



## **Extracts from the official history of the 50<sup>th</sup> division.**

These selected extracts concentrate on the first-week experience of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers, as they travelled from their base in the North of England to Flanders. The assault upon the village of St Julien is described. Other tracts are of places and events which have relevance (or mystery), and can be traced on the trench maps, and found in the photographs and written evidence: What *is* a "bantam battalion"? Did the Germans *really* disguise themselves as British soldiers? What was the significance of Oblong Farm? Who was living at Mouse Trap Farm on the day the panorama was taken? Is the concentration of intense shelling seen on the aerial photograph the same point where the barbed wire held up the advance, and became the area of major slaughter? Is this where the two crosses can be seen on the panorama?

## THE CALL TO ARMS

The hardy nature of the north countryman was never more in evidence than during the Great War. The fine physique of the Territorial and service battalions of regiments coming from the counties of Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire was more than commented upon by famous generals; and fine physique almost invariably means tenacity and courage in the face of extreme danger. Not to say that men of shorter build lacked those qualities for many miners belonged to the 50<sup>th</sup> division and often they were short and stocky, possessing great strength both of mind and body....

For the Territorials, mobilisation orders came at a most awkward time. Many units had just arrived at their annual training camps, or had been there several days, whilst others were actually *en route* by train or march. But on receipt of orders to mobilise there was a hurried packing up and scramble back to headquarters.

The remainder of August and September passed in hard work, training, and periodical alarms and excitements. The enemy made raids across the North Sea, shelling Scarborough and several towns on the East Coast, which entailed long hours of “standing to” night and day, although no hostile landings were attempted.

Eventually, early in October, the Northumbrian Division concentrated in and around Newcastle, all units being billeted either in the city or nearby. Then began a series of “sham fights”, route marches and other forms of training. By this period the Territorials were asked to volunteer for service overseas, their pre-war obligation being to serve in the United Kingdom only. The large majority agreed at once, and those who were unable to accept overseas obligations were replaced from the reserve battalions.

Christmas came and went, the division still training hard until at last, in early April, the long expected warning, followed by definite orders was received to proceed overseas on the 16<sup>th</sup> April.

On that date, in the dead of night, the Northumbrian Division (572 Officers and 16, 858 other ranks) left England, some units going to Havre, others to Boulogne.

The Steenvoorde area (west of Ypres) had been allotted the Division in which to concentrate and train. Thither the trains carrying the various units began to arrive, and the Diary of the administrative staff records that it was on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April that “The Northumbrian Division completed concentration in the vicinity of Steenvoorde.”

## **THE BATTLES OF YPRES, 1915**

No one who was serving with the original Northumbrian Division when it landed in France in April will forget the extraordinary happenings during the first month of active service; for a newly-arrived unit to be thrust into the battle front and take part in heavy fighting within a few days (and in some instance within a few hours) of disembarkation from England was no ordinary thing. But such was the lot of these Territorials . . .

With the arrival of the last unit at Cassel on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, the G.O.C. was no doubt looking forward to a short period of hard training behind the line , when late that night (at 10.40 p.m.) news reached him of a German advance. Ten minutes later he was ordered to have six companies of the York and Durham Brigade fully equipped, ready to move by motor bus. This order was supplemented by another received at 11.29 p.m. to have all units standing by in billets, ready to turn out immediately, fully equipped . . .

*What had happened?*

**...22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> April.**

The daylight hours of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April had been of rare beauty, for spring had already dawned in France and Flanders and, in the Ypres salient, though shell torn, battered and blasted, there still remained trees and shrubs which had begun to bud and bloom with green leaves, reminding one, at times, of springtime in England. Little that was not usual happened throughout the day; airmen observed considerable movement behind the enemy's line; in the forenoon the big German Howitzers had fired 17 inch and 8 inch shells into Ypres, piling a little more destruction upon destruction.

Towards five o'clock there was a gentle breeze blowing, the skies were clear, and the night had every appearance of falling calm and peaceful, with the possible exception of artillery fire and desultory rifle fire.

