THE BATTLE OF GAZA.

HOW SUSSEX BOYS WENT THROUGH A HAIL OF METAL.

A HAYWARDS HEATHENS LETTER.

Privates B. Cope, Royal Sussex Regiment, writing from Egypt to Haywards Heath, says:—“Perhaps you would like to hear about our attack on Gaza. Well, we packed up on Saturday, March 24th, as we had orders to move off at four o’clock the same night, and about 4.30, we moved off with the whole Brigade. We were marching for about five or six hours, with an interval between for resting. We arrived at our destination about 9.30, and started the night in an orchard. We moved off again on Sunday afternoon, going as we knew were. We were marching from dawn till about nine o’clock, when we halted again for a couple of hours, during which time we got what little sleep we could. At 1.30 we started off again, and were marching up to 1.30 o’clock on Monday morning to a ridge, where we massed in two halt. Everyone, more or less, had no idea we were going into action again. The morning was cold and thick with a dense fog. We stayed on the side of a hill for a time, where we had something to eat until the fog came out and the sun shone away. We then had orders to fall in and lead up with ten rounds of shell on the ridge. We had already been issued with a bandolier containing an extra 50 rounds of ammunition, in addition to what we were carrying, and we knew then that the wind was up. About 6.30 we advanced over the hill and then separated in Platoon, our own Platoon going into a gully close by under cover. We saw our artillery coming up behind, and as soon as their guns were in position they started bombarding the Turkish position. The enemy also began to get active with their artillery, which, in my opinion, was by no means inaccurate as regards firing, for they had got the range to a nicety. In fact, I think they had some far more experienced gunners there than they had on Gallipoli. As near as I could judge, it was about mid-day when we got the order to join our Company and prepare to advance. And what an advance that was to be sure! What we went through only those who were there and saw it fully know, and they will never forget it. How we were scoured that shell-swept plain God only knew, for shrapnel was littering all around us. Never did any regiment advance more gallantly, or with more pluck and grit. To make hardship doubly hard the rain was pouring down on us plentifully, and, worst of all, we were short of water, as it was impossible to get a transport up, for as soon as the canons which formed our transport advanced they were cut to pieces. At last we arrived within a short distance of the firing lines into a large gully, where we had a breather. Thus came the order to fix bayonets and charge. With a mighty shout, over the top we went, into the front lines through a perfect hail of bullets and shrapnel, which cast death and destruction all around. Any man who came out of that fight with his life, even if he was wounded—and a good many were—can think himself lucky. The ——— came up on our left flank, and as we were the first there we suffered heavily. We lost one poor old Colonel, I am sorry to say, beside several officers. I do not know the exact number of our casualties, but I am afraid they are heavy. We put up we braved a fight as any Regiment ever did, but we had to retreat at last, for no living thing could hope to get through that inferno of shell-fire. Never shall I forget the 26th March, 1917, as long as I live, or the splendid work done by our officers and men. Everyone showed what he was made of and proved himself a man. I am very glad to say I was one of the lucky ones, and came through it all unhurt, but a good shaking up, which I think everyone got. But many a brave lad will carry the marks of that fight to his grave. I cannot praise the good old Sussex too highly, for they proved themselves true Britons, and still keep up the tradition of the Sussex Regiment. I trust this will appear in ‘The Min’, which we are all glad to read whenever we get the chance.”