

**" TWENTY FOURTH AUGUST, 1914."
(AN IMPRESSION).**

"Oh it's fine to be a Cheshire on a sunny August morn, to rouse the kids and missus and then clad rags to adorn. There is hurry and there's fussing for you won't be late today and much fuming and much fretting ere you all are safe away. Then you all link up at Chester where there's greetings loud and shrill. "What cheer, Arthur! What ho Rozzer, Martin, Jim and Bill." You meet your old C.O. looking younger, full of cheer, or is it you grow older with the passing of each year? That benevolent old figure who was once your R.S.M. " Blimey, why did you get wind up, was it custom, but—ahem." And you think of all the toil that's gone to make the pleasant day, for some work whilst others pleasure— " Thanks to them " you say. Yet pride and grief are mingled as you watch the Colours go and wink from eyes the moisture you hardly like to shew, for they bring back many memories to a Soldier of the Line and your heart feels torn to tatters as the Band plays Auld Lang Syne.

Yes, 'twas grand to be a Cheshire on that Sunny August day, without a thought amongst us of the fate that for us lay. So we fought and boiled and sweated on that scorching Belgian field. Who were we to worry or to gloomy thoughts to yield 1 For like all other laddies who have joined the old Two Two we were simple homely Cheshires with a man's size job to do.

" Come on ! Shake yourselves ! " The Platoon Sergeant passed along the lines of drowsy men. Clincher rose and echoed his Master's Voice. He shook himself. It seemed only a moment ago that he had got down to rest. Stamping about seemed the best way of getting the damp chilly morning dew out of his bones. The field in which they had slept was in front of a factory. To the right were some slag heaps on which men were stirring. A slight ground haze foretold of the hot day that was dawning. August Twenty Fourth, Nineteen Fourteen. It was just an ordinary dawn, there was nothing about it to give warning of what the fates held in store for them.

The order came to enter and barricade the factory just behind them. With crow-bars and chisels they made loopholes in the walls. Clincher was quite proud of the loophole he made, it was so obviously according to regulations. A good broad V-shaped hole with but a small opening at the outer side of the wall. He sighted his rifle through it and found that he had a good wide field of fire. He was not going to lose it so he wrote his number, rank, name, Regiment and the date above it. The Engineers came and commenced to put up a platform so that another row of loopholes could be made higher up the wall. The dust they made drove Clincher from his loophole and, finding his chum, they considered breakfast. No rations had been issued since the previous noon. His chum had a brewing of tea ; Clincher a piece of bacon, the residue of a burglary in the galley of S.S. " Massilia," but they had not bread. The Platoon Commander came along and they asked if any rations were coming up. He did not know but he had managed to find half a French loaf. Round the corner of the factory they prepared their breakfast, a Belgian lady supplying aniseed water with which they brewed the tea. They shared and each had a good bacon sandwich. A Battery of guns opened up just to their rear and rather spoiled the meal.

Breakfast over, they returned inside the factory to find that The Manchesters were relieving them. Regretfully Clincher bade goodbye to his magnificent loophole and hurried to where the Company was assembling. Now where ?

The Battalion marched away from the firing. " Crumbs ! Would this marching about never cease? " After a few miles the Battalion entered a pea-field. The Divisional Commander and escort came into the field and there was a consultation of Senior Officers. One of the escort was a Lance Corporal of the Hussars who had been with Clincher at the School of Cookery. They had a good chat about chaps they knew, where they were and how they might be faring. All the time the fate of the Battalion was being decided. Clincher and his mates had no idea that The British Army was retiring. They believed they were still advancing. The wheel turned and they turned with it, helpless to do aught but assist in its turning. Clincher left that field as he had left others, without any special thought except to wonder when all this marching and counter-marching would cease.

Down a hill, up a hill, through a village and out into open country again. There was no sound of firing in the direction in which they were going. Where the German Army was and whether they would ever meet them was becoming a vexing problem in Clincher's mind. The Company marched along a sunken road and were halted.

