

## **Diary of a Lieutenant 1 Bn LNL - 13/14 Sept 1914**

"SEPTEMBER 13th 1914. Next morning was the commencement of the Aisne battle. We moved forward to a village and halted for several hours. Heavy guns are just on our left, and have opened already at enemy's position across Aisne. Passage is forced by 1st Brigade and we move down and cross at Bourg. I notice strong barricades and disguised trenches abandoned by the enemy which, if held, would certainly have cost us casualties. We hold just one side of Bourg at Point "A". Just settling down to a meal when we are moved on to hill "X" and lie just beneath the crest. Musketry fire has begun. Sussex and Guards are hard at it. We are shelled and one Sergeant is wounded. Towards dusk the regiment moved into billets at Moulins, except "A" Company, which is left out on the hill. Pass a good night, but called out hurriedly before daybreak and told to move. We fall in but are ordered to stand by for an hour. Fall out, and told to move off half an hour later. Rain began to fall and continued to do so for the remainder of the battle. We hear firing towards Vendresse. Move down road "B" to Vendresse and lie under cover of hedge "C". Things are beginning to liven up and bullets are falling all around us. Two men are wounded. One in foot and another in leg. Captain Body, who has taken over the Company, calls on all Company officers and explains situation. We are shortly moved up to Tryon to support attack on factory. While he was explaining all this the bullets kept singing by, some fairly close. I felt uncommon like making a dash for the nearest cover. Lieut. Loomes turned up and rejoined; we were all glad to see him. He was delighted at being back. When he had reached the base he was told to go to England, but not liking the idea he had got on a train and, by changing trains and living from hand to mouth, had succeeded in joining up just before going into action. "C" Company are sent to support Guards. They return after about an hour, having suffered very severely. Knowles had gone on gaily attacking the whole German army until he found himself very nearly surrounded. He then made a bolt for it. "A" Company rejoined, and we move up to Troyon. Pass about 350 prisoners, a welcome sight. They were in tears. They had been told all they had to do was to march through to Paris, which had already been captured. They were surprised at their reception. On approaching crest of hill we come on signs of conflict. Helmets lying all over the place, and also rifles. A good deal of blood, and several wounded and dead lying about. We reach crest and halt just under it. The bullets now seem to be coming from all directions. After a short rest we are ordered forward to attack factory. I extend my platoon after Loomes (he is far in front of his platoon waving them on; this was the last I saw of him). Loomes is on my right and Goldie on my left. Had only gone about a hundred yards under a perfect hail of bullets when I heard a singing song on my right. Two eight-inch shells had pitched 20 yards to my left and blew sky high a few of my platoon. The shells emitted a tall cloud of black dust and smoke. Truly terrible missiles. We go on forward, but as yet I can see nothing. At last we reach the firing line. How anyone reached it is beyond comprehending. And such a line. All manner of regiments are there, and the dead and wounded are lying round in scores. We carry the factory and hold on like grim death. Allason is a little to my right, and Goldie landed up to me. He shortly afterwards moved off to the left by rolling on his side, and that was the last I saw of him. The man next to me, just as he was getting down, suddenly pitched forward

