

Bethnal Green Infirmary

London, October 1915.

I am going to try and give you my impression of the three days and nights fighting against the Turks. If I seem to dwell on the terrible it is that which holds ones attention and will stick in the memory. Nothing I could say would convey one thousandth part of the reality.

On the afternoon of Thursday Aug. 5<sup>th</sup>: Ellis and I sorted and packed our belongings and tidied the bivouac in Monash Valley which had been more of a home to us than any other place in the nine weeks since we landed. The bivouac was a rectangular pit about 4ft. deep, the back wall being undercut for the better protection of our heads when lying down. It measured about 7 by 8 ft. and had on the bank beside it a fire-place over which grew shrubs. I packed all my clothes in my valise and carried it down to the stack where we left it under guard. We eat whatever food we could not carry in our haversacks and computed our respective chances for the ensuing action. I put them down at two to one one of us would be wounded and three to one against either being killed. That is I thought there would be 50% casualties 17% being killed!

Night came beautifully clear: rifle fire grew brisker and we marched off. I carried two hundred and twenty rounds, my iron ration, also a shirt, a pair of socks, shaving gear and such extra food as I could cram into pockets and haversack. We marched down the winding sap past the shadowy water tank to the beach: then North among the stacks of stores and ammunition into the sap again. On our left was the sea, on our right the group of hills one slope of which we have held since the beginning and the peak of which – Hill 971 – we were to capture. Towards dawn we camped in a little valley full of scrub. We spent Friday hiding in the valley. Twice a German Taube flew over us but we lay still under the scrub and they did not see us.

In the morning I went up with the water bottles of our section to the tanks on Walker's Ridge, a terrible climb in the heat. As we stood in a long queue the bullets began to drop about us, aimed at officers on the bank above us, and Kelly, a corporal in D company who was stood beside me was struck and fell dead. I filled our bottles and went back, passing a big new 5in. howitzer hidden in branches beside the track. How they had dragged it up that razor back I do not know. I looked out of a loop hole at the glorious landscape below. The slopes held partly by our dismounted and partly by Turks, the green flats, the Salt Lake, the low range of hills forming the Northern edge of the peninsular and the Gulf of Saros. I went down and tried to get some sleep in the scanty shade.

After dark we fell in in the dry creek bed and scrambled down into sap. It was a still starry night. As we approached our outposts the rifle fire increased and bombs came from the hill, on our right. Here the sap ended and we lay down in the open at the foot of the hill. Two search lights were playing from the destroyers off Sulva Bay. A Tommy regiment emerged from the sap and moved off in a confused way with much hoarse whispering and running to and fro apparently deploying between us and the beach, and then moved North. We moved off in file stumbling over tussocks and stones slid down the nullah and wheeled to the right. We had been under desultory fire since leaving the sap. We were now to advance up a long valley and to hold the shoulders of 971 by dawn. The mounteds were to sweep up the spur on our right and another detachment to

do the same on our left. We crept through a gap cut out by engineers in the barbed wire entanglement and stood confused in the dark amongst the stubble of a little field, spurs on eitherhand and the Turkish trench spitting fire at us less than 100 yards straight ahead. There was some hesitation and various orders. We extended in an uneven line across the gully. Someone shouted charge! and we rushed forward yelling. I was about the middle of the line but fellows bunched away to each flank so I was charging alone. In my right hand I had my rifle with fixed bayonet, in my left a precious spade. The Turks blazed at us till we were right on top of them. Then my leg suddenly melted and I was thrown on my face. I got up again and found I had been tripped up by soft earth thrown in front of the trench. I lost my spade, but jumped into the trench and ran down with the others towards the right. We ran over the body of a Turk who was wedged in the bottom playing possum. Those on the left shouted that there were Turks in the river bed and then on there was much rushing about and stumbling. The Turk got up and screamed for mercy. One of our wounded was crying out. On the left Ellis was mortally wounded, just made a section commander. I knew nothing of it till hours later. Sergt. Smith was also mortally wounded. A party of bomb throwers ran forward and took the second trench without opposition, which was a good thing as the bombs were a failure. Then came a wait: we had lost our platoon sergeant and no one took charge. At last we moved off up the valley.

