

Debris Of Trenches After Smoke Of Battle Clears

(Yorkshire, Eng. Post.)
The British Press Association's special correspondent, writing from the General Headquarters in France, says:

It was in May, just six months ago, that the Notre Dame de Lorette ridge fell into the hands of the French in the course of the great offensive that our ally then made in conjunction with our thrust at Festubert. From the 9th to the close of the month, the armies of General Foch were incessantly engaged in fighting of the fiercest description over bare, undulating country intersected by numberless white ribbons of roads, with endless possibilities of defence in many ravines and villages. The ridge that was finally torn from the Germans by sheer weight of artillery, and the incomparable dash of the infantry, dominated the whole of the surrounding countryside, jutting out into the plain of the Scheldt in a long spur, with little clumps of trees thickly clustered in its gullies. The ridge was finally carried late in the afternoon of the 17th, following upon the surrender of the garrison of Carency. A little village in the valley below the summit, Abain St. Nazaire, was also taken, and subsequently the famous Sugar Refinery of Souchez, which formed the key to the village itself.

Such was the battlefield that I have been permitted to visit this week by invitation of the French General Staff. With the help of a guide from the headquarters of a French battalion, we made our way through a pretty wood rising on the side of the plateau. Recent heavy rains had turned every path into a quagmire of sticky, chalky mud, and the going was, in consequence, very heavy. Such conditions naturally interfere very greatly with the transport of supplies for men in the trenches, and to overcome the difficulty the engineers have built a number of light railways, over which small trucks are hauled by horse power. The question of water supply is also an important one. There is no natural supply, and every drop for the troops has been brought up from the plain below. In the wood a number of reservoirs have been constructed, and here water is stored in enormous casks, a small quantity of a purifying agent being used. A walk of several kilometres over very slippery ground brought us to the lower slopes of the Notre Dame ridge.

The Litter of the Conflict.
The debris of the May fighting was still strewn thickly in every direction, and the whole picture, seen under the lowering sky of a November day, was most desolate.

Jagged pieces of metal tripped one up on every hand, while the eye had constantly to be on the lookout for unexploded shells and bombs which lay about the ground, liable to explode at the slightest touch. Rusty wire, cut to ribbons by French 75's, and innumerable mounds of chalky earth marking the site of former trenches, completed the scene of fearful disorder so typical of a modern battlefield. At one point at the end of a little fissure on the side of the hill the chapel of Notre Dame de Lorette had once stood. To-day there is not a single vestige or fragment of any kind left to mark its site. All has been swept away by guns. While we were thus clambering over these desolate slopes, surrounded on every hand by sights which strangely fired the imagination, French guns were blasting away incessantly, the rapidity of the reports conveying an impression of some gigantic machine-gun in action. The "Raketa" of the 75's formed a fitting accompaniment to the deeper boom of heavier pieces, while projectiles screamed over the crest of the ridge, seemingly but a very few feet above our heads, the wind of their passage being plainly felt.

The Desolated Landscape.
From the summit of the ridge a wonderful view of the surrounding country was obtained. The whole plain lay spread out at one's feet. In the immediate foreground, nestling as it were up against the foot of the spur, was Souchez, an unrecognisable wreck of the former prosperous agricultural village. The capture of it by the French in the course of the advance in September put the final touch to its ruin. Of houses there are none; not one stone stands upon another. Every building has been levelled, and from that height the village appeared like some enormous flattened out mass of whitish brick. The Chateau of Carency, formerly a German stronghold on the outside of Souchez, is a heap of bricks surrounded by a park, the trees in which are only bare stumps with their heads all lopped off by artillery fire. To the left Angres, still held by the enemy, stood out as a mass of red roofs, while in the background half-a-dozen chimneys, dimly seen through the haze, marked Lens.

To the right, on the other slope of the valley, the jagged tower of the church of Mont St. Eloi was a prominent landmark. Straight in front, the trenches criss-crossed the ground up to the summit of the Vimy height. German shells were being fired freely here, the black and white smoke-bursts being followed by a great cloud of white dust as the chalky soil was thrown up by the explosion. Descending from the ridge, we passed along the valley into a little village which the French wrested from the enemy in their push of last May. The hamlet is now but a blasted wreck, with trenches winding through excavated streets and ruined houses in every direction. Every house had been turned into a little fort by the Germans, every wall loop-holed, every length of road barricaded, every cellar used as a dug-out. Tremendous shelters had been constructed by the enemy for the protection of their men and guns, and these have now been turned to the use of the French. Lunch was taken in the back room of a small cottage. Before the fire the uniforms of men fresh from the trenches, were drying the damp cloth sending up a thick steam. Round the door half-a-dozen orderlies, their blue tunics stained and muddy, gathered, gazing at their unaccustomed visitors with curious eyes. Against the wall rifles were leaning. Through the half-open door, a glimpse was obtained of the courtyard where a doctor was standing gravely examining a wounded man just brought in on a hand ambulance from the trenches. In the rear two other less serious cases were patiently awaiting treatment.

