

“One man’s shelter was completely covered in. With feverish haste he was dug out, nose, ears, mouth and eyes full of sand, and he trembling like a leaf, for he had been unable to move a muscle beneath the weight of earth that covered him and thought, as he said, that his last moments had come.

“That an infantry attack would follow on the cessation of the bombardment was sure, but when that would be we did not know.

“Major Jackson was killed, and our only remaining company officer wounded.

“And then, at 4 pm every gun ceased fire with a startling abruptness.

“A brief, blessed interval of silence, and then the sentries’ ‘here they come’ brought every man to his feet to meet the coming attack. The rapid fire that followed caused the rifles to become hot in our hands, but we could not stem the tide of the advancing infantry. Avoiding a frontal attack, they came at our flanks while others advanced on to and occupied Longueval, or a portion of it, thus cutting us off in the rear.

“Some men from C Company ran up. ‘The Germans are in the wood behind; millions of them’, they said.

“And there they were sure enough, absolutely barring our way to the rear had we received orders to retire. We did not, however, receive such orders, and at that stage it would have been too late to carry them out had they been issued, so we devoted our attention to the enemy in the wood, keeping an eye on the other direction as well.

“A party of our own men passed through the wood a short distance away, and we could not understand the move until we saw the German soldiers over

them. Then another small party passed. That was too much.

“Leaving their positions a few charged towards the party and released the captured men, their German guards not waiting to see the matter out. Two of our number were mortally wounded in that little affair, one being the man who had been dug out earlier in the day.

“It was not to last however. There was no chance of relief, and we were hopelessly outnumbered and surrounded. No useful purpose could have been served, nothing gained, by further opposition. Only a few more German lives, and the extermination of our diminished force. Based on those considerations, towards evening the order to cease fire was issued.

“And that was the end.

“When the day was over we were able to take some stock of the havoc wrought in our ranks, but the fate of many of our comrades was unknown. Of the platoon I belonged to, four unwounded men represented the fifty who had entered the wood, while A Company’s muster of approximately two hundred, less than thirty remained. The rest had been killed or wounded, some of the latter being captured with us. The other companies suffered as badly as ours.”

*

The incessant shelling blasted the shallow trenches, killing and maiming the remnants of the company. Eventually, only Tom Heunis and a friend, Jack Russell, were left manning their platoon’s length of trench. Heunis knew that the Germans could watch them with binoculars from the two villages ahead (Ginchy and Guillemont). The next attack would overrun them.

Four Jocks then came to their aid, carrying two Lewis guns. There followed heavy shelling — then a lull. One of the Jocks stood up, then shouted “Here they are!” A wave of German infantrymen seemed to rise out of the earth. A couple were only five yards away. Heunis looked directly into a face with a large handle-bar moustache. Then the Jocks mowed them down with the

Lewis guns.

When the attack failed, the enemy fired whizzbangs at them. The first shell burst before them and the second behind, showering them with clods of earth and pieces of wood. Heunis screamed at his friend, “Jack, they’re going to get us!” and the next shell exploded in their trench. Despite his ringing ears and the stench of cordite, Heunis heard one of the Jocks call out, “Charlie, I’ve had it.”

The only one unscathed was the man who had warned them of the German attack. Heunis was hit in his legs and shoulders. He made his way back to a dug-out 100 feet back but could go no further as the Germans were infiltrating the wood.

*

Dick Unwin lay helpless in his battered trench when the enemy took it. A German officer walked over to a South African machine-gun officer and shot him. Unwin tore off his sniper’s badge with blood-stained fingers and pushed it into the mud. It was like destroying his death warrant. He was later led away with other walking wounded and prisoners, his head swathed in bloody bandages.

*

Private Cecil George Trenam, 25, was a clerk and diamond digger from Bloemhof, OFS. He had served as a trooper in the Bloemhof Commando under Gen Coen Britz during the Rebellion and in SWA. On 25 May 1915 Trenam was promoted to sergeant-major. After the SWA Campaign he joined the brigade as a private.

During the bombardment shell splinters almost severed his right arm and shrapnel hit him in the neck. Although weak from loss of blood, Trenam staggered to a first-aid post. He was delirious when stretcher-bearers carried him to an ambulance.

*

Captain (acting Major) John William Jackson was in the thick of the fighting until killed. He had served with the Queens Bays during the South African War and afterwards joined the SA Mounted Police. Jackson was subsequently engaged in gold mining at Roodepoort. When he joined the brigade his wife, Anne, and four children remained at the Princess Estate Goldmine.

One of the few remaining officers was Sec-Lieut Alfred Richard Barton, 34. He was the eldest son of the Rev P J Barton of Norfolk. After agricultural training he came to South Africa in 1901 and joined the Southern Mounted Rifles as a lieutenant.

Barton then farmed in the Transvaal before serving in SWA, then joining the brigade and serving in Egypt. His younger brother was killed during the fighting at Ypres in February 1916.

At Delville Wood Barton was last seen on the 18th fighting hand-to-hand among the few who were left in his trench.

*

Private Dudley Meredith and his companions on the southern perimeter were methodically wiped out.

“July 18 — the fourth day in the wood — dawned and with the dawn began one of the most violent bombardments known up to this time. Hour after hour the wood was afire from end to end with bursting shells. Mingled with the shriek and roar of bursting shells were the crashes of falling trees and the rending of branches. Every now and again a heavy shell would land in the wood and not explode, with the result that the whole wood shook as if in an earthquake.

“All the while, cowering and dazed we crouched in our little trenches while mud, leaves, twigs and shell-splinters rained down on us. The fumes of bursting shells caught us in the throat — the bursting of near ones seemed to

strike us in the chest and take our breath away.

“Gradually I felt my nerves going and began to pray for one to hit me and end it all, or for the shelling to stop: I seemed to bear a charmed life however — one whizzbang landed on my rifle where it lay handy on the bank and left nothing but the bayonet, while another landed behind me, not two yards away, as I stood up in the trench; but it only deafened and dazed me.

“The bombardment suddenly stopped at about 4 pm. With a cry of ‘There they come’ we manned our parapet, but there was no sign of an attack from the Waterlot Farm side. After about fifteen minutes the barrage came down again with renewed violence and once again we crouched praying for the end, at the same time expecting and even hoping that the next moment would be our last.

“The bombardment suddenly stopped again about 6 o’clock in the evening, and once again those of us who were still able prepared to beat off the attack. Again there was no sign of an attack from Waterlot Farm and we were wondering what was happening when there was a sudden cry — ‘My God! Look behind!’

“We looked back to see a line of Germans advancing through what underbrush remained, and at once we knew that Delville Wood was again in German hands. Without thinking I jumped back into our trench and opened fire on the Germans I could see in front of me. My mates thought that the better plan would be to retire back to the British lines diagonally across the fields in front of Waterlot Farm and without worrying about me, away they went. After the war was over I learnt that although subjected to a very severe rifle and machine-gun fire most of them reached the British line unscathed.

“A German appeared from behind a bush and instantaneously it seemed, we fired at one another. His bullet hit our parapet about four inches from my left eye and shot some gravel into my face. When I cleared my eyes I saw him

reeling and suddenly fall. Looking round now I saw Lieut Barton on my left, lying kicking in his death agonies — how he came to be there I did not know. At the same moment I realised I was alone in the trench.

"Another German became visible through the bushes and as I fired one of our men ran past in front of me. A second later, Sergeant Becker and two of our men, Lees and Hartz, came crawling into my trench, along with Scottie Ellis from the Machine-gun Corps, who was wounded in the back. 'Meredith, it's all up,' said Becker, 'and we had better try to get out.' Accordingly we started crawling down the trench in the direction of British lines, but soon came to the end of the trench behind a clump of bushes.

"We stopped here a moment to decide on our next move and no sooner had we done so than a German stepped round the bushes with his rifle trained on us. Turning quickly to get a shot at him, as I was at the end, I slipped and fell over in the mud at the bottom of the trench. The expected bullet did not come and on scrambling to my feet I saw Sergeant Becker and the others climb slowly out of the trench and put their hands up. I followed their example and our fighting days were over — we were prisoners.

"When we climbed out of the trench we realised how hopeless was our position, for not ten yards from our last little trench was a German machine-gun and a detachment of thirty to forty men. No doubt the German who had covered me had seen us crouching behind the bushes.

"As we now stood dejected, with heavy hearts, the Germans crowded round us, jabbering away while they disarmed and searched us. One fellow in particular waved a revolver in our faces and it really seemed as if he was prepared to shoot the five of us until a superior officer came and evidently ordered him to put his revolver away.

"Not that we really cared, for it seemed so disgraceful to us to be taken prisoners like rats caught in a trap — without having put up a decent fight.

Dejected, unwashed and unshaven, weary and muddy, we felt that nothing really mattered now that like cowards we had tamely put up our hands to the foe.

"The officer in charge now detailed one man to act as a guard and motioned to us to go with him towards the German lines. As we moved slowly along we found Newberry — who was well known as a cricketer, and had been our platoon cook — lying seriously wounded below the knee. I am almost sure that it was my last shot at the Germans that had hit him as he ran past, trying to get out of the wood. We bandaged him up as best we could, although the poor fellow was in agony and begged us to leave him alone, and I picked him up and tried to carry him out of the wood.

"Struggling painfully along through shell-holes we managed to progress about fifty yards or more, with Newberry begging pitifully all the time to be put down as the pain was unbearable. At last, when I could go no further, we came to a shell-hole somewhat larger than the surrounding ones, and here we decided to rest for a few minutes. It had one occupant — a German soldier shot through the stomach from side to side.

"As I put Newberry down he declared that he would go no further, and when we went on he wished to be left where he was. Hardly had he said this than a bullet hit him in the chest, and he slumped forward and passed away before our eyes. While we were seeing what we could do for the poor fellow, our guard tried to bandage up his compatriot.

"A momentary lull then occurred and so our guard motioned us to move on forward towards the edge of the wood — and Germany. Dejected and dispirited we moved slowly along while the tragic passing of Newberry and the pitiful haunting look in the eyes of the wounded German, made our hearts heavier than ever. The British now started putting down a barrage and machine-guns began to sweep the wood. Utterly dejected, however, we did

not try to dodge or take shelter — nothing seemed to matter any more.

"As we reached the edge of the wood we found a very deep shell-hole and the British fire having increased in intensity, our guard made us get into it. This shell-hole also had an occupant — a German soldier shot through the knee. The artery was severed and so we had to lie there and watch the poor fellow getting yellower and yellower as his life blood spurted out. Our guard evidently thought the poor fellow was too near death to try and do anything for him — he was almost at his last gasp as we jumped in beside him.

"We were now joined by the wounded German we had left in the shell-hole where Newberry was killed. I fancied I could see a look of triumph on his face as if he felt pleased that he had managed to catch up with us again. A moment later I received a terrific knock on the back of my leg. A shrapnel shell burst behind us and one of the pieces had hit me on the calf. It did not cut through the puttee fortunately, but the blow was severe enough to cause me to limp.

"After this occurred I was looking over the edge of the shell-hole, hoping that a chance of escaping might present itself even at this eleventh hour, when a wounded German passed by a few paces away, making for the German lines. As he passed our shell-hole he turned his head and saw me, and up went his hands. The grim humour of one prisoner surrendering to another impressed the incident on my memory, through all the misery and dejection of the time.

"Our guard now began to get restive and there being another momentary lull, made us get up and move across no-man's-land — here 60 to 70 yards wide — to the German trenches. The number of German dead lying here and at the edge of the wood bore silent testimony to the severity of the fight for Delville Wood — as we passed we saw bodies lying in hundreds everywhere.

"Half way across the open space a shrapnel shell burst over us and our

guard was wounded in the foot. To our surprise he ignored us from that moment. Divesting himself of his equipment he threw it on the ground with his rifle, took off his boot and started off for the German lines as fast as he could go. We were left standing but there was no chance of escape for an officer observed this incident from the German lines, and sent a guard to bring us to his trench.

"This officer in the intervals between watching operations through field glasses and giving orders, observed us intently for a few moments and then proceeded to give our new guard instructions for we were motioned to proceed with him, and at the same time help along a German soldier badly wounded in the leg. We took turns in helping this German along, one on each side, and so we gradually and painfully left the battlefield behind.

"As we approached Gueudecourt (north-east of Longueval) the fields showed fewer and fewer traces of war, until finally not even reserve trenches could be seen. Finally, after what seemed an almost endless march, we reached Gueudecourt. Hungry, dirty, dejected and with a swollen eye, I limped along a pace or two behind the other fellows.

"Just as we entered the village we passed some German billets and before I knew what had happened, a burly German had rushed out and literally kicked me up into line with the others as he shouted 'Marsh, schwein'. We had heard of the harsh treatment meted out to prisoners and so that kick, the memory of which will probably never be effaced from my mind, was not calculated to set our minds at rest with regard to our fate as prisoners.

"Just before we reached Gueudecourt some remarks shouted out from a German battery gave us an inkling with regard to the terrific punishment we had endured in the wood. One of the artillerymen enquired in excellent English how we enjoyed the day in Delville Wood. On our replying that it had been pretty hot, he informed us that his battery alone had fired 1,600

shells that day.

“In Gueudecourt we were marched to the field dressing-station, where we handed over the wounded German and Ellis had his wounds dressed. Here we were given a cup of coffee each and while standing about were an object of much interest to the Germans about us. One fellow got into conversation with me and asked in fairly good English what quarrel had South Africa with Germany that we should come halfway round the world to fight on the Western Front.

“We now were motioned to pick up a stretcher case and proceed with our guard, and thus commenced what was a fitting climax to the bitter trials of the day. Tired, hungry and worn out as we were we had to carry a fairly heavy patient nearly five kilometres to Le Transloy (east of Gueudecourt).

“This German was evidently badly wounded in the head for his whole face was covered with bandages. We could not see, therefore, how he was bearing up under our rough handling, but all along the road we hoped and prayed he would die so we could leave him at the side of the road. At long last, however, Le Transloy was reached and we handed our silent burden over to the hospital there.

“We were next taken to what was most probably the German divisional headquarters which were situated in Le Transloy. Here we were questioned by an officer speaking fluent English, but apart from learning our regiment and division he did not get much information from us. As a matter of fact we had nothing to impart had we wished to be communicative.

“It was now dark, so we were marched away to a large brewery nearby, where in the corner of a large room we prepared to make ourselves as comfortable as we could for the night. In this place we were again an object of great interest for an hour or so to the regiment of young Prussians billeted there. They treated us kindly, however, and once they learnt we were hungry

plied us with biscuits, jam and coffee from their own rations.

"Thus ended 18 July 1916, and our active participation in the war. From henceforth we were to be, as it were, spectators and yet indirectly still vitally concerned with the progress of the war. Absolutely worn out by the arduous day and all unaware of what might be in store for us in the dark days ahead, we slept peacefully on the brewery floor in Le Transloy."

*

Harry Cooper recalled how their colonel had rallied them.

"During the night a voice kept calling out our war cry (I still do not know how to spell it) to keep us on the alert. It came from one of the finest gentlemen who ever breathed, our own Colonel Thackeray. He has since passed on, but his memory will never die while a 3rd Regiment is still alive.

"Someone, somehow managed to get some paraffin or petrol tins of water into the wood — and did we pile in! But the trouble was the tins could not have been washed free of the paraffin and petrol. I can still taste the darned stuff.

"The wood was beginning to look less like a wood now and more like a ploughed-up field. Stumps of trees and trees lying flattened out and still the Jerries pumped into what was left. There was very little respite, sometimes they would stop for a short while to have their 'Sauer Kraut' I suppose, and then it would go on again.

"One day I was given a written order and told to do my best to get through to brigade headquarters. Off I went like a rabbit, through the village, down the sunken road with all the 'devils of hell' going through me. You don't know how scared you can be until you are alone, entirely alone, surrounded by dead. Dead everywhere looking at you with sightless eyes and the smell made me feel bad.

"Anyway I found my way and a non-com led me to the general's dug-out. I

faced the general (Lukin), saluted, gave him compliments of our colonel (Thackeray) and gave him the note. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and asked me to tell him something about his men in the wood. All the time he was exclaiming, ‘My men, my poor men.’ I told him as much as I knew. He then told someone to get me a drink and a bite. Was I grateful for both.

“It appears that the note informed him that more stretcher-bearers were needed as regiments had been helping one another to carry out wounded.

“My job was to show the bearers the way to the centre of the wood or to where they were most wanted. I might tell you that I lost no time in getting along that road again, back to the wood. How the chaps following got on I don’t know, but when we reached the wood and I found the colonel to report to, there were very few of them left. But the SA medical corps got right down to it.

“One of those fellows was my ex-school teacher. He was not far from me when over he went. I thought he was dead. After the war I met him again, minus a leg.

“During all this time ‘purposes of nature’ were almost forgotten. One can understand this when you realise that we had had precious little time to eat or drink, and hundreds remained in their one position all the time. Sleep was done in snatches, for who could sleep with this hell?

“Then lice got to work on us — scratch, scratch, until blood came. You could see some men, fast asleep, still scratching. The darn things got under your puttees; you could not remove puttees there, so the little fellows just got in. Well! They at least gave the chaps something to do besides killing Jerries.

“One day the shelling seemed to increase. Jerry was attacking and entering the wood. My pal and I were crouching near our padre when this happened. He turned to me and said, ‘Go on boys, run for it, you must not be captured.’ To which I replied, ‘What about you, Sir?’ He said, ‘Do as I say, I will be all

right. They will not harm me.'

"I asked if we could wait awhile until the heavy shelling had died down. He said, 'Do you think this is a hailstorm in South Africa and want to wait until it eases off? You get going.' He placed his hands on our heads and said, 'God grant that these lads get through — now off with you.'

"Jet propulsion had nothing on us; we simply flew, ducking and diving until I reached a trench full of 9th Division Scottish soldiers. My pal had gone off somewhere else. Into the trench I dived with all hell let loose behind me, and the men in the trench held their fire until we appeared to be all clear. Then they opened up and gave Jerry some of his own medicine. For quite a while it was chaos. Those Jocks knew their job and were they doing it well!

"From where I was blazing away I could see the Jerries had got the padre and were going down a deep cellar where wounded from both sides were taking shelter. A Jock asked me why the hell we had remained in the wood taking everything the Jerries could throw at us. 'You South Africans have got guts; no doubt about that.'

"He told me that they had been itching to go in and help, but nobody seemed to want to give them orders to do so. All the while a sergeant of the Jocks had been using a Lewis gun beside me and I became fascinated at the way he was carrying on. Swearing like nobody's business, telling everyone within earshot what he would like to do to this, that and the other so-and-sos.

"I then saw something I shall never forget. This sergeant, in the act of re-loading suddenly held his hand up and I saw his left thumb had gone. He went berserk, picked up a rifle with a bayonet fixed and went right over the top like a madman, right into the wood.

"The Lewis gun was lying on the edge of the trench, loaded and with the cocking handle in position. Here goes, I thought, I had handled Lewis guns in practice but never in action, so I attempted to give it a trial. My first burst

made a lot of dust and a Jock nearby said, ‘Lower your butt, laddie. It’s Jerries you should be hitting, not the bank in front.’ I finished the magazine, happy in the thought that I had done something towards winning the war and to cap it, with a machine-gun. Maybe they would let me put up a gunners’ badge if I came out. I had that honour very late in the war.

“Things began to get very quiet now, the attack had been repulsed and Jerry had gone back to lick his wounds. There were very few South Africans left and the wood was a shambles. Poor South African wives, mothers and others. What a shock it was going to be back home when the news got there.”

*

Lawson began the day in no-man’s-land.

“Midnight came, and the anxious and lonesome hours were slowly running on. I was on the point, about 2 am, of retracing my steps out of no-man’s-land, to arouse my brother-watcher when a mass of men, bent double and so moving slowly, appeared about sixty yards ahead. With a lightning-like pull on the wire, on all fours I mustered what speed I could, and in safety reached our trench. I found Breytenbach had lost no time. There was no regimental call of ‘stand to!’ but he had passed a whisper telling the boys to keep silence, and make the best use of their bullets.

“Breytenbach returned to my side. He assured me that everyone was ready, and was then silent, doubtless in a cry for that spirit of readiness he so manifested throughout. As if in answer, within one minute we greeted the oncomers with our rifles, and such was the fury and accuracy of our fire that the enemy’s attempt to bomb us out hopelessly failed. They threw their bombs at random, only to further maul no-man’s-land. Then, with a furious rush, they tried to storm and take our trench. Again the indomitable spirit, backed only by cool, telling rifle fire, prevailed. The Huns in mad disorder rushed for the cover of their own trenches, having paid heavy toll, as

evidenced by the surface of no-man's-land.

"Silence followed, and for the first time since entering that wood did we experience the delights of comparative peace, and enjoy any respite from the ceaseless fiendish flow of shells. That is, that instead of hundreds of shells per minute from various batteries, only dozens per minute fell. With this came a relaxing of tension, and for the first time I surrendered to a peaceful sleep. How long I rested I do not know, but on awaking I found Breytenbach, again ministering to the needs of others, smilingly inviting me to breakfast. Whilst I slept he had visited our fallen comrades, taking from them the food and water they no longer needed, and distributing them along the line, so that all had ample of both.

"The trial to come was a trial in which the grit of a few men was put to a terrible test. As will also be seen, it is clear that we could not possibly have held our position after the small hours of Tuesday morning, but for Breytenbach. Not only did we hold on after that, we inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. We were but a small forlorn party, armed simply with rifles, and the Germans knew this. They had shelled, as they must have thought, if not the life, at least the spirit, out of us.

"To face an infantry onrush we had to stand up in our shallow trench, exposing heads and shoulders. As will be seen we did this repeatedly and successfully. To a foe, themselves prone to surrender under conditions much less trying, the moral effect of the stand we continued to make must have been great. The question the South Africans put to the enemy at Delville Wood was, 'Can such men be beaten?' The only answer is an answer of despair to the enemy.

"Intense shell fire had again commenced and it gave us a feeling of grim satisfaction to find that the kind of shells now sent in to us was an acknowledgement that the enemy realised that they were facing intrepid and

death-dealing riflemen. Three-fifths of their shells were tear-shells. We shed tears copiously. They were the only tears we had shed — the product of the ingenuity of perverted human brain, fertile in the invention of the vile implements of scientific warfare. Our gas-masks became stuffy and suffocating, and had to be discarded.

"About 7 am I walked along the line, and counted but twenty-two to defend about 150 yards of this front-line trench. A number of these belonged to various companies of the 3rd Battalion, some to the South African Scottish, but there were very few of the old D Company men left.

"It was an inspiring sight. Sitting in their cramped trenches, facing the enemy, with clips of cartridges neatly laid ready in heaps on waterproof sheets beside them, and lightly holding their rifles in unconscious fingers, the brave lads were all fast asleep; from their appearance there was little to distinguish them from the dead. I felt the danger, but who so cruel as to waken them? I certainly could not. Breytenbach and myself resumed the weary watch, depending upon each other — my confidence in him was full.

"It was as if night for ever refused to give way to day. A drizzling rain was falling in an atmosphere unstirred by a breath of wind. Smoke and gases clung to and polluted the air, making a canopy impervious to light. What a contrast was this Tuesday morning to the morning of the previous Saturday, when we first entered what was then a beautiful sylvan scene, but now everywhere a dreary waste!

"Midday came, and with it a midday meal, eaten under this filthy pall. During the whole of this day no-man's-land was enveloped in this semi-darkness, making it impossible to see anything but blurred outlines.

"Our little party had to wait in their cramped condition of tortured suspense till nearly 3 pm for the only relief we now looked for, the relief afforded by the excitement of the desperate fighting against great odds. The enemy now

launched an attack in overwhelming numbers amid the continued roar of the artillery. Once more they found us ready — this small party of utterly worn-out men, shaking off their slumbers to stand up in their shallow trench and face the terrible odds.

“As the Huns came on they were mowed down — every shot must have told. Our rifles smoked and became unbearably hot, but though the end seemed near, it was not yet. When the Huns wavered and broke they were reinforced and came on again. We again prevailed and drove them back. Only one Hun crossed our trench, to fall shot in the heart a few yards behind it. Once more they had failed. The lip of our trench told more plainly than words can how near they were to not failing. Beyond, in no-man’s-land, we could do something to estimate the cost of their failure.

“Exhaustion now did what shell fire and counter-attacks had failed to do, and we collapsed in our trench, spent in body and at last worn out in spirit. The task we had been set was too great for us. What happened during the next two hours or so I do not know. Numbed in all my senses, I gazed vacantly into space, feeling as if the whole thing had been a ghastly nightmare, out of which I was now only awaiting complete deliverance.

“From this state of coma I was rudely awakened by a shell which exploded just over me, and instantaneously I passed into unconsciousness. When I regained consciousness a few minutes after, my first sensation was that of having been thoroughly refreshed by sleep. But on moving I found that the fight for me was over. (Lawson was severely wounded in the knee.)

“I tried to rouse my friend who had fallen face downwards beside me. Getting no response, I lifted his head, calling upon him by name, but I could not arouse him. I then commenced with pain and difficulty to walk down the line. I found the last two hours of shelling had done its work — only six remained alive in the trench.

“I aroused some of the young, brave, worn-out sleepers and told one of them, whose name I do not know, that I had been badly hit, and was going to try and walk out. He faced me for a second and asked me what he was to do. I said there was nothing to do but carry on, as the orders of Saturday morning had not been countermanded. His brave, ‘Right O!’ were the last words I heard there — surely fitting words as the curtain fell for me, on that fatal field of noble deeds.

“I returned to Breytenbach, and shook him gently and again raised his head. Then I realised that the shell which had put me out of the fight had put him to rest. With a last look at my friend, I turned to face that painful walk out of the stricken wood. The barrage that had left us isolated, and made it impossible for stretcher-bearers to come in, was unabated. Wounded and in pain, a consciousness of the presence of the spirit of this good man was as a guiding star to me out of the wood.”

*

During the day a shell exploded near the machine-gun officer, Lieut A Cameron, and he was wounded in the left shoulder. He had previously served with the Natal Carbineers in SWA.

*

The adjutant, Capt Claude Browne, found himself near the HQ dug-out in Buchanan Street. In 1912 he had served as a lieutenant in the Transvaal Scottish.

“On 18 July while engaged in the fighting in Delville Wood, I was wounded in the right thigh. I was taken into a dug-out in the trench. During that night I asked Col Thackeray to have me sent down to the dressing-station at Longueval. Colonel Thackeray got four stretcher-bearers and sent me away.

“We had hardly gone a few yards when one of the stretcher-bearers was

shot by a German sniper. The other stretcher-bearers dropped me and took shelter in shell-holes. In the meantime, the sniper was still firing at me. Colonel Thackeray crept out and pulled me to safety."

Private Charles Thomson showed magnificent courage in carrying important messages to headquarters under heavy fire. His indifference to danger inspired others in the difficult task of bringing up stores and ammunition. Thomson also assisted the wounded at great personal risk and was eventually himself wounded.

*

The battalion medical officer, Major Mitchell Stanislaus Power had worked day and night in Bernafay Wood (11-13th), in the sunken road behind Longueval (15th) and in Longueval (16-18th), the whole time under heavy shell fire which on two occasions smashed dressing-stations he occupied.

One of the youngest soldiers in the wood was Eric Wilhelm Beeton, 16, of Abrahamskraal, district Bloemfontein. As he stood 5 ft 11 ins he had found no difficulty in passing his age off as 18. Beeton was one of the draft which joined the brigade at Alexandria. He was killed during the bombardment of the 18th and is buried in the Delville Wood cemetery. His parents, who had moved to Cala, Transkei, in the interim, then gave his correct age.

*

Company Sergeant-Major James Wilson had assisted Capt Ross in reorganising the company the previous day after three officers were lost. He personally carried orders to detached posts under heavy fire on the 18th and led stretcher-bearers to exposed wounded, especially that evening at Longueval when he showed great energy, coolness and resource.

The company was subjected to heavy shell fire when it reached the northern perimeter and many acts of bravery took place amid the bursting shells and falling trees. Sergeant D Schuring reorganised the men at a critical time and

on several occasions brought in wounded men across shell-swept ground.

Two stretcher-bearers, Privates A McIntosh and W Swan, were conspicuous for the fearless manner in which they carried on their rescues of wounded men who were exposed to the shell fire.

Corporal Charles Dixon brought his Lewis gun into action under heavy fire. He fired standing, resting the gun against a tree and continued with great coolness until wounded.

Private Charles Slade had showed consistent gallantry as a stretcher-bearer during the past four days. On many occasions he carried the wounded through the barrage behind Longueval and fearlessly exposed himself while bandaging and attending to wounded under fire.

*

On the evening of the 18th Capt Hesketh Ross showed great coolness in his handling of his company at Longueval. It was a critical time and he enabled the position to be held with security.

*

Major Hunt records Boustead among the wounded.

“July 18 — sent 50 of B and C Company into wood. Lieut Smith wounded in leg, a Blighty, Boustead wounded, Fitz Bell killed just as 50 were starting off, so sent Maclean of B instead of Smith of C.

“Brought up remains of B and C Company in afternoon and advanced in line across open without casualties though shelling heavy, with some of 1st Regiment and first occupied Clarges Street with some Argylls and Black Watch, then moved to Longueval ruins and to south-west corner of wood.

“A Black Watch corporal went to a dead man and got his iron ration tin of bully, opened it with his bayonet and gave it to me, then went and got another for himself. I ate all mine.”

*

Major Donald MacLeod was wounded, so Hunt took over command of the 4th battalion.

Second-Lieutenant Charles Stewart Bell, 37, who was killed, had served with the Natal Mounted Police at the Siege of Ladysmith during the South African War, thereafter in a mounted corps. After the war he joined the SA Railways service and was appointed as Native Labour Superintendent. Bell was on leave in England when the war began so returned to South Africa where he was commissioned in the Engineers and served in SWA.

The following morning Pipe-Major Sandy Grieve would pipe what remained of C Company out of the battle.

*

The early barrage caught the sleep-befuddled Boustead unawares.

“There was a sudden alarm and dropping with sleep we fell in on the road after daylight, with orders to go back to the orchard and the woods. A barrage came down at that moment and of the thirty men now left out of the original two hundred and fifty in my company, four were wounded straight away.

“I was blown across the road, and went back to the Bernafay dressing-station with a hole through my kilt and thigh. At the dressing-station I asked to go back to the line since the wound was clearly a light one, but the doctors said the wound was poisoned and this meant Etaples at least and possibly England.

“My main relief at being hit was the chance to get some sleep. For five days and nights we had hardly slept at all and at times I was conscious of a longing to get hit anywhere to be able to sleep.”

*

Private Betteridge saw his battalion destroyed by the fearful bombardment.

“On the morning of the 18th, only 50 men of the 250 in B and C companies of the Scottish remained. They were mustered to join similarly depleted ranks

of the 1st and 3rd regiments holding the wood. Some stray Highlanders from other regiments of the division were ordered to accompany our boys.

“German shell fire rose to an unbelievable peak and many of these chaps never reached the front line itself, where they were woefully required to strengthen the depleted ranks. At that time, on the evening of the 18th, there were no officers to give orders, the few NCOs still alive carried on half stupid from fatigue and lack of sleep.

“There were enough emergency rations collected from the haversacks of dead companions but hot meals and tea had not reached the wood for three days.

