

Mid-Sussex Times 1st May 1917 page 3**THE BATTLE OF GAZA.****HOW SUSSEX BOYS WENT THROUGH
A HAIL OF METAL.****A HAYWARDS HEATHEN'S LETTER.**

Private B. Cook, 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 occasional interval between for resting. We arrived at our destination about 9.30, and stayed the night in an orchard. We moved off again on Sunday afternoon, going no one knew where. We were marching from three up 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 11.30 we started off again, and were marching up till 4.30 o'clock on Monday morning to a ridge, where we made another halt. Everyone, more or less, had an 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 sun came out and the mist cleared away. We then had orders to fall in and load up with ten rounds of ball cartridges. 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 Platoons, my 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 positions. 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 rejoin 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 got across that shell-swept plain God only knows, for shrapnel was bursting all around us. Never did any regiment advance more gallantly, or with more pluck and grit. To make hardship doubly hard the sun was shining down on us pitilessly, and, worst of all, we were short of water, as it was impossible to get a transport up, for as soon as the camels which formed our transport advanced they were cut to pieces. At last we arrived within a short distance of the firing line into a large gully, where we had a breather. Then came the order to fix bayonets and charge. With a mighty shout, over the top we went, into the front line through a perfect hail of bullets and shrapnel, which dealt out death and destruction all around. Any man who came out of that fight with his life, even if he were 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 our 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 as brave 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 shewed 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 bar 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 Britishers, and still keep up the reputation of the Sussex Regiment. I trust this will appear in 'THE MID,' which we are all glad to read whenever we get the chance."