

A comparison of two documents purporting to be the reminiscences of Lt Henry (Harry) Kane O’Kelly, 2nd Battalion Duke of Wellington’s Regt, 1914

Author’s Note - The numbered annotations were made by me while producing this comparison document. The wording in **red print** was either erroneous on the original or was missing from the ‘other’ document. The gaps in the text were made by me in order to line up the wording of each document ‘side by side’. The number of words in each paragraph is in brackets. Scott Flavings’s transcription was made in a Word Table so I kept to the same format and paragraphs by the simple expedient of adding another column next to Scott’s. The narrative of the ‘Dublin suitcase’ version contains an extra 484 words compared to the Bruce / RHQ versions and then carries on for a further 442 words beyond the other version(s). **Graham Sargeant**

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| <p>The Document in this column was transcribed by Scott Flaving from the version held at RHQ Halifax - now held at Bankfield Museum.</p> | <p>Document in this column was transcribed by Mr Dave Goodman from a typed version discovered in a suitcase in Ireland - the original owner of which had links to Dublin.</p> |
| <p>TITLE OF DOCUMENT</p> | <p>TITLE OF DOCUMENT</p> |
| <p>‘ACCOUNT OF 2nd BATTALION WORLD WAR 1 BY Lt. H K O’KELLY DSO 22nd – 26th Aug 1914’</p> | <p>‘ACCOUNT -of- RETREAT FROM MONS August 1914, As written by C. O’Kelly *(1), Lieut., Duke of Wellington’s Regiment (Special Reserve)* (2).</p> <p>* (1) If this is a copy of the ‘original’ document then it typed out by O’Kelly himself? His initials were ‘H K’ and not ‘C’. (Read on for a possible explanation). * (2) To the best of our knowledge O’Kelly was never in the Special Reserve (3rd Battn) and was listed by the Battn upon him joining, in August, 1914, as being ‘From the Supplementary List’. In fact, the London Gazette of 23. 6. 1914 - page 4894 - stated that ‘D of W’s (WRR) Cadet Sergeant Henry Kane O’Kelly from Dublin University Contingent, Officers’ Training Corps (OTC) was promoted to be 2/Lt (on probation) on 24. 6. 1914’. (Once again – read on for a possible explanation).</p> |
| <p>‘We arrived in France about 22nd August at a large shipping port called HAVRE, entrained to a village called MARVILLES, where we stayed several days. We then did two days’ march to a town, HORNU. We arrived there on Saturday. (40)</p> | <p>‘We arrived in France about Aug. 22nd * (3) at a large shipping port called Havre, entrained to a village called Marvilles * (4), where we stayed several days. We then did a two days’ march to a town Hornu. We arrived here on Saturday. (41)</p> <p>* (3) Incorrect. The Battn embarked from Dublin on 13th August and disembarked at Havre on 15th August. They camped just outside the town until 17th August when the move forward began. * (4) (Marouilles)</p> |

On Sunday morning I attended Mass and, just as it was nearly over, I was sent for and told that the enemy had been reported marching in very large numbers towards HORNU, that they were unopposed and that, as far as we knew, our division was the only one about. No French troops had been seen. We were pushed forward very hurriedly and, after about five miles march, shells began to drop amongst us, doing some little damage. At that time I commanded a platoon, 54 men strong. I was told that there was a canal in front of me and that I was to line the bank between two certain points. Soon after I got into position I found myself enfiladed by rifle fire coming from our right. Assuming I had been given a wrong front I doubled the platoon out across the open and faced them the other way. In doing this manoeuvre I lost a few men. When I and my platoon were lying out in the open a very heavy rifle fire opened on us, also shells whistled over our heads but, so far no damage had been done. I saw a natural bank some distance in front of us and moved on, getting the men lined up against it. About an hour later (about 3 pm) we saw the enemy advancing in a great mass several hundreds strong, while we were 54 only. We opened fire and did terrible damage, the enemy's front rank falling fast but always filling up. Each man must have fired at least 700 rounds that evening.