“During the whole of the battering not a single telephone line was kept intact from the front line to battalion headquarters. Every important demand for replacements etc. had to be conveyed by runner. Only half of these messages reached their destination.

“As mentioned earlier, I was one of the runners for C Company. That day I had been given orders to take with me into the wood a cook named ‘Geordie’. I never learnt his proper name.

“The 18th will always remain in my memory as the worst of those five dreadful days. It seemed that the German gunners had increased tenfold. How anyone lived through that intense bombardment covering further German attacks is difficult to believe. This was the last night we held the wood. In all that time it had been impossible to bury our own or enemy dead who now numbered thousands, along the divisional front.

“Colonel MacLeod had been wounded and Major Hunt was in charge at the Scottish battalion headquarters. In the afternoon, about 6 pm, in pouring rain, I was sent with Geordie, the ex-cook, to deliver a message to whoever I could find there who might be in charge of the remnants of the regiment. Owing to bursting gas-shells among the others, we had our gas masks on, most

uncomfortable keeping the eyepieces clean in the rain.

“Entering the wood, just over the sunken road near Longueval, a particularly vicious salvo of shells exploded next to us. We ducked into a large shell-hole and as I got up to go on, I felt as though a mule had kicked me and fell to the ground.

“I had been hit in the thigh by the nosecap of a 5.9 inch shell. I don’t remember hearing the burst of the shell that hit me. A four inch hole appeared in my left thigh, breaking my leg.

“As I sat up abruptly, I saw the nosecap next to me and tried to pick it up. It was still very hot and I dropped it. Geordie immediately pulled out my field dressing, carried inside my tunic; this bandage fitted nicely into the hole in my leg. I tried to stand up but found it impossible.

“Geordie left me there and took the message into the wood. I learned later he delivered it to a corporal and returning from the wood was killed. We had both taken off our gas masks when I was hit.

“I left my rifle and haversack in the nearby shell hole and crawled towards the sunken road. In spite of the shelling, gas, and rain, I fell asleep, completely exhausted. I cannot recollect any pain from the wound at that time.

“The day I was wounded, Sgt Vic Hunt was blown several feet into the air and landed in a muddy shell-hole. The shell killed four men with him, one of them being literally blown to pieces. If Vic had not been there, this chap would have been posted missing.”

*

Sergeant P J Neille went out time and again under the heaviest fire repairing and examining the wire. He was slightly wounded but carried on. His courage and coolness having a marked effect on his men.

Chapter 9 — The Bitter-enders

Wednesday 19th

At dawn on the 19th the 1st and 2nd Companies of the l/52nd German Regiment advanced from the north-west into the eastern part of the wood, where they took five officers and 195 men of the ‘3 Sudafrikanischer Regiment’ prisoner. With their ammunition exhausted, the survivors of the 3rd SAI on the eastern and southern flanks of the wood were compelled to surrender. In addition the Germans released 17 men of the 153rd Regiment.

At 7 am troops of the British 53rd Brigade were placed under Gen Furse’s command and rushed to Longueval to halt the enemy’s advance. The 8th Norfolks made the attack too late to take advantage of the British barrage and with no time for a reconnaissance or food. The German snipers ignored the first line of infantry, then inflicted heavy casualties on the supporting troops.

Thackeray’s garrison fired into the flank of the retreating Germans, thereby assisting the Norfolks to gain the line of Princes Street by midday.

The Germans brought up a new division, the 8th of the 4th (Magdeburg) Corps and made repeated attacks on Thackeray at Princes Street.

Heavy fighting continued and the 11/52nd were subjected to heavy artillery fire. Both other battalions of the 52nd were deployed at this time from the southern part of Longueval but not into Delville Wood.

That afternoon the German 26th Regiment and most of the 52nd Regiment faced Thackeray in an 5-shaped front around Princes and Buchanan streets. The 107th Reserve Infantry Regiment had come around the wood to take up positions 100 yards south of the Ginchy road.

The Germans reinforced the wood and the other battalions of the 53rd

Brigade made little headway against them later in the day. Artillery fire once more destroyed the signal wires.

In “The Big Push” R Gardner intimates that the South Africans were abandoned. “… someone seems to have forgotten the South Africans — or perhaps it was true that Empire troops always got the dirty jobs, because the British politicians would not have to answer to Empire politicians for their conduct.

“The South Africans’ life in Delville Wood had been hell on earth. Their machine-guns were eventually all knocked out, so when the Germans counter-attacked they had to stand up in the trenches and fire with rifles, an unusual procedure on the Somme. When they were taken prisoner many of them were shot.”

General Furse had asked the 53rd Brigade to relieve Thackeray but for some unknown reason they failed to do so. On the night of the 19th the 9th Division was relieved, the 26th Brigade initially withdrew to Carnoy and the 27th to Talus Boise. General Furse handed over the command of the section on the morning of the 20th to the GOC of the 3rd Division.

Thackeray and his small party clung to the south-west corner of the wood against overwhelming odds. German bombers and snipers came forward to be followed by mass attacks on three sides. Two wounded officers remained with Thackeray, Lieut Garnet Green of the 2nd and Lieut Edward Phillips of the 3rd SAI (attached to the light trench mortar battery).

The small “band of brothers” were shelled and sniped at throughout the day. By his personal example Thackeray kept their morale up. Though bone-weary and worn down by the continual fighting, they nevertheless rallied each time he called for it and threw back the attacking enemy.

*

Lukin’s report on the day’s events was terse.

“Throughout the 19th the heavy shelling of the wood continued.

“The Norfolk, Berkshires and Royal Welsh Fusiliers attacked, but the enemy snipers, who were in the wood in force, allowed the first line to go through and sniped the second and third lines very heavily.

“During the advance of the Norfolks, Lieut-Colonel Thackeray’s men were enabled to severely punish the enemy on the flank.”

*

During the day the men of the TMB helped to repulse three enemy counter-attacks. They threw bombs freely and with great success.

*

Gordon Forbes found his new role as infantryman extremely unpleasant. “Lying in trenches all day, with heaps of dead men all round us. Norfolks came up and charged through wood (Delville Wood) clearing the Bosches out and took a number of prisoners. No food and water all day except some musty iron rations, and waiting to be relieved by Suffolks. Hope to blazes they come soon. Have been shelled and whizzbanged all day and covered from head to foot with mud and wet. Next war I’ll send cigs and socks to lonely soldiers. I have had enough.”

*

Kenneth Earp of Rondebosch was hit by shrapnel on his birthday. “The topics of the day (later at hospital) were our narrow escapes. I had a particularly lucky one when a shell burst between five of us. Two were killed, two wounded and as for myself I got shrapnel through the boot. How I got out alive seems a miracle. The casualty list tells its own story. Our boys fought well and stuck to their posts. The Germans charged us twice when I was there with bombs, etc., but we got our backs up on each occasion and let them have it hot.

“I was nearly gassed at Montauban with gas-and tear-shells. The experience

was an awful one. One's throat got sore and water came out of the eyes as if one had had ammonia thrown in them. I cannot describe the battlefield. It was too hideous …

"Three of Jagger's men were among the wounded to my knowledge, including my half-section, Harvey Robson … There is only one man left of my stokes gun team out of five. Three out of the four trench mortar officers were killed."

*

Captain Patterson began mopping up.

"SA Brigade left Montauban and I spent day in organising search party and trying to find out what happened to guns. Almost impossible to do anything in the way of search work on account of shell fire. Collected five guns and a few men that were left and got news of all the others except four. Reported to the 26th Brigade in the evening and found they were being relieved."

*

The weary troops were suffering terribly from thirst. Padre Hill did everything possible to alleviate their plight.

"July 19. I returned (from Delville Wood) and found water short, so watched my opportunity and filled all cans, escaping snipers."

This incident, simply narrated by Hill, was more fully told by Sir Philip Gibbs in *Realities of War* (1944):

"There was no water except at a well at Longueval, under fire of German snipers, who picked off our men when they crawled down like wild dogs with their tongues lolling out. There was one German officer there in a shell-hole not far from the well, who sat with his revolver handy, and he was a dead shot. But he did not shoot the padre. Something in the face and figure of that chaplain, his disregard of the bullets snapping about him, the upright, fearless way in which he crossed that way of death, held back the trigger-finger of the

German officer, and he let him pass.

"He passed many times, untouched by bullets or machine-gun fire, and he went into bad places, pits of horror, carrying hot tea which he made from the well-water for men in agony. The padre in question was Father Eustace Hill, C R, of St John's College."

Padre Hill initially had some difficulty in deciding how to bury the dead. "… While wondering how to dig a grave to hold all the 12 lying about the aid post a terrific shell fell in the garden amidst the rose trees. Clods of earth went up and left a cavern into which I easily pulled all, and took the burial service throwing in rose leaves at 'ashes to ashes'.

"A German soldier we dressed but he died. The other we had carried on a stretcher. Buried on 19/20 July 1916. In huge shell-hole (made on 19th by big barrage) by SAI dressing-station in Longueval — 50 yards from big church and cemetery just by red brick coach-house with rose garden. These men left dead when doctors left. Living carried away. Dying left. V Adams died in a horse-hair chair. He was an old St J C (Old Johannian)."

*

Private William Robert Peggs, 18, was an apprentice engineer from Green Point, Cape Town. After the stark desert campaign he found the attractions of Marseilles irresistible, so went AWOL, however was soon arrested by the police. It was very nearly his last "fling".

At Delville Wood Will Peggs was hit by shrapnel in the neck. He later wrote to a friend describing what followed.

"I suppose you will have heard that I caught a packet — right in the neck, too, just below the ear. It did not strike me at first that I had been hit, but I started to bleed like a stuck pig, so I asked a chap to tie some bandage round it, and then made my way to the dressing-station.

"It was quite an exciting journey, too. I fell in with a few Jocks, and as we

were going through the wood two of us were blown to bits. Trees were falling all round us, likewise shells. One shell dropped about 10 yards from us (I think it was a coalbox) and buried six of us, myself included.

“It was ten minutes before we were all dug out. We had a bit of a rest then; we were too dazed to bother about the shells. We had not gone 20 yards on when others and myself were buried again. Oh! it was a lovely sensation — I don’t think! It did not take them so long this time to root us out. From here to our support trenches nothing occurred.

“Our supports were catching it hot; Fritz had the range to an inch, and every shell was killing, wounding or burying them. A shell burst quite close to me and sent me off with shell-shock. I remember being taken down to a dug-out, one of the deep ones, some 30 or 40 feet deep, that the Germans had made; they are past masters at this game.

“I must have ‘gone off’ for two hours as it was nearly four o’clock before I came to. I had not been awake five minutes when the order ‘stand to’ came, so an officer told me to make my way to the dressing-station. He put on a fresh bandage before I went, as the old one was saturated with blood.

“The dressing-station was over a mile from here, so I started to run as fast as I could, but seeing that I had had no sleep for three nights and no food for two days, not to mention my wound, loss of blood, and shock, you can imagine how fast I ran. On the way I felt as though the whole German artillery were trying their best to blot me out; that was hell to me, and it lasted for half an hour, until I arrived at the dressing-station.”

*

Charlie Ingram, 20, later recalled his impressions of taking and holding the wood.

“At 3.30 am on the morning of Saturday, 15 July 1916, we went over the top and attacked the wood. It was a ding-dong fight. Attack and counter-

attack from all angles.

“It was great fun potting German snipers who had been sniping from tree tops. At times shells were falling at the rate of 400 per minute besides continuous machine-gun and rifle fire plus tear-and chlorine-gas. It was estimated that 100,000 shells fell in the wood during the five nights and six days that we were there.

“Apart from shells, etc., it often rained to the discomfort of the troops but it also was a blessing in that we got water from the shell holes. On account of the terrific shelling by the Germans, rations and water could not be brought up. We survived on our rations and rations from the men killed.

“What was originally a beautiful wood of about 154 acres of lovely trees and undergrowth was now a mass of shell craters and tree stumps and corpses. Only one tree was not completely destroyed and that was riddled with shrapnel and machine-gun bullets. Not a square foot of ground had not been bombed and the only reason some of us survived was that we moved around.”

*

Cyril Barnes recalled that after four days of shelling they could see right through the wood.

“I had the impression that the ground was honeycombed with shell-holes … your feet sank in at least six inches — the ground was so ploughed up.

“Word was passed down from Capt Jowett (A Coy) to retire. Capt Jowett was killed after giving word to retire. When we returned there was a lot of sniping. Freddie Wendell and G J van Niekerk of Pretoria were with me.

“We retired half-way through the wood and came across support trenches manned shoulder to shoulder by troops. We then went to the HQ of the brigade. The first roll-call was answered by 30 of the 200 men of C Coy’s full strength.”

*

Corporal Doitsh had a rude awakening at 3 am.

“I was met with the spectacle of a number of Germans entering the trench in which I was lying, with picks and shovels; and seeing the dead officer, they began to examine the corpse and remove it to the parapet. They then began to dig, and were evidently going to take up their position in the trench.

“I felt a bit uneasy. I had my head covered up under the sheet, but they must have noticed me, as they began talking to themselves in German, and advanced towards me. I thought it was time to show myself, and I do not know who received the greater fright, they or myself. They evidently expected to find a corpse under the sheet, and when I exposed myself they seemed to get a shock.

“As a matter of fact, a few of them jumped over the top as if they had had a start. They pulled me out, and I saw a few hundred of them, who seemed to have just arrived, as they were starting to take off their packs. They appeared to be a fresh lot, as their uniforms were spotless, and they had evidently not occupied trenches (probably the newly arrived 52nd Regt).

“A big bully, whom I took to be a sergeant-major, came towards me, and said in broken English: ‘Here is a swine Englander.’ He ordered one of his men to fetch an officer. A very important-looking man came along, whom I took to be a general.

“He said he would get two men, when it got lighter, to take me over to their lines and get me fixed up. I told him I would be glad if he would let two of his men help me to get near my own lines, and I would then crawl along on my back the rest of the way. He replied: ‘Oh, no, you are my prisoner.’ Our artillery at this time was firing heavily, and their stretcher-men were very busy.

“It was quite a scene to watch the Huns trying to dodge the shells. I forgot

about all danger to myself; I suppose I was getting used to it. Their continual cry for the ‘sanitats’, which is the German for stretcher-bearers, kept these individuals quite busy.

“They placed me behind a tree, with a burly German to guard me. He kept on moving his arm, which made me a bit suspicious; but looks are deceptive, however, for after a while he offered me the only piece of bread he had in his haversack. I remained with him until it was properly light, when some of our boys were brought towards me under a German escort. I asked the guard over me if he were a Saxon, as he seemed too good to be a Prussian. He replied: ‘We are Prussians.’ Up to now they had not put their trench threat into practice — namely, to skin and burn alive the first South African they caught. We took it that they meant this as a way of revenge for South West Africa.

“With the thought of these fiends putting into execution their threat, of skinning and burning alive the first South African that fell into their hands, running through my burning brain, my foot hanging to my leg by a thread of skin which I tied into the remaining portion of the limb with the aid of a puttee, the rain pouring down heavily, my lot was not a happy one.

“The want of food and water did not add enjoyment to my position, and the thoughts of home and family made me one of the most depressed of beings.

“In this condition of despair, I saw coming towards me about seven other South Africans whom the Germans had captured farther back in the woods, escorted by three Germans. I felt somewhat relieved when they reached the spot where I lay.

“By the expressions they wore it would be hard to decide which of us looked the happiest. An officer came upon the scene, and ordered our removal to their lines. The wretched journey there now set in.”

*

Lance-Corporal Robinson, and Privates Fred Hampson and Billy Yeo were

miraculously still alive and together. Hampson recalled their being told to withdraw.

“Towards the evening we found ourselves mixed up with some strange troops. We found that these people had come up to relieve us. A young officer from one of the Scottish regiments — there were very few South Africans left — approached the three of us and said to me, ‘Who are you? Are you South Africans?’

“When I said, ‘Yes’, he said, ‘You poor buggers! Get out of it. We’ve come to relieve you.’ We didn’t need to be told twice.

“Rations had been out of the question and we’d been surviving on emergency rations and from what we could take from dead men’s kits. And we hadn’t slept for days; you dozed standing up. We found a ration dump behind the lines stocked with bread, cheese and tea. Oh — and rum. We imbibed not quite judiciously and slept the sleep of the gods.”

*

Private Johann Otto of St James couldn’t understand how he had survived when so many of his friends were dead.

“Though we were for a week in a continual dungeon of smoke, our boys behaved splendidly; they worked and fought till weariness quite overpowered them. Some of our boys were so tired that they stood sound asleep with their rifles at the shoulder.

“The enemy made many fierce rushes, and at one time we were shooting them at a range of ten to fifteen yards. Their casualties must have been enormous, and, though ours were about half theirs, I dread to think what the shock will be when Cape Town gets the news. There are only two of us left out of our section, the others are either killed or wounded, as they did not answer to their names at roll-call. How I got through everything untouched will always be a miracle to me.

“Half-dazed by shell fire and enraged at seeing your pals lying motionless round you, you simply carry on with murder in your heart, and I now realise the truth about men going half-mad when in the thick of the fight. I think this fight is likely to take its place in history. The papers here can’t speak enough about the South Africans and the way they behaved.”

*

Corporal Archie Dagnin thought mainly of sleep …

“One hundred of us were cut off from the brigade for three days and nights including Col Thackeray, where we held three companies of Germans off, who attacked us day and night for three days. We were living on dead men’s rations saturated in blood and even managed to snatch two hours’ sleep each day laying on dead men. We were too dead beat to care.”

*

There was a great deal of confusion as to what had happened to various men. Colonel Thackeray was later to recommend Errol Tatham for a DSO.

“Before and after Col Tanner was wounded this officer was indefatigable in assisting me in every way and fearlessly exposed himself in visiting the detachments of his regiment under heavy fire. He was wounded and is missing since. He left me during the big enemy attack on the 18th in Delville Wood.”

*

While holding a portion of the Buchanan Street trench Sec-Lieut Garnet Green and his men attacked and dispersed a body of Germans who were endeavouring to dig in about 30 yards away. His fearless and gallant manner instilled energy and confidence in his men.

*

Colonel Thackeray managed to get a message through to Gen Lukin by runner, saying that the British heavy artillery had fired on them causing

additional casualties and that snipers made it impossible to evacuate the wounded or bury the dead.

"… the strain of five days' continuous work and fighting is becoming beyond endurance and as I have now only Lieut Phillips and one or two NCOs I do not feel that we can hope to hold the trench in the face of any determined assault."

The 19th Durham Light Infantry reached Thackeray, but pressed on eastwards, saying that they had no orders to relieve him. Brigade-major Mitchell-Baker, replied to Thackeray's message at 4.45 pm, saying that Gen Furse had promised relief at the first opportunity, probably after dark.

"He has expressed the highest admiration for you and your men and describes your stand as a most gallant one."

*

Although himself wounded in the leg, Capt Claude Browne, 4th SAI, was a keen observer of the dogged defence by Thackeray and his men.

"On the following day I was lying on the parados of the trench when two shells (luckily duds) fell within a very short distance of me and partly covered me with earth. Colonel Thackeray again pulled me to safety and carried me into the dug-out used by him as headquarters; while he was doing this another shell fell within a few feet of me. During the whole of the day I lay in close proximity to Col Thackeray's headquarters, and he continually by his example kept the men fighting till the very last, although the odds were heavily against us.

"We were bombed and fired at from both sides of the trench at the same time by the Germans who had managed to creep through in places where the men had been entirely wiped out. I heard Col Thackeray tell the men that he would not leave the trench unless relieved, and the men were encouraged to hang on until the very end."

*

Lieutenant Edward Phillips had never realised what a fighter his colonel was.

“On the night of 19 July, when the enemy massed and assaulted our lines of trenches, Lieut-Col Thackeray jumped on to the parados and threw hand grenades, and when enemy’s grenades exploded, throwing him into the trenches, he immediately got up and continued throwing grenades until the enemy’s attacks were repulsed.

“In my opinion, had Lieut-Col Thackeray not shown his total disregard of danger, our men would never have fought the way they did in Delville Wood.”

*

Private R Thompson had shown conspicuous devotion to duty in the wood since the 15th. On the morning of the 19th he returned to the wood from carrying wounded out. Although almost physically finished he crawled back to his trench under machine-gun and sniper fire, determined to do what he could to assist the wounded while his strength lasted.

*

Two telephone operators, Privates Long and Capel, had remained with their instrument until it was destroyed by shell fire. Private Charles Ernest Long had farmed at Holmedene, Transvaal. When the war commenced he hired a man at 15 shillings a day to manage his farm, then enlisted at one shilling a day.

Howard Godfrey Capel, 25, came from Johannesburg. He had brown hair and eyes and a scar across his chin. After serving for a year in the Transvaal Field Telegraph Service, he joined the brigade and did a further signalling course in May 1916.

Charles Long later wrote of their brave stand.

“Shells fell among us like an African hailstorm, and still we stood it. My

word, I, with what remained of us, had decided to die fighting.

"One fellow was so frightened he dare not get up from the bottom of the trench. I made him load rifles for me. As soon as one got too hot to hold, he handed me another; so he was useful in that way.

"I was, with two others, told off for the telegraph instrument. First one got his arm broken, and then the other got shot right through the head whilst helping me to rescue our corporal, who was badly hit in his left leg and was dragging himself along the ground to our trench.

"We both ran out to help him and, after putting him in a large shell-hole, we both ran back again. I reached the trench safe enough but not so my mate; he fell dead at my feet, having been shot through the head. He was a good fellow and a brave chap. His name was Capel and he lived in Johannesburg."

*

Tom Heunis woke at 3 am. "As day broke I heard screaming going on. I stood up and looked into a German's face. He said, 'Kom! Kom!' Only 75 of us were there and they took us to the village. I was lucky that they were Bavarians. We were hungry so the Germans gave us food, which we cooked. A chap and I made a fire to cook. A British aeroplane came over and dropped a bomb. The Germans and French were running and geese were flying but we paid the plane no attention. After what we had been through, it was nothing."

*

Sergeant John Naisby, 45, of No 9 Platoon was an auburn haired engineer, originally from Northumberland, England. He was an imposing man, weighing over 200 lbs and with a scar on his left cheek. He had left his wife, Antoinette, and two children at his home in Mayfair, Johannesburg. His previous military service included two years with the Royal Engineers and Railways Regt and ten months with the Rand Rifles and SA Medical Corps in SWA.

From the 15th to 18th he constantly and fearlessly exposed himself under heavy artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire to assist the wounded and to fetch water and ammunition from Longueval and in the wood. He set an outstanding example of bravery to his men.

When severely wounded in the right foot, left shoulder and back on the 19th, he still insisted on helping another wounded man away. Colonel Thackeray was to recommend him for the VC.

*

Private O Chapman recalled that his friend Pte Frederick Butcher was shot early in the morning on the 19th. Chapman was on special duty with Lieut Francis Somerset when they struck a party of Germans in the wood and Somerset was killed.

Later Chapman and L/Cpl Parminter were half-buried by a bursting shell. The Germans dug them out.

“I was led and walked back about three miles over the German lines to their first dressing-station. Here I bade sad farewell to Palmy; he, Gordon and Blake being the only three left of 16 (Platoon).”

*

Private Roy Hill was personal orderly and runner to Capt Tomlinson. He continued to work though wounded and was carrying despatches when wounded a second time.

*

Although his men were completely worn out, Major Hunt knew that they would return to the wood with him.

“July 19. At 7 am received order timed 3.40 am from Dawson to retire to Talus Boise. Some Norfolks came up. Sent B and C companies to Talus Boise. Found Dalgety and walked down road with him to Talus Boise and then went to look for Brigade HQ at Montauban.

“On getting to entrance of Brigade HQ, dug-out was nearly blotted by shell which landed me in my kilt upside down at the foot of the dug-out steps. Found another brigade had taken over.

“Returned to Talus Boise and found General Lukin sitting on a stump. He told me Thackeray was still in wood and asked if we were ready to go in again to get Thackeray out. Said ‘Yes, sir!’ though in my heart knew all my lot were done in.

“Lukin then asked what was my strength? Told him 19 B Company, 21 C Company, 6 A Company here, lying down. He said ‘No! that would be no use, stop where you are!’ Company cookers are up here, thank goodness.”

*

Betteridge had no idea what had happened to the rest of his company.

“I woke at dawn, about 4 am to find it was still drizzling, but the terrific bombardment seemed to have eased somewhat. I crawled towards a dead Scottie a few yards away and found emergency rations in his haversack. I promptly opened a tin of bully beef and this, with an army ‘dog’ biscuit and water from the dead man’s water bottle, filled my empty tummy. I had hardly eaten anything for 24 hours.

“I felt horribly tired and the smell of gas did not let me rest in one place for very long, notwithstanding the pain I now had in my leg. Several wounded men passed me on their journey through shell-pocked terrain.

“I fell asleep again for about three hours, and then ten minutes later two of our stretcher-bearers came along and attended to my leg under still heavy shell fire. They placed me on their stretcher, my head next to the backside of a tall lad who was with me at school in East London; I think his name was Nichols.

“They had carried me about 150 yards when a shell burst alongside us. A large piece of shell hit the bearer next to my head, in almost the same place I

was hit. I was summarily dropped off the stretcher. The other bearer attended to the wounded man, applying a tourniquet to the gaping hole in his leg, which looked much worse than mine. He then carried our pal to the dressing-station, half a mile farther to the rear.

“I lay there for another three hours before another party of bearers picked me up. Before they arrived, I crawled to another shell-hole where I saw another dead Scottie, aiming to help myself to his emergency rations which he would not need. I never took his rations; he had both legs shot away and the shell-hole was half full of water stained red with his blood. A nasty sight in the midst of much death and destruction.

“I finally reached the rear dressing-station, lined up with many other wounded, unable to walk. Not far from us about thirty bodies covered with blankets and groundsheets awaited their last journey on this earth. The not so severely and walking wounded were crammed into motor trucks and taken to fully equipped hospitals in the rear.

“We lying cases were given injections, duly labelled and pushed into ambulances for the trip to the comparative quiet of the field hospital. After further attention there we were driven in another ambulance to the railhead for transport to Blighty.”

*

Lieutenant Allen Centilivres Chase, 23, was a customs clerk from Uitenhage, the great-grandson of John Centilivres Chase (1795-1877). John Chase was an 1820 settler who became civil commissioner and magistrate of Uitenhage and commandant of the Uitenhage Volunteer Cavalry. He was a leading public servant, merchant, historian, author and politician.

Allen Chase lived in Chase Street, Uitenhage. He was 5 ft 10 ins tall and had grey eyes and fair hair. Chase had previously served as a lieutenant in Prince Alfred’s Guards, and was a keen and highly efficient officer, popular

with his men and with all who knew him. He was shot in the chest at Delville Wood and carried out.

Chapter 10 — Relieved

Thursday 20th

The promised relief did not arrive during the night, despite an understanding that the 3rd Division would effect it. At 8 am Thackeray sent a message to Major Mitchell-Baker for Gen Lukin, in which he referred to the state of his men and requested food, water, reinforcements and news of what was transpiring elsewhere. He made no actual reference to their disappointment at not being relieved, knowing that Lukin would be doing his utmost in this regard.

During the fighting that day the Germans hurled themselves against Thackeray's band of bone-weary heroes, but could not overrun them. The colonel himself threw Mills bombs and fought with a rifle on the parapet. His personal courage and example inspired his gaunt survivors to superhuman efforts.

The War Diary of the 52nd Regiment shows that Thackeray's survivors were still full of fight. The German unit records that:

"On the 20th the enemy once again renewed the attack. In the evening the regiment was deployed in an 5-shaped formation in the wood. From west to east were stationed the 6/52, 5/52, a platoon of 8/52, 4/52 and 3/52. Part of 12/52 came next together with sections of 7 and 8/52." (From this one can deduce that part of the 1st Battalion were dragged into the fighting for the wood on the 20th but the main body of the regiment was still over towards Longueval.)

A German officer who visited the scene afterwards noted in his diary: "The wood was a wasteland of shattered trees, charred and burning stumps, craters

thick with mud and blood, and corpses, corpses everywhere. In places they were piled four deep. Worst of all was the lowing of the wounded. It sounded like a cattle ring at a spring fair."

This defence may well have saved the entire flank of the British front. At noon Field Marshal Haig enquired about the position at Delville Wood, realising that a German victory there would endanger the masses of British artillery in Caterpillar Valley and allow the Germans to enfilade the British advance.

General Rawlinson had issued orders for the XV Corps to seize High Wood and the XIII Corps (Gen Congreve) to take Longueval and Delville Wood. In the latter case the attackers lost direction in the assault and incurred heavy casualties.

*

The British fought valiantly to relieve the South Africans. Two men of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers were to win the Victoria Cross for their heroism.

In Longueval Cpl James Davies pushed through their own barrage and single-handedly attacked a machine-gun emplacement after several men had been killed in attempting to take it. He bayoneted one of the Germans and captured another together with the machine-gun. Although himself wounded, Cpl Davies then led a bombing party against a defended house and killed a sniper who was harassing his platoon. Davies subsequently died of his wounds.

Private Albert Hill, 20, from Manchester was one of the smallest men to win the VC. When the order to charge into the wood was given Hill dashed forward and on meeting two of the enemy bayoneted them.

His platoon sergeant then sent him to find the company. He was cut off and almost surrounded by 20 Germans. Hill attacked them with bombs, killing and wounding many and scattering the remainder. He then joined a sergeant

and helped him to fight his way back to their company.

On regaining their lines Hill heard that an officer and a scout were lying out wounded, so assisted in bringing them in. Finally he himself captured and brought in as prisoners two of the enemy. He was to receive a hero's welcome when he returned home on leave.

*

That evening Major Mitchell-Baker made strong representations to the high command which resulted in the 3rd Division relieving Thackeray at 6 pm.

When Lieut-Col Thackeray led the remnants of the brigade out of the wood at 6 pm he had two wounded officers and 140 NCOs and men with him. Of these, Lieut Garnet Green of the 2nd SAI and 81 men (1st SAI 9, 2nd SAI 33, 3rd SAI 14, 4th SAI 25) had entered the Wood on the 15th. Lieutenant Edward Phillips and the surviving 59 men of the Trench Mortar Battery had been sent forward as reinforcements on the 18th. They spent the night at Talus Boise, rejoining the rest of the brigade at Happy Valley, near Bray, the following day.

In summing up the brigade's achievement John Buchan wrote, "The six days and five nights on which the South Africans held the most difficult post on the British front, a corner of death on which the enemy fire was concentrated at all hours from all sides … constitute an epoch of terror and glory scarcely equalled in the campaign."

"In the *History of the 9th Scottish Division*, J Ewing wrote, "The defence of Delville Wood by Lieut-Col Thackeray's small band rightly takes its place as one of the classic feats of the war. But though less well known, the charge of the Highlanders that saved Longueval when a serious disaster seemed inevitable, is an achievement that ought to secure a lasting place in our military annals."

*

Brigadier Lukin's report on the final day of the battle was short and to the point. "Throughout the 20th the wood was again heavily shelled, and snipers were very active. In the evening Lieut-Col Thackeray and his men were relieved by the Suffolks. The strength at which he marched out was three officers (including two wounded) and 140 other ranks, being details of all units of the brigade."

