

The Nash Story

our family history



Dave Treanor

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Foreword

My parents would probably have thought me the last person to take an interest in the history of our family. I never paid much attention to my aunts or cousins.

The men on my father's side of the family were almost all vicars, in the Irish protestant tradition. They can trace their roots back into English and Scottish nobility, and still carry an air of gentility.

They have always invested heavily in education, and invariably went to public schools and university. The church was the family business, with a presence in every village and borough.

My mother's family were very different. I believe I was the first from her side of the family to go to university, and certainly the first in Chunky's dynasty.

My grandfather rose through the ranks in two world wars to become a senior army officer. His family were metal workers, village blacksmiths in Gloucestershire who joined the industrial revolution and moved to Birmingham and London as skilled metal workers.

My grandmother's family were farriers and publicans.

Their daughters had careers before marrying into the rising middle classes. Their grandchildren benefited from the great improvements in post war education, and mostly joined the professions. One of them married however briefly into the aristocracy. They embraced all the opportunities now on offer, and most of them have

lived comfortable lives, although there have been a few casualties, and a great many failed marriages.

Somehow my curiosity was aroused. My father died when I was still at university so I never knew him as an adult. Researching his origins was a way of getting to understand him better. In the course of it I learned a great deal about Irish history from a very personal perspective. I completed a book on the Treanor's last year.

I was very fond of my grandfather, Chunky, but we could hardly have been more different in our outlook on life. Most of the wars fought during my lifetime have seemed pointless and mistaken: Suez, Vietnam, Falklands, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and have hardly endeared me to the military.

The two world wars Chunky was engaged in were a different thing altogether. I have always had the greatest respect for the men who fought them. In researching this book I have seen the daily diaries of Chunky's commanders, and read the first hand accounts of his fellow officers. He was involved in most of the great battles of the First World War and I have observed them from his very personal perspective, and also sought to understand the bigger picture of what each side in the battle was doing.

He certainly had his flaws, but these are far outweighed by his extraordinary achievements. He was a remarkable man, and I would love to be able to pop

down the pub with him for a chat.

I have traced his origins through the industrial revolution, the shift from an agricultural economy to an industrial one, and the migration from the country into cities.

The horse seems to represent everything that is best about this side of our family. They were blacksmiths and farriers, and Chunky was a great horseman. His ancestors lived through the building of the canals and railways, that were an essential prerequisite for the development of cities. Traditional crafts were replaced by trades, and Chunky's ancestors moved from blacksmith to engine fitters and foundrymen, pattern makers and metal finishers.

Ancestral research begins by building family trees, searching through the indexes of births, marriages and deaths, and hunting for distant relatives in census returns.

It only really gets interesting when we try to understand what their lives were like, and collect family anecdotes, old photographs, and stories from their times.

I can visualise Nanna and Grandad's flat at Hova Villas. There were pictures of Chunky performing tricks on a horse, trophies, and regimental regalia, and a glass fronted cabinet with little treasures from their past. I seem to remember his sword. I can still recall the smell of his pipe tobacco.

After he died I was given his compass and binoculars, which I still have, and his whisky flask which was engraved as a present from his comrades, which someone stole from me many years ago. Some of his other bits and pieces were



**Nanna and Chunky
in their flat at Hova
Villas in Hove**

passed to other members of the family, along with many photographs - he had a camera for a long time. My cousins have been very good in sending me copies of some of their pictures, which are reproduced in this book.

I have Nanna's photograph album. She did not label any of the pictures, and we still do not know who some of the people are. But I have managed to identify most of them.

I was not the first to examine our origins. Steve Hunt had a go, as did John Nash, and both have passed on useful information. But the one who did most was my cousin Jenny's son Matt Elliott. It was he that discovered some of the best accounts of what Chunky's regiments were engaged in during the war, and who pointed me in the right direction for discovering more. He had also begun tracing Nanna's family.

I am very fortunate in living in London, with easy access to its archives. The National Archives at Kew are a very pleasant 40 minute cycle ride across Wimbledon Common, Richmond Park, and along the Thames. That is where I found the original war diaries, written each night in the trenches of the First World War in pen and pencil on faded forms. I can get to the British Library in

30 minutes, where the best records of the British in India can be found. Even the Imperial War Museum proved useful. It was there I came across the original hand written diaries of the commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the XXth Hussars covering the events for which Chunky was awarded a DCM, pinned on him by the King in the field during the opening months of the war.

Most ancestral records are kept on one of the proprietary websites such as Ancestry or Genes Reunited, which are applications that hide their data from search engines, so it is only accessible to those who subscribe. It was through Genes Reunited that I came across Veronica who had done extensive research into the Nash family. I also put our family history on our own website, open to search engines like Google. Rarely does a month go by without someone getting in touch, and adding their pictures and personal stories into our family history.

In writing this book I have tried to go back to original sources wherever possible. I have built on research by others, but have tried to avoid relying on second hand information as my sole source.

Once you get back beyond the census returns, it becomes harder to cross check the information. Records prior to 1800 are brief and very incomplete, so it is much harder to corroborate the links. It is easier where our ancestors were in the professions such as clergy or doctors or senior army officers, or made wills leaving their property to their sons and daughters. None of that applies to the ancestors on my mother's side.

Fortunately rural populations were relatively static. People were born, grew up, had their families and died all in the same parish, and married people from the same or neighbouring villages. So once we get back beyond the industrial revolution and can find old parish registers we are still able to trace some of our early ancestors.

Few will want to read the whole book from the beginning to the end. Even I became bored with who begat who amongst some of our most distant relatives about whom we know little else. It is a book I hope you will dip into where you will discover some wonderful stories.

Rita made a wise observation:

I have learnt, through my long life, that sometimes, opinions, hearsay and perceptions have nothing to do with real facts. So many stories and anecdotes we've heard from family elders have been embroidered and embellished with the constant retelling of the tale that when the story has been stripped of all the fine fancy stitches, the history of many an ancestor is plain, dull and downright ordinary. Isn't that the case in most families? But many an ancestor of ours, Nash or Wagstaff, Lawrence or Monteiro had enough grit, determination and stubbornness to rise above his or her station or class, overcome calamity or tragedy and raise his or her status and quality of life to the benefit of future generations.

In putting this together I will have made a few mistakes. There were times when I have had to make a judgement about the accuracy or relevance of a piece of information. But give or take an error or two, this is the story of our family



Part 1: My Grandfather

Lt Col H E Nash DCM

My grandfather came from a family of metal workers living in Kings Cross, the descendant of a long line of blacksmiths and skilled metal workers from Birmingham and before that from Gloucester. He enlisted as a trooper in a cavalry regiment, started the First World War as a sergeant and ended it as a Captain. By the time he finally retired he was a Lieut Colonel in charge of all prisoner of war camps in Southern England.

