

MEMORIES OF FORTY-EIGHT YEARS' SERVICE

BY GENERAL SIR HORACE SMITH-DORRIEN
G.C.B., G.C.M.G., D.S.O.

WITH MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



Frontispiece.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1925

there was again a period of open fighting, and there I may have to be a little more discursive.

In trench warfare, excepting when a big push has to be carried out, holding the enemy, attacking him and gaining ground are mainly planned by local Commanders, and are largely in the hands of the troops in the trenches, and their splendid deeds are as far as possible recorded in the *Official History*.

However, to take my readers to the Aisne, which includes the Battle of the Marne, I will reproduce my diary, written at the time from the 1st to 12th September, as I think it will convey a fair idea of our daily doings.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MARNE, 1914

Diary. 1st September, Crépy-en-Valois.—A French civilian came in to me about 3 a.m. and said that he had counted forty guns and a large force of cavalry at 1.30 a.m., moving through a village about five miles off, in the direction of the 3rd Army Corps; and this proved to be true, for soon after dawn there were Uhlans busy everywhere, and the 1st Cavalry Brigade found itself in bivouac within 600 yards of this cavalry force. They had a desperate fight, in which a lot of good men and officers were killed, and which resulted in "L" Battery temporarily losing all its guns, but then the Germans retreated, and in so doing lost all their guns, amounting to twelve. An excellent officer—Colonel Ansell—was killed in this action. When I heard the firing I asked General Fergusson to send a Brigade in the direction of Roquemont and Néry, at which latter place the cavalry fight had taken place, to help the III Corps to withdraw. This was successfully accomplished. At the same time the rear-guard north of Crépy of Cuthbert's Brigade was attacked, and had no difficulty in holding the enemy off, getting into their infantry well with artillery-fire, but suffered some forty casualties. The 3rd Division, which was farther east in the neighbourhood of Vaumoise, had no opposition to speak of. Whilst watching the fight at Levignen, I received a telegram from my wife, evidently sent off that morning, which shows that our communications are good. The heat of the day was again very great. We took up a line that night from Nanteuil to Betz—the 1st Army Corps being in touch with us at the latter place.

2nd September.—Troops were all on the move again by 2 a.m., and I followed at 3 a.m. It was a glorious night, and we halted on the line St. Soupplets-Étrepilly, my headquarters being at Monthyon, from which place I had a magnificent view looking right across to the forts outside

Paris, the nearest of which was only some eleven miles out in the direction of Senlis. The French VII Corps and Reserve Division were engaged against the German 1st Army. The C.-in-C. was in Lagny, where I was ordered to see him at 2.30 p.m. It was very sad to see all the roads crowded with refugees flying from the Germans, old and young huddled up in carts with as many household things as they could take away with them. They so blocked the roads as to prove a danger to us in our retirement, and it was only by very strenuous work on the part of Staff Officers that we were able to get the roads clear and to get these poor people away. The result of our talk with Sir John French was a decision to cross next day to the south bank of the Marne—a difficult operation, as it involved a flank march in the face of the enemy. We have been, and are still, carrying out one of the most difficult operations in war, and I cannot help being struck by the splendid way all our rearward services are being conducted—Supply Columns, Ammunition Columns, and Mechanical Transport vehicles continue to arrive regularly. We are very short of equipment and of entrenching tools, having lost some 80 per cent. of the latter in the Battle of Le Cateau, and, as our base has been changed from Havre to the west coast of France—which means that some 70,000 tons of stores have been sent round there by sea—I see no chance of replenishing these things until our new line of communication is opened. The General Staff work, too, in my own Corps is quite excellent; my Chief of the General Staff, General Forestier-Walker, is quite undefeatable, and I have the greatest confidence in my Divisional Commanders, Fergusson and Hamilton. The troops have quite recovered their spirits, and are getting fitter every day, and all they want is the order to go forward and attack the enemy—but this is not possible with the present rearward move of the French Army.

3rd September.—We spent the whole day crossing the Marne to positions on the south bank. Aeroplane reports say that the German Corps, instead of following us, are moving off to the east towards Château-Thierry, where the left of the next French Army on our right rests. We succeeded in crossing the river without any incident, blowing up all the bridges. I spent the day reconnoitring the position which my Corps was ordered to entrench and take up, and which proved to be an absolutely impossible one for defence;

but, as the troops did not reach it till dark, there was nothing to be done but to report the matter and make suggestions to General Head-quarters.

