

## The Seaforth Highlanders, August 1914 to April 1916

**T**HE 2nd Seaforths were stationed at Shorncliffe when orders were issued for mobilisation on August 4th, 1914. Brigaded as a unit of the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Division, their departure from England was delayed by a few days, with the result that they did not embark for France until August 22nd, the very eve of the Battle of Mons. They were at once rushed up to Le Cateau, coming under fire on the 25th, and, on the following day, when the Battle of Le Cateau was fought, they held the left wing of the British line. Although not seriously engaged, the men were exhausted by the action and by the heat of the weather. Nevertheless they had perforce to set out upon a long retreat under most trying conditions. Next day they retired 32 miles. Country carts were pressed into service, but many men had to march the whole way. In eleven days they covered a distance of 155 miles. It was not until September 4th that the battalion, now behind the Marne, was able to rest for a day and refit.

On the morning of September 6th they were once more advancing. In the course of the next few days they came into contact with the retreating German Army at La Ferté on the Marne, crossed that river, and pressed on rapidly to the Aisne. This they crossed on the 14th at Venizel, and at once pushed up the northern slopes to Bucy, where, under very heavy fire from the enemy's infantry and artillery on the plateau above, they hastily threw up cover and hung on for three weeks, steadily constructing a trench system.

It was on October 13th that the Seaforths next came into conflict with the enemy. They had left the Aisne a week earlier and had been moved northwards up towards the Belgian border. This sharp action was fought near Flêtre west of Bailleul. It consisted of an attack upon the German position delivered by the 10th and 12th Brigades of the 4th Division, the Seaforths

holding the right flank of the 10th Brigade. 'Point 62,' a hill north of Meteren village, was marked out as their objective. To reach it the Seaforths had to cross nearly two miles of flat and open country under enemy fire, in the haze of an autumn afternoon which prevented much artillery support being given. Nevertheless they pushed on and carried the enemy's position at the point of the bayonet. The Germans did not wait to receive their charge but fled in the gathering darkness.

Then followed a general British advance eastward through Armentières to the river Lys. Between October 18th and 26th the Seaforths came in for a good deal of difficult fighting in the outskirts of Frélinghien on that river. After part of the battalion had worked their way into some isolated houses on the edge of the town, an assault was delivered upon the enemy's trenches extending south-east from Frélinghien. Advancing over slippery and difficult ground under a cross-fire from enemy snipers in the town, they captured the trenches and did not let a single German escape. They then advanced further into the town, occupying several buildings, but were shelled out of them a few days later and compelled to fall back on the line of the old German trenches.

At the beginning of November 'D' Company of the 2nd Seaforths was moved across the Lys and attached to the 11th Brigade, then holding the British line in Ploegsteert Wood. The first Battle of Ypres was at its height. On November 7th a heavy German attack broke through our line on the eastern side of Ploegsteert Wood. 'D' Company advanced eastwards through the wood to bring help. On reaching its eastern edge a party of Germans was sighted 100 yards away. Two platoons, therefore, made their way through dense undergrowth to enfilade the Germans. Suddenly they were exposed to a terrific fire from another party of the enemy, and there was great slaughter. The remaining platoon, which had been left to line the edge of the wood, could neither see nor bring help. Their own position was insecure, for their right flank was now in the air, and on the left Le Gheer cross-roads had been rushed by the enemy. Their officer extended his line as much as he could, collected round him a number of Inniskilling Fusiliers, and held on till, next morning, the remainder of the Inniskillings joined up on his left. It was not until the following evening that the platoon could be relieved. Three days later the platoon, all that was left of 'D' Company, joined the rest of the battalion at Frélinghien.

Meanwhile, on October 30th, the 1st Battalion of the Seaforths had come into line on the Estaires-La Bassée road, some eleven miles south-west of the point held by the 2nd Battalion. Stationed at Agra when war broke out, the 1st Seaforths had landed at Marseilles with the Indian Expeditionary Force on the day before the action of Meteren. They were brigaded with various Indian regiments in the Dehra Dun Brigade of the 7th (Meerut) Indian Division. The brigade took over trenches which were in fact no more than a ditch running along the roadside. Here for a fortnight on end they lay exposed, day in, day out, to heavy shelling from enemy field guns and mortars and to enfilading rifle fire at close range from houses in Neuve Chapelle on their right. The enemy were entrenching and sapping up to 400 yards of their line, and made occasional infantry attacks without success. What with accurate sniping and shell-fire, the 1st Seaforths lost very heavily during this their first tour in the trenches.