That was quite remarkable at a time when social mobility was rare, and anyone with pretensions beyond their station was considered an upstart. This is his story. His military career forms a large part of it, and with the aid of my cousin Matt we have managed to find out where he was and what his units were engaged in right the way through the First World War.

CHAPTER 1

Lieut Col H E Nash DCM

70 Acton Street in St Pancras is where Chunky was born, next to the Queens Head pub (right)

Early years

Henry Ernest Nash was born on 4th January 1886 in St Pancras, the first son of George Nash and Clara Eagles, with two older sisters. In the 1891 census the family was living at 70 Acton Street in St Pancras, and this is probably where he was born.

I know this street well because it is just around the corner from Grays Inn Road where I worked for the National Housing Federation. It is now a busy one way street, but the house is still there next to The Queens Head pub. His father George Nash was a brass moulder, aged 36 from Birmingham. His mother was also from Birmingham and aged 38.

In the 1901 census they have moved to 24 Caledonian Crescent. This street is now Keystone Crescent, just off the south end of Caledonian Road, which runs north from Kings Cross station.

He was a pupil at St Jude's, aged 13. This was a Church of England school attached to St Jude's Church at the top end of Grays Inn Road, opposite Britannia Street. The church was closed in 1935 and subsequently demolished.

When he was 12 he took his first



step towards a military career by joining the 39th Company of The Boys' Brigade. *"The Object of the Brigade shall be the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among boys, and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.*

Military organisation and drill shall be used as means of securing the interest

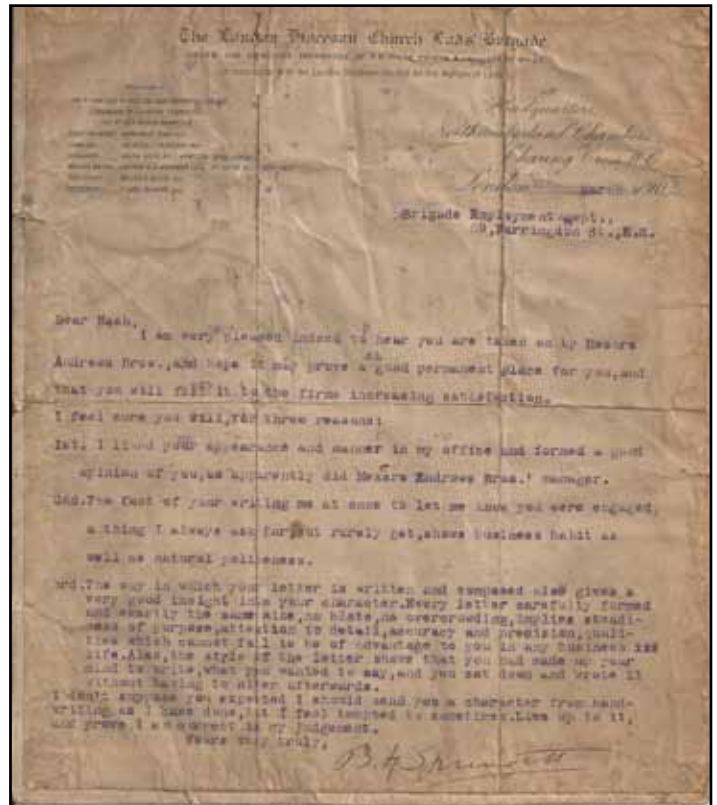
Gerry has HE Nash's membership card in the Boys Brigade



of the boys, banding them together in the work of the Brigade, and promoting among them such habits as the Brigade is designed to form”.

My cousin Annie gave me a scrapbook kept by Chunky with newspaper cuttings and various other memorabilia of his own choosing. In it was a glowing letter written to “Nash” by someone from *The London Diocesan Church Lads Brigade* after Harry Nash took up a job with Andrew’s Bros, and dated 19th March 1903. He praises Harry for his good appearance and manner, his politeness, his tidiness and attention to detail, his steadfastness and determination. I believe Harry worked for them as a Telegraph Boy, delivering telegrams and acting as a courier on a bicycle.

On 29th March 1905 he enlisted with the 20th Hussars in Brighton, at the age



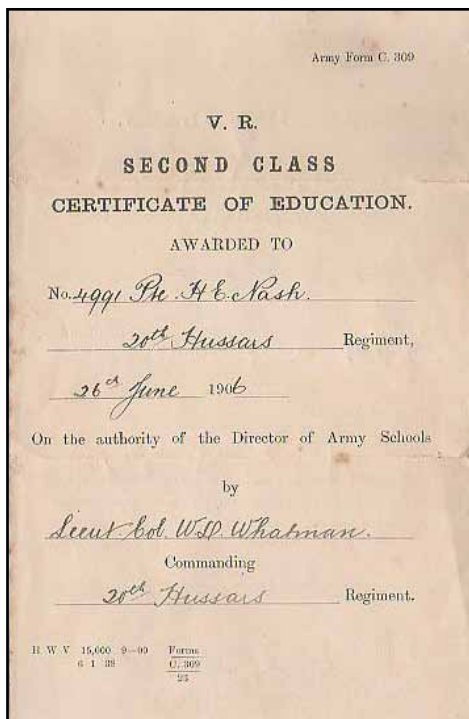
of 19. Matt thinks he may have enlisted earlier, under age, and that his service record was subsequently amended, although against that he found a letter written on 8th April 1905 from Ernest S Brown, Director of Andrews Brothers Proprietary Ltd of 51 Milton Street, London EC which says “*The bearer, H.E.Nash was in our employ for some considerable time, and we always found him trustworthy, and keenly alive to his duties. We are very sorry to part with him, and have no doubt that he will do well in the Army, which he left us to join*”.. Andrews were a woollen and linen firm from Australia that had a London office where Chunky must have worked.

He must have completed his education in the army, because a little over a year later, on 26th June 1906, he

Letter praising Nash from the Church Lads Brigade, and below a poster advertising Telegraph Boys



Chunky’s Certificate of Education (left)



Chunky in a sergeant's uniform with his horse Joe (right)

was awarded a Second Class Certificate of Education by his regimental CO. He spent almost the whole of his working life in the army. He is almost universally known by his army nickname, Chunky, although his father addresses him as Harry.