*

The TMB men had helped Thackeray to repulse further attacks. The battery was relieved at 4 pm by the Suffolks and went to Talus Boise where they would later meet him.

Lance-Corporal Gerald Strickland, who was attached to the TMB, showed conspicuous gallantry in keeping his men together in the wood and repelling an enemy bombing party after his senior NCOs had been wounded.

By this time Gordon Forbes had had enough of front-line fighting. "Still in Delville Wood awaiting relief. Found Hook lying dead and handed his disc and papers to Cooper. Relieved at 4 pm and marched to Carnoy where we slept a lovely sleep with no shrapnel or high explosives to startle one from pleasant dreams of home."

*

Fred Hampson and his two companions were fortunately out of the battle.

"We awoke in the morning of the 20th, drank more rum, filled our water bottles with rum and didn't care too much about the war. Later that day we found the remnants of D Company; out of nearly 300 men (our company was larger than usual) there were 13 of us alive to attend the roll-call."

*

Corporal Archie Dagnin and eight others of the 1st SAI survived with Thackeray.

"What tried our nerves more than anything was to see our men and friends

fall to rise no more, dropping, shot through the head and heart without a murmur. At roll-call we could not speak. Words failed to come to us. I was put down as missing in the papers."

*

William Hewitt, 22, was among the draft of raw recruits who had arrived one week earlier. Bill Hewitt came to South Africa with his parents in 1905. He had enlisted in the SA Police and served in the SA Constabulary and Natal Police. In 1909 he went farming in Natal. He enlisted in November 1915 and was sent to France to join the 2nd SAI on 12 July.

For some unaccountable reason, Bill Hewitt picked up an abandoned Lewis gun and carried it to the camp at Happy Valley. Captain Davis, the new company commander, brusquely told him that in future he would be the number one on the Lewis gun as the whole of the section were casualties.

*

Early on the 20th the Germans launched another attack on the weary survivors in Buchanan Street. Lieutenant Edward Phillips, although himself wounded, fought on. He later recalled:

"Even when the situation was at a most critical stage, Lieut-Col Thackeray issued orders to hold the line at all costs, and when the men were absolutely beat by fatigue, he went up and down the trenches encouraging the men. On the second attack early on the morning of the 20th, he grabbed a rifle and fought with the utmost gallantry, his acts inspiring the men to do their utmost."

*

Corporal Geoffrey Williams commanded a strong point in Princes Street. His determination and coolness in handling his men under fire was to earn him a Military Medal.

*

A Johannesburger Pte Syd Brown, 18, had served through SWA with the SA Irish before joining the brigade. He was wounded at Agagia and recalled being carried back to Mersa Matruh on a stretcher slung on a earners back. His recollections of Delville Wood were to be far more painful.

"When we went in it was a leafy wood of big trees, all around were fields of corn. When we came out it was a wilderness of stumps and shell-holes. Hopes were high of a major breakthrough on that day, July 14. The cavalry had been brought up and I remember seeing squadrons of the 7th Dragoon Guards and 20th Deccan Horse on our left screening an advance of infantry towards High Wood.

"But the Germans brought every man and gun they could find against us and we passed to the defensive. For four and a half days we held Delville Wood against unending German attacks. We faced the front and shot down Jerries wherever they showed themselves. The artillery bombardment never stopped.

"Shelter was in shell-holes; there was no trench system other than that which we made ourselves. At one time I sheltered in a shell-hole with two dead Germans. We tried to help casualties as best we could but all around us were dead men.

"At last we observed fresh troops crawling up to relieve us. There was no order to retire that I heard. We knew instinctively that these men were our relief and gave our places to them and ourselves crawled away. On the way out I stopped some shrapnel in my neck and arm …"

*

The commander in the wood, Col Thackeray, briefly summed up the events of the last two days. "Then the enemy brought up a fresh division and made repeated attacks. The next two days and nights the remnants under my command just had to stand and take it while still clinging desperately to the

south-west corner of that wood.

"We suffered incessant shell fire and sniping, the latter now from very close quarters. At last on the evening of the 20th, five days after we had gone into the wood, we were relieved.

"We marched out, two other officers and myself, all wounded, and 140 other ranks. When we paraded the next day at a place ironically enough called 'Happy Valley' there were less than 800 of us, as against the 5,000 that went into the battle."

*

Private Charles Long was proud of Col Thackeray as they made a "last ditch" stand.

"How I came out without a scratch passes my comprehension. We were attacked on three sides every day and night, and bombarded with scores of guns, about 300, for 13½ hours; the last ten hours most severely.

"The papers will tell you how only a few of us, some 143, came out with only one officer, and him our colonel. He was determined to die fighting; it was really fine to see him standing on the parapet, throwing hand grenades for all he was worth.

"How many times we actually attacked I cannot say. The last time the Bosches came so near that they could throw their bombs in our trench, but we bombed them back again. They actually charged with their bayonets, but wouldn't dare to come right up to us.

"Our colonel thanked me personally for my part in the battle, and said he had mentioned me in his reports. I don't know, of course, what that will mean; time will tell."

*

By now, Harry Cooper's main concern was how "lousy" he felt.

"News came through that we were to be relieved and I was told to make my

way back. No better news had I heard in all my life and I needed no further instructions. I knew my way back. Someone told me that the Bantam regiment had gone in. I did not know and I cared less. We had held that hell-hole quite long enough and I was covered with lice-bite sores which were driving me frantic.

"The remnants were played in by Scottish pipers and did we get a reception. Oh! Was it nice to see people walking about without a care in the world, and being able to drink a cup of tea and munch a biscuit. In the distance they were still at it. But here it was really heaven. Our colonel, the only officer left, lined up what was left of us. If I remember rightly, there were 13 privates, no non-coms.

"It was a sad day for our colonel. He tried to tell us what he thought of us, offered field commissions to anyone who would step forward. Yes! It was very hard for the grand old chap. Nobody moved forward. We were not after honours; too many had been earned in that wood and there was nobody left to vouch for them.

"The 'Senussi Brigade' had held that wood against enormous opposition. We had made a name for ourselves and did the 9th Division take us to their hearts! To think that a lot of untried civilians from all parts of South Africa had held the crack German battalions at bay for six days and nights? In the wood time for us was just night and day, holding on to what we had been told to do and caring for nothing else.

"My troubles had not ceased. I said before that the lice had done a good job on me. I had not received a scratch on me from all that shelling and bullets, but was I in need of a good bath and a delousing clean-up!

"Numbers of men newly arrived from South Africa were in a camp nearby and, after recognizing a few, I was sent over for scabies treatment, and then to a farm to help dig turnips to recover from the effects of our pals, 'blue

cross’ and ‘greybacks’ (soldiers’ slang for lice).

“It is a long time since all this happened, but I shall never live it down. To tell all the many incidents I witnessed would be too terrible. South Africa can be proud of that gallant band who went in, never gave up and did their job. May God rest their souls in peace.

“Dedicated to my pals who did not return.”

*

The youngest survivor was probably Pte James T McGill Rousseau, 17, of the 3rd SAI, who was born on 19 January, 1899.

Throughout the defence of the wood L/Cpl W Flanagan and Pte R Beland had signalled to aircraft in the area with lamps, despite themselves being under heavy fire for five days. Flanagan was to receive the MM and Beland a mention in despatches.

*

Second-Lieutenant Donald Ross, 35, was born in Ross-shire, Scotland. As a youngster he had joined the 1st (Volunteer) Seaforths and served with them for eight years. Then five years in the SA Constabulary followed, during which time he was one of Baden-Powell’s Scouts during the South African War.

For the following eight years Ross was a member of the 1st Transvaal Scottish as well as one of the first motor dealers on the Reef. This may be why he became grey in his thirties! He was a colour-sergeant in SWA with the Jocks and was mentioned in despatches.

Ross served as a sergeant-major at Bordon, where he was accounted as a crack-shot. His promotion to lieutenant had scarcely been gazetted when his company went into Delville Wood. He was reported killed in action on the 20th.

After his officer was killed, Cpl Horace Sumner rallied his men and held

strong-points in Princes Street. Although they were Jocks, they were attached to the Trench Mortar Battery.

One of the company's bandsmen, Pte John Quayle Greggor, 21, had been fighting in the wood since the 15th. He was born on the Isle of Man where his grandfather had been a boat-builder. Greggor was a plumber in Kensington, Johannesburg, before joining up for SWA.

Lance-Corporal John Hall, 21, was a small Cornish carpenter, standing 5 ft 4½ ins and weighing 130 lbs. He lived with his mother in Johannesburg and had served in the RLI for two years. He had been promoted to lance-corporal on 1 July, barely in time to control a Lewis gun team at Delville Wood. Between 18 and 20 July he held a strong point in Princes Street and through his determination held it under very trying conditions.

*

Major Hunt and the remnant of the Jocks rested at last. "July 20. Talus Boise. All had a good sleep. Captain Mitchell came to see us. He cried when he saw what was left."

Chapter 11 — Aftermath

The emotions of the South African commander after the battle are described in *Ulundi to Delville Wood*.

“It was a pathetic spectacle that was witnessed next day in the ‘Happy Valley’ to which the brigade was withdrawn. All that remained of it mustered before their general. They had marched out seven days earlier a stalwart force of 121 officers and 3,032 men. On the parade of 21 July, the total strength was 5 officers and 750 men.

“General Lukin took the salute, and as he looked at his shattered corps he bared his head and the tears trickled down his cheeks. ‘You see,’ he said, when he spoke afterwards of that day, ‘I know the fathers and mothers of those lads. They’re not just ‘cannon fodder’ to me: I feel responsible for them to their parents.’ The dark murk of war and slaughter hung heavy on the general.

“In Delville Wood and throughout the war Lukin seemed to possess a charmed life. Coolly walking among the bursting shells and the pelting bullets day by day, nothing hit him. But he did not leave that fatal wood scatheless. He wore no mask, and gas cloyed every hollow. It found the general.

“When the parade was dismissed, the doctor insisted that he must be treated in hospital. For a few days he submitted, but could not bear the restraint any longer. Perhaps it made no difference, but there is more than a suspicion that the German poison gas was the origin of the malady that nine years later caused his death.”

*

No greater compliment can be paid than by an erstwhile enemy. Anno Noack later said, “I can assure you that you have the respect of your enemy. You gave us a test of hell on earth … We Germans were left with the impression that the South Africans were a formidable enemy. Today I can speak with you, not only as your friend, but also as one of your countrymen!”

*

On 21 July Gen Furse sent a memorandum to his division.

“The 9th Division is being withdrawn from the battle line.

“It has played a conspicuous and honourable part in one of the greatest battles in the world’s history. We may all of us with justice be proud of having served in the division during the past three weeks.

“From the bottom of my heart I want to thank you all — Officers, NCOs and men — for all you have done during these weeks of strenuous fighting.

“The demands made on all branches of the division have been great, and right well have been answered.

“The infantry, Highlanders, Lowlanders and South Africans have, as usual, had to bear the most continuous strain. To sustain appalling and continuous shell fire, to try to dig for themselves trenches amongst the fallen trees and through the roots of Bernafay and Delville Woods, to suffer heavy casualties amongst their comrades and friends, to go on day and night for a week or more without any relief, and with only snatches of disturbed sleep, to bear all this time the stern responsibility of being the guardians of the very pivot of the commander-in-chief’s manoeuvre, and to maintain throughout as they have done an uncomplaining resolution and cheerful bearing — for all this, we who have had other work to do offer the infantry our whole-hearted admiration and thanks.

“And the infantry, I am sure, will be the first to recognise the continuous assistance they have received from the artillery, who have been working at

the highest pressure day and night since 24 June and are still in the line, as also from the engineers and from the pioneers, whose skilful help has always been at hand.

“Equally deserving of our gratitude are the surgeons and their untiring assistants, including the chaplains, for the care they have given to the wounded without thought for their own safety; and none of us will easily forget all the difficulties overcome by the Supply and Transport Services.

“Lastly I would thank the brigadiers and their staffs — and the various members of my own staff — for their zealous and efficient work which has had so much to say to the successes we have gained. Nor do I forget the Signal Service — that invaluable and hard-worked channel of orders and reports.

“We shall miss with lasting regret the many comrades and friends we have lost, but they with you, thank God, have won fresh honour for the 9th Division and success for our arms.”

*

General Rawlinson, commander of the Fourth Army, added his thanks on 25 July.

“As it will be impossible for me to speak personally to the 9th Division, I desire to convey to every officer, NCO and man my thanks and congratulations for the splendid work the division has done during the Battle of the Somme.

“The attack and capture of the hostile second-line system of defence, and the village of Longueval, on 14 July was a feat of arms which will rank high among the best military attainments of the British Army, whilst in the capture of Delville Wood, the gallantry, perseverance and determination of the South African Brigade deserves the highest commendation.

“Not only has the fighting spirit of the infantry of this division been

admirable, but the manner in which the divisional artillery has helped and supported the infantry shows that a high degree of training has been attained, and it is with regret that I am informed that the division is to be transferred to another army. I trust that at some future time I may again have the honour of finding them under my command."

*

Sergeant Leonard Arrons of Brigade HQ felt that Delville Wood should be commemorated annually. He ended a letter he wrote from hospital with the words, "In conclusion, may I humbly suggest that July 17 be a public holiday in South Africa, kept in remembrance of the flower of our manhood, whom we buried in Longueval and Delville Wood?"

*

The 1st Brigade had stood against three crack German divisions — successively the 10th Bavarian Division, the 8th Division of the 4th Corps and the 5th of the 3rd Corps.

Buchan summed up his chapter on Delville Wood eloquently:

"There is no more solemn moment in war than the parade of men after battle. The few hundred haggard survivors of the brigade in the bright sunshine in Happy Valley were too weary and broken to realise how great a thing they had done.

"Tributes had come to them from high quarters. Sir Douglas Haig had sent his congratulations. The commander of the Fourth Army, Sir Henry Rawlinson, had written that 'in the capture of Delville Wood the gallantry, perseverance, and determination of the South African Brigade deserves the highest commendation.'

"They had earned the praise of their own intrepid commanding officers, who had gone through the worst side by side with their men. 'Each individual', said Tanner's report, 'was firm in the knowledge of his

confidence in his comrades, and was, therefore, able to fight with that power which good discipline alone can produce. A finer record of this spirit could not be found than the line of silent bodies along the Strand over which the enemy had not dared to tread.'

"But the most impressive tribute was that of their brigadier. When the remnant of his brigade paraded before him, Lukin took the salute with uncovered head and eyes not free from tears."

*

Major Frank Heal also shed a brave man's tears.

"It has been an awful time, but by heaven we're proud of them all. South Africa will never know what those men did for her; no one who was not there can ever realise it; no imagination under the sun can ever grasp that awful hell.

"The German soldier we don't give a d--n for. We can beat him every time, and he's a fine fighter, too; but then we're South Africans, and that means a lot. But, and there's always that 'but', the German artillery and machine-guns are the limit, and they know how to use them, what's more.

"Poor old 'D'. (1st SAI) I cried when they formed up after the battle — only 36 were left. They had eight officers during those few days, and only one was left, and he started as a lance-corporal.

"If ever the CPR march through Cape Town, every man should take off his hat. I told you that they were sound — I trained those boys, and I know.

"Delville Wood is written in letters of blood, but if we were wiped out, the Germans lay in a thick carpet of grey, in places piled up, over the whole of the wood.

"The papers will tell you all that, but what they can't tell you is that at a moderate estimate the staff say that in that small area of about 1,000 yards square the Germans poured shells at the rate of 400 a minute between six and

eight hours — work that out, and it's nearly a quarter of a million shells — but they couldn't turn our boys out.

"At another place where our transport was, they poured in 10,000 lachrymatory and gas shells in hours. Do you wonder some were gassed?

"Our poor old brigade is nearly gone; but we have others coming in, and they will do well, but they are not the old crowd — they never will be until they have passed through their Delville and proved themselves.

"I have been in command of the (2nd) Regiment (Natal) — they had no one else left — but have just returned to the old lot again. What a gap! There only seems to be myself and the colonel left — as a matter of fact, there are only Nicholson, Davis and Isaacs left besides us two. Nicholson now commands 'D.'"

*

General Lukin concluded his interim report by drawing attention to the services rendered by his officers.

"Major J Mitchell Baker DSO, brigade major, rendered me most valuable assistance throughout the operation. He is a tireless and thoroughly capable staff officer.

"Captain A L Pepper, staff captain, carried out his responsible duties to my entire satisfaction. This officer has for a long period rendered excellent service and I recommend him for special recognition.

"Lieutenant P R Roseby, intelligence officer (died of wounds). This officer on all occasions showed ability and courage in the performance of his duties.

"Lieutenant F W S Burton, signal officer, is a capable officer with an intimate knowledge of his work, which he carries out wholeheartedly.

"Captain T V Ward, brigade transport officer, proved himself to be thoroughly capable and efficient in the performance of his responsible duties.

"Lieut-Colonel F S Dawson CMG (commanding 1st SAI), commanded

detachments of the 1st and 4th SAI with ability during the arduous and difficult street fighting which took place in Longueval from 14 to 19 July.

“Lieut-Colonel W E C Tanner CMG (commanding 2nd SAI), was in command of his battalion in the attack on Delville Wood, and after the capture of the wood was, until wounded on 17 July, in command of the troops holding it. He carried out his duties in an able manner.

“Lieut-Colonel E F Thackeray CMG (commanding 3rd SAI), commanded his battalion at the capture of Delville Wood and. after Lieut-Col Tanner was wounded, took over the command of the troops in the wood, with orders that it was to be held at all costs. On the morning of 18 July the enemy commenced a hurricane bombardment and attacked the wood with 9½ battalions. The troops holding the perimeter of the wood were practically decimated — all officers being either killed or wounded.

“Lieut-Colonel Thackeray’s Headquarters had been established in a narrow trench in the south-west portion of the wood known as Buchanan Street. Here this gallant officer, in spite of heavy bombardment and constant fierce attacks by the enemy, held on with his few remaining men.

“During the night 18/19 several hot bombing fights took place during which Lieut-Col Thackeray’s fine work stimulated his much exhausted men to fight on.

“Lieut-Colonel Thackeray with the remnants of his force held the south-west portion of Delville Wood until 20 July when he was relieved.

“I have no hesitation in stating that in my opinion it was the splendid gallantry, fine example and devotion to duty of this officer that enabled the British troops to retain a footing in Delville Wood. I recommend that he be awarded the Victoria Cross.

“Major D Macleod took over the command of the 4th SAI after the death of Lieut-Colonel Jones. This officer has proved himself to be a gallant and

capable battalion commander. In the fighting in Delville Wood he continued to command his men until he was wounded a second time.

“Major R N Pringle. This officer was in command of the bearer section, SA Field Ambulance, attached to my brigade. The evacuation of the wounded was a most difficult task but this officer by his untiring efforts did everything to overcome it with the means at his disposal.

“Major G R Hearn. This officer commanded the 64th Field Company, RE, attached to my brigade, and rendered valuable service.

“Captain J Patterson, commanding 28th Brigade Machine-gun Company, and Captain P J Baily, commanding the SALTM Battery both carried out their duties to my satisfaction.

“A number of officers and other ranks have been recommended by me already for immediate reward for special acts of gallantry and good work performed by them in the course of the operations and I attach a schedule of these.

“Owing to the heavy casualties amongst officers it has been impossible to obtain all recommendations of regimental officers — this is particularly the case as regards the 2nd SAI, as all officers of that unit who were in Delville Wood became casualties.

“As I do not wish to delay submitting this despatch I propose to submit my further recommendations at a later date.”

*

Major Hunt’s recollection of the following four days concerned reinforcements, newspapermen — and rest.

“July 21st — Moved to Happy Valley. Draft of 88 joined. Harris acting adjutant.

“July 22nd — Happy Valley. Draft of 59 joined. Mitchell rejoined from Highland Brigade staff.

“July 23rd — Moved via Meaulté to Maricourt. Set upon by a plague of war correspondents, but found myself somewhat at a loss as they wanted ‘incidents’ and at the moment I could think of none to tell them. Entrained at night for Hengest.

“July 24 — Marched to Moufflers and lay down in afternoon and rested in long grass.”

*

When Lieut-Col Frederic Tatham heard that his son, Lieut Errol Tatham, was reported as “wounded and missing” he immediately went to Delville Wood to personally search for him. He had just been informed that his youngest son, Midshipman William Tatham, 19, was presumed killed when his submarine hit a mine in the Adriatic.

On 18 August Col Tatham wrote a letter in which he resigned himself to Errol’s death.

“The dead lying in Delville Wood were still unburied when I was there (because burial was impossible under the fire going on). Men lie in layers. The South African heroes lie underneath.

“I wonder whether history will do them justice. Will it tell how, ordered to take and hold the wood at all costs, they took it — and then began one of the most heroic defences known in the history of war? For three days (July 15-18) they were subjected to continuous bombardment by guns of all calibre. They held on with very little food or water. Over and over again they were attacked by overwhelming enemy forces. The gallant fellows fell fast under the terrific bombardment and attacks, but not a man wavered.

“Finding them immovable, the Germans, at last, on the 18th, concentrated a terrific bombardment for seven hours on what was left of these splendid men, and then, about 5 or 6 pm launched an attack by three regiments on the survivors. The front trench was attacked in front and on each flank. My son’s

trench was attacked from back and front.

“Our gallant, splendid men, reduced to a mere skeleton of what they were, beat back the Brandenburgers. It was during this awful time that my dear boy fell. They died, our noble South Africans, but they held the wood! Thank God, they held the wood! and thank God, they kept up the traditions of our race! And my splendid boy helped. He took no inconsiderable part either.

“I want our South Africans to get the credit they deserve. If you have any friends who can spread the news of what they did, let it be told. I resign my dear son, who was very, very dear to me, into the safe keeping of my Maker, who gave him to me. It is very hard to part with him, but I glory in his glorious end, my splendid, chivalrous boy: and if his example inspires others, he will not have died in vain.

“Use this letter as you like, in order to let the world know what the South Africans did. I want these heroes to have some (they can never have all) of the honour due to their glorious memories. What a theme for some painter’s brush or some poet’s inspiration!”

*

Reports reaching South Africa of the Delville Wood battle and casualties were at first unconfirmed and gave rise to rumours of terrific losses sweeping the country. The “South Africa” newspaper repudiated such rumours in order to allay unnecessary alarm.

“Rumour has been busy this week with tales of how the South Africans have suffered in the Great Sweep. As the very circumstantial report went, out of a force of 4,000, only 400 were left. This was too much to go unchallenged, and ‘South Africa’ took the matter up with the Records Office in Victoria Street. Colonel Herbert condemned the statement unhesitatingly, and said that the circulators of such alarms ought to be punished.

“The South African casualties are no higher than those of any other troops,

and 20 per cent would be a liberal estimate. Further, the proportion of wounded to killed in the lists is very large. The truth of this is shown by a typical list issued one day this week, wherein there were 60 of the former to six of the latter.

"There are also a great number of trivial wounds which heal quickly … It is interesting to observe, by the way, that the rank and file casualty lists are published approximately a fortnight after the casualties occur. Officers' names are telegraphed and get through more quickly.

"Colonel Herbert entirely denies the story of the 400 survivors, and characterises it as a pure invention. 'There might be an excuse for it if it came straight from the front,' he said. 'Wounded, and with men falling all around, one gets a highly exaggerated idea of the number of deaths occurring.'"

*

The "glamour" of war is lost on the dead, wounded, blinded and maimed. The South African wounded walked or were carried on stretchers to the regimental aid posts (RAPs) then to advanced dressing-stations (ADS) where they were given anti-tetanus injections. From there they were conveyed at night in ambulances or wagons to a casualty clearing-station (CCS) near Corbie then to a field hospital.

Transport was then by barge to Abbeville (No 1 SA General Hospital) or by hospital train to Rouen or to the large military hospital at Etaples on the coast. If the patient qualified for a Blighty he was taken by hospital ship to England. The large London hospitals were at Shepherd's Bush, Tooting, Clapton, Wandsworth (No 3 General Hospital), Denmark Hill (No 4 General Hospital) and Richmond, the latter being later reserved largely for Springbok patients and staffed by South African doctors and nurses.

*

Arthur Stanley of the 1st Battalion D Coy was gassed at Delville Wood.

Despite this he was impressed by London's reception to our wounded.

"The reception London gave us when the ambulance train arrived was marvellous. The crowd stopped the ambulances and nearly smothered us with roses and pinks, and all the old men (no young now) raised their hats when we passed, and all ladies waved. As for us we mostly wiped our eyes.

"The wounded who are able, go driving every day and have a grand time. I am on a water-bed, not allowed to move, worse luck. Each morning about nine they carry my bed out into the grounds and there I stay till eight at night reading and writing a little, and thinking lots; not what you would call a stirring life perhaps, but there are no shells or land mines and it suits me for a while.

"The English papers say great things of the South African Infantry, and I'm very bucked by it; as many of my pals are dead and I'm glad it's not in vain.

"The doctor does not tell me much, but I overhear I've got to go on getting worse for six weeks and then either take up land (6 ft x 2 ft) or more or less get well. The pain is not bad, only a tired feeling and suffocation, alternating with violent fits of coughing that do not remove the obstruction."

*

Arthur Betteridge of the 4th SAI C Coy was one of the wounded men sent to England.

"I must have done a lot of sleeping because the next thing I recalled was waking up in a hospital ship filled with all manner of officers and men who had an astonishing variety of wounds. We were bedded down in a series of bunks built in tiers.

"It was so refreshing to feel the unaccustomed cleanliness of sheets and to see the cheerful clean faces of VAD nurses and sisters. Two of the wounded men died on the way across the channel. They were buried in England. On arrival at Southampton we were relabelled for conveyance to various

hospitals. I was taken to Chelsea Hospital in London where most of the British regulars who had been blinded a year earlier, were attended to.

“Next morning an old Boer War veteran sister attended to my wound in the thigh; without moistening the bandage which fitted the hole nicely, tore the bandage off, giving me hell. I objected to this treatment and she was quite shocked that a mere private should dare to complain. When I spoke to the doctor he sent me to the South African Hospital at Richmond.

“I forgot to mention that while lying in the field before being picked up, I was slightly gassed as well. This seriously affected my eyes; for a few days I was almost blind. Fortunately no serious damage was done by the gas and I quickly regained normal sight. Instead of reaching the South African hospital I landed up at a delightful VAD hospital on Richmond Green where I met several of my pals who had also been wounded a few days before I got my Blighty.

“The nurses here were kindness itself. The site of the hospital was right next to the Thames at Richmond Bridge. In this lovely home for the wounded, we had lots of fun. Some of the nurses were rather inexperienced and we pulled their legs, asking why it was necessary when taking or getting a bed bath, for them to wash us down as far as possible, then up as far as possible, leaving the washing of ‘possible’ to the patient himself.

“When able to get about on crutches we were able to explore the delights of the river, many a happy afternoon was spent in a punt on that lovely part of the river. Eelpie Island was at its best that fine summer in 1916.

“On 21 July my parents in Klerksdorp received a cable, saying I was missing, presumed killed in France. News of the battle for Delville Wood had appeared in the South African papers which carried news of the battle and heavy casualties.

“My mother positively disbelieved I had been killed. She explained to my

father and sisters that about the time I was wounded on the 18th, not knowing I had been wounded that day, she had a most vivid feeling I had been hurt in the battle then raging, but that I was safe. She had not told the family because she did not want to worry them.

“Only a week later was the original news amended to say I was seriously wounded but safe in hospital. That night of the 18th my mother dreamed she saw me in a kilt on a stretcher talking to a man in uniform who did not wear a kilt. She was convinced I was safe.

“Mother must have been psychic because she had a similar feeling about my brother in April the following year when he was wounded at Arras. Only a week later was the news received that my brother had in fact been wounded. Another strange coincidence was that my aunt in Torquay read in the newspaper that a Private Arthur Betteridge had been killed in the Battle of the Somme the same month I was wounded. This was no relative although he came from Birmingham where I was born.

“There are many cases on record of wives and mothers having these extraordinary telepathic experiences which proved to be correct. It is strange that science has not been able to adequately account for them.

“I met several pals who had also come to Blighty suffering from wounds. We were not at all surprised to learn that of the 980 officers and men of the SA Scottish who entered the battle, only 49 of them marched out of Delville Wood.

“Major Hunt was among them and he recorded later that when they marched into Happy Valley, they were plagued by a swarm of war correspondents eager to get personal stories of incidents in the battle. There were so many of them to select what these people wanted. Figures spoke for themselves.

“Only 137 officers and men came out of the wood while nearly 4,000 of the

Brigade went into the battle. Of the famous 9th (Scottish) Division, of which we South Africans were proud members, only ten per cent were not killed or wounded.

"Another remarkable incident in the wood must be mentioned. Padre Hill remained in the front line for three days and nights helping the wounded and the dying. He was sometimes able to cook a billycan of hot water in the midst of that holocaust, to make tea or Bovril for the few men holding the line.

"I saw him twice unconcernedly giving first-aid to the wounded and once giving consolation of the last rites to the dying, irrespective of their religion. He was eventually induced to accept the MC, but no decoration was good enough for the constant bravery of our Padre. He was one of the few men of the cloth who put their beliefs into practice under very trying conditions.

"Sergeant Vic Hunt and two other signallers were among the few who came out of the wood unscathed although all of them had many escapes from death. Two Military Medals were awarded the section and these three men tossed for them. My pal, Gurrie McGuire, a telegraphist on the railway in Pietermaritzburg was one of the lucky ones, Vic Hunt the other. Vic was killed at Arras in April 1917.

"Thinking of my own narrow escapes, I came to the conclusion I was born to be hung, not killed in war. Several of us discussed the reason why we had been selected to be among the fortunate ones to be alive after our recent experiences. What was the reason? We came to the conclusion that at early age there was a large element of luck or fate on the battlefield, especially. If a shell or bullet was intended for you, you got it.

"Even this reasoning was unsatisfactory to most of us. What was totally inexplicable was that we had been taught God was on our side. The enemy had been similarly brainwashed. We decided God had nothing to do with the havoc caused by man himself, right down the pages of history.

“Only as recently as the battle of Waterloo, the Germans were fighting with us against the French. Man is a terrifying brutal animal, in fact the only animal who kills his kind unnecessarily. I am still trying to understand why so many men who believe in God, deliberately go about killing others who believe in Him also.

“One thing was clear to us. The comradeship of men brought together in battle was a thing to be treasured. I am still proud to recall that several friendships formed during my army service, still exist. A lot of happiness has resulted from these alliances formed more than half a century ago.

“Unfortunately most of my wartime friends have passed on. Many of them had their lives shortened as a result of wounds, gas or shellshock. It is a sad reflection that one must now ask oneself — Was it worth it? That splendid phrase ‘War to end Wars’ lost its meaning long ago.”

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Geoffrey Lawrence of C Coy, 1st SAI continues his story from the casualty clearing-station.

“Lying in the bed next to me was a young Highlander with bandages over both eyes. I was told a bullet had passed through behind the eyes severing the nerves and blinding him.

“I could not sleep that night for listening to the roar in the distance and thinking of the fellows I had left in that awful wood. I was somewhat consoled about leaving them when my wound was examined and it was considered necessary to put the leg in splints, there being no exit wound.

