

CHAPTER X

THE COUNTER ATTACK

KENTUCKY and Pug and their fellow Stonewalls fell to work energetically, their movements hastened by a galling rifle or machine-gun fire that came pelting along their trench from somewhere far out on the flank, and reaching the trench almost in enfilade, and by the warning screech and crash of some shells bursting over them. The rain had ceased a few hours before, but the trench was still sopping wet and thick with sticky mud. It was badly battered and broken down, and was little more for the most part than an irregular and shallow ditch half filled with shattered timbers, fallen earth, full and burst sandbags. Here and there were stretches of comparatively uninjured trench, deep and strongly built, but even in these, sandbags had been burst or blown out of place by shell explosions, and the walls were crumbling and shaken and tottery. The Stonewalls put in a very strenuous hour digging, refilling

sandbags, piling them up, putting the trench into some sort of shape to afford cover and protection against shell and rifle fire. There was no sun, but the air was close and heavy and stagnant, and the men dripped perspiration as they worked. Their efforts began to slacken despite the urgings of the officers and non-coms., but they speeded up again as a heavier squall of shell fire shrieked up and began to burst rapidly about and above the trench.

'I was beginnin' to think this trench was good enough for anythin', and that we'd done diggin' enough,' panted Pug, heaving a half-split sandbag into place, flattening it down with the blows of a broken pick-handle, and halting a moment to lift his shrapnel helmet to the back of his head and wipe a dirty sleeve across his wet forehead. 'But I can see that it might be made a heap safer yet.'

'There's a plenty room for improvement,' agreed Kentucky, wrenching and hauling at a jumble of stakes and barbed wire that had been blown in and half buried in the trench bottom. When he had freed the tangle he was commencing to thrust and throw it out over the back of the trench when an officer passing along stopped him. 'Chuck it out in front, man alive,' he said. 'We don't want to check our side getting in here to

help us, and it's quite on the cards we may need it to help hold back the Boche presently. We're expecting a counter-attack, you know.'

'Do we know?' said Pug disgustedly, when the officer had passed along. 'Mebbe you do, but I'm blowed if I know anythink about it. All I know I could put in me eye an' then not know it was there even.'

'I wish I knew where Larry is, or what's happened to him,' said Kentucky. 'I'm some worried about him.'

A string of light shells crashed overhead, another burst banging and crackling along the trench, and a procession of heavier high explosive began to drop ponderously in geyser-like spoutings of mud and earth and smoke. The Stonewalls crouched low in the trench bottom, while the ground shook under them, and the air above sang to the drone and whine of flying shell fragments and splinters. Our own guns took up the challenge, and started to pour a torrent of light and heavy shells over on to the German lines. For a time the opposing guns had matters all to themselves and their uproar completely dominated the battle. And in the brief intervals of the nearer bangs and crashes the Stonewalls could hear the deep and constant roar

of gun-fire throbbing and booming and rolling in full blast up and down along the line.

'I s'pose the papers 'ud call this an ar-tillery doo-el,' remarked Pug, 'or re-noo-ed ar-tillery activity.'

'I always thought a duel was two lots fighting each other,' said a man hunkered down close in the trench bottom beside him; 'but the gunners' notion of duelling seems to be to let each other alone and each hammer the other lot's infantry.'

'Seems like they're passing a few packets back to each other though,' said Kentucky. 'Hark at that fellow up there,' as a heavy shell rumbled and roared over high above them, and the noise of its passing dwindled and died away, and was drowned out in the steadily sustained uproar of the nearer reports and shell bursts.

'Stand to there!' came a shout along the trench. 'Look out, there, C Company. . . . Wait the word, then let 'em have it. . . . Don't waste a shot, though.'

'Wot's comin' now?' said Pug, scrambling to his feet. Kentucky was a'ready up and settling himself into position against the front wall of the parapet.

'Looks like that counter-attack we heard of,'

he said. 'And—yes, by the Lord, some counter-attack too. Say, look at 'em, will you? Jes' look and see 'em come a-boiling.'

Pug, snuggling down beside him, and pounding his elbow down on the soft earth to make a convenient elbow-rest, paused and peered out into the drifting haze of smoke that obscured the front. At first he could see nothing but the haze, starred with the quick fire flashes and thickened with the rolling clouds of our guns' shrapnel bursts. Then in the filmy grey and dun-coloured cloud he saw another, a more solid and deeper coloured grey bank that rolled steadily towards them.