Chunky joined the army at a particularly interesting time. The main means of transport was the horse, and the leading fighting force was the cavalry. They were trained to charge into battle with drawn swords or lances, although they also carried rifles. Motorised transport was in its infancy and was slowly becoming more reliable. The horse and cart remained the main means



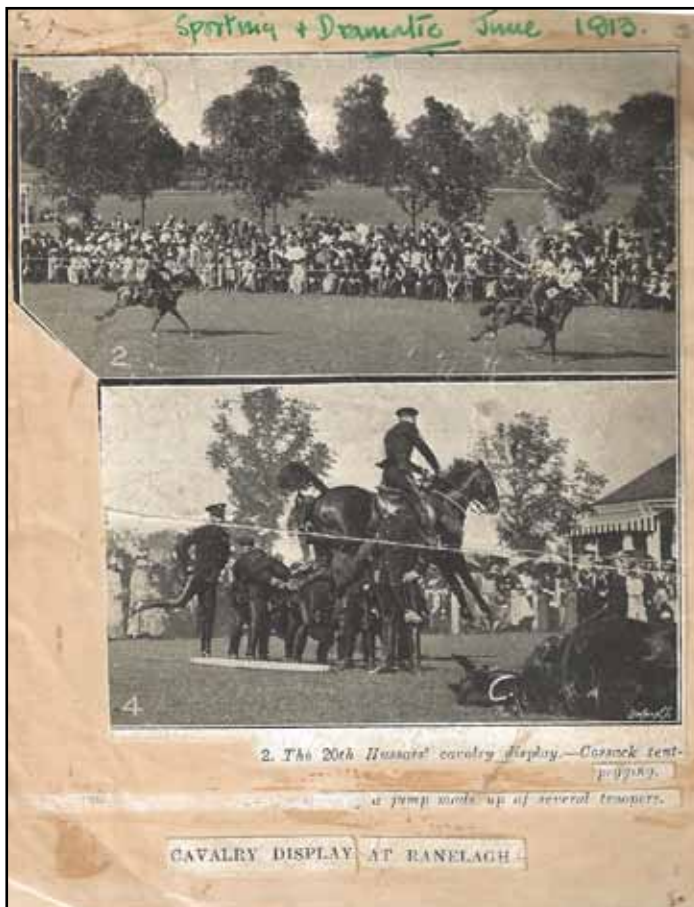
of transporting equipment into battle throughout the First World War, while the railways provided the long distance logistics. It was the machine gun more than the artillery that signalled the end for the cavalry, but it took a while for the army to adapt its tactics in the face of these new technological developments.

In 1906 the 20th Hussars relieved the 14th Hussars at Shorncliffe Camp near Folkstone in Kent and remained there until 1908 when they undertook a tour of Ireland, and were garrisoned at the Curragh in Co Kildare. On 23rd February 1909 he became a riding instructor in his regiment. He was promoted to lance sergeant in 1910, which meant he was a corporal acting up as a sergeant.

He won the *Combination Event* at the 20th Hussars annual athletic sports day at the Curragh. He also came first in *Dummy Thrusting* and third in *Lemon Cutting*. The British Tentpegging Association describes these sports:

Combination event: The ultimate competition that brings all the skills together, riders use swords to attack dummies between jumps, then use a revolver firing .38 (9 mm) blanks to burst balloons in mid air over jumps and on the ground, the lance is then used on the final element of rings and peg.

Newspaper cuttings from Chunky's own scrapbook



Dummy Thrusting: The rider engages a series of dummies, both left and right and at different heights with the sword, whilst completing a series of jumps, simulating the engagement of multiple enemies across country.

Lemon Cutting: Fruit is hung from the gallows and riders use swords to slice the fruit and then take a peg.

They returned from Ireland in 1911, and on 23rd May 1911 Corporal Nash came second in tent pegging at the Royal Tournament in front of the King. Tent pegging is “performed with either lance or sword at a flat out gallop; the rider has to pick up the pegs that start at 3 inches and go down to 1 inch in competition run offs”.

From 13th March to 31st October



1912 he attended the Netheravon Cavalry School on the eastern side of Salisbury Plain to take his Cavalry Noncommissioned Officer's Certificate. He was described as “An excellent N.C.O. very hard working and a good horseman”. He passed out 1st of 23 on the course. He was an elite roughrider in a cavalry regiment. He came first both in tent pegging and the combination event at a sports day in Durrington on 3rd August 1912.

Towards the end of 1912 he rejoined his regiment in Colchester. That is



Chunky in the Royal Tournament at Olympia in 1914, riding Joe, dressed as a Palladin, fighting the Saracens

probably where he met Nanna. Her parents were living at 24 St Albans Road in Colchester in the 1911 census, although Nanna aged 17 was visiting her sister Jesse and her husband in the barracks at Devonport near Plymouth at

Display of ‘Rough riding’ at Olympia (left)



This picture was on the wall of Nanna & Chunky's flat in Hova Villas. On the back he has written: “Joe” A Squadron XXth Hussars, Royal Naval & Military tournament 1914. This watercolour picture was painted by George Ince, East Lancashire Regt in my wife's autograph book, and taken from the original photograph by Gale and Poldar, the Trumpeter replacing myself”. The photo he refers to is above. It is actually by Gordon Ince



A postcard to his father from Colchester showing a recent display the 20th Hussars had given illustrating an Arab attack on a British Square, in which Chunky had to throw his horse during a charge as if it had been shot

the time of the census. Her father had spent his life working with horses in the Indian Army and would have been interested in the cavalry.

Harry sent her postcards back from action in the field from the earliest days of the war, so we know they must have courted before it all began. He addressed them to Gertie Wagstaff.

In June 1913 the 20th Hussars took part in the Royal Tournament at Olympia. Chunky had a number of photographs of this and subsequent events, including one of him dressed as a Paladin crusading against the Saracens.

Chunky kept newspaper cuttings with the results of all these events, including the one at Ranelagh.

Mobilisation in BEF

The 20th Hussars became part of the 5th Cavalry Brigade together with the Royal Scots Greys and 12th Royal Lancers. In the army a brigade is made up of a number of battalions often from different regiments, with a brigadier in command, and a division can be made up of a number of brigades with a major general in charge.

On 4th August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany, following their invasion of Belgium. The 5th Cavalry Brigade received orders to mobilise at 6.15 pm that day. On 16th August they were transported by train from St Botolph's Station in Colchester to Southampton, where they began boarding the *Indore*.

Loading the men and their horses took a while. The various regiments of the brigade arrived over the next couple of days on a series of trains. When they disembarked in Le Havre in the evening of 18th August 1914 to join the rest of the "*contemptible little army*" the 2nd Battalion 20th Hussars had 24 officers and 519 other ranks.

There were three squadrons in the battalion with Lieut Colonel Edwards in command. The squadrons were identified as "A", "B", and "C". We believe Chunky was in "A". Each squadron was commanded by a major, with a captain as second in command, and a squadron sergeant major as the senior NCO. It was divided into four troops, each lead by a lieutenant or 2nd lieut, with about 30-50 men in each, and a sergeant as senior NCO. A cavalry squadron is equivalent to an infantry company, and a troop to an infantry platoon. A private in the cavalry is often referred to as a trooper.