“I was now a stretcher case and put into a nice bed in an ambulance train bound for Rouen and from there loaded on to the St George hospital ship. Stretcher cases were stacked far below; knowing enemy submarines were about, I was pleased when we were safely put ashore at Southampton.

“We reached Waterloo Station in due course and were stacked in long rows

on the platform where some lovely nurses attended us. All South Africans were taken to Tooting Military Hospital and very well treated there by kind nurses and staff.

“My poor little half-section, Gussie, and most of my company fell in that holocaust of destructive fury. My first ten days in hospital were spent in bed. The comfort of cool sheets, good meals served by nurses or patients on the mend, made life in bed a restful and happy affair.

“For the moment our main worry was of the news in the daily papers and the long casualty lists. If only we could get news of the friends we left in the wood and how the battle as a whole was going. Reports in the papers appeared to us rather over-optimistic and yet progress was claimed and ground won, but at what cost?

“In our ward there were many of our men who could walk around being wounded in the arms or head. I had many of these as visitors and we would go over again our individual experiences. Some were wounded earlier than I was though a surprisingly large number were hit on the 16th as I was.

“A few were there who were wounded on the 17th and 18th and described the terrific fighting and overwhelming shell fire of those days of sheer horror and grim holding on relieved by intense bouts of repulsing heavy enemy attacks when they were killed in their hundreds by our accurate rifle-and Lewis gun fire.

“A man in our ward of dormitory-like rows of beds kept walking up and down the ward in great pain clasping his armless shoulder. He came from the Bedford district and as far as I can remember his name was Ainslie. I know it was a Scot’s name.

“The poor chap had his right arm taken off very close to the shoulder and told us his still raw wound was paining him terribly and that he could distinctly feel his fingers that weren’t there. He told me how his arm was

shattered from the elbow down by a shell blast and as he was being dressed at a first-aid post in the wood another shell fell alongside him and took the remainder of the same arm off as far as his shoulder and killed most of those who were aiding him.

"He got away somehow and after a further operation in France was evacuated to Tooting Military Hospital. All this happened only two weeks earlier and the fresh wound was giving him great pain. Being a hefty and extremely fit fellow he was able to stand the shock, one that would have killed a weaker man.

"He was in the 4th (Scottish) regiment of our brigade and I remember wore his kilt with great dash. Unfortunately I lost touch with him when he left us for specialised treatment and a metal arm. He was a great chap and was liked and admired by us all.

"In bed on the other side of me was a young chap by the name of Jones, either 1st or 3rd South African Infantry who had a very narrow escape. He was firing at the enemy at the edge of the wood when a bullet struck him in the mouth, pushed his back teeth through his cheek and passed out at the base of his head only just missing his spine. He was wonderfully patched up and got a fine set of false teeth to boot.

"Another young fellow came in with shell-shock; he had been blown high up into the air by a bursting shell and miraculously came down without a scratch of any kind but was deaf and dumb. His deafness cleared in hospital but he was unable to talk. A few weeks later he was accidentally bumped and being annoyed, said 'Damn!' From then on he was cured and spoke fluently and amusingly of his strange experience and of the frustration during his spell of speechlessness.

"I was soon up and about and spent many cheery hours chatting with the less fortunate still in bed. An X-ray was taken of my leg and this showed up a

nose cap screw from the shell that got me. Having burnt and sterilized its way in, it was decided to leave it and await further developments. My cousin, a doctor in the South African Medical Corps, promised to take it out free of charge when we returned home. Unfortunately the poor chap did not survive the war. The screw remains with reminders at times of my lucky Blighty.

"Fitted out in hospital blues we were free to visit the town with few restrictions. We were well entertained by many people who took us on jaunts into the countryside and generally made a fuss of us.

"After six weeks I was discharged and given the customary ten days' leave. This was mostly spent in the Isle of Wight at Totland Bay with an old aunt of mine who had made her home there many years before. What a lovely island it is in the early autumn of September; it was good to be alive and able to enjoy the peace and beauty of the green countryside."

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After the South Africans were relieved the fighting continued on a lesser scale for the next eight weeks.

On 27 July the 2nd Division re-took Delville Wood and held it until 4 August. The 17th Division then took over. On 18 and 25 August the wood was cleared of all enemy resistance by the 14th (Light) Division.

On 31 August the Germans counter-attacked. The front line was north and east of the wood. Three assaults were launched under cover of artillery fire and aeroplane surveillance. They regained a foothold, only to be finally evicted on 8 September by three brigades of the 7th and 24th Divisions.

Guillemont was taken after bloody fighting on 3 September and Ginchy six days later.

The 15th September 1916 was to be a red-letter day — for this was the first time that tanks were used in battle and it was the day that High Wood and the Delville Wood areas were cleared of Germans.

The tank had been developed under the greatest secrecy. Crews were trained near Thetford, Norfolk, under a similar cloak of security. Despite opposition, Gen Haig was determined to use this secret weapon in the Somme.

Of the 32 tanks at the assembly area only 24 actually went into battle. Most became bogged down or were knocked out. Four tanks broke through to Flers and rumbled down the main street with cheering infantry following. By that evening all the tanks had been destroyed or scattered.

One of the artillery officers in action on the 15th was Capt Kenneth Willoughby Lee MC, 28. Lee was born in October 1886 and educated at Wellington College and Woolwich. He was commissioned in 1906, then went to South Africa with the 96th Battery where he was employed in survey work in the Transvaal.

In October 1912 Lee married Alfreda Botha, the step-daughter of Christian Botha MLA, of Bloemfontein, and they had a daughter, Sylvia. He rejoined his battery and went to India, then exchanged into the 35th Brigade and returned to England in 1913.

Lee took part in the 1st Battle of Ypres in October 1914 with the 12th Battery RFA. After four days in action he galloped a gun into the open within 1,000 yards of the enemy and fired 70 shells into a strong point, thereby destroying it. Three German batteries fired on him but he managed to get the gun away without losing a man or a horse. For this he was awarded the MC and promoted to captain.

Captain Lee took part in the battles of Loos and Neuve Chapelle and in May 1915 was wounded at Festubert and sent home on sick leave. When he returned to the front he was given command of A Bty, 95th Bde RFA. He was badly wounded during the attack on 15 September 1916.

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Thereafter the equinoctial rains turned the battlefields into quagmires. In a last attack on 13 November Beaumont Hamel in the west was finally captured. The British advanced over the high ground and condemned themselves to spend the winter in the valley's flooded trenches. Nothing of any great value had been attained and "The Big Push" was over.

On 17 February 1918 the brigade returned to the wood to hold a memorial service. A tall wooden cross was erected on the south side near Longueval and was inscribed "In memory of the officers and men of the 1st SA Infantry Brigade who fell in action in July 1916 in the Battle of the Somme".

The drumhead service was conducted by chaplains of the English, Presbyterian and Dutch churches. A lament on the pipes was composed and played by Pipe-Major Sandy Grieve of the 4th SAI.

Delville Wood was lost during the great German offensive in April 1918. It is incongruous that Marrieres Wood, where the South African Brigade was overrun by the Germans on 24 March, lies only a few miles south-east of Delville Wood. The wood was retaken by the 38th (Welsh) Division on 28 August 1918.

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After being relieved the brigade marched to Maricourt on 23 July, then entrained for Hengest. On the 27th they arrived in the Frevillers area north of the main road between Arras and St Pol, where they were reinforced by new drafts.

On 23 August the brigade relieved the 26th Brigade in the Vimy area. At the end of that month Lieut-Col Christian arrived from England and took temporary command of the 2nd SAI. On 23 September the brigade was relieved and on 9 October moved to High Wood where they took over from the 142nd Brigade.

On 12 October the brigade took part in the attack on the Butte de

Warlencourt. After a week of heavy fighting they were forced to withdraw, having sustained approximately 1,150 casualties. The Butte de Warlencourt was finally occupied in February 1917 when the Germans retreated.

During November 1916 the brigade was billeted in the St Quentin and Arras areas. When Gen Furse was appointed as Master General of the Ordinance, Gen Lukin was promoted to command the 9th Division with the rank of Major-General. Lieut-Colonel Dawson took command of the brigade and Major Heal of the 1st SAI in turn.

On 4 March 1917 the brigade marched from Arras to Ostreville for intensive training. On 6 April they were inspected by Gen J C Smuts and three days later they took part in the Battle of Arras. Their advance was steady despite mounting casualties however the following day, due to faulty artillery support, the South African attack failed.

In July 1917 the brigade moved to the Somme area for training. Two months later they accompanied the 9th Division to Flanders to take part in the Third Battle of Ypres. On 20 September the brigade had its most successful achievement of the war in taking the heavily defended “pill-boxes” of the German Bremen Redoubt. At this Battle of Menin Road the brigade’s second VC was won by L/Cpl W H Hewitt.

Between 13 and 26 October the brigade occupied a salient near Paschendaele and endured much bombing by enemy aircraft. On 15 October Lieut-Col Tanner left the 2nd SAI to take command of the 8th Brigade (3rd Division) and was succeeded by Lieut-Col Christian.

On 20 November 1917 the brigade left the Ypres area. On 1 December they began marching southward in bitter cold sleet. They relieved the Guards Division near Gouzeacourt south-west of Cambrai in the Somme and set about repairing the defences. New recruits arrived and rapidly trained in trench warfare. As it was mid-winter there was much illness and also

problems with trench feet.

At the end of January the brigade was taken out of the line for a much needed rest. On 17 February the brigade held a memorial service at Delville Wood. Sgt McFee of the 4th SAI made a cross from a shattered tree while Pte John Greggor played the Last Post. The cross was unveiled by Padre Hill. In accordance with British policy one battalion had to be disbanded and the following day the 3rd SAI ceased to exist. Practically all the men joined one of the other South African units. General Lukin left the division at the beginning of March and returned home on leave.

The brigade, numbering approximately 1,800, then returned to the front and on 12 March took over from the 116th Brigade of the 39th Division. The Great German offensive was unleashed on 21 March. Under the cloak of a dense mist the German army rolled forward, crushing all opposition.

The South Africans defended Gauche Wood and re-took Chapel Hill then, as ordered, fell back. General Dawson handled the brigade skilfully during the following two days as they retreated westwards. Acting as the rearguard of the 9th Division, they held up the German advance as best they could. Lieutenant Garnet Green and B Company of the 2nd SAI were destroyed, fighting to the end.

At dawn on the 24th remnants of the brigade, about 500 in all, waited at Marrieres Wood for the impending German assault. There could be no retreat as the countryside was devoid of cover. Dawson sent a messenger to the rear with the brigade’s records. They were shelled in error by British artillery, then by the Germans. The frontal attack was beaten off by Lewis gunners. Lieut-Colonel Heal of the 1st SAI was killed, an example of cheerfulness until the end

By 4.15 pm only 100 men were left, short of ammunition and with every machine-gun and Lewis gun out of action. They were overrun shortly

afterwards. German officers referred to the last stand of the South African brigade as “magnificent”. Of the commanders, Heal was dead, MacLeod wounded and Dawson and Christian prisoners. Remnants of the brigade began collecting almost immediately behind the British lines and were formed into one battalion under Lieut-Col Young.

The composite battalion then accompanied the 9th Division. The brigade was immediately reorganised and Gen Tanner brought back as its commander: the 1st SAI was placed under Lieut-Col Young, the 2nd under Capt Jacobs and the 4th under Capt Reid.

On 8 April 1918 the reconstructed brigade was thrown into the Battle of Messines Ridge. The South Africans performed well, charging and routing Germans with the bayonet. Four days later they were withdrawn and joined up once more with the 9th Division. On the 16th Tanner led the brigade into the Battle of the Lys near Mt Kemmel. The brigade reassembled on the 23rd.

As sufficient reinforcements were not forthcoming the remnants of the brigade was organised into one composite battalion with Lieut-Col H Bamford MC as commander and Major H Jenkins as second-in-command. The 9th Scottish Rifles and 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers were included with the SA battalion in one brigade commanded by Gen Tanner.

They took part in the battle of 29 April when the Germans were repulsed with heavy losses. On 5 May the brigade rejoined the 9th Division. Thereafter followed the action of 25 June near Meteren in which five men were killed and Lieutenants Harvey and Uys and 21 other ranks wounded. On 19 July the brigade assisted in the taking of Meteren.

During August 1,000 men were drafted to the battalion. It was then once more reorganised into a brigade under Gen Tanner. On 11 September the brigade left the 9th Division and joined the 66th Division. The parting from the 9th after two and a half years of fighting together was not easy.

On 8 and 9 October the South Africans fought from Beaurevoir to Maretz, then encircled Reumont. The last great fight of the brigade, indeed of the war, was the attack on the “Hermann Line” and the crossing of the Selle River north of Le Cateau between 17 and 20 October 1918.

The South African brigade moved forward again on 2 and 9 November. On Monday, 11 November the 1st SAI Brigade was at the forefront of the British advance when the armistice came into force at 11 am. The brigade had travelled a long road and left many of its brave sons along the way. The casualties in France were close on 15,000 of whom 5,000 were dead. Although it was disbanded on demobilisation the brigade left a proud war record. This pride South Africa still shows in its annual Delville Wood memorial services.

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The Battle of Delville Wood revealed a major flaw in strategic planning. There was too little room for cavalry to manoeuvre around the natural obstacles the woods presented. The only recourse was to assault and occupy them, which in turn led to the slaughter of infantry by artillery and snipers.

Had the enemy lines across a broad front been captured and the infantry consolidated in the open ground beyond the wood, the carnage experienced in taking and holding the wood would have been avoided. As a prelude to the attack the German strong points within the wood could have been subjected to and destroyed by a heavy artillery bombardment, instead of leaving them for the infantry.

It is conceivable, however, that had there been no Delville Wood for the Springboks there would have been some other such battle to commemorate, for Gen Haig used up his brigades in one assault after another until by mid-November the British Empire’s casualties for the Somme were over 500,000.

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Private Albert Marr and Jackie returned to the front in November 1916 and survived the later fighting at Arras, Ypres and Paschendaele. Jackie proved extremely useful in the front lines. The friendly baboon entertained the men to relieve the boredom and stalemate of trench warfare. At night he accompanied Marr on guard duty and was particularly useful because of his keen eyesight and acute hearing. He would give early warning of enemy movement or impending attacks with a series of short, sharp barks and would tug at Marr's tunic.

Jackie wore his uniform with panache and would light a cigarette for a "pal". He always saluted any officers passing on their rounds. Jackie went "over the top" with the regiment in all the heavy fighting they were engaged in and shared all the privations of the ordinary soldier in the muddy shell holes and trenches on the western front.

Peter Digby, honorary curator of the Transvaal Scottish Regimental Museum, wrote of Jackie's further experiences in his article, *The Mascot who went over the Top*.

"After the German advance in April 1918, the South African Brigade was being heavily shelled as they retreated to Rinningholst. Jackie was seen frantically trying to build a wall of stones around himself, to serve as additional protection from the flying shrapnel from the shells that were bursting all around. In this he was merely copying the actions of soldiers he had seen going through similar motions. The wall was never completed. A jagged piece of shrapnel wounded him in the arm and another in the leg. At first Jackie refused to be evacuated by the stretcher-bearers trying vainly to continue with his wall, hobbling around in excruciating pain, on the bloody stump that had been a leg.

"The incredible story is best told in the words of Lieut-Col R N Woodsend of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who wrote of the incident as follows: 'It

was a pathetic sight; the little fellow carried by his keeper, lay moaning in pain, the man crying his eyes out in sympathy. “You must do something for him, he saved my life in Egypt. He nursed me through dysentry.” The baboon was badly wounded, the left leg hanging with shreds of muscle, another jagged wound in his right arm.’

“‘We decided to give the patient chloroform and dress his wounds. If he died under the anaesthetic perhaps it would be the best thing. As I had never given an anaesthetic to such a patient before, I thought it would be the most likely result. However, he lapped up the chloroform as if it had been whisky, and was well under in a remarkably short time. It was a simple matter to amputate the leg with scissors and I cleaned the wounds and dressed them as well as I could.

“‘He came round as quickly as he went under. The problem then was what to do with him. This was soon settled by his keeper: “He is on the strength.” So duly labelled, number, name ATS injection, nature of injuries, etc., he was taken to the road and sent by a passing ambulance to the casualty clearing-station. It was several days before I could visit the CCS. “Oh yes” said the commanding officer; “he was pretty bad when he arrived, but we put him to bed and that night when I was doing the rounds he sat up in bed to salute me. He went down to the base hospital the next day.” This hospital was on the French coast and it was a common sight to see Jackie frolicking on the beach with the other patients.’

“With the war drawing to a close, it was the end of active service for Albert and Jackie. They received much publicity in newspapers such as The Times. September 28th saw the two friends at Inkermann Barracks, on the occasion of the 2nd SAI Reserve Battalion’s sports day. During the course of the afternoon, Major-General Sir H T Lukin KCB, DSO, who had commanded the SA Brigade in France, introduced Jackie as the mascot of the 3rd SAI.

Private Marr went round the ring of curious onlookers and collected funds for the Red Cross.

“Jackie had many other momentous occasions of a similar nature to look back on — surely his proudest moment came with his participation in the Lord Mayor’s Day procession of the Right Honourable Sir Horace Brooks-Marshall, the then mayor of London. In the printed programme of the Order of Procession of Saturday, 9 November 1918, appears the following note: ‘77mm German Gun captured by SA Troops, with Jackie the baboon (twice wounded in action).’ So from that vantage point, Jackie rode through the streets like royalty and saw London.

“From early September to 14 February 1919, Jackie and Private Marr had been lent to the Red Cross by the War office and the South African Government for the purpose of collecting money for sick and wounded soldiers. Between them they raised over R2,000. At one Red Cross fete in Leicester, for example, Jackie charged 25c for a handshake and 50c for a kiss. Much of the money the pair made was from postcards depicting Jackie and Private Marr, which were sold.

“On 5 May 1919, Jackie and Albert were on the last leg of their long journey home to Pretoria and Cheshire Farm, Villeria. That day, a Sunday, Jackie dined at Johannesburg’s Park Station Restaurant. Sitting on a chair next to Albert, he demolished the excellent fare provided for him by the buffet. As a reporter on the spot wrote: ‘Jackie is endowed with a lot of intelligence. He had an affectionate countenance and seems to understand all Marr said — “Now shake hands with the gentleman” and there was no hesitation about doing it.’

“Jackie had been officially discharged at Maitland Dispersal Camp, Cape Town on 26 April. On his arm Jackie wore one gold wound stripe and the three blue service chevrons indicating three years’ frontline service. At

Maitland he received the usual parchment discharge paper, a military pension, plus a ‘Civil Employment Form for Discharged Soldiers’, which had been filled in, signed and witnessed like any other such document.

“After their arrival home, Jackie was again feted and the centre of attention on occasions as the parade to officially welcome back the 1st SAI Brigade and the Peace Parade on Church Square, Pretoria, on 31 July 1919, where he received the Pretoria Citizen’s Service Medal.

“Jackie was able to live out his days in peaceful retirement. To have gone to war was one thing, but to actually return home was quite another. Life on the farm continued until his death on 22 May 1921, the day after a fire destroyed the Marr home, the shock and perhaps unconscious reminder of the war was too much for Jackie. He was buried in an unmarked grave on Cheshire Farm, Villeria. Thus died the loveable Jackie, an unsung hero, yet he had made a unique contribution to the tapestry of South African military history.”

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In 1917 Nancy suffered a broken horn during the shelling at Armentieres. She bolted in panic and collided with a tree trunk. As no doctor was prepared to set the broken horn, it then grew downwards at an angle. Nancy’s tartan coat thereafter carried a gold wound stripe.

In April 1918 Nancy was at the forefront of the proceedings when memorials were erected at Delville Wood. In November she developed a growth in her neck and did not respond to treatment. The delicate springbok died on 26 November 1918, 15 days after the armistice.

Nancy was buried with full military honours in the cemetery of Hermeton-sur-Meuse, Belgium. Her skin was sent to a London taxidermist. The mounted springbok was then sent to Sir William Dalrymple and stood in his Parktown home for a number of years. He then presented it to the Transvaal Scottish Officers’ Mess at the Drill Hall, Johannesburg. In the early 1950s

Nancy was placed in the SA National War Museum in Johannesburg.

Chapter 12 — Memorials

The largest and most moving memorial is Delville Wood itself. The whole wood has been set aside as a cemetery, for more than 600 South Africans lie in its trenches and shell-holes. In addition we shall never know how many brave British and German soldiers lie there.

The glades follow the original rides and the street names are indicated on concrete blocks at intersections. Many paths follow the lines of trenches. Large hollows bear mute testimony to the fury of the shelling.

Other battlefields on the Somme such as Beaumont Hamel have had their trenches restored and have been turned into parks. Delville Wood differs in that, other than for the pathways, no restoration has been attempted and the ground is consecrated. No picnicking or games are allowed within its confines.

South Africa very nearly lost the opportunity of erecting a monument at Delville Wood. The military attaché at South Africa House, Col Herbert, was struck by the battered and desolate wood in which no one appeared interested. He sought out the owner and obtained an option to purchase the ground for £1,000, in the hope that the South African Government would buy it in order to erect a memorial there to the South African dead.

There was no response from Pretoria, however, and the option was about to lapse when he met Sir Percy Fitzpatrick (1862-1931) and told him of it. Sir Percy is most famous for his book, “Jock of the Bushveld” and for suggesting the two-minute pause on Armistice Day each year. Sir Percy, whose eldest son, Nugent, was killed in France in 1917, was horrified at the thought of losing the option so immediately took it over.

Soon after Sir Percy's return to South Africa he took the matter up with the Prime Minister, Gen Smuts, who wrote as follows to him: "I honour your feelings and thank you for what you were prepared to do … I should esteem it a favour if you will consent to take the lead in this matter of organising our voluntary effort to make Delville Wood a place in some small manner worthy of the memory of our great dead."

Sir Percy was appointed chairman of a Delville Wood Memorial Committee; the president was the Governor General and the vice-presidents were Gen Smuts, the four Provincial Administrators and the mayors of the four principal cities.

In 1920 Delville Wood was bought by the South African Government. During the following years poachers were attracted to the wood by the proliferating rabbits. As the gendarmes had no authority to enter South African sovereign territory it was agreed that France repurchase the wood. In accordance with policy the French Government bought back the land for one franc and granted South Africa its use in perpetuity. The South African Government is responsible for its upkeep.

The wood is fenced off with diamond-mesh wire, the only entrance being at the caretaker's cottage and the memorial area. The wood was replanted with indigenous trees.

Only one tree survived the battle, a hornbeam. A metal detector when placed against its gnarled and twisted trunk indicates that it is riddled with shrapnel, shell splinters and bullets. The tree is close to the present Voortrekker Cross of Consecration. Cuttings from this tree have found their way to South Africa and been planted at a number of places, among others General Smuts' home at Doornkloof, Irene, and the Garden of Remembrance at Pietermaritzburg.

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Public subscriptions were raised for the erection of a memorial. Sir Herbert Baker designed the cemetery and memorial. He decided to use the southern portion of the wood and to separate the cemetery from the memorial by using the existing road.

The following description of the memorial was published in October 1926:

“The design was entrusted to Sir Herbert Baker ARA, who appropriately included in one scheme the Memorial and the Imperial War Graves Cemetery, in which are buried the recovered bodies of those who fell at Delville Wood, and which lies adjacent to the wood itself, where the unrecovered bodies rest.

“The Longueval-Ginchy road separates the cemetery from the wood. At the far end of the cemetery stand little chapel-shelters, linked with a half-backed seat in the form of an apse; in the middle the Stone of Remembrance; and nearer the gate, the Cross of Sacrifice; the two latter being built in the centre of a grass path which separates the headstones.

“A broader path on the same axis leads through an avenue of young South African oaks up to the Great Arch of the Memorial, which is placed on the highest contour of the wood. Through the arch the grass path leads on again to the Cross of Consecration.

“The Memorial faces south; thus, southwards from the arch, is seen, through the avenue of oaks, the symbols and headstones of the cemetery; and northwards, a second Cross silhouetted against the position and the distant hill, which were held by the enemy.

“The arch is flanked on either side by a flint and stone semi-circular wall. These flanking walls terminate in two covered buildings, designed in reminiscence of the Summer House built by Simon Van der Stel on the slopes of Table Mountain above Groote Schuur.

“These buildings contain the Roll of Honour of the South African dead

commemorated by the Memorial. Steps lead up to the flat top, as in Van der Stel's building, and on the balustrade, dials indicate the memorable places of the surrounding battlefields.

"The central monument thus has its larger arches facing up and down the vista of the two Crosses; smaller arches at its side lead, by stone paths in front of the walls, to the flanking buildings. Above these side arches are the dedicatory inscriptions in English and Afrikaans:

To the Immortal Dead from South Africa, who at the call of Duty made the Great Sacrifice on the battlefields of Africa, Asia and Europe and on the Sea, this Memorial is dedicated in proud and grateful recognition by their countrymen.

Aan die onsterflike, Suid-Afrikaners wat op die Slagvelde van Afrika, Asië, en Europa en op See die Groot Offer op die Altaar van Plig gelê het, is hierdie Gedenkteken deur hul landgenote in trotse en dankbare herinnering gewy.

"On angle panels, in large letters, are graven the names of the eight greater battle areas where South Africans fought. In the centre, over the great arches, are the shorter inscriptions.

Their ideal is our legacy. Their sacrifice our inspiration.

Vir ons is hul ideaal 'n erfenis, hul offer 'n besieling.

Above these are the words '*Aux Morts*'.

"The stone dome which crowns the Monument supports a group in bronze of two men representing Physical Energy, and the two races of South Africa, between them leading a war horse into battle, and with one hand clasped over the horse's back.

"The group was inspired by the Greek sculpture of the twin gods Castor and Pollux and their horses guarding the steps of the Capitol at Rome, and by the legend of the great twin brethren who came overseas to fight in the ranks of

Rome.

"The whole of the sculpture is the work of Mr Alfred Turner ARA. The oaks, planted in a double row, framing the avenue were gathered from the old oaks at Franschhoek in the Cape Province — whose parent acorns were taken out from France by early colonists about 150 years ago.

"Behind the avenue, and stretching far away on all sides round the site of the memorial is the forest — now replanted and covered by brambles and other undergrowth."

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The memorial was unveiled by the widow of Gen Louis Botha on 10 October 1926. The South African Prime Minister, Gen J B M Hertzog addressed the gathering, and said in part:

"This monument dedicated to these our sons, will stand here in remembrance of that great sacrifice — an inspiration and a warning, a warning against human passion and national folly, an inspiration to all that is good and noble in human action and devotion, and in national unity of heart and endeavour.

"The part played in the war by our dead will ever be an inspiration to us. It will be recorded with pride in the pages of our history, so that future generations of South Africans, in the quiet of the evening can turn over these pages and hear the distant footsteps of men marching to their fate one in the proudness of their hearts they will claim them as their dead. And so once more may there be sanctified unto us the sacrifice of our dead who nobly surrendered their lives in the services of peace."

Field Marshal Earl Haig, commander-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Force in 1916, said in his speech: "In erecting your national memorial here at Delville Wood … no one will say that you have not chosen rightly. It was here that South African troops first gave proof on the Western Front of the

splendid dash and energy of their attack; it was here that they first showed with what dogged, unflinching resolution they could hold on to what they had won.

"It was here that the manhood of South Africa first paid on the Western Front its contribution in blood and suffering … to preserve those noble traditions and ideals of liberty and justice which are the common heritage of all members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. I am proud … to acknowledge the deep debt of gratitude I owe as their commander to the South African Brigade."

A scale model of the monument may be seen at the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town. The sculpture of the twin gods and the war-horse is also atop memorials before the Union Buildings in Pretoria and in the Gardens at Cape Town, the latter close to the statue of Gen Tim Lukin.

The custodian of the memorial until 1940 was Mr Beckwith, formerly of the SAI. From November 1947 Capt C E Norman acted as caretaker. Delville Wood was re-dedicated on 5 June 1952 to include the South African dead of the Second World War.

It is proposed to build a museum at Delville Wood. The visitor will then be in a position to understand what happened there and perhaps learn something of the men who fought there. The museum will be modelled on the Cape Town Castle, with rooms at each of the five corners, and will encircle the present Voortrekker Cross of Consecration.

During his last illness Marshal Foch was to write: "The heroic dead of South Africa, whether Dutch or British by origin, France will never forget what she owes to them."

If the French will never forget their debt to these men then neither should the South Africans.

*

The cemetery contains 5,493 graves and is the second largest in the Somme area. Of these only 151 graves are of South Africans killed at Delville Wood. Among the latter are Major Harry Gee, Lieuts Jack Hollingsworth, J G Connock, A H Brown, C T Litchford, F H Somerset and 16-year-old Pte Eric Beeton. One of the Britons interred is Sgt Alfred Gill VC, of the Kings Royal Rifle Corps.

Gill was 36 years old, married and came from Birmingham. His Victoria Cross citation reads: Date of Act of Bravery 27 July 1916.

The London Gazette dated 24 Oct 1916, records the following: “For most conspicuous bravery. The enemy made a very strong counter-attack on the right flank of the battalion, and rushed the bombing post after killing all the company bombers. Sergeant Gill at once rallied the remnants of his platoon none of whom were skilled bombers, and reorganised his defences, a most difficult and dangerous task, the trench being very shallow and much damaged. Soon afterwards the enemy nearly surrounded his men by creeping up through the thick undergrowth, and commenced sniping at about twenty yards’ range. Although it was almost certain death, Sgt Gill stood boldly up in order to direct the fire of his men. He was killed almost at once, but not before he had shown his men where the enemy were, and thus enabled them to hold up their advance. By his supreme devotion to duty and self-sacrifice he saved a very dangerous situation”.

The names of the South Africans buried in the Delville Wood cemetery are listed in the appendix “Roll of Honour” and in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s booklet, one of which is available at the cemetery.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for the maintenance of the cemetery. The beautiful flowers and manicured lawns pay tribute to their competence. At present the caretaker’s cottage is occupied by their district manager.

Each year on the anniversary of the battle the children of Longueval lay flowers on the graves of the South Africans buried there. The children's beautiful rendition of *Sarie Marais* has brought tears to the eyes of many pilgrims to the wood.

Ex-servicemen of the MOTHS (Memorable Order of Tin Hats) regularly repeat the famous words of Laurence Binyon:

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

Most of the men who fell at Delville Wood were Christians and it is fitting that a number of crosses have commemorated their memory. Wayside crosses can still be seen in the countryside near the wood.

In October 1926 Chaplain Eustace Hill MC, wrote an article entitled "Why Delville Wood had to have a Cross".

"These are some of the many reasons for this cross: The men of each of the four regiments set up a cross for their regiment. These crosses have been removed and now are held in high honour at the Castle, Cape Town; Natal; St John's College; and St George's Presbyterian Church, Johannesburg.

"The first memorial service was held by Dutch Reformed and Anglican Chaplains in 1917 beside one of these crosses, and the brigade formed up on three sides in the snow.

"On the way to the wood, past Montauban, the ruined church in 1916 still upheld a crucifix, which looked down on men going up to the wood, and as they entered the ruins of Longueval a wayside crucifix rose from a most welcome hollow, and so provided useful cover at its foot. These were left in dust after the final attack and so to replace them is a debt we owe.