'Gaw'strewth,' he gasped. 'Is that men? Is all that lump Germans? Blimey, it must be their 'ole bloomin' army comin' at us.'

'There sure is a big bunch of 'em,' said Kentucky. 'Enough to roll us out flat if they can get in amongst us. This is where we get it in the neck if we can't stop 'em before they step into this trench. It looks ugly, Pug. Wonder why they don't give the order to fire.'

'I've never bayoneted a 'Un yet,' said Pug, 'but mebbe I'll get a chawnce this time.' He peered out into the smoke. 'Can you see if they've

got 'elmets on, Kentucky?' he said anxiously. 'I'm fair set on one o' them 'elmets.'

To Kentucky and Pug, and probably to most of the rest of the Stonewalls' rank and file, the German counter-attack boiled down into a mere matter of the rapid firing of a very hot rifle into a dense bank of smoke and a dimly seen mass of men. Each man shot straight to his front, and took no concern with what might be happening to right or left of that front. In the beginning the word had been passed to set the sights at point blank and fire low, so that there was no need at any time to bother about altering ranges, and the men could devote the whole of their attention to rapid loading and firing. So each simply shot and shot and went on shooting at full speed, glancing over the sights and squeezing the trigger, jerking the bolt back and up, and pulling trigger again till the magazine was empty; then, throwing the butt down to cram a fresh clip of cartridges into the breech, swinging it up and in again to the shoulder, resuming the rapid shoot-and-load, shoot-and-load until the magazine was empty again. Each man was an automatic machine, pumping out so many bullets in so many seconds, and just because long drill and training had all

gone to make the aiming and shooting mechanically correct and smooth and rapid it was mechanically deadly in its effect. And because the motions of shooting were so entirely mechanical they left the mind free to wander to other and, in many cases, ridiculously trivial things. Kentucky began to fear that his stock of cartridges would not last out, began vaguely to worry over the possibility of having to cease shooting even for a minute, until he could obtain a fresh supply. Pug was filled with an intense irritation over the behaviour of his rifle, which in some mysterious fashion developed a defect in the loading of the last cartridge from each clip. The cartridge, for some reason, did not slide smoothly into the chamber, and the bolt had to be withdrawn an inch and slammed shut again each time the last cartridge came up. Probably the extra motion did not delay Pug's shooting by one second in each clip, but he was as annoyed over it as if it had reduced his rate by half. He cursed his rifle and its parts, breech, bolt, and magazine severally and distinctly, the cartridges and the clips, the men and the machinery who had made each; but at no time did he check the speed of his shooting to curse. 'What's the matter?' shouted Kentucky at last. 'This

blasted rifle,' yelled Pug angrily, jerking at the bolt and slamming it home again. 'keeps stickin' all the time.' Kentucky had some half-formed idea of saying that it was no good trying to shoot with a sticking rifle, and suggesting that Pug should go look for another, handing over meantime any cartridges he had left to replenish his, Kentucky's, diminishing store; but just then two men came pushing along the trench carrying a box of ammunition and throwing out a double handful of cartridges to each man. Kentucky grabbed. 'Oh, good man,' he said joyfully; 'but say, can't you give us a few more?'

Pug glanced round at the heap flung at his elbow. 'Wha's th' good o' them?' he snapped. 'F'r Gawd' sake rather gimme a rifle that'll shoot.'

'Rifle?' said one of the men, 'there's plenty spare rifles about'; and he stooped and picked one from the trench bottom, dropped it beside Pug, and pushed on. Pug emptied his magazine, dropped his rifle, snatched up the other one, and resumed shooting. But he was swearing again before he had fired off the one clip, and that done, flung the rifle from him and grabbed his own. 'Rotten thing,' he growled. 'It don't *fit*, don't

set to a man's shoulder ; and it kicks like a crazy mule.'

Both he and Kentucky had jerked out their sentences between shots, delaying their shooting no fraction of a second. It was only, and even then reluctantly, when there was no longer a visible target before their sights that they slowed up and stopped. And then both stayed still, with rifles pointing over the parapet, peering into the smoke ahead. Kentucky drew a long breath. 'They've quit ; and small blame to them.'

'Got a bit more'n they bargained for, that time,' said Pug exultantly, and then 'Ouch !' in a sharp exclamation of pain. 'What's the matter ?' said Kentucky. 'You feeling that arm ?' 'No, no,' said Pug hastily, 'just my elbow feelin' a bit cramped an' stiffish wi' leanin' on it.'

