

STORMING THE MESSINES RIDGE

Nature seemed in harmony with the spirits of the contestants. On the night of June 6th a thunder-storm swept the battle front with ominous rumblings and fierce flashes of lightning. When the storm passed, through the darkness men and guns and "tanks" moved forward from the British reserve line to the battle zone and waited patiently for the signal to assault the enemy. By 3 A. M. on the 7th the guns were in full play and at 3.10 the battle began in earnest. Philip Gibbs, the war correspondent, gives the following account of its appalling opening:

WONDERFUL WORK OF THE BRITISH GUNS AND AIRMEN

"For five days at least many Germans were pinned to their tunnels as prisoners of fire. No food reached them. There was no way out through these zones of death. A new regiment, which tried to come up last night, was broken and shattered. A prisoner says that out of his own company he lost fifty to sixty men before reaching the line. For a long way behind the lines the British heavy guns laid down belts of shell fire, and many of the enemy's batteries kept silent.

The British gunners smothered the German batteries whenever they were revealed to the airmen. Those flying men have been wonderful. A kind of exaltation of spirits took possession of them, and they dared great risks and searched out the enemy's squadrons far over his lines. In five days from June 1 forty-four separate machines were sent crashing down, and this morning very early flocks of airplanes went out to blind the enemy's eyes and report the progress of the battle.