"Again, if one penetrated below the talk of our men, and sought out the

spirit which remained constant in the hearts of the fellows, one found the crusaders' spirit.

"This is illustrated by some words of the colonel of the South African Scottish who, the day he was killed, said to me: 'These other campaigns' (pointing to rows of ribbons) 'are nothing. This is a crusade.' The shell that killed him cut those ribbons to bits, and sealed him as a crusader.

"The road up to the wood was in fact the Way of the Cross, trodden by men whose own difference had been adjusted at the cost of a little blood, but who had joined together to march to that front where they knew ninety per cent became casualties every push.

"Any doubts as to the reality of the odds against them were dispersed after entering the battle area. Limping past them was a long line of walking wounded and then the sorrowful parties of German prisoners and the unending succession of ambulances.

"On the horizon hung a cloud of smoke, reddened continually with flashes. Above the fog swung our 'gas bags' at regular intervals until they disappeared into the dim distance. Few and far were the enemy balloons, but not seen for long, as our men held the air and soon sent them into flames.

"This was the vision our men contemplated on Sunday, July 2nd, and the pause was a time of putting a severe test to the spirit. Religion is such a natural thing that it seems out of place only in an artificial Vanity-Fair-like atmosphere, as unnatural as a naked babe in a ballroom, but when nature stands with her inevitable bill in hand, humbug flees and nature regains her sway.

"Men wanted something fairer than this vision of very ugly death and bigger than their rapidly diminishing selves. The Great Christ, who faced the most awful torture who saw the certainty of agonising death, was also the Christ who steadfastly set his face towards the cross and moved forward.

Here was someone who felt all they felt about the horror of a violent death and yet did his duty.

“Martyrs got into close union with Him, but was He not the Friend of the ordinary man who, despite his sins, now and then really did try to do his duty and wanted to help sorely?

“All men had some religion, and I am sure were getting from it what helped them most. Clearly, still closer touch with the Great Christ was needed, and so at Dawn the chaplains all did their best to supply this need.

“What happened in one regiment is typical. At dawn an altar, made of two bales of forage, screened by three stretchers up-ended, stood in the middle of one regiment, and the strength of the Great Crusader passed into many and left them determined to do their best and bear the worst with minds peacefully active.

“Later on in the day a service of Penitence and Assurance of Forgiveness was held beside a gun, and for once it seemed as though Christianity had mastered the deadly spirit of worldliness, and was free to show its real fighting powers and ability to uplift weak flesh and overcome the devil himself.

“Life was intensely worth living and worth giving in return for such intensity. It was the joyous life given by the accepted cross to crusaders in their weak efforts to follow the Way of the Cross. Padre Cook had it as he said: ‘I’ve overcome all fear’, and fell carrying a stretcher from Bernafay Wood.

“Wounded, left exposed to shell fire because there was no cover for them, knew its powers, and young B---, after saying he felt no hatred against Germans but his wife and some of theirs would be widows next day, had this power, for, though shot through the chest, he sprang up and killed two Germans before he fell dead.

“Such acts of bravery, animated by the crusaders’ spirit of duty, whether active or passive, could be multiplied, but there is no need to further illustrate what is certain, namely, that the Cross of Christ has given Christians of all sorts, in all campaigns, and on both sides, an inspiration to do their duty, even unto death.

“It is thoughts of death for self that force themselves into the mind, and, despite all propaganda of the offensive, killing spirit, leave the soldier facing the call to die, rather than to kill, for his country.

“Victory no doubt throws the emphasis on the conquering spirit, and the Delville Wood Memorial expresses this.

“There is the arch surmounted by Castor and Pollux, Dutch and English leading the Horse of War.

“This artistic group must stir the martial pride of patriots; but, look through the arch into the heart of the wood and see the cross. Pass under the arch — move over the ground they trod, when shells were falling seven a second, and get to the cross. Leave the world and its poor values behind and as you think yourself back into the spirit of the best of those men, you will feel the cross had to be there, in the midst.

“The crusaders’ spirit is the bond of union, uniting all South African patriots all over the Empire, and the cross in the wood symbolises the best spirit, and the truest union of all South Africans. This high sense of sacrifice in a greater and greater comradeship we pray will grow and grow until it passes from Dominion to Empire and from Empire to the whole World.”

*

One of the strangest occurrences, bordering on the supernatural, concerns the “miracle” cross of Pietermaritzburg. For 60 years the cross wept annually during July by exuding resin from the knots.

In 1918 the SA Pioneer Corps made three crosses from timber salvaged

from the splintered trees of Delville Wood. One was placed at the Cenotaph in Durban, the second at the Castle in Cape Town and the third in the Carbineers garden alongside the Pietermaritzburg City Hall. This cross bears the date “July 1916” on the upright and the words “2nd SAI” on the crossbar.

In 1958 the Pietermaritzburg cross was moved to its present niche in the MOTHS circular Garden of Remembrance in Leinster Road. The annual weeping then became particularly noticeable. The oozing takes place at knots at both ends of the crossbar. The upright bar, although it has many knots, does not “weep”.

Mr Jac Uys, an inspector of the Department of Forestry, made an investigation into this phenomenon. In the Carbineer Gardens the cross had faced west. Mr E Milford, national vice-chairman of the MOTHS told him that the cross wept profusely at the time.

Mr Uys took a sample of the resin and sent it to the Wattle Research Institute for analysis. He also sent shavings of wood to Pretoria for analysis. The cross is made from the Pinus Sylvester, a European pine tree prevalent in that part of France at the time. He ascertained that Mr William Olive, a local building contractor, had made the cross and used liberal applications of linseed oil.

Some of the theories advanced to explain this phenomena are:

a. The cylindrical hut acts as a heat trap. In fact the shelter is open. In any event the cross stood in the midday sun at the City Hall.

b. It may contain pieces of shrapnel which expands during July and heats the resin — in this case the weeping should take place in December, summer time!

c. The cross exudes the linseed oil used. The “resin” sample does contain small traces of linseed oil.

Mr Uys resumed his researches as follows:

“Every year for the past 60 years resin has dripped off the crossbar on July 14 and continued for a week or two.

“This year I have kept an eye on the cross every morning since May, noting the length of time the sun shines on it. I began my investigation with an open mind, but the more I look into it the more baffled I am. It looks supernatural.

“In France resin oozes from the trees in mid-summer, when the weather is very humid. No resin drips from the Maritzburg cross in summer. It seems more than mere coincidence that it begins to weep every year on the same date.”

*

A few years after the war Col Donald MacLeod asked W A Beattie to write a poem about Delville Wood. Beattie had served in the wood with the 4th SAI and was wounded. His poem concluded with these verses:

“By ruined homes in Montauban, by trench and sunken road,
All resolute and strong the living stream of khaki flowed.
Through land laid waste and seared and torn by ruthless giant guns
And to that stream South Africa had lent her sturdy sons.

“Of Boer and British stock were they, and lean and lithe and tanned,
Yet mingling there as brothers fighting for one Motherland;
For kith and kindred o’er the sea, for King and Country now
Their hands they join in fellowship, and took the filial vow.

“And thus they entered Bernafay through fire and fited fume.
While every tree atrembling stood, as if it sensed its doom,
And in that avenue of woe they paused to count their dead,
Then grimly on to Delville, where their path of glory led.

“Within that wood of epic fame for days and nights they fought,
And backward thrust the stubborn foe, though every step was bought
With tragic toll of vivid youth, that had but life to give,

And gladly gave that precious gift, that you and I might live.

"From hour to hour the battle raged and fearful tumult reigned,
And still they fought as men inspired and still their ground maintained
And as their stricken comrades fell, the shattered boughs dropped down
In pity on their mangled forms — and made their laurel crown.

"So year by year we think of them and humble homage pay
To those who trod with courage high that Gethsemane.
Now Delville is South Africa blooddrenched with manhood's bloom
Our heritage from heroes brave, our temple and our tomb."

*

Many other poems have been written, eulogising the bravery of our men at Delville Wood. The lyrics of *A Soldier's Song* by Lieut Fred C Cornell make stirring reading.

"In Delville Wood — in Delville Wood,
The German foe in thousands lay,
And no-man's-land, with British blood,
Ran red as wine that summer's day —
We'd sworn to take it — and we would!
God help the Bosche in Delville Wood!

"In Delville Wood — in Delville Wood,
As inch by inch the ground we gained,
With bullet, steel, and smashing butt,
We fought and fell, till few remained;
But Boer and Briton steadfast stood,
For Freedom's sake — in Delville Wood!

"To Delville Wood — To Delville Wood,
We faced his fire, and forced our way,
To where his grim machine-guns stood,

And where he fiercely turned at bay —
We'd sworn to beat him — and we would!
We'd turn him out of Delville Wood!
"In Delville Wood — in Delville Wood,
'Midst splintered trees and shattered wrack,
From morn till night we still made good
'Gainst shot and shell and massed attack,
We'd sworn to win, so firm we stood —
Or died like men — in Delville Wood!
"In Delville Wood — in Delville Wood,
The shattered trees are green with leaves,
And flowers bloom where cannons stood,
And rich the fields with golden sheaves —
Sleep soft ye dead, for God is good —
And Peace has come to Delville Wood!"

*

The Germiston town council named one of its suburbs "Delville" in memory of the battle. The streets are named after other First World War battles and places.

Many children have been named "Delville" in honour of the battle. Perhaps the most significant memorial is the annual "Delville Wood" parades, in which South Africa pays homage to the dead, not only of Delville Wood, but in its name to all those who died for their country.

An interesting memento kept at the Transvaal Scottish Regimental Museum is a silver communion cup. This was made from a shooting trophy won by Col Dalrymple and used by many men of the 4th SAI who fought at Delville Wood.

Biographies

As far as possible I have attempted to trace what happened to the men mentioned in this book. Should a reader have particulars of such men not mentioned in the following pages I would be grateful to receive the information.

The names are listed alphabetically for ease of reference. The rank, unit and decorations listed below the name are those applying at the time of the Battle of Delville Wood. Where no biography is given, the individual may have been killed, in which case consult the “Roll of Honour”.

*

After his foot healed, John Adams returned to the front. In March 1917 he was made a lance-corporal. Shortly afterwards he was wounded in his left arm at Arras. In November 1917 Adams was promoted to corporal. He was killed in action on 12 January 1918.

*

Sergeant James Ainslie was wounded on the 17th by shrapnel in both hands — the left hand being rendered useless. On the 22nd he was posted to the reserve battalion and evacuated to England. He received a mention for Delville Wood. In November 1917 he was discharged as permanently unfit for service.

*

Andrew Aitken was recommended for the DCM but received no award. Again at Warlencourt his courage was marked. As a second-lieutenant at Arras in April 1917 he was one of the officers in charge of “mappers”. He cleared enemy trenches and dug-outs and with a small party captured 60 to 70

Germans.

*

Victor Allen was recommended for the DCM however was awarded the MM. He continued serving until 9 June 1918, when he was posted as missing, assumed dead.

*

Jack Atterbury was to serve for the duration of the war. In 1926 he, Boet Lucas, Henry Sherman and Bob Healey represented Port Elizabeth at the unveiling of the Delville Wood Memorial in France. He worked for the City Treasurer's department then became beach manager for seven years. While visiting Salisbury he was offered a position in the City Treasurer's office. Atterbury and his wife lived there for the next 42 years and produced a son and a daughter. His wife died in 1971. Atterbury retired to East London where he lives at present.

*

George Baker was recommended for the DCM for assisting Faulds in saving Lieut Craig, but was awarded the MM. He was killed in action on 12 April 1917.

*

Major Baker remained as brigade-major until March 1917. He then became GSO 2 (General Staff Officer) of the 36th Division. For his services in France he was appointed brevet lieutenant-colonel in June 1919 and awarded the CBE.

After the armistice Baker was in charge of demobilisation of the SA contingent in the UK. In 1920 he was district staff officer in East London, then returned to Defence HQ as a general staff officer. In 1922 he was appointed ADC to King George V (later to King George VI) and the following year acting chief of the general staff.

In 1929 Baker was promoted to colonel and retired three years later. On the outbreak of the Second World War Baker was recalled for duty as quartermaster general. By 1944 he was a major-general and was awarded the CB for his services. He was promoted to lieutenant-general in 1947 and retired the following year. General Baker died at George, Cape, on 14 December 1956, aged 78.

*

Domingo Balini was also wounded at Arras. After the war he returned to Cape Town and in 1966 made an SABC recording about his experiences in Delville Wood.

*

Capt Harry Bamford was wounded through his cheeks in the wood. He was recommended for the DSO but awarded the MC. In April 1918 he commanded the SA Composite Contingent. In September Lieut-Col Bamford commanded the 2nd SAI Regiment in the reconstituted brigade, and was wounded in the advance of 8 October, 1918.

*

“Billy” Barlow was severely wounded at Delville Wood. He returned to his regiment after the Somme and commanded one of the companies of the SA Brigade which resisted the advance of the Germans near Ypres. He was subsequently given his majority and served right through to the armistice, participating in the capture of Le Cateau and the victorious advance of the Allied forces. Late in the war he served as a brigade-major with the 9th Division.

*

Ernest Barlow returned to South Africa in 1920, with his health undermined and impaired by shell-shock. He died tragically on 4 February 1921, at the age of 43 years.

Barlow’s legacy to his widow and five minor children (two sons and three daughters) was the small firm of Thomas Barlow & Sons. The firm had been incorporated in 1918. Both his sons, Charles Sydney (Punch) and Peter entered the business in due course. Punch was to become one of South Africa’s greatest industrialists.

The small one-man business which Ernest Barlow had founded in Durban in 1902 grew into the giant Barlow Rand Group, a multinational company and the largest industrial conglomerate in South Africa. There is an oil portrait, showing him in uniform, in the boardroom of Barlow Rand Limited at Sandton, Transvaal.

*

Cyril Barnes emerged from the wood unscathed. He was wounded near Hill Farm in April 1918. The Germans were sending coalboxes over them when one fell short and exploded 30 yards away. He felt the blast which shattered his eardrum, but felt no pain. A friend who helped stop the flow of blood from his ear pointed out that the shovel which protruded from Barnes’s kitbag alongside his head had been holed.

A mortally-wounded friend, Harry Ayers, once gave him a letter for his wife. Much later when Barnes handed this to her in Kimberley she said that she had known the morning that he was killed, as her young son had cried and said that he had seen his daddy in uniform and that he wouldn’t ever be coming home again.

Barnes was promoted to sergeant and selected to accompany the Baghdad party to Persia. This was composed of men from all Allied nations. After the war he studied assaying at the Royal School of Mines at Kensington, then returned to SA to do a book-keeping course and entered the building industry in 1934. He married Catherine Reid and had a son. After her death he married Phyllis Thaw. Barnes retired in 1955 and today lives in Durban.

*

Cron Bate spent the rest of the war as a POW. He was transferred to Holland then repatriated on 17 November 1918, after which he spent two months at the Richmond Hospital. Bate was promoted to captain before he was demobilised in June 1919.

*

Arthur Betteridge spent five months in hospital then was granted leave to visit Aberdeen. He returned to France in January 1917 and, as a signaller, was flown over their lines. During the battle of Arras he met his brother who was wounded. Captain Ross was killed by a whizzbang near to him.

Betteridge applied for a transfer to the RFC which was approved in July 1917. Two months later he began his flying training. He studied aeronautics at Oxford and came 17th out of 300 pupils. He was trained to fly at Beaulieu, near Southampton, and commissioned in February 1918. There he met Gladys Juniper, his future wife.

In August Betteridge was posted as a fighter pilot to No 3 Squadron near Doullens, France. He and Makepeace are the only Delville Wood veterans to have fought over the wood. This occurred in August when he straffed the German front line in his Sopwith Camel. In error he dropped dummy practice bombs on them. Soon afterwards his engine was hit at low level but he managed to glide over the British lines before crash-landing.

He was involved in a number of dogfights and saw many of his friends go down in flames. On one occasion he had a wheel shot off yet managed to land safely. On 29 October 1918 he buzzed a football match being watched by 20,000 troops. On his last dive his wheels hit the goal post and he crash-landed. Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Salmond had to rescue him from the irate troops. His madcap flying included flying through a Zeppelin hangar.

Betteridge remained in the RAF after the war. He was married to Gladys on

9 April 1919. In October he was demobbed and returned to South Africa with his bride. Aboard ship was Capt Stuart Cloete and his first wife. Neither couple were to have any children.

Betteridge rejoined the SAR and remained with them for 44 years. In 1921 he was a pallbearer at Capt A W Proctor VC's funeral. During the Second World War he served at Air Force HQ and overseas. He was involved in a car accident in Algiers and after a spider bite was hospitalised for four months.

Major Betteridge recruited for the SAR after the war, then became staff officer to and ultimately sales manager of SA Airways. He retired on 26 August 1956, his 60th birthday. He thereafter represented UTA Airlines in South Africa. Gladys died on 5 July 1966. Arthur Betteridge wrote his unpublished war memoirs *Combat in and over Delville Wood* in 1974. He lived in Pretoria where in November 1982 he fractured his hip. After some operations Betteridge died on 31 January 1983 and was cremated.

*

Rudolph Blom was evacuated to Boulogne and then to England. He lost his right eye, so was declared permanently medically unfit and discharged at Wynberg on 11 November 1917.

*

Hermann Bloom's reaction on reaching London was typical of other Springboks.

"When we arrived at Charing Cross the people went mad, and threw flowers in our motors. Why, goodness only knows."

The compound fracture in his leg didn't heal properly and he was discharged as unfit in October 1916.

*

Hugh Boustead was sent to the London General Hospital and after recuperating was commissioned to Sec-Lieutenant. He rejoined the 4th SAI at

Arras in October and was wounded in the thigh during the battle, for which he was awarded the MC. In September 1917 he was posted to the 4th Gurkhas, Indian Army, and was sent to India. There he won the all-India boxing championships.

He returned to France at his own request in September 1918 and rejoined the 4th SAI. After the armistice Boustead volunteered to serve in the Russian White Army and spent a year there, then captained the British modern pentathlon team at the 1920 Olympics.

He spent the next four years with the Gordon Highlanders in Turkey and the Mediterranean, later commanding the Camel Corps in the Sudan until 1928. Boustead became the district commissioner and OC the Frontier Battalion. In 1933 he accompanied the Mt Everest expedition.

During the Second World War Boustead served with Wingate in Ethiopia. Thereafter he became the resident adviser to the Sultan at Mukalla, Aden. His next appointment was as development secretary in Oman and finally as political agent to Abu Dhabi in the Persian Gulf. He wrote an autobiography called *The Wind of Morning*. Col Sir Hugh Boustead KBE, CMG, DSO, MC visited South Africa in September 1975. He died aged 85 March 1980.

*

Duggie Brice-Bruce was reported missing as a “sergeant” and later discharged as such. He recalled being transported to POW camps in cattle trucks, “It reminded me of my farming days, sending cattle off to slaughter. We were packed so tight that we had to stand up. Our destination was West Germany and then on to Poland. I tried to make a break for it in Luben. They caught up with me and gave me a bad time, but I managed to survive.”

After the war Brice-Bruce returned to farming near Ixopo in Natal and in 1924 married a local girl. He became field manager for a large farming enterprise until he retired at the age of 65. Bruce remarried five years after his

wife’s death and at present lives in Pietermaritzburg.

*

After lying in the shell-hole for two days Wilfred Brink was rescued by the relieving forces. By then gangrene had set into his left bicep. He was invalided to England where surgeons joined up the nerves and cut away the dead flesh. He was at a Southampton Hospital for the next two years. Brink returned to a civilian job in South Africa. He married a Miss Farmer and had a daughter, Colleen. After his wife’s death he married a Miss Tromp, and had a second daughter, Carol (Carole Charlewood of the SATV).

In 1927 Brink became one of the first members of the MOTHS. He joined the Intelligence Corps during the Second World War and was commissioned, later being promoted to captain. Brink studied law and became Registrar of Mining Titles in Johannesburg. In 1937 he accompanied the South African coronation contingent to England.

In 1973-4, aged 80, Wilfred Brink visited Easter Island and went on an expedition to Antarctica. After his retirement and the death of his wife he moved to the Johannesburg Country Club where he lives at present.

*

Syd Brown remained with the 3rd Battalion until it was disbanded, then joined the 2nd SAI. As a bugler he recalled that Padre Hill had called on him hundreds of times to sound the Last Post at burials. In three years of fighting Brown had two Blighty leaves of six days each. After being demobbed he returned to Johannesburg. At the age of 80 he wrote a short account of his wartime experiences.

*

Claude Browne was awarded the MC as well as an OBE. He was promoted to major and fought at Ypres on 20 September 1917 and Marriere Wood on 24 March 1918. The following year he served in Russia against the Bolsheviks.

In 1920 Browne married Gladys Johnstone, the daughter of a Johannesburg doctor. In 1921 he studied at the Inner Temple in London, then the following year went to Nigeria as a district commissioner where they lived for the next 18 years.

Browne returned to England in 1939 where he did intelligence work during the Second World War, attaining the rank of colonel. He transferred his family treasures to a bank in Hull, where everything was lost in the blitz.

Browne then went to Palestine. By chance he had just left the Hotel David when it was blown up. They returned to South Africa where they lived with his sister-in-law, Lady May Lister, widow of Sir Spencer Lister, former director of the SA Institute of Medical Research. They then moved to Howick. While visiting Mbabane, Swaziland, Col Browne died and is buried there. His decorations and medals are on display at the Transvaal Scottish Regimental Museum in Johannesburg. Gladys Browne died in 1973.

*

Although not a Delville Wood participant, as the writer of *The South African Forces in France* John Buchan did much to preserve the story of the brigade. He was born in the late 1870s as a son of the Manse. Buchan won high honours at Oxford and Glasgow universities where he studied law and then became one of Lord Milner's young men, the brilliant group that set about reconstructing South Africa after the South African War.

He entered publishing in 1906 as a partner in his friend Thomas Nelson's firm and was elected to Parliament in 1911. In 1914 he was hospitalised after an accident and fretted so at not being at the front that he began writing *The Thirty Nine Steps*, being an early success.

Buchan served in various capacities in the First World War, then was commissioned to write the history of the 1st SAI Brigade. He returned to the House of Commons in 1927 and in 1935 was appointed Governor General of

Canada and became Lord Tweedsmuir. When Buchan died in 1940 he was a renowned biographer, historian and writer of adventure stories.

*

Frederick Burton was admitted to hospital on 18 August 1916 for a week on account of general debility. He was promoted to lieutenant and in June 1917 was awarded the MC for the operations on the Somme in October 1916. In February 1918 Burton was transferred to the 5th Army Signalling Coy RE, then to the 24th Division Signalling Company. Burton was demobilised at Maitland in April 1919.

*

Kekewich Calder, 18, ran messages for two days at Bernafay Wood and was promoted to acting-corporal on 24 July and awarded the MM. On 20 August he was commissioned as a temporary second-lieutenant. He was killed in action on 12 October 1916 at the Butte de Warlencourt.

*

Clive Canning returned to his company after his wound healed. He was taken prisoner at Marrieres Wood on 24 March 1918 and repatriated on 30 November 1918.

*

James Charles Victor Casson used the name Vic Clark during the war. He obtained an affidavit from Gerard Saunders, a Durban auditor who had served in the 2nd SAI, to verify this. Although he was reported as missing Capt Jenkins wrote to his mother and said that he believed him to be a prisoner. Casson was taken to Dulmen Camp and then to Sprottau Camp in Silesia.

After the war Casson returned to De Beers in Kimberley. In 1920 he married May Roberts in Johannesburg and they moved to Durban where he became a health inspector. They later returned to the Reef where Casson was

a health inspector for 25 years. Casson retired in 1962 then returned to Durban where 13 years later he bumped into Geoff Lawrence who was holidaying there.

After 58 years of marriage May Casson died in 1978. Victor Casson lives in Pietermaritzburg where his hobby of genealogy has resulted in his tracing his maternal family back to the 14th century.

*

Chapman was taken prisoner. He wrote home on 31 August 1916 from Ohdruf Camp that he had been in five hospitals, four motor ambulance journeys, one horse ambulance, two train journeys and one in a wagon … and was still going strong.

*

Allen Chase recovered from his gunshot wound in the chest. He returned to South Africa on furlough during his convalescence, visiting his parents in Uitenhage, however returned to the firing line shortly afterwards. On 15 September 1917 he sprained his left ankle badly, thereby missing the Third Battle of Ypres. Chase was killed in action on 17 April 1918.

*

Maurice Cistel served until the end of 1917 when he was wounded at Arras. He returned to South Africa where he joined the Yardley perfumers. In 1938 he went to England on a training course and because of the war remained there. He married Dorothy Misell and had two daughters. He retired in 1978 and returned to Cape Town two years later. After his wife’s death Cistel moved to Johannesburg.

*

When the fury slackened Connock was taken to a field hospital and then to England for four months’ convalescence. His brother, Sec-Lieut Joseph Connock was killed on 19 July and is buried in the Delville Wood cemetery.

Connock was commissioned in November 1916, and in April 1917 he attended a Lewis gun course.

In September 1917 Lieut Connock was wounded in the head at Ypres, for which action he received the MC. After the armistice he was transferred to the 46th Bn Royal Fusiliers with which he served in Northern Russia in 1919.

After the war Connock was employed by the Forestry Dept. He studied at Grootfontein and was sent to Australia to study sheep farming for a few years. He returned to Potchefstroom and was then transferred to Port Elizabeth. After he retired from government service Connock joined the Farmers Co-operative Union at Stutterheim.

He finally retired to East London where he was a keen administrator of sports at the Buffalo Club and took a keen interest in ex-servicemens' organisations. He represented East London at the 50th Anniversary celebrations in 1966. His wife died two years later. Major Connock died early in 1982.

*

Henry Cooper and seven other stretcher-bearers were recommended for mentions in despatches by Capt Liebson.

After the disbandment of the 3rd SAI Cooper was transferred to the 4th. He was demobbed on 2 March 1918 and returned to South Africa. In 1970, aged 73, he lived at the Red Cross Ex-Servicemen's Home in Sandringham, Johannesburg. His reminiscences were published in *The Star* of 11.7.1970 and the *Springbok* of September 1972.

*

Arthur Craig wrote to Faulds from hospital, thanking him for having saved his life, enquiring about others of his platoon and asking that Lieut English salvage his kit.

*

Archie Dagnin was promoted to lance-sergeant. At Arras on 13 April 1917 Dagnin was with his friend, Domingo Balini, who had been wounded at Delville Wood. At 5.30 pm they came under machine-gun fire. Balini was hit by eight bullets in the chest and arm but survived because of the heavy greatcoat he was wearing. Dagnin was hit in the right hand. He was evacuated to Richmond Hospital.

Dagnin then served at the SA Discharge Depot at Bordon and in 1918 at Penham Down. Dagnin was demobbed at Maitland in June 1919. He returned to his removal and storage business at Cape Town and since 1920 nurtured the 1st SAI Brigade (Overseas) Association. He was the chairman, then the secretary/treasurer for 28 years. In addition he organised the annual get-together of D Company. Archie Dagnin died in July 1974 aged 81 and was cremated.

*

Douglas Davey managed to get out of the wood early on the morning of the 17th. His 19th birthday came five days later. Davey served for the duration of the war and was demobbed in June 1919. He returned to work at the gold mine reduction plant at Germiston. He is at present living in London, aged 85 years.

*

Lieut (temp Capt) Francis Madesfield Davis was recommended for the MC for his courage at Bernafay and Delville woods. In each he had been slightly wounded yet continued to display an excellent example from 8 to 19 July 1916. After Delville Wood Davis commanded B Company. He was killed on 21 September 1917 at the Third Battle of Ypres.

*

Lieut-Col Dawson commanded the 1st SAI Regiment at the Butte de Warlencourt. He was promoted to temporary brigadier-general in December

1916 and thereafter commanded the 1st SAI Brigade at Arras, Third Ypres and in the Somme Retreat. In May 1917 Dawson was appointed as additional ADC to His Majesty King George V. He was captured on 24 March 1918 when the brigade was overrun at Marrieres Wood. For his services he was decorated with the CMG and the DSO and bar.

After his release on Christmas Day 1918, Dawson returned to South Africa where he relinquished his imperial commission. He served as district staff officer of No 1 Military District and commanded the Returned Soldiers Battalion, however declined an appointment to the Permanent Force staff.

General Dawson took leave in July 1920 and went to East Africa where he contracted enteric fever and died on 26 October 1920.

*

Robert Deane remained with the brigade and was acting lieutenant-colonel from 10 August 1916 to 11 January 1917, then commanded the discharge depot. He was mentioned in despatches on 13 March 1918 and awarded the MBE three months later. Deane was commandant of the SA concentration camp from January to April 1919.

*

William Stanley Dent lost his right arm. He was promoted to captain and returned to Port Elizabeth where he worked in his family's business. He at present lives there in a hotel, aged 92.

*

Charles Dixon was recommended for the MM by Capt Ross. Major Hunt added, "This incident was also brought to my attention by an officer of another regiment of 9th Division, whose name I do not know." The MM award was gazetted on 21 September 1916. His medals are today on display at the Transvaal Scottish Museum. His brother, Pte Frederick James Hannon Dixon was killed in action at Arras.

*

Emanuel Doitsh's almost severed foot bled for 30 hours. A German doctor dressed his wound then he was taken to Le Cateau and from there to Ohdruf near Cologne. His right leg was amputated above the knee. As a limbless prisoner of war Doitsh was repatriated to England with 118 others. He returned to South Africa in October 1918. Doitsh wrote a book of his experiences entitled *The First Springbok Prisoner in Germany*.

*

Charles Dunn's recovery was miraculous. "After being kept at this dressing-station for three days, I was then conveyed by barge down the river to another large town called Abbeville and then taken to a hospital. I was put in a tent and I can't say that much was done for me here. The doctor did not bother himself about me, he only said that as soon as I got stronger he would mark me out for Blighty. I was in this hospital only three days when my wound started to discharge. I was also spitting blood for two weeks. What caused the wound to discharge as it did was because of the dirt and metal in the wound — it was causing an abscess on the lung. The smell was something!"

He was invalided to England where his mother, who lived in Cambridge, visited him. A serious operation on 9 August saved his life. Dunn returned to South Africa where he married Alice Rechner, 17, in 1921. They were to have a son and a daughter. He worked for Kodak for the next 40 years, at Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. He was manager of the photo-finishing plant in Port Elizabeth, and died there in 1958, aged 62 years.

*

Dunston received a bullet wound in the foot on 19 July. He was awarded the MM for Delville Wood and promoted to acting lance-corporal in May 1917. Dunston married Dorothy Beatrice May on 15 August 1917. He was

discharged in February 1918 as unfit.

*

Frederick Dromgoole was evacuated to England suffering from multiple gunshot wounds. He was discharged in February 1917 and placed on the strength of the Cavalry Command Depot, eventually rejoining his battalion in July. After the Third Battle of Ypres Dromgoole suffered from boils and general debility. He was killed at Marrieres Wood on 23 March 1918.

*

Joel Emanuel was taken as a POW to Dulmen Camp, then to Hammelburg and to Silesia. He was repatriated in January 1919 and demobilised at Wynberg in May 1919. Emanuel then ran an African trading store in Northern Natal. He married and had a son and a daughter. In 1939 he lied about his age in order to join the army and became a staff-sergeant before the end of the war. Emanuel retired to Durban in 1962, where he died, aged 84, in September 1982.