" No. 9 Platoon ! Extend to the left " Clincher jumped to life, his section extended on the left flank of the Platoon and under the bank. Now what ? " Forward."

Clincher tried to take the bank at a bound but failed, sliding back into the road accompanied by the jeers of the men still in fours. Scrambling up and over the bank he raced after his section. This was going to be the real thing, at last. No more holding of dark and dismal streets. " Keep your extension !" he yelled excitedly. " Left incline," signalled the Platoon Sergeant. Clincher repeated it to his section. They turned half left and doubled down the field.

" Get down and make head cover ! " Off came the packs and out came the entrenching tools. To the right the extended lines were coming down the field to take up a position alongside them. It looked fine, it was the soldiering he had been taught. Bullets began to whine over their heads. From along the ' line the rattle of rifle fire opened out.

Where Clincher lay the ground was most uneven. He could obtain no field of fire and was unable to identify any of the targets upon which the remainder of the Platoon were concentrating their fire. He crawled to the centre of the Section but the ground there was just as bad. A terrific weird screaming noise passed overhead. Whatever was it ? They looked at each other enquiringly. Word came down the line from the Platoon Sergeant. " That is shrapnel and you are all right as long as you hear it screaming. It is passing overhead."

That was that. They trusted their Platoon Sergeant even though they feared his censure. Word was passed down the line to open fire on the Germans advancing through a gap in front of a village, Barsseux. From where he lay, Clincher could not see the gap and very little of the village. He decided to crawl his section forward to try and obtain a better field of fire. After several lengthy crawls the section obtained a good field of fire quarter left of their position, could get no frontal view and only a distant view to the right. The Germans were moving in batches across the open ground, quarter left of where they lay, and about four hundred yards away. They opened fire. Some time afterwards the Lancers came across the ground, in file, just a few yards in front of them, turned right into line and disappeared into the dead ground in front. The shrapnel started to burst over the hollow into which the Lancers had disappeared. Clincher had no instructions and he was worried about it. He passed messages to the Platoon Sergeant, but received no reply, his messages vanished into thin air. He crawled the length of his section and found the reason why. He was out of touch. The shrapnel ceased to burst in front and from their left front a squadron of Cavalry charged towards the hollow where the Lancers had gone. The section had hardly commenced to fire on them when someone yelled " Cease fire, they are our men ! "

They were Dragoons. Later, in Germany, Clincher met a Squadron Sergeant Major who always blamed The Cheshires for his wounds and for the fact that he was a prisoner. Clincher always declared that he had no knowledge of any cavalry that day !

After The Dragoons had entered the hollow the batches of Germans recommenced to cross the open ground to the left front. Clincher concentrated the fire of his section upon them and passed word for the right hand man to crawl back and inform the Platoon Sergeant of their position. The batches of Germans crossing the open space were getting wary, and commenced to dash across in small groups at more irregular intervals. It became more difficult to make them scatter. The volume of fire passing over and around them was increasing in intensity and sound, even to Clincher's inexperienced mind it was obvious that the Germans were getting much nearer. He could not, however, see the attacking parties responsible for the fire. The shrapnel had ceased to pass over. Very little attention was paid to it after the Sergeant's explanation, it seemed more noisy than dangerous. The man he had sent to the Platoon came back.

" Retire individually from the right." Each man acted upon the order, in turn. Taking up their packs they started back up the hill. Farther up the field other sections were going back and over the crest of the hills. It had been hot lying in the open with the sun blazing on the back and

neck. It was hotter still mounting that hill, the bullets whipping and cracking all around them. Here and there a man stumbled and fell but most of the section managed to reach the road. Clincher relaxed gasping under the shelter of the bank. In the road was some confusion.