But at 5 p.m. the enemy's heavy Howitzers suddenly broke out with a fresh and violent bombardment of Ypres and the villages in front of it. Simultaneously there came the characteristically sharp barking of French "75's" firing rapidly. British Officers, attracted by the firing and looking in that direction, then observed two curious clouds of a greenish-yellow tint creeping slowly along the ground on either side of Langemarck from the German lines. Presently these two clouds joined up and, carried in a southerly direction by the light breeze, took on the appearance of a light mist enveloping the French positions and sealing them from the astonished gaze of those who looked on at this unusual sight. Next, heavy German rifle was heard, from which it was evident that the enemy's infantry was advancing.

The deadly mist which had enveloped the French lines was asphyxiating gas.

What followed baffles adequate description, but Sir John French, in his dispatches, written shortly afterwards, describes briefly the results of that first dastardly attack: "The effect of these poisonous gases was so virulent as to render the whole of the line held by the French Divisions mentioned above practically incapable of any action at all. It was at first impossible for anyone to realise what had actually happened. The smoke and fumes hid everything from sight, and hundreds of men were thrown into a comatose or dying condition, and within an hour the whole position had to be abandoned, together with about 50 guns".

Back along the roads leading to Ypres, and to the western bank of the Yser Canal, came crowds of coughing, gasping and awful agony, many falling by the wayside, dying there and then in terrible pain. Across country galloped transport and gun teams, all bent upon putting as great a distance as possible between themselves and that ghastly death cloud.

The retirement of the Frenchmen uncovered the left of the Canadian Division, whose flank thus exposed to attack appeared certain to be overwhelmed and cut off from other British troops occupying the Salient to the east.

But with magnificent courage and tenacity the Canadians held their ground and, supported with great promptitude by the which had been resting in Billets about Vlamertinghe, the enemy was repulsed and some sort of line formed. The formation of this line - imperfect as it was with gaps existing in it - was undoubtedly facilitated by the Germans themselves. They were afraid of their new weapon. With the terrible effects of the gas everywhere evident as they bore down upon and through the French positions, fearing that they too might share the fate of the unfortunate Frenchmen (from their own gas), they hesitated to advance further, for they wore no respirators, neither had

they any protection against the poisonous fumes; and as early as 7.30 p.m. they were reported as digging in.

This pause in the enemy's advance gave the British valuable time in which to push troops forward to fill dangerous gaps in the line.

Thus the reason the G.O.C. Northumbrian Division, had received, at about 11.30 that night, orders to have all units of the Division "standing by" in Billets ready to turn out immediately, fully equipped

...

... At Poperinghe the Battalions de-bussed and continued on foot. As they tramped along the pavé road, the boom of guns became ever louder. Crowds of refugees were met, hurrying westwards with handcarts, perambulators and almost every kind of vehicle laden with all the worldly possessions left to them, and the troops, for the first time, saw one aspect of the War and what it meant to the unfortunate Belgians, for the latter, before the gas attack still occupied farms and cottages close behind the line, in the Salient, feeling secure so long as Allied troops were in front of them . . .

... All Battalions reached their destination between 6 and 7 p.m. Their diaries contain few comments on that first approach march. The 4<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers record that the Battalion had marched 14 ½ miles "very dusty", "no men fell out"; the 6<sup>th</sup> that it was "St. George's Day" and that on reaching Brandhoek they went into some trenches there "simply for shelter and not for any tactical reason and there spent the night".

### ***The Battle of St. Julien; 24<sup>th</sup> April - 4<sup>th</sup> May.***

At midnight on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April the German line ran from between one half and three quarters of a mile south-south west of Poellcapelle, thence in a south-westerly direction west of Keerselere north of St Julien along the southern exits of Kitchener's Wood to Oblong Farm.

The positions of all Allied troops in the Ypres Salient were now precarious, for the enemy with his preponderance of heavy artillery, was able to enfilade any part of the British line south east and north of Ypres. Even at this date our Artillery was woefully weak compared with that of the Germans. Our obsolete heavy Howitzers were no match for the big German Howitzers, and what guns we had were supplied with only a limited amount of ammunition. The outlook, was therefore, one of great anxiety.

It was of course pitch dark when the Brigade set out on the march to the Yser Canal . . . “The march to our line was a queer one. We knew not where we were going nor what to do; the men’s anticipations were not brightened by seeing a dressing station in a very busy state. We crossed a pontoon over a small canal - a piece of the Yser Canal but not actually it. The banks were very high and we were on the further one which commanded the other side. It was provided with trenches and dug outs, and after much scrambling in the dark and moving further down and so forth, we got into our position, holding partly some dug outs and partly a trench. This was about 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>. When day broke we found that there was an old, factory with a chimney on our right and several farms and cottages occupied along our front. Ypres was on our right and the French line to our left front. There were some Canadian Scottish in the factory who kindly gave the men some beef and tea.”

