

The attack was originally fixed for Tuesday, the 20th, but since all chances of success depended on the action of the asphyxiating vapor it was postponed, the weather being unfavorable. On Thursday, the 22nd, the wind blew steadily from the north, and that afternoon, all being ready, the Germans put their plan into execution. Since then events have moved so rapidly and the situation has moved so frequently that it is difficult to give a consecutive and clear story of what happened, but the following account represents as nearly as can be the general course of events. The details of the gas apparatus employed by them are given separately, as also those of the asphyxiating grenades, bombs, and shells of which they have been throwing hundreds.

At some time between 4 and 5 P.M. the Germans started operations by releasing gases with the result that a cloud of poisonous vapor rolled swiftly before the wind from their trenches toward those of the French west of Langemarck, held by a portion of the French Colonial Division. Allowing sufficient time for the fumes to take full effect on the troops facing them, the Germans charged forward over the practically unresisting enemy in their immediate front, and, penetrating through the gap thus created, pressed on silently and swiftly to the south and west. By their sudden irruption they were able to overrun and surprise a large proportion of the French troops billeted behind the front line in this area and to bring some of the French guns as well as our own under a hot rifle fire at close range.

The first intimation that all was not well to the north was conveyed to our troops holding the left of the British line between 5 and 6 P.M. by the withdrawal of some of the French Colonials and the sight of the wall of vapor following them. Our flank being thus exposed the troops were ordered to retire on St. Julien, with their left parallel to, but to the west of the highroad. The splendid resistance of these troops, who saved the situation, has already been mentioned by the Commander in Chief.

Meanwhile, apparently waiting till their infantry had penetrated well behind the Allies' line, the Germans had opened a hot artillery fire upon the various tactical points to the north of Ypres, the bombardment being carried out with ordinary high-explosive shell and shrapnel of various calibres and also with projectiles containing asphyxiating gas. About this period our men in reserve near Ypres, seeing the shells bursting, had gathered in groups, discussing the situation and questioning some scattered bodies of Turcos who had appeared; suddenly a staff officer rode up shouting "Stand to your arms," and in a few minutes the troops had fallen in and were marching northward to the scene of the fight.

Nothing more impressive can be imagined than the sight of our men falling in quietly in perfect order on their alarm posts amid the scene of wild confusion caused by the panic-stricken refugees who swarmed along the roads.

In the meantime, to the north and northeast of the town, a confused fight was taking place, which gave proof not only of great gallantry and steadiness on the part of the troops referred to above, but of remarkable presence of mind on the part of their leaders. Behind the wall of vapor, which had swept across fields, through woods, and over hedgerows, came the German firing line, the men's mouths and noses, it is stated, protected by pads soaked in a solution of bicarbonate of soda. Closely following them again came the supports. These troops, hurrying forward with their formation somewhat broken up by the obstacles encountered in their path, looked like a huge mob bearing down upon the town. A battery of 4.7-inch guns a little beyond the left of our line was surprised and overwhelmed by them in a moment. Further to the rear and in a more easterly direction were several field batteries, and before they could come into action the Germans were within a few hundred yards. Not a gun, however, was lost.