4th September.—The news this morning is that the Germans, five Corps at least, are on the line of the Marne to the east of us, the nearest being some ten miles from our right flank. What our next move is going to be I am not quite sure, but I imagine, from what the Chief said at the conference at Lagny, that with our left flank resting on the Paris forts we shall retire back to the Seine. So long as we keep our left flank safe, I do not think we have anything to fear. The Germans, we hear, are very tired, and have had very heavy losses, and if they attack us I have every confidence in what the result will be. About midday it became evident that one German Corps was crossing the Marne at La Ferté, six miles from my outposts, and as Haig's Corps was already falling back so as to expose my right flank, I had to get Hamilton's Division back a bit. I met Sir John French at Haig's Head-quarters at 1.30 p.m., and we discussed the whole plan of campaign. It is very pleasing to me to hear again from the C.-in-C. praise of the way we had extricated our force, and also of the injury we have inflicted on the enemy by deciding to fight the battle at Le Cateau on the 26th August; Sir John also expressed to me over and over again his absolute confidence in me, which was decidedly pleasing to hear. It was arranged that we are to fall back to-night about twelve miles towards the Seine, to take advantage of the dark to cover our movements, and also to avoid the piercing heat of the sun, so trying to the men and horses. The heat the last few days has really been tremendous, and is telling very much on the horses as well as the men. I am sorry to say my casualty list has not come down as much as I had hoped, and the figures now are 350 officers and 9,200 men—about one-third of my force. A retirement is always a dangerous operation with regard to discipline, and a good many cases of unnecessary straggling and looting have taken place. Five men are to be tried by court-martial this evening. The losses of officers and non-commissioned officers in certain units makes it very difficult to maintain a proper standard of discipline, especially as the temptations are very great, owing to the hospitality of the country-folk and the desertion of so many houses with valuables in.

5th September.—We completed the night march without

incident, having received about 2,000 reinforcements by rail and road during the march, and I took up my abode in the neighbourhood of Presles, at the Château Villepateur. We had one of the most restful days since the war commenced, and were very much cheered up by hearing that the French really are going to take the offensive, and that we ourselves shall move in the right direction to-morrow, namely, north-east instead of south-west. The Chief of the Staff, Murray, came and told me that early to-morrow my Corps was to get on to the line Houssaye-Villeneuve, that the French 6th Army—consisting of the VII Corps, the 55th and 56th Reserve Divisions, the Algerian Division, and the Moroccan Brigade—were moving east, north of the Marne, and would be at Lizy-sur-Ourcq at 9 a.m. to-morrow, that the 5th French Army, under Franchet d'Esperey, had its left at Courteçon, and was going to advance north at 5 a.m. to-morrow. Our Army thus forms the apex of the angle of which the two French Corps form the sides, and we have enclosed in front of us at least six or seven German Corps. I visited the Divisions and found the men very elated at the idea of moving forward instead of backwards.

6th September.—We moved at dawn to the position named, my Head-quarters going to Château-Combreaux, just outside Tournan. The I Corps was moving on our right, and was attacked lightly all the morning, evidently rear-guards, for the general trend of the German Divisions, as given by aeroplanes, was in a northerly and north-easterly direction, indicating that they could get no farther south for some reason or other. Our own advance is very slow, as the C.-in-C. wisely is determined to hold us back until the two French Armies have got well engaged with the enemy to hold them to their ground. The news throughout the day was thrilling, as both the 5th and 6th French Armies were heavily engaged and were gaining ground steadily. By evening the VI French Corps, heading off the II German Corps and the IV Reserve German Corps, were trying to cross the Marne at Trilport and Changis. In the afternoon we moved forward again to the line Villiers-sur-Morin-Courtry-Les Parichets. Somehow the I Corps hung back, and at night we were far in advance. Hubert Gough, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, was engaging the enemy's machine-guns near Pezarches. Sir John French came to see me, and was most complimentary, repenting what he had

said to me before, that our determined action in fighting the battle of Le Cateau had saved the whole situation, and that he was referring to it in such terms in his dispatch. I have an aeroplane squadron now permanently with me, under Salmond (now Air-Marshal Sir John S., K.C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., D.S.O.), which gets us some splendid information. We got orders to move at 5 a.m. to-morrow, which were subsequently changed to later, as it was found that the French Corps had not advanced as much as had been expected.