Some six weeks later the 1st Seaforths took part in their first serious battle in France. They had been holding trenches in the neighbourhood of Givenchy—trenches that were constantly falling in, and were flooded with ice-cold water which had to be baled and pumped and drained day and night. It had been intended that a surprise attack should be delivered by the Dehra Dun Brigade upon a portion of the German line in the early morning of December 19th. Unfortunately the attack was anticipated by heavy bombing from enemy trench mortars, and had to be abandoned. Moreover the 2nd Gurkhas, who were to have taken part in the attack, were forced to retire to a new line slightly in rear of their original position. Their retirement had the effect of exposing the Seaforths' left flank.

On their right the Seaforths were still in touch with the Sirhind Brigade, which was holding the village of Givenchy. But at about nine o'clock in the morning of the 20th a succession of mine explosions on the Seaforths' right cut off connection with the Sirhind Brigade; and at the same time the Germans heavily attacked the front held by that Brigade, driving them back upon Givenchy. 'B' Company, which was holding the right of the Seaforths' line, was breakfasting when the German counter-attack began. The enemy rushed down the fire trench from their exposed right, hiding their advance under smoke-balls, and bombing as they came. Yet, taken by surprise as they were, the Seaforths made two determined stands before they lost

the trench. Their company commander threw back his men into a communication trench, which he held, facing right, but was himself shortly afterwards shot dead.

Meanwhile the Gurkhas had given way still further on the left, creating an ugly gap at the other end of the Seafort's line. The Germans, attacking at this end with 'hair-brush' bombs, drove the Seafort's for a hundred yards up their trench. Here they were held up; a fresh supply of bombs reached the Seafort's, and a bombing party not only cleared the lost trench, but succeeded in retaking ten traverses in the Gurkha trench beyond.

Help was now on its way. The 58th Rifles came up on the Seafort's left, and by six in the evening had filled the gap caused by the retirement of the Gurkhas. They also supported the Seafort's in their fire and support trenches. And during the afternoon half of a battalion of the Black Watch had succeeded in establishing connection with the Seafort's right.

That night the 1st British Division arrived upon the scene. Its 2nd Brigade had orders to attack through the Dehra Dun Brigade on the 21st and recover the lost trenches. Their assault was delayed till seven p.m., and was then only partially successful.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 22nd the enemy again suddenly attacked and bombed the Loyal North Lancashires of the 2nd Brigade out of several of the trenches which they had taken during the previous evening. The Seafort's left was again unprotected, but one of their officers rallied some of the North Lancashires and bombed the Germans back, losing his own life in the process. Reinforcements were now brought up, and by three o'clock in the afternoon of this, the fourth day of the Battle of Givenchy, the Seafort's, who had lost heavily, were at length relieved.

On the very day on which the 1st Seafort's held up the German attack at Givenchy, the 1/4th, a Territorial Battalion which had come out to France six weeks earlier, came into the trenches for the first time to gain experience in trench fighting. They were attached to the Dehra Dun Brigade and so joined the 1st Battalion of their own regiment.

In the following March both battalions had their share in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. The attack on the German trenches was timed for the morning of March 10th, 1915, and was directed to be undertaken by a British Division and by the Meerut Division of the Indian Corps. The Garhwal Brigade

was detailed for the assault, the 1st Seaforths being attached to them for that purpose. The assaulting troops rushed the enemy trenches and got into the village of Neuve Chapelle. But there was one portion of trench which remained untouched. Two companies of the 1st Seaforths were ordered to assault it from the left, while units of the Garhwal Brigade made a frontal attack. It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and the advance on the Bois Du Biez, which formed the second phase of operations, was being retarded. So the two remaining companies of the 1st Battalion were ordered to co-operate in the attack. 'B' Company at once set to work bombing the Germans along the trench, with the result that 120 Germans surrendered. By nightfall the 1st Seaforths and two battalions of the Garhwal Brigade, all under the command of a Lieutenant-Colonel of the Seaforths, were holding a section of the old German line, and the village of Neuve Chapelle had been cleared of the enemy.