When dawn broke on the 24<sup>th</sup>, these Officers and men looked on the Ypres Salient, or that portion of it which could be seen from their position, for the first time.

Ypres, the ancient city of the Belgian cloth workers lay on their right. As yet, though scarred and battered in many places, there was still some semblance to a well ordered town. From far off its ruins were hardly apparent. But as one drew closer, passing in at any of the gates over the old moat, the seemingly-whole houses disclosed themselves

as mere shells with blackened walls inside, as if one looked through the eyeless sockets of a skull discoloured by age.

Due east of their position could be seen first La Brique and then beyond that place St. Jan, Wieltje and St. Julien - all three of the latter villages lying on the Ypres-Poellcapelle road, which stretched away north-easterly from Ypres.

But of equal importance although they were gradually being reduced to mere heaps of bricks and mortar, were numerous small farms scattered about, and around which some of the fiercest fighting took place. Just south east of St. Julien was Fortuin - a curious place which no one has ever defined as a village, locality or geographical feature; it existed on maps and that was all. Next, coming west, was Mouse Trap Farm <sup>1</sup>(north of Wieltje) and Oblong Farm (which at this period was in German hands). North-West of Mouse Trap were Hampshire and Canadian Farms; Turco Farm (one of the most notorious farms in the Ypres Salient) was about half a mile west of Canadian Farm . . .

As soon as it was light on the 24<sup>th</sup> the enemy's guns opened fire, and for the first time the York and Durham Brigade was shelled: Some of the enemy's projectiles burst on the Canal Bank wounding several men - the first casualties suffered by the Northumberland Division in the war . . .

Two Battalions of the York and Durham Brigade from the canal bank were ordered to man the GHQ line astride the Poellcapelle-Wieltje and Fortuin-Wieltje roads in support of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Brigades.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally called Shell Trap, the name was considered to be ill-omened and altered to Mouse Trap Farm

The GHQ line is thus described in the official history of the War: “It ran from Zillebecke Lake where it was 1½ miles behind the front, northwards to a point half a mile east of Wieltje, where it was 3 miles behind the front, thence it gradually turned north westwards to join a line covering Boesinghe Village and Railway Bridge. It consisted of well-constructed textbook redoubts, of some 30 yards face, with their flanks turned back, each for a garrison of 50 men. These redoubts were four to five hundred yards apart and joined up by fire trenches.

The line was exceedingly well sighted from the point of view of a good field of fire, sometimes on a reverse, sometimes on a forward slope, but not overlooked owing to the general flatness of the ground. The real strength of the line lay in its wire - of continuous belts of 6 yards wide, with openings only at the transverse roads and tracks.” Indeed the GHQ line was better prepared for defence than the front line. It had been originally constructed by the French as a second line  
...

St. Julien had been lost at about 3p.m, or rather the Germans occupied at that hour...

And they were already moving southwards out of the village when the attack of the Green Howards and East Yorkshires broke upon them.

Both Battalions were at full strength and they advanced in full marching order. The sight of these two battalions advancing as an Officer said, “as if they were doing an attack practice in peace”, was inspiring . . .

At the crossroads just short of Fortuin, a few Germans with machine guns were encountered; these were very soon put to flight. On through Fortuin the two Battalions went, next encountering the enemy in force advancing south from St. Julien. They forced the enemy to give

ground and drove them back into the village. They then found themselves up against a muddy stream, known as the Hannebeke, on the southern exits of St. Julien and, the crossings being swept by heavy rifle and machine gun fire, the two Battalions were forced to take what cover presented itself. Casualties during this affair were severe, but the counter attack was completely successful and, besides preventing the Germans from making any further advance on the 24<sup>th</sup>, reflected the greatest credit upon the two gallant Battalions. (The 50<sup>th</sup> Divisional Memorial is erected at St. Julien in memory of this gallant attack).

The general situation on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> April was distinctly unfavourable to us. The Salient, held so gallantly by the Canadian s on the right of the line, "locality C" and St. Julien, had been lost, though up to midnight that village and Fortuin were clear of the enemy. This fact was however unknown to us.

