



he Royal Munster Fusiliers were formed from the amalgamation of the 101st Foot Regiment Royal Bengal Fusiliers and the 104th

Foot Regiment Bengal Fusiliers. These two regiments became the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Royal Munster Fusiliers under an order passed in July 1881. Regimental headquarters were in Tralee. In 1886, they were sent to Burma to suppress an uprising by the Dacoit rebels. During their stay in Burma, they won a prize of 300 rupees in a rifle contest which was open to all the troops. During the 1890s, they were posted back to India again. The Boer War broke out in October 1889, and the Munsters were off again. They landed in Durban on 30th December 1901, and from there they proceeded to Botha's Pass, where they were employed building blockhouses from Botha's Pass to Vrede. The blockhouses were set up in an effort to control Boer movements. The wide open plains gave the Boer guerrillas superior mobility and hampered the British forces and their supply columns. The blockhouses were cylindrical in shape, with projecting A-shaped roofs, and each was manned by seven men. During a drive on the Orange River Colony, on February 21st and 22nd 1902, a detachment of fusiliers were sent to Botha's Pass to

THE SECOND MUNSTERS 1914 — 1918

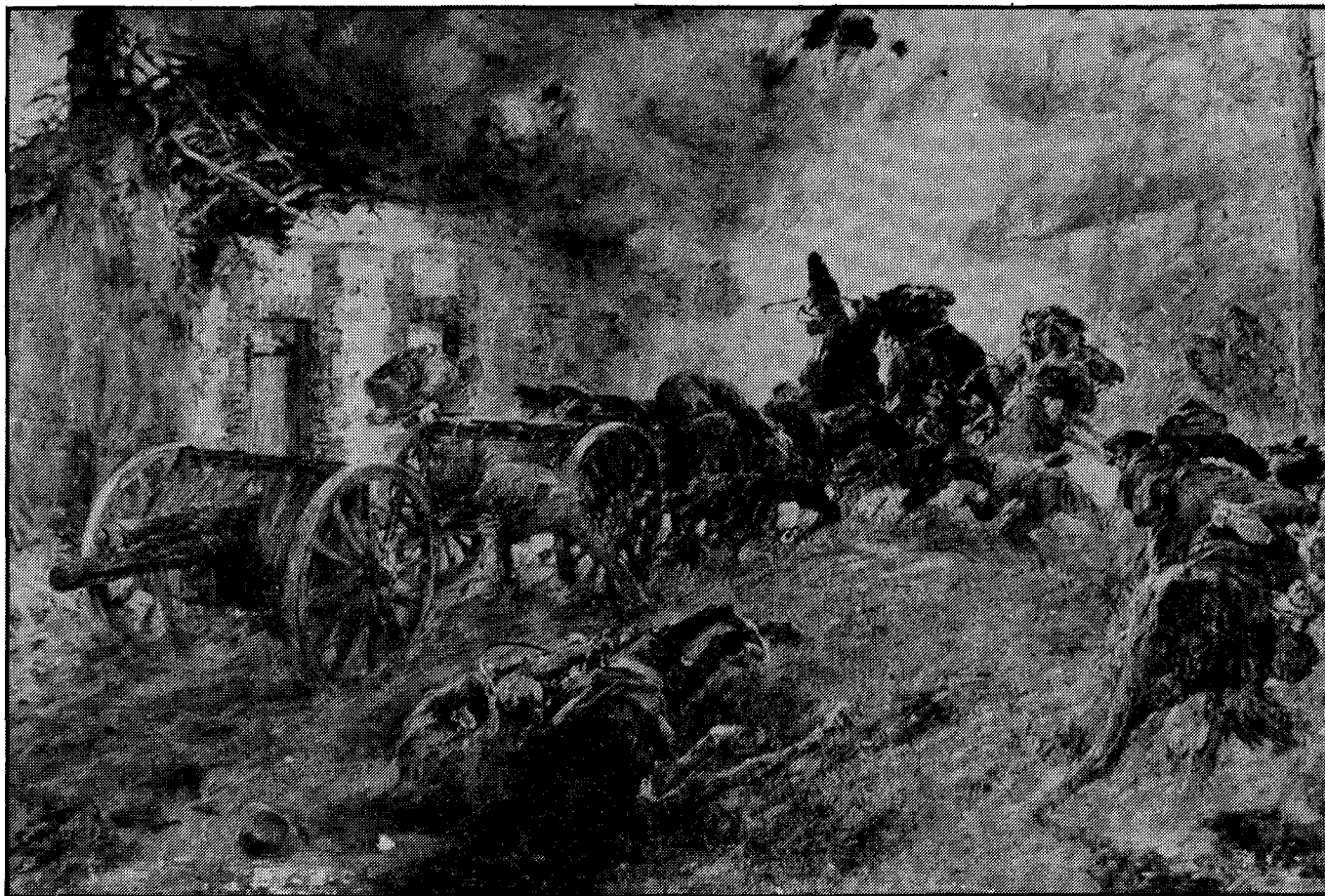
by *Des Ryan*

Part One

reinforce the blockhouse line, and a private was wounded when a party of Boers rushed the line. On 10th October 1902, they left South Africa and returned to Ireland, arriving in Queenstown (Cobh) on 16th of November.¹

In August 1903, they were presented with new regimental colours by King Edward VII at Cork racecourse. In April 1904, they were stationed in Gibraltar, where they won the Governor's Cup for musketry. Later on, the battalion returned to Ireland and were stationed

at Limerick for a while. When Edward VII died in May 1910, they were sent to London and lined the funeral route at Picadilly. During the coronation of George V, in 1911, they again lined Picadilly and part of Pall Mall. Because the Mall was behind Picadilly, they had to break ranks and run down the side streets to get there on time. During a miners' strike that year, they were posted to Birmingham and Coventry; their duties consisted mainly of guarding railway stations and signal-boxes



The action at Etreux, August 27th, 1914.

and of escorting supplies. When war was declared, they were stationed at Aldershot.

