

## **How Major George James Christie, Of The 9th Argyll And Sutherland Highlanders (T.F.), Won The D.S.O. At The Second Battle Of Ypres.**

During the night of May 9th-10th 1915, a draft of thirty men belonging to the 9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (T.F.), all burning to take their share in the great battle which had been in progress for nearly three weeks, joined their battalion, which was occupying dugouts in the Zouave Wood near Hooge. At dawn the new arrivals were allocated; before midday they were fighting for their lives; and when evening came only two of them were fit for service. For that day was a terrible ordeal for those gallant Territorial.

Early in the morning the German artillery began a heavy bombardment of the British trenches on either side of the Ypres-Menin Road, which in places were soon almost demolished, and the bombardment was followed up by an attack under cover of gas. Between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. the 9th Argyll's were ordered to reinforce the 2nd Cameron's with two companies, and "A" Company and "D" Company were accordingly dispatched, under the command of Major Christie. Through a terrific shellfire, Major Christie led his men to a position astride the Menin Road, two hundred yards west of Hooge, where the Cameron headquarters were. Here they dug themselves in, while the major went forward for further orders.

At 9.30 he was ordered to lead one company forward to reinforce a trench south of the Menin Road, and between it and the Sanctuary Wood, which was reported to be breaking. "A" Company, being stationed on the south side of the road, was chosen, and advanced in short rushes, with cries of "Good old 9th Argyll's!" The advance lay over a bare slope right to the ridge opposite Chateau Hooge, without a ditch, or hedge even, to afford cover from view, and was accomplished under a most murderous fire. But though comrades were falling to right and left of him, not one of those brave Scotsmen wavered, but only became the keener to come to close grips with the Huns.

They were only just in time, for the gas, on top of the terrible shelling, had been more than flesh and blood could endure. The trench, which they had come to save, had broken, and the men were falling back. At sight of the Argyll's, however, they raised a cheer, and passing through them, the Territorial dashed into the trench, bayoneted or chased out those Germans who had already gained a footing there, and, setting up their machine guns, began to mow down the advancing enemy with them and rifle fire. The Huns, astonished at this unexpected resistance, fell back in confusion, and the Argyll's and Cameron's, having done what they could to repair the damage done to the trench by the enemy's shellfire, awaited developments.

Presently they saw, to their astonishment, a strong force of men in Cameron kilts, advancing through the Belleward Wood, north of the Menin Road, toward the trenches occupied by the 91st. Uncertain as to whether they were British or Germans, they refrained from firing, until volley upon volley from the trenches of the 91st told them they were the enemy in disguise.

Meanwhile "B" and "C" Companies of the 9th Argyll's had advanced from Zouave Wood to the trenches, which Major Christie's men had dug near the Menin Road. On the way, their gallant and much loved Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Clark, and shells killed another officer. Major Christie, who had hurried back to report the new attack, dispatched "D" Company to reinforce the 91st; but, notwithstanding the assistance of the Territorial, the latter were driven from their trenches by the determine attacks of the kilted Germans. The 9th Argyll's and 2nd Cameron's, though now exposed to an enfilading fire from north of the Menin Road, gallantly held their trenches against every attack, until night fell, and piles of corpses beyond their entanglements bore eloquent testimony to the deadly work of their machine guns and rifles.

They had themselves lost heavily, however. Among the slain was Colonel Campbell, commanding the Cameron's, who was killed by a shell, which had landed right in the middle of a machine gun team, who work he was directing. At 2 a.m. relief arrived, and Major Christie, whom the death of Colonel Clark had left in command of the 9th Argyll's, led his sorely tried men back to their dugouts in Zouave Wood. In that and the previous days fighting the battalion had had twelve and some three hundred men killed and wounded. The losses were considerably increased during the next two days, May 11th and 12th, when, their position having been located by a captive kite balloon sent up by the enemy, the wood was raked by a terrific shelling, which seemed to search every yard of it. Major Christie's own dugout was twice blown in, but, happily, he escaped without injury.

When the shelling ceased, hardly a tree of that wood remained standing; all was a jumble of broken timber and undergrowth, beneath which lay dead men, broken rifles and equipment, and torn sandbag. On the 16th the 9th Argyll's were sent to the rest camp at Poperinghe. But they were not permitted to enjoy even so much as one whole day's rest, as, scarcely had they arrived, when orders came to join the 10th Brigade at La Brique. **Just after dawn on May 24th**, while they were occupying the support trenches northeast of Saint-Jean, the enemy started bombarding our front with asphyxiating shells and immediately afterwards gas was released from the cylinders against the whole three miles of front from Shelltrap Farm to the Belleward Lake. After the gas came a violent bombardment from north, northeast and east.

Seeing that the troops in the first line trenches were beginning to give way, Major Christie at once resolved to repeat that dash to the rescue, which had saved the Cameron's trench at Hooge a fortnight before, and having adjusted their respirators, the territorial doubled across the shell swept ground which lay between them and the fire trenches. The sight which met their eyes as they reached them was terrible, for maimed and gassed men were lying everywhere. But they lost no time getting to work, and, lining the broken parapet, opened a withering fire on the advancing Germans. The enemy fell back, but soon it became apparent that their artillery was concentrating on that particular trench, while, though the German infantry fell in heaps before our fire, they continued to advance in ever increasing numbers. Major Christie saw that, if the trench was to be held, more men must be found to replace those whom we were losing every minute. As all communication with the rear had been cut, he left one of his officers in charge, and ran back to the support trench, in search of stragglers.

He found a few odd lots of the Dublin Fusiliers and of his own battalion and rushed them forward. But still there were not sufficient rifles to line the parapet, so out into the fire swept open went the major again, searching for men-men with rifles. In a small isolated trench he found another odd lot, gassed and half dazed, but, though for the moment the poor fellows could be of little use, they had rifles, and, pouncing upon them, he was leading them forward, when he was hit in the leg by a piece of shell and fell to the ground. But the odd lot he was leading went on and reached the trench, and it seems to have been largely through the assistance rendered by them that the German hordes were held off until relief arrived.

Major Christie did what he could for himself with a tourniquet, until Drummer Bell, of the Argyll's came out of the trench to his assistance and after rendering first aid, went away and returned with two men of their battalion carrying a stretcher. Lifting the wounded officer on to this, they set out for the nearest dressing station; but so tremendous was the fire through which they had to pass, that they were obliged several times to stop and take refuge in a ditch or under a hedge. Major Christie begged the men to leave him and look after themselves; but these brave fellows indignantly refused to do, and, though all three were wounded, they managed to stagger on with their load until they reached the dressing station.

Drummer Bell, who repeatedly interposed his own body between his wounded officer and the enemy's fire, was subsequently awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the French Croix de Guerre. Major Christie, who received the Distinguished Service Order, is a native of the Vale of Leven, and the youngest son of Mr John Christie, of Levenfield, Alexandria, Dumbartonshire, chairman of the United Turkey Red Company, Limited, and its thirty-five years

of age. He served for a number of years with the Alexandria and Renton Company of Volunteers, retiring with the rank of honorary major. He is a good shot and won several prizes at the Dumbartonshire Rifle Association meetings at Jamestown. At the outbreak of war he volunteered for service, and went into training with his old regiment at Bedford, proceeding to the front in February 1915. He was immensely popular with the 9th Argyll's, alike for his dauntless courage and his solicitude for their comfort, and it is indeed regrettable that the injuries he received will prevent him from leading them again. Extracted from 'Deeds That Thrill The Empire'