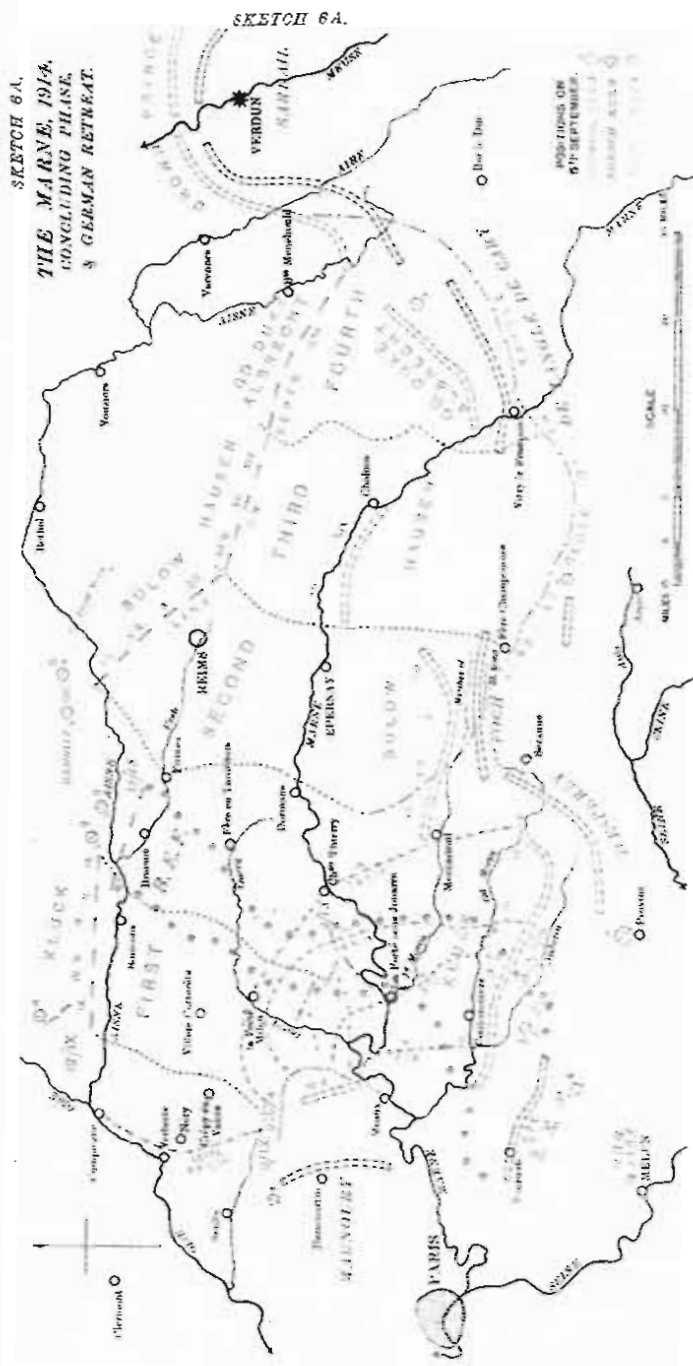
7th September.—The situation was that the 6th French Army was still fighting north of Meaux, and that the head of the 8th Division of the IV French Corps which had marched from Paris, had reached Serris and was in touch with Pulteney's Corps, that the French 5th Army extended from Provins-Montreaux-lès-Provins-Esternay, and that the left of the 6th French Army had moved forward to Nantcuil, one Division being sent there by rail. We also heard the situation of the other French Armies; immediately to the right of the 5th Army, and in touch with it, was General Foch's Army. To the east again, with its left on Sompuis and its right about Vitry-le-François, on the Marne, was the 4th French Army; and to the east again, with its right thrown forward, was the 3rd French Army, stretching from Revigny to Ste. Menchould. Facing these last two Armies were the following German Corps from east to west—XVIII, VIII, XIX, and XII. Facing Foch were the Guard Corps and the X Corps. Facing the 5th Army were the IX, III, and IV, whilst falling back before us and facing the 6th French Army were the II and IV Reserve Corps—the whole covered by a great deal of cavalry. Our advance this day was opposed everywhere by rear-guards, chiefly cavalry and guns. The South Lancashire Regiment, of McCracken's Brigade, had about forty-one casualties last night, and this morning, getting into Coulommiers; young Hadfield, a son of General Hadfield, was severely wounded; I visited them in their improvised hospital. I took up my abode this night in a château at Faremoutiers; the whole village being occupied by Germans last night, it was very dirty. The château itself was littered with debris, and the remains of the breakfasts of the officers, which we had to clean up. The inhabitants who had not deserted were distinctly cheered by seeing us back again. I am sorry to say that two of our men had

to be shot to-day, one for plundering, and the other for desertion.

