

This picture of British troops throwing up a barricade in a village street during the retreat from Mons gives the very spirit of those glorious days.



Imperial War Museum

F.M. Lord Haig (then General Sir Douglas Haig) as he appeared at the time of the retreat.

If you are in London next Sunday and would like to see how troops should march, go to the City after tea and watch some 2,000 men swing past the Lord Mayor as he takes their salute at the Mansion House at 4.30. Their colours will be carried on parade, but the men, though marching with steadiness worthy of young Guardsmen, will be wearing plain clothes, and few of them will be under sixty.

These veterans belong to the Old Contemptibles' Association, and, as their badges and the clasps on their 1914/15 Stars signify, they were all on active service between August 5 and November 22, 1914. They owe their proud title to the order given by the Kaiser to von Kluck's army commanders on August 19, 1914: "Walk over General Fr  nch's contemptible little army!"

Jubilee Year

SUNDAY'S parade precedes the Old Contemptibles' annual memorial service in St. Paul's Cathedral, attended by the Lord Mayor in state. These ceremonies are usually confined to members of the London area, but 1950 is the Association's Jubilee year, and Old Contemptibles are coming from all over Britain and from overseas for a week of remembrance and celebrations, highlight of which will be their Silver Reunion at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday next. Chief guest of the evening, it is hoped, will be Queen Mary, who has accepted an invitation

'CONTEMPTIBLE LITTLE ARMY'!

By WILFRID WEBSTER

The Germans said that had they succeeded in destroying our little army the war would have been won in 1914. But to the eternal glory of those tough, hard-hitting regulars the enemy onslaught was eventually defeated.

to be present. Many of the old soldiers will remember her coming with King George V to say farewell to them at Chelsea Barracks and Aldershot nearly 36 years ago.

The main feature of the Albert Hall reunion is to be a musical pageant depicting the progress of the British Expeditionary Force from England to France, from Mons to the Marne, and from the Aisne to Ypres. Apart from a few star soloists, all the 'actors' will be serving soldiers, wearing 1914 uniforms.

What a stirring story the producer has to tell! What memories it will bring to the audience, beginning with hurried, secret departures from Blighty and exciting arrivals in France!

"Are We Downhearted?"

THE pipers of the Argylls, first to land, playing on the quay at Boulogne on August 14. . . . General Sir Douglas Haig, one of the B.E.F.'s two corps commanders, at Le Havre, smiling quietly at the roars of "Are we downhearted?" "No!" echoing from ship to ship bringing Allenby's cavalry division into the harbour. . . . The French people, slightly bewildered, learning the song they were to know so well—"Tipperary!"

That first experience of French train travel, then two long days' dusty marching in the blazing sun. More than half the men were Reservists, who found the cobbled streets hard in their new army boots and their kit and equipment, weighing 60 lb., no light burden. They had no steel helmets and the Sam Browne belts, with swords, worn by the officers were to make them particularly conspicuous targets for the enemy.

The men were in good heart. "So far," Haig wrote in his diary, "they look on the campaign as a picnic."

They did not know that, on either side of Metz, French attacks were being

repulsed, with over 300,000 casualties, by von Bulow's armies. Nor were they aware that the formidable mass of von Kluck's armies threatened the B.E.F., whose left flank was completely unprotected, with a great swing designed to encircle the Allied forces and end the war in a few weeks.

When the B.E.F. took up battle positions along 20 miles of canal at Mons, it was nine miles ahead of the French Fifth Army on its right and its left flank was quite in the air. Taken in relation to the numerical strength of the opposing armies, that adjective of the Kaiser's was not inappropriate, for the Germans had 2,000,000 men on the Western Front, and the British—100,000!

Von Kluck attacked on August 23, and much to the surprise of the German General Staff, the all-day battle of Mons ended in a resounding victory for the contemptible little army. General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's Second Corps took the brunt of the onslaught and inflicted very heavy losses on the enemy. As night came, Smith-Dorrien was confident of being able to carry out his orders to hold his ground, but in the small hours of the 24th came the word from G.H.Q.: "Retreat!"

At midnight, Sir John French, 62-year-old Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F., had received what he called a most unexpected message from Joffre, the French C.-in-C. It told him that at least three German army corps were moving to attack the British front and that another threatened their exposed left flank. From that message, too, French learned for the first time that the French Fifth Army on his right was in full retreat.