I had sent several messages back to say unless help came very soon we would be wiped out as, of course, had we retreated into the open we would have been shot down at once. The enemy advanced very slowly but, towards 5 pm, were within 300 yards of us, at which time I got a message from Major Townsend, our Company Commander, telling me there was no possible hope of escape and that we must sell ourselves as dearly as possible, as he was also preparing to do. We fixed bayonets and waited patiently, the men behaving admirably. I told them our retreat had been cut off and that we could not expect to rejoin our regiment any more. This was the one and only time during that war that I prayed for a bullet and hoped that it would soon come. (409)

On Sunday morning I attended Mass and just as it was nearly over I was sent for and told that the enemy had been reported marching in very large numbers towards Hornu, that they were unopposed, and that, as far as we knew, our division was the only one about. No French troops had been seen. We were pushed forward very hurriedly, and after about five miles march shells began to drop amongst us, doing some little damage. At that time I commanded a platoon, 54 men strong. I was told that there was a canal in front of me and that I was to line the bank between two certain points. Soon after I got into position I found myself enfiladed by rifle fire coming from our right. Assuming I had been given a wrong front I doubled the platoon out across the open and faced them the other way. In doing this manoeuvre I lost a few men. When I and my platoon were lying out in the open a very heavy rifle fire opened on us, also shells whistled over our heads, but so far no damage had been done. I saw a sort of natural bank some distance in front of us and moved on, getting the men lined up in it. About an hour later (3 o'clock afternoon) we saw the enemy advancing in a general mass several hundreds strong while we were 54 only. We opened rapid fire and did terrible damage. The enemy's front rank falling fast but always filling up. Each man must have fired at least 700 rounds that evening. * (5) I myself picked up a dead man's rifle and fired till it got so hot the woodwork fell off and I was unable to hold it.

I had sent several messages back to say unless help came very soon we would be wiped out as, of course, had we retreated into the open we would have been shot down at once. The enemy advanced very slowly, but towards 5 o'clock were within 300 yards of us, at which time I got a message from the Major, our Company Commander, telling me that there was no possible hope of escape, and that we must sell ourselves as dearly as possible, as he was also preparing to do. We fixed bayonets and waited patiently, the men behaving admirably. I told them that our retreat had been cut off and that we could not expect to rejoin our regiment any more. This was the one and only time during that war that I prayed for a bullet and hoped that it would soon come. (440)

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| | <p>* (5) Each infantry soldier would normally have carried up to 150 rounds of ammunition about his person but this could extend to 300 rounds if carried in pouches on bandoliers around his neck and shoulders. So, unless O’Kelly’s platoon was re-supplied with ammunition (which might have been difficult in the circumstances pertaining on the day), or they had carried a few boxes of ammunition with them, [the 300 they carried plus the extra 400 O’Kelly suggests that they fired making 700] x 50 men = 20,000 rounds, then this figure of 700 seems rather high.</p> <p>[NB This was the first ‘whole sentence’ to go missing from this version of the document - but for what reason?].</p> |
| <p>Of course, had the Germans known our numbers they would have come on at once. About 5.30 a lot of bugles sounded the ‘cease fire’. I concluded that this could not possibly apply to me, so every time the enemy jumped up to advance we continued the fire. This, I afterwards learned, was treachery on the part of the Germans. They never got nearer than 200 yards as, suddenly, they started to retreat. They either suspected a trap, cavalry charge or something else, but imagine our delight when we found they retreated and we still kept up our fire until we could not see in the dark. Later that night Townsend sent for me and told me to retire. I had three men killed and about 12 wounded. We joined the battalion and found the total losses were very few, Captain Carter being the only officer wounded. (147)</p> | <p>Of course had the Germans known our numbers they would have come at once. About 5.30 a lot of bugles sounded the “cease fire”. I concluded that this could not possibly apply to me, so every time the enemy jumped up to advance we continued the fire. This, I afterwards learnt was treachery on the part of the Germans. They never got nearer than 200 yds. as suddenly they started to retreat. They either suspected a trap, cavalry charge, or something else but imagine our delight when we found they retreated, and we still kept up our fire until we could not see in the dark. Later that night Townsend sent for me and told me to retire. I had 3 men killed and about 12 wounded. We joined the battalion and found the total losses were very few, Capt. C..... being the only officer wounded. (147)</p> |
| <p>We marched all that night and took up a position behind a long wall which ran along the edge of a wood. The other three Companies dug trenches behind us in the wood at about 50 yard intervals. At about 3am on Monday morning, artillery fire poured into the wood from two directions. This fire lasted all day, till 5pm when we saw infantry advancing. It is too long an account to tell how that artillery fire almost wiped us out, suffice it to say that before 5pm I commanded half our own Company and half a Company of Bedfords. If you look at my sketch you will see some dotted lines on the right. This is where I was originally with my platoon which, before 3pm was depleted, leaving myself, one NCO and 17 men the only survivors. I</p> | <p>We marched all that night and took up a position behind a long wall which ran along the edge of a wood. The other 3 companies dug trenches behind us in the wood at about 50 yds. intervals. About 3 a.m. on Monday morning artillery fire poured into the wood from two directions. This fire lasted all day till five o’clock when we saw infantry advancing. It is too long an account to tell how that artillery fire absolutely wiped us out, suffice it was to say that before 5 o’clock I commanded half our own company and half a company of Bedfords. If you look at my sketch you will see some dotted lines in the right. This is where I was originally with my platoon which before 3 o’clock * (6) was wiped out, leaving myself, one N.C.O. and 7 men the only</p> |

