

SUBMARINES AND OTHER THINGS

THE persisting rain has at last called a temporary halt to the Flanders fighting, but not until the British forces had waded waist deep through the mud and won their way to a nearly complete possession of the Passchendaele Ridge. The village of Passchendaele lies at the northern extremity of the ridge which has Gheluvelt for its southern terminus, but Wytchaete and Messines, still further south, may be said to be parts of the same ridge, and the struggle for their possession was therefore a part of the same battle that is now being waged. Even though no further advance should be possible, the British are now in a position of extraordinary advantage. Bruges and Zeebrugge are actually within range of their guns, or they will be within range as soon as those guns can be brought into position. The Lille-Ostend Railroad lies only four miles to the eastward, and is in full view from the top of the ridge. We may say that it has actually been cut, since it can no longer be used for German supply purposes. The point of the Ypres salient is now well to the rear of the German lines to its north and south, and these lines have therefore become untenable and must retire. Even though there should be no further fighting, we may still say that the British success is of the most significant kind, not only from the nature of the territory that has been won, but still more from its demonstration of the fact that the Germans have lost the power effectively to resist either the British artillery or the British infantry.

This succession of gains must, of course, be attributed mainly to the irresistible power of the artillery. A dispatch from Copenhagen says that the German authorities are finding it difficult to reconcile their own descriptions of the intensity of the British fire with their assurances that the submarines have seriously interfered with the transport of munitions. They can not minimize the strength of the guns, seeing that it explains their own discomfiture. On the other hand, they can not reconcile the overwhelming supply of ammunition with their vaunts that their submarines are the masters of the ocean. A few months ago the references to the British drum fire were frequent in the German bulletins, and drum fire was supposed to represent the maximum of artillery intensity. But apparently the maximum has now been surpassed. We read of "whirlwind" fire, and the German bulletins say reproachfully that it is unprecedented in volume and rapidity. The Copenhagen dispatch in question quotes a description furnished by Lieutenant-General von Ardenne, military expert of the Berlin Tageblatt, of the curtain of fire through which the German storming troops had to pass in the battle of September 26th. He compares it with a waterfall. It could be passed only by watching the shells, and sprinting forward in short dashes, each man for himself, immediately after the bursting of a shell, and risking the chance that another shell would fall in the same place. The artillery is not only directed with shattering force against counter attacks, but it is used to isolate the German trenches that are about to be assailed, and to cut them off from reinforcements. The Germans hoped that they could disconcert the artillery fire by the use of "pill box" fortifications instead of trenches. The "pill box" is a small and nearly invisible concrete cupola sheltering one or two machine guns. These miniature forts were scattered about over the area to be defended in the expectation that they would be overlooked by the guns, and that they could be brought into effective action against advancing infantry. But they failed completely. The artillery fire was so dense that nothing escaped it, and the few "pill boxes" that survived the bombardment were easily taken by the bombers.

ADMIRAL VON TIRPITZ seems at last to have confessed that the submarines are a failure, if he is correctly quoted by the Brunswick Landes Zeitung. The admiral says: "We can continue confidently to expect a final triumph over England as long as we continue to sink vessels faster than she

ZEEBRUGGE and Bruges, submarine bases, are now within British gun range. A smash-up at either or both of these bases would do a good deal to write Ultimate Failure on the words of Von Tirpitz, whose defence of the submarine campaign is a lame-duck effort. And the recent mutiny among the German sailors, who objected to submarine service, shows how popular the sub campaign is among those who know what it is.

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constructs them. A submarine war success can not be expected immediately, however, but if we pursue our aim firmly we shall find after some months that our position for negotiations with England will be quite different." Now if the German public can extract any consolation from assurances of this kind they must either be at the point where small mercies are thankfully received, or else their memories must be very short. A few months ago Admiral Tirpitz was quite sure—and he said so with an exaggerated and quite Prussian arrogance—that the submarines would reduce England to an abject plea for peace within three months. At the expiration of the three months the German naval authorities—I believe it was Captain Persius this time—asked for a slight extension of time to compensate for unavoidable miscalculations. Three months had proved insufficient, but another two months would enable the submarines to win the war. Then we had the proclamation of Von Hindenburg assuring the army that it had nothing to do but hold on, and the submarines would do the rest. Then came a still more reduced plea. The Allies, we were told, were losing their merchant marine, and this would place Germany in a most advantageous position after the war. And now comes Von Tirpitz with his rather shadowy guarantee that after "some months" England will be ready for negotiations if Germany can continue to sink ships faster than England can build them. Von Tirpitz is, of course, quite well aware of the actual situation, and therefore he is quite well aware that England can bear the present rate of tonnage reduction far longer than Germany herself can bear to continue the war. He is also aware that the rate of reduction is falling fast, and we may notice with interest that he carefully refrains from any reference to American shipbuilding, and the immense reinforcement that it will give to the Atlantic merchant fleet. The admiral excludes American participation from his calculations because he does not dare to admit it. It is one of the factors that the German commanders refuse to face. The position of England, says the admiral, is comparatively favourable, and therefore she "desires negotiations." There is no evidence of such a desire, while on the other hand there is evidence of a German desire that finds expression about twice a week. But here we have a practical admission that things have been going badly with the German arms, an admission that the official war bulletins have been careful not to make. But then sailors were never famed for their diplomacy.