In company with the officer in charge of the garrison, who took an obvious pride in showing us over his domain, we made a tour of the village. Remarkable German Dug-outs.
Some of the dug-outs constructed by the Germans during their period of occupation were indeed, marvels of engineering construction—deep cavities, burrowed out of the soil and fenced over with solid tree trunks, and many thicknesses of sandbags. Here and

there subterranean passages linked up two strategic points, and one dug-out had a special trap leading into a communication trench which could be used in case of the normal exit being blocked by a shell burst. Great holes had been dug in the gardens of cottages by the "Marmites," as the French call the heavy shells, and in many of such holes gruesome relics are exposed to the naked eye. In one great pit that had been made by a German 8-inch howitzer, the trunk of a German soldier minus the head had been turned up, tunic still intact, and number of his regiment on the shoulder strap still legible.

Against such a desolate picture as the ruined hamlet afforded, the spirit of the French soldier stood out in sharp contrast. The village was not a pleasant spot that afternoon. The rain came down in a steady stream, turning the main street into a morass, through which troops had to founder as best they could. The shattered cottages offered but little shelter from the weather, while the dull greyneap of the whole scene weighed heavy on the mind. Yet, despite these conditions, the men there went about their tasks with patient cheerfulness. They had evidently determined to make the best of their surroundings, and accordingly not a gloomy face or depressed look was to be seen. Our appearance was greeted with a respectful word of welcome or a smart salute. Yet they had good cause for depression. Most of the men forming the garrison came from faraway departments. Their families had been left behind; their homes were perhaps in ruins. And yet, living in perpetual conditions of mud and damp, they made no complaint, but just went on their duty with a rare fortitude and determination that must excite general admiration. With such men to hold her line, France may well feel confident of the future.

IN A TIGHT CORNER.

While the Canadians were in a very tight corner, and retreating amid a hail of bullets, Private Gledhill saw some Germans advancing down the trench, he saw also that only three Canadians were left in the trench, two with the machine-gun, and himself, as he said, "running a rifle."

Before he had time to observe more an invader's bomb literally gave him a life home, and landed him uninjured outside the trench with his rifle broken.

He found another rifle, and fired away from the knee, until it became necessary to join the retreat. During that manoeuvre, which required caution, he fell over Lieutenant Brown, wounded, and offered to convey him home.

"Thanks, no," said the Lieutenant, "I can crawl."

Then Private Ullock, who had one leg missing, said: "Will you take me?"

"Sure," replied Gledhill. But Ullock is a heavy man, and could not well be lifted. So Gledhill got down on hands and knees, and Ullock took good hold of his web equipment, and was hauled gingerly along the ground towards the home trench.

Presently Gledhill left Ullock under some cover while he crawled forward, cut a strand of wire from our entanglements, and threw the looped end back, lassoo fashion, to Ullock, who wrapped it round his body. Gledhill then hauled him to the parapet, where stretcher bearers came and took charge.

During all his gallant actions, Gledhill was subject to a perfect tempest of fire, and was lucky enough to escape without even a scratch.

BURIED BY A SHELL.

Sploosh! A "Jack Johnson" had gone off and buried a machine-gun section of the Gloucesters in a sea of mud.

Here was a tragedy! The enemy's fire was deadly, and at the same time an effort must be made to rescue the gun and its crew.

Lieutenant Bush was equal to the emergency. Summoning a few of his spare men, he gave the order for digging operations to commence, he himself superintending them personally.

With such goodwill did the party get to work, in spite of the risks they ran from the enemy's fire, that it was not long before men and machine-gun were brought to the surface again, all of them unharmed.

Giving the crew time to recover from their unpleasant experience, the young officer had the gun put in action once more, giving the enemy a taste of its most unpleasant qualities.

But for Lieutenant Bush's promptness, both gun and crew might easily have been lost, with a consequent advantage to the Germans.

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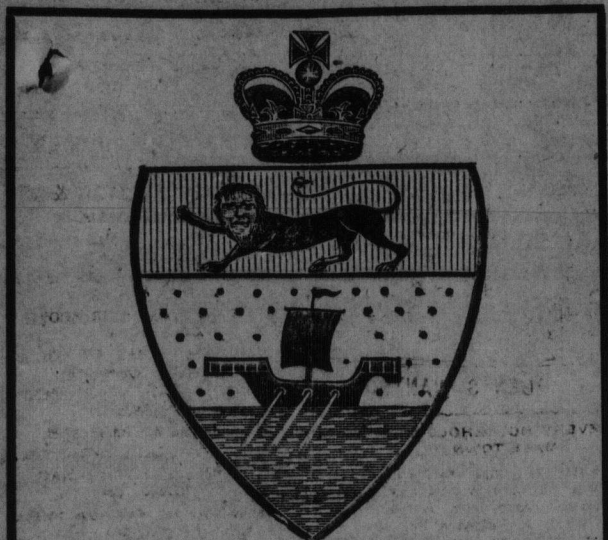
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