then moved down to the wall and rejoined the remainder of my Company, found that Major Townsend was wounded and several junior officers, and that I had to take command of C Coy. I was also given, by Count Glietzen, about 100 Bedfords who had lost their officers about 4pm. The shelling became so heavy that the wall was being fast knocked down and men being killed in dozens. I went up and saw Colonel Gibbs, who was in the trench marked 2, and asked leave to retreat. This he refused to allow me to do, though **Major MacLeod**, the Second in Command, advised him to do so. I told him he had no idea of the slaughter going on. The poor **Colonel**, I suppose, thought he was doing his duty, but stuck firm. He was soon hit by a **stray** shell and **Major MacLeod** sent me down word at once to say I might retire and that he thought that I had better not do it through the wood as the further back trenches would stay on till later. (320)

survivors. I then moved down to the wall, and joined the remainder of my company, found that Townsend was wounded and several junior officers, and that I had to take command. I was also given by Count Glietzen about 100 Bedfords who had lost their officers about 4 p.m. * (6) The shelling became so heavy that the wall was being fast knocked down and men being killed in dozens. I went up and saw the Colonel who was in the trench marked two, and asked leave to retreat. This he refused to allow me to do, though the **Major**, the second in command, advised him to do so. I told him he had no idea of the slaughter going on. The poor **old fellow**, I suppose he thought he was doing his duty but stuck firm. He was soon hit by a **chance** shell (6) and **the Major** sent me down word at once to say I might retire, and that he thought I had better not do it through the wood as the further back trenches would stay on till later. (322)

* (6) Col Gibbs was wounded by the shell at around 12.05 so O'Kelly's previous timings are well out. [One's concept of time is probably the first thing to 'go' under such stressful conditions].

On the sketch there is a place marked by a hole in the wall which was made by a shell. Through this hole I started the retirement. The arrow, F, shows the position I wanted to get to and told the men to double through the hole and round by the arrow to F. Unfortunately, a machine gun opened fire the moment they appeared, killing men in dozens and, by the time I was to go, the hole was blocked up with bodies. This suited us, as it turned out, and myself and about four men left crouched under these bodies, and so got cover from the machine gun, whose bullets dumped about, making a most sickening noise on the poor bodies. Of course, we had to leave all the wounded behind the wall and all near the hole. As we ran up the road, myself and four men, about 12 Uhlans (cavalrymen) rode at us. We turned round, the men's rifle fire frightening the horses though they fired well up in the air. I, myself, fired four revolver shots, only nailing one Uhlan although they were quite close to us and, had we fixed bayonets, we would have done them all in. They

On the sketch there is a place marked by a hole in the wall which was made by a shell. Through this hole I started the retirement **and of course had to remain and come through last**. The arrow F shows the position I wanted to get to and told the men to double through the hole and round by the arrow to F. Unfortunately a machine gun opened fire the moment they appeared, killing men in dozens, and by the time I was to go, the hole was blocked up with bodies. This suited us as it turned out, and myself and about **4** men left crouched under these bodies, and so got cover from the machine guns whose bullets dumped about, making a most sickening noise on the poor bodies. Of course we had to leave all the wounded behind the wall and all near the hole. As we ran up the road, myself and **4** men, about 12 Uhlans (**cavalry men**) rode at us. We turned round, the mens' rifle fire frightening the horses though they **fired up** in the air. I myself fired **4** revolver shots only **2** nailing one Uhlan though they were quite close to us, and had we fixed bayonets we would have done them