As soon as he had ordered the B.E.F. to withdraw, Sir John wired the bad news home to Lord Kitchener at the War Office. The retirement would be a difficult operation, he said, and he



Imperial War Museum

F.M. Lord French, another great soldier whose name is for ever linked with the 'contemptible little army.'

ended with the ominous words: "Immediate attention should be directed to the defence of Havre."

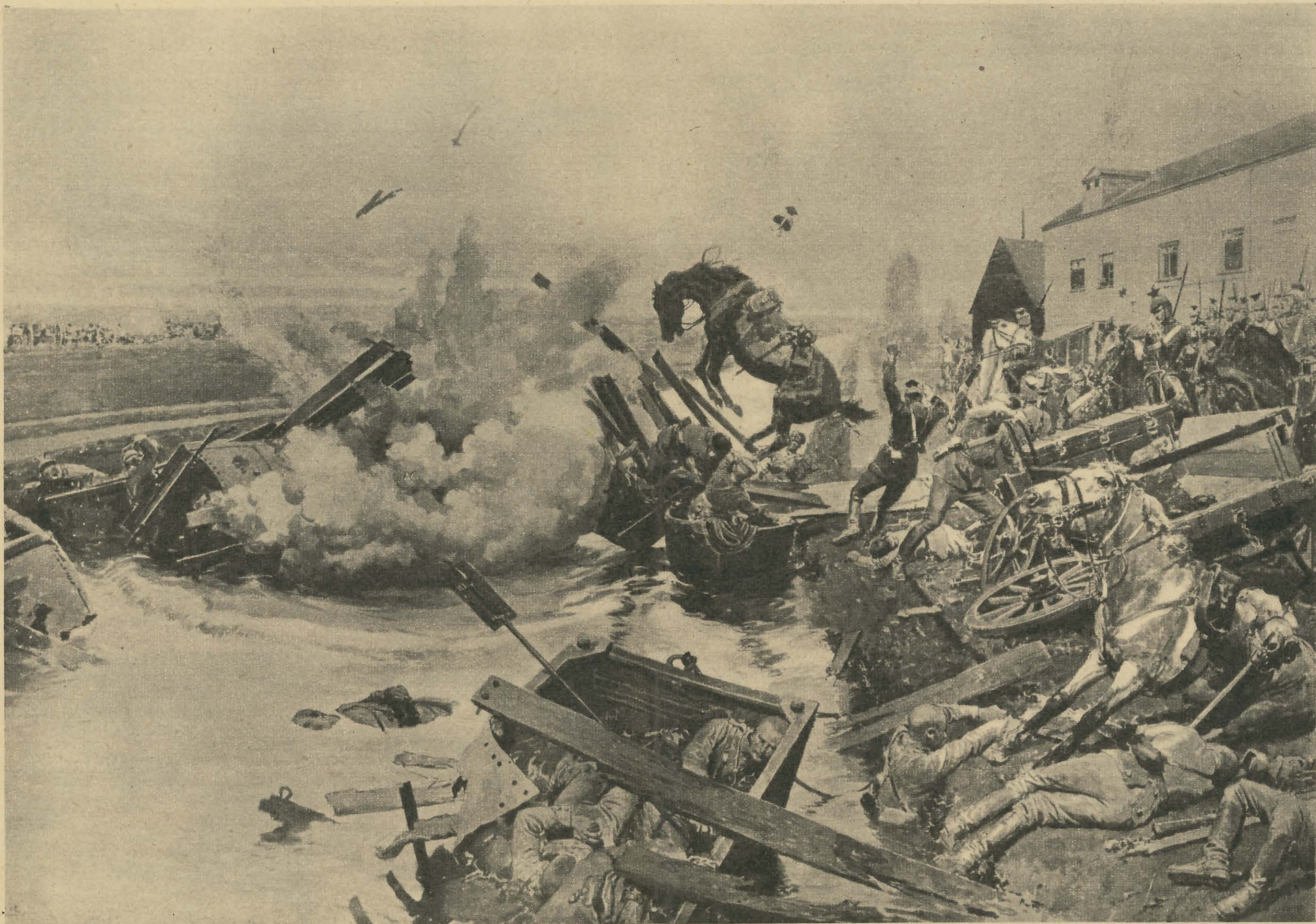
Retreat was inevitable, and by all the rules of war it should have been followed by annihilation. But there was to be no 'Dunkirk' in 1914: for the next 13 days and nights the B.E.F. marched and fought and emerged an undefeated fighting force.

