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**THE ROYAL DRAGOON GUARDS**

**“THE FIRST AND LAST”**

**22nd August 1914 – Casteau, 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards:**

“Major Bridges gave the order “4th Troop dismount ready for action; 1st Troop behind, draw swords, ready to go”. I can recall no tremendous sense of battle or ferocity of encounter, even at that moment, or anything that seemed more exciting than one of peace-time manoeuvres. I saw a troop of Uhlans coming leisurely down the road, the officer in front smoking a cigar. We were anxiously awaiting their movements when, quicker than I can write here, they halted as if they smelt a rat. They turned back. Captain Hornby got permission to follow on with the same troop and down the road they galloped. My troop was ordered to follow on in support and we galloped on into the little village of Casteau. Then it was we could see the 1st Troop using their swords and scattering the Uhlans right and left. We caught them up. Captain Hornby gave the order “4th Troop, dismounted action”. We found cover for our horses by the side of the chateau wall. Bullets were flying past us and all around us, and possibly because I was rather noted for my athletic ability in those days, I was first in action. I could see a German cavalry officer some four hundred yards away standing mounted in full view of me, gesticulating as he disposed of his dismounted men. Immediately I saw him I took aim, squeezed the trigger and automatically, almost as it seemed instantaneously, he fell to the ground, obviously wounded, but whether he was killed or not is a matter I do not think was ever cleared up. This was the first shot that was fired by a rifle in the British Army.“ *Corporal Ernest Thomas, 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards*

**11th November 1918 – Lessines, 7th Dragoon Guards:**

“At 0900 the next morning, the Brigadier arrived in the bivouac, told Major Chappell about the 1100 Armistice, and ordered the Squadron to move off with all speed to capture Lessines and the river crossing before the Stand Fast. The Squadron galloped forward to the outpost troop, picked it up and continued forward towards Lessines. At about 10.45 am the reconnoitring troop was held up by five machine guns and some snipers about a mile west of the village; after a halt of three minutes, parties were sent forward on either side of the high road and the squadron followed. They rushed Lessines, captured 24 other ranks and a machine gun on the western edge, and a total of 3 officers and 103 other ranks in the village, and securing intact the bridges which had been prepared for demolition. Thus did hostilities end.” *Military Operations in France and Belgium 1918, Vol V*

***Lessines and Casteau are both in southern Belgium, about 20 miles apart. Between these actions, our four antecedent regiments served continuously on operations in France and Belgium, earning the following Battle Honours: Mons le Cateau, Retreat from Mons, Marne 1914, Aisne 1914, La Bassee 1914, Messines 1914, Armentieres 1914, Ypres 1914, Ypres 1915, Givenchy 1914, St Julien, Frezenberg, Bellewaarde, Somme 1916, 1918, Bazentin, Flers-Courcelette, Morval, Arras 1917, Scarpe 1917, Cambrai 1917 1918, St Auentin, Rosieres, Avre, Lys, Hazebrouck, Amiens, Albert 1918, Hindenburg Line, St Quentin Canal, Beaurevoir, Pursuit to Mons, France and Flanders 1914 – 18. Six hundred and sixty six officers and men were killed in action.***