

"Battering the Boche" With the Colonials

How the Senegalese, Moroccans and Algerians Fought at the Chemin des Dames and Cleaned Up the German Trenches

By PRESTON GIBSON.

PART IV.

THE evacuation hospital held about 1,800 men and was made of canvas, the wounded being put on the ground on stretchers. There was a small bar where four separate divisions contributed coffee, hard boiled eggs, sandwiches of cheese and champagne free. Of course they were only for the wounded and those working in the hospital.

I must say here again that the French are wonderful. No man took even a slice of bread unless he was really hungry, and then ate very sparingly, and I was shocked to see one—thank heaven, only one—American eat sandwich after sandwich after having had a full supper at 6 o'clock—and these wounded men taking simply a bite or a swallow, though some of them had not had anything to eat all day.

Wounded Lay in the Cars.

The wounded began to arrive in a line of automobiles stretching for a mile and a half along the road. It was a big attack and a big job was on. The cold got under my skin, for I had to be outside all the time.

The wounded now came in so fast that finally there was not room for one more stretcher in the hospital and the last arrivals had to stay in the cars on the road until some of the patients could be removed to other base hospitals. Yet this hospital covered an area equal to that of the lower floor of the Biltmore. I noticed that nothing but Colonials came in—Senegalese, Zouaves, Moroccans, Algerians, Chasseurs. I talked with one, a youngster who was shot in the head.

It was now about 6 o'clock in the morning. The smell, the stench of blood, the tiny stoves bringing it out, was overpowering and the surgeons were literally dripping. The youngster said the fight was going splendidly. He was one of the first over the top. The attack was launched about midnight, following a terrific tir de barrage which had been going on for eleven days and nights and which had used up about \$100,000,000 worth of ammunition.

Boche Fears Long Knives.

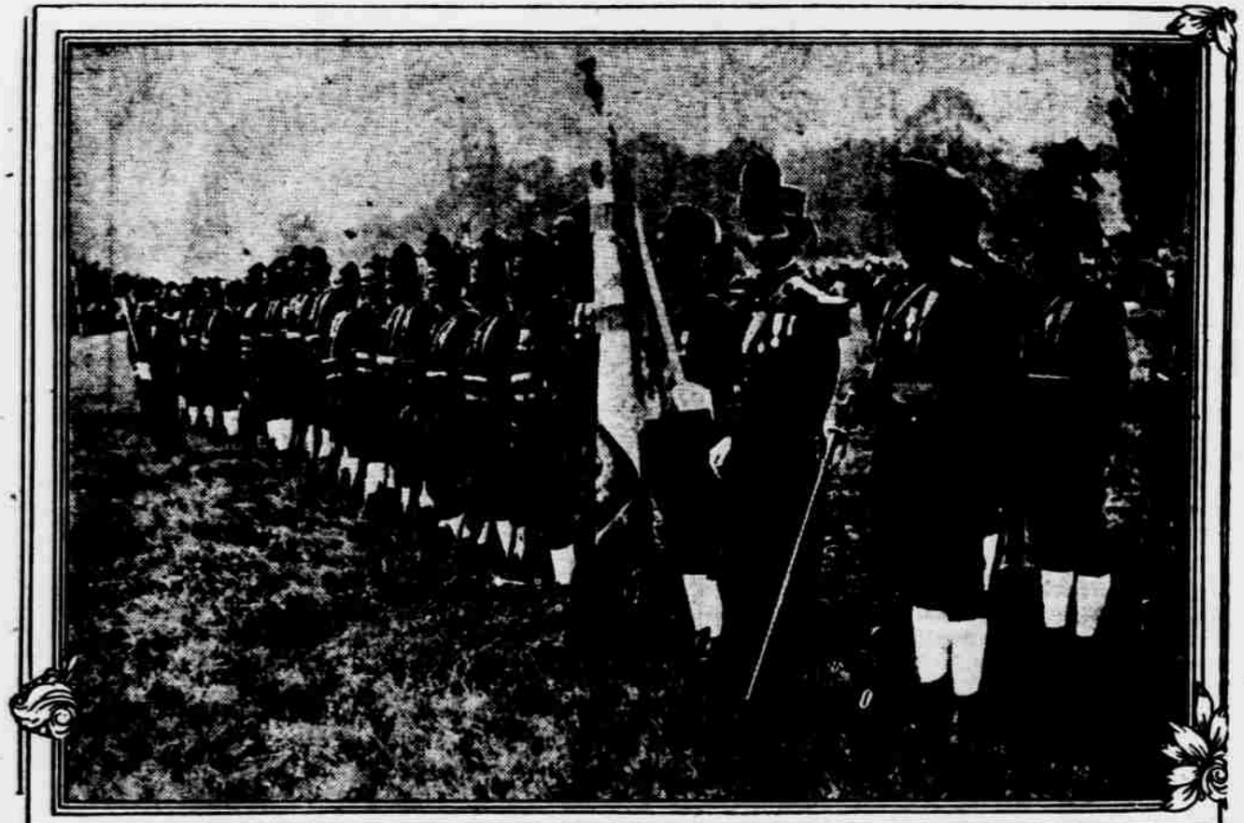
With star shells illuminating their path the negroes, Zouaves and Algerians, armed with hand grenades and long knives only, went over and kept going over in wave after wave. The Boche could not stand the thousands of knives glittering in the star shell light and they gave way. The first trench was taken and the Chasseurs came over, followed by the Zouaves.

