

WRETCHED BEYOND DESCRIPTION IS CONDITION OF THE TRENCHES IN WHICH MEN LIVE AND FIGHT

Wet and Cold Have Added Greatly to the Hardships Borne by the Troops Fighting in Belgium—From Having to Sit or Stand on a Mixture of Straw and Liquid Mud They Have to Contend With Half-frozen Slush, which Also Deadens Force of the Enemy's Shells

London, Nov. 27.—Col. E. D. Swinton, the British official eye-witness with the expeditionary forces on the continent, continuing his narrative of the army operations, and supplementing his account of November 19 writes:

"Nov. 20.—Once more there is no change to record in the military situation on our front, with the exception of an attack in force again upon our left, Nov. 17. Four days, from the 16th to the 19th, have been unusually uneventful.

"The great change that has occurred has been in the weather. Winter has now set in earnest. A miserable afternoon of snow and slush, succeeded by a night of frost, this morning is keen, calm and bright, and promises well for the aviators, who have recently been so much hampered in their work.

"Regarding the exact situation at Ypres, since certain misstatements to the effect that the Germans had penetrated the town and had been driven out again, have apparently been circulated, it is well to state that Ypres is in the hands of the Allies, and that save for prisoners of war or possible spies, no Germans have succeeded in entering the town or even getting near it. The Allies position there is stronger than it has ever been.

"Monday, Nov. 16, our troops on the left passed the most peaceful day they had experienced during the last month. There has been little shelling and no infantry attacks. A prisoner asserted that it had been the intention of the Germans to assault this starter on the 15th but the damage inflicted by our artillery on the previous day had been so heavy that it had been decided to postpone the operation until reinforcements should arrive.

"Germans Pay Dearly For Mistake. There is no doubt that on the 19th in massing preparatory to attack, the

Germans had committed certain faults, and our guns and Maxims were given a good opportunity, which they at once seized, with devastating results on to the rear battalions.

"The fighting to the south of Ypres continued without marked advantage



to either side, but the French everywhere held their ground. On the centre all was quiet. On our right the enemy continued to show some activity, pushing forward the saps, and throwing bombs from their trenches and mortars. One of their sap heads was successfully attacked during the night, and an earth boring tool was captured.

"On Tuesday on our left, the Germans made another effort in the direction of Ypres. After shelling our positions to the east and to the southwest, they made three attacks. About 1 p.m. their infantry advanced in strength against our section on this line and took possession of some trenches, out of which our troops had been driven by shell fire. When the Germans endeavored to press on, our infantry made a brilliant counter attack with bayonets, and drove them out of the trenches, and for some five hundred yards beyond.

"A second attempt was made further to the southwest, was pressed

within five yards of our line before it was broken by our rifle fire. On this occasion the Germans advanced obliquely across our front, and suffered very severely from our rifle and gun fire.

"The number of killed left in front of a length of some five hundred yards of our front, is estimated at about 1,200. The assault was made by regular troops, though not by the Guard.

Successful Day for British Arms
"About 3 p.m., they massed for the third assault, but being subjected to a hot shell fire they gave up the attempt. On the whole, it was a most successful day for our arms.

"Wednesday, the 18th, was another quiet day. Nothing occurred except the shelling of our right. The enemy contented himself with sapping, it is said. Owing to the high tide, the inundation was extended satisfactorily to the southeast of Dixmade.

"Thursday, the 19th, also was uneventful. Our trench mortars were used for the first time, with good results. The successful resistance we have up to the present made to all the efforts of the enemy, has had a very encouraging effect, in spite of the exhausting nature of the operations of the past month. Our men show great enterprise in making local counter attacks, in cutting off the enemy's patrols, and in similar affairs of outpost.

"Around Ypres we continually are finding fresh evidence of the slaughter inflicted on the enemy. On the 15th one of our battalions, while advancing, discovered a German trench, manned by seventeen corpses, while there were forty-nine more in a house close by. On the next day a patrol discovered sixty dead in front of one trench, and fifty more opposite another. All the farms and cottages to our front are charnel houses.

"The significance of such small numbers lies only in the fact that they represent the killed in a very small area.

Costly Attacks on Ypres
"According to prisoners, the German attempt to take Ypres proved costly. One stated that there were only fifteen survivors out of his platoon, which went into action fifty strong. Another report that of 250 men who advanced with him, only 19 returned. It is believed that one Bavarian regiment, 3,000 strong, which left Bavaria for the front on October 19, had

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only 1,200 men left when an attack was made along the Menin-Ypres road on November 14, in which it again suffered severely.

"The plight of some units of new formations is even worse, one regiment of the Third Reserve, corps losing six hundred men, out of three thousand.

"If the period since the beginning of the war, is considered, the numbers are even greater. For instance, of the Fifteenth Corps, one regiment lost sixty officers and 2,550 men. Another lost 3,000 men. These figures include casualties of every kind—killed, wounded and missing.

"On all four days the weather has been bad. Generally fine and frosty in the early morning, it turned to heavy rain as the day wore on. Thursday snow started to fall about 1 p.m., and continued until about six o'clock. It fell in large soft flakes, which covered the ground for two inches and melted under foot. The state of the roads, already bad, was rendered worse.

"The condition of the trenches became wretched beyond description. From having to sit or stand in a mixture of straw and liquid mud, the men had to contend with half frozen slush. It is an ill wind etc., and one good point about the wet weather is that it made the ground so soft that the enemy's howitzer shells sink so deep in before they detonate, and expend a great part of their energy in an upward direction, throwing the mud about.

Life in the Trenches
"Nevertheless, the wet and cold have added greatly to the hardships of the troops in the trenches, and the problem how to enable them to keep their feet reasonably dry and warm now is engaging serious attention.

"At one place, owing to the kindness of the proprietor, certain works

recently were placed at our disposal as a wholesale bath house, lavatory and repair shop. In the works are a number of vats, large enough to contain several men at one time. They serve excellently for the provision of hot baths for the men on relief from the trenches.

"While the men are enjoying their bath, their clothes are taken away, their underclothing washed or burned, and replaced by a new lot. At the same time their uniforms are fumigated, cleaned and repaired, and buttons sewed on. The repairs are done by a gang of women who are employed for the purpose. By this installation some 1,500 men are catered to in every way.

"What this re-habilitation really means to the soldiers alone can be appreciated from the realization of their previous state. It must be remembered that they not only had not bathed for weeks, but they had not been able to take off their clothes; that subsequently in many cases, the officers as well as the men are verminous.

"As the latter troop up to the bath, they are unrecognizable in appearance, weary and haggard. They are coated with mud, a good deal of which is crusted on them. Some are splashed with the blood of their comrades or of the enemy.

"When they come out clean, refreshed, they are again happy, and it is a distinct addition to his fighting value and an asset to the force. Nevertheless, bodily, the men are in good condition. Food in abundance reaches them regularly, except in a few cases, such as are incidental to trench warfare."

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