" Who had given the order to retire ? " They were not left long to consider. Down the road came the Platoon Sergeant. The Germans might be dangerous but here was a much closer menace, Clincher had the remainder of his section and the other men in the road, up on the bank in a trice. Where they were situated the road turned over the crest of the hill and swung round a corner. Clincher was at the left of the line where the road led down hill. He never saw what happened at the other end of the line, nor could he say how far round the corner the line was extended, that end was under the Platoon Commander. The Platoon Sergeant busied himself with the full length of the line, keeping everyone going. Clincher received all his instructions from the Platoon Sergeant who was an experienced and competent N.C.O. The Lieutenant of Reserve left much of the control of the Platoon to the Sergeant until he had gained a little more up-to-date experience.

Fire was kept up on the Germans and as men came up the road from the left they were put on the bank with the rest. To the right rear fire opened out from some raised ground. Clincher judged it to be from the other Platoon he had seen retiring over the hill crest, he wondered why they had gone so far back and had not stopped at the road. Gradually the fire behind them died away, they seemed to be alone in the road.

The Second-in-Command came up the road from the left and the Platoon Sergeant went to meet him. " Who had given the order to retire ? " Clincher glanced over his "shoulder as he lay upon the bank. The Second-in-Command seemed to tower above him. It gave him a greater sense of security. He had kept his head well down because the bullets sounded so near. Seeing the Major towering above him, seemingly oblivious to and completely unaffected by the hail of bullets, he felt much less apprehensive. The order to retire had all along been questioned, there did not seem to be any reason for it. It had not been followed up by any further instructions. The Platoon Sergeant understood the Major's question to infer that the retirement should not have taken place, he gave the order to advance again. Clincher and a Lance Corporal mounted the bank ready to take the sections forward.

" Bring them back, Sergeant, it's no use." The Second-in-Command countermanded the Sergeant's order. Clincher slid hastily to the road, things did hum up there. The Major moved away down the road to the left and Clincher never saw him again that day. Indeed, twenty two and a half years were to elapse before he had the pleasure of meeting him again.

For a short space the German fire slackened and Clincher had a chance to look around him. To the rear, there was a wood way over the fields—all seemed quiet in that direction. To the rear right, the raised bank was about two hundred yards away. No sign of movement there. To the right front were some buildings and he could see men dribbling through them, but too far away to identify whether they were English or German. The ground between the buildings and where he stood was hidden by the hill crest. Out in front there was dead ground but half left they again had a good field of fire. Just over the hill crest someone was calling. A Drummer tottered over the hill top, bent double. He was pulled down under the bank and Clincher and the Lance Corporal began to bandage the wounds in his back. Others were performing the same services for each other. Before the task was finished the Platoon Sergeant hurried down the road. " Fix bayonets, they're coming ! "

They let the Drummer roll into the gutter with the others. Poor devil, they did not even fasten up his pants. Clincher had a swimming feeling in his stomach as he fixed bayonet. On Company training this had been his special forte ; he had always felt elated as they had fixed and charged with hearty yell. He turned to the chap near to him to see how he was taking it—and saw the sweat trickling in lines down his cheek. Phew ! He looked up the road. The Platoon Sergeant stood, tense and rigid, peering over the bank. All seemed to be looking that way, it seemed to be less of a strain than staring at the top of the bank, waiting to see what would be coming over. The Platoon Sergeant relaxed and went round the corner. What had happened Clincher could not see, perhaps the Germans swung into the dead ground in front.

" What d'you think, Corporal, will there be time for a draw before it starts up again ? " The speaker was a Reservist and Clincher had never taken any particular notice of him. His request sounded so startling that the youngsters around regarded him with interest. " Blimey ! " thought Clincher, " Fancy ' bothering about a smoke at a time like this ! " He suddenly realised that he was very thirsty and that he had a water bottle. " Crumbs, they had been busy. No time to think of anything ! "

The Reservist was puffing away at a fag-end and started to relate an impossible yarn of how he had kept a donkey tied to his bedpost. They stared at him. first in amazement, then in amusement. Gradually he brought them all back to normal. The firing opened up before they had heard what had been the end of the donkey episode. They sprang to the bank calmed and refreshed. Good old Snowy '. He was such a steadying influence.