On 28th June 1914, Gavrilo Princip, a member of a Bosnian nationalist movement, assassinated the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and also his wife, Sophie, who had been on a visit to the capital of Bosnia, Sarajevo. Princip's weapons were supplied by a terrorist organisation in the neighbouring state of Serbia. (Bosnia and Serbia are now part of Yugoslavia). The Austrian government believed the Serbian government were behind the assassination and sent Serbia an ultimatum. Although Serbia complied with most of its terms, Austria was not satisfied, and declared war on the 28th July. Within a few days, all the major powers of Europe were involved in the war; Russia supported Serbia; Germany backed up Austria and France sided with Russia. Germany declared war on Russia on the 1st August and against France on the 3rd. The German invasion of neutral Belgium brought England into the war.

On 4th of August, England declared war on Germany. An expeditionary force was raised which became known as the BEF, and the Munsters Fusiliers formed part of this force. On 13th of August, the fusiliers left Southampton on the ship "Dunvegan Castle" for the French port of Le Havre. They stayed in a camp for two days during bad weather when there was heavy rain and thunder and lightning. From Le Havre they travelled by rail to a place called Le Nouvion and then marched to a village named Boue, where they spent another five days doing route marches. By 22nd August, they had moved up to the Belgian frontier. On Sunday morning, the 23rd, 86,000 soldiers of the BEF were waiting on a twenty mile front, near the Belgian mining town of Mons.² They were divided into two armies, the 1st and 2nd. The Munsters were part of the 1st Army under the command of General Haig. The German 1st Army was known to be near; its commander, General Von Kluck, did not expect any opposition and had remarked earlier on that he would send the police to arrest the BEF — a phrase once used by Bismark.

In Mons, that Sunday morning the sun was shining brightly and the people of the town were getting ready for mass. A small train filled with holiday-makers was seen passing on its way to the coast. At 10 a.m. the Germans came. As the battle raged all that day around the coal fields of Mons, the Munsters somehow or other escaped the German onslaught. About 5 p.m. the French 5th Army — who were to the right of the fusiliers (see map) — began to give way and retreat. Due to a lack of communication between the French and the BEF, Sir John French, (the BEF commander) did not receive

news of the retreat until 11 p.m. Later that night (2 a.m. on Monday 24th), the 1st and 2nd Armies received their orders to disengage and pull back. It appears that the strategy was to hold the Germans at bay during daylight, and then fall back under the cover of darkness. That Monday morning, as the Munsters were digging in, the German attack was renewed, as one fusilier has recounted:

does about using a knitting needle. The Germans shot the horses from under our men and then the Uhlans tried to capture our battery."³ "The Munsters got orders to leave the trenches and pull the guns out of action", said another fusilier, Private Crowley. He had been wounded in the leg, but this did not stop him from giving his comrades a hand. After tying the pull-ropes to the guns, they were



Lanc. Cpl. Jim Cleary, of Westland Row, Limerick, captured at Etreu, August 1914.

"The Germans turned up en masse. Their first shells landed at our rear, but they soon found the proper range through their flying machines, which kept beyond our rifle range. We were digging our trenches when the first shells went wide, but before we had time to occupy our trenches, the Germans got the accurate range. Our men withstood the fire bravely, though we were up against a regular stone wall of Germans. We mowed them down as we went through them, but as far as we went they were still there. After our thirty miles march we were fairly worn out and besides the Germans were much better served with machine-guns than we were. In our battalion we had only one machine-gun, while they were able to bring up columns of machine-guns. But we rushed them with our rifles and bayonets. As far as their rifle firing was concerned they could not hit a hay-rick. They knew no more about using a bayonet than a child

attacked by German cavalry. He lost his footing while endeavouring to parry a sword stroke which a German made at his head, and though he avoided this one and got to his feet again, he received another trust in the forearm.⁴ Later that night as the fusiliers were preparing to fall back, they hitched the captured German horses to the guns but still had not enough horses, and the men had to pull some of the guns. One fusilier with a sense of humour remarked: "The German horses did not understand Irish but they pulled the guns alright". They had to pull the guns a distance of about five miles, and getting on to the main road just as darkness set in, they rested until daybreak, when relief horses came to their assistance.⁵

On 25th August, the Munsters were expecting to billet at Landrecies. As the 1st Army entered Landrecies, they encountered on the road a body of troops who wore French uniforms and whose officer spoke in French. Sud-

denly these troops, "without the slightest warning, lowered their bayonets and charged". They were some of Von Kluck's men and, like the 1st Army, were also scheduled to billet that night at Landrecies. General Haig, thinking he was under heavy attack, telephoned BEF headquarters to send help. Assuming the worst, GHQ sent orders altering Haig's line of retreat for the next day. This move was to split the BEF in two, the result being that the 1st and 2nd armies lost contact for several days.⁶