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| <p>fled anyway, leaving the one dead, and we continued running up the road under a perfect hail of rifle bullets. Here I had my water bottle shot off. It was a very sad sight to see the long line of wounded (and dead) here, who begged us to help them which, of course, was impossible. When I got to the point F very few men were there. That night the Battalion retired eight miles back – its losses being very heavy indeed.</p> <p>As I have very little paper, less time and a very bad pen, I won't describe anything else till I come to the Battle of Le CATEAU, which happened several days later. (317)</p> | <p>all in. They fled anyway leaving one dead, and we continued running up the road under a perfect hail of rifle bullets. Here I had my water bottle shot off. It was a very sad sight to see the long line of wounded and dead here who begged us to help them which was of course impossible. When I got to the point F only about 45 (less than 50) of my men were there. That night the battalion retired 8 miles back. Its losses being 700 men missing and 13 officers left out of 36 * (7). As I have very little paper, less time, and a very bad pen, I won't describe anything else till I come to the battle of Le Cateau which happened several days later. (340)</p> <p>* (7) The true figures for the 'Dukes' losses at Wasmes were a more modest 12 officers and 236 men, most of whom had been wounded and taken prisoner. There were, however, hundreds of stragglers who had not caught up with the regt at this stage. The Dukes had, in fact, started with 26 officers plus another 2 on attachment.</p> |
| <p>We had a good night's rest before Le CATEAU; were wakened about half an hour before dawn and started to dig trenches where we had been sleeping. We had a splendid field of fire and could see a low level plateau for about 1,200 yards. At Le CATEAU we did not see infantry advancing at all, except at a great distance. Just as we were dug in, shells began to burst over our heads. Personally, I had made quite a good trench for myself. I was, at the time, in command of half a company. We stayed there all day under very awful shell fire, with our guns firing right beside us. I saw, that day, the gunners doing the most extraordinary feats of bravery. I saw one officer, with his arm blown off, still riding his horse giving instructions. Of course, he soon fainted from loss of blood but, just imagine, doing your duty with your arm blown off, in most awful agony, knowing you had only a few minutes more to live. I also saw batteries blown to pieces; one gun being left intact in one battery, immediately a team of gunners galloped out with their horses and hooked up and galloped back, with their gun, safe. (209)</p> | <p>We had a good night's rest before Le Cateau; were wakened about ½ an hour before dawn, and started to dig trenches where we were sleeping. We had a splendid field of fire and could see a low level plateau for about 1,200 yds. At Le Cateau we did not see infantry advancing at all. Just as we were dug in, shells began to burst over our heads. Personally, I had made quite a good trench for myself. I was at the time in command of half a Company. We stayed there all day under very awful shell fire, with our guns firing right beside us. I saw that day the gunners doing the most extraordinary feats of bravery. I saw one officer with his arm blown off still riding his horse giving instructions. Of course he soon fainted from loss of blood, but just imagine doing your duty with your arm blown off in most awful agony, knowing you only had a few minutes more to live. I also saw batteries blown to pieces, one gun being left intact in one battery; immediately a team of gunners galloped out with their horses and hooked in and galloped back with their gun safe. (203)</p> |
| <p>I saw an Artillery Major blown high in the air and falling down in small pieces. The Major was in</p> | <p>I saw an Artillery Major blown high in the air and falling down in small pieces. The Major was in</p> |

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| <p>command of our Battalion then and, I am sorry to say, an order to retire too soon was given. This would have meant that the German cavalry would have come across the gunners, but the General, quite calmly riding about amongst the shells, quite calmly asked our fellows to return and volunteer to try and save the gunners; this they did. Messages were repeatedly coming along to say French divisions and four Cavalry Brigades were coming up on our left to help us. Unfortunately, they never came.</p> <p>About 4pm we were told to retire on to the main road, every man for himself and to get away any way they could. (131)</p> | <p>command of our battalion then, and I am sorry to say gave the orders to retire too soon. This would have meant that the German cavalry would have come up across the gunners, but the General rising out amongst the shells, quite calmly asked our fellows to return and volunteer to try and save the gunners; this they did. Messages were repeatedly coming along to say French divisions and 4 Cavalry Brigades were coming up on our left to help us. Unfortunately, they never came, and we afterwards heard that the General and 30 of his officers were shot for being in the pay of the Germans. * (8) About 4 o'clock we were told to retire on the main road, every man for himself, and to get away any way they could. (151)</p> <p>* (8) As far as I am aware this was an unfounded rumour.</p> |
| <p>I happened to be the last to leave the front trenches and, coming along, I found the Major in his trench, he having made up his mind not to bother to escape.</p> <p>It was an awful sight, men rushing by in hundreds, every time a shell whistled they would drop down in terror. Most had no clothes, I mean coats and equipment, on. The Major and myself got on the road and here we found huge columns of transport, guns, wagons, ammunition columns, etc, etc, all struggling to get on, and infantry rushing by in thousands. I got the Major onto an ambulance wagon and trekked on myself, when I came up with one of our Captains. We were the only three officers left of my old Company. When we had gone on about three miles, often getting knocked about by the crowds rushing by, we were stopped by a General who asked for the senior officer. He told him he wanted an officer to stay behind on the crest of the hill, with some men, to protect the column which, he feared, would be followed up by the cavalry. The Captain told him he would do it were he not awfully ill and near a nervous breakdown and that he did not like asking me to do it. Of course, there was nothing for it but</p> | <p>I happened to be the last to leave the front trenches, and coming along I found the Major in his trench, he having made up his mind not to try and escape. I had terrible trouble to try and get him to come along, and it made me very sad to see a fine strong man weeping bitterly, and I really think he was not weeping about himself but at the rout of the fine British Army. It was an awful sight, men rushing by in hundreds, every time a shell whistled they would drop down in terror. Most had no clothes, I mean coats and equipments, on. The Major and myself got on the road, and here we found huge columns of transport, guns, wagons, ammunition columns, etc. etc., all struggling to get on, and infantry rushing by in thousands. I got the Major on to an ambulance wagon, and trekked on myself when I came up with the Captain. We were the only three officers left of A Company, my old Company. When we had gone about 3 miles, often getting knocked down by the crowds rushing by, we were stopped by a General who asked for the senior officer. He told him he wanted an officer to stay behind on the crest of the hill with some men to protect the column which he feared would be followed up by cavalry. The Captain told him he would do it were he not awfully ill and near a nervous breakdown, and that he did not like asking me to do it. Of course there was nothing but for me to say that I</p> |

