

the march. The car forges ahead slowly, passing one by one the marching battalions, traction engines, towing great guns, ammunition trains, long lines of Red Cross ambulances—everywhere the pungent odor of gasoline.

The Silent Advance

Every little wood belches forth men. They march silently. They might be phantoms, dim hordes of Valhalla, were it not for the occasional spark of a cigarette. There is no talking. All is tense excitement. Can the thing be pulled off, or does the Boche know? For miles and miles in a wide concentric sweep every road and lane and by-path is crowded with these slow-moving masses. Over the bare hill-sides are lumbering the heavy tanks, keeping pace with the marching men. At length, somewhat footsore, we pass through a gaunt village—unhappy Gentelles—where stars shine down through skeleton rafters and all is ruin. Presently, thanks to an excellent map and a torch-light, the knoll is reached and some of our support trenches. The night is very still. It seems incredible that all this unpreventable hum and rumble can have failed to reach an alert enemy. The watch-hand is moving round, half-past 3, 4, ten past 4—an interminable laggard. What will this stunning experience be like? One can only imagine.

The Guns Begin

"Zero" is set for 4.20, and the pointer has barely reached that minute, when behind us there goes up a mighty flare, and simultaneously along the line, ten miles to north and to south of us, similar flares light up the countryside. At the same instant there breaks out the booming of our heavy guns—the dull roar of howitzers and the unbroken roll of field guns—an inferno of noises. Shells whistle and whine over our head. In front, right athwart the horizon as far as the eye can see, spreads out a hell of flame and fire and bursting charge, reverberating back to us in mighty unison the message that the battle has started. Bright out of this fiery furnace break out quick flashes, which shoot into the air—the "S.O.S." call of the German trenches for artillery support.

A Majestic Spectacle

For a minute the din is stunning, but the ear quickly becomes accustomed. The eye is overwhelmed by the majestic spectacle. The heavens are lighted up across their broad expanse by a continuous sheet of lightning, playing relentlessly over the doomed Boche lines. Our men can be plainly made out walking leisurely—or so it seemed—forward, the tanks lumbering ahead to clear the wire. To right and left teams of horses gallop forward with the field gun batteries assigned to follow hard on the heels of the infantry. It is a perfectly prepared plan, working out without a hitch. The batteries behind raise the barrage step by step just ahead of the men. All is co-ordinated to victory. Then down comes the fog, blotting out the spectacle, but saving us many casualties.

An Overwhelming Surprise

The attack has been such a complete and overwhelming surprise that the enemy's initial defense is feeble. Many of his batteries are captured still wearing their tarpaulin hoods and their crews deep in their dug-outs. It is a curious fact that from our knoll, amidst all this maelstrom of our raising, we cannot conceive a single enemy shell within a mile of us. They have no time for counter-attack against our batteries and our artillery comes off almost scathless, except among the galloping field guns. By 6 o'clock they are three miles beyond the enemy front line, what we had pictured as a perilous aerie is the safest spot in France.

Advance of the Whippets

Long before the time set for the lifting of the barrage, its work was done and the enemy in head-long retreat miles away. After them go the whippet tanks—little uneasy beasts of steel and petrol that have no difficulty in keeping ahead of the trotting cavalry—they can make quite a good pace across country when the going is anywhere

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26

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