The rifle fire was slackening and dying along the line, but the shells still whooped and rushed overhead and burst flaming and rolling out balls of white smoke over the ground in front. 'Wish them guns 'd knock off a bit till we see what sorter damage we've done,' said Pug. But along to the right with a rolling crash the rifles burst out into full blast again. 'Look out,' said Kentucky

quickly, 'here they come again,' and he tossed muzzle over the parapet and commenced to pump bullets at the grey bulk that had become visible looming through the smoke clouds again. He was filled with eagerness to make the most of each second, to get off the utmost possible number of rounds, to score the most possible hits. He had just the same feeling, only much more intensified, that a man has at the butts when the birds are coming over fast and free. Indeed, the feeling was so nearly akin to that, the whole thing was so like shooting into driven and helpless game, the idea was so strong that the Germans were there as a target to be shot at, and he there as a shooter, that it gave him a momentary shock of utter astonishment when a bullet hit the parapet close to him and threw a spurt of mud in his face, and almost at the same instant another hit glancing on the top of his helmet, jolting it back on his head and spinning it round until the chin-strap stopped it with an unpleasant jerk on his throat. He realised suddenly, what for the moment he had completely forgotten, that he was being shot at as well as shooting, that he was as liable to be killed as one of those men out there he was pelting bullets into. Actually, of course, his risk was not

one-tenth of the attackers': He was in cover and the men advancing against the trench were doing little shooting as they came. They on the other hand were in the open, exposed full length and height, were in a solid mass through and into which the slecting bullets drove and poured in a continuous stream. Machine-gun and rifle fire beat fiercely upon its face, while from above a deluge of high-explosive shells and tearing gusts of shrapnel fell upon it, rending and shattering and destroying. And in spite of the tempest of fire which smote it the mass still advanced. It was cut down almost as fast as it could come on, but yet not quite as fast, and the men in the trench could see the front line constantly breaking and melting away, with ragged, shifting gaps opening and closing quickly along its length, with huge mouthfuls torn out of it by the devouring shells, with whole slices and wedges cut away by the scything bullets, but still filling in the gaps, closing up the broken ranks, pressing doggedly and desperately on and in on their destroyers.

But at last the attack broke down. It had covered perhaps a hundred yards, at an appalling cost of lives, when it checked, gave slowly, and then broke and vanished. Most of the men left

on their feet turned and ran heavily, but there were still some who walked, and still others who even then either refused to yield the ground they had taken or preferred the chance of shelter and safety a prone position offered rather than the heavy risk of being cut down by the bullets as they retreated. These men dropped into shell holes and craters, behind the heaps of dead, flat on the bare ground; and there some of them lay motionless, and a few, a very few, others thrust out their rifles and dared to shoot.

A heavy shell screamed over and burst just behind the Stonewalls' trench. Another and another followed in quick succession, and then, as if this had been a signal to the German guns, a tornado of shells swept roaring down upon the British line. It was the heaviest and most destructive fire the Stonewalls had yet been called upon to face. The shells were of every weight and description. The coming of each of the huge high explosives was heralded by a most appalling and nerve-shaking, long-drawn, rising torrent of noise that for the moment drowned out all the other noises of battle, and was only exceeded in its terror-inspiring volume by the rending, bellowing crash of its burst; their lesser brethren, the 5-in.

and 6-in. H.E., were small by comparison, but against that their numbers were far greater, and they fell in one long pitiless succession of hammer-blows up and down the whole length of trench, filling the air with dirty black foul-smelling smoke and the sinister, vicious, and ugly sounding drone and *whurr* and whistle of flying splinters; and in still larger numbers the lighter shells, the shrapnel and H.E. of the field-guns, the 'Whizz-Bangs' and 'Pip-Squeaks,' swept the trench with a regular fusillade of their savage 'rush-crash' explosions. The air grew dense and choking with the billowing clouds of smoke that curled and drifted about the trench, thickened and darkened until the men could hardly see a dozen yards from them.

Pug, crouched low in the bottom of the trench beside Kentucky, coughed and spluttered, 'Bad's a real old Lunnon Partickler,' he said, and spat vigorously.

An officer, followed by three men, crawled along the trench towards them. 'Here you are, Corporal,' said the officer, halting and looking over his shoulder; 'this will do for you two. Get over here and out about fifty yards. Come on the other man. We'll go over a bit further along,' and he crawled off, followed by the one man.

Wot's the game, Corp'ril?' asked Pug, as the two began to creep over the top of the parapet. 'List'nin' post,' said the Corporal briefly. 'Goin' to lie out there a bit, in case they makes a rush through the smoke,' and he and his companion vanished squirming over the shell-torn ground in front.

