



CHAPTER IV.

En Route for the Somme—Albert, Tara Hill and Chalk Pits—"Over the Top" at Regina—New German Trench—Connecting Desire and Regina—Out of the Mouth of Hell



LEAVING its pleasant summer quarters at Tournehem on the 3rd day of October, the Battalion set out for the Somme. Opinions differ as to the comparative conditions of the Somme and of Passchendaele which we were destined to visit just a year later, but it is generally agreed that, though the enemy artillery work in the latter area was more intense and the protection afforded practically non-existent, and though the Passchendaele landscape was dreary in the extreme and the mud intolerable, yet the Somme left a more indelible impression of sordid misery on the minds of those who saw service on both fronts. For a month and a half the battalion struggled in a sea of mud against an implacable enemy and the majority of those who survived to the end regard the Somme tour as the most exhausting and nerve-racking which the battalion undertook throughout its period of service.

Prior to departure every man exchanged his Ross rifle for a Lee-Enfield and was issued with one of the new small box respirators which had come to take the place of the old P-H helmets, though the latter were carried for use in emergencies for another eighteen months or so. The new respirators were a great improvement, but it may be said in passing that the battalion as a whole was never called on to undertake any operation on a large scale under conditions which made the wearing of respirators necessary; we never had to face cloud gas and though in later days we were constantly harassed by gas shells, these were purely local in their effects and rarely necessitated the wearing of the respirator for any length of time.

An afternoon's march on October 3rd brought the battalion to Arduicq at 5.30 p.m., where train was taken for Doullens, which was reached twelve hours later; Doullens is a fair-sized town with tempting out-door cafés, but we were not destined to gain any enjoyment therefrom, marching direct from the station through the town to Gézaincourt, where we were billeted for the night. Gézaincourt proved to be larger than the majority of villages, boasting an extensive