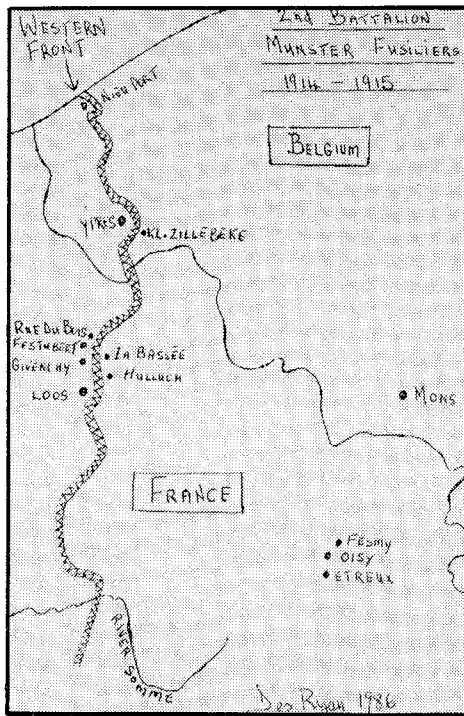
As the Munsters left Landrecies the next morning, they spotted some Germans coming out of a forest: "They crossed a tillage field on to a ridge about 1,000 yards away. They were at the rate of twelve to one. We did a bayonet charge. When they saw the wild Irish coming, they held up their hands, and also six white flags. We went over to take them prisoners. When we got out on the left of them they picked up their arms and shot us down. They opened up on us with a lot of maxims (machine-guns). Very few of us got back. There were five of us who got back without a wound. But we paid them for it. Our artillery kept it shelled night and day and every rifle shot took down a German. When we got done they were as thick on that ground as grass — dead and wounded."⁷

After a tiring march on Wednesday the 26th, the Munsters had reached the village of Fesmy. It was here they received their orders to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of the rearguard. A French army officer, wounded during the retreat, was in Fesmy and witnessed this event: "The Colonel simply nodded his head and he passed them (orders) on to the men, like as though he was giving orders to a waiter at a hotel."⁸

To help them out in this task they were given two field guns (each gun was pulled by six horses) and two troops of the 15th Hussars. They were divided into four companies (ABCD) and took up positions in and around Fesmy, under the command of Major Paul Charrier. Half of "A" Company and one troop of Hussars were sent to the village of Bergues, about two miles away. At 9 a.m. on Thursay, the 27th, a German cavalry patrol appeared just outside Fesmy. They fired a few shots into the village. While some fusiliers were digging, others fired at the enemy.⁹ The Germans, dismounting from their horses, took cover and waited for reinforcements. New orders arrived for the Munsters: they were to hold onto their positions until ordered or forced to retreat.

At 12.30 a.m., the road at Etreux was reported to be clear of all transport. At 1 p.m. orders were dispatched to all rearguard units to retire at once.¹⁰ This message though sent by two routes failed to reach the Munsters, who were

now under heavy attack at Fesmy. "What they did not know was that a dispatch rider with orders to continue the retreat had been shot down."¹¹ Around noon the 10th Reserve German Army had launched their attack on Fesmy. Having forced their way into the village, they got as far as a couple of gunlimbers drawn up at the side of the road and killed and dispersed the gunners and horses. The Munsters counter-attacked and drove the Germans from the village. The Germans then



A map of the battlefield.

retaliated, this time driving cattle in front of them; but after a couple of machine-gun bursts from the fusiliers, they fell back.¹²

Private Patrick O'Donnell's company was stationed at a crossroad outside Fesmy. In a letter to his wife, he said:

"Now is my chance to tell you about our first battle on the 27th August, when our first misfortune took place. We were all together and took up position at a cross of four roads. But we did not know what was going to happen this day. There was only the Royal Munster Fusiliers at this battle fighting the rearguard action. It was there where our comrades fell. We formed a company about four miles from the remainder of our battalion. We were at this crossroads for two hours before we met anything. I was put on an out-post alone, four fields away. It was a risky job, but we did not think for a moment that we were going to fight. I was up an apple tree getting some apples, when I was fired on by the Germans. I was put about for a moment, but soon came to my senses, and looking around me I could see nobody. I fell off the apple tree — it was the quickest way to get

down. I was no sooner down when two shots came ringing over my head. I was then four fields away from my comrades. I got down on my hands and knees and crept along the ground until I got back to my comrades. There they lay ready for action, when they heard the shots. I was very unlucky for a moment. I was again sent back to my post, but when there I did not see anything. While I was eating an apple I heard the German cavalry coming along in close order with their lances, one thousand yards from me, but they did not see me. In order to check their advance, I fired three shots. They got off their horses when they heard the shots. That gave me time to get back to my comrades and tell them about the enemy. At this time there was only half of "A" company to fight or die. There was only two sections of us in this battery. Our line of fire was small, and only extended one hundred yards. The German line of fire extended over two miles. We held our position until there was only seven of us left. We were lying there for two hours, and they were coming nearer and nearer, until they were only ten yards from us. They were all around us. While we were there the rain fell in torrents. Thank God for the rain — that is what saved us from being killed. There we were and our teeth crackling from the cold and hunger at the same time. Our officer was brave and so were our men. We all gave up to be killed and sure to die. We had only one chance to take a certain road, and there were Germans left and right of us. I led my comrades as best I could. We all ran. I was first, but the fire was too heavy and I turned myself under a hedge until all the fire ceased. All my comrades had gone away, and I was alone. I fell nine times under heavy fire, but God must be with me, to say that I could escape. I was lying on the road for ten minutes before I could get up and being then alone, I was in great danger. Our brave officer was wounded and two of my comrades, leaving only three out of five hundred. It was God that saved me."¹³

