

Surrender of Germans in Drovers

Disheartened by Regularity of British Capture of Strongholds—Abandonment of Combes Without a Fight.

By Philip Gibbs, The Daily Chronicle Special Correspondent.

With the British Armies in the Field, Oct. 1.—The enemy cannot stand against us on his present line. That has been proved today and yesterday by sweeping British successes, which include the capture of Gueudecourt, Morval and Combes, with nearly 2,000 prisoners (according to my own reckoning) and a great mass of material. The German infantry was ordered to hold on to these places at all costs, to the very death.

The enemy may pretend later that they have made a voluntary withdrawal to "take up a new and stronger line of defense"—that is the usual convention—but I have talked with their officers and men and know what their orders were. They were to fight for every inch of soil against us, and they did not lack courage.

Too Strong For Enemy.

But our men and our guns have been too strong for them. As soon as we held the high ridge from the Pozleres windmill through the old German trench line below Martiniupich, and above High Wood and Ghinchy, their position down the slopes became untenable because of the new observation we had for our artillery.

One by one their strongholds have fallen. Courcellette and Martiniupich and Piers, now those other places, Gueudecourt, Lesboeufts and Morval. In spite of their massed machine-guns in strong emplacements, and all their tunnelled dug-outs, and all their stubborn resistance, they could not hold on to a line here under the hurricane of fire our guns have flung upon them, and the tide of men who crept forward and overwhelmed them.

Their defense began to show signs of cracking when they were unable to force home their repeated counter-attacks by any big general scheme of offense.

Hammer Strokes.

It was clear that our constant hammer strokes, with those delivered by the French on our right, had demoralized and disorganized them, and that they were unable to gather reserves from other parts of the line quick enough or big enough to strike back heavily so as to thwart our progress. They had to rely mainly on their gun power, and formidable as that is it has been mastered by ours for the time being, and could not do more than make our advance costly to our wonderful infantry, who went through its certain fire.

Even that has weakened a little during the past 48 hours—our men who come back broken by it will not think so, poor fellows—and the last attacks have succeeded with far fewer casualties on our side than ever before on such a day of success in this Battle of the Somme. The casualties, indeed, were very light considering the striking successes gained. The enemy is in retreat—not for a great distance, perhaps, but certainly retreating.

Without a Fight.

For the first time in the history of this war on the western front since the Battle of the Marne and the beginning of trench warfare the enemy has been compelled to abandon a town without a fight in it. He has withdrawn from Combes, which is a place of some importance, and more than a mere village, and our troops have entered it from the north, while the French hold the southern half.

As soon as Morval was taken yesterday, after that wonderful assault upon the double line of trenches defending it, his gunners near Sully Saltille, to the east, packed up and bolted away. In the night troops holding the ground between Morval and that place have melted away, and our cavalry patrols are out there trying to find out his rear-guard. I am told also, though this is not absolutely confirmed, that a squadron of horse has ridden round the north of Gueudecourt and gone out "into the blue" on the great adventure.

Between Gueudecourt and Lesboeufts a body of German infantry tried to rally up to a counter-attack and came forward a little way with a show of strength and resolution.

Our gunners were quick to get their target. Clouds of shrapnel burst over those massed men, and their attack turned into a panic-stricken rout. They flung down rifles and packs and fled back towards Le Transloy, leaving many dead and wounded in their wake.

The worst thing that has happened to the enemy is the breaking up of the morale of his troops. These men have been ordered to hold out in death-traps, and although there can be no slur on their courage, for they have fought well and are brave men, they have seen with dismal eyes that if they hold on longer they must die or be taken.

Surrenders En Masse.

As soon as our men had swept across the trenches and the sunken roads where the Germans defended themselves stubbornly and entered the villages—Morval being taken from the north—the garrisons came up out of their underground places and surrendered in heaps. They could have fought longer and harder here, perhaps, but only with their backs to the walls asking for death. They had not the spirit to do that, and no man would expect it of them.

They were done and dazed by the appalling intensity of the shell-fire which we had smashed over their tunnels. They were disheartened by the unflinching regularity with which the British had captured one stronghold

after another since July 1, and at last after two years of utter confidence in the supreme strength of the German war-machine, their faith has been destroyed. They have seen it crack and break, leaving them as the victims of its failure. Men who have lost faith in the one idol to which they had pledged their souls are not so strong as before. It is this loss of faith among her soldiers which is the worst thing that has happened to Germany.

Stupefied Enemy.

In opposition to the faith which we have now broken is the fear they have of British troops whom, once upon a time, they were taught to despise, they are stupefied by the grim way in which our men attack, reckless of loss, so that no barrage stops them, and they are amazed that men who were not soldiers a year ago should now be equal to their own best troops in fighting skill as gunners and as infantry.

A German officer who surrendered today with a whole company when the British stormed their way into Morval paid a tribute to them when he was taken prisoner. "Your soldiers," he said, "surprised me by their sangfroid. They were very cool and calm in moments when most soldiers would lose their heads."