The French Lieutenants then rounded up the Senegalese, who took advantage of many opportunities to dodge the bullets from German rapid fire guns by hiding in shell holes. The officers simply give them a kick and said, "Get up and go on," and if the negroes did not obey they of course would threaten to shoot them, but the order is usually sufficient. Throat after throat was slit from ear to ear by these expert negroes. The Boche don't like this kind of fighting and fell back over the Chemin des Dames, up to the Fort of Malmaison, where they had their big guns.

Treachery of the Germans.

This killing of the Germans has become necessary, as so many Boche have feigned to be wounded or shouted "Kamerad!" with both hands up, only to stab their captor from behind as soon as his back was turned. This piece of treachery accomplished, they lie down again, awaiting the next victim. So these Senegalese, who are marvellous with the knife, cut each throat. It is the only safe method.

The Zouaves, Chasseurs and Senegalese do not like to take prisoners in any event. They have suffered too much from the "Kamerad" trick. I know of one case in which a whole regiment of Boches were taken prisoners with their hands up. Then suddenly, at a signal, they all lay down on the ground, and behind them



Senegalese, with white officers. Some of the French Colonial troops who battered the Boche badly at the Chemin des Dames.

a section of rapid fire German guns got into action and simply laid 900 French Chasseurs dead on the ground. They then retreated.

One great feature of the French temperament is this: having seen about 4,200 wounded, I have never noticed the slightest indication or suggestion of a desire that one man be moved or taken care of before another. One man who was lying within an inch or two of another—they were all like sardines on the ground—uttered a groan and I went over and gave him a drink. His stomach was practically shot away and he was in great pain. But not by even the raising of an eyelash did he indicate a wish to be treated before the youngster who lay near him and who simply had his hand injured.

Wounded Never Whimper.

Others lay for half an hour soaking their stretchers with blood, but never a whimper, never a word from them; all were silent in their suffering. And they had been through a great trial. I must give you an idea of how long it takes a man who has been wounded to get to a hospital.

He is wounded on the field, say, at 12 o'clock. He is brought in by the stretcher bearers at 12:30 to the third line. He waits his turn, about fifteen minutes; then he is taken to a poste de secours; then put into the ambulance about fifteen minutes later; then driven to a field hospital, a trick which takes from half to three-quarters of an hour. Then he waits from fifteen minutes to one hour for his turn; is carried into the hospital and again waits his turn, not less than fifteen minutes; then is transferred into another ambulance for a trip of several kilometers to a base hospital—traffic frightfully congested, time allowed from half to three-quarters of an hour. In other words, during this attack a man was lucky if he reached a base hospital within three and a half hours after he was wounded.

German Wounded Only Boys.

Now the German wounded began to come in, all boys of from 17 to 20. I must have seen about 150 of them and I saw not one who looked over 20. I talked with a number of them in French and in English. They were brought in with the French wounded, in the same ambulances, and there was no discrimination in the treatment of the French and of the German wounded.

Yet in the face of this Germans, when on the way to a French hospital in a French ambulance to be cared for by a French doctor at the expense of France, if they have a free hand, reach over in the car and tear open the bandage from a helpless Frenchman, hoping that he may bleed to death before he reaches the hospital. There have been a number of cases in which a Boche has torn off a Frenchman's bandage with his teeth, thus opening an artery and causing the death of the Frenchman.

A boy of 17 who was shot in the head told me he had not tasted food or drink for four days; had not even had any water. I got him some. He had no shoes or stockings or underwear, just his

coat and breeches, which were soaked through with rain, mud and blood. A French stretcher bearer outfitted him.