"The way the retreat was carried out was remarkable," von Kluck admitted. "I tried very hard to outflank them. If I had succeeded, the war would have been won."

Remarkable Retreat

ON August 25 the two retreating British army corps became separated by the forest of Mormal and communications were not re-established between them until September 1. The roads were packed with refugees and made still more congested when Sordet's French cavalry moved across to the west. Following a fierce night attack in pitch darkness at Landrecies, repulsed by the Coldstream Guards, Haig continued the withdrawal of the First Corps on French's orders, but late that night Allenby came to Smith-Dorrien's headquarters and warned him that his depleted and scattered cavalry might not be able to screen the exhausted Second Corps against the mass attacks expected early next morning.

Smith-Dorrien turned to his staff officers and said, to their evident relief: "Very well, gentlemen. We will fight." And so on August 26, the anniversary 13



Ten times the Germans attempted the perilous crossing of the Mons-Condé Canal, and ten times the British guns blew the pontoon bridge to pieces.



The 'contemptible army' lands in France. Amid the cheers of the people of Boulogne the first British troops reached France early in August, 1914.

of the Battle of Crécy, the Second Corps stood and fought at Le Cateau.

Lying in hastily scraped ditches on a forward slope, with corn stooks their only cover, Smith-Dorrien's men held out all day against seven enemy divisions. Their guns were outnumbered by five to one, and the battalions holding the right of the Corps' line were enfiladed by German artillery firing from high ground to the east.

Incessant Bombardment

FOR nine hours men of the Suffolk regiment and the 2nd Argylls, the *Thin Red Line*, stood up to an incessant bombardment. Their deadly rifle fire mowed down hundreds of the attacking enemy and two Captains of the Argylls, A. J. H. Maclean and the Hon. R. Bruce, kept calling out their tally of hits as though they were engaged in friendly rivalry on the rifle range. But in the end Suffolks and Highlanders were overwhelmed by weight of numbers and the survivors taken prisoner.

After the enemy had been fought to a standstill, Smith-Dorrien broke off the action with great skill and once again his men took to the roads. They marched all that night and all next day, and all the next night, in inky darkness and drizzling rain. Then, like their comrades of the First Corps, they went on marching, with an average of four hours' rest in twenty-four.

An officer said afterwards that he would never have believed that men could be so tired and so hungry and yet live. Especially in the early days of the retreat, the men, undefeated, could not understand why they had to keep on withdrawing. Their N.C.O.s, backbone of the Army, kept up morale with cracks like: "Retreat? We're advancing—in circles. On you go, lads!"

Time and again the rearguards of both corps turned at bay to hold back

the pursuing enemy. The old Munster Fusiliers, for instance, covering the withdrawal of the Guards in the First Division, on August 27, fought off the Germans for nearly twelve hours.

The retreating B.E.F. crossed the Aisne on August 31. Next day, at Nery, 'L' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, fought the action in which it won lasting fame, and three V.C.s, in the course of a single morning.

It was misty at dawn and the battery was preparing to pull out from an orchard in which it had spent the night when it was caught by three German batteries, whose fire from a ridge only 800 yards away was reinforced by the machine-guns and carbines of an enemy cavalry division.

Famous Gun

THREE of the six British guns were knocked out immediately and most of their detachments killed: many of the horses, away being watered, were also killed. The other guns were unlimbered, but two more were knocked out before they could be brought into action.

The battery commander was killed. Mortally wounded, Captain E. K. Bradbury directed the fire of the remaining gun, propped up against the trail. Sergeant Dorrell laid the gun, Driver Nelson acted as No. 2, Drivers Osbourne and Derbyshire supplied the ammunition. They were the only ones left, but they kept firing until the rescuing Middlesex and Scottish Rifles drove the Germans back. The enemy abandoned eight guns; that last surviving one of 'L' Battery's is in the Imperial War Museum in London.

On September 6 came the welcome order to turn and attack. Writing off the B.E.F. as a spent force, von Kluck made the mistake of changing his wide right swing into a shortened jab to the