*

The award of the Victoria Cross to Faulds was gazetted on 9 September 1916. In October 1916 he was promoted to corporal, in April 1917 to sergeant, and commissioned the following month. He served briefly in the Transport Dept in Egypt, then returned to France. Faulds was wounded and taken prisoner in March 1918. The award of the MC followed.

In March 1921 Faulds married Thelma Windell in Kimberley and they had a son and a daughter. He was employed as a mechanic at De Beers Company. On resuscitation of the Kimberley Regiment Faulds re-enlisted and served as a captain. He was in charge of guards of honour during royal tours and was one of the King’s guard, all being men who wore the VC, at the coronation of King George VI.

Faulds then moved to Bulawayo. During the Second World War Faulds

enlisted as a private in the Mechanical Service Corps and served in Abyssinia and Egypt. After the war he was appointed government industrial inspector, in which position he was transferred to Salisbury, where he died in August 1950, aged 55 years.

*

Eddie Fitz and Henry Oldfield were taken by hospital train to Rouen and then to Richmond Hospital. Douthwaite, Fitz and Mitchell were awarded the brigade's first Military Medals for their bravery at Bernafay Wood. Douthwaite was killed in action on 12 April 1917.

Fitz returned to stacking supplies in "hellish freezing weather" near Rouen. From there he was sent to Arras. On 20 September 1917, he reconnoitred the front line at Ypres with Capt Garnet Green. He lost Green while running through a barrage but found him later having tea in a pill-box with other officers. Fitz was sent to a cadet school in Cambridge and commissioned in March 1918.

After Marrieres Wood there was a surplus of officers in the brigade so he transferred to the RAF and did flying training at Dublin. After qualifying he was awaiting a posting when the war ended. He was mentioned in despatches twice during the war. On 20 November 1918 Fitz married Edeline Moore, and they had two children, Phillip and Marion. He became a director of an electrical company in East London. Their daughter died at eight years of age shortly before the Second World War.

During the war Fitz was personal staff officer to Major-General Frank Theron in the Middle East. After attending staff college at Haifa he returned to South Africa. Major Fitz MM was attached to the combined HQ at Cape Town for a year then transferred to GHQ in Pretoria. Afterwards he returned to East London, then in the early 1960s moved to Johannesburg. Edeline Fitz died in 1974. Eddie Fitz is a student of ancient history and an expert on the

old Egyptian and Hebrew tribes.

*

Gordon Forbes survived Delville Wood to fight at Vimy Ridge in September, of which he wrote: “Yes, I have heard a lot about Vimy Ridge and was a little curious to see it. I am not anymore. I want to go home”.

He joined the Royal Flying Corps, as did his brothers, Duncan and Haldane. On his first operational flight Gordon Forbes was shot down and wounded in the head. He was taken prisoner, however died on 18 October 1917 and is buried in Belgium.

Gordon’s brother, Haldane, was to win the Croix de Guerre and was mentioned in despatches during the war.

His war diary was found by Haldane on their Burgersdorp farm many years later. His nephew and namesake was to become one of South Africa’s most famous tennis players.

*

Garnet George Green was awarded the MC for his exemplary conduct at Delville Wood. On 12 April, 1917, he won a bar to his MC for voluntarily reconnoitring ground under heavy machine-gun fire. On 20 September he again reconnoitred front lines, on this occasion with Cpl Eddie Fitz MM. Green was promoted to captain in January 1918. Three months later Capt Green commanded B Company at Gauche Wood. There was no chance of withdrawing and he was killed, fighting to the last.

*

Lovell Greene was recommended for the DSO, however he received the MC. In April 1918 he was awarded the DSO when as a captain he took command of the 2nd SAI at a critical stage and threw back repeated enemy counter-attacks.

*

John Greggor, bandsman, was wounded at Vimy Ridge later in the war. He sounded the Last Post when the 4th SAI cross was unveiled in Delville Wood by Padre Hill. His uniform, kit and bugle are on display at the Transvaal Scottish Museum, and he at present lives near Kimberley.

*

Stan Griffiths was to see many of his friends killed in France during the following two years. Among them were the three Magennis brothers from Uitenhage. After returning to South Africa he worked on a Constantia farm before taking over management of a farm at Elands River, Uitenhage. In 1929 his first wife, Doris Vermaak, died in childbirth. In 1931 Griffiths married Maude Meyer and had two sons and two daughters. After his father died he took over from him as messenger of the court, a position he was to hold for the next 44 years. He is now retired and lives at Uitenhage.

*

After four months in hospital Harold Hall was sent to Eastbourne for convalescence. While there he met Mary Stamp. He was attached to A Coy in November 1916, then invalided out of France in April 1917 and returned to South Africa as permanently unfit for duty.

After the war he returned to marry Mary Stamp at Portslade on 2 August 1920 and had a son and a daughter. They set up home at Port Elizabeth, then several years later transferred to Cape Town with the SAR and in 1944 moved to Germiston where he retired in 1958. He was secretary to the Germiston Industries Medical Aid Association for five years. Hall died on 27 May 1981.

*

John Hall was awarded the MM for Delville Wood. He was promoted to corporal in November 1916 and sergeant on 24 March 1918. He was discharged in May 1919 whereupon he was employed by the Chamber of

Mines in Johannesburg.

*

Frederick Louis Hampson was promoted to lance-corporal in January 1917 and by 20 September was a sergeant. He served through the war and was discharged at Maitland in June 1919. He has retired and lives at Sedgefield, Knysna.

*

William Fairfield Harris was promoted to lance-corporal on 19 August. The award of the MM to him for his gallantry at Longueval was gazetted on 2 September 1916. On 30 December 1917 Harris was shot in his right thigh and head. He was evacuated to Rouen and then to England. He suffered from his injuries for many years, being in and out of hospitals at Wynberg, Roberts Heights and Kimberley.

*

Frank Henry Heal of the 1st SAI was in command of the Transport at Delville Wood. On 8 August 1916, he wrote a letter to Capt Rawbone of the Cape Peninsular Rifles which was published. On 17 July, as there were no senior officers left in the 2nd SAI Heal was given command. When Lieut-Col Dawson succeeded Gen Lukin as commander of the Brigade, Heal succeeded him as CO of the 1st SAI. He led the regiment at Arras, the Third Battle of Ypres and the Somme Retreat.

Lieut-Col Heal was wounded twice at Marrieres Wood, on 24 March 1918, but insisted on remaining with his men. He kept cheery despite a terrific shell fire until he was killed at about 3 pm.

*

On 19 July William Healy was promoted to lance-corporal and on 6 October 1916 to corporal, shortly after he was awarded the DCM for Delville Wood. He was killed in action on 17 April 1917 and is buried at Athies Military

Cemetery, near Arras.

*

“Senussi Bill” Helfrich was wounded in the knee, left arm and head and invalided to England. He was awarded a Silver War Badge, a King’s Certificate and mentioned in despatches (Gazetted 4.1.1917). He returned to South Africa because of his wounds in January 1918.

*

Tom Heunis was taken with other prisoners to Cambrai. He remained there with the original dressing on for 14 days before he was attended to. Then he was transferred to the Hammelburg laager hospital where a German doctor operated without anaesthetic on his back. The wound spouted when the dressing was pulled off. In another two days he would have died of gangrene.

After recovering Heunis was sent to work on Bavarian farms. He was permitted the freedom to do beer deliveries as well. He recalled that some prisoners, especially the French, took to consoling the lonely wives of absent soldiers. Heunis was jailed twice, once for refusing to work on a Sunday and once for leaving his place of work.

After the war he could find no work so went to the Makwassie diamond diggings, but had no luck. From April 1920 he worked at the ERPM Gold mine at Boksburg. In 1923 Heunis married Blanche McGreevly from Durban and they had three sons and a daughter. After 36 years underground he worked in the mine compound for eight years before retiring. Mrs Heunis died in 1973, and Tom in April 1982, aged 84.

Four months earlier he said to the author “I’m very proud of our people. This is the finest country in the world. I saw how far the Afrikaner ‘Volk’ has gone in a short space of time. Be proud of your nation”.

*

Bill Hewitt was wounded in the leg at the Butte de Warlencourt on October

24 when his Lewis gun section was wiped out. He was to meet his future wife at the Tooting Hospital. He returned to the battalion in April 1917. In September he took part in the Third Battle of Ypres where, for his bravery in single-handedly destroying a strong German pill-box, he was awarded the Victoria Cross. He was badly wounded in the throat by a German hand-grenade.

He married Lily Olett in October 1918 then returned to his farming in Natal.

In 1925 the Hewitts moved to Kenya where he bought a coffee farm. They had four daughters, one of whom died as a baby. He sold the farm in 1939 and during the Second World War Major Hewitt was an Asst Provost-Marshal at Mombasa. In 1950 he retired to a seaside cottage at Hermanus, Cape.

His health deteriorated and pieces of shrapnel were removed with his larynx. He learned to speak without it. Hewitt then contracted Parkinson's Disease. In 1961 his wife took him to England for specialist treatment. He died there in 1966, aged 82. Mrs Hewitt returned to South Africa in 1972 and again in 1974 when she came to scatter his ashes on the Hermanus cliffs. She died there, was cremated and her ashes scattered at the same spot by her daughter, Pamela.

*

Bert Higgins limped out of Delville Wood on 18 July. He returned to France in November 1916 and remained with the 4th SAI until he was captured in March 1918. He returned to visit Delville Wood in 1963. Higgins died early in 1982 at Kensington, Johannesburg, aged 84.

*

Padre Eustace Hill was miraculously unscathed at Delville Wood, however, at the Butte de Warlencourt he was severely wounded by machine-gun bullets

while employed in rescuing wounded men. His shattered foot healed, but it was found necessary to amputate his right arm. He was awarded the MC for gallantry, a decoration he never wore as he felt it belonged rather to St John's College.

He returned to France in April 1917 to assist at No 32 Casualty Clearing-Station. Taking communion for casualties, writing letters for them and officiating at funerals filled his days. The war ended for him when he and his soldier servant were taken prisoner in March 1918. His health suffered in the POW camps and he was weak and ill when he was released after the war.

Padre Hill received a hero's welcome in Johannesburg. He returned to his great love, St John's College, where he was the headmaster from 1922 to 1930. His war wounds had left him slightly deaf, a condition he took advantage of when he did not want to hear something!

His eccentricities and absent-mindedness grew worse but his self-discipline and courage remained unimpaired. When he left the College he hid his MC behind the Crucifix which hung on the wall of the school Sacristy.

Hill's last years were spent in a monastery in Hampshire. He retained his great love for St John's and South Africa and corresponded regularly with old Johannians and veterans he had known. He died on 12 February, 1953, aged 80 years.

*

Thomas Holiday was evacuated to No 4 General Hospital, Denmark Hill, London, where he was treated for shell-shock. He was awarded the MM for Delville Wood.

He transferred to the RFC in May 1917, where he was commissioned as a lieutenant. He returned to South Africa after the war and in March 1941 re-enlisted in the SAAF as a temporary-lieutenant. Holiday was used as an administrative officer, but released in July 1943 on medical grounds. In

September 1965 he was living at the St James Hotel near Cape Town.

*

Norman Arthur Horne, 20, was severely wounded in the early stages of the battle and was taken to a field hospital. At first he was regarded as being beyond help, then an Australian nurse found that he still had a pulse and summoned a doctor. She pleaded with him to “give this young soldier a chance” and offered her blood for a transfusion.

Horne miraculously survived and was sent to England where he spent the next three years in hospitals and had several major operations. He returned to live in Belville, Cape. His wife, Lily, died in March 1982 and he died on 20 September 1982, aged 86.

*

Major Donald Hunt’s diary provides a personal record of his experiences in Delville Wood. He remained in command of the 4th SAI until MacLeod’s return. Hunt fought through all the battalion’s battles in France until January 1918, then served in Mesopotamia, Persia and Russia.

After the war Hunt returned to his position as Native Commissioner, from which he retired in 1931. He and his family then went to live at Blackridge, near Pietermaritzburg. In 1940 Hunt was appointed lieutenant-colonel commanding the 3rd Native Military Corps. He was released in May 1942 on account of his age. Lieut-Col Hunt died at Pietermaritzburg in May 1949, aged 74 years.

*

John Hurlin was evacuated to the City of London Hospital, Clapton. He returned to the front in time for the Battle of Arras where he was killed on 12 April 1917. Hurlin is buried at Brown’s Copse military cemetery, four miles east of Arras.

*

Charlie Ingram emerged unscathed from Delville Wood. He was wounded at Arras on 12 April 1917 and sent to hospital in England. He rejoined his regiment in September 1917 as a corporal and served in every engagement thereafter. Ingram was buried alive during shelling at Paschendaele but was dug out. At Marrieres Wood he and two others evaded capture on Saturday, 23 March 1918. The following day one was killed, the other wounded and he was captured. He was repatriated in January 1919 and discharged four months later.

Ingram joined the Uitenhage SAR Mechanical Engineers office. He represented Uitenhage and district at the 1926 Delville Wood Memorial Unveiling. In July 1930 he married Dorothy Marsh and they had two sons. He enlisted in May 1940 and served in East Africa, being demobbed in July 1945. Ingram was one of 25 Delville Wood veterans to attend the 50th Anniversary in France in 1966. He died at Uitenhage on 29 July 1979, aged 83.

*

Herbert Jenkins rejoined his battalion on 17 September 1916. He was wounded on 18 October at the Butte de Warlencourt in the left thigh and hip. In 1918 Jenkins was promoted to temporary major and temporary lieutenant-colonel and was awarded the DSO.

*

Lieut-Col Frank Jones was buried in Peronne Road cemetery, Maricourt (Plot 1, Row G, Grave 2). He was awarded the CMG posthumously. He had won the DSO for his bravery during the Battle of Paardeberg in 1900.

*

Angus Murdoch-Keith received a minor shrapnel wound to his knee. He remained with the brigade until October 1917 when he went on a bridging course in England. Keith joined the Royal Engineers in March 1918 and was

commissioned. During the final advance he won the MC.

After the war he returned to complete his apprenticeship on the Ferreira Deep mine. Keith was sent to the United States to study under the Goodrich Rubber Company. He returned to South Africa as a technical adviser on conveyor belting, etc. During the Second World War he was employed in the UK munitions industry. From 1948 onwards he went into business for himself. Today he has interests in a number of companies and lives in Johannesburg.

*

Walter Kirby was wounded and his brother, L/Cpl H G Kirby, killed at Delville Wood. Kirby had served as a trooper in the Natal Light Horse in SWA and was wounded at Gibeon in April 1915. He joined the 4th SAI and served in Egypt and France. He was wounded on four occasions and awarded the MC. By the end of the war Kirby was a captain.

Kirby served with the Transvaal Scottish in the 1922 Rand Revolt and was wounded. He was a man devoid of fear of any kind. He trained a company of the TS during peacetime and during the Second World War commanded the 3rd TS, raised mainly from the East Rand. They trained at Barberton then went to the Middle East. On 22 November 1941 the battalion was destroyed at Sidi Rezegh and its commander, Walter Kirby, died with it.

*

Geoffrey Lawrence was evacuated to Southampton. After recovering he returned to France, however missed the Butte de Warlencourt through German measles. He rejoined the brigade at Arras in December 1916 where he became a company runner. Lawrence was commissioned in May 1917 and transferred to A Coy under Capt C W Reid. He fought in the Third Battle of Ypres, where he was responsible for laying the tapes. After the Armistice Lawrence went farming at Groot Drakenstein. His reminiscences *Echoes of*

War were published in “Militaria” in 1978. He died at Somerset West on 27 February 1978, aged 82.

*

Captain Lawrie was awarded the MC for Delville Wood. His brilliant work in evacuating the wounded at Arras was also noted. Lawrie was wounded at Ypres on 21 September 1917. During hostilities he won the MC and bar.

*

John Lawson was evacuated to Etaples and then to London. In April 1917 he was posted to a cavalry command and in October commissioned in the SA Native Labour Corps. In July 1918 Lieut Lawson transferred to the 1st West Yorkshire Regt. From December 1918 to April 1919 he was a town major in the 18th Bde in Germany.

He retired as an Hon-Major and joined the National Bank at Johannesburg. On his discharge form Lawson entered opposite Honours and Awards, “The pleasure of doing my duty.” In 1922 he was treated at Roberts Heights for the effects of gassing.

*

Kenneth Willoughby Lee was evacuated to the Etaples Hospital. His mother and wife, Alfreda, were en route to visit him when they were told at the War Office in London that he had died of tetanus infection on 27 September 1916. He is buried in the Etaples cemetery.

*

Dr Stephen Liebson attended to the wounded of the 1st SAI on the 15th and 16th July with nothing but a small shelter trench. Although wounded on the 16th he continued attending to the wounded at Longueval until the 19th. He was awarded the MC. Liebson was killed on 22 March 1918.

*

Aubrey Liefeldt was evacuated to the 4th London General Hospital where he

remained until January 1917, meanwhile being promoted to captain. He visited his parents in South Africa, then rejoined the brigade and was given command of B Coy. Capt Liefeldt was wounded and taken prisoner at Marrieres Wood.

After the armistice he returned to his position as court interpreter at Cape Town. In November 1919 he married Dorothy Dent of East London, having met her while she nursed in London. Her brother, Lieut Dent, had lost an arm at Delville Wood.

Liefeldt transferred to Grahamstown where he became assistant magistrate, and magistrate of various districts. On the outbreak of the Second World War he did a major's course, however the department would not allow him to proceed on active service. As Liefeldt was living at Witbank at the time, he formed the Witbank Commando.

After the war Liefeldt served as chief magistrate of Cape Town for six years and retired in 1952. He succeeded the late Gen Frank Theron as president of the Cape Town branch of the SA Infantry (Overseas) Brigade. He lives at Kenilworth, Cape Town.

*

Albert Loubser was awarded the DCM for Delville Wood. In January 1917 he was given 14 days' field punishment for imbibing too heavily! On 16 October he was promoted to corporal and on the 12th was wounded in the back. He died of wounds eight days later. He is buried at Dozingham British Cemetery, 2½ miles north of Poperinghe.

*

Oswald Lovegrove returned to the front where he was gassed on 17 October 1918, however survived and was discharged in October 1919.

*

Brigadier Lukin commanded the brigade at the Butte de Warlencourt. On 2

December 1916, he was promoted to command the 9th (Scottish) Division with the rank of major-general. He led the division in the Third Battle of Ypres, Arras, Paschendaele and Cambrai. He relinquished command of the division in March 1918 to take home leave, then because of the grave illness of his wife he accepted a tour of duty in England, and was given command of the 64th (Highland) Division. He was awarded a CB and created a KCB (1917) for his brilliant war service.

Brigadier Lukin retired from the army in 1919. On his retirement the French Government conferred on him the Commander of the Legion of Honour. His health deteriorated, as he never fully recovered from the effects of the gas he inhaled at Delville Wood. In July 1924 Lukin was appointed as a member of the Council of Defence.

He died on 15 December 1925, aged 65, and was buried with full military honours at the Plumstead cemetery. His biography, *Ulundi to Delville Wood*, was written by R E Johnston.

*

Albert MacDonald was recommended for the DSO by Thackeray but received an MC. He was wounded by shrapnel in the abdomen at the Third Battle of Ypres on 20 September 1917, and died the following day.

*

Donald MacLeod was severely wounded at Delville Wood and awarded the DSO. He again commanded the regiment in the Third Battle of Ypres and was wounded in the Somme Retreat on 24 March 1918. In the advance on Le Cateau he was once again wounded, losing the use of his right arm. He carried on until the armistice.

Lieut-Col MacLeod then went to North Russia to join General Sir Edmund Ironside’s staff. During the Archangel relief operation he was in charge of the British Military Mission and was given command of a Russian Regiment

which had mutinied. For his service he was awarded the Order of St Anne (2nd Class). After Lieut-Col J Sherwood-Kelly VC left, MacLeod was given command of the 2nd Hampshire Regiment and he returned to England with them. He embarked for Cape Town on the *Kenilworth Castle* in February 1920.

On 21 May, 1920, Lieut-Col D M MacLeod DSO, MC, DCM was appointed OC of the Transvaal Scottish on its re-formation after the war. MacLeod was in command of the regiment at Dunswart during the 1922 Revolt. On 4 November 1923, he resigned his commission on account of family reasons. He left Johannesburg early in 1930 to go coffee planting in Kenya. He was honoured by a great reception given by the mayor and various ex-servicemen associations at which he bade farewell to hundreds of the men and fellow officers he had commanded in France.

At the age of 69, he was appointed as assistant to the chief welfare officer to the South African Forces in Kenya during the Second World War. Macleod spent his 70th birthday in Addis Ababa. His one aim was to get as near to the fighting line as possible — by hook or by crook he would get to his beloved troops. Released from wholetime service in January 1942, he was stricken with malaria and passed away two months later.

Thus died the gay-hearted, gallant Donald MacLeod of the Transvaal Scottish … the regiment’s most famous colonel.

*

Roy Makepeace emerged from the wood relatively unscathed. He was awarded the MM for bravery in the field. In January 1917 he was found to be under age so transferred to the reserve battalion as a signaller. On 8 October he joined No 1 Wing of the Royal Flying Corps. After training as a pilot he was commissioned in January 1918 and served in France from September until well after the armistice.

*

Albert Marr and “Jackie” served until the armistice. Jackie had his right leg amputated from a wound received at the Battle of Messines in April 1918. Marr returned to live on his Cheshire Farm near Villeria, Pretoria. Jackie died there on 22 May 1921, the day after Marr’s farmhouse burnt down. He retired from the SA Railways in 1948 and lived in Pretoria until his death in August 1973, aged 84 years.

*

George Marshall was evacuated to Rouen and then to Shepherds Bush hospital. The award of his DCM was gazetted on 14 November 1916. On 9 December he was promoted to sergeant and on 9 February 1917 to second-lieutenant in B Coy. He was taken prisoner at Marrieres Wood on 24 March 1918 and sent to the POW camp at Karlsruhe and later Mainz. Marshall was demobbed in April 1919, then went to work at the Standard Bank in King Williams Town.

*

Emile Mathis fought at the Butte de Warlencourt and Arras. He was wounded in the left forearm at Ypres on 20 September 1917. In March 1961 he was living in Kensington, Johannesburg, when he wrote his account of Delville Wood for The Springbok.

*

Ivan McCusker was evacuated to the military hospital at Tooting. He wrote of his experiences to his father on 25 July, concluding with:

“Of course, I am still in bed, but hope to be OK as soon as I have had the piece of shell out of my side. Best regards to all. — Your loving son, Ivan M McCusker.

I had been recommended, some few days before the advance, by General Lukin, for a commission in the Machine-Gun Corps. I don’t know what will

come of it now that I am wounded. — Ivan.”

He died as a result of his wound on 5 August and is buried at Wandsworth cemetery.

*

Richard Medlicott was reported as missing believed killed in action. This was corrected when it was learnt that he had been taken prisoner on the 19th. Medlicott was released to Holland in June 1918 on account of his failing health and thence to a hospital at Marylebone. Medlicott returned to service in October 1918 as CO of C Coy SA contingent concentration camp. He was demobbed in July 1919 and awarded the OBE and the Order of Danils (5th class) by HM the King of Montenegro.

*

Dudley Meredith escaped from Dulmen Camp with three Australians, however was recaptured after 11 days when only four kilometres from the Dutch border.

Meredith returned to study agriculture at Potchefstroom and the U.S.A. He was married in 1924 and had two children before his wife was killed in a motor accident. Meredith entered the ministry and qualified as a D Sc in 1947. He wrote an account of his war experiences while living in Johannesburg. Copies of this manuscript are kept at the McGregor Museum and at the Natal Archives. Meredith died on 3 July 1975 aged 79.

*

Allister (Mac) Miller was awarded the DSO for the Somme and promoted to flight commander. At the end of 1916 he returned to South Africa on a recruiting drive, one of his recruits being Andrew Beauchamp-Proctor who was to win the VC. Miller was awarded the OBE (Mil) in June 1919.

In November 1919 he piloted an Avro biplane on the first internal commercial flight in South Africa. In 1924 Miller was elected to Parliament.

During the Second World War Lieut-Col Miller commanded air training schools at Kimberley, Queenstown and Benoni. Miller was rightly regarded as the father of South African Aviation. He died in Port Elizabeth on 14 October 1951, aged 59.

*

George Miller survived Delville Wood, however, was wounded by an explosive bullet in the jaw at Arras in April 1917. After many months in hospitals he was returned home. Miller then returned to farming at Fullerton, Cape, ran a store and tried diamond digging. He married and had a son and daughter. In 1945 he bought the Assegaibosch Hotel, which he managed until his death in June 1956.

*

Francis McEwan Mitchell had served as a lieutenant with the Cameron Highlanders during the South African War. In 1906 he joined C Company Natal Rangers (Transvaal Scottish) for the Bambata Rebellion. During the Delville Wood fighting he was attached to the 26th Brigade. Mitchell was awarded the MC and the brevet of major. He was twice seriously wounded which caused his premature death on 8 February 1925.

*

John Naisby was evacuated to the Wandsworth Hospital in England where he remained until 25 September 1916. After his convalescence he remained medically unfit so was discharged at Bordon and posted to Class W Army Reserve in March 1917. He resided at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Naisby was recommended for the VC by Thackeray, however received the DCM and the Montenegran silver medal for merit. Official documents referred to him as “a most valuable NCO of great courage and proved reliability.” Naisby returned to South Africa in October 1919 where he was discharged as medically unfit.

*

Coenraad Nelson almost lost his arm through gangrene. He was evacuated on a stretcher to England and hospitalised at Clacton-on-Sea where he remained through several operations during the next eight months. About seven months in Nursing Homes followed before he was taken back to South Africa on a hospital ship, where he was discharged as medically unfit. He was living near Johannesburg in 1978 when he was interviewed about his Delville Wood experiences.

*

Hubert Cuthbert Nicholson, 23, of Uitenhage was shot in his hand on 19 July. On 17 October he was buried alive when his trench collapsed. He died of wounds the same day.

*

Later in the war Anno Ludwig Noack was awarded the Iron Cross, 1st Class, for leading his unit to safety after they had been surrounded.

He served as a second-lieutenant of the 5th Garde Feld Artillerie Regiment, then as gas officer with the staff of the 3rd Garde Infanterie Division.

After the armistice Noack returned to his studies at Dresden. He specialised in mining engineerings at Munich and Berlin and in 1921 received his doctorate. He became a director of a coal mining company in Silesia, then in 1931 emigrated to South Africa. In 1938 Noack married in Germany, then returned to live in Cape Town. In 1966 he recorded his Delville Wood experiences, describing the battle as one of the most heroic meeting of enemies in the history of warfare. Noack died in September 1973, aged 82.

*

Will Peggs returned to duty in time for the Butte de Warlencourt where he was shell-shocked on 17 October 1916. He was declared medically unfit and returned to Cape Town where he was discharged on 5 September 1917.

*

Edward Phillips was one of the two wounded officers who emerged on the 20th with Col Thackeray. He was awarded the MC in September 1916. On 13 October Phillips was dangerously wounded at the Butte de Warlencourt, from which he died on the 16th of October.

*

Willie Pitout was troubled by his right foot, which had four toes amputated, so returned to South Africa and was discharged on 1 April 1917. Two weeks later he re-enlisted in the SASC for the Campaign in Nyasaland, returning in February 1919 suffering from malaria. He returned to Willowmore where he worked in a general dealer's store.

The following year he had an uncanny and tragic experience, which began after Delville Wood.

"Towards the end of 1916 I was in England and it was whilst spending a week-end in London, that something happened to me, that even tonight after eleven years, still makes me go cold.

"A lady-friend invited me for dinner, and proposed some sightseeing first. After visiting Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, and a few other places, we went to see the wax figures at Madame Tussauds.

"Eventually we were in the part called the Chamber of Horrors.

"It was whilst I was studying one of the figures there, that I caught sight of an envelope on the floor, which I picked up. On looking at it I found my name and regimental number on it. I tore the envelope open, but all I found inside was a clean sheet of paper with the figures 10-12-20 on it.

"I went cold as I read this. I handed the envelope and piece of paper to the lady, took out my pay book and made the entry 10-12-20 in it. I must admit that the dinner etc was not enjoyed. I was a worried man now, as I was going back to the firing line in a few weeks' time.

“However, with the excitement of the next few years this episode had passed out of my mind entirely. I served till the cessation of hostilities, then went back to South Africa to my wife and family to pick up the threads of life after four years’ absence from my kiddies who wanted a father to join in their sports and share their joys.

“I managed to get a fair billet and soon everything was running smoothly again.

“In December 1920 my eldest son was writing for his matric, a very clever boy, was 1st in his class, and intended to go to Stellenbosch to study for a Dutch Reformed minister. The Matrics finished writing exams on 9 December, and on the morning of the 10th December, I was walking down the street to my business at about 9 o’clock where I came across my son, Lomie. He told me the Matrics were on their way now to a farm 5 miles out of town, to swim. He was excited and happy.

“At about 11 o’clock a gentleman came into the office and told me that my son was drowned. This was 10-12-20. I had the same feeling I had four years ago at Madame Tussauds. It struck me about the entry in my pay book. I went home, got out my pay book and saw 10-12-20, which I wrote in 1916.

“Then only everything was made clear to me.”

Willie Pitout died of pneumonia on 1 June 1938 and is buried at Willowmore.

*

Major Mitchell Power was awarded the DSO for Delville Wood. After the armistice he returned to his wife at Kalk Bay, Cape Town, and was discharged at his own request in May 1919.

*

Ronald Rawbone was taken to the London General Hospital. He was declared medically unfit and sailed for Cape Town on 26 December 1916.

*

Chauncey Reid was promoted to captain. He later joined the RFC and was captured in January 1918.

*

Cecil Rice was sent to a hospital in England where his heel cleared up. He was sent on a signal instructor's course, then on a musketry course at Aldershot. He was promoted to sergeant and became a musketry instructor at Bordon. He returned to France in 1917 to join the 4th SAI, D Coy at Arras. While at the front he was gassed, then evacuated to the brigade hospital at Richmond. The war ended before he could return to France.

Rice retired in Johannesburg where he died in 1979, aged 82. At the time of his death his nephew had reconstructed a spitfire which flew perfectly and made national headlines.

*

Percy Roseby died on 25 July from wounds received during his reconnaissance on 17 July. He is buried at Corbie communal cemetery.

*

Hesketh Ross was one of only four 4th SAI officers to emerge from Delville Wood unscathed. He was awarded the MC for his bravery and leadership in the wood. On the night of 18 October Ross led 200 bombers, signallers and Lewis gunners of the SA Scottish at the Butte de Warlencourt. The enemy counter-attacked and he was wounded by a gunshot in the forehead. On 3 April 1917 Ross was allegedly killed by a sniper's bullet at Arras; Arthur Betteridge says by a whizzbang.

After the war when Mr Tate-Connor was commissioned to sculpture the SA Scottish memorial, which stands in Joubert Park, Johannesburg, he modelled the face and figure of the statue on Capt Ross, as someone who typified those who had gone through the horror of the First World War. The memorial was

unveiled on 1 April 1923. Capt T H Ross MC, is buried at Faubourg D Amiens cemetery at Arras, France.

