

Read through the extract before using this to write your newspaper report.

FOR JUST A few short moments we moved forward at the trot as we had done in training. In the eery silence of no man's land all that could be heard was the jingle of the harness and the snorting of the horses. We picked our way around the craters keeping our line as best we could. Up ahead of us at the top of a gentle sloping hill were the battered remnants of a wood and just below a hideous, rusting roll of barbed wire that stretched out along the horizon as far as the eye could see. 'Wire,' I heard Trooper Warren whisper through his teeth. 'Oh God, Joey, they said the wire would be gone, they said the guns would deal with the wire. Oh my God!' We were into a canter now and still there was no sound nor sight of any enemy. The troopers were shouting at an invisible foe, leaning over their horses' necks, their sabres stretched out in front of them. I galvanised myself into a gallop to keep with Tophorn and as I did, so the first terrible shells fell amongst us and the machine guns opened up. The bedlam of battle had begun. All around me men cried and fell to the ground, and horses reared and screamed in an agony of fear and pain. The ground erupted on either side of me, throwing horses and riders clear into the air. The shells whined and roared overhead, and every explosion seemed like an earthquake to us. But the squadron galloped on inexorably through it all towards the wire at the top of the hill, and I went with them.

On my back Trooper Warren held me in an iron grip with his knees. I stumbled once and felt him lose a stirrup, and slowed so that he could find it again. Tophorn was still ahead of me, his head up, his tail whisking from side to side. I found more strength in my legs and charged after him. Trooper Warren prayed aloud as he rode, but his prayers turned soon to curses as he saw the carnage around him. Only a few horses reached the wire and Tophorn and I were amongst them. There were indeed a few holes blasted

through the wire by our bombardment so that some of us could find a way through; and we came at last upon the first line of enemy trenches, but they were empty. The firing came now from higher up in amongst the trees; and so the squadron, or what was left of it, regrouped and galloped up into the wood, only to be met by a line of hidden wire in amongst the trees. Some of the horses ran into the wire before they could be stopped, and stuck there, their riders trying feverishly to extract them. I saw one trooper dismount deliberately once he saw his horse was caught. He pulled out his rifle and shot his mount before falling dead himself on the wire. I could see at once that there was no way through, that the only way was to jump the wire and when I saw Tophorn and Captain Stewart leap over where the wire was lowest, I followed them and we found ourselves at last in amongst the enemy. From behind every tree, from trenches all around it seemed, they ran forward in their piked helmets to counter-attack. They rushed past us, ignoring us until we found ourselves surrounded by an entire company of soldiers, their rifles pointing up at us.

The crump of the shelling and the spitting of rifle-fire had suddenly stopped. I looked around me for the rest of the squadron, to discover that we were alone. Behind us the riderless horses, all that was left of a proud cavalry squadron, galloped back towards our trenches, and the hillside below was strewn with the dead and dying.

'Throw down your sword, Trooper,' said Captain Stewart, bending in his saddle and dropping his sword to the ground. 'There's been enough useless slaughter today. No sense in adding to it.' He walked Tophorn closer towards us and reined in. 'Trooper, I told you once we had the best horses in the squadron, and today they showed us they are the best horses in the entire regiment, in the whole confounded army - and there's not a scratch on them.' He dismounted as the German soldiers closed in and Trooper Warren followed suit. They stood side by side holding our reins while we

were surrounded. We looked back down the hill at the battle-field. A few horses were still struggling on the wire, but one by one they were put out of their misery by the advancing German infantry, who had already regained their line of trenches. They were the last shots in the battle.

'What a waste,' the Captain said. 'What a ghastly waste. Maybe now when they see this they'll understand that you can't send horses into wire and machine-guns. Maybe now they'll think again.' The soldiers around us seemed wary of us and kept their distance. They seemed not to know quite what to do with us. 'The horses, sir?' Trooper Warren asked. 'Joey and Tophorn, what happens to them now?'

'Same as us, Trooper,' said Captain Stewart. 'They're prisoners of war just as we are.' Flanked by the soldiers who hardly spoke, we were escorted over the brow of a hill and down into the valley below. Here the valley was still green for there had been no battle over this ground as yet. All the while Trooper Warren had his arm over my neck to reassure me and I felt then that he was beginning to say goodbye.

He spoke softly into my ear. 'Don't suppose they'll let you come with me where I'm going, Joey.

I wish they could, but they can't. But I shan't ever forget you. I promise you that.'

'Don't you worry, Trooper,' Captain Stewart said. 'The Germans love their horses every bit as much as we do. They'll be all right. Anyway, Tophorn will look after your Joey - you can be sure of that.'

As we came out of the wood and onto the road below we were halted by our escort. Captain Stewart and Trooper Warren were marched away down the road towards a cluster of ruined buildings that must at one time have been a village, whilst Tophorn and I were led away across the fields and further down the valley.

There was no time for long farewells - just a brief last stroke of

the muzzle for each of us and they were gone. As they walked away, Captain Stewart had his arm around Trooper Warren's shoulder.