A few minutes later another couple of men crawled along and huddled down beside Pug. 'Crump blew the trench in on some o' us along there,' said one. 'Buried a couple an' sent Jim an' me flyin'. Couldn't get the other two out neither. Could we, Jim?' Jim only shook his head. He had a slight cut over one eye, from which at intervals he mechanically wiped the blood with a shaking hand.

'Trench along there is a fair wreck,' went on the other, then stopped and held his breath at the harsh rising roar that told of another heavy shell approaching. The four men flattened themselves to earth until the shell struck with a heavy jarring THUMP that set the ground quivering. 'Dud,' said two or three of them simultaneously, and 'Thank God,' said Kentucky, 'the burst would have sure got us that time.'

Wot's that they're shoutin' along there?

said Pug anxiously. 'Stréwth!' and he gasped a deep breath and grabbed hurriedly for the bag slung at his side. 'Gas . . . "Helmets on," they're shoutin'.'

Through the acrid odours of the explosives' fumes Kentucky caught a faint whiff of a heavy, sickly, sweet scent. Instantly he stopped breathing and, with the other three, hastily wrenched out the flannel helmet slung in its special bag by his side, pulled it over his head, and, clutching its folds tightly round his throat with one hand, tore open his jacket collar, stuffed the lower edge of the flannel inside his jacket and buttoned it up again. All four finished the oft-drilled operation at the same moment, lay perfectly quiet, inhaling the pungent odour of the impregnated flannel, and peering upward through the eye-pieces for any visible sign of the gas.

They waited there without moving for another five minutes, with the shells still pounding and crashing and hammering down all round them. Pug leaned over and put his muffled mouth close to Kentucky's ear: 'They got a dead set on us here,' he shouted. 'Looks like our number was up this time, an's if they meant to blow this trench to blazes.'

Kentucky nodded his cowed head. It did look as if the German gunners were determined to completely obliterate that portion of the trench, but meantime—it was very ridiculous, of course, but there it was—his mind was completely filled with vague gropings in his memory to recall what perfume it was that the scent of the gas reminded him of. He puzzled over it, recalling scent after scent in vain, sure that he was perfectly familiar with it, and yet unable to place it. It was most intensely and stupidly irritating.

The shell fire worked up to a pitch of the most ferocious intensity. None actually hit the portion of trench the four were in, but several came dangerously close in front, behind, and to either side of them. The wall began to crumble and shake down in wet clods and crumbings, and at the burst of one shell close out in front, a large piece broke off the front edge and fell in, followed by a miniature landslide of falling earth. The trench appeared to be on the point of collapsing and falling in on them.

‘We gotter move out o’ this!’ shouted Pug, else we’ll be buried alive.’

‘What’s the good of . . . don’t believe there’s anyone left but us . . . better get out of it,’ said

the man Jim. His voice was muffled and indistinct inside his helmet. But although the others only caught fragments of his sentences his meaning was plain enough. The four looked at each other, quite uselessly, for the cowl-like helmets masked all expression and the eyes behind the celluloid panes told nothing. But instinctively they looked from one to the other, poking and twisting their heads to bring one another within the vision range of the eye-pieces, so that they looked like some strange ghoulish prehistoric monsters half-blind and wholly horrible. Jim's companion mumbled something the others could not hear, and nodded his shapeless head slightly. His vote was for retirement, for although it had not been spoken, retirement was the word in question in the minds of all. Kentucky said nothing. True, it appeared that to stay there meant destruction; it appeared, too, that the Stonewalls as a fighting force must already be destroyed . . . and . . . and . . . *violets!* was it the scent of violets? No, not violets; but some flower . . .

Pug broke in. 'There's no orders to retire,' he said. 'There's no orders to retire,' and poked and turned his head, peering at one after the other of them. 'We can't retire when there ain't no orders,' wagging his pantomimic head triumph-

antly as if he had completely settled the matter. But their portion of trench continued to cave in alarmingly. A monster shell falling close out on their right front completed the destruction. The trench wall shivered, slid, caught and held, slid again, and its face crumbled and fell in. The four saw it giving and scrambled clear. They were almost on the upper ground level now, but the hurried glances they threw round showed nothing but the churned up ground, the drifting curling smoke-wreaths, tinted black and green and yellow and dirty white, torn whirling asunder every few moments by the fresh shell-bursts which in turn poured out more billowing clouds. No man of the Stonewalls, no man at all, could be seen, and the four were smitten with a sudden sense of loneliness, of being left abandoned in this end-of-the-world inferno. Then the man Jim noticed something and pointed. Dimly through the smoke to their left they saw one man running half doubled up, another so stooped that he almost crawled. Both wore kilts, and both moved forward. In an instant they disappeared, but the sight of them brought new life and vigour to the four.