While all this was taking place, there were one or two humorous incidents. A company cook was seen chasing a pig, and its yells could be heard above the sound of battle. Another cook was seen running from one side of the road to the other, under heavy fire, with the men's dinners. The men taunted him with shouts of "Come on Micky, what are you stopping in the middle of the road for?" and "Don't be emptying all that tea down your trousers."

Around 2 p.m. there was a lull in the fighting and the Munsters began evacuating their positions. The field-gunners went first and took up posi-

tions outside the village to cover the men's retreat. Meanwhile, "A" Company and the Hussars, after being driven out of Bergues, retreated southwards towards Oisy, arriving about 3 p.m. By 5.30 p.m., nearly all the battalion was assembled at Oisy, except "B" Company. Runners and cyclists were sent out to find them and it was nearly an hour before they rejoined the battalion. As the fusiliers prepared to leave the village the Germans tried to surround them. The Munsters opened fire and a bridge over which the Germans were forced to come was filled with the dead and dying. Gradually, the fusiliers left the village and after a final burst of fire, they leaped to their feet and ran for it. Unknown to the Munsters, the German 19th Reserve Infantry Division (who were some miles away) heard the fighting and anticipated the fusiliers' next move to the village of Etreux. The Germans moved into the village and waited.

As the Munsters edged their way towards Etreux, they spotted some Germans running across the road in the village. Major Charrier summoned their two field-guns. As the gunners whipped up their horses and galloped down the road, a battery of German artillery, about 15,000 yards east of the village, opened fire on them.¹⁴ With terrifying impact, a shell exploded among the leading gun-team, killing and wounding most of the men and horses. Another shell hit a farmhouse which the gun-team were passing at that time. Short range rifle fire was opened on them from the south and from some Germans, who were hidden in houses on the northern outskirts of the village. The Germans' main position seemed to be a loop-holed house on the west side of the road. The battalion was surrounded. Charrier called to the gunners to put a round into the house, but to no avail, and the last remaining gunner was shot down while carrying an 18-pounder to the gun. The rattle of musketry and the booming of guns could be heard everywhere; the air itself vibrated. On all sides, the dead lay in huddled heaps, while the wounded, with grey faces, tried to rise, or crawled in maimed agony a little further on to die. Bit by bit, the shattered remnants of the battalion fell back into an orchard, where Captain Chute brought the machine-guns along the road under a hail of lead and placed them in position. He was wounded in the side and immediately afterwards was killed by another bullet. Led by Major Charrier, the fusiliers charged the loop-holed house but could not take it. An enveloping force now circled around them with a ring of fire, shells and bullets. Major Charrier, who was twice wounded, steadily continued the direction of the action. He was standing by one of the guns, which had been put out of action, when Lieutenant Gower came and

reported to him, at about sunset. Once more, he rallied the men to the charge and, mortally wounded, fell as they crossed the road.¹⁵

Incident by incident, the later stages of the Munsters' stand developed as the hours passed by and ammunition could only be renewed by taking what was left from the dead and dying. Slowly and dreadfully, the twilight came as the German onslaught gathered force and the many sounds of battle rose around the men who, with the battalion thinned to less than half their fighting forces, still resisted the massed battalions of German soldiers.¹⁶

"So many officers had by this time fallen that the command devolved upon Lieutenant Gower. Collecting such men as were left, he formed them in an orchard, facing to all points of the compass and continued to resist. Gradually the Germans crowded in on them from three sides, bringing fresh machine-guns into position and at 9.15 p.m. they closed in also from the north and the little band of not more than two-hundred-and-fifty of all ranks, with ammunition almost spent, was overpowered. The Munsters had been fighting against overwhelming odds for nearly twelve hours and discovered at the end that they had been matched against at least six battalions of the 73rd and 77th Reserve Infantry Regiments of the 19th Reserve Division, besides three of the 15th Regiment of the 2nd Guard Reserve, all forming part of the 10th Reserve Corps. Beyond question, they arrested the enemy's pursuit in this quarter for fully six hours."¹⁷

The next day about 1500 wounded Germans were assembled in the village and this number did not include the casualties at Fesmy and Oisy.