On our right we could hear firing and an occasional cheer as our fellows charged a fresh trench. We wound ahead up the steep narrow floor of the deep gully, occasional snipers firing out of the dark. The firing on either flank now fell well behind. Then came a burst of firing in our rear. We halted, and Cap. Colquhoun came back. Then we began to retire, matters steadied and we wound slowly back to where our flank guard, some 50 yds off in the scrub, were hotly engaged with a party of Turks. I do not know details, but the firing died down and we advanced again. From our left came an occasional ringing cheer. I do not think that I have told you that all our work had been done with the bayonet. We had been forbidden to load or fire a single round. A great black sugar loaf hill disentangled itself from the dark mess on our right and from about half way up it some hundred yards away, came a burst of firing. We were halted, turned right, and ordered to take the hill. The scrub was like a barbed entanglement only pitch black and denser. I could hear the twigs crackling on my right but not on my left, and made a mighty effort to try and be first at the top. Then in a little glade I stumbled over a dead Turk. Whether he had been killed by shell fire or bayonet I do not know, but he lay huddled there, and the sight was encouraging. Then came a steep bare slope with three dead Turks: and beyond it, our fellows streaming up a good road on to the summit! They had been luckier than I! On the flat top within the trenches, were a crowd of Turkish prisoners guarded by part of the mounted men, who apparently had taken the hill before us, attacking the N.W. face while we had attacked independently in the rear. I lost my company, and acted on hurried orders of an officer to dig in before dawn. By dawn, we should have been dug in according to the General's plan on Sari Bair (Hill 971). But we were so far off, that that was impossible. Gus Levitt joined me, and we heard Major Statham shouting orders to Otago so we plunged down into a deep gully in the half light and got in touch, though Canterbury and Otago seemed inextricably mixed. Gus like many more of our fellows was suffering from dysentery, so we climbed the opposite scrub clad hill slowly.

It was daylight when we came out on the upper slopes, where the open spaces were continuous. Then a cheer rolled along our front and we surged forward anyhow, over the Turkish trench. Our part of it was quite empty. Then we stumbled up the steep slope of Rhododendron Hill to the summit line and began to dig in. I looked over the crest and saw that we were almost in the rear of the Turkish positions called the Chess-board which slope down to meet the old Anzac positions Walker's, Pope's, and Quinn's. There was the mouth of a tunnel in the face of the opposite slope,