Most of us have little idea what life was like for a soldier at that time. We may have heard about the battle of the Somme and the endless trench warfare in which men were required to go over the top and mown down in their thousands. But we know little about what daily life was like for a soldier or the earlier stages of the war, when armies were still moving rapidly.

A good account of the fighting Chunky was involved in can be found in *20th Hussars in the Great War* by Major J.C. Darling. I also looked at War Diaries which give day by day accounts of what each battalion did. I have drawn on other books which give the bigger picture, but Darling's book is my main source for this summary. It is from page 57 of this book that we learn that Chunky was squadron sergeant major (SSM) of "A" Squadron in January 1915, the same squadron as he



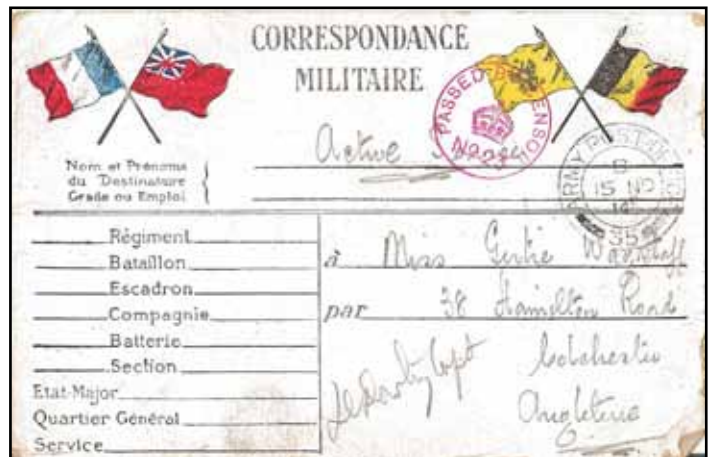
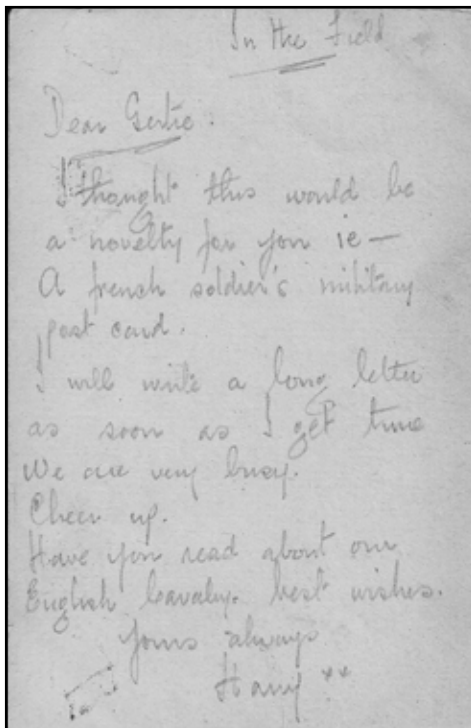
Painting of Chunky horse jumping at Olympia with the XXth Hussars in 1913

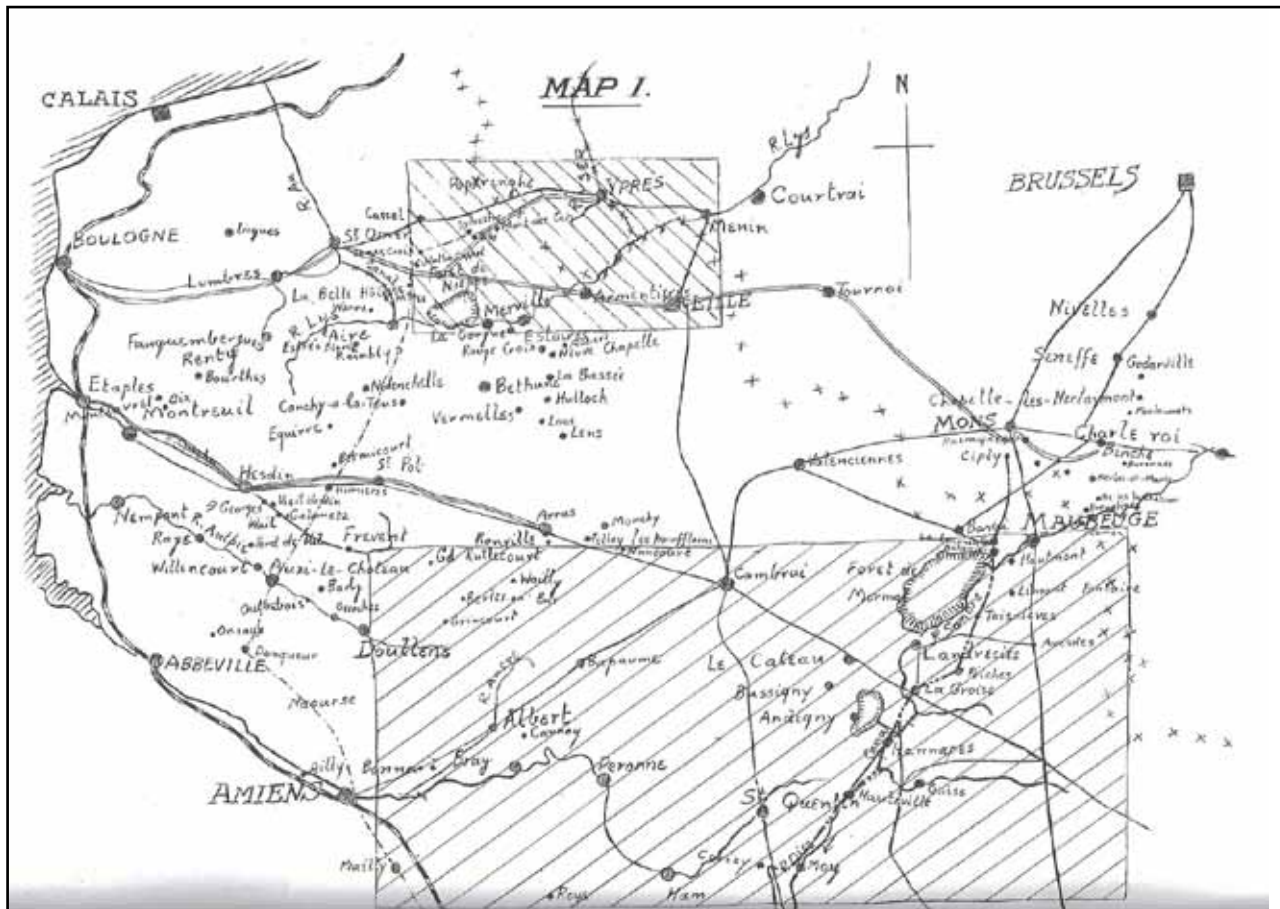
was in during the Royal Tournament in 1914, where he rode a horse name "Joe" with the number "A22". It is a fair bet that he was in that squadron throughout his time fighting with the 20th Hussars, although at the start of the war he was still a sergeant.