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| <p>for me to say I would do it. So the General stopped about 130 men of all regiments and pushed them into a field. (251)</p> | <p>would do it. So the General stopped about 130 men of all regiments, pushed them into a field, and promised me that he would arrange for 6 motor lorries to remain to hurry us away if we stopped until the last. I have not since seen the General, but I think I know who he is and hope yet to see him some day. (339)</p> |
| <p>I found that we had a machine gun with us and another, very young, officer. I don't know what regiments were with us, was too tired to notice particulars, only I saw about seven men of our own regiment, whom I called together and asked them to show a bold front and give a good example. I also told them that they would probably be motored back. Well, it was getting on towards twilight, with no sign of the enemy. The infantry and the cavalry had mostly, except for stragglers...</p> <p>...passed on, when I saw Germans bringing a big gun down a laneway with twelve horses attached. I got the machine gun on them and shot the twelve. They brought up another lot and tried to harness them; these were also shot, and we were beginning to enjoy it, when a shell burst amongst us. This came from a gun they had brought up from the other side of the road.</p> <p>This shell blew up the machine gun and killed seven or eight men, including the little officer.</p> <p>Immediately, three other shells burst in our midst, doing frightful havoc and everyone ran, myself included. (194)</p> | <p>I pushed the men on top of the hillock in open order and found to my great delight that we had a machine gun with us and another very young officer. I don't know what regiments were with us, was too tired to notice particulars, only I saw about 7 men of our own regiment, whom I called together and asked them to show a bold front and give a good example. I also told them that they would be motored back. Well it was getting on towards twilight, with no sign of the enemy in sight. The infantry and cavalry had all passed on, when two men leading 7 horses came along with a message from the General, saying he was awfully sorry but the motor wagons were full of wounded, and that these 7 horses might give some of us a rest, but that in case they would not come with us I was to shoot them and on no account let the Germans get them. I consulted with the other officer fellow, and decided not to tell then men, as I know they would not hesitate to shoot me if they knew. I also sent away the two grooms. About ten minutes later I saw Germans bringing a big gun down a laneway with twelve horses attached. I got the machine gun on them and shot the 12. They brought another lot and tried to harness them, these were also shot, and were beginning to enjoy it when a shell burst amongst us. This came from a gun they had brought from the other side of the road, and my observers had not done their duty, and had run away and failed to keep a watch, as of course I could not be on both sides of the road.</p> <p>This shell blew up the machine gun and killed seven or eight men including the little officer.</p> <p>Immediately 3 other shells burst in our midst, doing frightful havoc, and everyone run, myself included. (335)</p> |
| <p>When we collected together I halted them about 30 yards back in a cave and found only 11 men and</p> | <p>When we collected together I halted them about 30 yds. back in a cave and found only 11 men and</p> |