He was touched, too, by their kindness to him, puzzled by it, not finding any kind of hatred in their hearts now that the fighting was over. "They asked me whether I would like to go down at once or wait until the barrage eased off. That was very good-natured of them. Then they gave me 'kitchen'—little cakes—and called me 'old boy' as though they had known me before."

They are grateful for our treatment of them, and truly some of our men are chivalrous in the way they behave to them after the bloodshed is over and the fierce and frightful things of battle.

There were two fellows on the roadside today, an English soldier and a German, trudging side by side to a field dressing station. Both heads were bandaged, and one man could see out of one eye and one out of the other.

Said the Englishman: "This chap tried to gouge out my eye with his fist, and I did the same to his with my elbow, and now we get on famously together."

Two other men came in—enemies an hour before.

"This is old Bill," said the English soldier, pointing to a wounded German. "Where I go Bill goes. I wounded him and I took him. . . . Come on, Bill, old son."

I saw 1,200 German prisoners today just out of the battle. They lay in rows, grey body close to grey body so that when any stood and walked about they had to step carefully over all those lying men. They were men from Morval and Lesboeufts, and some from Combes, who, in the retreat in the night had mistaken their way out and come into our lines.

They were mostly strong, well-built young men—better than some of those I saw yesterday—and were nearly all Prussians from the Rhineland. In the mass there was nothing repulsive about them, though here and there was an evil-looking face. These fresh-colored fellows, very smart and soldierly, and with very little of the dirt of war upon them, as they had been

QUIT MEAT WHEN KIDNEYS BOTHER

Take a glass of Salts before breakfast if your Back hurts or Bladder is troubling you.

No man or woman who eats meat regularly can make a mistake by flushing the kidneys occasionally, says a well-known authority. Meat forms uric acid which excites the kidneys, they become overworked from the strain, get sluggish and fail to filter the waste and poisons from the blood, then we get sick. Nearly all rheumatism, headaches, liver trouble, nervousness, dizziness, sleeplessness and urinary disorders come from sluggish kidneys.

The moment you feel a dull ache in the kidneys or your back hurts or if the urine is cloudy, offensive, full of sediment, irregular of passage or attended by a sensation of scalding, stop eating meat and get about four ounces of Jad Salts from any pharmacy; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast and in a few days your kidneys will act fine. This famous salt is made from the acid of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for generations to flush and stimulate the kidneys, also to neutralize the acids in urine so it no longer causes irritation, thus ending bladder weakness.

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Living in the dug-outs, stared about them with curious eyes—at the British troops passing and British transports, and all the traffic that goes up to the battle lines. They were startled at finding themselves in so great a company of fellow-prisoners. They confessed to one of our officers that it was "a great British victory."

With the Wounded.

But in a tent not far away, and in other tents, were rows of Germans on stretchers, lying very still, and looking very grey, in blood-soaked clothes. Some of them were moaning their lives away, but English doctors were with them, attending to them just in the same way as they dealt with our wounded men carried into other tents.

"We make no difference," said the medical officer. There was a young officer there whom I had met yesterday who had wounded him and I took him. He sat up when he saw me again, and said he wanted nothing that could be given to him, and was grateful for the treatment. He had just been writing down the address of one of his wounded comrades, who was going to die, so that he might send a letter to the man's wife. He had been asked to do this by one of the English doctors, and he was glad to do it.

I sat down by the side of a young soldier from the Rhineland. "Are you badly wounded?" I asked. He pointed to his shoulder and said "Here."

When I said he looked very young, he shrugged that wounded shoulder of his, and said, "All my comrades were young. We fought as well as older men. The English came behind

us, or we would not have been taken. The pride of the boy remained with him even now, and it seemed to me fine and plucky.

But these men, as a whole, have none of the bragart confidence of the prisoners we used to take a year ago. The truth, I think, is beginning to dawn upon them. The guns that protected them have been matched by British guns, and the new army that has grown up against them has broken their strongest lines.

It is only the beginning. People at home must not think that the German army has lost its power of defense and that the great rout is at hand. They are drawing back their guns, but saving most of them. They are retreating, but will stand again, and dig new trenches and defend other villages.

There will be greater and fiercer and more desperate fighting before the end comes, and God alone knows when that will be. But so far as the fighting goes it is a real stroke of victory for us. Within the last few hours we have put out of action eight German battalions between Lesboeufts and Morval, and the enemy can ill afford such loss after all that has happened since the first day of July.

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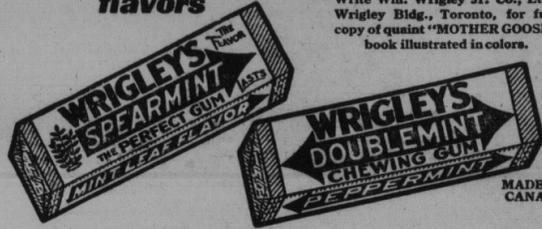
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