The SSM was the most senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) in the squadron, responsible for administration, standards and discipline.

In condensing 70 pages into less than a dozen I have concentrated on the activities of "A" Squadron, whilst giving a general idea of what was happening around them.

Postcard to Gertie Wagstaff in the early days of the war (left and below)





Map from 20th Hussars in the Great War showing the northern half of the territory over which the Great War was fought.

The shaded areas are shown in more detail on maps on pages 20 and 26

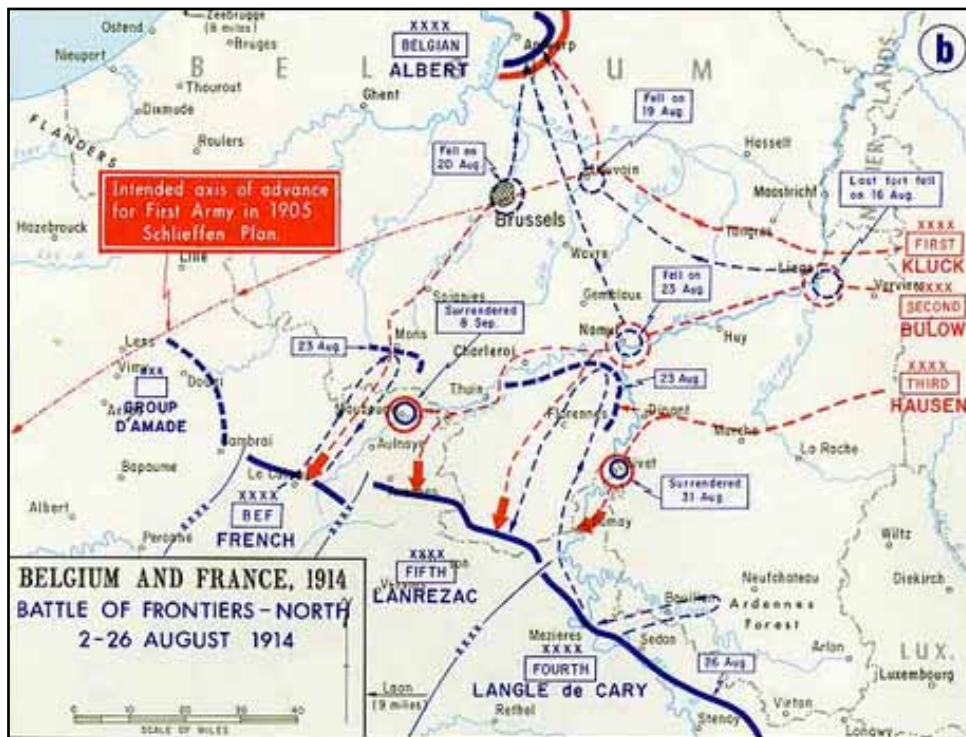
Battle of Mons

From Le Havre the 5th Cavalry Brigade was transported by train in open cattle trucks labelled “Hommes 40, Chevaux 8”. They stopped in Rouen around midday on 19th August to water the horses and feed the men. They were warmly greeted by the French population – this was the “*entente cordiale*”. Their train rolled uncomfortably through the night to Hautmont just south of Maubeuge where they were unloaded the following morning. From there they rode south to Limont-Fontaine where they were billeted for the night. The next day they rode into Belgium to Merbes-Saint-Marie, a distance of about 18 miles,

and took up a position covering a gap between the right flank of the British Expeditionary Force and the French 5th Army.

The following day, the 22nd August, “C” squadron were the first to encounter the enemy. They went out on patrol at about 4.00 am, travelling about 30 miles and sighted a number of German patrols, most of which they avoided. They engaged with a troop of Germans, capturing three horses which they brought back in triumph.

This was the first engagement between British and German forces and the beginning of the battle of Mons. The British Commander in Chief Sir



Map showing the line of attack of the German forces at the battle of Mons and the defensive positions of the BEF

John French at first underestimated the strength of the enemy force and began to attack them. His 70,000 troops were opposed by 160,000 Germans, and he soon changed tactics. By the 23rd August the French army was in retreat, and the BEF (British Expeditionary Force) pulled back to a line stretching 40 kilometres East and West of Mons, having suffered 1,600 casualties.

On 24th August the 20th Hussars saddled up early and moved to positions along the road between Mons and Maubeuge. "A" Squadron was about half a mile east on the Mons to Harmignies railway line, with a machine gun section behind them on their right. They were covering the retirement of the 2nd Infantry Division. They were shelled heavily and suffered casualties, while "B" Squadron engaged some infantry or dismounted cavalry. By the afternoon the British infantry had

all passed through and they withdrew 4 miles to a new position which they held until early evening, before retiring to La Longueville, about 12 miles as a crow flies from where their day had begun. This was a successful rearguard action in which they had held a succession of positions allowing the infantry to put many miles between themselves and the advancing enemy. They had engaged the enemy with rifle fire, and used their mobility to break off the engagement and retire behind the infantry lines for the night.