The Bois Du Biez is a large wood lying between Neuve Chapelle and the Aubers Ridge. To reach it from the village it is necessary to cross the little river Layes. Shortly after four o'clock orders were issued to the Dehra Dun Brigade to advance to Neuve Chapelle and attack the wood. At half-past five in the afternoon the assault was delivered by two Indian regiments with the 1/4th Seaforths in close support. The river Layes was crossed without difficulty, and the edge of the wood was reached. But the British Divisions which were to have co-operated upon the left had been held up, and the Dehra Dun Brigade were consequently obliged to withdraw across the river and then to dig themselves in.

Orders were received to renew the attack at half-past seven on the following morning (March 11th). Progress was difficult, for again no infantry support was forthcoming on the left, and our troops were met by heavy frontal fire. The commanding officer of the 1/4th Seaforths was wounded early in the day. Orders were issued to stand fast until the 8th Division came up on the left, and later, for a fresh attack at a quarter past two p.m., provided the 8th Division was in readiness. Although the expected reinforcements had failed to appear, the leading company of the 1/4th Seaforths left their support trenches at the appointed time and doubled forward. They lost heavily, and the survivors had to take cover in the trenches already filled with Gurkhas in their front. At six o'clock the battalion was

ordered to withdraw and re-form in rear. They were relieved that night.

All that day the 1st Seaforths and the Garhwal Brigade had continued to hold their line at Neuve Chapelle and assisted in repelling with concentrated machine-gun fire massed German attacks made against them on the morning of the 12th. Throughout that day they were subjected to a continuous heavy bombardment, their losses during the three days being somewhat heavier than those of the 1/4th.

It is now time to turn to the 2nd Battalion. After holding trenches on the river Douve, north of Ploegsteert, throughout the winter, they were taking a well-earned rest at Bailleul when the news came of the German gas-attack on the evening of April 22nd, 1915, and of the retirement of the Franco-British line before Ypres. Leaving their packs and greatcoats and waterproof sheets behind them, the 2nd Seaforths set out at once to march to Wieltje on the Ypres-St. Julien road. Covering the 17 miles of road that lay between them and their destination, they reached Wieltje on the evening of the 24th and were ordered to attack before daybreak on the following morning. Little was known of the situation, nor was there time to give much instruction to company commanders. The objectives given were St. Julien and the wood to the west of it. The attack was timed for four a.m., but was postponed at the last moment till five o'clock as some battalions were not ready. However, the Seaforths were already committed and were drawing upon themselves the enemy's fire, so had to advance at once. They met with heavy fire from rifles, machine-guns and artillery, suffered very severe losses, and found themselves unsupported on either flank. By seven o'clock they had reached Vanheule Farm, and were still nearly 1,000 yards short of St. Julien. No further advance could be made, so they had to dig in. Their commanding officer was wounded. Their casualty list was 50 per cent. higher than on the day when the Highland Brigade was mown down at Magersfontein. It was more than double the losses which they had suffered at Paardeberg, although that battle produced the heaviest casualty list in the South African War.

That night the 11th Brigade came up and extended the line to the right, the Seaforths continuing to hold their trenches in front of Wieltje in spite of violent shelling which inflicted numerous casualties. Their ordeal was not yet over, for at

half-past five on the evening of May 2nd a terrific bombardment broke out on the British trenches, and simultaneously a cloud of asphyxiating gas was released. For several days our men had been living in an atmosphere of gas fumes, and officers and men had been dropping off sick. No efficient type of respirator had yet been invented. So, when this new gas-attack descended in full force upon the 10th Brigade, one battalion was forced to leave its trenches. But the Seaforths stood firm, though nearly every man of the diminished battalion was badly affected. Five officers and 321 men were sick with gas; others died of it. Still the Germans were unable to press their advantage. They formed up for the attack, but the Seaforths were even now prepared to meet them, and the attack came to nothing. The next day the 1st Seaforths received orders to leave their trenches and retire upon the old line. So virtually ended their share in the second battle of Ypres.

A week later the Indian Corps, in co-operation with the 1st and 4th British Corps, again took the offensive at Festubert. The main object of the operation was to drive the enemy from the Aubers Ridge. With this in view the Indian Corps was to attack between the two British Corps, the assault being delivered by the Dehra Dun Brigade of the Meerut Division. This Brigade was directed to assault the enemy's first line trenches, to push forward against the La Bassée-Estaires Road, and finally to capture the Ferme Du Biez at the southern extremity of the well-known Bois Du Biez, which formed their first objective. The attack was made at twenty minutes to six on the morning of May 9th by the 1/4th Seaforths and two other battalions of the Dehra Dun Brigade; the 1st Seaforths and the remainder of the Brigade were in support.