and Turkish communication trenches quite unprotected from attack from Rhododendron Hill. The top of the opposite slope all spiked with direction poles for indirect artillery fire, formed the skyline above us, and we could see nothing of the Chess-board or Anzac. Bullets now began to fly thicker and thicker, coming from all sides except the direct rear, so I left the firing line to dig their trench, and slipped back to finish my bivouac or shelter pit. I dug one, deep enough to shelter head and body but not legs, a work involving time and energy. Then came the order "Otago Infantry to the left". As my dug out was on the right, I sorrowfully abandoned it, and plodded off. Rhododendron Hill is somewhat conical, so that very little movement towards the left brought us, (Otago), round to the slope facing the Turks. By this time, the Turks must have rallied, and reinforcements must have poured in though not one could be seen on the slopes about us. Bullets whizzed in one continuous shower. The wonder is that anyone lived at all. I lay down in a little hollow in the steep hill side and once more commenced the work of digging in. The hollow lay in a natural lane through the scrub, which was now picked up by a Turkish machine gun. In no time they had bagged ten or a dozen of our men, as Otago streamed back across it from a position that was nothing less than suicide. It was here that Atkinson and Spotswood and Anderson were killed and H Hendle and Cap. Colquhoun were wounded and many more of Otago. I was hit in the ribs by a spent bullet which did not penetrate my shirt. This has happened more than once now, but generally as the result of ricochets or shrapnel. I dug into the hill, and built up the flank with sandbags of which there were many derelict. We each carried two when we came out. Then I had a very pretty dug out, the best on the hill I think, and crept out to bandage some wounded in the lane. Some had moved off and some were already bandaged, and the dead lay everywhere. One man was shouting, so I went down to him. Poor chap was shot through the brain, and was smothered in blood, from which arose the invariable stench. Another fellow was busy on him and I gave a hand. As fast as we bandaged him he tore it off. We gave it up and had to leave him to writhe there in the sun. I got back and settled in a doze. Before I could drop off an officer walked up across the bullet-swept slope waking up the weary men, setting them to work on deeper dug-outs and a communication trench and firing line. Finally he came into my camp and stood gazing down the lane. I shouted at him to lie down. He did not move, but began to count the Turks on the opposite slopes, enthusiasm growing with the numbers, Ten! Twenty!! Fifty!!! Hundreds!!!! Then looking at me and my bivvy "who taught you to dig emplacements for machine guns? Splendid! I am afraid we shall have to turn you out of this, I am sorry but - Bring up that machine gun!" I humbly asked if I might retain one corner. "I am afraid it will be wanted for ammunition" then he got astride the gun and became absorbed with the Turks, the Turks replied and I wandered off with Quigley, too tired to trouble. It was Capt. Wallingford, the most valuable man in the Expeditionary Force. Shrapnel opened up from our left rear. We went into some scrub, had some food, dug a shallow bed and lay down. Occasionally a wounded man crawled by making down hill for doctors or bearers.

Then word came for us to go back into reserve while Canterbury took over the firing line. In the night attack we had worn on the back two patches of white calico for identification at night. I had taken off my tunic as being too conspicuous and now lost it. With it went my letters from Eva and Home, my letter of credit, my letters from Dr. Thomson and odds and ends. I looked down from the scrub and found Otago already moving. A crowd rushed down the slope across the hollow, over the ridge and out of sight into comparative safety. The hollow was the upper end of a gully into which a whole army must have been firing. The dust was leaping into a hundred jets like Frying Pan Flat. A body or two lay there and a man was being helped over the ridge. Another group streamed down and I took the chance, keeping well off to the left and so running solitary. My knees grew wobbly with the slope and roughness of the ground and suddenly I saw something at which I threw myself flat. It was a line of fluttering leaves in a horizontal line from left to right, a couple of feet from the ground. I thought it was the beam of a machine gun. Watching it for a

minute I saw it was the telephone wire, over which everyone was tripping. I ran past the body of Wilson, into comparative peace. We still lay flat but the bullets came from odd snipers concealed in the country we had passed over, and not from whole companies. We got into the Turkish trench and went down the gully up which we came originally. Cuttle appeared to be in charge. It was Saturday afternoon. The gully-bottom swarmed with moving troops and mules. Engineers were continuing the Turkish road, Indians were driving the mules laden with sealed benzene tins of water for the firing line, wounded hobbled down or were carried on an unending stream of stretchers. Gourkas, Maories, New Zealanders, and men of K's army toiled up with ammunition. I saw Galloway go by with blood on his neck, but smiling.

We sat down and rested while our water bottles were refilled. We had gone in on the previous evening with many chaps sick and now lack of sleep and overwork began to take toll. We slung rifles and clambered up the gully, which is a spur of Hill 971, setting down for tea and a drink on scrub covered hillside sheltered from Turkish fire. Nearly a mile ahead, well up on the bloody hill was our firing line indicated by a continuous rattle of musketry. When I was in Malta I remembered what I thought was a dream. It now turns out to be a dozing memory of real events. A Taube appeared above us apparently directing their artillery. Then out of the blue swooped an Allied aeroplane and the German fled downwards with smoke pouring from his exhaust, till lost behind the hills. Night came and we dozed off rifle in hand, wakened off and on by new orders or new bursts of fire or by slipping down the steep hill on to the other sleepers below.