The Munsters were allowed to bury their dead comrades. They buried at least 110 men in the orchard which had been the scene of their last stand. (In 1921, the orchard was bought, a wall was built around it, with iron gates facing the Etreux-Landrecies road. On the 4th of June 1922, Father Willie Gleeson performed a dedication ceremony).¹⁸

Private Wm. O'Connell, from Bishop Street, Limerick, was one of those who survived, and he has recorded:

"After being captured we were brought to an old mill near Etreux and there we remained for 16 days, living on a very 'substantial' basin of soup called cabbage-water. Nothing else was offered to us, although the majority of our lads suffered from rather severe wounds. In order to partake of this so-called soup, we had to use broken bottles, as no utensils were provided. On the seventeenth day we were all ordered to 'fall in' and for two days and nights we had to

take the road to get the train for Senelager. During our journey many of the men dropped down from pure exhaustion and hunger. Expecting on our arrival that decent provision would be made after what we suffered, to our great surprise and astonishment we were compelled to sleep out on a 'sandy desert' without covering of any description. This class of thing prevailed for about ten or twelve days, when information was tendered by a German under-officer that some straw would be



given to us. No tents were erected, and we had only a blue sky above us. In hail, rain, frost and snow we were condemned to submit to this terrible ordeal. During all that time the condition of the men was something awful. No clean underwear was ever given them; nor facilities for resting or anything else offered. We were compelled to exist on a drop of black coffee made from burnt horsebeans and a small ration of bread for the whole day and had often to work very hard. Many a time, I have seen unfortunate Irish lads driven at the point of the bayonet to walk three or four kilometers to carry heavy railway sleepers and owing to their weak conditions

they fainted under the heavy burden. The sanitary arrangements here were very simply abominable. Starvation, misery, and cruel treatment constituted our lot during our time in Sennelager. On the 22nd December, 1914, we were transferred to Limburg camp."¹⁹

Another fusilier tells us that when he was being transported by train to a prison camp, a search party of Germany soldiers had "knocked him about" in his train carriage, a process which he found repeated with growing

Carey, had left the house the night before to give a hand at a neighbouring farm. When he returned on the next day and discovered what had happened, he fell to his knees and thanked God for his escape, and prayed for the souls of his dead comrades.²¹

In Brussels, an escape route existed right under the noses of the German authorities. It was run from a clinic by an English nurse, Edith Cavell. The allied soldiers who hid there were allowed to go out at night for exercise (when the evenings got dark) and were

parade, at St. Gobain on the 29th August, the battalion could only muster 5 officers and 196 other ranks. Reinforcements arrived on 6th September. Meanwhile, the German advance into France was stopped at the Battle of the Marne which was just beginning.²³

Some of the Munsters who had been badly wounded at Etreux were still there in October. An officer attached to the 2nd Battalion described the scene:

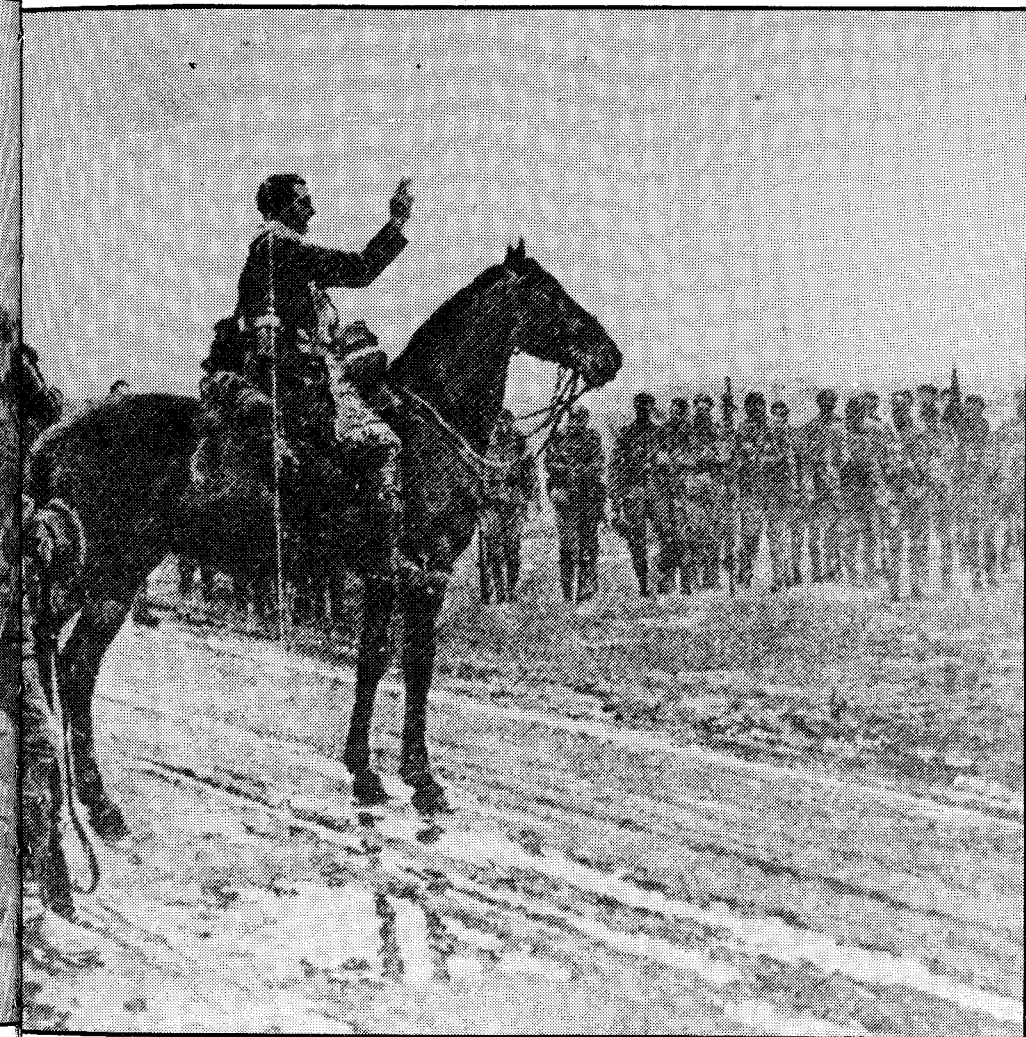
"I was wounded in two places, a bullet right through my throat, and all the biceps of my right arm blown away by a piece of shell, but no bones broken. The Germans are really good to us prisoners, and seem to be very clever, so there is really nothing to complain about. All the officers were sent off to Germany yesterday and all the men who were able to travel, so I am alone here among the Germans, except for three or four of our men who are very bad. The town where we are is just one big hospital. Every home in it is full of wounded men, and the flies and smells are awful ... I stay out in the air all day, and walk along by the canal as far as I can to be away from it all. Although we were well beaten, I believe we gave as good as we got. Some of the men who served in the Boer War said: "It was child's play to this, and that never was a battle so fierce as the one we were knocked out".²⁴