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| <p>myself; We sat there until it was dark and then I crept back and found a good many were only wounded but found none who could walk. We then started to try and escape and I decided to do so across country. The first village we came to was deserted and, as I had neither map nor compass, I had not the slightest idea where we went. We must have gone in a ring and, of course, very slowly. Anyway, the next village I came to was full of Germans and some of our prisoners. I set off again in the opposite way and so kept going all night, sometimes passing quite near Germans, always afraid to approach a peasant as, on one occasion, I rode up to one to ask the way and she called her husband and the two together cried out most hysterically "Vive l'Angleterre", which brought Germans, who were feeding in her house, out after us. Towards morning I decided that I must hide in some place and sleep all day and creep out at night again. (201)</p> | <p>myself, and succeeding in catching 5 of the horses. We sat there until it was dark, and then I crept back and found a good many were only wounded but found none who could walk. We then started to try and escape, and I decided to do so across country. The first village we came to was deserted, and as I had neither map nor compass I had not the slightest idea where we went. We must have gone in a ring and of course very slowly, sharing our 5 horses. Anyway the next village I came to was full of Germans and some of our prisoners. I set off again in the opposite way and so kept going all night, sometimes passing quite near Germans, always afraid to approach a peasant, as on one occasion I rode up to one to ask the way and she called her husband and the two together called out most hysterically "Vive L'Angleterre" which brought Germans who were feeding in her house out after us. Towards morning I decided I must hide some place and sleep all day and creep out at night again. So we tied up the horses in a little wood and crept into a stack nearby. (228)</p> |
| <p>We were only nine, two having fainted in the night. We were too tired to keep a watch, so just fell asleep.</p> <p>That night, one of the men appeared to be going off his head and, as he was getting violent, we left him sleeping and stole away without him. I did not like doing it but, if I awakened him, I would have been in for it as, of course, the men loathed me for betraying them, as they called it.</p> <p>Next daylight we hid in a cave and when I woke up it was just getting dark. I found that, of the seven men, only three remained, four having left us in the day. That night (the third night) we did not see a single German and all I can remember is trekking</p> | <p>We were only 9, 2 having fainted during the night. We were too tired to keep a watch, so just fell asleep. I was wakened up by one of the men when it was dark. I did not know how long we had slept. We got up and found only 4 horses, one having either broken away or been stolen. This night the place was so infested with Germans that I was obliged to kill the four horses. This I did with a piece of iron paling and a mallet. We had tried muffling their feet with cloth but it was no use, the poor beasts were so hungry that whenever they heard a German horse they would neigh and nearly go mad. That night one of the men appeared to be going off his head and as he was getting violent we left him sleeping and stole away without him. I did not like doing it, but if I wakened him I would have been in for it, as of course the men loathed me for betraying them, as they called it, and would have killed me only they trusted me to lead them out. Next daylight we hid in a cave and when I woke up it was just getting dark. I found of the seven men, only three remained, four having left us in the day. That night (the third night) we did not see a single German and all I can remember is trekking along by myself. When I</p> |

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| <p>along by myself. When I woke up I found myself in an ambulance in charge of a Lieut _____. He told me, the next day, that he had picked me up, a nervous wreck, and that he was with the 4th Division which had been only three days out in France. He was a very nice chap and wanted to report the thing to Headquarters but after two night's rest I was so rational he did not like to report the matter, which I begged him not to do. He eventually handed me over to Headquarters with a report that I was picked up by one of his ambulances, very fatigued after several days marching. I gave General Snow (4th Division) a slight account of why I stayed behind and he very kindly placed a motor car at my disposal, in which I got to the 2nd Division, and joined the Regiment. I was absent four days and four nights, not including my three days motoring with the 4th Division. (305)</p> | <p>woke up I found myself in an ambulance in charge of Lieut. He told me next day that he had picked me up a raving lunatic, and that he was with the Fourth Division which had been only three days out in France. He was a very nice chap and wanted to report the thing in Headquarters, but after two nights' sleep I appeared so rational he did not like to report me a lunatic, which I begged him not to do. He eventually handed me over to Headquarters with a report that I was picked up by one of his ambulances, very fatigued after several days marching. I gave General (Third Division) a slight account of why I stayed behind and he very kindly placed a motor car at my disposal, in which I got to the Second Division, and joined the Regiment. I was absent four days and four nights, not including my three days motoring with the Third Division. (417)</p> |
| <p>The retirement from Le CATEAU lasted three weeks * (?) and for the first week we were badly pressed by the Germans. We used to have very hard marching and very little sleep. During that three weeks I hardly ever closed my eyes more than an hour when I used to wake up in a panic, thinking I had been deserted. I told very few in the Regiment a full account of my experience, but any I did tell were awfully decent and they used to sleep beside me and assure me when I would jump that I was alright. I have quite got over that now and can sleep anywhere and everywhere. (113)</p> | <p>The retirement from Le Cateau lasted three weeks * (9) and for the first week we were badly pressed by the Germans. We used to have very hard marching and very little sleep. During that three weeks I hardly ever closed my eyes more than an hour and used to wake up in a h--- of a panic, thinking I had been deserted. I told very few of the Regiment a full account of my experiences but any I did tell were awfully decent and they used to sleep beside me and assure me when I would jump that I was all right. I have quite got over that now and can sleep anywhere and everywhere. The two officers referred to true enough both fainted a little further down the road that day, and both are at present in England suffering from nervous break-down. We have only six officers (Original ones) with us now. (152)</p> <p>* (9) Actually, it lasted 12/13 days from 24.8.14 until 5.9.14</p> |
| <p>This brings my account up to the time when we started to advance, which we had steadily continued, never once have we yielded ground, except for a few hours. (29)</p> | <p>This brings my account up to the time when we started to advance, which we have steadily continued, never once have we yielded ground except for a few hours. (29)</p> |
| <p>The next account of any interest was the capture of the Death's Head Hussars. We were retreating about a fortnight from the date of Le CATEAU *(?)</p> | <p>The next account of any interest was the capture of the Death's Head Hussars. We were retreating about a fortnight from the date of Le Cateau *(10)</p> |

