

## STORMING THE MESSINES RIDGE

---

In the darkness queer monsters moved up close to the lines, many of them crawling singly over the battlefields under cover of woods and ruins. They were the tanks, ready to go into action on the great day of the war, when their pilots and crews have helped by high courage to a great victory.

Last night all was ready. The men, knowing the risks of it all (for no plans are certain in war), had a sense of oppression, strained by poignant anxiety. Many men's lives were on the hazard of all this. The air was heavy as if nature itself was full of tragedy. A Summer fog was thick over Flanders and the sky was livid. Forked lightning rent the low clouds and thunder broke with menacing rumblings. Rain fell sharply, and on the conservatory of the big Flemish house, where officers bent over their maps and plans, raindrops beat noisily.

But the storm passed and the night was calm and beautiful. Along the dark roads and down the leafy lanes columns of men were marching and brass bands played them through the darkness. Guns and limber moved forward at a sharp pace. "Lights out," rang the challenges of sentries to staff cars, passing beyond the last village and nearer to the line. Masses of men lay sleeping or resting in the fields before getting orders to go forward into the battle zone.

All through the night the sky was filled with vivid flashes of bursting shells and with the steady hammer-strokes of guns. From an observation post looking across the shoulder of Kemmel Hill straight to Wytschaete and Messines Ridge I watched this bombardment for that moment when it should rise into a mad