8th September.—Early aeroplane reconnaissances were most interesting, telling us that in our immediate front at La Ferté on the Marne there was a tremendous mass of wagons, guns, and men, trying to get over the river, and that there was very heavy fighting going on in the neighbourhood of Montmirail, in the neighbourhood of the 5th French Army on our right, and to the north of Meaux in the neighbourhood of the 6th French Army. Our orders were for the English Army to advance in the direction of Château-Thierry, and to try to reach the Marne. It was a day of intricate fighting—the country is very broken in the neighbourhood of the Petit Morin River, and covered with trees, making it very difficult to find out what was opposed to us, and easy for weak rear-guards to hold up large numbers. Both the I Corps and the II Corps had a considerable amount of fighting, and also the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, under Hubert Gough. The brunt of our losses fell on the 8th Brigade in endeavouring to cross the Petit Morin River at Orly. I saw the C.-in-C. at about three o'clock, and he seemed pleased with the way things were going, but disappointed that the Germans were getting away so fast. After his departure I went out to the front myself and found Fergusson north of St. Cyr at a place called L'Hermitière. His troops looked very fresh and well, and had pushed on fast, capturing 150 Uhlans. Whilst with him bullets and shell, evidently our own, came from the direction of Orly, a place behind the 5th Division, where heavy opposition was holding up the 8th Brigade. In consequence Fergusson withdrew his infantry slightly to avoid loss from our own fire. By nightfall my Corps had gained the south bank of the Marne, where it placed outposts and settled for the night, my head-quarters at Douc. Late in the afternoon the battle appeared to be raging very fiercely, both in front of the 6th and 5th French Armies, especially the latter.

Afterwards I heard that the heavy firing to the east was an attack by one of the Guards Brigades in Haig's Corps, in which they caused a considerable number of Germans to surrender, not, however, without some sad losses in the Guards. My Chief Engineer, Major-General A. E. Sandbach, joined me to-day.

9th September.—Our orders are to cross the Marne and



push straight north, and the advanced guards were over at 6.20 a.m. Directly after dawn very heavy firing was heard again in front of the 5th and 6th French Armies. It appears that the Germans are holding the line of the Ourcq from the neighbourhood of Lizy up to Thury-en-Valois, and that they have strongly entrenched the part from Posoy to Thury; further, that the Germans in this neighbourhood have been reinforced. The French extend from Chambry (just north of Meaux) through Marcilly-Puissieux to a wood just south of Betz, and appear to be holding their own, whilst their Cavalry, under Sordet, is south of Villers-Cotterets, unable to penetrate the wood there. It seems to me, then, that if we push forward straight north as we are going we shall be in rear of the German position and must force them to retire, possibly to a flank in face of the enemy.

The 8th Brigade had a good many casualties—Gordons, Royal Irish, Royal Scots, and Royal Scots Fusiliers. I visited our wounded in the village of Saulsoy, two or three miles east of Doue, where I made my head-quarters for the night. The only officer there was poor young Hay of the Royal Scots, badly hit in the stomach. About a hundred casualties altogether, but Captain Hewat of the Royal Scots was killed and about forty other ranks. The weather shows signs of a change. There was a heavy storm threatening in the evening, which ended in a dust storm and a certain amount of rain. A heavy battle has been going all day away to our left, the 5th French Corps' passage of the Ourcq being obstinately resisted by about two and a half German Corps—the French 5th Army does not appear to have had much resistance, but on their right General Foch's 9th Army got into a marsh, and were very severely handled, but towards evening made a determined counter-attack and drove the Germans back.