'The Jocks that was on our left,' shouted Pug, 'gettin' out'er the trench into shell-holes. Good enough, too. Come on.'

They did not have far to seek for a shell-hole. The ground was covered with them, the circle of one in many cases cutting the circle of the next. There were many nearer available, but Pug sheered to his left and ran for the place he had seen the two Highlanders disappear, and the others followed. There were plenty of bullets flying, but in the noise of shell-fire the sound of their passing was drowned, except the sharp, angry hiss of the nearer ones and the loud smacks of those that struck the ground about them.

They had less than a dozen yards to cover, but in that short space two of them went down. Jim's companion was struck by a shell splinter and killed instantly. Pug, conscious only of a violent blow on the side, fell, rolling from the force of the stroke. But he was up and running on before Kentucky had well noticed him fall, and when they reached the shell-hole and tumbled into it almost on top of the two Highlanders there, Pug, cautiously feeling round his side, discovered his haversack slashed and torn, its contents broken and smashed flat. 'First time I've been glad o' a tin o' bully,' he shouted, exhibiting a flattened tin of preserved meat. 'But I s'pose it was the biscuits that was really the shell-proof bit.'

'Are you hurt at all?' said Kentucky.

'Not a ha'porth,' said Pug. 'Your pal was outed though, wasn't 'e, chum?'

The other man nodded. '. . . cross the neck . . . 'is 'ead too . . . as a stone. . . .'

'You're no needin' them,' said one of the Highlanders suddenly. 'It's only tear-shells—no the real gas.'

The others noticed then that they were wearing the huge goggles that protect the eyes from 'tear,' or lachrymatory shells, and the three Stonewalls exchanged their own helmets for the glasses with huge relief.

'What lot are you?' said one of the Scots. 'Oh, ay; you're along on oor right, aren't ye?'

'We was,' said Pug; 'but I 'aven't seen one o' ours since this last shell strafin' began. I'm wondering if there's any left but us three. Looks like our trench was blotted out.'

But on that he was corrected swiftly and dramatically. The pouring shells ceased suddenly to crash over and about them, continued only to rush, shrieking and yelling, high above their heads. At the same moment a figure appeared suddenly from the ground a little in front of them, and came running back. He was passing their shelter when Kentucky recognised him as the officer who earlier had moved along the trench to go out in front and

establish a listening post. He caught sight of the little group at the same moment, swerved, and ran in to them. 'Look out,' he said; 'another attack coming. You Stonewalls? Where's our trench? Further back, isn't it?'

'What's left of it, sir,' said Kentucky. 'Mighty near blotted out, though.'

'Open fire,' said the officer. 'Straight to your front. You'll see 'em in a minute. I must try'n find the others.'

But evidently the word of warning had reached the others, for a sharp crackle of rifle fire broke out along to the right, came rattling down towards them in uneven and spasmodic bursts. The men in the shell-hole lined its edge and opened fire, while the officer trotted on. A dozen paces away he crumpled and fell suddenly, and lay still. In the shell-hole they were too busy to notice his fall, but from somewhere further back, out of the smoke-oozing, broken ground, a couple of figures emerged at the double, halted by the limp figure, lifted and carried it back.

'There's still some of us left,' said Pug cheerfully, as they heard the jerky rifle fire steady down and commence to beat out in the long roll of independent rapid fire.

'Not too many, though,' said Kentucky

anxiously. And it took us all our time to stand 'em off before,' he added significantly. He turned to the two Highlanders, who were firing coolly and methodically into the thinning smoke. 'Can you see 'em yet ?

'No,' said one, without turning his head ; 'but we've plenty cairtridges . . . an' a bullet gangs straight enough without seein'.' And he and the other continued to fire steadily.

Then suddenly a puff of wind thinned and lifted the smoke cloud, and at the same instant all saw again that grim grey wall rolling down upon them. The five rifles in the pit crashed together, the bolts clicked back, and the brass cartridge-cases winked out and fell ; and before they had ceased to roll where they dropped the five rifles were banging again, and the five men were plying bolt and trigger for dear life. Behind them and to the right and left other rifles were drumming and roaring out a furious fire, and through their noise rose the sharp tat-tat-tat-tat of the machine guns. The British artillery, too, had evidently seen their target, the observers had passed back the corrections of range and rapid sequence of orders, and the bellowing guns began to rake and batter the advancing mass.