and on arrival at a village we were informed that a cavalry division had pushed on very rapidly and were about four miles behind us. We were told this about 7pm. C Company was on duty and at that time I was in command of it. As you know, a senior Captain or Major, a 2nd Captain and four subalterns is the correct number of officers to a Company. I was sent on outpost duty, which means that my Company had to stay on watch all night while the other three companies slept. I got the men stretched across our front for about a mile, made the usual arrangements and lay down to sleep, with instructions that I was to be called on anything being seen. (152)

and on arrival at the village we were informed that a Cavalry Division had pushed on very rapidly and were about four miles behind us. We were told this about 7 o'clock. "C" Company was on duty and at that time I was in command of it. I had no other officers. As you know a senior Captain or Major, a second Captain and four subalterns are the correct number of officers to a Company. I was sent on outpost duty which means that my Company had to stay on watch all night while the other three Companies slept. I got the men stretched across our front for about a mile, made the usual arrangements and lay down to sleep with instructions that I was to be called on anything being seen. (158)

* (10) 2/DWR reached Crepy-en-Valois 5 days after the battle of Le Cateau. If O'Kelly really had been 'wandering around for 4 days' after this battle then his actions at Crepy-en-Valois which earned him his DSO must have occurred just a day or so after he had rejoined the Battalion.

At dawn some cavalry were pointed out to me on the crest line. I judged them to be a patrol sent on, so gave instructions not to fire on anything without orders. I sent down a message to Headquarters saying I might require reinforcements later and started the company digging themselves in. A road ran through my front and this is where I selected my own trench, putting some of the Company on each side of the road. I got a message to say B Company was 300 yards in my rear and, if I wanted reinforcements, to send for them. About 900 yards away from my trenches there was a thick wood. About two hours later we shot some cavalry approaching from our left. A little later two motor cars came spinning down the road. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping the men from firing till they got in close range. At about 300 yards we loosed off and succeeded in stopping the motor cars, which were armoured. Immediately we came under a veritable hail of bullets from the wood as we did not think the enemy had infantry so near. I then noticed a man signalling from the motor car in the rear so, determined...(208)

At dawn some cavalry were pointed out to me on the crest line. I judged them to be a patrol sent on so gave instructions not to fire on anything without orders. I sent down a message to Headquarters saying I might require reinforcements later and started the Company digging themselves in. A road ran through my front and this was where I selected for my own trench, putting some of the Company on each side of the road. I got a message to say B Company was 300 yds. in my rear and if I wanted reinforcements to send for them. About 900 yds. from my trenches there was a thick wood. About 2 hours later we shot some cavalry approaching from our left. A little later two motor cars came spinning down the road. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping the men from firing till they got in close range. At about 300 yds. we loosed off and succeeded in stopping the motor cars which were armoured. Immediately we came under a veritable hail of bullets from the wood as we did not think the enemy had infantry so near. I then noticed a man signalling from the motor car in the rear, so determined...(208)

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|---|---|
| <p>Total Words to this point = 3,026 (A difference of 484 words between this version and the one opposite! - So, almost 500 - words were lost / cut at some stage from the version discovered recently in Dublin!)</p> | <p>Total Words to this point = 3,510 (A difference of 484 words between this version and the one opposite! - So, almost 500 - words were lost / cut at some stage from the version discovered recently in Dublin!)</p> |
| <p><i>Account ends here</i></p> | <p><i>This account continues as follows -</i></p> |
| | <p>...as we could not reach them with bullets we would have to charge them. I then sent a message to D Company asking them to come up and support us as I was going to charge and wanted covering fire. I got back a message from the officer of D Company to say he was very sorry to say he was not able to bring up the Company as the men had refused to move. I called out for volunteers and charged out with fixed bayonets. We reached the motor cars right enough. There was an old general potting at me with an automatic pistol, and I determined not to miss him as I am a hopeless shot with a revolver. I shoved it in his face and pulled the trigger nearly blowing the poor old chap's head off. The men prodded most of the others and some had been hit with rifle bullets. I tried to start the cars but could not get either going so was obliged to leave everything as we were under very heavy fire. We first burst up a gun which they had mounted on the rear car. I also took all the despatches and relieved the old gent of his revolver which I have still. I also took a few other things which I afterwards lost. There were two serio-comic things about it. No. 1. – An officer in great agony was waving his arms, nothing would persuade one of our fellows that he was not signalling, so he bayoneted him. A second was a young aide-de-camp who spoke English quite well, begged of me not to kill him and offered me a lot of jewellery as a bribe. I don't know what he took me for. On the return journey we came under rifle fire from the direction of our own trenches. It turned out to be a b----- (excuse language) young fool of an East York * (11) Regiment who mistook us for Germans. He shot two of my seven volunteers and three got wounded from German fire, so I was extraordinarily lucky to escape. The capture turned out to be Headquarters staff of First German Cavalry Division, which was composed of Death's Head Hussars and was of some importance. I am glad to say the five survivors of the volunteers have been</p> |