In Limerick in those opening weeks of the war, recruits were enlisting at the Strand, Castle, the New (Sarsfield) and Ordinance (later Morgan McMahan's timber yard in Mulgrave Street) barracks. A relief committee was set up by the Old Munsters' Comrades' Association and the following appeal was issued:

"Amongst the troops at the front is the 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers, the Regiment which for many years has been localized in Munster and whose Regimental District comprises the Counties of Clare, Cork, Kerry and Limerick. It's ranks are largely filled with men drawn from those counties. We, who are watching their fortunes in the field with anxious hearts, must take care that they lack nothing which we can send them to add some measure of comfort to the inevitable hardships of active service; we must relieve them of all care or anxiety as to the welfare of their dear ones left behind; and we must see that funds are forthcoming to assist the many who alas! will return home battered and maimed from the battlefield, unable to earn a livelihood."²⁵

Among the ladies on the committee was Major Charrier's wife, who did not know, at that time, that her husband was already dead.

A German merchant ship, the "Terpischore", which had been in Limerick when war was declared, was stopped



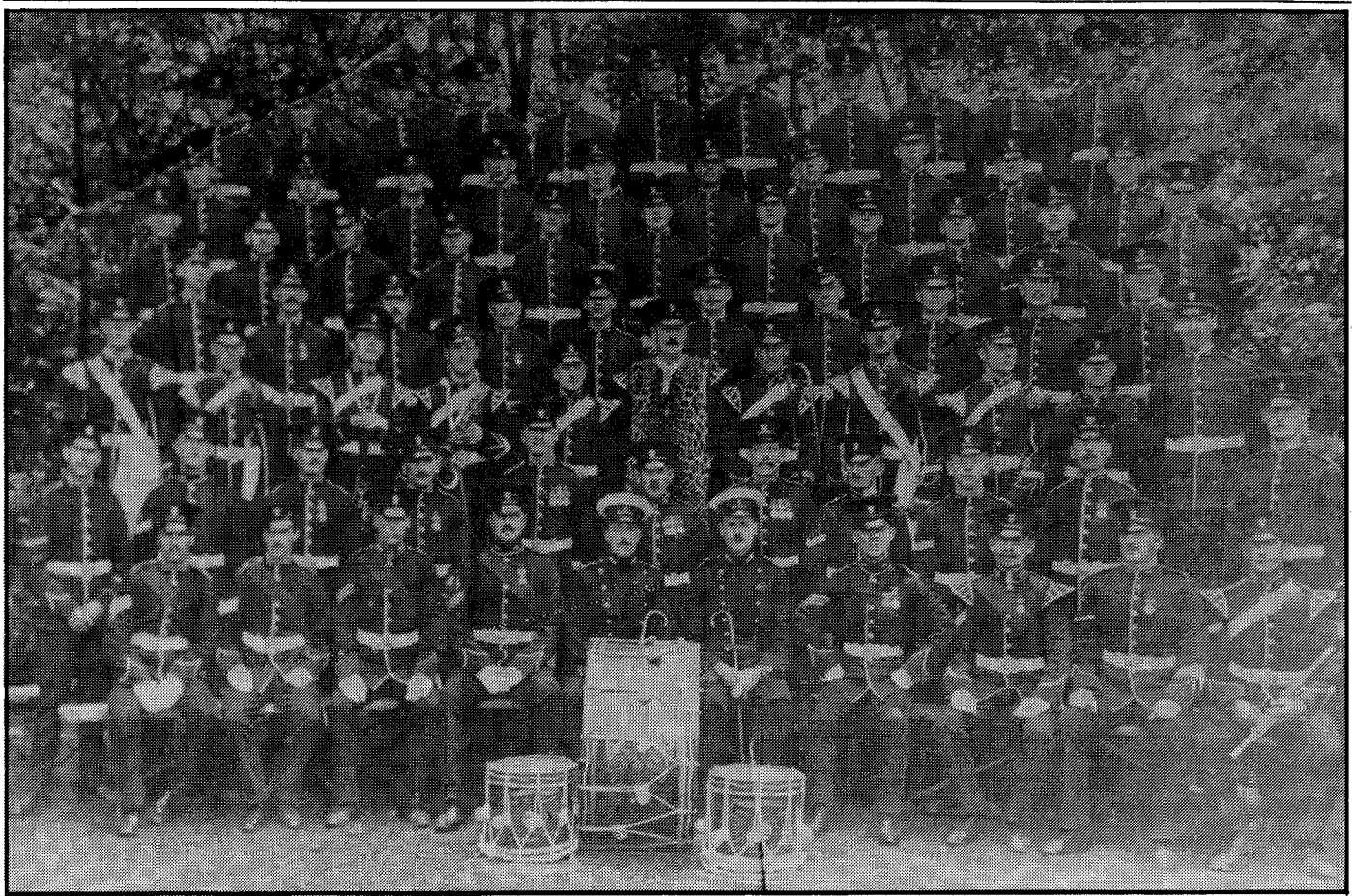
Fr. Willie Gleeson giving general absolution, Rue du Bois, 8th May 1915.