*

“Mac” Rousseau, reputedly the youngest Delville Wood survivor, was wounded at Arras in April and Ypres in July and September 1917. He was appointed as a second-lieutenant and wounded again at Cambrai in March 1918. In the 1920s he served with the SA Railways and was married in November 1939. He was mentioned in despatches for gallant and distinguished services from July to October 1941 and was promoted to temporary major the following year. Rousseau was also awarded the efficiency decoration. He retired from the Permanent Force in January 1954 and in 1966 attended the Delville Wood 50th Anniversary celebrations.

*

Ryan was evacuated with shell-shock. He returned to the brigade after recuperating. He was severely wounded on 21 September 1917 at Ypres by gunshot and shrapnel in the right arm. Ryan was demobilised on 10 January 1919.

*

Douglas Sampson was evacuated to Tooting and Richmond Hospitals. He left hospital in February 1917, then returned to South Africa where he was discharged as permanently unfit in March 1918.

*

Gerard Saunders was repatriated on 11 December 1918. He returned to Durban to complete his articles and qualify as an accountant. In 1927 Saunders married Celia Rankin, a teacher from Naboomspruit. He continued in public practice as Saunders Haynes & Stewart in Durban and died there in February 1969, aged 72 years.

*

William Shapcott received a gunshot wound in his right elbow at Delville Wood. He was awarded the DCM for his bravery in Capt Tomlinson's raid. After convalescing he returned to France where he was wounded again in March 1917. In July 1917 he was promoted to sergeant in the SANLC. Another wound followed in June 1918. He sailed for South Africa six months later.

*

After being wounded in the shoulder on 16 July, Henry Sherman was inoculated against tetanus and sent to England as a stretcher case. On 20 September he returned to France and fought at the Butte de Warlencourt where he was the chief battalion runner. Despite being buried in a trench during a bombardment on 18 October, Sherman brought back vital intelligence to Dawson, for which he received the MM. He was promoted to corporal in January 1919 and sergeant in November 1919.

Sherman was demobbed in January 1920. Six years later Sherman and two others represented Port Elizabeth at the Delville Wood Monument unveiling. During the Second World War he served as a special constable in the Walmer Civilian Protection Services. He was a member of the Eastern Province branch of the 1st Infantry Brigade Association. Sherman died at Port Elizabeth in May 1971, aged 74 years.

*

James Simpson was evacuated as walking wounded. He became a 1st class Lewis-gunner in January 1917. He was killed at Arras on 12 April 1917 and is buried at Brown's Copse British cemetery, four miles east of Arras.

*

Charles Slade was mentioned in despatches for Delville Wood. He died from wounds received on 11 May 1917, and is buried nine miles northwest of Arras.

*

Ernest Solomon was taken prisoner and sent to Gef Friedrichfeld prison camp. He was repatriated in October 1918 and reached England a week after armistice. Solomon returned to Johannesburg where he joined Hutchinson, Bowen and Sersel, attorneys. His book *Potchefstroom to Delville Wood* describes his war experiences.

*

Walter Stewart was awarded the MM. On 15 September 1916 he was promoted to lance-corporal. On 13 October 1917 he was shot in the head and died soon afterwards. Stewart is buried at Duhallow, the advanced dressing-station cemetery at Ypres.

*

Charlie Stuart was taken to the Dulmen Camp and in February 1917 to the Sprottau POW Camp. He embroidered the flags of all the allied nations on the seat of his underpants which he later had framed. His brother, Walter, had meanwhile joined the 2nd SAI and was promised a battlefield commission by Lieut Garnet Green the day before Green was killed. Walter was taken prisoner at Marrieres Wood.

Stuart was discharged in May 1919 and went to work at the ABC Bank in Durban, where as a keen sportsman he rowed, played rugby and tennis. From 1925 he was the bank's branch accountant at Mooi River, where he married Norah Patricia Lawrence.

On the outbreak of the Second World War Stuart enlisted as a second-lieutenant in the Natal Reserve battalion. He became manager of the Umzinto branch of the bank where he was re-united with old Delville Wood friends Howard Brice-Bruce, Paul Richards, J Stewart and D Davey. Stuart transferred to Port Shepstone and then retired at Pietermaritzburg in 1954 where he joined the Natal Provincial Administration.

He died-there on 22 May 1972, aged 77. On his deathbed he told his nephew, Bob Stuart, how much he regretted having killed the young German in the shell-hole at Delville Wood. Another nephew, Kelsey Stuart, was president of the SA Red-Cross and chief legal adviser to the SA Associated Newspapers.

*

Garnet Tanner was evacuated to England. After his recovery he was introduced on a blind date to his future wife, Molly, who was assisting with catering for soldiers at the time. He was awarded the DCM in June 1917 for his bravery at Delville Wood. Tanner was married on 7 August 1918 and returned to South Africa in April 1919. After 63 years of happy marriage the Tanners live at Bergvliet, Cape Town.

His brother, Douglas, was awarded the MM for bravery in getting an ammunition train through at Ypres. Douglas served in Egypt during the Second World War. His brother, Stanley, went to live in London where he served as a stretcher-bearer in the Home Guard during the Second World War. Stanley's two sons attended Sandhurst. Stanley Tanner died in London in February 1946.

*

For his leadership at Delville Wood William Tanner was awarded the CMG and promoted to temporary brigadier-general. He led the 2nd SAI at Arras. In October 1917 he left the brigade to command the 8th Brigade in the 3rd Division.

After the 1st SAI Brigade was lost at Marrieres Wood, Gen Tanner returned to command the re-formed brigade. He fought with them at the Battle of the Lys, the advance and capture of Le Cateau and was with the advanced guard when the war ended. For his services he was awarded the CB, DSO, Croix de Guerre (Belgium), Order de Leopold Officier (Belgium), and Croix de

Chevalier Legion d'Honneur (France) and mentioned in despatches six times.

Between 1919 and 1933 he held several important posts in the UDF, *inter alia*, adjutant general, commandant of the SA military college, OC at Roberts Heights (Voortrekkerhoogte) and chief of the general staff on four occasions. In 1926 Tanner attended the Imperial Conference and the Unveiling of the Delville Wood Memorial. He retired in October 1933 with the rank of brigadier-general.

Tanner was a staunch Anglican, whose hobby was carpentry. He imported oak from Delville Wood for making the Delville memorial crosses at South Africa's main centres. His son, flying officer Erskine Tanner, RAF, was killed in a flying accident at Northold in April 1934.

Tanner developed his fruit farm at Elgin Valley and served on several committees. In 1938 he led the SA Battlefields Pilgrimage to Europe as organised by the BESL. During the Second World War Tanner was recalled as OC of the Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith areas, in August 1940 OC Wit Command and in October OC Cape Command. He retired on 30 April 1942 as a major-general. General Tanner died at Elgin, Cape, on 29 September 1943, aged 67.

*

Harold Tayler was badly shell-shocked and evacuated via Rouen to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. He was discharged on 23 August. In April 1917 Tayler transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and was commissioned as a temporary second-lieutenant on 14 July 1917. The following day he was shot down over the German lines, wounded in the leg and taken prisoner. His condition deteriorated so much that he was repatriated on 15 January 1918. Tayler's right leg was amputated a week later. His award of the MM was gazetted on 16 November 1918.

*

Edward Thackeray commanded the 3rd SAI at the Butte de Warlencourt, at Arras and at Third Ypres. He was awarded the CMG and DSO for his services. In September 1919 Thackeray was appointed as a general staff officer and in February 1923 posted to the SA Staff Corps, Permanent Force, and headed the Witwatersrand Command. He retired with the rank of colonel on 1 April 1926. He then became Transvaal Commissioner of the Boy Scouts, Provincial Secretary of the 1820 Settlers Memorial Association and served on the Johannesburg Committee of the Governor General's Fund from 1926 to 1937. Thackeray was Dominion President of the BESL.

Col Thackeray was in England when the Second World War commenced. He immediately offered his services but was turned down on account of his age of 69, so enlisted in the Home Guard as a private. His bearing and skill came to notice, so was promoted overnight to colonel, and headed a youth training battalion.

Thackeray was a familiar figure at veterans' day parades in Johannesburg. "A straight-backed man with a white moustache and blue eyes …"

He died at Johannesburg on 8 November 1956, aged 86.

*

Leonard Tomlinson was wounded and evacuated on the 15th. At the time his wife was living in London, so visited him at hospital. He rejoined his unit before his DSO award was gazetted in November 1916. He was also mentioned in despatches in January 1917. Tomlinson commanded D Coy in the 20 September 1917 Ypres battle and briefly commanded the battalion during Col Thackeray's absence two months later. When the battalion was disbanded Tomlinson transferred to the 4th SAI. In October 1918 he commanded one of their companies in the fighting at Reumont. After the armistice he was an acting major at the HQ and relinquished his commission in July 1919.

*

Cecil Trenam was taken to Tooting, then Richmond hospital. His right arm became gangrenous and he was not expected to survive. The surgeon, Capt E A Leviseur, saved his arm from amputation. Trenam studied accountancy and learnt to write with his left hand. After recovering the use of his right arm he could write with both hands simultaneously. While at hospital he met a distant relative, Isabel Gardiner, his future wife.

Trenam was repatriated to South Africa early in 1918. Isabel followed in March 1923 and they were married shortly after her arrival. At the time he was accountant at the Dept of Irrigation, Cradock. They had two sons, Frank born in 1924 and Robert born in 1927. Cecil Trenam died on 5 December 1962, aged 71, and Isabel in April 1980.

*

Dick Unwin's real name is Richard Postlethwaite. He learnt to knit in the Ohdruf POW camp in Saxony. He made a jersey from 14 pairs of socks with knitting needles cut from a wire fence. He was to wear this jersey in various POW camps and after the war, on the West Rand Consolidated Mines where he worked as foreman electrician.

In 1920 he married Hilda Hulbert and had a son, Leslie. Postlethwaite had to swear an affidavit in order to receive the medals issued to his alias, Unwin. He won the Transvaal bowls championship twice running in the early 1930s. His son served with the Jocks during the Second World War.

His grandson, Ian, was a sergeant-major in the Natal Carbineers and was tragically killed when pretending to rob a friend and was shot. Richard Postlethwaite has retired to Amanzimtoti on the South Coast. His jersey has been donated to the MOTHS Warriors Gate Museum in Durban.

*

Captain Vivian had served in the Rand Light Infantry and Railway Regiment

during the Rebellion and SWA. He was wounded at Delville Wood on 15 July. He won the MC before being killed at Ypres on 20 September 1917.

*

Nicholas Johannes Vlok was awarded the DCM for his bravery at Delville Wood and was mentioned in despatches. When the Boer medals were awarded in 1921 for the South African War, Vlok received the “Dekoratie Voor Trouwe Dienst”, the Boer officers’ decoration. He returned to farming, after which he retired to live at Beaconsfield, Kimberley. Vlok appears in the South African *Who’s Who* of 1926.

*

Lionel Walsh was awarded the DCM for Delville Wood. He was commissioned as a second-lieutenant on 26 April 1917 and transferred to the 7th Bn London Regiment.

*

Capt Walshe was the Roman Catholic chaplain attached to the 2nd SAI. He originally came from Tipperary in Ireland. He was attached to the 2nd Reserve Battalion in January 1918 and promoted to temporary major three months later. Father Walshe was awarded the MC in September 1918. He returned to South Africa a year later and was appointed a chaplain in the Union Defence Force in 1920.

*

George Warwick was evacuated to Etaples Hospital where shrapnel was removed from his thigh, then he was sent to England to recuperate. He returned to Bordon Camp in September 1916, then rejoined the brigade at Arras in December. He took part in the Battle of Arras in April 1917.

At the Third Battle of Ypres in September 1917 Warwick was wounded in the spine by shrapnel and paralysed. He was evacuated to the SA Military Hospital at Richmond. He returned to Durban in October 1918.

In January 1926 Warwick married Marjorie Leadbetter at Durban. He was to be disabled throughout his life, yet by 1931 had learnt to walk for short distances. He obtained a B Comm degree, then studied theology at Edinburgh and was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in 1934.

The Rev George Warwick served at Dannhauser, the Bluff (Durban) and Vryheid. He studied part-time to graduate as a BA in 1939. He was forced to retire because of ill health in 1957 and was given the status of a Minister Emeritus of the church. His book *We Band of Brothers* was published in 1962.

*

Capt Tom Welsh, previously a mine doctor, was awarded the MC in January 1917. He died of wounds received at Arras on 12 April 1917.

*

Francis Wiley was evacuated to England. After recuperating he attended a bomb-throwing instructors' course in September, and was commissioned in November 1916. He was wounded in the left wrist and head at Ypres on 20 September 1917. In May 1918 Wiley attended a bombing course at Aldershot. On 3 July he died at Woking Barracks and is buried at the Brookwood cemetery.

*

Francis Wilkie was evacuated to England. After his left wrist healed he returned to his regiment as CSM. He was wounded in action on 15 October 1917. At Marrieres Wood on 24 March 1918, Wilkie held up the enemy with a Lewis gun while his regiment retired, for which he was later awarded the DCM. He was taken prisoner and repatriated on 18 December 1918. Wilkie was discharged at Bloemfontein in June 1919. He was awarded the French and Belgian Croix de Guerre medals and the Coronation Medal for 1937.

*

Sandy Young was invalided to England and hospitalised at Brighton. He returned to France in September 1916 and fought under Capt Ross at the Butte de Warlencourt on 18 October. He was killed early the following morning when the Germans counter-attacked with flammenwerfers. Young is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial and on the Bulwer (Natal) War Memorial.

Roll of Honour 14-20 July 1916

Possibly in no other area have exaggerated reports perpetuated a myth so consistently as in the case of Delville Wood fatalities. Their figures varied annually. The heights were reached in one report of the battle "… in which about 3,000 South Africans lost their lives."

The losses sustained by the 1st South African Brigade sent a shock-wave through South Africa. It is not necessary to exaggerate them. Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Cilliers MC, of the South African Agency of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission spent many years compiling a record of the battle's fatalities. The difficulty of providing a complete record of casualties need not be emphasised.

The Delville Wood fatalities commencing on 14 July are:

1st Battalion (192) … 105 killed in action, 59 death assumed, 28 died of wounds

2nd Battalion (181) … 104 killed in action, 51 death assumed, 26 died of wounds

3rd Battalion (225) … 123 killed in action, 77 death assumed, 25 died of wounds

4th Battalion (168) … 112 killed in action, 31 death assumed, 25 died of wounds

Total (766) … 444 killed in action, 218 death assumed, 104 died of wounds

Notes

1 These figures exclude the SA Light Trench Mortar Battery, SA Medical Corps, 64th Field Company RE and 28th Brigade Machine-gun Company who were attached to the brigade.

2 The men who died of wounds include those who died up to October 1916 of wounds sustained at Delville Wood. Generally those who died after this date, being of next engagement, have not been included as it would be impossible to tell from the First World War Roll of Honour when they were mortally wounded.

*

(Name Age Rank Date of death)

1st Battalion

Allen P J L/Cpl 19.7; Allsop F Pte 16.7; Anderson B E Pte 22.7; Anderson V 19 Pte 17.7; Appleton R 29 L/Cpl 16.7; Bailey W E Pte 18.7; Baker H R L/Cpl 16.7; Bentley G E Pte 18.7; Bicheno W Pte 18.7; Bleasby J R 30 Sgt 16.7; Botha D Pte 17.7; Bothma S A Pte 18.7; Breakey L W Pte 18.7; Brodie E J Pte 18.7; Brookstein A W J Pte 18.7; Brown A E (H) Sec-Lieut 16.7; Brown H Pte 16.7; Burges E T Major 18.7; Burton C F S L/Sgt 18.7; Butler S Pte 17.7; Callaghan G Pte 16.7; Capper W F Pte 17.7; Carlisle A D Pte 16.7; Carlson W E Pte 14.7; Carter A Pte 18.7; Carter R C Pte 16.7; Castle H B Pte 17.7; Chaney W Pte 18.7; Clarence W H Pte 18.7; Clews A J L/Cpl 16.7; Clews W E 26 Pte 17.7; Colling N 20 Pte 15.7; Colvin J A 19 Pte 20.7; Conway T P Pte 17.7; Cook C F Pte 20.7; Cussack J Pte 18.7; Dania A J Pte 18.7; Davids W G Pte 18.7; Davis H Pte 18.7; Davis R W Pte 18.7; Davis T Pte 18.7; Dignam J L Pte 18.7; Dillon J B Pte 17.7; Downey T A Pte 18.7; Doyle D D Pte 18.7; Doyle N 22 L/Cpl 16.7; Dryer L L Pte 14.7; Dunneen M J Pte 18.7; Dusting L Pte 18.7; Elliott EF Pte 18.7; Elms T Pte 15.7; Enke F Pte 18.7; Ewan C Pte 18.7; Eyden F Pte 18.7; Faure E Pte 18.7; Feast F L/Cpl 17.7; Ferguson W Pte 14.7; Findley C J L/Sgt 18.7; Fisher A C Pte 14.7; Fraser J Pte 18.7; Fourie J J 22 Pte 17.7; Foxcroft T H Cpl 14.7; Francklow J T J Pte 17.7; Furmidge C A 25 Pte 18.7; Glazebrook F L/Cpl 16.7; Going E B Pte 18.7; Goodacre W H Pte 18.7; Greenwood G F Pte 14.7; Gregory E W

Pte 18.7; Gurney F Pte 18.7; Haarhoff A C Sec-Lieut 17.7; Hagell A Pte 16.7; Hahn E A L Sec-Lieut 16.7; Hall E L L/Cpl 18.7; Harris C A Pte 18.7; Harrison C A Pte 18.7; Hawkins W Sgt 18.7; Heathcote C E Pte 18.7; Hetherington W Pte 22.7; Hewett W H R Pte 18.7; Hinton E J L/Sgt 18.7; Hollingsworth J M 21 Sec-Lieut 20.7; Hopper E W Pte 18.7; Howell J L L/Sgt 16.7; Hume P R Sgt 18.7; Hutton J W Pte 18.7; Immelman L G Pte 18.7; Ireland J Pte 19.7; Isemonger L W 20 Pte 18.7; Jackson M H 19 S-bearer 21.7; Jansen F J Pte 18.7; Jenkins C R A Pte 17.7; Johnson A Pte 18.7; Jones V A Pte 17.7; Jowett P J Capt 20.7; Kaber J Pte 18.7; Kalis H J P Pte 20.7; Kallis C D Pte 18.7; Keating E W Pte 17.7; Kensit EG Pte 18.7; Keys A E Pte 18.7; King G A Pte 18.7; Kirkham W J 39 Pte 17.7; Knight J H Cpl 17.7; Krige J Pte 18.7; Kuys A G J Pte 16.7; Laerman L C Sgt 18.7; Lang F H W Pte 18.7; Larson E E Pte 18.7; Laubscher J J Pte 18.7; Lavender O C Pte 18.7; Leak G A Pte 18.7 ; Ledbury V E Cpl 16.7; Lloyd R C 32 Pte 17.7; Madden C Pte 18.7; Marles A G Pte 18.7; Martin I L Pte 18.7; Matheson J R Cpl 18.7; McDonald P Pte 18.7; McGregor W Pte 18.7; McGregor J G Pte 18.7; McKenzie W A Pte 18.7; Miller G J Capt 16.7; Mills F Pte 18.7; Mocke F Pte 18.7; Moller C N 17 Pte 21.7; Momsen H J Pte 18.7; Morgan W J Pte 18.7; Morrison R W Pte 18.7; Munro D 35 Pte 16.7; Nash J Y 26 Pte 14.7; Needham W Pte 18.7; Newell C F W Pte 16.7; Newell G H Cpl 17.7; Nowell A J Pte 18.7; O’Connor S J Pte 16.7; Padden E E C L/Cpl 18.7; Paisley S N Pte 17.7; Palphramand G H Pte 18.7; Palphramand R H Pte 18.7; Parker LT Pte 24.7; Parkes T Pte 20.7; Parsons C B Lieut 16.7; Patterson T E 22 Pte 16.7; Pattison V R Pte 18.7; Pearce A 27 Pte 18.7; Playsted J Pte 18.7; Potgieter G D Sgt 18.7; Prodehl H C Pte 18.7; Quinn J H Pte 14.7; Raphael H C Pte 18.7; Raphael S F 25 Cpl 19.7; Roberts R F Pte 17.7; Ross C S Pte 14.7; Ryden F Pte 18.7; Ryder J Pte 18.7; Schafer C W Pte 14.7; Schon C J Pte 18.7; Schooling A G Sgt 16.7; Selby C O Pte 18.7; Seller A G Pte 18.7;

Semark S C Pte 18.7; Slatem T R Pte 18.7; Smith A E Pte 18.7; Smith E J O Pte 18.7; Smith F A Pte 17.7; Smith W C Pte 18.7; Soderland C D Pte 18.7; Sparkes A J Pte 18.7; Stoffberg C M F Pte 18.7; Strutt A Pte 18.7; Stuart C H Pte 18.7; Sturrock P L/Cpl 17.7; Sutherland J W Pte 26.7; Sullivan C Pte 18.7; Swanepoel G Pte 18.7; Thomas S Pte 19.7; Thomson H C G Pte 18.7; Trent E G Pte 18.7; Turner H Pte 14.7; Van Blerk C L/Cpl 18.7; Van der Spuy J H Pte 18.7; Walker J B Pte 18.7; Wallace E Pte 18.7; Walters F Pte 14.7; Ward P Sgt 18.7; Weldon C G Pte 18.7; Whitter R J Pte 14.7; Wiles H Pte 18.7; Williams W Pte 18.7; Willson W E CSM 18.7; Wise T H Pte 18.7; Wright H B 18 Pte 18.7

2nd Battalion

Allen F 29 Pte 18.7; Armstrong A E B Cpl 17.7; Barnes E Pte 18.7; Barrett J Pte 18.7; Bartley H W Pte 18.7; Beetlar J Pte 17.7; Bell R H Pte 19.7; Bennant P E Pte 15.7; Bennett W A L/Cpl 18.7; Bentley G J Pte 15.7; Bester J Pte 15.7; Bird T C Pte 18.7; Blunt C H L/Cpl 19.7; Brokwell E F 19 Pte 18.7; Bru-de-wold T W Sec-Lieut 15.7; Buckle C A Pte 18.7; Campbell H Pte 20.7; Carmichael C L/Cpl 15.7; Cheek G W 20 Pte 18.7; Cheeseman H R L/Cpl 14.7; Chichester T A Pte 18.7; Clack B Pte 18.7; Cleary T J Pte 18.7; Clifford H E Capt 19.7; Clift C C V Pte 16.7; Clifton W S Pte 20.7; Cohen A E Pte 17.7; Colly H D Pte 16.7; Connock J G 31 Sec-Lieut 19.7; Coombes E G Cpl 18.7; Cooper C B Cpl 15.7; Corlett J J Pte 19.7; Cowie A Pte 16.7; Cravell J J Pte 15.7; Creed H E F Capt 15.7; Dale C Pte 18.7; Dansemer W A H Pte 18.7; Davis T O Pte 17.7; Deeley H M 18 Pte 15.7; De Vos J Pte 17.7; Dewing F Pte 14.7; Dingley H O Pte 18.7; Dor W R Pte 19.7; Du Plessis J Pte 22.7; Eaton F L A Pte 18.7; Edkins V J Pte 14.7; Edwards H Pte 15.7; Edwards H Pte 18.7; Evans T J Pte 18.7; Fennell G H Sglr 15.7; Ferreira B Pte 19.7; Flack W H Pte 19.7; Flemmer W H Sec-Lieut 18.7; Foaden F Pte 18.7; Fuller S M Pte 18.7; Gately F M Pte 15.7; Gee H H A 48 Major 18.7;

Geraghty C P Pte 15.7; Gillon R C S Pte 18.7; Gough B V Pte 15.7; Graham W G Pte 17.7; Gray W J Capt 15.7; Green H A Pte 18.7; Griffin T H Pte 04.8; Hager A V Pte 15.7; Haig P Pte 15.7; Hamilton J W Pte 18.7; Hammond H J Pte 18.7; Harrison W Pte 17.7; Hickman W B Pte 30.7; Hill WJ Lieut 20.7; Hollister W R Pte 16.7; Hook J S Pte 20.7; Hoptroff W F Capt 18.7; Horsley W B Pte 18.7; Huber A L Pte 20.7; Hudson E S-bearer 15.7; Hutchinson A M Pte 15.7; Husband W J M Cpl 16.7; Introna B J Pte 18.7; Irvine R McL Pte 14.7; Jackson H Pte 18.7; Jacobs A N L/Cpl 15.7; James J T Cpl 18.7; Janion F T Pte 19.7; Jenkinson C Cpl 15.7; Jones R E Pte 19.7; Kannemeyer A R Pte 18.7; Kidson C G Pte 15.7; Kirkman A J Pte 18.7; Kurz L Pte 15.7; Lake C Pte 19.7; Lansdown B H Pte 18.7; Lees R W Pte 20.7; Letchford C T K 28 Sec-Lieut 20.7; Letley A Pte 17.7; Lewis E D Pte 19.7; Little W B 21 Pte 17.7; Malin J H Pte 18.7; Malley J H St C Sgt 18.7; Mandy L M 28 Pte 17.7; Marshall R Pte 18.7; McClelland DJ Sgt 15.7; McDonald A J 19 Pte 18.7; McDonald P J Pte 18.7; McLean D R Pte 18.7; McNab H D Sgt 18.7; Mellett F G Cpl 18.7; Miles L Pte 17.7; Miller J Pte 18.7; Miller R G Sec-Lieut 20.7; Miller R F Pte 18.7; Myers M H Pte 19.7; Nelson A A Pte 17.7; Newton F Pte 16.7; Newton P Pte 16.7; O'Connor C F R Pte 18.7; O'Neill C C Pte 18.7; Openshaw H D Pte 16.6; Parker J A Pte 19.7; Patterson J R Pte 15.7; Payne A R Pte 15.7; Pearce D C L/Cpl 18.7; Phelan E W Pte 18.7; Pollock C Pte 16.7; Poole G Pte 19.7; Prebble E E (DCM) CSM 18.7; Pulford H Pte 18.7; Purvis W O 34 L/Cpl 18.7; Pusey G C Pte 18.7; Quail J W Pte 18.7; Rafter E W 30 Pte 19.7; Rainbow W T L/Cpl 14.7; Reffey FJ Pte 16.7; Reid T F J Pte 18.7; Reid W Pte 18.7; Renshaw H Pte 17.7; Restall C A 41 Sgt 15.7; Richardson C H Pte 18.7; Roberts A E Pte 18.7; Roseby P R 39 Lieut 25.7; Rozenzweig W H 21 Pte 18.7; Rosser G H Pte 23.7; Ryder R F Sgt 15.7; Scruby C R Pte 17.7; Sikimich M Pte 17.7; Sinclair W 29 L/Cpl 19.7; Slattery J M Pte 17.7; Sly A W Pte 29.7; Smith F J

Cpl 18.7; Smith F W Pte 16.7; Smith J J Pte 18.7; Stevens R A Pte 25.7; Strachen D D Pte 16.7; Tarboton R H Pte 15.7; Tatham E V Sec-Lieut 18.7; Tatham R P Sec-Lieut 20.7; Tetlow U Pte 23.7; Theobald W C R 25 Pte 18.7; Thompson D J Pte 18.7; Thomson G H Sgt 15.7; Thorpe G E Pte 18.7; Tooke A F Pte 18.7; Tuckett L J Pte 18.7; Turrell H Pte 18.7; Tweedie K R Pte 18.7; van Tonder J N Pte 18.7; Wales A T Sec-Lieut 17.7; Walton F Pte 18.7; Warren H T Pte 18.7; Watkins E Pte 18.7; Webster D S Pte 15.7; Whitelaw C O L/Cpl 19.7; Wilkinson A H Sgt 14.7; Williams F H H Pte 18.7; Williams R Pte 18.7; Wilson A H Pte 18.7; Wood J B Pte 15.7; Wright W J Sgt 15.7; Wybrow L Pte 15.7; Young W C C/Sig 18.7

3rd Battalion

Adams J H Pte 16.7; Adams V I Pte 19.7; Adendorff L L Dvr 01.8; Afflick J D Pte 17.7; Alsop J Pte 18.7; Anderson R Pte 18.7; Aronson N Pte 01.8; Baird J 36 Pte 20.7; Barker A Cpl 01.8; Bartlett G Pte 01.8; Barton A R Sec-Lieut 20.7; Belshaw W Cpl 18.7; Berry W J Pte 15.7; Biggs G S Cpl 01.8; Black RJ Cpl 01.8; Braithwaite L G Pte 15.7; Brooks C H Pte 15.7; Brown H A Pte 19.7; Bryant J W Pte 16.7; Bryant P CSM 16.7; Bunn G W Pte 01.8; Burman D A Pte 18.7; Burnside J Pte 18.7; Burton R C Pte 16.7; Burton V R Pte 16.7; Butcher F C 26 Pte 20.7; Capel H G 25 Pte 19.7; Carnegie W C Pte 01.8; Clark W Pte 01.8; Cleaves R C Pte 19.7; Clifton N P Pte 01.8; Coad E A Pte 18.7; Collins A C Pte 15.7; Cook A G L/Cpl 15.7; Cook J W C Pte 20.7; Crossley L Pte 01.8; Coxford H L Sgt 20.7; Davis F Pte 18.7; Davey C H Sgt 17.7; Davidson S C Pte 19.7; Demin G Pte 01.8; Dent F Cpl 16.7; Dick C H Sec-Lieut 20.7; Dillon J Pte 01.8; Dinan H Pte 01.8; Dixon P K L/Cpl 16.7; Dondovich H G W Pte 27.7; Donnell R C Pte 18.7; Douglas R Pte 01.8; Drury L H 18 Pte 16.7; Dunn J A Pte 17.7; Dutton W H Pte 01.8; Edwards G G Pte 01.8; Elliott H 31 Pte 18.7; Elliot H G Lieut 20.7; Estill D L/Cpl 16.7; Fichat C C L/Cpl 16.7; Fivaz R Pte 01.8; Fletcher A McA Pte 18.7; Flitcroft