A new note had entered the volume of fire passing over and around. The Germans were again beginning to break cover from the ground on their left front. There was a distinct rhythmic whizz as the bullets sped past to thud into the bank on the opposite side of the road. Casualties started to mount up. Thud, thud, thud, rapped the bullets into the bank behind. Clincher found the party running short of ammunition and wondered how the other end of the line was situated.

The Sergeant came along but he was realising the same difficulty. In the pea field at Dour the Sergeant had anticipated their going into action and had drawn a generous supply of extra ammunition. These he had distributed, ordering the Platoon to fill their pockets. There had been some grumbling at the additional weight. Clincher now wished they had brought even more, they were out of touch with the Company and had no idea where the ammunition mules could be found. The Reservist had an idea and got down from the bank. Returning he passed a few clips to each man and went for more. " Funny he had not thought of it before," mused Clincher. " Those chaps had no further need of ammunition."

Thud, thud, thud, went the bullets into the banking behind. The sound had a monotonous regularity that somehow fascinated Clincher, and from the direction of the thuds he could note the sweep of the machine guns as they searched the Hill crest. As he turned to mark the effects of the bullets upon the banking, he heard voices. The Platoon Sergeant stood in the road below talking to the Officer Commanding " D " Company.

The Sergeant waved his hand around his head and pointed across the field behind. Clincher understood, he got his men down and they stood, backs to the bank, ready to move off.

" What are you doing here ? " he asked the Platoon Sergeant, who duly explained. " They are retiring on our right ! " called out the Platoon observer. " Who are they ? " demanded the Officer. " I will go and identify them," announced the Platoon Commander, who had come from his position in the right.

He went to his death, they were not English troops retiring but Germans working round.

So they stood awaiting the order. The Captain and the Platoon Sergeant at the foot of the bank on the opposite side of the road bent forward under the hail of bullets sweeping over.

" For God's sake don't leave us ! " cried the wounded. It was a strain to leave them but they were safer there under the banking. The Sergeant waved his left arm, the retirement began at that end. He waved to Clincher and that end followed. It was the last movement of the Platoon. Clincher always likes to remember it was in perfect order, no undisciplined rush. Previously they had been retiring but had not known it. Now they knew they were retiring.

Up on the bank and on to the open field. Hell opened out, the German machine gunners had a clear view of them. On across the field the Platoon sped in swift, short rushes between the bursts of machine gun fire. Up, rush, down, up, a few paces at a time they made their way. During one of the rushes, to the right front, Clincher saw a civilian leading a child by the hand. During the next rush, both had disappeared. At the end of the field was a hedge but what a strain it seemed to reach it. Each time they went forward their numbers were fewer. Rush, down, up, rush—the hedge was about twenty yards away when smack went a bullet into Clincher's hand, his rifle fell to the ground. Down he crashed too as a hundred snarling whips cracked about his ears, the air around him seeming alive. The burst of fire slackened. With a

last despairing, frantic rush, Clincher burst through the hedge and slithered gasping and sweating to the railway metals below. A small group of dazed men, a dozen or so, stood between the lines. Clincher looked about for the man and child but could not see them. No more men came through the hedge. Clincher felt sick at heart, appalled at the sudden heavy losses. Of his Section, he alone remained, of the Platoon, the Sergeant, himself and the observer. The others were men who had rallied to them in the road. A few minutes before they had been holding their own, now they were but a dazed, badly shaken remnant. Germans started to come down the railway.

As they stood in the railway line Clincher's thoughts were in a whirl owing to that mad hair raising rush across the open field. Of one thing he is certain, no thought of Esprit de Corps entered his mind. He noted the Germans farther up the line, but without particular interest. If any one thought emphasised itself above the others it was the thought of the child he had seen in front of him. Did it go down under the hail of machine gun fire which had swept the Platoon out of existence ? He did not know, he will never know.