Unfortunately the Germans had suffered little from the forty minutes bombardment which preceded the assault. Their line was well manned, and the 1/4th Seaforths were met by machine-gun and rifle fire the moment they attempted to advance. Numbers of their men were put out of action in the first minute. The remainder pushed forward in face of a hurricane of bullets, and as many as could do so took cover in the ditch running in front of the enemy's parapet. Here they were forced to remain. Many others were lying out in the open or in shell-holes, unable either to advance or retire. The 1st Seaforths made three gallant attempts to advance in support. Each attempt was checked after a few yards of ground had been gained. The task imposed upon

them was absolutely impossible. So at nine o'clock orders were issued that all men who could should crawl back. Few could do so, for the slightest movement drew a terrific fire from the enemy. More managed to regain their trenches when the Bareilly Brigade attacked in the afternoon, but the majority had to lie out under fire until darkness set in.

In this abortive attack the 1/4th suffered severely, the proportion of killed to wounded being one to two. The losses of the 1st Battalion were unprecedentedly heavy, especially in officers, and were half as high again as those of the 2nd Seaforths on April 25th.

During the summer months of 1915 many new divisions were added to our Expeditionary Force. On May 1st a Highland Territorial Division, the 51st, which contained in its 152nd Brigade both the other Territorial Battalions of the Seaforths, 1/5th and 1/6th, arrived in France in time to support the later operations of the Battle of Festubert. The 7th Battalion, which had been allotted to the 26th Brigade of the 9th (Scottish) Division, also came out in May, and on the last day of June found themselves in line with the Territorials of the 1/4th Battalion. The 9th Seaforths came out as a Pioneer Battalion in the same division. Finally the 8th Seaforths landed in France on July 9th with the 44th Brigade of the 15th (Scottish) Division. Both the Regular Battalions, all three first-line Territorials, and all three Service Battalions were now in France. The three battalions of the New Army were all in on the opening day of the Battle of Loos.

That battle opened on September 25th, after a four days preliminary bombardment of the German trenches. It began with an attack delivered by two army corps on a seven mile front extending from the La Bassée Canal to the village of Grenay south-west of Loos. Six divisions were involved in this main attack, among them the two Scottish Divisions of the New Army (9th and 15th). The 15th Division of which the 8th Seaforths formed a part, assaulted the German trenches in front of the town of Loos. Further north the 9th Division attacked the formidable Hohenzollern Redoubt. One company of the 9th Seaforths was assigned as pioneers to each of its three brigades. Of these the 26th Brigade was on the right, with the 7th Seaforths in the front line. Simultaneously with the opening of the main battle the Indian Corps commenced a subsidiary operation near Neuve Chapelle. Here the attack was delivered



by two brigades of the Meerut Division, but the Dehra Dun Brigade, to which the 1st and 1/4th Seaforths belonged, was that day held in Divisional Reserve. Proceeding from south to north of the battle-field, we shall tell first of the attack of the 8th Battalion at Loos; then of the fighting of the 7th Battalion round Hohenzollern; and finally of the part played by the 1st and 1/4th Battalions near Neuve Chapelle.

The morning of September 25th broke dull and grey. The wind was light and variable, veering between south-west and south, and seemed little favourable to the use of gas, which it had been decided to employ for the first time against the enemy. Until the last moment there was some doubt whether the original programme would be followed out. Nevertheless at ten minutes to six a.m. the gas cylinders were turned on. After some ten minutes a smoke screen was sent up from the British trenches. Then after an interval, the cylinders were turned on again full blast. Two minutes before the time fixed for the assault, the gas was stopped; the air was thickened up by triple smoke candles; and our men climbed out of the trenches and lined up behind the smoke barrier in readiness for the attack, which had been timed for twenty minutes past six.

The 15th Division attacked on a two-brigade front; the 44th Brigade, with the 8th Seaforths in the front line, being on the right. Company followed company of the Seaforths across the open, and within a few minutes from the time that the two leading platoons had started on their way, the whole battalion was launched to the attack. Although exposed to losses from artillery fire, the men bore steadily down upon the enemy's first line trenches, and had captured them within a quarter of an hour of leaving their own line. The German second line was forced in almost as short a space of time. Its garrison fled back into the town of Loos, the approach to which was guarded by enemy machine-guns. These were quickly put out of action, but the Germans within the town put up a stubborn resistance. Every house became a fort; every cellar a refuge for the enemy. Each in turn had to be cleared by our bombers; their occupants being captured or killed.