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| | <p>recommended for the D.S.M. *(11) From that day on we started our advance, and as it has taken me two days to write this very rough account, I think I will start the other again. If we are still held up here I shall have time to write it up to date. (442)</p> <p>* (11) This piece of information was also missing from the version which appears in Bruce (1927), and which ma it look as if the firing came from The 'Dukes!'</p> <p>*(12) Actually, the DCM</p> |
| | <p><i>End of account</i></p> |

Conclusions

The above comparison leads me to the following conclusions - Firstly, the typed document, found in the suitcase in Dublin, described as 'a copy', is more likely to be a 'truer' copy of Lt O'Kelly's 'original' hand-written account than the versions found in C D Bruce's book and at RHQ. The Bruce / RHQ documents are missing 484 words from its text compared to the 'suitcase' version and those 'missing' words and phrases could be described as being either 'emotive' or 'detrimental' to certain individuals / units. There were, therefore, plausible reasons for C D Bruce (and, as a result, the transcriber of the RHQ version) to have made some judicious editing in the 1920s at a time when emotions from the Great War were still raw and while certain individuals were still alive. However, in the 'Dukes' archive there are other accounts from 'Dukes' officers which appear to be unadulterated and which do criticise fellow officers and the conduct of the war. The difference being that those accounts do not appear in Bruce's book and were probably acquired by / donated to the archive many years later. The narrative in the Dublin version carries on for a further 442 words beyond the other versions. It may well be that the 'unseen hand' of Brigadier-General Bruce appears in all of this - just as it did over the 'probably incorrect' and 'unattributed' annotations to Col Gibbs' map of the Wasmes battlefield which also appeared in his 1927 book. Secondly, there is a connection to Dublin, via Pte Hickey's medals, which were also found in the suitcase. He had served in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in WWI and had become a POW very early in the war. Pte Hickey could well have been a friend or associate of O'Kelly.

The alternative theory is that there were two entirely different versions of this account drafted by O'Kelly but I don't see this as being either likely or feasible, especially in view of O'Kelly's rather forthright nature. I much prefer the above theory, i.e. that O'Kelly's account was 'edited' for use in Bruce's book and that an identically edited account was 'made' for the 'Dukes' archive at some later stage and was subsequently treated as a 'genuine' or 'original' copy. It all begs the question - was the copy used by Bruce a 'carbon' copy of the original - and was the 'suitcase' version actually one of the original typed-up copies? Unless Lt O'Kelly kept a 'yet to be found' copy for himself then I guess we will never know. The other mystery is how that document came to be in that suitcase in Dublin? I also wonder if O'Kelly ever read Bruce's book and what he made of it. He may well have concurred with the editing-out of his 'emotive' and possibly 'defamatory' comments or he may, by then, have completely forgotten what he had written all those years previously. As for possible 'IRA retribution' - we know that H K O'Kelly lived and worked in the UK for many years and commanded a Home Guard battalion in WW2.

Perhaps there are lessons to be learnt from this - 'Be careful what you write in your memoirs and always leave a long cooling off period before putting pen to paper.' Secondly - 'If you are going to subtly edit someone else's memoirs then be careful you are not subsequently accused of "tampering with the evidence!"'

After an eventful life Henry (Harry) Kane O'Kelly died in 1975 in Co. Wicklow.

Lastly, it was quite propitious that the 'Dublin suitcase' version came into my hands as I am probably the only person who knows the previously encountered versions 'chapter and verse' and I was immediately able to identify the document as being of some importance. Only one thing is spoiling this tale for me and that is that in his account O'Kelly refers to a map which probably accompanied his account and which obviously relates to troop dispositions at Wasmes on 24th August, 1914. That map could solve many of the riddles about the battle at Wasmes. If anyone knows its whereabouts then could they please contact us.

Graham Sargeant July, 2018.

PS - I am always open to further suggestions, comments and ideas on the above.