So late in the afternoon of the Twenty Fourth August they paused on the railway line. Clincher estimated the time to be about five thirty, history sets it somewhat earlier. Clincher's estimates of time was admittedly hazy. They did not know it but they were miles behind the German Advance Guard and within the encircling sweep of units of the German Fourth Army. The others must have felt like Clincher, just a sense of numb bewilderment. Yet within a short time he was to experience and feel the true meaning of Esprit de Corps. The term " Regimental as a Button Stick " was to take on a new and wonderful meaning.

The Platoon Sergeant was the first to collect himself. The Officer Commanding " D " Company spoke of a French Army Corps away to their right. They thought him mad. Although he did not speak of it he appeared to be wounded. The Sergeant took command and lined them up. " Where the devil is your rifle ? " he asked sharply.

So wild and frantic had been his last rush to the hedge, Clincher had forgotten to pick up his rifle which he had dropped when the bullet hit him. Hastily, he thrust his wounded hand behind him, he might be reprimanded for that also. The Sergeant led the way out of the railway, Clincher and the Captain brought up the rear. They turned down alongside the hedge lining the railway bank and started off in the direction of the wood Clincher had seen in his left rear as he had lain on the bank at the road. A burst of fire from the right drove them into some thickets. They dodged from thicket to thicket, evading the fire until they came to the edge of the wood. Clincher glanced at the Sergeant who had had a lucky escape, his cap was torn by a bullet. Clincher's water bottle had stopped one and the trickle of water down his leg caused him further perturbation of mind until he assured himself of the reason.

The Sergeant fixed bayonet and entered the wood meeting a German patrol which cleared off at the sight of him. When Clincher followed he found the Sergeant and Captain examining a cavalry pony which they declared to be English. The far end of the wood was still under shell fire, but that way seemed to lead to safety. The remaining members of the party, again reduced by casualties, penetrated into the wood, coming to a well defined path along the edge of which they proceeded. As they went along the firing ceased and by the time they reached the end of the wood all was quiet and peaceful.

Clincher's hand was beginning to ache, but as he had used up his bandages on the Drummer by the roadside, he could do nothing to it. He was sorely tempted to slip into the undergrowth and stay there. The Sergeant called them all together and took stock. They now numbered seven, four with rifles ; Clincher, a Drummer and the Captain without rifles. They had twenty rounds of ammunition amongst them, five rounds for each rifle. The Sergeant left the wood to reconnoitre, the others remaining just inside the wood until he returned to say that the way to the village in front seemed clear of the enemy. Across the fields they went, following a kind of cart track. Clincher felt more hopeful.

At the entrance to the village the cart track emerged into a kind of cattle pen leading into a lane about two hundred yards long. A gate barred the entrance to the lane and the pen was surrounded by a strong thorn hedge. As they approached the gate leading to the lane fire was

opened upon them from the village end of it and from the gardens behind the houses. A Lance Corporal and the two Privates sprang to the gate to return the fire. "Come out of it," yelled the Sergeant, "We shall be caught like rats in a trap."

They broke through the hedge surrounding the pen and opened fire. The Captain and Clincher stood just behind, the Drummer took cover. The Germans in the lane fled into the gardens behind the houses. To the right, at the far end of the village, a body of men appeared on the edge of the field upon hearing the rifle fire. Clincher pointed them out to the Captain who surveying them through his glasses turned to Clincher and said: "These men," indicating the four firing over the hedge, "will never get away whilst we are with them."

Clincher admitted to himself that they were of little assistance to the other four. He had his bayonet in his unwounded hand. What he expected to do with it he could not have said but it gave him the feeling of being armed. The Drummer had only a bayonet and the Captain appeared disarmed. Certainly he had no sword. No doubt his weapons had been left with his horse, wherever that was now.

