Miscellaneous Section

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AMAZING WORK OF THE BRITISH FORCES AGAINST GERMAN TRENCHES

Attack Upon Kaiser's Somme Defenses Is Most Desperate and Dashing Ever Seen in Modern War.

MONSTER TRACTORS ARE LUDICROUS BUT DEADLY

New Engines of Destruction Destroy Trees, Houses and Wire Entanglements in Path; Aeroplanes Efficient.

(By Philip Gibbs, in Special Cable to New York Times.)

With the British Armies in the Field, Saturday, Sept. 16.—Another day of great remembrance has been given to England's history by British troops, September 15, that will not quickly pass out of the memory of the people, for on that day the British soldiers broke through the German third line of defense and went out into the open country and gave staggering blows to that German war machine which for two years, all but two months, seemed unthinkably strong.

It was a day of good success. Yesterday the British had the taste of victory and it was like a strong drug to their hearts, so that they laughed, even while blood was streaming down their faces, and they said "By God, it's wonderful," when they came limping off the battlefields with wounds on fire and said, "We made 'em run like rabbits," when they lay on stretchers and could not move without a groan. And it was wonderful, indeed, for the day of victory came after two and a half months of continued and most bloody fighting. This new British army has not had an easy walk through after its time of preparation and training in the dirty ditches of the old trench warfare. Every yard of ground they had made since the dawn of July 1 was made by sheer, stubborn resolution to get forward, reckless of all cost in life or suffering. The first smash through of that great network of defenses had been made by masses of men dinging themselves upon positions which the Germans had the right to believe impregnable, and the price was high.

The task set the British soldiers yesterday would have been formidable on the first day of the great offensive. Coming after two and one-half months of the continuous fighting, it was startling in its boldness and showed that the generals had supreme confidence in the men, in their own powers of organization and in the luck of battle that comes to those who work for it. The Germans believed the offensive had petered out. There was much evidence for that. They did not believe it possible that an army of the size and strength of the British could carry on an attack at the same fierce pace. They cherished the hope that the British divisions were broken and spent, that the British stores of ammunition were giving out, that the men were overtired. They still had faith in their own gunpowder, a defensive strength of a thousand guns against the British front and it was reasonable faith. They had been digging furiously on dark nights to strengthen the third line of defense, the famous Flers line which was, they thought, to be the boundary of the advancing British tide.

Yesterday I saw their prisoners coming off the battlefields in droves and today hundreds of them in barbed wire cages behind the lines. They were dazed men, filled with gloom, tortured by a great bewilderment.

"It is your victory," said one of their officers, speaking to me in French. "It is our defeat. I can not understand."

"Germany is kaput," said one of their noncommissioned officers. He meant that Germany is down, "in the soup," as the British soldiers would say. It was an exaggeration, for Germany still has a lot of fight left in her, but it was the belief of her captured soldiers yesterday.

Go Into Battle Cheering.

The British were exalted, excited by the smell of victory, exaggerating their gains in the belief that the last great smash had been made, and that the end of this war was at hand. They went out at dawn yesterday filled with the spirit of victory. Many of them went over too, in the great and good humor, laughing as they ran, like children whose fancy had been inflamed by some new toy. They were cheered by a new weapon which was to be tried with them for the first time, the "heavily armored motor machine guns of a type quite unmentionable already in the official bulletins."

That description is a dull one compared with all the pride and pride shadows which belong to these extraordinary vehicles. The secret of them had been kept jealously for months. Only a few days ago it was whispered to me, "Like prehistoric monsters, you know, the Dinosaurus kind," said the officer. I told him he was spilling my tea.

"But it's a fact, sure." He repeated hard and hushed in a quiet way as some enormous enthusiasm. "They go in broons and put the fritzes under their bellies and walk right over 'em."

I knew this man was truthful, but I could not believe him.

"They knock down trees like matchsticks," he said, staring at me with shining eyes. "They go about anything so broad."

"And anything else?" I asked, feeling what I thought was a new sense of humor.

"Everything else, we and everything."

"They take the Boches like kindergarten, they simply love shell craters, knock 'em."

It appeared also that they were proof against rifle bullets, machine gun bullets, bomb and shell splinters, just shrugged their shoulders and passed on. Nothing but a direct hit from a fair-sized shell could do them any harm.

Called "Hush, Hush," by Some.

"But what's the name of these mythical monsters?" I asked, not believing a word of it. He said "hush," other people said "hush, hush" when the subject was alluded to in a remote way, and since then I heard that one name for them is the "hush, hush," but their great name is tanks.