He said the French artillery was terrific; you could not get away from it. It was everywhere. Their roads had been and were being shelled so that no food could be brought up to the soldiers and he was glad when he was wounded and taken by the French.

I asked him how he happened to get over with us, and he replied that the last thing he saw was four stretcher bearers carrying a German, when a shell burst and killed all five of them. He then decided it was safer over on the French lines and he had crawled over. This was the first time he had ever been under fire.

The French treat these wounded Germans, who have killed their fathers and brothers, and left French mothers and sisters and widows roofless, just as they treat their own wounded. Just as gently they carry them and cover them with blankets and give them food and warm drink; while we are told the Boches starve, mutilate, inoculate with disease, torture for information, the gallant Frenchmen they capture. What a lesson the Christ has taught these people!

Helped Any One He Could.

At this time I had no special duty. I was there to help in any capacity possible. The road was now filled with *assés* (or men who have been wounded but still can walk), with fractured arms, wounded heads and hands or other comparatively slight wounds; hundreds of them, a stream of humanity, dripping with blood, seeking aid. And not a single murmur, not a single complaint. Many I helped into the hospital, through the driving rain and mud, whose feet were frozen or numb from the wet and cold. It seemed curious, in a way, to go up to one of these fellows, a negro, say, covered with mud, who had fallen or slipped down; to help him up and to have him put his arm over your shoulder, while you assisted him to go where there was succor, though at the moment one only thought, "It's part of the game, play it, or sit at home."

Asked for a Cigarette.

A young South African came up the road with a wet bandage around his head and a spot of red over his right eye about the size of a silver dollar. He was a very fine type. He stopped and asked me for a cigarette. He said that along the whole battle front the Germans were retreating precipitately over the Oise-Aisne canal; that the French had captured the fortified village of Pinon to the left of and far above the Fort of Malmaison; that the whole forest of Pinon was now in French hands; that the Boches were in full retreat.

It was now 1 A. M., October 25. Many Senegalese walked in with frozen feet or sat around the tiny stove. The rain now turned into sleet. The wind was cold and they do not stand cold well—nor do I. The stove was only about ten inches in diameter, and the odor arising from overheated boots and unwashed bodies and mud soaked clothes and caked

blood was almost unbearable. Despite that we crowded around the stove. It was at least warm.

My South African acquaintance said: "I went over the top at 10 o'clock this morning. It was very hard going, as the mud was too slippery to afford a footing, but we managed to get out and at them, using mitrailleuses, hand grenades and knives, and we put them on the run. Our tir de barrage had simply slaughtered them."

Carrier pigeons now came back and brought the news that the French had captured the high tower of Pinon, which was two and a half miles from their starting point, together with about 5,000 prisoners and seventy-five cannon.

Preparation Really Marvellous.

The preparation for this attack had been really marvellous. As far back as Vailly and Braisne, on every road, in every clump of woods, even in fields, were piles and piles of ammunition. It took a good six weeks to bring up the ammunition alone for this attack.

Arriving at the poste de secours, which is about half a mile from the third line, we found a great number of dead piled up in the road—horses and men. Some of bodies had to be pulled off the road in order to make it clear for traffic. Besides the bodies that were lying stretched in different positions, some with their heads shot off, some with their chests torn and ripped open, I saw two mounds of dead Chasseurs—about fifteen or twenty in each mound, one body piled on top of the other.

Some lay as if in slumber; the faces of others were contorted by the great agony they had passed through; others were in most grotesque positions. One had fallen astride of four other comrades and with his helmet on looked for all the world as if he was playing horse.

Long Procession of the Dead.

One could see a long line of men winding their way from the front to this place, and each two carried one who had given his life that France might gain this great and glorious victory. This procession of the dead wound its way toward us silently and slowly from as far as one could see.

The poste lies in a very beautiful valley. To the right is a grotto which is simply extraordinary for its size. To the left the chateau with its barns and stables nestled against the hill, while through the valley a gentle stream winds its way from the hills above, the water, once clear and dancing in the sunlight, now murky with blood of many peoples.

The glorious chateau had not one stone left upon the other. Back of the piles of rubbish were our 155s, blazing away their message of death to the Boches. In front, on the other side of the road, were the 75s doing the same work. The trees were scorched and the grass was seared from German shells.

I called it in my imagination the Valley of Desolation, and as I went along the road and thought of the happiness which had once been there, and the sadness and sorrow which had entered in, I seemed to

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