The German bulletins have systematically slighted or denied the British and French gains, although those gains find a tacit and unwilling admission in the geographical references contained in these bulletins. Thus we are told that Gheluvelt is still "firmly held," which is at least a confession that Gheluvelt is under attack. The German definitions of the battle front show clearly enough the extent of the British advance, if they are read in conjunction with a map. The map will show also the vital nature of gains that are minimized in the German bulletins by vague references to advances of a kilometer or so. The Germans have not allowed the British bulletins of the Passchendaele fighting to

appear in their newspapers, although it has been their practice to print those bulletins. They suppressed also the reports of General Maude's victory at Ramadieh until they had obtained a semi-official Turkish bulletin to the effect that the British reports were "greatly exaggerated." Without the aid of a large scale map it is not possible to estimate the true value of any advance. The gain of a mile may be insignificant, or it may be vital. It may bring under fire some place of importance that was previously out of range, or out of sight. In this instance the gain of a mile has brought Bruges and Zeebrugge under fire, it has cut the Ostend-Lille Railroad, and it has tactically completed the outflanking of the German lines to the north. To refer to such a gain as "only a kilometre" is childish.

But there is another gauge of success that is even more valid than the map. An advance that involves the capture of guns implies confusion and rout. It means so rapid an abandonment of positions that the guns could not be saved, and it need hardly be said that to save the guns is a point of honour with a soldier. Now within the last two months the Germans have lost 332 heavy guns, and they have taken not a single one. They do not claim to have taken a single one. It need not be said that heavy guns are not placed on the front lines. They are to be found in the rear, and their capture implies not only a considerable penetration of the enemy positions, but it implies also a disorderly abandonment of those positions. When Junker statesmen assure the Reichstag that Germany's military position is a favourable one, they are either displaying themselves as impenetrable by facts, or they are assuming that their auditors are impenetrable by facts, perhaps both. If we mark the changing positions on the western front by shaded lines on the map we shall find a steady enlargement of the shaded area, and it is an enlargement that moves inexorably eastward. The same is true of the French positions around Verdun, and of the French positions to the north of the British lines in Flanders. It is now taken almost as an axiom that an Allied attack in the west implies a German retreat. It has been an unbroken rule for many months, and the fact is incontestable. It was conceded by the German authorities when they said that their "last hope" was in the submarines. The military situation for the Germans is much worse than it was when that confession was made, and now we have the frank statement by Von Tirpitz that the submarine also has proved to be a broken reed.

THE submarine situation is largely explained by the stories of mutiny in the German navy. It has been suggested that actually there has been no mutiny, and that the whole thing was a Junker ruse to discredit the Socialists. It is impossible to accept such a theory. The facts must have been known to large numbers of persons. If there had been no such event the story would instantly have been challenged by the incriminated Socialists in their own defence. They did not challenge the story. On the contrary, they seemed to know all about it, and they contented themselves with a denial of their own complicity. If they had been guilty they would have been shot on the spot, and we may therefore be quite sure that they would have denied the story if it had been deniable. Reports from neutral countries attribute the outbreak to the demoralization that comes from inaction, to bad feed, and to a dread of the submarine service. Probably all three causes played their part, but it is likely that the last of the three was the most important. Life on a submarine is almost unimaginably arduous, and a long period of rest must follow every trip. We know that the chief German difficulty has been to find crews for the ships that they have built, and to persuade the requisite number of men to undergo the long training that is necessary, and to face the dangers that follow that training. The silence of the Allied admiralities as to their successes against the submarines has lent an element of mystery to the situation that must have tried the nerves of the prospective crews.