9th Sept. (contd.).—Fergusson and Hamilton pushed north to the Marne at 5 a.m. The former was stopped by guns and infantry, the latter got to the road two miles north of Pezu at 9 a.m. My Corps was extremely fortunate in finding the bridges in front of them on the Marne last night—whether this indicates that the Germans were too hard pressed to blow them up, or whether they think they may want them again on their return journey, is doubtful. I rather favour the latter view, as their retirement is very orderly. The III Corps, Pulteney's, which had to cross at La Ferté,

found the bridges blown up and the far side strongly held by artillery, infantry, and machine-guns. It was this that exposed the left flank of Fergusson's Division, for the ground between that and La Ferté is high, and gave good positions to the enemy. About eleven I went to Pulteney's head-quarters to see if I could help him in any way by pushing troops in between Fergusson and himself, but he thought he could manage without help. Whilst I was talking to him Sir John French arrived, and expressed himself very pleased with the way my Corps was pushing on. He told me that the I Corps, which ought to be in line with us, was somewhere behind. The French 5th Army are still having a great battle north of Lizy in their efforts to get across the Ourcq. In one place there are ninety German guns in action. The move of my Corps, which is pushing a wedge right in behind their position, is bound to make the Germans withdraw. The 8th Division of the 4th French Corps, which is just west of the III Corps, is endeavouring to cross the Marne to threaten the left of this great German battery. Aeroplane reports indicate enemy retiring north, opposing us everywhere they can. Two or three Divisions are on the line Marigny-Château-Thierry. Our aeroplane officers are real heroes. Not only do they appear to have put the fear of God into the Germans' aeroplanes, for they hunt them wherever they see them, with the result that there have been none in the air for two days; but, in spite of being shot at almost every time they go up, they continue their reconnaissances and bring back quite invaluable, and what always proves to be true, information. Just now, two of them arrived one after the other; both their machines had been hit several times, and one of the officers had a bullet actually through his clothes, which he produced whilst he was talking to me. The Flight attached to me consists of Major Salmond, Captains Jackson, Charlton, Conran, and Cruikshank—Jackson was the man who produced the bullet. Altogether it was rather a disappointing day, as, with the I and III Corps back on our flanks, we were not able to make such progress as we ought to have done, but the effect on the Germans was material; not only did we kill a great many and capture a good many prisoners, but the two and a half Corps facing the V French Corps thought it wise to retire, as we were uncomfortably near their backs. It seems that in this battle on the Ourcq both the French and Germans have

suffered very heavy losses—they say the French VII Corps alone had nearly 7,000 casualties; but the French have got their tails up well and are fighting splendidly. My casualties to-day are about 230 wounded, and forty or fifty killed. Our losses were principally due to an exceedingly well concealed battery in a wooded country, in front of Fergusson, which it was impossible to locate for many hours, but which was eventually knocked completely out by one of our howitzer batteries. Another Q.F. battery gave us a good deal of trouble, but was also silenced, and we captured the whole battery, nearly all the horses and men being killed. At nightfall Montreuil-aux-Lions was still in the possession of the enemy. In front of that, some very disagreeable wood fighting had taken place. The D.C.L.I. had a good many casualties, but after dark Cuthbert managed to clear the enemy out with his Brigade. I took up my head-quarters for the night in Saacy, where I met Hubert Gough, looking extremely well and full of enthusiasm because his men had gained such absolute confidence whenever they came in touch with the enemy. I am not sure how many prisoners we have got to-day, but something pretty considerable.

10th September.—The III Corps appear to have spent the greater part of the night in getting over the river at La Ferté, and in repairing the bridge, so they are still a long way behind. The 5th and 3rd Divisions started at 5 a.m., covered by Hubert Gough's 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, all going due north. It was a wettish morning's march. Hamilton made great progress, but Fergusson was stopped by the enemy holding Germigny. Enemy's columns were reported by aeroplane trekking away north from Germigny, and Hamilton realised that if he pushed on he would not only get into a better position, but force the people in front of Fergusson to retire. The I Corps on the right again was going very hard, and the 2nd Division, the left of Haig's Corps, was even farther forward than Hamilton's Division. There was a good deal of fighting to-day, and by midday the III Corps was able to come up into line. Hubert Gough and Chetwode, I hear, were enjoying themselves very much driving back the enemy and collecting stragglers. Quite a lot of Germans were killed. They were very scattered, and dead bodies were alongside the roads wherever I motored, going out to the advanced guard. The number of prisoners captured to-day by my Corps is well over 1,000. The woods, of which there