"Have you a white handkerchief?" he asked. Clincher replied with some hesitation that he had a towel. "Keep it," continued the Captain, "It will do to surrender to the French when we meet them." With his hand he waved in the direction of the body of men they had seen appear at the end of the village. Clincher hoped he was correct, but somehow, like the rest, he thought that the Captain's talk of a French Army Corps revealed his imagination was working strangely. The four men came away from the hedge as their ammunition was expended. Fortunately the Germans had had enough and disappeared to the other side of the houses.

The party collected in the field just outside the cattle pen to consider what their next step should be. It was useless to try and force their way through the village without ammunition. The Sergeant decided that it would be better to make for a small wood about four hundred yards away, and quarter right from where they were standing.

The Captain did not mention the body of men he and Clincher had seen, so the Sergeant was unaware of their position. As they started off Clincher moved off to the left of the party, the Sergeant on the right. On passing the Captain the Officer said "Pass close to the right of where we saw them." Clincher nudged the Drummer to follow him as he continued to feel off left. Soon he was close to the hedge that ran down the field and could no longer see the corner of the village.

The next period of their retirement will always be one of puzzling bewilderment to Clincher. Were his impressions the result of an actual experience or a figment of his imagination. Try as he will he can replace them by no other impressions, they are still very vivid yet he must admit that they are certainly fantastic. The feeling of lassitude and depression he had been fighting to bear off since their mad rush to the railway line was creeping upon him again. He thought he understood the Captain's intention and hoped it would turn out all right. It made him feel hopeless. Vaguely he wondered whether the Sergeant would notice the change of direction and call him in. The Captain, the Drummer and he should be feeling off quarter left, the Sergeant and the three men with rifles quarter right. Would there be sufficient space between them before the Sergeant noticed it and by the time they reached the spot where he and the Captain had seen that body of men? The Captain had as good as indicated they were French, and he had seen them through his glasses.

Clincher felt that they were remarkably quiet considering that the village was occupied by Germans. Were they French? Had the Captain made a mistake or —? Clincher's mind boggled at the idea. If they were Germans what had he to do when he came to the end of the hedge? Perhaps the Captain thought that whilst they were being challenged the others would get away. Would he never speak?

Down the hedge he went, his mind in a turmoil, his hopes oozing away with every step. At last the hedge came to an end, had he had a rifle and ammunition he would have blazed madly around it, he was so worked up. He must have hesitated. A voice behind him, imagination or fact, he cannot say, ordered "Straight on across the road Corporal."

He felt rather than saw the road. Down the bank across the road, up the banking on the other side and into the field. Would nothing ever happen. All seemed deadly quiet except for the hammering of his heart and a buzzing in his ears. He took a few steps in the field and then—a shout ! crash ! It was as if a heavy lid had been put over him. He heard the empty cases roll into the road as the Germans reloaded. He tried to run but his legs refused to function, something seemed to go flop inside him. As he lay there he seemed to have no sense of feeling, his mind worked in a dull rusty manner. Close to him he could hear someone coughing and vomiting. He watched some ants crawl over his wounded hand. The rifle fire slackened, then flared up again. " Ah! " he thought, " The others are up and diving for it." He tried to follow but everything just faded away.

Someone poured some wine down his throat and he felt himself being carried a short distance. He lay in the roadside, watching the Germans in a dim kind of way. He became interested in their numerals and noted that there were three different sets of numerals amongst them. How long he lay like that he could not say. He was aroused out of his stupor by a well known voice which rasped out " Well, if I had known you were living I would not have bloody well surrendered! "

There was the Platoon Sergeant in the grip of some burly Germans, looking all hot and bothered for the first time that day. A German officer prevented him from being bayoneted for his outburst. Clincher's heart sank again. So he had not got away after all. It transpired that when the rifle fire slackened the Sergeant tried to take the party on.

" Who's going forward ? " shouted the Sergeant. Only the Lance Corporal responded and together they had raced for the small wood. The Lance Corporal tripped over a ditch and fell, losing his rifle. The Sergeant turned back to help him, but the delay lost them ground. A squadron of cavalry coming up on one side and infantry on the other, they were surrounded and obliged to surrender.