At 4.15 p.m. a message from General Headquarters: "Every effort must be made at once to restore and hold line about St. Julien or situation of 28<sup>th</sup> Division will be jeopardised," was received.

At 3.30 a.m. on the 25<sup>th</sup> a strong counter-attack was to be made in a general direction towards St, Julien . . . St. Julien and Kitchener's Wood were to be the first objectives, the enemy to be driven as far north as possible . . .

Dawn had broken and the rain had passed away, but it was still misty when the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, passing through the wire of the GHQ line, formed up facing the line St. Julien - Kitchener's Wood.

The mists had covered the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade as the Battalions had passed through the wire, but before they could open out, rifle and machine gun fire was opened up on them. In faultless order these gallant troops shook out into fighting formation and advanced, but from the houses

in St. Julien, from Kitchener's Wood and from Oblong and Juliet Farms, south of the wood, a murderous machine gun fire swept their ranks. With superb courage the leading lines reached a position about 100 yards from the outskirts of St. Julien; they were then forced to lie down under a storm of machine gun bullets. The lines coming on behind were pinned to the ground and, after several vain attempts to advance, the survivors crawled back to whatever cover the ground afforded. The magnificent but hapless efforts of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade resulted in the enormous casualty list of 73 Officers and 2,346 other ranks. There was however, one compensation of this sacrifice: The position taken up by the units of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade was held until it was voluntarily evacuated on the 4<sup>th</sup> May, and they had stopped the German advance from St. Julien . . .

At 2.25 a.m. operation orders for the 25<sup>th</sup> April were issued; counter attacks were to be made by the French and British, by the latter against the centre of the German line - St. Julien to Turco farm.

But the story turns first to the right of the line . . . where the gallant Durham Territorials, holding an advanced and exposed position, clung to their positions to the very last. Dawn broke on the 26<sup>th</sup> with thick mist covering the ground . . .

The narrative of the 8<sup>th</sup> Durhams states that: "The Germans came on dressed in Khaki, calling out that they were British and 'Suffolks'". The disappearance of the Monmouths had caused a gap in the line and into this gap the enemy poured . . . Machine gun fire was then opened on the Durhams, taking the line in enfilade.

The situation was now hopeless and ridge about Boetlear Farm untenable . . . As the Farm had now fallen, the Durhams and the Company of Middlesex now fell back . . . In spite of hostile artillery fire, being strung out over a wide front they suffered few casualties.

On the other hand, by steady fire, they shot down large numbers of the enemy and presently brought him altogether to a standstill . . .

“The greatest possible credit is due to the 8<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry . . . in spite of having their *flanks turned* . . . *remained in the northern line, beating off all attacks and inflicting heavy loss on the enemy and thereby securing the flank of the 85<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade*”.

The Battalion had lost 19 Officers and 574 men . . .

For the Northumberland Infantry Brigade however the 26<sup>th</sup> April was a day of disaster for, though fighting with the utmost gallantry, the three Battalions engaged with the enemy (the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers) suffered very heavy losses, while the Brigadier was also killed. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> NF were, during the early morning of the 26<sup>th</sup>, concentrated at Wieltje.

At about 1.30 p.m. Brigadier General Riddell (commanding) received orders to attack St. Julien in co-operation with the Lahore Division and the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (4<sup>th</sup> Division). The attack was to take place at 2.05 p.m. The artillery was to open fire at 1.20 p.m. when the attacking troops were to advance to positions from which to deliver the attack at 2.05 p.m.

The difficulties confronting the Brigade were considerable: for one thing no officer had reconnoitred the ground between Wieltje and St. Julien, approximately a distance of one and a half miles. No information was received of the actual position of the enemy trenches or even of our own. It was not then known that the G.H.Q. Line was strongly wired and that there were only certain places through which troops would be able to pass. Finally, no communication was made with the artillery and no artillery officer got in touch with the Brigadier.

...considering that any failure to attack on the part of his Brigade might seriously hamper the operations, General Riddell decided to carry out the orders he had received, impossible as they seemed.

By 1.50.p.m. the battalions were on the move.