The Seaforths fought their way through the town, capturing a German battery of field-guns in the course of their advance. Until the bombers had cleared the houses from which machine-guns were firing on them, their losses were severe. Few of their officers were left. There was much desperate hand-to-hand

fighting. In the general *mêlée*, units broke up into small detachments, and the different battalions of the 44th Brigade became inextricably mixed. Still the fighting drifted steadily through the town and out beyond it towards Hill 60. By ten o'clock the 44th Brigade had made an advance of 2000 yards and were ascending the western slopes of the hill. Here they were met by troops of the 46th Brigade, who had been attacking from the left. And even men from the 47th Division, who had been fighting on the right, joined in the throng. They gained the crest of the hill, and then informally sorted themselves out into their units.

In an amazingly short space of time five successive objectives had been carried without a check, and for a moment there was an end of German resistance. But now came uncertainty and hesitation. Cité St. Auguste was their next objective. But which was Cité St Auguste? Hitherto the pylons of Loos had formed an unmatched guide. Now these were passed, and the landscape changed. Losing sense of direction, the brigade, instead of advancing due eastward, deflected its course to the south-east, towards the Cité St Laurent.

The Cité St. Laurent was a strong salient which formed part of the northerly defence of Lens. To the north of it, and on the left of the brigade as it advanced, was an entrenched enemy position, known as the Dynamitière, held by machine-guns. Fire from the Dynamitière made it impossible to advance down the bare slopes of Hill 70 without artillery support or without the steady flow of reinforcements which the brigade had been led to expect. An hour passed during which the enemy machine-guns developed a tremendous volume of fire. At length it became absolutely necessary to retire and take cover behind the crest of Hill 70. Our men fell back the best way they could, and were immediately followed up by a strong counter-attack which threatened to sweep them off the hill.

Preparations were hurriedly made to receive the enemy, and when they appeared over the crest of the hill, they were instantly checked. The British troops hung on tenaciously to their position a little way down the western slope. But their position was insecure. The Seaforths now had both flanks in the air, and their left was seriously menaced by an outwork which had again passed into the possession of the Germans during the struggle. A conference was therefore held at Brigade Headquarters at which it was decided to relieve the 44th Brigade by the 45th.

Accordingly the troops who had taken part in the attack were withdrawn in the course of the afternoon; the 8th Seaforths—now a handful of thirty-five men led by the adjutant and a single subaltern—passed out of the conflict.

At the same moment that the 8th Seaforths had started on their way to capture the village of Loos and Hill 70, the 7th Battalion left their trenches over against the Hohenzollern Redoubt. As they advanced at a steady walk behind clouds of smoke, machine-gun fire was opened on them and a few men went down under it. Then, quickening their pace, they bore down upon the Redoubt. At its first trench they lost a good many of their officers. Nevertheless they continued to advance, and bombed their way up the communication trenches leading from the Redoubt to the main German trench; pressed forward and went right on to the Trois Cabarets between Fosse 8 and the village of Haisnes. Here they stayed and waited until the two front companies had been reinforced by the remainder of the battalion. It was now half-past seven, and the 8th Gordons, who had been in support, went through them and carried on the attack. The 7th Seaforths had orders to stay where they were and convert their trench into a fire trench, at the same time making ready to deal with a counter-attack. They had lost touch with the Camerons on their left in the course of their advance, and their position on that flank was insecure until a battalion of the Black Watch came into line with them. They had lost their colonel and their adjutant at eight o'clock that morning. All four company commanders had been killed or wounded early in the action, and most of their officers had become casualties. All day they were exposed to a murderous shrapnel fire, but the behaviour of the men was beyond all praise.

About midnight they were relieved by a regiment of the 73rd Brigade. The Seaforths had filed out and re-formed preparatory to marching back, when the Germans attacked. The newly arrived troops showed signs of falling back; but two officers of the Seaforths led back their men, held the position once more, and drove out the enemy. They then withdrew to support trenches and there reorganised. Throughout the day of the 26th they continued to hold German trenches east of Fosse 8, under a very heavy bombardment, and assisted the 73rd Brigade to beat off several German counter-attacks.