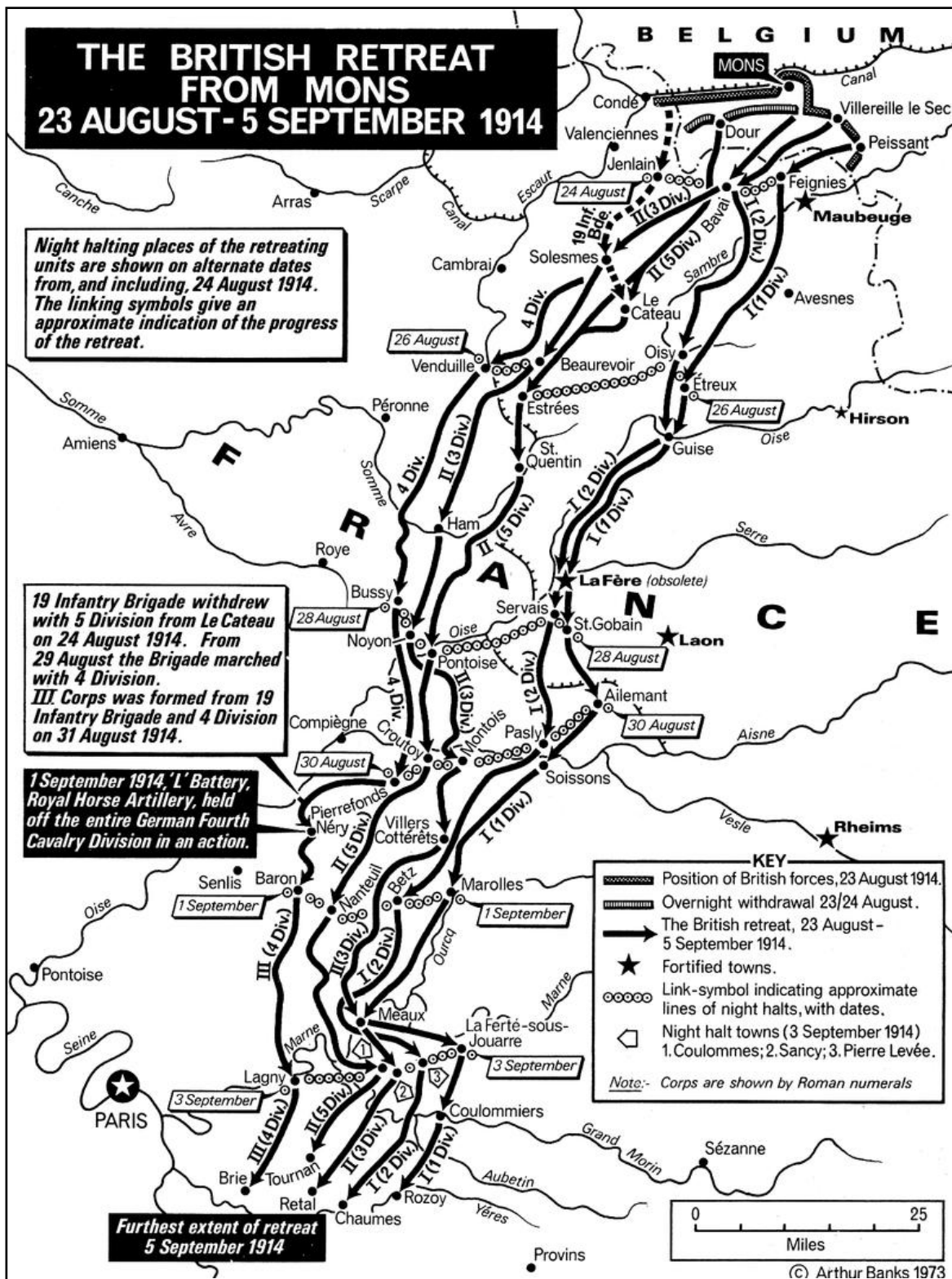
The 25th August followed a similar pattern, taking position at Hargnies that enabled the infantry to cross the Sambre in an orderly retirement. In the course of this they came across bedraggled French columns that had clearly "*been through it*", and it became abundantly clear that things were not going well for the Allies. They also had to fight off rapidly moving

THE BRITISH RETREAT FROM MONS 23 AUGUST - 5 SEPTEMBER 1914

Night halting places of the retreating units are shown on alternate dates from, and including, 24 August 1914. The linking symbols give an approximate indication of the progress of the retreat.

19 Infantry Brigade withdrew with 5 Division from Le Cateau on 24 August 1914. From 29 August the Brigade marched with 4 Division. III Corps was formed from 19 Infantry Brigade and 4 Division on 31 August 1914.

1 September 1914, 'L' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, held off the entire German Fourth Cavalry Division in an action.



German patrols that were sniping at the retreating troops well in advance of the main German front line. It was after 1 am before they stopped for the night. They covered the retreat to Hannappes on the following day, suffering more casualties in action against German patrols.

On the 28th they set out again at around 4.00 am and marched down the valley of the Oise, occupying high ground near Cerizy to cover the retirement of General Horne's infantry brigade. This turned into their first aggressive engagement of the war. "C" Squadron were faced by a strong squadron of German cavalry galloping over the brow a hill about 500 yards away from them. The Germans dismounted and opened fire from a standing position in front of their horses. The 12th Lancers led an attack on them, and stampeded their horses, and then charged the dismounted troops, most of whom surrendered.

The Colonel of the 20th Hussars then led most of his men to attack a battery of German guns that were a serious threat to our infantry position. They suffered quite a few casualties, but it was generally reckoned to have been a very successful battle. The German cavalry had attacked without first finding out the strength of the opposition they faced. The British forces, even though in retreat, had used forward reconnaissance to keep them well informed of the enemy's movements, and successfully overcame them.

Following this battle they then rode 25 miles mostly in the dark to their billets at Autreville, very tired, but confident of their capabilities as a fighting force.

This was typical of the role played by cavalry in the early weeks of the war.

Their job was to protect the infantry with fast moving patrols collecting information on the disposition of the enemy, or to attack German patrols that were doing the same to the Allies, and to use their speed and mobility in rearguard action to cover a retreat. There were no real cavalry charges during these battles, and when fighting was needed they almost always dismounted and used their rifles.

Over the next two days they continued in rearguard action covering the retreat of the BEF but without engaging the enemy, and ending up on 30th August in billets at Vauxaillon just north of the River Aisnes.

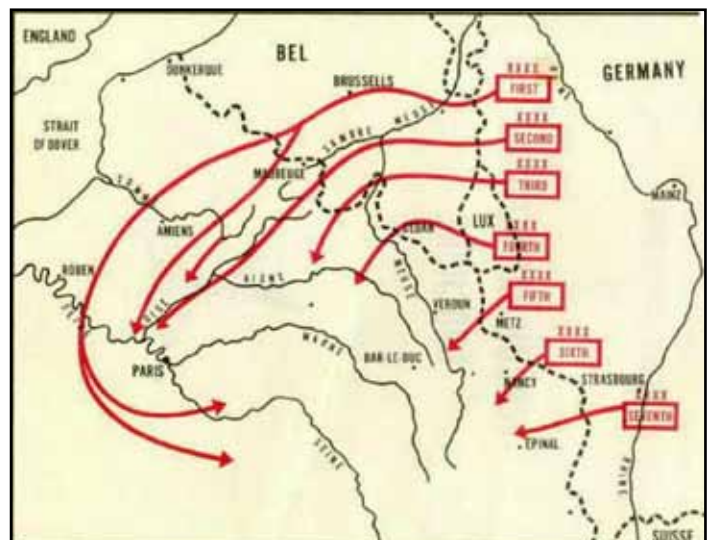
With hindsight we can now view the battle of Mons from the perspective of both the German army and of the Allies. Up to 27th August the 5th Cavalry, of which the 20th Hussars were a part, were facing Von Kluck's 1st Army on the extreme right flank of the German line, and this army then turned west of the line of retreat of British forces in the hope of enveloping them. The cavalry the 20th Hussars had



Chunky's cap badge in the 20th Hussars



The Von Schlieffen Plan showing what the German army intended to achieve at the outbreak of war