brutality at every station throughout Germany. Angry crowds of soldiers threatened him and waved revolvers in his face; the German Red Cross people had been "particularly bad", ignoring his wounds, while repeatedly giving food to the German soldiers. Though weak from his wounds, he was prodded with bayonets to march the mile from the train station to the camp.²⁰

As the Germans moved into northern France, groups of fusiliers were trapped behind the lines. In one case, a party of twelve Munsters were hidden by a miller and his family. The Germans having discovered this, raided the house and executed the miller and eleven fusiliers. The twelfth, a man named

asked to be back by 9 p.m. One evening, a group of Munsters went to a cafe, some distance from the clinic. They got drunk and a fight started. After causing some damage to the cafe, they were thrown out. Fear and panic had set in at the clinic by the time the drunken soldiers came back singing "It's A Long Way To Tipperary". They had placed themselves, Nurse Cavell and the many others who were trying to help them in great danger. As far as is known, this incident passed unnoticed by the Germans who were billeted in the area.²²

After the battle at Etreux, those fusiliers who were lucky enough to escape southwards reformed at the town of Jonqueuse. At a roll-call



"F" Company 2nd Munsters, Aldershot, circa 1913.

at Foynes, and the crew were made prisoners-of-war. The ship was then brought back to Limerick. By 8th September, six or seven Limerickmen arrived home on leave after the retreat from Mons. One of those was Jeremiah Lyons. On 23rd September, the ex-army men employed in the G.P.O. where he had worked, presented him with a cigarette case and a box of cigarettes. October brought news of Limerickmen who had been captured during the retreat. Mrs. O'Connor, in Mary Street, received a letter from her husband, who had been wounded during the fighting and was now in a German hospital: "Nearly all the Battalion was captured and were prisoners in Germany".

Lance-Corporal Joseph O'Driscoll, of Little Barrington Street, in a postcard to his mother, wrote:

"Just a line to let you know I am alive and well. We have been captured by the Germans. There are about 140 killed, and about 50 wounded. The rest are alive but prisoners. If you want to write my address will be Lance-Corporal O'Driscoll, Prisoner, German Army".²⁶

A number of other families in the city also received cards.

Towards the end of October, the Munsters were moved up the Ypres ("Wipers") salient and for four days in November they were in the thick of the fighting. Reorganised as a battalion on

9th November, they were ordered into the front line. On the 10th, they marched through Zillebeke to the woods near Klien Zillebeke, where they relieved the Grenadier Guards. On the next morning, intense artillery fire was opened up on them. Shells of all weights and sizes hissed and screamed through the air, and the constant vibrations from exploding shells knocked out the fillings from the men's teeth. The advance of the Prussian Guard could be heard long before it was seen. As the Germans approached, they could be heard singing "Die Wacht am Rhine". The air was filled with bursting shells and with tree splinters which flew in every direction — the falling trees burying the fusiliers as they lay in their shallow trenches. The men fought in groups of two and three and wave after wave of Germans were shot down. Due to the rain and snow that had fallen, the area was now a sea of mud, and the Munsters had a job in trying to stop the mud from clogging their rifles. As the Prussian Guard came closer, the fusiliers charged and the Guard "scattered in wild disorder at the point of the bayonet".²⁷

On 12th Nov., the Munsters began to dig their trenches a bit deeper, to a depth of four feet. That day also, the senior NCO., of the Battalion, Quartermaster-Sergeant Fitzmaurice, was killed, leaving Regimental Sergeant-Major John Ring, a Limerickman, in

command. The rifle fire was very heavy that day, and the men had to throw their food from one trench to another; any attempt to carry it along the line was to court certain death.

On the 13th, the Germans broke through on the Munsters' left and could actually be seen coming around behind them. At that moment, some forty men of "C" Company attacked the Germans. When they went forward with a yell, the Germans hesitated and those who stood their ground were bayoneted. Onward swept the wave of Munsters, and in a short time the lost trenches were regained. That night, under cover of darkness, they moved back to their old positions.²⁸

On the morning of the 14th, a number of German soldiers came forward as if to surrender, with their hands above their heads and their rifles held in one hand. The Munsters shouted at them to drop their rifles and come in. A few did so, but some yards from the trenches the rest of them dropped as if one man and a second wave of Germans opened fire. Some of them were shot down, but the attack was beaten back. This was the last attack that the Germans made against the battalion during the battle for Ypres.