are a great many, are full of skulkers, and battalions are busy collecting as many as they can. In consequence of the wet, the roads were extremely difficult to-day, as we were crossing deep valleys, and some of the horses are feeling the fatigue very much, whereas the men seem to improve in spirits and in health every day—in fact, they are in fine fighting fettle. To-day is the first which has made me come to the conclusion that there is real evidence of our enemy being shaken, for the roads are littered and the retreat is hurried; but I still realise that the main bodies of the German Corps in front of us may be in perfect order, and that the people we are engaged with are strong rear-guards who are sacrificing themselves to let their main bodies get far enough away for fresh operations against us. To-night I have taken up my head-quarters in a very fine château at Marigny-en-Orxois, and we are all much elated at a letter I received from Wigram dated the 8th, conveying His Majesty's congratulations to the Corps. I am hoping His Majesty realises that all credit is due to those who enabled the troops who fought in Belgium under my command to be extricated. I mean to my Staff, both General and Administrative—the latter, by their foresight and energy, kept the impedimenta far enough away from the retiring troops to prevent their being hampered, and at the same time not too distant to prevent their getting food and ammunition when required, whilst the General Staff foresaw everything, and their Chief, General Forestier-Walker, grasped every situation in a moment, and issued the necessary orders without hesitation throughout the six or seven days of hard fighting and anxious situations. To him and his assistants, Colonel Oxley, Colonel Gatherne Hardy, Colonel Shoubridge, and Major Russell, and on the Administrative Staff to General Hickey, Colonel Rycroft, and Major Wroughton, the greatest praise is due. We are a very happy family, and are thoroughly enjoying our campaigning together. The King's congratulations have pleased us all immensely, as also the rest of the news in Wigram's letter about the several reinforcements which are coming out at once, and the several Armies which Lord Kitchener is preparing, and which we suppose will be ready within the next year. We all feel sure now that the King and Country are absolutely determined that, even if it goes on many years, the British Empire will remain top dog. This is the most inspiring news for the troops in the field, and I shall

take good care to let all my Corps know about it. Our Signal Services, under Major Hildebrand and Captain Gandy, have never failed us for an instant. All through the arduous retirement and fighting at Mons and Le Catcau, and throughout the retreat up to the present time, they have always kept us in telephonic or telegraphic communication, both with the troops in the field, and with the C.-in-C.'s Head-quarters. We have, too, a most undaunted lot of motorcyclists, from Universities and Public Schools, who know no fear and never seem to be tired. One of them, named Barnett, alas! ran into a German patrol and was killed yesterday. We find the villages and châteaux very dirty now we are following the Germans, and strewn with broken champagne-bottles, and the villagers report that they drink very deeply. I am sorry to hear that poor General Findlay, the Commander of the Artillery of the 1st Division, was killed yesterday by a shell.

General Joffre, the French C.-in-C., has directed us to move north-west instead of north, and has narrowed our front. This move, with our impedimenta and only two roads between three Divisions, is a very difficult one, and a long march is impossible just as it is so necessary to press on and catch up the enemy. Had we been able to make a long march to-day, we should have caught a lot of the enemy's transport. Our troops were practically unopposed, but lots of stragglers surrendered. Towards evening, however, Gough's Division, consisting of the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, joined in with some French troops, and were very busy with their guns against the Germans in the neighbourhood of Soissons, with what result we have not yet heard; but reports say that the town and bridges at Soissons and approaches thereto are thronged with masses of wagons and men and horses. Unfortunately it has been so thick to-day, ending in very heavy rain, that it has been impossible for aeroplanes to go up and tell us about the enemy. We have been very lucky up to now in our weather, and, by being kept informed by aeroplanes of the whereabouts of the enemy, have been able to press forward much faster than we should have in the old days: in fact, aeroplanes prevent the enemy from delaying us with their rear-guards in the way they used to. In the afternoon it came on very cold and wet, and I tremble for the health of the troops, many of whom, officers included, have no great-coats, waterproof sheets, nor change of clothing,