The 4<sup>th</sup> battalion N.F. had been ordered to attack on the right *i.e.*, with their left on the Wieltje-St. Julien road; the 6<sup>th</sup> N.F. on the left, with their right on the Wieltje-St. Julien road...

It was 2.05 before the leading battalion reached the GHQ Line. No sooner had they deployed on both sides of the Wieltje- St. Julien road than they came under very heavy shell and rifle fire. The thick wire entanglements in front of the GHQ Line, not having been reconnoitred, caused delay and heavy losses for the men were bound to bunch together in order to get through the gaps.

However, the wire was presently negotiated and the advance toward St. Julien began. It said much for their pre-war training and stamina that these territorial troops, subjected to all the nerve racking experiences of a great battle, advanced steadily and most gallantly in the face of violent machine gun fire and murderous rifle fire. Most of the machine gun fire came from Kitchener's wood on the left front.

By 2.45 p.m. the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> battalions had reached the front line where they were to find the battalion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which was to connect the Northumbrians to the Lahore Division on the left. By now the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been absorbed into the line. No troops of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade were seen; indeed their orders had been cancelled earlier and they were not there...But, pushing on with great dash without artillery support, isolated parties of the 6<sup>th</sup> reached positions about 250yards in front of the front trench and occupied some small trenches from which the enemy had apparently retired. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> battalions were unable to get beyond the front line mentioned.

The records state that: “The culminating point in the advance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion...was reached at about 3.45p.m. when, unsupported on their left flank and heavily shelled with high explosive shells, they were compelled to dig themselves in, and remained in possession of the ground they had gained until dusk, when they returned to the front line trench.”

Just when the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion had reached its furthest point in the direction of St. Julien, i.e., at 3.45 p.m., their Brigadier met his death. General Riddell, for the purpose of getting into closer touch with his battalion commanders, left the support trench at 3.30 p.m. and proceeded towards Van Heule Farm... At about one hundred and fifty yards south of the farm he received a bullet through the head and fell dead....

The Northumberland Brigade had in this attack lost 42 officers and 1,912 other ranks - over two thirds of its strength The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 7 officers and 112 other ranks killed, 7 officers 492 other ranks wounded.

There are some officers’ notes on the attack by the 6<sup>th</sup> from which these extracts are taken:

“Within five minutes... the Battalion deployed into artillery formation, “A” and “B” companies in the front line and “C” and “D” in the second line at fifty yards interval and two hundred yards distance. Directly we left the cover of the village the enemy literally poured shrapnel into our flanks, causing heavy casualties. The first rush took us over a shallow hollow of land littered with dead and wounded, for the enemy’s machine gun fire was intense. Up the rise we began to meet machine gun bullets, rifle fire and high-explosive shells from all directions, the result of which thinned our ranks considerably.

“We advanced about a mile in this formation and, after clearing some forward trenches, a small wood and a few scattered farm buildings we were eventually checked within four hundred yards of our objective, although some of our men actually got into the outskirts of the village. As there were no reinforcements available, those that were left held on to their positions until night fall when we were withdrawn.”

Referring to the advance again the note adds: “We had not advanced very far beyond the trenches occupied by the 4<sup>th</sup> Division when we were held up by barbed wire, which had to be cut before we could get forward, and it was at this point that many of our officers and men made the supreme sacrifice, going forward to cut the wire to allow us to pass. All the enemy’s machine guns appeared to be trained on to this wire, for our casualties here were appalling. One of our first officers to fall was Lieut. Mortimer who, together with many of his platoon, was killed by a shell bursting right amongst them. When we got through this wire a prolonged cheer from the Canadian troops in our rear did much to encourage our men and they again went forward, suffering losses that could never be replaced. Lieut. Garton, in spite of heavy machine gun fire and shells, cut a gap in the wire and, turning around smiling, said, ‘come on boys!, We will get at them now’”, but he was killed before going much further.

“This was our first encounter with the enemy, our first taste of actual warfare, and the Battalion acquitted itself in a manner befitting the traditions of the regiment to which they belonged....

“The enemy had everything in their favour, and their gunners and riflemen took every advantage of the target offered them. In spite of this hail of shot and shell coming as it did from all angles, the line never wavered, and at each forward word those that were able to responded to the orders. The coolness and leadership displayed by the officers was a shining example to our men, inspiring them with confidence ...”