In the course of the morning of September 27th the enemy

succeeded in driving the hard-pressed 73rd Brigade out from Fosse 8. By one o'clock the whole Fosse had passed out of our hands, and the Germans were pressing south against the Hohenzollern Redoubt. The 7th Seaforths had only six officers left when, at three p.m., they received orders to counter-attack with a view to restoring the position. They advanced across 200 yards of ground swept with bullets and shrapnel. The enemy opened on them with high explosive shell, inflicting a considerable number of casualties. German bombers were active on the right, but the Seaforths drove them back. Although they did not succeed in regaining the Fosse, their timely help prevented any further German advance and, for the time, saved the Hohenzollern Redoubt. The men knew that they had done well, and one of their pipers got up on the parapet of the Redoubt and played the 'charge.' About eight o'clock that evening they were withdrawn after having suffered losses greater even than those endured by the 1st Battalion at Festubert.

Up at Neuve Chapelle on this same morning of September 25th the 1st and 1/4th Seaforths were less seriously engaged, since they were not called upon to do more than support the attack of the Bareilly and Garhwal Brigades. The attack met with success on the left but failed upon the right, where the Garhwal Brigade was hung up on wire before the German front trench. Shortly before eleven the two Seaforth and two Gurkha Battalions received orders to concentrate on our own front line, with a view to attacking through the first line troops, and advance on the hamlet of Pietre. The communication trenches were crowded with troops, and movement along them was almost impossible; so it was not until nearly three that the Seaforths succeeded in pressing their way to the British front line. By this time the Bareilly Brigade had been forced to abandon the trenches captured by them in the early morning, and the Germans had recovered their front line. Further attack was useless. Nothing remained but to hold the British line against possible counter-attack. Night set in in a downpour of rain, which quickly rendered all further movement impossible.

Such was the share of the Seaforth Highlanders in the great Battle of Loos, a battle in which two battalions of the New Army, neither of them many months out in France, first met Continental troops, and worthily upheld the honour of the regiment.

Instead of recording in detail the part played by the various battalions of the Seaforths in France during the long period of

trench-warfare which intervened between Loos and the Battle of the Somme, we shall follow the fortunes of a battalion of this famous regiment which was sent out from France at the close of 1915 to Mesopotamia, there to take part in the attempted relief of Kut. It was employed with a force operating on the left bank of the Tigris, and its actions are crowded into two distinct periods of seventeen days each. The first extended from January 7th to the 24th, 1916, and was characterised by attacks on successive Turkish positions at Sheikh Saad, the Wadi, and Umm-Al-Hannah. The second period, April 5th-22nd, opened with the capture of Umm-Al-Hannah and, for the rest, consisted of repeated attempts to drive the Turks from Sannaiyat.

It was on New Year's Day, 1916, that the Seaforths disembarked at a point some distance up the Tigris. There they marched forward towards Kut, across country intersected by irrigation-ditches, and at noon, on January 7th, were approaching the Turkish position at Sheikh Saad, forty miles distant from their final goal. Their brigade had been ordered to turn the enemy's left flank, but before they had reached the assigned position, a very heavy cross-fire was opened on them from their front, right-front and right flank. At the same time artillery fire broke out on their right rear. They had, in fact, themselves been caught in a very dangerous salient.

The attack had consequently to be launched under most difficult circumstances against a position made invisible by mirage and towards an afternoon sun which shone full in the eyes of our men. None the less the Seaforths advanced with great rapidity, losing heavily as they went. One company even managed to get within 40 yards of the Turkish trenches, but the rest of the battalion was brought to a standstill 350 yards away. They had only five officers left. They had lost more than 33 per cent. of their fighting strength. Their position, at the close of the attack, was extremely dangerous, for, while two companies were in line with the brigade on their left, a gap of 700 or 800 yards separated them from the other two companies which were facing an opposite direction. By now the Turks were moving further and further round the flank. It was getting dark, however. In the night they were able to consolidate their position, join the gap in the centre, and dig themselves well in. Next evening they retired to a straightened line in the rear.

Two days later the Turks withdrew from Sheikh Saad to their next position, named the Wadi, some ten miles in the rear.

This in its turn was attacked by our troops on January 13th. The Seaforths were in reserve that day, but, as the attack proceeded, two of their companies were sent up into the firing line in support. They advanced with great dash and vigour under a very heavy fire. Although the main attack was held up, the Turks once more retired in the night and fell back upon Umm-Al-Hannah.