But this time they had an undue share of the

work to do. For all the volume and rapidity of the infantry fire, it was quickly plain that its weight was not nearly as great as before, that the intense preparatory bombardment had taken heavy toll of the defenders, that this time the attack had nothing like the numbers to overcome that it had met and been broken by before. Again the advancing line shredded and thinned as before under the rifle and shell fire, but this time the gaps were quicker filled; the whole line came on at greater speed. In the pit the five men shot with desperate haste, but Kentucky at least felt that their effort was too weak, that presently the advancing tide must reach and overwhelm them. Although other shell-holes to right and left were occupied as theirs was they were slightly in advance of the ragged line, and must be the first to be caught. There was nothing left them apparently but to die fighting. But if the others saw this they gave no sign of it—continued merely to fire their fastest.

One of the Highlanders exclaimed suddenly, half rose, and dropped again to his knees. The blood was welling from a wound in his throat, but as his body sagged sideways he caught himself with a visible effort, and his hands, which had never loosed their grip on the rifle, fumbled at the breech a moment, and slipped in a fresh clip of

cartridges. He gulped heavily, spat out a great mouthful of frothy blood, spoke thickly and in gasps, 'Hey, Mac . . . tak' her, for . . . the last. The magazine's full . . .' And he thrust out the rifle to the other Scot with a last effort, lurched sideways, and slid gently down in the bottom of the pit. The other man caught the rifle quickly, placed it by his side, and resumed firing. The others never ceased for a moment to load and fire at top speed. Plainly there was no time to attend to the dead or wounded when they themselves were visibly near the end the other had met.

The German line was coming in under the guard of the shells that the gunners dared not drop closer for fear of hitting their own line. The rifles were too few to hold back the weight of men that were coming in now in a scattered rush.

Pug cursed wrathfully. 'I do b'lieve the blighters is goin' to get in on us,' he said; and by his tone one might suppose he had only just realised the possibility; was divided between astonishment and anger at it. Kentucky, who had looked on the possibility as a certainty for some little time back continued to pick a man of the advancing line, snap-shoot hurriedly at him, load and pick another target. And away somewhere in the back of his mind his thoughts worked

and worried at the old, irritating puzzle—'Lilies, no; but something like them . . . heavy, sweetish . . . not lilies . . . what other flower, now . . .'; Jim, the third Stonewall, glanced back over his shoulder. 'Why can't them fellows back there shoot a bit quicker?' he said irritably. 'They'll have this lot a-top o' us if they don't look out.' Kentucky, his fingers slipping in a fresh cartridge-clip, his eye singling out a fresh mark, was slightly amused to notice that this man, too, seemed surprised by the possibility of the Germans breaking through their fire; and all the while '. . . lilac, stocks, honeysuckle, hyacinth . . . hyacinth, hyacinth, no . . .'; the Scot lifted the dead man's rifle and put it on the ledge at his right elbow.

'Strewth,' said Pug, with confident cheerfulness. 'Won't our chaps make them 'Uns squeal when they gets close enough for the baynit?''

The shells continued to rush and scream overhead, and burst in and over the mass of the attackers. But the front line was well in under this defence now, scrambling and struggling over the broken ground. The nearest groups were within thirty to forty yards.

They were near enough now for the bombers to come into play, and from the scattered shell-

holes along the British line little black objects began to whirl and soar out into the air, and the sharp crashes of the exploding 'Mills' grenades rose rapidly into a constant shattering series that over-ran and drowned out the rolling rifle fire. The ground out in front belched quick spurts of flame and smoke, boiled up anew in another devil's cauldron of destruction.

The advancing Germans were for the moment hidden again behind the swirling smoke bank, but now they too were using their bombs, and the stick-grenades came sailing out of the smoke; curving over, bombing down and rolling or bucketing end over end to burst about the British line. One fell fairly in the shell-crater beside Kentucky, and he had only bare time to grab at it, snatch it up and fling it clear before it burst. And yet, even as he snatched, half expecting the thing to go off in his hand, his mind was still running on the memory quest after the elusive name of that scent he had forgotten.

The German line emerged from the smoke, raggedly but yet solidly enough to overwhelm the weakened defence. Plainly this was the end.

'Roses,' said Kentucky, suddenly and triumphantly. 'Roses—tube-roses. That's it exactly.'