For they are real and I have seen them, walked around them, got inside their bellies, looked at their mysterious organs and watched their monstrous movements. I came across a herd of them in a field, and like a countryman who first sees a giraffe said: "Hell, there ain't no such animal." Then I sat down on the grass and laughed until the tears came into my eyes. On war one has a funny sense of humor, for they are monstrously comical, like lords of vast size emerging from the primeval slime in the twilight of the world's dawn.

The skipper of them introduced me to them.

"I felt awfully burked," said the young officer, who was about five feet high, "when my beauty ate up her first house, but I was sorry for the house, which was quite a good one."

"And how about the trees?" I asked.

"They simply love trees," he answered.

When the British soldiers first saw these strange creatures loping along the roads and over the old battlefields taking trenches on the way, they shouted, cheered wildly and laughed for a day afterwards. Yesterday the troops got out of their trenches laughing, shouting, cheering again, because the tanks had gone on ahead and were scaring the Germans dreadfully while they moved over their trenches and poured out fire on the German side. These motor monsters had strange adventures and did very good work, justifying their amazing existence.

Great Preparations for Attack.

For several days before the great blow was struck and while there was heavy fighting in progress at most parts of the line, there was a steady forward movement and a concentration of all men and machinery to strike at the Flers line. The villages beyond the zone of fire where battalions had been resting suddenly became emptied.

The men had passed on higher up on the roads where there was a struggling tide of all the traffic of war, with supply columns, mule trains, guns, lumbers, ambulances and troops from all parts of the empire surging, swelling, struggling slowly forward through the narrow village streets, up long winding roads, across trampled and barren fields, through the ruins of villages destroyed a year or more ago, and out into the country of evil menace, which is criss-crossed by old trenches and pitted with shell craters and strewn with the refuse of the battle two months back in history. Here a great army, with all its material of war, incredible vast and crowded, lay waiting for the hour when it should be hurled to the great hammer stroke.

Attack Begins at Daybreak.

They were masses of men who were the night before the battle hidden in the darkness of the earth, not retreaded even by the white moonlight except in huddled crowds and camps.

Before 6 o'clock, summer time, all the guns were firing steadily and all the sky was very pale and shimmering in the first twilight of day, filled with the flashes of guns and shells. I went to the right of the line, hoping to see the infantry attack to the left of Leuze wood. Here one of the motor monsters was coming across the ground, but as the sun rose higher it drew the moisture out of all these shell craters and trenches and a dense white mist blotted out the ridge. For an hour or more the French troops who join the British line here, came across country. The British soldiers were moving forward on the left steadily, with the mist about them. Overhead shells went rushing by. It was the usual bombardment, not so heavy as others I watched.

It was not until two hours after the first attack, by which time the British troops were in Flers, that the artillery generals unmasked a number of new batteries, and there was an infernal pandemonium of noise, with every kind of gun and trench mortar flinging explosives over the lines which were now the German first line of defense.

Airmen Have a Great Day.

The machine gunfire ripped out in fierce spasms and the German archies were throwing up shells which burst all about the planes of the British airmen, who came like a flock of birds over the battlefields, flying low about the mists. They did wonderful things yesterday, those British air pilots, risking their lives audaciously in single combats with hostile airmen in encounters against great odds, in spotting enemy headquarters, railway stations, kite balloons and troops and registering or observing all day long for the artillery.

They were out to destroy the German last means of observations, and they began the success of the battle by gaining absolute mastery of the air. Thirteen German aeroplanes were reported by General Haig to be driven down and their fly-by-night brethren did not come across the British lines to risk more losses.

It is impossible at this stage to give a detailed narrative of the great battle along the whole front of attack. It is still in progress and there are many troops engaged. It is only possible to give a general outline of the action and a few glimpses of some of its adventures.

On the British side there was nothing of the killing character within their reach and knowledge which they did not use, and they turned the Germans' own weapons against them.

The material of war made for the first time by workers in British factories by machinery not had was called in. Men who in days a month ago to break through the German third line without sending in cavalry to smash down any opposition they might meet, and to go forward and for until they could get the Germans on the run.

A body of troops went out in the early morning to the tune of "Tipperary" and "Auld Lang Syne," and there was music in the air. The English mothers had sent it to them. Everyone marched up to it, and now with a renewed confidence swelled the throats the lads sang "Tipperary" fiercely and exultantly. They went in at the Germans, and there were moments yesterday when they saw some pace of them.

Hand Fighting at Courcelette.

The area of the British attack yesterday extended on the left from the road north of Pozieres to the Bazentin-le-Petit road, a front of about three miles. In the north of Ginchy on the left and its purpose was to break through the third German line below Courcelette, Martinpuich, and Le Sars, a distance of about six miles.