One of the Munsters summed up the battle in a few words:

"The Germans had made an effort to take it (Ypres), and when they saw

that was impossible they almost levelled it to the ground with their monstrous shells. the inhabitants scarcely got time to leave and a great many perished under their own roofs. The Germans were driven back with great losses. The fighting was terrible. When the enemy retired they went for a rest, which was short lived, for a 'coal box' came through the roof, killing seven..."²⁹

as to what happened next. On the 22nd, the Battalion received orders that the original line was to be retaken. The day before there had been a number of contradictory orders, and it would appear that this was to prove fatal for the Munsters. On the left of the fusiliers were the Gloucesters, and on their right, the Coldstream Guards. The Munsters left the trenches that morning at 7 a.m. As they moved out into no-

wounded men were taken first. It was the same with Major Thompson. He lay out side his trench all day wounded, and still issued orders to his men till he died from exposure ... Captain O'Brien left his bit of cover and gave it to a private and was killed a few minutes afterwards. Other officers were killed and wounded during the advance, still the men went forward and took the trenches at the point of the bayonet.³¹

To make matters worse, the battalion was shelled by its own artillery. At 10 p.m. that night, they received orders to withdraw. On Christmas Day, an unofficial truce was observed on some parts of the front line, but not where the Munsters were:

"We have a priest attached to the Battalion, Father Gleeson, a Thurles man. He said mass for us on Christmas Day, actually in the firing line. Where he had his little altar, was peppered with bullets. He is a grand priest and shows no fear"³²

In January 1915, despite the unofficial truce, those soldiers who had played football with the Germans on Christmas Day, were now being ordered to play the game of war — or face courtmartial and possible execution.



Regimental Sergeant-Major John Ring.

On the 15th, the fusiliers were relieved by the Grenadier Guards. As they staggered back to the rest area, hungry, haggard, caked in mud, and wet through, their was a feeling among the men that they had avenged the deaths and capture of their comrades at Etreux. Their next two nights of rest were spent bivouacking in the rain and bedding down in a field 3 inches deep in water.

On 21st December, the Munsters were sent down the line to Festubert. Some Indian soldiers had been driven back in this sector a few days previously, and there was a gap in the line between Festubert and the village of Givenchy. The fusiliers were called in to fill this gap. There is some confusion

man's-land, past Givenchy, a shot rang out, then what appeared to be a battery of machine-guns opened up on them. Within ten minutes, over 200 men were hit. They took shelter in a country road with shallow ditches. There was no sign of support, either from left or right. Later on, they would discover that they had been 500 or more yards ahead of the advancing troops.³⁰

As their Colonel realized what was heppening, he ran forward to rally the men, who got up and charged into the hail of fire:

"Colonel Bent got wounded trying to save a wounded private who lay in front of his trench, and when the stretchers bearers went for him he refused to be moved till all the

REFERENCES

1. *History of the Royal Munsters*, Vol. 2, by S. McGance, Gale and Polden, 1922.
2. *War Underground*, by A. Barrie-Star, 1981.
3. *Limerick Chronicle*, 5/9/1914.
4. *Limerick Chronicle*, 12/9/1914.
5. *Limerick Chronicle*, 12/9/1914.
6. *Guns of August* by B. Tuchman.
7. *Limerick Chronicle*, 7/11/1914.
8. *Limerick Chronicle*, 10/12/1914.
9. *Limerick Chronicle*, 10/12/1914.
10. *History of The Royal Munsters*, Vol. 2, by S. McGance, Gale and Polden, 1922.
11. *Limerick Chronicle*, 10/12/1914.
12. *The 2nd Munsters in France* by H.S. Jarvis, Gale and Polden, 1922.
13. *Limerick Chronicle*, 27/10/1914.
14. *History of the Royal Munsters* by S. McGance, Gale and Polden, 1922.
15. *The Story of the Munsters at Etreux, Festubert, Rue Du Bois and Hullock* by Mrs. Victor Rickard, Hodder-Stoughton, 1918.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *History of the Royal Munsters*, Vol. 2 by S. McGance, Gale and Polden, 1922.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Limerick Chronicle*, 13/2/1919.
20. *The Irish Sword*, Vol. XV, No. 59, 1982.
21. *Old Contemptible* by H. Beaumont, Hutchinson and Co., 1967.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *History of the Royal Munsters* Vol. 2 by S. McGance, Gale and Polden, 1922.
24. *Limerick Chronicle*, 20/10/1914.
25. *Limerick Chronicle*, 1/9/1914.
26. *Limerick Chronicle*, 27/10/1914.
27. *Limerick Chronicle*, 12/12/1914.
28. *The 2nd Munsters in France* by H.S. Jarvis, Gale and Polden, 1922.
29. *Limerick Chronicle*, 12/12/1914.
30. *The 2nd Munsters in France* by H.S. Jarvis, Gale and Polden, 1922.
31. *Limerick Chronicle*, 16/1/1915.
32. *Ibid.*