The German Commander was interested in the Sergeant's ribbons. " What ribbons are they ? " he enquired. " South Africa," replied the Sergeant.

He became a person of great interest and respect to all the Germans. They had seen him make his bold dash for freedom from under their rifles ; had seen him turn back under their fire to help a comrade, and had accepted his grudging surrender, when without ammunition he had been obliged to capitulate to their tremendous superiority in numbers. Now they recognised him as an old and seasoned soldier. He went round with a few Germans and collected his party, reporting all accounted for although the Platoon observer was lying behind a cornstook waiting for darkness and escape. The retirement was ended. The Captain and the Drummer were killed, a Private lay dying, Clincher wounded. The Sergeant and the Lance Corporal miraculously uninjured. The other member still at large. It was stated that the Captain had refused to surrender.

Clincher and the Lance Corporal sat beside the dying Private. Clincher's wounds had been dressed and he did not feel so hazy, yet his heart and body ached. What a day. What an end to it ! They took the Private's small Book and examined his Will. He had left all his money to a reputed female in Derry. That she had meant only a name to him did not matter. Clincher remembered how they had been asked to make out their Wills, and having nothing to leave they had amused themselves filling them up with financial heirs. One chap who was in debt left all he possessed to " The King of England! " Clincher was reminded as to how his own Will was made out and tore the leaf out of his small book. The Lance Corporal tore the Private's Will to pieces.

The Germans had been digging a shallow trench on the bank at the side of the road, now the Sergeant and the German Commander were in consultation. The German Officer in charge of the Cavalry joined in the conversation. He then came over to the Clincher and the dying Private and examined their wounds. There was a sudden order and the Germans commenced to assemble the infantry in the road, the cavalry in the field behind them. Two Germans came and carried the dying Private to the field side of the shallow trench. The Sergeant saluted the German Commander and came over to Clincher and the Lance Corporal. " Fall in," he ordered.

Clincher got up and fell in beside the Sergeant. In the trench lay the Captain and the Drummer. Clincher watched the proceedings in a listless, apathetic manner.

The German Commander took up his position on the other side of the grave, opposite the Platoon Sergeant. Behind him stood the Squadron Commander and another German officer. In the road the German Infantry, in the field the Cavalry. Clincher stood next to the Platoon Sergeant, on his right the Lance Corporal, next to him lay the dying Private. The Sergeant read some parts of the Service. Clincher listened.

A command rang out in German. The Battalion and Squadron saluted ; the German Commander and the two Officers behind him with drawn swords, at the Salute. Clear and decisive came the response from the British side of the grave, as if it were the changing of a guard. Clincher admired the drill of the Germans, so smart. He looked at his Platoon Sergeant, straight and erect, smart, soldierlike, as "Regimental as a button stick," facing the Germans with all the pride and effrontery of an equal, not a prisoner. The term, " Regimental as a button stick," took on a new and wonderful meaning. Clincher straightened himself up and copied his Sergeant, facing the Germans squarely. " Cheshires, Right Hand Salute ! "

The Platoon Sergeant proclaimed their identity. Clincher felt his weakness disappear. Yes, he was a Cheshire, too. The importance of the ceremony became clear. In that moment of defeat Clincher learnt the true spirit of *Esprit de Corps*. He was proud to be a " Cheshire."

On this side of the grave stood the representatives of The Regiment and The British Army. Another German word of command and three volleys crashed into the air. The day was over, their first and last action had been fought and finished. The grave was filled in and the Sergeant, Clincher and the Lance Corporal were taken to join a few other prisoners who were held at the other side of the road.

The Cavalry formed up and passed on. An aeroplane flew overhead flashing coloured lights, which, according to their guard, was the " All Clear " signal. The action was ended. The German Battalion went into bivouac. Clincher had watched that Battalion drill with the precision of the parade ground during the burial of his comrades, now they were performing a peculiar movement. They seemed to stand in groups of fours, each turned inwards. A few words of command, a few movements, a long low, brown bivouac appeared from nowhere. They were then served with a cooked meal from travelling kitchens, all within half an hour of the action ending. " This," thought Clincher, bitterly, " Is the Army reputed to be surrendering in thousands and reported to be living on grass."