and lay in front moaning the whole of the time we were there. We opened up a sharp fire on the German line, but are not able to see very much. Allason, on my right, is bandaging up a wounded Guards' officer. He was a fine example and seemed to shew no fear. He would not lie properly down. The German machine guns are nasty; they keep traversing up and down our line. A great increase in the noise of cracking whips overhead always heralded their return. Many men are hit and the casualties become truly appalling. We get no reinforcements or ammunition, and soon exhaust our supply. Germans heavily counter-attack. I noticed their way of carrying machine guns on stretchers. We used not to fire at these until we knew their contents. Goldie sends back word that he has been wounded in the leg and is going to crawl back to the rear. That was the last news I heard of him. Allason orders me to retire, and I do so with two Loyal North Lancs., three Black Watch, two Cameron Highlanders. We move back at a fast double and, coming to a donga, take shelter there. We are subject to a terrific bombardment and it is death to shew a hand. The shells seem to come right in and sweep the hole out. We lie there for some time and then move a little further back. I strike the Gloucester Regiment, who are the 3rd Brigade. They have come up to support and have had no casualties. They are all very eager to go on. I have already lost my Loyal North Lancs., and the Highlanders go off to try and find their regiment. I decide I will attach myself to the Gloucesters. I am absolutely done. 2nd/Lieut. Harding and I settle down to eat something. I supply the jam, he the bread. This revives us. The fire is still tremendous, but we are sheltered under a steep cliff and do not suffer. It is not safe to go on top. A party tried to bring in a wounded man, but all of them were either killed or wounded. Towards darkness the Gloucesters are ordered to attempt to advance on factory via village of Tryon. They ask me to come and I do so, there being no chance of finding my unit. We move off and have several escapes from "Jack Johnsons" and move up the road. Reach top of road when half battalion in front get panic. The General's escort bolted and the half battalion Welsh opened fire on us. Luckily they fired so high so no damage was done. The Gloucester Regiment's leading Company had scattered, and it seemed as if we were in for another fight, for we did not know who was firing at us. The officers exerted themselves and quickly succeeded in getting the regiment together again. We then lay down and shouted to those in front to cease fire. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun. We all thought the thing closed, but no, suddenly a black wall seemed to rise in front of us and a crown of charging men came through us. They were the Welsh. They bayoneted two Gloucesters on their passage through. They went on a couple of hundred yards and lay down, and once more opened fire on us. Again no one was hit and it stopped. After a good deal of not knowing what to do, we got orders to retire down to the bottom of the road and entrench. This we did, moving a platoon at a time from the head of the column. I am glad to say I was able to help several of our wounded down. They were lying very thickly up there. Of my Company, no fewer than 3 officers out of 5 and 175 men of our 220 were either killed or wounded. It was terrible not being able to help them and still to hear them cry out "North Lancs". I passed the night after having supped off biscuits and jam, under a water-proof sheet, and, as it rained the whole time, I had a very uncomfortable time. Harding (Gloucesters) slept next me; he was afterwards killed.

SEPTEMBER 15th 1914. Next morning early the Germans attempted to push through, but, after suffering severe casualties, they were compelled to desist. I waited a short time, then thinking I would be of much more use elsewhere, proceeded to try and find my Regiment. I had one or two narrow shaves from snipers going down the road. Met the transport of the Welsh Regiment and the officer in charge gave me tea. This revived me very much for I was still very exhausted, besides being drenched through by the night's rain. I went on through the village of Chivy and asked a staff officer the way. He took me in and took me to see the General. He was very kind and directed me on my way. He told me 3rd Brigade had captured about two hundred prisoners that morning. I went along and came on H.Q. Guards Brigade. The General, Maxse, was also very kind and sent one of his staff officers to direct me to the 2nd Brigade. We were just then in a state that news like that was very cheering. We had to hug the cliff very carefully as the shells were pitching just over the crest very close every time. I reached the H.Q. 2nd Brigade and see Troyte, also the General who was very kind. He told me the Regiment was only a few hundred yards further on. I went and saw Captain Allen. He waved his hand frantically at me, and then I saw several more heads bob up from under a haystack. Soon I was shaking hands all round. They all thought I had been killed and had given me up for lost. We were soon exchanging all our adventures, and I had a really good meal. Jack Miller had a marvellous escape. He was blown up by a shell and rendered unconscious. When he came to he found himself a prisoner of war. He managed to make his escape when we pushed them back again. Captain Prince was grazed at the knee. In fact, we all had wonderful escapes from death. We were, including M.O., 10 officers in all, having lost 14 during the previous day's fighting; our losses in men were about 400. My Company only mustered just over 50. We were dug in, in shallow trenches, just below the crest and out of sight of the Germans. The day passed very quietly except for shell fire. I went down to Vendresse and found Spread in hospital. He was badly wounded and not expected to live. His first question was, what had happened to Goldie."