On the left in front of Courcelette, there was hard and unexpected fighting. As it is known, the Germans had prepared for an attack and had massed troops in considerable force in the front and reserve lines. They sent out advanced patrols and bombing parties while the British were waiting to go over, and immediately there was a fierce encounter. The Germans came out in a rush. Most fell before the British rifle fire, but others managed to jump into portions of a trench and bombed their way up. Several of the machine guns were turned on them, and there were not many left alive.

But before the fight ended a new one began, for the British zero-hour time had come, and the straggling troops saw as one man, taking no heed of what had happened, and swept across their own trenches and the Germans, who were in them, and went straight across country toward Courcelette.

They came up immediately against difficult ground and fierce machine gun fire. Southward of Courcelette, beyond the shell craters and bits of a broken trench, which the men had carried easily enough, smashing the Germans down before them, stood the ruins of a sugar factory, which the Germans had made into a redoubt with machine gun emplacements. It was one of those deadly places which had cost so many lives earlier in the British in other parts of the battle ground, but they had a new engine of war to destroy the place.

Over the British trenches in the twilight of dawn one of these great monsters lurched up and now came crawling forward to the assault. Who called it the assaulting tank? Who called it our words of encouragement to it and laughed so that some men were laughed even when the bullets rattled them in their throats? Anyhow it was the name of this particular engine, and it waddled. Then it rushed over the old German trenches and went forward very steadily toward the sugar factory. There was a lower from the Germans there and suddenly their machine gun fire ceased, but in moments grenades and stickers against the side of "Mother Ida" Tank." but the tank did not mind. The bullets fell from its sides harmlessly.

Walked Through Sugar Factory.

It advanced upon a broken wall, heaved up against it heavily and it fell with a crash of bricks, and then row on to the bricks and passed over them and walked straight into the midst of the factory ruins. From the sides came flashes of fire and showers of bullets, and then it turned round and round, the machine gun emplacement, "bursting a grand time," as one of the men said with enthusiasm. It crushed the machine guns and its men ran and killed the machine gunners with the bayonet. The tank followed in good luck the men who had done good work and then advanced again around the flanks of the monster.

In spite of the luck, which did yeoman work, the assault on Courcelette left was hard and costly. Again and again the men came under machine gun and rifle fire, for the Germans had also their trenches called "strongpoints" and "self-regulators," which had not been wiped out by the artillery. They fought with great courage and desperation. Several men who advanced the line in part of Flers there were sworn foes, the officers who were trying to fill those places fell also, but their great tables were not disheartened, for it is current in position in a great wave of assault.

Then they went on to the village. It was like all those villages in Germany, neat, squeezed with a look of daintiness and strongholds hard to take. The British troops entered it from the north, one fought said, by cold and bayonet resolved to have it. A tank came along and passed along, searching for defenses, for lone gunnes, threatening over lots of wall, mere lots and then and sitting in heaps of ruin where it first found the streets. In 1:30 last, morning the village was taken. The British took the prisoners and when they were brought down to Pozieres last night they passed old "Grease de Menthe," who was young now. They held up their hands, crying "Non in Himmel," and asked how they could fight against such monstrous things. The taking of Courcelette was a great achievement skillfully planned and carried out by splendid men and one monster.

Attack Upon Martinpuich.

On the right of these forces there was a great assault upon Martinpuich and High Wood. Here also in High Wood the Germans had been ready for attack, and, being forestalled in that, they made a strong counter-attack, which for a time had some success driving the British back to the southern edge of the wood. The British attack had been heavily shelled beforehand, and that found the Germans in much stronger force than one had expected in the wood of Little mystery, but the British fought very valiantly, some among them little without experience of the Somme kind of fighting, and they killed a lot before its ferocity of fire.

But the older men, veterans of a year's service in more, covered them up, kept them steady, and led them. The counter-attacked and regained their old lines, and then, to their great joy, saw the tanks advancing through High Wood and on each side of it.

"It was like a fairy tale," said a Cockney boy. "I can't help laughing every time I think of it." He laughed then, although he had a broken arm and was covered in blood.

"They broke down trees as if they were matchsticks and were over the barricades like elephants. The Boches were thoroughly scared.

"They came running out of their shell-holes and trenches shouting like mad. Some of them attacked the tanks and tried to bomb them, but it wasn't a bit of good. Oh, crikey! it was a rare treat to see the biggest fake that ever was. They just stamped down the German dugouts as one caught a wasp's nest."

Little Shelter for Attackers.

On the left of High Wood was a very fine body of troops who had no trenches to lie in, but they just lay out in shell craters under the constant fire of the white range, that is to say, the field guns, firing at short range, which was extremely hard to endure.

"It was cruel," said one of these men, "but we went forward all right when the time came over the bodies of our comrades, who were lying in pools of blood, and afterward the Germans had to pay."

They were cooperating with some

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