The sight of food reminded him that he had not eaten since early morning and had only had one sip of water whilst on the road. He had an " Iron Ration " in his haversack but the sense of restriction remained, he had no orders to eat it. He wondered what had become of the Battalion. He knew where his Platoon, and the stragglers they had picked, could be found. From the field to the road, from the road to the railway, down the railway and through the wood on to the grave. There they could be found, but where were the others?

Almost with joy they had advanced down the field that morning, confident they were going to attack, the road to Berlin opening at last. Unknown to them they were covering the retreat of the British Army. So they had lain, awaiting orders which never came. Their transport, their supplies, even their ammunition taken back. In small groups the remnants were scattered over a wide area, each group wondering what had become of the others.

The sun sank behind the wood, its last rays lighting up a wooden cross on a grave by the roadside. On the cross, in a strange but respectful hand, was written :—

"Ein Engelsch Kapitein,
Ein Engelsch Soldat."

Below, the friendly hand of the Sergeant had written their names and identities :—

Captain Jones
Drummer Hogan
The Cheshire Regiment.

The Battle of Mons was over. The grave marked its end in time and place. Away to the right, a hundred yards from the grave, the seventh member of the party lay behind a cornstook, hugging the ground, anxiously awaiting darkness and escape. Many months afterwards, after vivid experiences, he reached England via Holland. That anxious khaki figure showed that Number Nine Platoon was still a "fighting unit." The spirit of its Commander had triumphed.

The Twenty Fourth of August was ended. It was just an ordinary sunset ; there was nothing about it to indicate the disaster that had been. The Lance Corporal and Clincher lay, looking to where the Platoon Sergeant sat, a picture of inconsolable grimness. "What a day it has been !" said the Lance Corporal. "What an end to it," added Clincher. "But hasn't the Platoon Sergeant been fine !" continued the Lance Corporal. Together they gazed in pride at the one who had led, harried, and held them together through the enormous difficulties of the day.

"Hell," muttered Clincher, angrily, "What a loss to The Regiment." Shortly afterwards he was removed to hospital.

W.C..

NOTES:

The article was published in the Regimental Magazine, "*The Oak Leaf*" (date unknown), pages 150 – 157.

It was written by 10066 Cpl. W. Crookes ("C" Coy), who witnessed the burials of Captain Jones and Drummer Hogan.

Capt. Ernest Rae Jones, aged 36, was the Son of the late Mr. and Mrs. S. Jones; husband of Geraldine Esme Belinda Robin Hall (formerly Jones), of Berry Hill House, Lichfield, Staffs. Born at Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. He is buried In South-East quarter, III. A. 4. of Wiheries Communal Cemetery.

Capt. Jones' wife was born Geraldine Esme Belinda Prior (Oct – Dec 1883) in Clifton, Gloucester. They were married Oct – Dec 1908 in the Lichfield District of Staffordshire. In 1901, aged 17, she was a boarder at Eastbury House School, Watford, Herts.

Drummer E Hogan is also buried In South-East quarter, III. A. 5. of Wiheries Communal Cemetery.

Also present at the burials were:

4227 Sgt. A Raynor ("C" Coy) – the '*Platoon Sergeant*' in the account
9708 L/Cpl M Blake ("D" Coy)
10303 Pte. F Garrad ("D" Coy)

Private Garrad died later on the 24th August 1914 and is buried in Grave IV. B. 18., Auberchicourt British Cemetery. He was 20 years old and the Son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Garrad, of Mill Lane, Brook St., Manningtree, Essex. Born at Little Bromley, Essex.

The Platoon Observer in Cpl. Crookes account is 9887 Pte. A Wood ("C" Coy) who made it back to England. He went back to France and was wounded at Morval on 25th September 1916.