T N Pte 16.7; Frankish N E Pte 01.8; Fraser C J Pte 01.8; Fraser D Pte 01.8; Friedenthal M D Pte 02.8; Fynn D B H 20 Pte 16.7; Glasson J Pte 15.7; Gordon W H Pte 04.8; Gove H W Sec-Lieut 21.7; Gray FH 37 Pte 21.7; Hair J F Pte 01.8; Hanks A C Sec-Lieut 15.7; Harper R C Pte 01.8; Harris A R Pte 16.7; Harris R E 26 Pte 19.7; Harwood J Pte 19.7; Hawes L W Pte 20.7; Hawthorne L Pte 15.7; Henrick W M Pte 15.7; Hester F D Sgt 01.8; Hirtzel B Pte 17.7; Hollingberry W Pte 31.7; Hood A Pte 01.8; Hookham F G Pte 01.8; Horne H J Pte 01.8; Howell C S Pte 16.7; Hunter G Pte 20.7; Husband J Pte 19.7; Indge F H Pte 16.7; Isom W A Pte 01.8; Israel G R L/Cpl 16.7; Jackson J W Capt 20.7; Jackson T E Pte 18.7; James E Pte 01.8; James J E Cpl 17.7 James P A L/Cpl 17.7; Jarrett W T Pte 27.7; Jearey A F Pte 01.8; Jennings W Pte 01.8; Johnson F J Pte 18.7; Johnson J E Pte 20.7; Johnson H Pte 01.8; Johnson W Sgt 15.7; Kane F Drmr 20.7; Kemp R F Me Pte 21.7; Keogh G H Pte 20.7; Kerswill H J Pte 01.8; Kew W O 27 Pte 30.7; Keys H Pte 01.8; Kidson E M L/Cpl 21.7; Kirby A S Pte 15.7; Lahee A E Pte 01.8; Lewis A Dvr 19.7; Lewis C M Sgt 16.7; Lloyd I 36 Pte 18.7; Loverock M 41 Pte 19.7; Lupton R Sgt 16.7; Lupton J Pte 01.8; Maade J H Pte 01.8; Maherry J J 33 Pte 20.7; Mallett A C M Pte 18.7; Marsh H C Pte 18.7; Martin W Pte 18.7; Mather W Pte 18.7; May G Pte 15.7; McAuley E 36 Pte 01.8; McBroom W Pte 01.8; McCarthy C H Pte 15.7; McClure R Sgt 16.7; McCuaig H H Pte 20.7; McCulloch J L/Cpl 01.8; McCusker I M Pte 05.8; McDonald W S A/Sgt 20.7; McLachlan D R Capt 16.7; McLachlan K A Pte 16.7; McLean E H Pte 15.7; McLeroth P D Pte 16.7; McNeil W A 41 L/Cpl 21.7; Medlin B W Pte 17.7; Mellew J Pte 15.7; Mills J A Pte 01.8; Morgan J Pte 17.7; Munro W A Sgt 15.7; Naylor R 34 Pte 18.7; Newberry C Pte 01.8; Newton E A 22 Pte 16.7; O’Connor J Pte 02.8; Owen J E Pte 18.7; Parsons D H Pte 18.7; Patrick C H Pte 18.7; Pearson W R C Cpl 20.7; Perkins J H 30 Pte 16.7; Petrie H G Pte 16.7; Pitts C R L/Cpl 20.7; Pocock J W Pte 15.7; Pollock N M Pte 16.7;

Pollock T L/Cpl 17.7; Prince W R L/Cpl 01.8; Quirk A E Pte 01.8; Rautenbach W D Pte 01.8; Rayner J S Pte 16.7; Read T J L/Cpl 01.8; Readett R H Pte 20.7; Redpath Pte 15.7; Reid F V W Sgt 19.7; Reid D Pte 16.7; Reynolds B K Pte 01.8; Robb J Pte 01.8; Rodgers P Pte 16.7; Rogerson S C 25 Pte 16.7; Rowe W E Pte 16.7; Ruddle F Pte 17.7; Salmond A A Pte 01.8; Sanders D R L/Cpl 15.7; Sansbury J E Pte 01.8; Sayle R A Pte 01.8; Schofield T Pte 01.8; Shaw H Sgt 20.7; Sherwood E S CQMS 17.7; Shilton W P Pte 18.7; Siebert W H Pte 19.7 Simmonds C R L/Sgt 17.7; Singlehurst F J A 19 Pte 15.7; Smith C Pte 15.7; Smith W Dvr 01.8; Sneezum J Pte 17.7; Snowden H J Pte 17.7; Soal B Pte 18.7; Somerset F H 33 Sec-Lieut 20.7; Spencer C Pte 18.7; Spencer E W L/Cpl 21.7; Stagg F Dvr 01.8; Stericker W Sgt 16.7; Steyn J J J Pte 01.8; Stone G W Pte 01.8; Streeton P J Pte 01.8; Sturgeon N R Pte 17.7; Taljaard J J Pte 18.7; Thoday L L/Cpl 15.7; Thom J M Pte 01.8; Thomas W L Pte 13.8; Thompson J D Pte 18.7; Todd A 36 Pte 20.7; Trace R G Pte 16.7; Travill M Pte 01.8; Truscott R J Pte 17.7; Tubbs W H 27 Pte 17.7; Tucker E E Pte 18.7; Tweedie J H Pte 18.7; Van der Walt J Pte 15.7; Van Holst D S Pte 01.8; Wales WTR Pte 20.7; Walker H S L/Cpl 01.8; Walker H W Pte 01.8; Watson J Pte 18.7; Wentworth F Pte 19.7; Whatmore J H Pte 01.8; Wheatley A Pte 01.8; Willett R Pte 01.8; Wiltshire F Pte 19.7; Wood E L Cpl 18.7; Woodburn E T Pte 16.7; Wright G Pte 18.7; Wright J Pte 01.8

4th Battalion

Anderson W N Pte 20.7; Baker C L/Cpl 30.7; Banbury H A Pte 18.7; Barber E Pte 14.7; Bean O L Pte 16.7; Beeton E W 16 Pte 18.7; Bell C S Lieut 20.7; Bell F C L/Cpl 16.7; Beverley A G Pte 16.7; Binden A W Pte 16.7; Birch W G L/Cpl 19.7; Botha F Pte 16.7; Bowley E S 21 Pte 19.7; Bradfield A W Pte 15.7; Bridson W Pte 17.7; Brown A H Lieut 20.7; Brown C P 25 Pte 15.7; Brown P A Pte 19.7; Buckingham J I Pte 17.7; Burleigh J 27

Pte 15.7; Cairns J McG Pte 15.7; Cameron J RSM 15.7; Carpenter P W Pte 18.7; Carson J Pte 16.7; Cleft P H Pte 17.7; Clegg E W L/Cpl 18.7; Cline J Pte 18.7; Combrinck P R Pte 17.7; Comerford A E J Pte 18.7; Coombe A V 30 L/Cpl 16.7; Cooper W Pte 16.7; Cousins A E Pte 18.7; Cullen J Pte 15.7; Cutler A E Pte 26.7; Dall T A H Pte 18.7; Davey H L Pte 09.8; Davidson L G Pte 16.7; Davis P F 26 Pte 16.7; Dingwall T Pte 15.7; Dodd H L/Cpl 16.7; Drummond J Pte 17.7; Edwards A V E Pte 20.7; Ellie R H Pte 28.7; Evison C Pte 17.7; Ewbank J J Pte 19.7; Fenton W E Pte 19.7; Filby A Pte 16.7; Fockens A J Pte 16.7; French J Pte 16.7; Froneman N P Pte 16.7; Gaisford N Mc N Pte 16.7; Garton H W L/Cpl 17.7; Gooding J H Pte 16.7; Grant J Pte 16.7; Gray R Pte .7; Gow T P Pte .7; Greenway E W H L/Cpl 17.7; Grigg W Pte 16.7; Groenewald W A Pte 18.7; Haggis G P L/Cpl 28.7; Hammond G V Pte 16.7; Hare V Pte 16.7; Harris R F Pte 27.7; Harvey M Pte 16.7; Haynes J A Pte 19.7; Herbert F W Pte 14.7; Hewitt E J Pte 15.7; Hodge J S Pte 16.7; Horn H L/Cpl 15.7; Humphries J D N Cpl 17.7; Hunter T Cpl 16.7; Innes A D Pte 16.7; Jacobson F W 25 Pte 23.7; Johns F Pte 15.7; Johnston H J Pte 31.7; Keet B L Pte 16.7; Kensley G W Pte 16.7; Kinley J A Pte 21.7; Kirby H G L/Cpl 19.7; Kleinhans W G Pte 17.7; Knox G C L/Cpl 18.7; Lambie W V Pte 18.7; Langston T H Pte 19.7; Leddra G Pte 18.7; Lock R Pte 17.7; Logal W L/Cpl 15.7; Lombard D J Pte 16.7; MacDonald R L/Cpl 18.7; Mackie T J Pte 18.7; Mackintosh J C G Pte 16.7; Magee H Pte 17.7; Malcolm A N L/Cpl 15.7; Mathews W J Cpl 15.7; Mays J W Pte 15.7; McCabe A B Pte 15.7; McCallum C F Pte 15.7; McDonald D W Pte 19.7; McDonald M Pte 16.7; McDonald R Pte 15.7; McGregor J Pte 17.7; McHenry F Pte 17.7; McIntosh J L/Sgt 17.7; McKay A McS B Pte 16.7; McKay E D Pte 21.7; McKinnon J B Pte 15.7; McLachlan A Pte 16.7; McLean A C Pte 17.7; McNaughton A Pte 18.7; McPhee C Pte 17.7; Merrington G W Pte 15.7; Middlemass J G Pte 19.7; Miller W Pte 15.7; Morton A A Pte 16.7; Mozley C B Pte 17.7;

Nedham L C Pte 18.7; Nesbitt C V Pte 18.7; Nicholson A Pte 18.7; Noble J Pte 17.7; Paul J Pte 18.7; Philip P B Pte 18.7; Pilbrow J D Pte 15.7; Pitman P Pte 01.8; Pole F E Pte 16.7; Randall W L Pte 18.7; Roberts H J Pte 17.7; Rodger J M M Pte 16.7; Ross D 35 Sec-Lieut 20.7; Ross H N Pte 16.7; Royan J Pte 19.7; Scott G L 24 Pte 18.7; Scott N Pte 17.7; Service A G Pte 19.7; Shaul N S Pte 19.7; Short A G 36 CQMS 19.7; Short R R Pte 19.7; Sinclair J Pte 18.7; Sinclair W D Pte 17.7; Skillen A Pte 15.7; Slade L S Pte 19.7; Smith E W Pte 08.8; Sneddon L H CSM 19.7; Sobey S I L/Cpl 18.7; Stephens S Pte 18.7; Stewart C Pte 18.7; Stewart D Pte 18.7; Stewart J C Pte 18.7; Swemmer P F Pte 18.7; Tait I H Pte 17.7; Tennant W H 22 Pte 16.7; Thorburn R B Lieut 20.7; Timms B C S Pte 17.7; Towers H C Pte 21.7; Tweedie W Pte 19.7; Veitch F 19 Pte 19.7; Wallace J H L/Cpl 19.7; Wallace R Pte 21.7; Wardrop J Pte 18.7; Watkins W Pte 19.7; Watt AG Pte 24.7; Webster L G Pte 15.7; Welch H Sgt 17.7; Welcott J Pte 19.7; Wensley W Pte 19.7; Williams R B Pte 20.7; Wills W C Pte 15.7; Woolcot A H Pte 18.7; Young G G Pte 16.7; Yule J L Pte 17.7

Bailey's Sharpshooters

Hunt W G 41 L/Cpl 18.7; Laing A 32 L/Cpl 16.7; Marnoch J 31 L/Cpl 17.8; Vaughan L F 27 L/Cpl 17.8

*

The following are the known graves to Delville Wood fatalities.

Flers (2) … 1st SAI (1), 2nd SAI (1) 3rd SAI (-), 4th SAI (-)

Carnoy (1) … 1st SAI (1), 2nd SAI (-) 3rd SAI (-), 4th SAI (-)

Caterpillar Valley (1) … 1st SAI (-), 2nd SAI (-) 3rd SAI (-), 4th SAI (1)

Delville Wood (81) … 1st SAI (27), 2nd SAI (15) 3rd SAI (24), 4th SAI (15)

High Wood (6) … 1st SAI (-), 2nd SAI (1) 3rd SAI (5), 4th SAI (-)

La Neuvelle, Corbie (19) … 1st SAI (9), 2nd SAI (2) 3rd SAI (6), 4th SAI

(2)

Ovillers (2) … 1st SAI (-), 2nd SAI (-) 3rd SAI (1), 4th SAI (1)

Butte de Warlencourt (1) … 1st SAI (-), 2nd SAI (-) 3rd SAI (-), 4th SAI (1)

Notes

1 Pte George Edward Hale, 23, was shot in the back on 13 July 1916. He died on 16 July 1917 and is buried at the Ordnance Road Military Cemetery, Durban. As he was not in Delville Wood he is not included above or in this roll of honour.

2 All cemeteries are in the Somme area of France.

3 Details of graves are to be found in the cemetery registers compiled by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

4 The cemetery register at Delville Wood records 151 South African graves. Of these 70 are of unknown soldiers.

5 The names of all the untraced South African dead are commemorated on the Menin Gates (Ypres) and Thiepval (Somme) Memorials.

Nominal Roll of Infantry Officers at the Somme in July 1916

1st SAI Brigade

Key

1A *1st Battalion A Company*
2B *2nd Battalion B Company*
3D *3rd Battalion D Company*
G *Gassed*
W *Wounded*
K *Killed*
D *Died of wounds*

(Name Age Rank Unit Remarks Casualties Date)

Abel D M Sec-Lieut 3A W 8
Anderson R Capt 4D S
Baker J B Lieut 3C W
Bamford Harry W M Capt 2HQ Adjutant W
Barlow Ernest 38 Capt 2B W 15
Barton Alfred Richard 34 Sec-Lieut 3D K 18
Bate Cron Ivor 34 Sec-Lieut 1C POW
Bailey Sec-Lieut MG Coy W 16
Bayley Z B Hon Lieut 4HQ QM
Bell C S 37 Sec-Lieut 4C K 18
Beverley Robert Lieut 2A W 18
Brown Arthur E Sec-Lieut 1 K 16
Brown Arthur Hugh 38 Lieut 4C K 16
Brown Williem Nimmo Lieut 1 K 6

Browne Claude Melville Capt 4HQ Adjutant W 18
Bru-de-Wold T W Sec-Lieut 2A K 15
Bryant E C Sec-Lieut 2C I
Burges Edward Travers 38 Major 1D K 18
Burgess Edwin John Lieut 1 W 18
Burton Frederick W S Sec-Lieut Bde HQ Signals
Cameron A M Lieut 4HQ M-G Officer W 18
Carding W H Hon Lieut 3 QM
Chapman H G Lieut 1 W 16
Charlton William Denham Lieut 4B
Chase Allen Centilivres 23 Lieut 4D ex Uitenhage W
Clerk E G Capt 4D
Clifford Herbert Edward Capt 2C D 10
Connock Joseph G 30 Sec-Lieut 2 K 18
Cook George Thornhill Capt 3HQ Chaplain K 11
Craig Arthur William Lieut 1B W 16
Creed Harold E F Capt 2B K 15
Dalgety E F Sec-Lieut 4
Dougherty B H L Lieut 3 W
Davies Edward Arthur Lieut 1HQ Transport
Davis F M Lieut 2D W
Dawson Frederick Stuart 42 Lieut-Col 1HQ CMG
Deane Robert L Capt MG Coy
Dent William Stanley 26 Lieut 1A W 14
Dick C H Sec-Lieut 3D K 17
Elliot Harold G Lieut 3C M 20
English Frederick S Lieut 1B
Farrell T Lieut 4 G 14

Fenix N Sec-Lieut 2 W
Flemmer W H Sec-Lieut 2C D 18
Fry J S Lieut 4 K
Furmidge P W Sec-Lieut 1 W
Gee Harry H 48 Major 2D D 18
Gove H W Sec-Lieut 3 M 21
Gowie D J W Sec-Lieut 3 S
Grady E C D Capt 4A W
Gray W J Capt 2C K
Green Garnet George 26 Sec-Lieut 2C W 18
Greene Lovell Lieut 2C W 10
Grierson R D Lieut 4D G
Guard S J Sec-Lieut 3 POW W
Guest C M Lieut 4HQ Staff W
Haarhof A C Sec-Lieut 1 K 16
Hahn E A L Sec-Lieut 1 K 16
Hanks Alfred C 40 Sec-Lieut 3A D 15
Harrison Arthur Cecil Lieut 1 W
Heal Frank Henry Major 1HQ Transport
Heeley H N Sec-Lieut 3 W
Heenan Claude R Capt 2A W 15
Henry Walter Douglas Lieut 1C POW W
Hill Eustace St Clair 43 Capt 1HQ Chaplain
Hill Walter James Lieut 2B K 20
Hirtzel H M Lieut 3 POW
Hollingsworth Jack M 21 Lieut 1 (A Coy) M 16
Hoptroff W F Capt 2D K 18
Hunt Donald Rolfe 41 Major 4C

Isaacs Leonard Isidore Lieut 1B
Jackson John W Capt 3C Actg Major K 18
Jenkins Herbert Harold Capt 1C W 15
Jenner D Sec-Lieut 3A W 17
Jones Frank Aubrey 42 Lieut-Col 4HQ CMG DSO K 11
Jowett Percy John Capt 1A M 20
Kirby Walter Houx Sec-Lieut 4 W
Knibbs A R Sec-Lieut 2D W
Larmuth Wilfrid Austin Lieut 1 W
Lawrie Capt Bde HQ SAFA
Legge E A Hon Capt 2HQ QM
Letchford C T K 28 Lieut 2D K 20
Liefeldt Aubrey William 24 Lieut 1D W 15
Liebson Stephen Capt 3HQ SAMC W
Lukin Henry Timson 56 Brig-Gen Bde HQ CB CMG DSO G
Lyne R M Sec-Lieut 1
MacLeod Donald Macleary 35 Major 4HQ W 18
Marshall George Edmund W Capt 4C S 17
MacDonald Albert W H Capt 3HQ Adjutant W
McFarlane Brian Neil Sec-Lieut 2C W 10
McLachlan D R Capt 3C K 15
McLean C A A Sec-Lieut 4B W
McLean W Lieut 4A Bde Staff
Medlicott Richard Frederick Capt 3B MC POW K
Miller George John 35 Capt 1B K 16
Miller R G Sec-Lieut 2A 20
Mitchell F Mc E Capt 4 Attd 26 Bde
Mitchell-Baker James 38 Major Bde HQ

Mulcahy C L H Lieut 2B D 10
Newson H M Lieut 4A POW
Nicholas Sec-Lieut M-G Coy
Nicholson Cyril Francis S Lieut 1
Oughterson H G Lieut 4 K 6
Parsons Cecil Braithwaite Lieut 1 K 16
Paxton A L Lieut 3 W
Pearson S Sec-Lieut 3 W
Parkins W J Lieut 2A W 18
Pepper A L Capt Bde HQ
Phillips Edward James 33 Lieut 3 Attd TMB W 20
Pirie D A Lieut 3 POW
Power Mitchell Stanislaus Major 4HQ SAMC
Priday Thomas Oscar Lieut 1HQ Adjutant W 16
Pringle R A Major Bde HQ SAFA
Reid Chauncey Wilfred Lieut 1A W 14
Ritchie F K St M Sec-Lieut 3 POW
Roseby Percy Richardson 39 Lieut Bde HQ Died 25th D 17
Ross Donald 35 Sec-Lieut 4 K 20
Ross Thomas Hesketh Capt 4B
Russell S C Capt 4A Trones Wood D 10
Scallan W Sec-Lieut 3 W
Schreiner Lieut Son of Cape PM W
Sharpe A E Sec-Lieut 3 G
Shenton J L Lieut 4D Signal Off. W 10
Smith G Lieut 4C W 18
Somerset Francis Henry 33 Sec-Lieut 3D D 20
Stokes S B Sec-Lieut 3 W

Stuckey A Lieut 1
Style Sydney Wallis E Lieut 1D W 18
Tanner William Ernest C 40 Lieut-Col 2HQ CMG W 17
Tatham Errol Victor 25 Sec-Lieut 2B K 18
Tatham Russell Pears 24 Sec-Lieut 2A K 20
Taylor A S Lieut 4D W 14
Taylor Robert Capt 1HQ SAMC
Tempany W Sec-Lieut 1 W 16
Thackeray Edward Francis 45 Lieut-Col 3HQ CMG W
Thomas O H de B Lieut 3 POW W
Thomson A M Lieut 3 W
Thomson S Capt 4HQ Chaplain
Thorburn R B Lieut 4B Waterlot Farm K 15
Tomlinson Leonard W Capt 3D W
Vivian E V Capt 3A W 15
Wales A T 23 Sec-Lieut 2 K
Walsh F G Sec-Lieut 2HQ Transport
Walshe PJ Capt 2HQ Chaplain
Watkins J Lieut 4D W
Wearner Arthur Charles Hon-Capt 1HQ QM
Young Alexander (Sandy) 43 Lieut 4D VC of SA War W

Delville Wood Decorations

Key

(C) *Lieut Craig's rescue on 16th.*

(H) *Lieut Hill's party.*

(T) *Capt Tomlinson's raid on 15th.*

(KIA) *Killed in Action*

(MDA) *Missing, death assumed*

(DOW) *Died of Wounds*

(Name Rank Regt. Recommended Awarded Notes)

Aitken A L/Cpl 4 DCM —

Ainslie J Sgt 4 MM — Wounded

Allen V W Pte 4 DCM MM MDA 9.6.1918

Badnall G F Pte 2 DCM — Bernafay

Baker G F Pte 1 DCM MM KIA 12.4.1917 (C)

Baker G T Pte 1 MM MM

Bamford H W Capt 2 DSO MC

Bansemer W H Pte 2 MM — KIA

Bennewith W R Pte 2 MM —

Beverley R. Lieut 2 MC MC Bernafay

Bryant N J CSM 3 MM — KIA (T)

Calder K Pte 2 DCM MM Bernafay KIA 12.10.16

Chapman O L Cpl 3 — (T)

Charlton W D Lieut 4 MC MC Bernafay

Chave A F L/Cpl 4 DCM — Trones

Cooper J H Pte 4 MM — Stretcher-bearer

Davies W F QMS 3 MC —
Davis A A Pte 3
Davis F M Lieut 2 MC —
Dinnes J L/Cpl 3 MM MM Trones “Scout”
Dixon C Cpl 4 DCM MM Wounded
Dixon P L/Cpl —
Douthwaite R Pte 2 DCM MM Bernafay KIA 12.4.1917
Dunstone S Pte 2 DCM MM
Du Plessis S L/Cpl 3 —
Estment A Pte 1 DCM MM (C)
Faulds W F Pte 1 VC VC (C)
Fitz E H Pte 2 DCM MM Bernafay
Flanagan W N L/Cpl 3 DCM MM
Fleck W F Pte 2 MM — KIA
Garland F L L/Cpl 2 DCM MM (H)
Govan F G Pte 3 DCM
Granger J L Pte 2 DCM MM
Green G G Sec-Lieut 2 MC MC MC Bar 1917, KIA, March 1918
Greene L Lieut 2 DSO MC DSO 1918
Grierson R D Sec-Lieut 4
Hall J L/Cpl 4 DCM MM
Halstead F Cpl 4 MM — 12 July Trones
Harris W F Pte 1 MM MM
Healy W M Pte 1 DCM DCM KIA 17.10.1917
Heath C W Pte 2 MM —
Heenan C R Cpt 2 MC —
Hendry N T Cpl 3 —
Hill R Pte 3 —

Hill E St. C Reverend 1 DSO — MC at Butte de Warlencourt Hill
W J Lieut 2 VC MID Escaped. KIA
Hoatson A Pte 2 DCM —
Holdsworth W Pte 2 MM MM Bernafay
Holiday T H Pte 1 MM MM
Hollingberry W Pte 3 MM MM Dangerously wounded (T)
Hollington E E Pte 4 DCM MM
Holmes R J Pte Brig HQ MM MM See Smuts
Hort G A L/Cpl 1 MM MM Wounded
Jenner D Sec-Lieut 3 — Wounded
Lawrie M B Capt SAMC MC MC
Lawson J A Pte 3 —
Liebson S Capt 3 MC MC Attd SAMC. KIA 1918
Lobb G T Pte —
Loubser A J Pte 1 DCM DCM KIA 17.10.1917
MacFarlane B N Lieut 2 MC MC Bernafay & Trones Wood
Mandy G I Pte 2 MM —
Marshall G E Sgt 2 MM DCM
Maudlen J C Pte 3 MM —
McCormack J Pte 3 —
McDonald A W H Capt 3 DSO MC DOW 21.9.1917
McDonald W S Sgt 3 MM MM Seriously wounded (T)
McIntosh A Pte 4 MM —
McKay B S Sgt 2 MM — Bernafay Wood
McLachlan A Pte 4 MM — Missing
Mitchell F L/Cpl 2 DCM MM Bernafay
Moneron F G Pte 3 DCM MM Stretcher-bearer
Morgan R H L/Cpl 4 MM —

Naisby J Sgt 3 VC DCM Seriously wounded
Neille P J Sgt 4 DCM —
Noble W M Pte 3 MM —
Peacock W F Pte 2 MM — See Bennewith & Heath MID 1917
Phillips E J Sec-Lieut 3 DSO DSO Wounded
Power MS Major 4 DSO DSO SAMC Attd 4th SAI
Pebble E E A/RSM 2 DCM DCM KIA DW Egypt
Prentice W Pte 4 MM MM KIA 6.7.1918
Pringle R N Major SAFA DSO DSO
Quinton R J Pte 4 DCM — Helped Lieut Charlton
Richardson C E Pte 2 MM —
Robertson T Pte 4 MM — Stretcher-bearer
Ross T H Capt 4 DSO MC KIA 3.4.1917
Schurray D Sgt 4 MM MID
Scott R E Drummer 3 MM —
Shapcott W H L/Cpl 3 DCM DCM Wounded (T)
Shenton J L Lieut 4 MC MC Wounded
Smuts M Pte Brig HQ MM MM See Holmes
Stephens H Pte 2 MM —
Stephens H J J Pte 2 DCM —
Stewart W A Pte 3 DCM MM KIA 13.10.1917
Strachan G T Pte 2 DCM —
Strickland G C L/Cpl Mortars DCM MM
Style S W E Capt 1 MC MC
Sumner H L Cpl 4 DCM MM
Swan W Pte MM —
Tanner G G Pte 2 MM DCM
Tatham E V Lieut 2 DSO —

Taylor A S Lieut 4 MC — Wounded
Taylor J L/Cpl DCM —
Taylor H M Pte 2 MM MM
Taylor R Capt 1 MC — SAMC
Thackeray E F Lieut-Col 3 VC DSO
Thomas G Pte 1 MM MM
Thompson R Pte 3 MM —
Thomson C A Pte 4 MM —
Thomson J M A/CSM 2 DCM DCM DOW 17.10.1916
Thorburn R B Lieut MID
Tomlinson L W Capt 3 DSO DSO Led raiding party (T)
Tretheway B D Cpl 4 MM — Wounded
Vlok N J Pte 2 DCM DCM Wounded
Walsh L H S/Sgt SAFA VC DCM
Welsh T Capt SAFA MC MC KIA 12.4.1917
Williams G W Cpl 3 DCM MM
Wilson J CSM 4 DCM MC KIA 9.10.1918
Wolstenholme W H Pte 2 MM —
Wright W J Sgt 2 MM —

Recommendations for mentions in despatches

Name Rank Regt

Aarons Cpl 1
Arnot C W Pte 3
Beland R Pte 3
Bird F Pte 3
Brook J A Pte 2
Brown A H Lieut 4
Butler Sgt 4
Capel H G Pte 3
Cooper H Drummer 3
Davis A A Pte 3
Dunn Cpl 1
Du Toit Pte 4
Felton W H Pte 3
Giles C R Pte 3
Green G 2nd Lieut 2
Hall J L/Cpl 4
Harris R E L/Cpl 3
Hogarth D L/Cpl 4
Humphries W N F Pte 3
Hunter H J Cpl 3
Kelly A L L/Cpl 2
Kelly V J Pte 3
Knox P Pte 3

Lobb G T Pte 3
Long C E Pte 3
Margolis H Pte 4
McPherson J Pte 4
Molony W Pte 3
Montgomery A S Pte 1
Morgan A F Pte 4
Neilson J E Pte 4
Noble J E T Pte 3
Norton H J Pte 3
O’Keefe D Pte 3
Osmond H E Pte 3
Pinnock R L/Cpl 3
Preston W Pte 3
Radcliffe D C Pte 2
Ravenscroft W J Pte 1
Rossiter J B Pte 4
Rubenson J Pte 2
Sharp A Pte 1
Sharpe A E Lieut 3
Simpson W S Pte 4
Slade C S Pte 4
Starrs J Pte 3
Stokill Sgt 1
Strickland G C L/Cpl 3
Sumner H L Cpl 4
Thompson B Pte 3
Thompson E C Pte 4

Thompson W H Pte 4
Trewatha J H Pte 3
Van Holst M A K Pte 3
Willocks W Pte 3
Williams G W Cpl 3
Williams W H Pte 1

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Abbreviations

ADC *Aide-de-camp*
AWOL *Absent without leave*
Brig *Brigadier*
Capt *Captain*
CMG *Companion of St Michael & St George*
CPR *Cape Peninsula Rifles*
CMR *Cape Mounted Riflemen*
CSM *Company Sergeant Major*
Coy *Company*
Cpl *Corporal*
DCM *Distinguished Conduct Medal*
DSO *Distinguished Service Order*
FOO *Forward Observation Officer*
Gen *General*
GOC *General Officer Commanding*
GSO *General Staff Officer*
HQ *Headquarters*
HE *High Explosive*
HM *His Majesty*
ILH *Imperial Light Horse*
KOSB *King's Own Scottish Borderers*
L/Cpl *Lance-Corporal*
Lieut *Lieutenant*
Maj *Major*

MC *Military Cross*
MG *Machine-gun*
MM *Military Medal*
MID *Mentioned in Despatches*
MOTHS *Memorable Order of Tin Hats (SA Ex-Servicemens' Organisation)*
NCO *Non-commissioned Officer*
OBE *Order of the British Empire*
OC *Officer Commanding*
OFS *Orange Free State*
POWs *Prisoners of War*
Pte *Private*
QM *Quartermaster*
RFA *Royal Field Artillery*
RFC *Royal Flying Corps*
RA *Royal Artillery*
Regt *Regiment*
RSM *Regimental Sergeant-Major*
SA *South African*
SAFA *SA Field Ambulance*
SAI *SA Infantry*
SALTMB *SA Light Trench Mortar Battery*
SAMC *SA Medical Corps*
SANLC *SA Native Labour Corps*
SAMR *SA Mounted Rifles*
Sec- *Second*
Sgt *Sergeant*
SWA *South West Africa*
S/Sgt *Staff Sergeant*

Sgt/Major *Sergeant-Major*
TS *Transvaal Scottish*
UDF *Union Defence Force*
VAD *Voluntary Aid Detachment*
VC *Victoria Cross*
2IC *Second in Command*

Epilogue

The author's daughter, Cheryl, 15, found this poem which aptly sums up a veteran's feelings after he had read in September 1955 of the glorious battles of the Somme, Arras and Delville Wood. The poem was written by Harold Goodwin and published in 'A new book of South African verse in English' — selected and edited by Guy Butler and Chris Mann.

GLORIOUS?

In the days long gone by when the 1st S.A.I.
Took part in a battle arboreous,
Mid Delville Wood's trees with a vertical breeze
I don't recollect feeling glorious.
When the battle was o'er and we counted the score
We didn't feel very victorious.
With most of our band in a far better land
Not one of us said it was glorious.
When a pal fell down dead with no top to his head
We may have used language censorious,
But whatever we said as we looked at our dead
I'm certain we never said glorious …

If you enjoyed *Delville Wood*, please share your thoughts on Amazon by leaving a review.
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