For the Northumbrian Division the 27<sup>th</sup> of April passed practically without incident. The enemy's shell fire caused further loss, for by now the dangerous salient held by our troops was such that German artillery could bring destructive fire upon from the south, east and north; indeed it was, already difficult "for the enemy to avoid hitting somebody with every shell." The Northumbrian Infantry Brigade remained all day in Wieltje....The Lahore Division had made further (but fruitless) counter-attacks upon the enemy, but on the right of the line no hostile infantry attack had developed although the enemy's shell fire was heavy. His quietude, however, was suspicious, and we now know that he was preparing another gas attack ...

On the third and fourth of May the withdrawal operations were concluded... "The new line formed a semi-circle around Ypres...from near hill 60 to half a mile short of the Roulers railway to Mousetrap Farm and a short front from Mousetrap to Turco Farm." Thus ended the battle of St. Julien....

# Postscript...

(...the story of Mousetrap Farm continues...)

...at 2.45 a.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup> May red lights from the German lines soared into the sky. The lights were immediately followed by a heavy outburst of artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire from the enemy's trenches. Dawn had broken, and as the crash of gunfire tore the morning air great clouds of gas were seen to emerge from the German line and float slowly on towards the British trenches. The discharge... was so violent that, even through the roar of guns, the hissing from the gas cylinders could be heard across No Man's Land... the effect of the gas was felt later some twenty miles behind the front line, so that what it must have been in the latter can best be imagined. The gas clouds soared as high as forty feet and were so dense as to blot out houses and farms.

But the wind being favourable, many officers in the front line were on the alert and, as a surprise attack, the gas failed. Nevertheless, owing to the proximity of the opposing lines in certain places, the troops had little time to adjust their primitive respirators before the fumes overcame them.

The enemy's infantry assaulted immediately but, met by a withering fire from machine guns and rifles, experienced a heavy and costly repulse. Only in one part of the line, *i.e.* at Mouse Trap Farm, held by only two platoons of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, did he succeed in over running our position. At this point the opposing trenches were only thirty yards apart, and the Germans were in the "Farm" (now only rubble heaps of bricks and mud) ere the garrison had an opportunity of putting up a defence..... Blasted and crumbled by weeks of heavy shell fire, "Farm" had become a misnomer and it merely consisted of a pile of broken bricks and rubbish which the

Dublin Fusiliers had turned into a defensive position, though of a weak nature. Only a few yards (not more than thirty) separated the “Farm” from the enemy’s front line, so that when the hissing noise of gas coming through the dense clouds of poisonous fumes reached the Irishmen, their line was almost immediately enveloped by the deadly vapours.

As told by the 5<sup>th</sup> NF: “At 2.30a.m. the Germans commenced an attack with asphyxiating gas, the wind being favourable for its use against our trenches. This gas was accompanied by a heavy shrapnel and high explosive shell fire, with the result that portions of the trenches were practically demolished. The Essex, who were on the left of the line... endeavoured to disperse the gas by rapid fire, but with little effect, although no doubt it saved many men from becoming asphyxiated had they lain low in the trenches... Under cover of the gas the Germans delivered an infantry attack against the Dublin Fusiliers, the Royal Irish and “D” company the 5<sup>th</sup> NF. The Dublins were forced to retire, with the result that the Royal Irish were enfiladed, large numbers of men being killed and wounded. The Irish were now compelled to vacate their trenches, leaving behind many men suffering from gas poisoning, these men being either killed or taken prisoner by the Germans who swarmed into the trenches.

On the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> May and for some weeks there was comparative quietude in the Salient, *i.e.*, so far as attacks on or by the enemy were concerned; indeed the German High Command had ordered all offensive operations in the Salient to cease for the time being in view of larger operations taking place further south.

Exhaustion also, not only of troops but of ammunition, was another forceful reason why offensive operations were stopped; with the British the ammunition problem had reached a critical stage...

The 50<sup>th</sup> Division emerged from the Battles of Ypres, 1915, sadly depleted in numbers. The total British losses from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April to the 31<sup>st</sup> of May (in the battles of Ypres and the attack on hill 60) 1915 amounted to no less than 2,150 officers and 57,125 other ranks. Owing to the large number of all ranks given in the diaries as “missing,” who were subsequently accounted for, it is impossible to give an accurate Figure of the casualties sustained by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division.