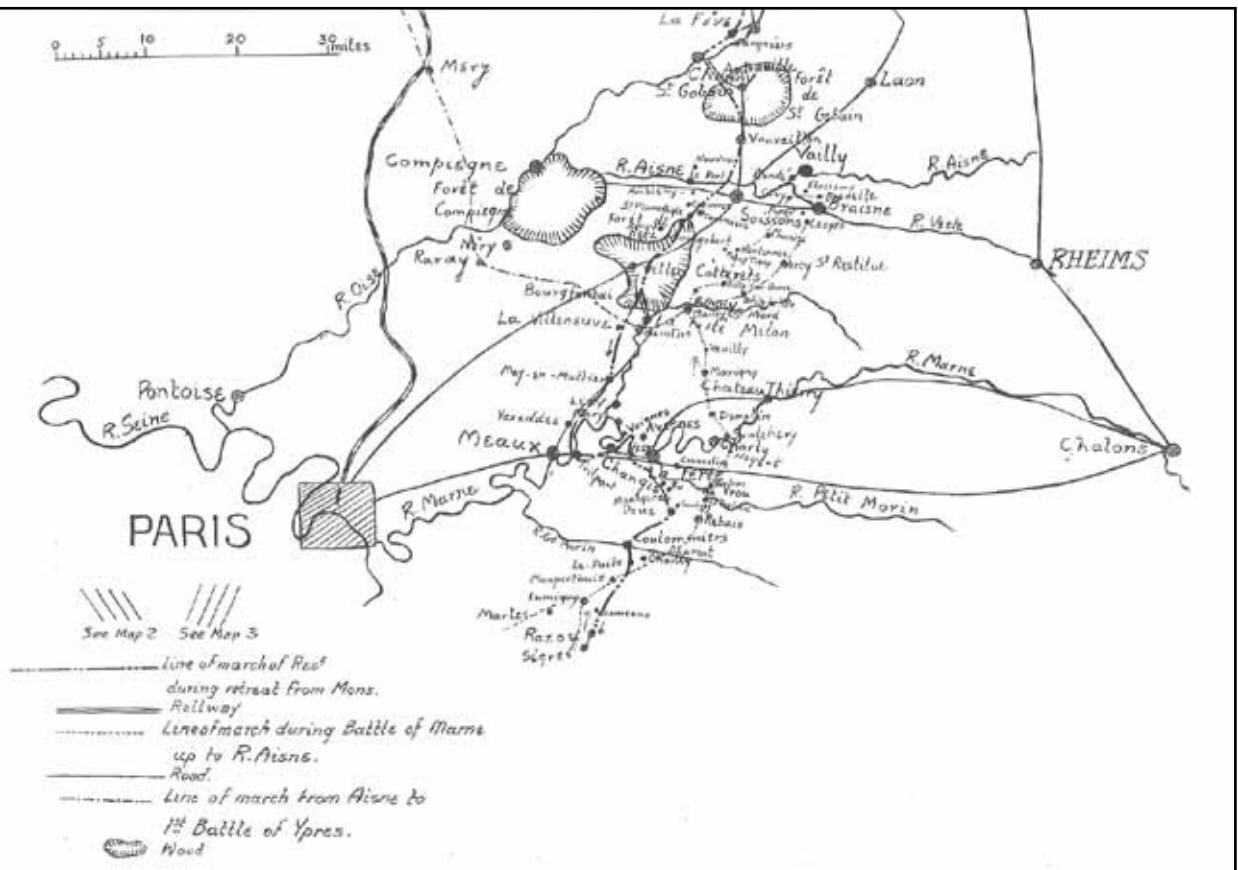
engaged on 28th August were from Von Bülow's 2nd Army who were fighting the French army to our right. As a result the BEF had managed to escape vastly superior forces through a gap between the German's 1st and 2nd armies. This was very fortunate, because after six days of fighting they were exhausted, running out of supplies, and had averaged little more than a couple of hours sleep per night. By the time Von Kluck realised that his envelopment had failed he had lost the initiative, and exhausted his own troops in travelling twice the distance that the British had to cover.

The Germans advanced more rapidly than expected and came over the river in a number of places, so that a couple of these patrols found themselves well behind enemy lines. By late afternoon the infantry had regrouped around Villers Cotterets. The regiment's rearguard duties for that day were complete. But they now had to extricate themselves. By this time the Germans had outflanked "A" Squadron and occupied the woods to their rear. "A" Squadron had the task of holding up the German advance while the rest of the regiment got away. They did this with well-judged bursts of fire that misled the Germans into believing they were facing a much larger force. A sergeant was wounded, but managed to mount and ride with the rest of the squadron in a dash to rejoin the rest of their brigade on the road to La Ferté, before withdrawing to billets in Villeveuve at 11 pm.

Map from 20th Hussars in the Great War showing the southern half of the territory over which the Great War was fought. It joins up with the map on page 16.

Battle of Marne

On 1st September the 20th Hussars crossed the Aisnes and took up rearguard positions in the Forêt de Retz. The next day they sent out patrols to check potential crossing points along the river.



2nd September was a quieter day, and they crossed the Marne at Trilport where they spent the night. The next day the brigade crossed back to the north of the Marne and occupied positions to defend bridges along the river. This was another classic rearguard action in which their job was to delay the enemy crossing the river for as long as possible before making their own escape. Several men were killed that day, particularly in "C" Squadron which also lost their Captain. The last person to retreat across the Marne was Colonel Edwards, the regiment's commanding officer, and the bridge was then blown up. They then passed through the new infantry line at La Ferté and bivouacked about 4 miles behind it near Rue-de-Vrou.

The 4th September should have been a quiet day, since the bridges across the Marne had been destroyed, putting an obstacle in the way of the enemy. "A" Squadron sent out three patrols to observe the crossing points, but almost immediately came under attack. Lieut Bairstow of their first troop was severely wounded at Courcelles. Large numbers of German troops were seen south of the river, getting out of motor buses and preparing to attack.

The regiment was ordered to take up a new rearguard position at Doue, which they held until 3.30 pm. The whole Brigade then set off south, with "A" Squadron fighting a series of rearguard actions as daylight faded. They fell back through Coulommiers where the infantry outposts held off enemy attacks late into the night. The 20th Hussars spent the night at Le Puits a few miles further south.

The 5th September was the last day



German transport at
Marne

of the retreat, which ended for them at Sèvres, where a few lucky people actually managed to sleep in a bed for the first time since landing in France.

The troops they had been engaging were Von Marwitz's Cavalry Corps, who were guarding the right flank of Von Kluck's 1st Army. This army was marching south-east to attack the French 5th Army, leaving one large reserve corps to keep an eye on the French 6th Army which was forming to the left of the British. The French army grew so fast that Von Kluck's reserve corps could no longer hold them, and he had to retrace his steps to stop them from being overrun which would have left his main army surrounded and cut-off from its supplies.