At eight o'clock on the morning of the 21st, after a few minutes of intense bombardment, the British once more attacked the Turks in their new position. Only 450 yards separated the front-lines of the opposing forces; but the ground between was as flat as a billiard table, covered with three inches of mud and water, and swept by machine-gun fire. The attack on the left was temporarily successful, but the ground gained had to be given up for want of support. The Seaforths failed to get forward on the right. Still less success attended the renewal of the attack at one o'clock. The Seaforths again endeavoured to advance, but there was no general forward movement. Any advance from the front line proved, in fact, quite impossible, and the attack petered out.

It is difficult to exaggerate the misery of that time, or the severity of the conditions under which the Seaforths had to engage in most difficult fighting. It rained incessantly till the level ground became a swamp and the trenches became ditches. Drenched and physically exhausted, with no rum or even tea to warm them, they stood and sat all night in the water. At best they lay down in their soaked clothes, with only their great-coats to cover them, and waited for the bitter cold of dawn, then woke to look out on a battlefield strewn with rifles and ammunition, and wounded men lying untended. For days and nights on end, subsisting only on their emergency rations, they fought and dug and marched till they were so exhausted that they slept as they marched. And all the time they were conscious that Kut lay before them and the undefeated Turks between.

An interval of rest and reorganisation led up to the capture of Umm-Al-Hannah by the troops of another Division upon April 5th, and made it impossible to drive forward against the Turkish lines of Sannaiyat, the last formidable barrier on the road to Kut. During this second period of fighting the Seaforths, by now much reduced in number, formed part of a composite Highland Battalion, having been amalgamated with the Black Watch, who had suffered even more severely than themselves.

Out of the three unsuccessful attempts that were made to carry the Sannaiyat position (April 6th, 9th and 22nd), the Highland Battalion took part in the first and last.

It had been decided to follow up the capture of Umm-Al-Hannah by a rapid blow against the enemy, and to deliver a surprise attack on their new position at dawn of the very next day. There was consequently no time to locate the Turkish lines with any exactness. Our men made slow progress in their advance over unknown country, and it was nearly broad daylight before they had come within striking distance of the enemy. The Highland Battalion had just opened out, but the brigade on their right was still in close formation when the storm burst on them from the enemy's trenches. Under this outburst of rifle and machine-gun fire the projected attack was stopped dead, while our own shells ploughed their way into the left rear of the column. It was Magersfontein over again. Further advance was out of the question; and, after digging and holding three lines of trenches during the day, and suffering considerable losses, the battalion was withdrawn at dark.

Before the third and final assault was made on Sannaiyat, the division steadily pushed forward its saps until only 500 yards separated them from the enemy's front line. But the ground was not favourable for an attack. Ankle-deep in water and hemmed in on the left by the river Tigris, on the right by the Suwaikeih Marsh from which water was continually blown by the wind into our trenches, the ground covered by the attack was limited to a narrow frontage, 300 yards broad. It had been intended to employ two brigades, but the brigade on the right found themselves unable to attack owing to the water on their front. The whole burden of the attack therefore fell upon the Highland Battalion, which had now come to be composed largely of drafts led by very young officers, and upon an Indian regiment reduced in strength to 200 rifles.

At six o'clock on April 22nd our guns commenced a deliberate bombardment. Seven was the hour named for the assault. The Highlanders, with the Indians on their right, advanced in splendid order, and quickly reached the enemy's front line, only to find it a mere water-logged ditch. The second line was carried with the same result. Pushing on to the third line and now supported by the brigade on the right which had succeeded in forcing the water in front of it, they beat off one counter-attack, and met another one made in much greater force and led with the greatest

bravery and determination. The leading Highland platoons were enveloped ; their rifles were clogged with mud ; still for a time they successfully resisted the attack. It was only after the troops on the right had fallen back ; after the Indians, their flank being open, had given ground ; after a second Indian regiment, thrown in on the left, had been decimated by machine-gun fire, and when the whole line was crumbling, that the Highland Battalion fell back, fighting stubbornly. Most of their killed and all their missing fell between the second and third Turkish lines. Small parties of men were pinned to the ground near the enemy's front line, but were got in later. The battalion's losses had been exceptionally heavy, and of the Seaforths no more than four officers remained alive and unhurt at the end of the day.

So ended the last gallant effort to relieve Kut, whose beleaguered garrison, after holding on for another week, their position being now hopeless, were at length forced to surrender.

H. H. E. CRASTER