due to their having lost so much in our retirement from Belgium. This might have been remedied by now, but by being forced from our base at Havre, and having to form a new base at the mouth of the Loire, there has not been time to get our new line of communication working to its full extent, and so we cannot get the necessary things. Again, when we moved south we destroyed several railway bridges, and now that we are following the enemy find ourselves hoisted with our own petard, for the trains can now only come within thirty miles of us, and in a few days will be farther behind still. Sir John French visited me in Chézy at midday, and was very pleased with our prisoners—over 2,000 of which we captured yesterday, besides an enormous number killed. Young Lord Stanley, with our spare horses, succeeded in rounding up three German officers and 106 other ranks. I made my head-quarters at Rozet St. Albin in a château belonging to the family of Berthier, Napoleon's Chief of the Staff, my most advanced troops being for the night at the village of Hartennes. We have not done very well in messing up to date, but we are gladdened to-day by the arrival of a French chef who says he had once been with Lord Rosebery. There are persistent rumours that a Russian force is being assembled in Scotland to land in Belgium—needless to say, it is not believed. I am glad to say I find that the first reports of my casualties yesterday and to-day were greatly exaggerated, and I understand now that on the 9th and 10th there were three officers killed, fifteen wounded, and four missing, and of other ranks seventeen killed, sixty-nine missing, and 384 wounded. Unquestionably the fighting has been very hard, and the number of German casualties during those two days enormous, and therefore I do not think our losses are excessive.

I see in *The Times* of the 29th August, which is our latest paper, that all our losses in men and material, including guns, had then been made good. The wish was evidently father to the thought, for, although I have heard of guns being seen on our Lines of Communication, none have reached us, and my Corps is still forty-two guns deficient. The C-in-C. has adopted the policy of sending on a lot of the Divisional Artillery with the Cavalry, so as to worry the retiring enemy, and this is bound to affect him very seriously, for it is largely the system the Germans carried out in following us from Mons, and I can speak from experi-

ence that it tries retiring troops very highly. The pursuit is to be continued vigorously to-morrow, and, as the rain appears to be stopping, we should make good progress and be on the River Aisne in the neighbourhood of Vailly, east of Soissons, by the evening.

Saturday, 12th September.—The operation this day was an advance to the line of the River Aisne, the C-in-C.'s intention being, if possible, to cross it and occupy the high ground on the north side. It was a terribly wet day, with a good deal of wind, and the roads were in an awful state, delaying all wheeled vehicles to a very serious extent. Allenby, with his Cavalry Division, occupied Braisne in the early morning, but had to call for infantry support to maintain it, and this was given by the 3rd Division. Later on in the day Gough's Division seized the high ground just north-east of Chassemy, and had an action with some German infantry at Peuplier on the high ground, killing seventy and capturing 150. He was only able, however, to get within 500 yards of the bridge at Vailly, which was held by machine-guns. Throughout the day a tremendous artillery battle was waged by the III Corps and 6th French Army away to our left, the Germans being in position just north of Soissons, and to the east and west of it. The Germans appear to be making a great stand in order to get all their transport away, and one can easily understand that with the roads in their present state they must be more hampered by the weather than we are. Aeroplanes were only able to do very little, and this made the location of the German guns very difficult. Since the Germans have destroyed all the bridges on the river as far as we can make out, it looks as though the one idea they had in their minds was continued retirement. The 5th Division only got its head as far as Ciry, and found Missy bridge strongly held. In some mysterious way, however, Lieutenant Pennycuik of the Royal Engineers managed to get on the river and to float down within 150 yards of the Missy bridge, enabling him to bring us an excellent report of the state of the bridge, which showed that it was very badly destroyed. The river is at least sixty yards broad and very deep. Night fell—one of the worst I have ever known: blowing hard and pouring in torrents, finding us unable to establish ourselves on the river. The men, drenched to the skin, were mostly got under cover in some of the villages during the night; but I am afraid they suffered a good deal.

We always had the cheering thought that it was worse for our enemies than for ourselves. I located myself in a beautiful château at Muret, belonging to the Louvencourts, relations of one of my dispatch riding officers, Lieutenant Chapman. The French are reported to have lost very heavily in the neighbourhood of Soissons.¹

¹ Strategically the Battle of the Marne was a great one, but as an actual fight from the soldier's point of view it was not very serious, for the total casualties in the whole B.E.F., that is five Cavalry Brigades and three Infantry Corps, only amounted to 1,701 in five days—6th to 10th September.