Under Von Schlieffen's Plan the German army had hoped to defeat the French in their first advance, and make rapid progress to Paris. The Chief of the German General Staff wrote afterwards that they had failed to pull this off due to the rapid assistance brought to France by the British. The BEF were quite a small force, but it was made up of highly experienced soldiers. They were heavily outnumbered, and the whole army was in retreat from the moment they engaged with the enemy. But they slowed the



British cavalry at the battle of Marne

German advance, and with their French allies bearing the brunt of the fighting they eventually stopped it in its tracks, which was a great achievement.

Having stopped the advance, the roles were reversed, and the Allies started chasing the German armies back into Belgium.

So instead of continuing south on 6th September, they saddled up at 4.00 am and set off north. The 20th Hussars were the lead regiment, and Chunky's "A" Squadron was in the advanced guard. That day they moved to Marles and finally to Chateau-Lumigny for the night. "B" Squadron was shelled and lost five men. "A" Squadron was not in

The German advance was halted at Marne



contact with the enemy. They were all very pleased to be pushing the Germans back, and advanced 4 miles that day.

On 7th they moved off at 6.00 am in pursuit of the retreating Germans. They decided to lighten their baggage wagons, removing the picks and shovels and anything not urgently required, to enable them to move faster. They marched via Mauperthuis, Chailly and Charcot to Rebais, during which they mopped up a few straggling German soldiers, including a couple of Polish cavalry whose lances were smuggled back home as trophies. The Germans had looted most of the houses in Rebais and furniture was strewn all over the streets. Some of the houses were on fire, and there were dead horses, killed by shrapnel. This was not untypical of an army retreating through foreign territory.

The next day was frustrating, with no further progress made. The enemy rearguard was holding all the river crossings, and Major Darling gives the opinion that they played the enemy's game by being unduly cautious and failing to pursue the enemy as vigorously as they could have done. On the 9th September the infantry had secured the crossings, capturing prisoners and machine guns, and they advanced via Le Tretoire and Boitron to the Marne. They crossed the river on a bridge of boats near Saulchery, where they halted for a couple of hours before moving to billets in Dompnin. That afternoon Field Marshal Sir John French rode up and addressed each regiment in the brigade, praising them for the excellent work they had done during the retreat.

They set out at 3.00 am on the 10th

with “B” and “C” Squadrons to their left and right, covering a wide area of ground, clearing stragglers. They came across a German convoy with an escort in a hollow below Veully, and a regiment of German cavalry retiring at a gallop a mile or two away. They wanted to give chase, but were pulled back because the rest of the brigade had turned to the left leaving a gap which would have been unprotected. So instead of taking advantage of the surprise, they waited for an infantry brigade to move up with artillery. The Germans convoy and their escort had no artillery, but fought well, until they were all killed or captured, which was a slow process.

The 3rd Cavalry Brigade came up from their left and the two brigades combined under the orders of General Hubert Gough, and advanced to Marizy-St Mard, just south of the Ourcq.

The next day they marched with the 3rd Cavalry via Billy-sur-Ourcq and Hartennes to a billet at Parcy Tigny. Then on the 12th September they continued to Chacrise and Ciry, and were about to join the 3rd Brigade in attacking Brenelle when the garrison there surrendered. This turned out to be made up of older men, which lead some of them to think that the enemy must be getting desperate and must soon be defeated. Unfortunately that took another four years!

This was the end of the battle of Marne. The 5th Cavalry had experienced very little of the fighting. Most of this was done to their left by the French 6th Army who drove back the German 1st Army, and to their right by General Foch’s 9th Army. Both of these battles took place on 9th September, with British forces playing a minor role.



Crossing the river on a pontoon bridge

The Battle of Aisne

On the 13th September they set off in pursuit of the retreating German forces, but found them holding a line along the Aisnes river. So they withdrew and handed over to the infantry, returning to their billets in Braine. On the same day the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades were formed into the 2nd Cavalry Division under General Gough.

On the 14th the regiment was ordered to cross the river and pursue the enemy, protecting the rear of the new brigade. The Greys and the 12th Lancers were already across when they reached Vailly, where the Royal Engineers had laid a pontoon bridge. That morning there was a thick mist that began to lift as they crossed on the pontoons, leading their horses on foot in single file. Once across they discovered that the infantry had failed to secure the high ground, and the cavalry were sent back across the pontoons. By this time the German artillery had found their range, and they were heavily pounded, losing ten men. The 12th and Greys lost even more when they followed across the river later. They went into billets at Augy, where they stayed throughout the next day.

The battle of Aisne was the beginning of trench warfare. The Germans were the

first to dig trenches so as to stop the Allied advance and defend territory they had occupied in Belgium and France. After a few months these trenches had spread from the North Sea to the Swiss Frontier.

As the Germans were the first to decide where to stand fast and dig, they had been able to choose the best places to build their trenches. The possession of the higher ground not only gave the Germans a tactical advantage, but it forced the British and French to live in the worst conditions. Most of this area was barely a few feet above sea level. As soon as soldiers began to dig down they would invariably find water two or three feet below the surface. Water-logged trenches were a constant problem for soldiers on the Western Front.

The 2nd Cavalry's job was to watch Condé Bridge which was in enemy hands, but this was mostly done by other regiments. On 17th September reinforcements arrived with 63 men and 59 horses. The regiment saw none of the action which was chiefly fought by the infantry. They remained in comfortable billets from 16th September to the end of the month. They had been at war for six weeks without yet facing any serious fighting.

German supply columns on the march through Belgium towards Ypres



First battle of Ypres

In September 1914 four new German army corps had been formed (approximately 48,000 men in total). Over two thirds of the men were young, inexperienced volunteers between 17 and 19 years of age. As a result of the young age of so many of the soldiers, they became known as the 'Kinderkorps'.

These four corps were incorporated into the newly established German 4th Army. By 19th October, with only a few weeks of training, they were on the march towards Ypres from the north east.

From 20th October they encountered the experienced, well-trained soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force who were holding a series of positions making up the forward British line north-east and east of Ypres. German casualties were very heavy. Some German regiments lost 70% of their strength in casualties. The British battalions fought to hold their ground but also lost casualties in dead, wounded and prisoners. The British forces were relatively experienced but ill-equipped and often ran out of munitions.

On 6th October SSM Hatton of "A" Squadron received a commission in "C" Squadron, and we believe this is when Chunky was promoted to SSM of "A" Squadron. He became the youngest SSM in the British Army.

On 7th October the 20th Hussars began marching in easy stages towards Ypres. They billeted just north of Amiens on 7th, Domqueur on 8th, Humières on 9th, Rombly on the 10th, and La Belle Hôtesse on 11th. The 12th began as a foggy day. The regiment was leading the brigade